

Various Zoroastrian

Fire-Temples



Coin of Shapur II, circa 240 A.D., showing fire-altar

Out of Asia came the Big Four faiths, the four great monotheistic religions of the world--Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam--and a fifth, Zoroastrianism. This last is very old: its prophet, Zarathustra or Zoroaster having lived (probably) at about the same time as the Buddha, circa six hundred B.C.--but no one knows exactly when or where Zoroaster lived y traditions. Equally, the names of Zoroaster's contemporaries are or died; there are onl .unknown to history

Fire was holy to Zoroastrians. It was ranked according to its uses: that is, from the lesser fires of potters and goldsmiths, through cooking-fires and hearth-fires up to the three great eternal fires of Sasanian Persia. These fires were the Farnbag, the Gushnasp and the Burzen-Mihr flames, sacred respectively to the three classes of priests, warriors, and e was at first located in Khwarism, but (according to tradition) farmers. The Farnbag fir removed to Kabulistan by Zoroaster's patron, King Vishpaspaspa; and relocated again, circa ۵۰۰ A.D., by King Khosrow to the sanctuary of Kariyan in the Persian province of Fars. The Gushnasp fire was located in the city of Shiz. The Burzen-Mihr fire appears to be of .dubious location

Fire-temple of Baku

At the city of Baku, on the shore of the Caspian Sea, there was for a long time a very old fire-temple; this particular fire-temple was probably older than recorded history. (Other fire-shrines dotted the whole area of Baku, which in the present day is a major petroleum (.source

According to Haxthausen (who wrote about Baku in a book published in 1863) this Atish-gah or Atish-jah--that is, the Place of Fire; in Persian, 'fire-temple' is atash kuda--had been recently rebuilt: the holy flame issued from a central opening and also from four hollow pillars in the temple, which was a building of triangular form, about one hundred and constructed by a Hindu merchant in the eighteen hundreds. He , ninety paces to the side described the flame as about four feet high, bright, and a wondrous sight as it waved heavily .to and fro against a dark sky - ie, the temple was unroofed

In 1876, the English traveler James Bryce also visited the fire-temple, and remarks that its maintenance and the upkeep of the one attendant priest was paid for by the Parsee .community of Bombay, whose members also visited Baku on pilgrimage

And in 1784, by the account of George Forster of the Bengal Civil Service, the Atish-gah was a square structure about 30 yards across, surrounded by a low wall and containing many apartments, in each of which was a small jet of sulphurous fire issuing from a funnel "constructed in the shape of a Hindu altar." The fire was used for worship, cookery and the fire was extinguished, at which time a hollow sound was warmth. On closing the funnel heard accompanied by a strong and cold current of air. Exclusive of these, there was a large jet from a natural cleft, and many small jets outside the wall, one of which was used by the Hindus (of which there was a large trading community at Baku just then) for burning their .dead

The Fire-fountain of Hit

At the town of Hit or Hid, near Baghdad in Iraq, there were famous and ancient naphtha springs: the ground was yellow limestone covered with a layer of crystalized gypsum, from which issued springs with salt or bitterly sulphurous water; various gases escaped in large bubbles from these springs, and bitumen flowing on the surface of the upwelling resembled salt rimmed the springs. The bitumen issued from these springs with dirty scum. Deposits of a peculiar sound, was scooped up with palm leaves, stored in large pieces, then diluted with lime and exported by boat. Harvesting bitumen was a local business. There were many pitch or bitumen springs in the vicinity, and naphtha springs as well. (That's understandable; (.we're talking about the Persian Gulf here

In Assyrian times the ancient name of Hit was Id. "At Id there were the usmeta stones, and great gods spoke there also." (From the account of king Tukulti Enrta II's campaign of

great gods spoke there also. (From the account of King Tukulti-Ninurta II's campaign of about 889 BC--the earliest surviving mention of Hit.) The word iddu in Babylonian meant 'bitumen spring'. The word usmeta may have meant 'hardened bitumen', or else the golden .was quarried near Hit limestone of the area which

