TAḴT-E SOLAYMĀN
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TAḴT-e SOLAYMĀN, outstanding archeological site with substantial Sasanian and Il-khanid ruins in Azarbaijan, between Bijār and Šāhin-dež, about 30 km north-northeast of Takāb, at about 2,200 m elevation, surrounded by mountain chains of more than 3000 m height. The place was obviously chosen for its natural peculiarity; an outcrop of limestone, about 60 m above the valley, built up by the sediments of the overflowing calcinating water of a thermal spring-lake (21° C) with about 80 m diameter and more than 60 m depth on the top of the hill (Damm). The place is mentioned in most of the medieval Oriental chronicles (e.g., Ebn Ḵordādbeh, pp. 19, 119 ff.; Ṭabari, p. 866; Nöldeke, p. 100, n. 1; Belʿami, p. 942, tr., II, p. 292; Ebn al-Faqih, pp. 246, 286; Masʿudi, ed. Pellat, sec. 1400, tr., IV, pp. 74 f; idem, *Tanbih*, p. 95; Abu Dolaf, pp. 31 ff.; Ferdowsi, pp. 111 ff.; Yāqut, Beirut, III, pp. 383-84, tr., pp. 367 ff; Qazvini, II, pp. 267; Ḥamd-Allāh Mostawfi, p. 64, tr., p. 69, who attributes its foundation to the Kayanid Kay Ḵosrow) and was visited and described repeatedly by western travelers and scholars since the 19th century (e.g., Ker Porter, pp. 557 ff.; Monteith, pp. 7 ff.; Rawlinson, pp. 46 ff.; Houtum Schindler, pp. 327 f.; Jackson, 1906, pp. 124 ff.). It was erroneously taken for a second Ecbatana by Henry Rawlinson, and defective Byzantine sources caused it to be confused with the great Atropatenian city of Ganzak and other places (Minorsky). A first archeological survey was carried out by the American Institute of Iranian Art and Archaeology under Arthur Upham Pope in 1937. Between 1959 and 1978 archeological excavations were conducted by the German Archealogical Institute together with the Iranian Antiquity Sevices (Edāra-ye koll-e ḥefāẓat-e āṯār-e bāstāni wa banāhā-ye tāriḵi), which, during the first three seasons, has been working with Swedish cooperation. At present restoration and research are done by the Iranian Archeological Research Center (Pažuhešgāh-e bāstān-šenāsi).

The mention of the thermal lake in the Middle Persian Zoroastrian literature (Humbach), the medieval literary tradition, as well as the inscriptions on clay bullae found during the excavations (Göbl), provide grounds for identifying the site as the sanctuary of Ādur Gušnasp, the fire of the warriors and kings and one of the three most revered fires of the Sasanian period (Boyce, pp. 8 ff.). Up to the early Islamic time the geographical name of the place and the region was Šiz, probably derived from the name of the Lake Čēčast, which also seems to apply to Lake Urmia. In the Il-khanid period its name was Soqurluq/Suḡurluq or Saturiq (Rašid-al-Din Fażl-Allāh, ed. Jahn, pp. 70, 86; ed. ʿAlizāda, pp. 200, 205; Ḥamd-Allāh Mostawfi, p. 64). The name Taḵt-e Solaymān (lit. Throne of Salomon), together with the surrounding mythological ensemble of Zendān-e Solaymān (Prison of Salomon), about 3 km west of Taḵt-e Solaymān, and Ṭawila-ye Solaymān (Stable of Salomon), and Taḵt-e Belqis (the throne of the queen of Sheba) appeared only after the Timurid conquest of Persia (still referred to as Soqurloq in 810/1407; Ḥāfeẓ-e Abru, I, p. 222)

The earliest settlement on the hill was a rather small and poor agglomeration of houses with stone socles and clay or mud brick walls at about 60 m northwest of the lake (Naumann and Huff, 1975, pp. 138 ff.). It is dated into the Achaemenid period by pottery and few small finds, like three-winged bronze arrowheads, beads of semiprecious stone and an elbow-shaped fibula. Intramural burials were placed in the corners and next to the walls of the houses and courtyards in pits cut into the rocky ground and partly covered by benches or walls. There were also dog burials. Earth burials are unexpected here in ancient Media, where, according to Herodotus (1.140), exposure of the dead was practiced. Traces of canals show that the water of the spring-lake was lead off for agricultural irrigation. Abandoned after a few generations, the clay buildings were washed down by the unregulated water that covered the site with a layer of limestone sediment.

