

BANDIÂN

A Sasanian Fire-Temple Complex

Pictures: Soroor Ghanimati (a photo essay of "Sasanian Bandiân" and Iran's Cultural Heritage Organisation (CHO))



In 1994, when the archaeological importance of Bandian was realized, the first excavations were carried out to reveal precious remains of art and architecture of the pre-Islamic Iran, dating from the Sasanian period (224-651 A.D.).

Found at the site, near the town of Daregaz, 1150 km northeast of Tehran near the Turkmenistan border, were a stucco-decorated hall with columns, Sasanian Pahlavi inscriptions, and at last the some remains of brick architecture, which are considered to be one of the most invaluable finds of that period.

Moreover, the excavations led by the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization's archaeologist, Mehdi Rahbar, yielded a Zoroastrian temple, with a substantial amount of its decoration and design features intact. Although the upper parts of the stucco reliefs were not preserved, nevertheless a good deal had remained in place (info from Bandian of Daregaz).



Dr Mehdi Rahbar

The photographs were taken by Soroor Ghanimati in 1998. Ghanimati is a Research Fellow at UC Berkeley's Department of Near Eastern Studies and a Deputy of UNESCO's World Heritage Organization.

Historical Background and Geographical Position of the Site:



The town of Daregaz is situated 1150 km from Tehran and 255 km from the center of Khorasan province. It is bound by Turkmenistan from the north, Mashhad from the east and southeast, Chanaran from the south, and Qoochan from the west. The town's geographical co-ordinates are 37°36' N and 59°6' E. The center of Daregaz township is Daregaz, which was previously known as Mohammadabad, an area which can doubtless be placed among the most ancient centers of Iranian culture. Excavations in this mountainous site have revealed artifacts dating back as far as the Parthian and Sasanian periods, and pre-historic times. Numerous mounds and other ancient sites have also yielded much evidence of the site's rich historical and cultural inheritance. Throughout its history, the site has been known by a variety of names: Dara, Daragyard, Pavart in pre-Islamic Persia, and Bavard, Abivard after the Islamic expansion. With its rich bazaar and access to fertile lands, the city was considerably more prosperous than neighboring Nesa and was widely known as one of the largest and most affluent cities of the Big Khorasan area.

From its ideal location on the northern foothills of the Khorasan mountains, it was the first defense zone to sight an approaching enemy and was a vitally important political and military center. It also played an important role as a significant economic center on the Silk Road.

The historic area of Bandiyan covers almost 1.000 sq- m. and can be divided into three main parts:

1. The remains of the Sasanid temple (excavated some years ago)
2. Yarim Tepe (yet to be excavated)
3. Another mound (presently being excavated).

The History of Archaeological Excavations in the Region:



During six seasons of the site's excavations, the building's central part was found; its main hall, measuring 10.25x8.45 m, as well as several rooms and corridors were unearthed. The hall had four lime columns that supported the straight ceiling of the building. The columns' strengthening system is quite interesting. Another remarkable feature of the building is its mihrab (arched niche) in about 2.80x1.70 m.

To the south from mihrab a small room 2.5x3 m was dug.

The preliminary analysis of the collected artifacts indicate that the room could have functioned as a place for storage of received mail and gifts. This interpretation is strengthened by the discovery of several stamps with imprinted patterns, among them a deer, a griffin, a person's bust with a word "Roozbeh" on his both sides, etc.

However, the implemented fieldwork did not provide sufficient evidence. It implies that during the building's destruction the precious items were removed to another place or simply sacked.

Behind the mentioned room, found close to the mihrab, another room measuring about 5.20x4.80 m was also unearthed.

Near the walls, stretching from the north east and westwards, three arched lime one-piece "false coffins" were found. They used to keep the dead 's bones and were decorated by simple engraved miniatures, all based on the mythological material. Moreover, in the end of the western passageway, running from the hall, a room, which served as a Zoroastrian burial place, as well as a round tower were discovered. This tower was partially excavated.

Unfortunately, the discovered building had been cruelly destroyed (eventually by the-enemy) and shortly afterwards another brick edifice was erected on its ruins. In 1994 (1373 AH), when the archaeological importance of the site was scientifically proved, the first excavations were carried out to reveal precious samples of the Sasanid architecture. Among them there were a stucco-decorated hall with columns, Sasanian Pahlavi Inscriptions ,and at last the remains of brick architecture, which are considered one of the most invaluable finds of that period. Moreover, for the first time the excavations yielded the Zoroastrian temple, all the decoration and design features of which were preserved. Although the upper parts of the stucco molding were destroyed, nevertheless its several parts remained intact. Wall engravings depicting various scenes were found; they are from left to right as follows:

1. A hunting scene
 2. A war scene
 3. A scene depicting the results of this war (immediately after the previous scene)
 4. A scene depicting a hall divided in two parts by a curtain; beside this curtain there is a woman in long dress pouring water from a jug
 5. Five persons, all in frames decorated with artichoke's leaves (inside the mihrab)
 6. Four standing persons attired in special clothes (along the northern wall)
 7. Another extensively damaged scene with vague pattern (immediately after the previous scene)
- The fire-place of the temple is really impressing. It has got a stage basement and a lavishly decorated main structure

.With regard to the found inscriptions in the Middle Persian, stucco moldings and engravings & several historical scenes , the Mid-Sasanid period is recommended for this ancient site.



