



QADAMGĀH

QADAMGĀH, an ancient site at the southeastern tip of the Kuh-e Raḥmat, some 40 km south of the [Persepolis](#) terrace (lat 29°43'10" N, long 53°12'05" E; [Figure 1](#)). Its Persian name ("place of the footprints") was explained to the 19th-century visitor as due to "the curious marks in the rocks, which are said to be the foot-prints of Ali's horse" (Wells, p. 143). The site can be reached straight from Persepolis along the western slope of the Kuh-e Raḥmat, but today more easily by a road along the eastern slope of the mountain. Two deep terraces 13.5 m in width are vertically cut, from the top of the mountain slope (of approximately thirty percent grade) down to the bottom, into the strata of decaying limestone. The two terraces have vertical rear walls and are linked by stairs on either side. There are no visible traces of built parts on these walls or on the floors of the terraces.

Qadamgāh was first visited in 1881 by an English traveler, Capt. H. L. Wells (Royal Engineers), who published the unique plan and section available up to now (Wells, facing p. 184; [Figure 2a](#), [Figure 2b](#)), but he did not provide any description (pp. 143-44). In 1952, [L. Vanden Berghe](#) gave a short description and the first photographs (Vanden Berghe, 1953, p. 7 and Pl. V, nos. 10-12), which he repeated in his survey of Iranian archaeology along with a schematic plan (Vanden Berghe, 1959, fig. 10, Pl. 63). Some archeologists later discussed the rock-cut monument.

The two terraces together are 20.30 m in width and 16.50 m high; the floor of the lower terrace is 3 m above the plain overlooking a pond, which is fed by a spring underneath the lower terrace. The two rock-cut staircases on either



side, of 17 and 18 steps, respectively, give access to the upper terrace 4.25 m higher. Each terrace is about 13.50 m wide. Above the upper terrace, 3 rows of 5 shallow rectangular cavities are cut into the back wall, each of them being 1.60 m high and 2.80-3.0 m wide for the side niches, and 2.45-2.80 m for the three central ones. Other features include shallow, circular holes ca. 10-12 cm in diameter dug around the edge of the upper terrace (but they are less regularly spaced than is shown in Wells's plan).

Concerning the function of Qadamgāh, Vanden Berghe suggested two different hypotheses—either as an open cult area related to the spring and the pond or else as a funerary monument, in which the series of rock-cut funerary cavities are to be compared to the more sophisticated niches at Ākor-e Rostām (Vanden Berghe, 1953, p. 45), 5 km south of Persepolis, and in many other funerary monuments in the central Zagros and Asia Minor. M. T. Mostafavi (pp. 27-28) suggested a funerary monument of the Achaemenid period or slightly later, while K. Schippmann (pp. 167-69) preferred a cultic function. P. Calmeyer (p. 110, fn. 64) compared Qadamgāh with the Achaemenid Royal tombs; he did not exclude a possible façade, possibly of the post-Achaemenid period, but stressed some differences from the Royal tombs: length of the façades and the insufficient height at Qadamgāh. Despite his remarks, R. Boucharlat, who has not visited the monument, suggested that Qadamgāh is an unfinished, Achaemenid/post-Achaemenid monumental rock-cut tomb (Boucharlat). In opposition to Calmeyer, he stressed the strong similarities between Qadamgāh and the two Royal tombs at Persepolis (Schmidt, 1970, fig. 38, Pls. 77-78; Zander, figs. 14-15): the general location on a slope, the two terraces, the general size (ca. 20 m in width and 16 m in height for the upper back wall), comparison of the width of the vertical row of niches (2.45 to 3 m) with the span between the half columns of the façade of the tombs (2.90 m at Persepolis), and finally the total height of the three rows of cavities (ca. 6 m) with the height of the half columns of the Persepolis tombs (6.10-6.20 m). The apparent differences were attributed to the fact that construction Qadamgāh was abandoned before its completion, as was the unfinished tomb of Persepolis South, the so-called tomb of Darius III. As the latter shows, the upper part of Qadamgāh would have been built in dressed blocks of stone in order to complete the height of the carved façade (Boucharlat, fig. 4, to be compared to Kleiss, Calmeyer, figs. 2-5).

Closer observations of the monument later showed this hypothesis to be wrong and led to quite different conclusions. W. Kleiss (Kleiss, pp. 161-64)

reacted against the previous hypothesis, stressing that the monument was certainly completed, as shown by several polished surfaces in the rear and side walls. For the site's function, he noted that, while some cavities are deeply cut into the rock (up to 0.60 m), only a narrow strip of their lateral walls is carefully cut (Figure 3); hence he suggested that the niches were a sort of *astōdān*, each of them possibly being closed with a stone slab the size of the opening.

Later, J.-C. Bessac's study, focusing on the cutting techniques, confirmed that the monument was completed, because it is polished down to the lower parts, which are the latest to have been worked out, the masons completing the work step by step from the top to the bottom. The series of holes on the edge of the upper wall are interpreted as the remains of the hoists used by the builders or for fixing poles for anchoring the scaffolding. Given the fractured quality of the rock, the monument needed numerous repairs during the construction phase itself. The niches are explained as being due to very regular repair work, as is usual in Achaemenid architecture, rather than patches of non-geometrical shapes that were part of the original construction.

Beyond this explanation, Bessac cautiously suggested an aesthetic aim with the possible use of stone slabs of a different color and not excluding the hypothesis of some reliefs or inscriptions carved on the hypothetical slabs. Discussing Kleiss's observations, he noted that some cavities are some dozens of centimeters deep into the rock, while others are very shallow, though certainly completed. Therefore they cannot be incomplete *astōdān* in a clearly finished monument, and Qadamgāh was definitely not a funerary monument. Bessac agreed that Qadamgāh very likely had a cultic function related to water.

The date generally accepted is the Achaemenid or the post-Achaemenid period. Given the lack of any built structure, it is impossible to go beyond this very general hypothesis of an open cultic place. In the Persepolis Fortification Tablets (see [PERSEPOLIS ELAMITE TABLETS](#)) dating from Darius I's reign, a series of documents records the delivery of grain, wine, beer, and livestock to various places, sometimes mentioned as a sanctuary, garden, or tomb, for performing ceremonies and sacrifices. Several places or areas in Fars have been proposed as locations of such ceremonial sites, such as the Neyriz area for [Cambyses'](#) tomb (Henkelman, 2003; 2008, pp. 491-92, fnn.). However, archeological sites that would correspond to those suggestions have yet to be discovered. Qadamgāh could be such a place, given its very specific location on



a rocky slope and the presence of water—a so far uniquely known, open-air cultic place of Achaemenid Fars.

This fragile monument, slowly decaying, has never been drawn since H. L. Wells in 1881; it deserves a complete and careful survey in the near future, and some excavation at its foot.

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