During the Parthian period a small fortification was built at the northern edge of the lake. A rough-stone socle of a semicircular bastion and two branching off curtain walls were excavated under the great *ayvān* of the later temple. The scanty and seriously disturbed archeological layers delivered only some fragments of cinnamon ware for the Parthian dating. (Naumann, Huff, and Schnyder, 1975, p. 184)

The history of monumental architecture on the site began with mud brick buildings and foundations of rough-stone, laid out on a master plan, which determined all later building activities. Traces of this mud brick period, which itself had several phases, could only be uncovered in limited areas and sondages within the later massive stone and brick structures (Naumann and Huff, 1975, pp. 142 f.). The summit of the hill was surrounded by a mud brick wall, 12 m thick, with semicircular bastions. A northern gate and its semicircular gate towers were of baked bricks; we may presume the same for an early southern gate. In the more spacious area between the northern gate and the lake, a square area was enclosed by an inner mud brick wall, open to the lake side and with a northern inner gate of baked bricks in line with the outer northern gate. Here we have to presume the main buildings, which, however, were mostly destroyed by the massive stone and brick constructions of the later rebuilding (FIGURE 1). Traces of a large edifice with rooms along a rectangular hall or courtyard and an axial square room with four round columns of baked brick, accompanied by rectangular side rooms and an antechamber were unearthed in the western part of the square area. A regular layout of mud brick rooms was also found in the northeastern part of the square. A kiln for the production of bull's eye glass was installed there probably during the period of reconstruction into stone buildings. There is no evidence for which windows the glass roundels were employed. Some coins of Sasanian emperor Pērōz (r. 457-84) and a newly coined gold dinar of the Byzantine emperor Theodosius II (r. 408-50) give an approximate date for the mud brick period. (Naumann, Huff, and Schnyder, 1975, p. 164-68) There is no archeological evidence of the function of the mud brick buildings, but with regard of the undoubtedly religious nature of the later fire sanctuary we may justly presume the same function for the predecessor.

The replacement of the mud brick architecture by masonry constructions of stone and baked brick was a gradual process with periods of coexistence of mud brick and stone buildings side by side. According to find coins from the last years of reigns of Sasanian Kavād I (since 528) and his successor Ḵosrow I Anōširavān (531-79) in the layers above razed parts of the mud brick buildings, we may hypothetically presume that the process of architectural transformation began after the suppression of the Mazdakite movement about 528 C.E. and with the reestablishment of the Zoroastrian state church, which was carried out by Ḵosrow I, who was the crown prince at that time.

The main parts of the sanctuary, the first to be replaced, are distinguished by cut blocks of stone and well-baked bricks; later periods used rough stone. The exterior mud brick wall was coated by a rough-stone wall with a facing of large stone slabs, imitating stretching and heading bond, obviously a copy of the technically more perfect masonry of the great Caucasian wall of Darband (see FORTIFICATIONS), which is ascribed to the reign of Ḵosrow I Anōširavān. The northern stone gate, built exactly on the place of the older one and badly damaged now, was obviously identical with the well-preserved southern gate with its gallery of blind windows above and its lateral semicircular bastions (Osten and Naumann, pp. 39 ff). The lower part of the gate is covered with debris, only the upper part, that is less than half of the gate height, being visible today. The wall had an uncovered passage with parapet and stepped crenellations, tower chambers above the massive bastions, and connecting vertical shafts down to the gate-house, probably for interlucation. The inner brick wall was replaced by a stone wall with interior vaulted corridor and semicircular bastions outside. The old inner gate of baked brick was kept in use unchanged.

