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Space and Rite in Elymais

Considerations on Elymaean Religious Architecture and
Rock Reliefs during the Arsacid Period.

by

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a thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Column of Bard-e Neshandeh (Ghirshman 1976, Pl. I, 1)

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Abstract

Central to this thesis is the identification of religious architecture in a region which has a special position in Ancient Iran, the mountainous area of Khuzestan known to classical sources under the name Elymais. This area can be considered Iranian only due to its geographical position, since its population was not of Iranian origin.

A more direct approach to the study of Elymaean archaeology concerns not just the Susiana plain – which shows a strong Greek and Semitic influence – but also the sites with major rock reliefs (Tang-e Sarvak, Shimbar, Izeh-Malamir), as well as the religious architecture of Bard-e Neshandeh and Masjed-e Soleyman.

This study will try to prove, working from religious architecture in Elymais of the Arsacid era, that there were hereditary ties (historical, archaeological, philological) between the Elymaeans and the Elamites, the ancient inhabitants of these territories (Ancient Elam). Given the strong relationship between Elam and neighbouring Mesopotamia, the possible presence of Mesopotamian or other foreign influences in the religious architecture and consequently the use of these types in an Elymaean context can be examined in detail. A review will be made of previously accepted hypotheses of Elymais and its population. The cultural-historical and religious interactions that occurred in this area will be examined in an attempt to establish a nexus of identity for the people of Elymais.

This work aims to bring together, perhaps for the first time, diverse studies concerning Elymais: archaeological, historical, philological, numismatic and religious. This key goal will be pursued to provide a platform for their analysis as a corpus. To achieve this, details of archaeological and historical contexts including locations, excavation reports, grave goods, descriptions of monuments and observations regarding rock reliefs have been collected from a number of available sources, many of them in the form of short articles.

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*“Listen: this story's one you ought to know,
You'll reap what you sow The Consequence of.
This fleeting world is not the world where we
Are Destined To abide eternally:
And for the sake of an unworthy throne
You let the devil claim you for His Own.
I've few days left here, I've no heart for war,
I can not strive and struggle any more,
But hear an old man's words: the heart that's freed
From gnawing passion and ambitious greed
Looks on kings' treasures and the dust as One;
The Man Who Sells His brother, as you've done,
For this same worthless dust, will never be
Regarded as a child of purity.
The world Has seen so many men like you,
And laid them low: there's nothing you can do
But turn to God, then take thought for the way
You travel, since it leads to Judgment Day”*

Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh*

1. Introduction

Historical-religious research and studies of ancient Iran are deeply dependent on philological research and studies, and leave many questions still to be resolved. Accordingly, research involving sacred architecture in this region has considerable value, even if it raises new questions about the interpretation of many structures for which religious functions have been proposed. A lack of comprehensive archaeological documentation constitutes the main obstacle to knowledge of the sacred architecture of Iran, and if it is correct to say that the evolution of religious ideology and religious practices as attested by written sources surely must have influenced this architecture, only a careful and thorough analysis of the monuments will clarify many problems related to their function.

In addition to these considerations, it should be noted that the Muslim invasion largely brought to an end the pre-existing religious and cultural traditions in Iran, especially in monumental architecture.

In particular, this thesis will address questions surrounding the identification of religious space in a region that had a special position in Ancient Iran, the mountainous area of Khuzestan known to classical sources under the name *Elymais*. The fundamental aim will be to try to discuss and address in a unified way all the fragmentary material which makes up the socio-political and cultural-historical background of *Elymais*. Interestingly, such an area can now be considered Iranian due to its geographical position, but, in all probability, the population of *Elymais* was not of Iranian origin. In this specific case, the subject of my thesis will be the study of the Elymaean religious architecture in the Arsacid period. Starting from a careful analysis of these complexes and rock reliefs, it may be possible for the first time to provide an all-round view of this remote and little known part of Khuzestan.

1. Introduction



Figure 1 – Map indicating Iran and Elymais (map online at : jozan.net). Modified.

The region was sometimes independent and sometimes subject to Parthian domination from the 2nd century BC until the 3rd century AD in southwestern Iran. The toponym *Elymais* may presumably be understood as “Elam Minor”¹, defining the rugged countryside referred to by Strabo² in the territories of the Zagros Mountains, as distinct from the plain of Susiana where the seat of Elamite kings Susa was located. Indeed, ancient sources from the period speak of *Elymais* and *Elymaeans*, in whom could be recognized a Graecized form of the names Elam and Elamites. Nevertheless, a Persian origin has also been suggested for this population, which may have been settled in this area of Iran from the 8th century BC³.

One of the first descriptions of the inhabitants of *Elymais* was made by the admiral of

1 Hansman 1998; Potts 1999a.

2 Strabo, *Geography*, XV, 3.12; XVI, 1.17.

3 Ghirshman 1976.

1. Introduction

Alexander the Great's fleet, Nearchus of Crete (c. 356-312 BC), whose journal did not come down directly to the present day, but was handed down thanks to the Greek historian Flavius Arrian (c. 95-175 AD), who used it for his work on the Indian subcontinent, the *Indica* (a unique document from the Classical world). Nearchus defines *Elymaeans* as one of the four predatory tribes situated in what is now southwestern Iran - in the adjacent region of Susiana – who would have demanded and obtained the payment of an economic tribute by the Achaemenid kings⁴.