Herodotus refers to the town of Is, eight days from Babylon; past this town, he says, flowed a little river also called Is, which joins the Euphrates; its waters carried bitumen such as was used in building the fortifications of Babylon. Isidore of Charax mentions Hit as the waystation of Ispolis; Ptolemy's Geography calls it the town of Idikara (presumably from id ctively the Babylonian and Aramaic-Arabic words for bitumen). At the time and kara, respe of Xenophon, Hit was known as Diacira, from Du Kir, meaning 'giving bitumen' - another .ancient name for the town

All of the following accounts come from Professor A. V. Williams Jackson, a scholar of) (.Indo-Iranian languages who traveled through Persia in the year 1906

The Ash-hills at Urumiah

At Lake Urumiah in Azerbaijan, a former center of the Zoroastrian faith, there are as many as sixty-four large hills scattered around the lake, each hill being composed of ashes mixed with earth. Each hill is built up on a small natural elevation, and each is supposed to have been formed from the heaped-up ashes of a fire-shrine. None of the fire-shrines remain; ash-hills. A dozen mounds are in the immediate vicinity of the city of there are only the Urumiah, and Professor Jackson examined them in 1906. They were called 'hills of the Fire-worshippers' by the local people. (The original meaning of the name Azerbaijan is something (. 'close to 'place of the holy flame

The hill of Degalah, close to the city, was one such ash-hill. It was three or four hundred yards long, nearly as broad, and a hundred feet high . . . and easy to examine, since it had been excavated all over by the neighboring farmers, who had lately taken to using the ashes to fertilize their fields and make saltpetre with. (Apparently many similar ash-hills near ities had already vanished, dug away for fertilizer.) Professor Jackson other Persian c thought at first that the hill was made of soft earth with many strata of solid ash, each several feet thick; but on close examination he decided it was clay, with ashes mixed in. He was informed that within local memory, stone buildings had stood on the hill, but they had .(Degalah(whose name was also al villageall been pulled down to build the loc

A foundation-wall of burnt brick had been found near the bottom of the hill; the bricks

were about six inches thick by eighteen to twenty-four inches long, this shape being typical of the old fire-temples investigated by the professor. Also found in the ashes were thousands of fragments of pottery, terra-cotta figurines, and coins. Some of the pots had figures of men awn on them. There were some large jars; Professor Jackson himself and horses dr examined a shattered amphora found twenty-feet down a shaft in the hill. It had been buried upright and there were pieces of bone and grains of parched corn in the debris around it, as well as a great deal of ashes. He writes he could not find anyone who had .hthough s,nfound any inscribed tablets or cylinders in the excavatio

Another hill named Lakki was located seventeen miles north of Urumiah; it too was made of .ash

Another hill called Termani was six miles east of Lakki. This mound was fairly intact, shaped like a cone, and the outline of an old building's foundation could be traced on the ground nearby. What stones remained from this building were large enough to make the villagers wonder how they could have been moved into place. They remarked that in the the hill and a large image found buried in the ashes; \ ^ ^ \ 's, a well had been sunk into afterward the local Muslims destroyed this statue, since idol-making is forbidden by the .Koran. The ground around was strewn with potsherds

Another hill named Ahmat was just southeast of Termani. Large urns were found in this hill, and human skeletons were found in the urns. The local farmers also found graves with .stone slabs over them, buried in the ashes