Traces of rough-stone foundations in a sounding west of the lake suggest that another mud brick wall with inner corridor and bastions enclosed the lake and the southern part of the precinct as a second square, in line with the northern area. This wall however was never replaced by a stone structure, and so probably were kept all other buildings in this southern area, with the result that the clay material was dug away and reused by post-Sasanian occupation and the remains were washed off by the water, which in the end covered all the area with a thick sediment of limestone, making excavation nearly impossible here. The architectural layout inside the oval exterior wall may be reconstructed as a walled in rectangle, long twice its width, fortified by semicircular bastions and with a high and bulky building protruding from the center of its impressive western front of 280 m length. This building was a palace with rooms of different size surrounding an *ayvān*, the biggest construction of the site. The three rooms at its western front have wide openings to the outside, perhaps for ceremonial purposes. The *ayvān* was open to the area north of the lake, obviously a royal courtyard. The western, eastern, and southern banks of the lake probably served as a forecourt with the lake as a natural poolin the center. There should have been an inner southern gate, continuing the access from the outer southern gate, but this could not be verified.

The square enclosure on the north side of the royal court was the temple area proper, accessible from the north gate as well as from the royal courtyard in the south, where its facade consisted of two wings of arcades on either side of the big temple *ayvān*. The northern enclosure is divided into two unequal parts by a straight corridor, connecting the royal court with the northern temple court. The main building in the larger part is a massive *čahārṭāq* with surrounding corridors, located exactly on the main north-south axis of the layout. In its central, domed cella (A), the *gonbad* (see DOME), we have to presume the place of the Ādur Gušnasp fire altar, now destroyed by treasure hunters who have hacked open the brick floor, which originally was paved with yellow travertine. Traces of podiums, socles, and stands or poles surrounding the center indicate that it is the place of the altar (Naumann and Huff, 1965-66, pp. 622 ff.). The cella was shielded from the corridors by thin walls or parapets. There were gates from outside in line with the main axis, but broken off thin brickwork seems to be the remains of some kind of closure of contraction of the opening. Narrow-sided doors lead into the eastern corridor from north and south. There is no sufficient evidence to explain in detail how the interior of the temple was used by priests and devotees. However, the superficial impression of openness given by the axis, which ran through the temple uninterruptedly from the outer north gate to the center of the lake is misleading. In fact there were two opposite ways of approach from north and south, each ending up in an *ayvān* in front of the central temple building (Huff, forthcoming). The southern approach from the royal courtyard, doubtlessly was reserved for the king and his court. A special link between the temple and the royal palace is a podium of perfectly polished blocks of freestone with a small stair, standing on the axis of the palace *ayvān* but immediately in front of the temple *ayvān*. This probably carried an open-air throne.

The northern approach, certainly the access for the normal pilgrims, is a diminished repetition of the southern royal one. The northern *ayvān* (I), closed by a front wall with a door for climatic reasons during a later period, and the door into the temple were considerably smaller at the north side. The arcades, starting from the northern *ayvān* with an identical design as in the south, enclose a comparatively small northern forecourt. The pilgrims, after scrambling up the high northern slope of the hill, had to continue climbing on from the outer north gate through the inner northern gate up to the gatehouse of the northern forecourt, a painstaking access, compared with the comfortable southern approach for the king through the higher situated outer southern gate. Traces of simple mud brick structures on the west side of the second northern forecourt were obviously the remains of shelters, hostels and toilets for the pilgrims, taking the place of the royal palace in the south. Especially here some small amulets or votive plaques of gold, silver and bronze were found, with anthropomorphous or symbolic representations. A specific civilian function must be attributed to a room (Z) between the gate house of the northern temple court (M) and the entrance to the north-south corridor; a hoard find of clay sealings of documents, so-called *bullae* (Göbl; Huff, 1987), indicates that this was a room for scribes and an office and archive for acts of civil administration, duties of which the Sasanian clergy was in charge. The location at a "high gate," at the entrance to an official area, is typical for places of this kind.