Yet another hill, named Geog Tapah (or Gog Tepe) was east-southeast of Urumiah. A large Nestorian church crowned the summit. When the workmen were excavating the foundations of the church, they came across an underground chamber built of stone, containing a carved hollow cylinder three or four inches high. They filled in the chamber (to the cylinder, at the turn of the century, was make the church foundations more secure) and in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. This cylinder is shaped like a large napkin-ring of translucent alabaster. Professor Jackson examined it in New York, and describes it: "The design of the carvings, in the opinion of this authority, is archaic and Babylonian <showing> the sun-god, Shamash, emerging from the portals of the east accompanied by other divine personages. The god ... carries a club on his right shoulder and holds a weapon in his left hand ... Two bearded porters, with flowing hair and wearing low double-horned caps, fling open the gates through which the god advances. Behind the left-hand gate-keeper stands the demigod, Ea-bani, half man, half bull, facing full front and nds a standard. Behind him again are three figures, on the other side of holding in his two ha the cylinder, approaching the sun-god. The first of these is a man; the second a woman in a flounced robe ... the third, a bearded divine figure clothed in a long skirted mantle." Also found in this hill were large earthen jars containing bones (ie urn-burials) and two skulls .(?dthe skulls of two people who had been execute ie(ears with brass nails driven into the

At Sain Kalah

In the vicinity of Sain Kalah there was reported to be a mound of ashes, the remains of an ancient fire-temple. (This was apparently mentioned or described in Bishop, *Journeys in Persia*, vol 2 197.) This is on the road from Urumiah, crossing a high pass through the Mian .Bulagh mountains to Sanjud, and just beyond the Jagati river

The Gushnasp fire at Shiz

(and the Sovar fire at Tus)

There was a defunct fire-temple at Takht-i Suleiman (the Throne of Solomon) a ruined city near Mount Zindan, 'Solomon's Dungeon.' These ruins are about ninety miles from Lake Urumiah. Mount Zindan itself is a volcano, with a crater at the peak and a long volcanic ridge extending two or three miles from the peak. The volcano was extinct, but blasts of rom the ground of this ridge, and there were a score of tiny fetid air apparently steamed f warm springs bubbling up from miniature craters. Professor Jackson and his party rode up the ridge to the volcanic cone, which was called Solomon's Prison Height; Jackson climbed right up to the summit (about 45 feet above the plain) and tossed a stone into the funnel of Just north of e.feet in circumferenc 300 the crater. The rim of the crater itself was about Mount Zindan is the mountain Takht-i Bilkis, 'Throne of the Queen of Sheba'; on its summit, legends say, King Solomon built a summer palace for his beloved. To the east are lower ridges, but they form a huge cauldron rimming the plain, from which rises a low hill .crowned with the fortified ruins of Takht-i Suleiman

From Professor Jackson's account, the ruined city itself was surrounded by massive ramparts, between thirty and forty feet high; there were once four huge gateways roughly aligned to the cardinal points. The walls enclosed an oblong shape about three-quarters of a mile around. Inside the walls were a number of buildings, including the abandoned fire-temple

This fire-temple was called a bath-house by the locals, who know (of course) very little about fire-temples. It was an arched and vaulted building with a dome. nartlv sunk below the

ground, and made from bricks nearly a foot square (as Professor Jackson found true of other ruined fire-temples he examined). There were two arched portals, through which one rick chamber below; the walls were four or five feet thick; inside descended to the vaulted b the chamber were arched wall-recesses. The interior had the air of a place built for the .preservation of precious treasure

In Professor Jackson's opinion, these ruins were the ancient city of Shiz (as named by Arab writers) and also the Gazna or Ganzah of the Persians, the Gazaka or Canzaca of classical writers and the city of Ganjak named in the Pahlavi texts. If the city was Shiz, then the fire-temple housed the holy flame named Adhargushnasp or Gushnasp. Shiz was described as walls a lake which calcified all objects that were thrown into it; containing within its .Jackson describes such a lake inside the walls of Takht-i Suleiman