The very specific layout of the eastern rooms of the great temple got varying interpretations, which are difficult to verify. An inner courtyard (E) with arcades and a windmill-like arrangement of surrounding rooms may have been a depot or treasury. Of special interest is a cruciform room with a central dome, another closed *čahārṭāq*,the only one with a direct, axial connection with the *gonbad.* In its center a basin, 3 m², was set up on the brick floor by side walls, 33 cm high (Osten and Naumann, pp. 57 ff). The room was alternatively interpreted as a room for permanently sheltering the sacred fire (*atašgāh*), from which the fire was carried into the great *gonbad* for official ceremonies, a theory developed by Kurt Erdmann (1941, pp. 48-65 **)**,which meanwhile has proven obsolete, as a room for ritual washing, as an Anāhitā water temple (see ANĀHĪD), which also must be excluded, because a wide opening on the south side of the basin could not be tightly closed to keep the water. As quantities of fine grayish material were found in the basin, which might have been ashes, it seems possible, that the ashes of the sacred fire was collected and stored here, to be distributed to the faithful, a tradition which still exists in contemporary fire temples (communication with members of Yazd Zoroastrian community).

The western part of the sacred enclosure, which was separated from the main sanctuary by the north-south corridor, was identified as a completely independent, second fire temple, with subsidiary buildings of its own. The temple proper consisted of a straight sequence of two three-winged columnar halls (FIGURE 2), the first with rectangular, the second with round pillars of stone and baked bricks respectively, of anterooms and of a cruciform, domed cella, where the lower part of a fire altar was preserved (Naumann and Huff, 1975, pp. 147 ff.). Before the rebuilding of the sanctuary the fire burned in the square mud brick room with four columns, which was found beneath the later anteroom, and this older brick cella was even preserved as an anteroom when the cruciform stone cellar was built and the fire transferred there; it was replaced by the stone anterooms only during a later reconstruction.

The two columnar halls of the stone temple were separated by a thin brick wall with narrow gates in the side wings only, and in the second hall too the direct access to the altar room originally was blocked by a thin brick wall, so that there was no possibility to view or walk along up to the fire altar. The second hall had benches or platforms in between both tiers of columns with niches on either side, in which several round, conical gypsum objects were placed, broken off at the top, perhaps supports or stands for ritual purposes. Beside several of the columns, the lower parts of roughly worked, rounded shafts of lime stone with cubical base and a decorative ring at mid height were preserved, fragments of which had been found in several places on the site. As they resemble the shafts of fire altars on Sasanian coins, they are generally interpreted is such. This is doubtful, however, because of their small size. They may be supports for incense burners, as depicted on the Issakvand and near Kermān (Huff, 1999, pp. 23-27) tomb relief, or of some other liturgical requisite. The altar of a sacred fire was considerably bigger and more steadfast, as demonstrated by the remainders in the altar room of the second temple. The altar there, walled up of brick, stone, and mortar, had a shaft of 65 cm diameter; the three-stepped socle was 1.63 m^2, and the altar table must have had about 1 m side length (FIGURE 3).

Fragments of anthropomorphous, theriomorphous, and floral plaster reliefs as well as column flutings, deliberately buried and preserved in the clay fill of a secondary floor, demonstrate that especially the altar room and the halls of the second temple, but in analogy also the great main temple and the palace, were richly decorated with stucco. They also indicate a severe destruction of the buildings and a period of obviously less luxurious restoration. This might be connected with the devastation of the site during the Persian campaign of the Byzantine emperor Heraclius 624-28 C.E., who described the demolition of the idols in the heathenish temple in his report to the senate of Constantinople (Minorsky, pp. 91 ff.; Sebeos, tr., I, pp. 80 f. II, pp. 214 ff).

The western part of the second temple obviously served for more profane purposes. However, a sequence of two rooms immediately beside the anteroom and the altar room show a special relationship to the sacred area. With view blocked by shifted doors and a very small side cabinet with lamp niches in the wall, the second room, side by side with the altar room, seems to have served as a place next to the sacred fire for privatemeditation and prayer of the king or other prominent persons.

A large cruciform hall with central dome, surrounded by rooms and courtyards with great quantities of pottery sherds and traces of rotten organic material, as well as a kitchen court and three toilet rooms, are clearly a compound used for festivities with banquets.

The access to the second temple was only from the royal courtyard and from the side rooms of the palace. From this we must conclude that this temple was exclusively reserved for the king and his entourage. Whether the tradition that each Sasanian king had a fire of his own should be related to the second temple, and whether these personal fires were permanently installed in one and the same sanctuary, or whether they traveled with the king, is an open question.