.Shiz was also supposedly the birthplace of Zarathustra

Now, Shiz was described circa AD 1220 by the geographer Yakut. At this time, the fire-temple was still in use. Yakut wrote of the city: "Shiz, a district of Azarbaijan. Its name is a form of Chis, out of which the Arabs have made Shiz. It is said that Zaradusht, the prophet of the Fire-Worshippers, came from there ... Here is what Mis'ar ibn Muhallhal says about n is situated between Maraghah, Zanjan, Shahrzur, and Dinavar, in the Shiz: '... this tow midst of mountains containing mines of gold, quicksilver, lead, silver, orpiment, and amethysts ... A wall encloses the city, and within its circuit is a pool whose bottom cannot be sounded. I dropped a line in it more than fourteen thousand cubits, but the lead did not find e.The area of the lake is about one quarter of an acr .any resting-place and remain steady Earth soaked with water form it immediately becomes hard stone. Seven streams of water flow from the lake, each of which turns a mill before flowing out under the wall. At Shiz there is also a large fire-temple, which is held in great veneration. From it are lighted the fires of the Magians from the east to the west. On top of the dome there is a silver crescent n. Many rulers have tried to remove it, but have not succeeded. One of the which is a talisma extraordinary things connected with the temple is, that a fire has been kept burning in it for seven hundred years without any ashes having been found; nor has the fire gone out for a single hour. ... Whenever an enemy advances to take the city and plants his ballista against and if he d;achines falls into the pool which we have mentioneits walls, the stone from the m move the ballista back, even as far as one cubit, the stone falls outside the wall ...' ... Someone else has related that in Shiz there is the fire of Adharakhsh, a temple honored of the Magians. It was customary for their kings, when they ascended the throne, to make a pilgrimage thither on foot. The people of Maraghah and of this neighborhood call this place ".ws bestGazna; but Allah kno

The city of Shiz was supposedly built by the legendary Persian king Kei Khosru. Various Arab and Persian geographers all mention the city and its fire-temple, Adharjushnas. Al-Hamadhani (writing about AD 910) adds that the fire of Adhariushnas or Adharøushnasn

belonged to Kei Khosru and was originally located elsewhere in Azarbaijan, but was removed to Shiz

One Masudi (died AD 951) wrote an account of various fire-temples titled Meadows of Gold. He mentions Shiz: "A fourth fire-temple is found in the country of Shiz and Arran; it was originally consecrated to those idols which Anushirvan destroyed. Others say that Annushirvan, having found in this temple an altar on which the sacred fire was burning, al-Birkah ('the basin' near Shiraz). The <ancient Keianian> transported it to a place called <king Kei Khosru built a temple which was known under the name of Kusujah <ie Ganjah

The fire itself, Gushnasp or Ataro-gushnasp, was the subject of legends. It was regarded as a holy aura or numinous being: it was the triumphant fire Ataro-gushnasp, which aided Kei Koshru while he was engaged in putting down idol-worship around Lake Chechast; according to Zoroastrian tradition this occurred about 800 BC. The holy fire settled on the drove away all darkness and gloom, so that the idol- mane of Kei Koshru's horse and temples could be destroyed. In the same locale as the extirpated idol-temples, Gushnasp was then established at an appointed shrine on Asnavand mountain , near Lake Chechast from .which blew warm winds which defeated demons

.Also established near Lake Chechast was a second fire, Sovar, near a place called Tus

Finally, one of the Byzantine church fathers, Georgius Cedrenus, describes the destruction of Shiz circa AD 1100, by the emperor Heraclius during his war against the later Sasanian king Khosru Parviz (King Chosres): "The Emperor Heraclius took possession of the city of Gazaca, in which was the temple and the treasures of Croesus, king of Lydia, and the ls. On entering the city he found the abominable image of imposture of the burning coa Khosru, an effigy of the king seated under the vaulted roof of the palace as though in the heavens, and around it the sun, moon, and stars, to which he did homage with superstitious awe, as if to gods, and he had represented angles bearing sceptres and ministering unto him. e,s to have drops falling from above And the impious man had arranged by cunning device like rain, and sounds resembling roaring thunder to peal forth. All these things Heraclius ".consumed with fire, and burned both the Temple of Fire and the entire city

At Kermanshaw

There was a fire temple at Komish near the rock carvings of Takri Doston; both are close to