The area between the rectangular enclosure and the oval outer wall was at least partly occupied by mud brick houses, probably of priests and officials; one house on the east side was replaced by a stone building. A small settlement of rough stone and mud brick houses existed outside below the wall at the foot of the western hillside. During the Arab conquest, a peace treaty with the margrave (*marzbān*) of Azarbaijan guaranteed religious integrity to the sanctuary and allowed the population of Šiz to dance undisturbed in their festivities (Balāḏori, p. 326); but with the Sasanian dynasty disposed and the royal buildings without owner at least in the 9th century, the population had moved into the walled area. It is not clear, when exactly and under which circumstances the sanctuary was given up and whether the fire or fires were taken along with the emigrating Zoroastrian population. The place developed as a prospering Islamic town, still under the name of Šiz, with its greatest density of population during the Saljuq period.

After the Mongol invasion, Abaqa, the second Il-khan of Persia, dislodged the inhabitants and had a palace built an the foundations of the ancient sanctuary shortly after his accession to the throne in 1265 (Mostawfi, p. 64, tr., p. 69; FIGURE 4). The palace was to be used mainly by women and princes of the Il-khanid dynasty. Bringing the original Sasanian layout to perfection, a new southern gate was cut through the oval wall exactly on the northsouth axis. A straight access across two forecourts and an entrance *ayvān* led into the great palace courtyard with the lake in the center, surrounded by arcades, which replaced the old Sasanian ones, although these must have completely vanished by that time. Opposite the entrance, the great southern *ayvān* of the fire temple, the vault of which had collapsed like all the other major Sasanian vaults, was considerably enlarged and a great stair was built in it, leading up to a vast hall, which was placed on top of the re-vaulted fire temple. Also the vault of the Sasanian palace *ayvān* was rebuilt with a considerably greater height and the palace enlarged by two octagonal kiosks (*kušk*)and upstairs rooms beside the *ayvān*. At the north east corner of the great courtyard an opposite *ayvān* was built and behind the arcades rooms and kiosks of a great variety of types and shapes were lined up, partly forming small palaces of their own. The palace is a unique example of pre-Safavid palatial architecture in Persia. A square building with decorated door frame and with four central columns of red sandstone stands in the western area, divergent from the directions of the main grid. Its interpretation, for which an assembly hall or a Buddhist temple is suggested, is unclear. Several small palace pavilions, kiosks, are arranged in line with the transverse axis of the master plan and on special view-points on the wall; they may have been set in a garden layout. Other comparatively rich houses may have belonged to the administration staff of the palace. An excavated example showed a division into a domestic and a representative part, the latter on the layout of the kiosks,with three *ayvān*s around a central hall. In general the northern area inside the oval wall was reserved for workmen and workshops during the construction of the palace. There ware kilns for the production of at least part of the glazed wall tiles (Naumann, 1971), which, beside stucco and painting, were the most prominent decorative elements, mainly applied at the palace building with the great *ayvān* and the *ayvān* and hall on the former fire temple (Qučāni; Masuya). Already during its palatial period, the northern area of the site developed into the civilian settlement of Saturiq/Saḡurluq with the ancient north gate as an entrance of its own, and a small *bāzār* along the ancient way up to the temple. With the end of the Mongol rule, the whole site was re-occupied by the peasant population. There was destruction and squatter occupation in the palatial buildings. Columns and decorative blocks of stone were pulled out and reused for the construction of a small mosque beside the ancient inner north gate, for another square mosque or mausoleum above the ancient pilgrim's courtyard north of the fire temple, for a bathhouse, and for simple living houses. Later on another mausoleum was attached to the eastern wall of the enlarged Il-khanid *ayvān* of the fire temple. The complete wall decoration of glazed tiles in the palace was cut down and probably sold to be reused at other representative buildings somewhere else. Only great amounts of small, broken off fragments were found, dumped in corners of rooms and in debris pits, some reused as decoration of the new peasant's houses. The existence of the civilian town of Saturiq lasted for approximately half a century only; no substantial amounts of post 14th century pottery was found. Its abandonment may have been a consequence of the Timurid conquest of Persia.

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