There was a fire-temple at Kermish, near the rock carvings of Taki Dostan, both are close to the city of Kermanshaw, which is at Lat. 34 degrees 26' N. (This is also near Hamadan, the site of the ancient palace of Ecbatana.) More rock carvings are at Besittoon

Temple of Anahita at Kangavar

There was a more modern fire-temple dedicated to the goddess Anahita at Kangavar (a small but very old town, lying directly on the route between Bisitun and Hamadan or Ecbatana). Kangavar was mentioned by the Greek geographer Isidor of Charax in the first century AD, under the name of Konkobar; its name may be derived from the Avestan town was surrounded by mounds and low *Kanha-vara, 'enclosure of Kanha'. In 190, the hills, some of them capped with buildings erected on the foundations of older buildings. There was a modern brick citadel and one or two mosques. But near the heart of the town (on the main road, close to a large caravanserai) were more interesting remains: the ruins of a wall of broken white marble blocks of mammoth size, hewn with precision, crowned by columns and pilasters; the whole formed the outline of a grand enclosure of buildings erected in Greek style

In the enclosure were two large buildings, one to the northwest lying directly on the main street, and the second some distance southeast on the edge of a slope or hollow. The Arab geographer Yakut wrote of Kangavar in 1220; he says the place was the haunt of bandits, locally called either Kasr-i Shirin, 'castle of Shirin' after Khosru's favorite wife, or more the 'Robber Castle'. He wrote: "The Robber Castle is a very remarkable monument, and there is a platform some twenty cubits above the ground and on it there are vast portals, palaces, and pavilions, remarkable for their solidity and their beauty"

In the nineteenth century, various Europeans investigated the ruins. Ker Porter in 1818 found them to form the foundations of a single huge platform - a rectangular terrace three hundred yards square, crowned with a colonnade. Professor Jackson in 1906 found one very well-preserved retaining wall at the NW corner of the enclosure, probably part of the temple; it was 12 to 15 feet high and runs north and south for more than 70 feet. At right angles eastward from this extended the north wall of the temple, equally massive, built of granite blocks some of which were more than 7 feet long and 4 feet high - this north wall was partially buried in debris and hard to investigate. These walls have supported a colonnade of pillars in were capped with a heavy coping, which seemed to be the Greek style. Three columns were still standing when Jackson saw them, on the cornice of the NW wall; they were each about 6 feet in diameter and had been preserved by being built right into the side wall of a modern building. A fourth broken column stood alone at the corner where the north-south retaining wall met the east-west retaining wall. (Ker Porter found a fourth column in 1818, but it was destroyed in 1819.) Jackson found a jumble of immense blocks in Dastan in 1918, supposed to be the site of the temple.

intact columns.) Jackson found a jumble of immense blocks in 1810 recorded eight the SE corner of the ruins, and traced the general outline of a wall running about 100 feet north-south. In his opinion, this was all that remained of the ancient Temple of Anahita

A temple of Anahita is not a fire-temple per se, but it was Zoroastrian (Anahita being one of Ahuramazda's good angels) and was probably far more lavishly appointed than a normal fire-shrine. According to classic historians, for example, the temple of Anahita at Ecbatana was a vast palace, four-fifths of a mile (ie seven stades) in circumference, built of cedar or of it, not a single plank or column stood but was covered by plates of silver or cypress. In all gold. Every tile of the floors was made of silver, and the whole building was apparently faced with bricks of silver and gold. It was first plundered by Alexander in 335 BC, then further stripped during the reigns of Antigonus (BC 325-301) and Seleucus Nicator (BC he found columns C,B 210 Great arrived at the city in ۳۱۲-۲۸۰ . . . (but when Antiochus the covered with gold and silver tiles piled up in the temple, along with gold and silver bricks. .From these he struck coinage amounting to about four thousand talents' worth

Marabin fire, Isfahan

At the city of Isfahan was a deserted but largely intact fire-temple, locally known as the Atash Kadah or Atash Gah. This deserted shrine stood atop of a hill which rises about 700 feet sharply above the plain, at a distance of perhaps 3 miles from Isfahan. One ascended the hill by a winding path with a series of natural stone steps. The ruined temple was on the hill; it was about 14 feet high and 15 feet in diameter, octagonal in form, very crest of the and composed of large unburnt bricks. The roof was once domed, but most of it had collapsed by the time that Professor Jackson visited it. In the walls were eight doorways looking out toward different points of the compass; that is, this building had eight sides, in co columns framed the doorways and supported each of which was a door. Brick and stuc the roof, giving a pillared effect. There was no artificial foundation beneath the temple; its floor was living rock, evidently unsmoothed, since Jackson remarked that part of it thrust .itself upward into the middle of the shrine

Over the inner side of each doorway was a sunken niche, whose lines curved up to give an arched appearance to the doors. Traces of brownish plaster clung in these niches, but no clue to the original finish of the walls remained. There were no inscriptions, just a few graffiti of modern Persian names scrawled in corners. The sanctuary floor was 13 feet 6 circular in shape, and in the center of it was a curved outline, inches in diameter, almost .probably of the mortar base upon which a fire-altar rested. There were ashes in the debris

Other ruined buildings stood on the same hill, surrounding the shrine at the summit. These stand a little below the shrine and probably formed a temple precinct. Jackson wrote "The design and arrangement reminded me of the ruined sanctuary of fire which I noticed near Abarkuh on my journey to Yezd." He also described a series of arched recesses or cells inset into itself, partly constructed of sun-dried bricks in the slope of the hill.

Arab geographers called this place the fire-temple of Marabin or Maras. Masudi in Meadows of Gold said the temple was originally devoted to idol-worship (that is, worship of the sun, moon and five principal stars) and it was made into a fire-temple by King Vishtaspa, Zoroaster's original patron.

According to local tradition at Isfahan, the temple went back to the time of the Achaemenian king Artaxerxes, who reigned BC 465-425. An annal written by one Hamzah of Isfahan (eleventh century AD) enlarged on this tradition: "He founded in one day three fire-temples in the Province of Isfahan. The first was in the east, the second in the west, and the third is situated near the citadel of Marin and is the Fire the third in the middle. The first of Shahr Ardashir, the word Shahr signifying district, and Ardashir being a name of Bahman; the second is the Fire of Zervan Ardashir, located in the territory of Darak called Barkah; and the third is the Fire of Mihr Ardashir, located in the territory of Ardistan of which the Zoroastrian religion widely bore the same name." Artaxerxes is credited with spreading the Zoroastrian religion widely across Persia.

Ali's Well, Shiraz

Near the city of Shiraz, outside the city's Allahu Akbar Gate and in the vicinity of the grave of the poet Saadi (who wrote the Gulistan) are hills where lie a ruined fortress or castle, probably Sasanian; its name was Bandar's Fortress. West of this was a large hollow in the rock of a hill, partly artificial and partly natural; its origin and purpose are unknown. Its name was the Kahvarah-i Div, Cradle of the Demon. Also near the castle were two very deep wells, one called Ali's Well and supposedly the site of an old fire-temple. This, Ali's Well, was a pool at the bottom of a series of steps, surmounted by a building which gave the well a holy air; according to legend, the water sprang up and quenched the flame of the fire-temple. Professor Jackson wrote that he came into Persia when the true faith of Mohammed had not yet been established. Local people also pointed out to him the ruins of an ancient fire-temple on a hill overlooking the city.

Professor Jackson seems to have been an eccentric authority, though; on his travels through Asia--and he was an authority on Zoroastrianism, interested in nothing but fire-temples--he

passed through Baku but completely missed the fire-springs there. At several cities, he mentioned being pointed toward fire-temples by the locals, but for some reason he never himself. He mentions images of fire-altars on ancient Parthian coins, a visited these temples h strange mistake since there are no fire-altars pictured on Parthian coinage—only on Sasanian coins, alas! Also, he carefully photographed Bactrian camels for posterity . . . and called them dromedaries. However he can presumably be trusted on what he saw with his .ml kingdoown eyes, provided it did not involve the anima

Fire of Nimrud, at Abarkuh

Outside the city of Abarkuh, on an elevation at the side of the road stood two buildings, ruined edifices of mud and sun-dried bricks. Both were evidently temples. One closely resembled the Shrine of Fire near Isfahan. Large heaps of ashes (like those at Urumiah) had also been found in this vicinity, and were commented on by Arab writers as early as the the people of Abarkuh called these the ashes of the fires of tenth century; at that time Nimrod, into which Abraham was thrown. (A nice theory, but according to the Bible, Abraham never got near the place. But that's folklore for you.) By the twelfth century, Abarkuh was calling itself the city of Abraham, and local superstition claimed that rain and cattle were never m;hanever fell within the city walls, owing to the prayers of Abra .raised by the city's farmers, because Abraham had once forbidden it

Another legend claimed that Sudabah, daughter of Tubba and wife of Kei Kaus, fell in love with her husband's son Kei Khosru (ie Siavash in the Avesta?) and tried to seduce him. When he rejected her, she told his father he had tried to dishonor her, which was a lie. Then Kei Khosru built a large fire at Abarkuh and said if he was innocent the fire could not burn guilty he would surely burn; he walked right through the flames and was him, but if he was not scorched, thereby disproving all Sudabah's accusations. The ashes of this fire formed a .vast hill, which came to be called the Mountain of Abraham

Fire of Victory, at Yezd

In the city of Yezd, in 1906, there was a large Zoroastrian colony with four living fire-temples, besides smaller fire-shrines in Zoroastrian villages spread around the city. The major temple was the Atash-i Varahran or Atash Bahram, 'Fire of Victory'. The three .minor temples were designated either as Dari-i Mihr or Adarian

Isfendiar's temple, Ardistan

At the city of Ardistan, there was a fire-temple supposedly founded by Isfendiar (the son of King Vishtasp).

Shrine of Zoroaster, at the tomb of Darius

Two fire-altars are carved in the stone by the tombs of the Achaemenian kings, at Naksh-e Rostam. This site is near the ruined city of Stakhra, forty miles south of Persepolis. Here, cut into a cliff face, are the tombs of four succeeding kings: Darius, Xerxes, Artaxerxes I, and Darius II. About five miles south is a great platform which once housed the royal Achaemenian tombs of somewhat later date. At the foot of the cliff palaces, plus three other Achaemenian tombs of somewhat later date. At the foot of the cliff palaces, plus three other are seven panels depicting Sasanian kings—five showing scenes of battle on horseback or kings mounted receiving tribute, from which the site was mistakenly named Naksh-e Rostam, Rostam's Horse.

Opposite the fourth tomb is a square building dating back to Achaemenian times, called Ka'bah-i Zardusht, the Shrine of Zoroaster. By its resemblance to fire-temples at Naubandajan (near Fasa below Fahliyan in Farsistan - the modern Fars province of Iran) and Firuzabad—and to representations of fire-shrines on coins of the Parthian dynasty—this is Jackson's book shows a picture of this shrine. It is a building was a fire-temple. Professed building of large stones or bricks (to a modern eye they look like masonry blocks) square in shape, with a flat roof. In one of the two visible walls is a doorway with uneven sides. In the second wall are three sets of two parallel niches which look like the windows in a three-story building; but Jackson says they are not merely blank spaces, window storey building; but Jackson says they are not smoke-vent.

The two nearby fire-altars stand close together at the lower end of the bluff. They appear to be carved out of the living rock, and look rather like squat chess-castles, about four feet tall, with vaguely crenelated-looking tops. They are very much like the fire-altar shown on the Shapur II coin.

Solomon's Prison, near the Tomb of Cyrus

.Here we have a small conflict of opinion

At Pasargadae, the site of the tomb of Cyrus the Great, is a stone platform which was evidently the foundation of a palace's audience-hall; it is outlined in immense blocks of masonry, over 250 feet long and 50 feet broad. The local people call it Takht-i Suleiman--ie, .yet another Solomon's Throne. Many other ruins are scattered over the vicinity

According to Professor Jackson, near Solomon's Throne is a single remaining wall from a square stone building, which is called Solomon's Prison, Zindan-i Suleiman. He claims that .his fellow scholars agreed with him that this building was a fire-temple

He examined the site. According to later experts, this building--the Prison of Solomon--is almost identical to the Ka'bah-i Zardusht near Darius' tomb. Both are described as high towers with three rows of false windows and a single interior room, and apparently this chamber is also very high up and access is by way of a grand staircase. Jackson thought explains away the lack of windows or smoke-vents by claiming they were fire-temples, and the magi would burn relatively smokeless fuel in their holy fires, since they considered smoke unclean anyway. More recently, the two buildings were thought to be tombs, or .perhaps to have been used for special rituals in the initiation and coronation of kings

Finally, here's one last description, of the fire-temple of Baku in 1879, from the description :of Edmond O'Donovan

After stumbling through the black naphtha mud . . . a hole roughly broken in a modern " wall gives entry to a small chamber, twenty feet by fifteen, adjoining which is a smaller one to the right. In the opposite wall and to the left is another low door opening onto a semi-circular yard, fifteen feet wide at its greater diameter. It is the remaining half of a once ple, or rather of the small monastery connected with it. The exterior wall, celebrated fire tem eleven or twelve feet high, on which is a parapeted walk, is composed of rough stone. From the courtyard one can enter thirty-five roomv cells. accessible by as many doors. These were

the cells of the former devotees of fire, or perhaps the accommodation for the pilgrims who These y.as we see at celebrated religious tombs in Persia toda came to visit the shrine, such cells formerly enclosed a circular space, one-half of which has been demolished or has fallen to ruin, and a modern wall through which one enters is the diameter of the circle. Looking northward, and supported by three double sets of pillars, is the ancient chief entrance, above which the parapet walk is continued. This entrance has been long walled up, and the n by the hole broken in the modern wall behind. The cells formerly only access is give occupied by the monks or pilgrims are now rented at a moderate price to some of the workmen who belong to the factories immediately surrounding, by the priest, the last of his race, who still lingers beside his unfrequented altars. Near the western wall of the semi-of a s,ascended by three step m,a square platfor circular enclosure is the real fire shrine. It is little over one foot each in height. The upper portion of the platform is about sixteen feet square, and at each angle rises a monolith column of grey stone, some sixteen feet high and seven feet broad at the base, supporting a gently sloping stone roof. In the centre of the platform is a small iron tube, where the sacred fire once burned. North, south, and east of temple are three wells with slightly raised borders, the contents of which could this shed-like at a previous period be lighted at will. Now, owing to the drain on the subterranean gases, this is no longer possible . . . The priest is called for. He is the same we have seen lounging meditatively in the gardens of Baku. He dons a long white robe, taken from a rude drawing near a kind of wide altar tomb at the d,an l,cupboard in the white-washed wal south-western corner of the chamber, railed off from the outer portion of the apartment by a low wooden balustrade, applies a lighted match, which he has previously produced, rising to the height of eight inches or a foot. Seizing the rope of a bell hung over his head, he rings a half dozen strokes upon it, then takes in his hand a small bells, and ringing it continually, to bow and genuflect before the altar, 'muttering o'er his mystic spells.' The lights proceeds ".wane gradually, and go out



.Fire-altar on reverse of coin of King Ardashir I, circa 226 A.D

The images of coins are kindly provided by [The Coins and History of Asia](#)

:Jewelled Button Courtesy of Ann

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