It seems evident that after more than a hundred years of intense archaeological activity in Iran, our knowledge of *Elymais* and its people is still far from being clarified, although it should be pointed out that in the last few decades scholars have shifted focus, and *Elymais* and *Elymaeans* have started to attract growing interest within the academic community⁵. One of the factors contributing to this situation is to be found in the geography of southwestern Iran. Its combination of highlands and lowlands led to archaeological works being heavily biased towards lowland areas, while the mountainous Elymaean stronghold is still poorly known.

Therefore, a focal point to keep in mind in order to fully delve into the Elymaean world is to understand that a more direct approach to the study of Elymaean archaeology should concern not so much the lowlands and their urban centre, Susiana and its main city Susa, which had a strong Greek and Parthian influence, but rather those desert and desolate wastelands of this rough territory between the Zagros Mountains where sites developed with major rock reliefs, such as Tang-e Botan, Tang-e Sarvak, Hung-e Azhdar, or with the religious architecture of Bard-e Neshandeh and Masjed-e Soleyman.

The first aim of this work will be to bring together disparate studies (archaeological, historical, philological, numismatic, religious) concerning Elymais, seeking to present them as a corpus to allow a more cohesive discussion of all its aspects such as the historical context in which events developed, the artistic productions that were derived, the religious influence that characterized them, and the numismatic spread which allows dating.

4 Strabo (regarding Nearchus), *Geography*, II, 13.6.

5 As demonstrated at the 5th conference of the Societas Iranologica Europaea (Ravenna, 2003), where Iranian archaeologist Jafar Mehr Kian spoke about the discovery of a new bas-relief (Mehr Kian 2003), while the Japanese scholar Seiro Haruta compiled an up-to-date list of known bas-reliefs and inscriptions accompanied by a strong critique of past theories considered “outdated and groundless” (Haruta 2003), or, thanks to the five-year agreement (2008-2013) of the *Iranian-Italian Joint Expedition in Khuzestan* conducted by Vito Messina and Jafar Mehr Kian, using new laser technology.

1. Introduction

In the expectation that more precise evidence will emerge in the future with new data provided by further excavations, this study will suggest a reassessment now of the previously accepted hypothesis regarding this area and its population. In the final section of this thesis – after a review of the most significant sacred structures and rock relief for the purposes of this thesis – the cultural-historical and religious interactions that occurred in this area will be examined in an attempt to establish a nexus of identity for the people of Elymais so that place, community and tradition may be discussed together in order to characterize this population by a socio-political and ritual ideology. Undeniably, the study of the inhabitants of Elymais and their origins – as a basic premise of this research work – create an indispensable socio-cultural framework for the articulation of the subject of this thesis. To summarize, this work proposes – through a more careful analysis of sources and an integration of photographic documentation – to provide an investigation into Elymaean religious architecture during the Parthian period that has too often been left in the shadows. A gap in the scholarship that I hope to narrow somewhat in the course of the ensuing discussion.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Ancient Sources

The ancient sources at our disposal show that there existed in southwestern Persia, from the 2nd century BC to the early 3rd century AC, a sometimes independent, occasionally vassal state of the Parthians, called Elymais by classical writers.

The history of the Parthian kingdom and of the various states that were part of it presents a particular problem, namely that the sources on which to base research are mostly fragmentary and "foreign". For fragmentary, I refer to the 30 Greek lapidary inscriptions recovered at Susa, nine of which may be safely assigned to the Diadochi and Seleucid epochs, providing only an insight into the political and social status of the Greek settlers in Elymais, but nothing regarding the native inhabitants of this area⁶. On the other hand, the Babylonian cuneiform records – the late *Babylonian astronomical diaries* – contain several incomplete references to *Kamniskires King of Elam*, i.e. *Kamniskires King of Elymais*, in 145 BC, and to intense fighting between Parthians and Elymaeans in 140-138 BC⁷. For "foreign", however, I refer to the scarcity of authentic local sources, as the most numerous records regarding western Iran during this period are to be attributed to surviving Greek and Latin sources⁸, which captured experiences and eyewitness accounts as well as hearsay and popular lore, and preserve part of the wealth of knowledge accumulated during the campaigns of Alexander the Great and his successors in Iran⁹.

The problem is compounded by the fact that most of the patrons of the writers who dealt with this topic were frequently at war with Parthia, so the tone of the writings is generally tinged with hostility. It is precisely this hostility which may be seen in references such as "barbarian" in Greek and Latin ethnographic descriptions of Elymais and its inhabitants. Moreover, it seems that the classical authors were either heedless of Elymaean affairs or found very little or no useful information to report in this regard among the earlier records. All of the above weighs on our capacity to fully understand these regions and the societies that existed in them. It should be

6 Published in SEG 17 (Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum); see also Potts (1999a), Table 10.1.

7 The main interest of the Babylonian scribes was astrological and astronomical; for this reason the historical information appears only incidentally. See Potts 2002.

8 For a complete list see Appendix 2.

9 Not surprisingly, as mentioned in the introduction of this work, the first source to speak of Elymais is the account given by Nearchus, admiral of Alexander.

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added that the literary fashion of the classical world was to frown on detailed descriptions of far-away people and countries, as can be seen clearly from the disrespectful comment of Lucian on the author of a Parthian history:

“...who gives, according to his own idea, the clearest, most convincing description of every town, mountain, plain or river... Why, Vologesus's breeches or his bridle, God bless me, they take up several thousand lines apiece.”¹⁰

To the authors of the Classical World must be added the late *Babylonian astronomical diaries* which – while recording astronomical observations – are a mine of incidental yet precious historical information, and the Bible – with particular attention given to the two books of Maccabees and the book of Daniel – where there are different references to Elymais and Elymaeans¹¹.

“Nearchus says that there were four predatory tribes and that of these the Mardi were situated next to the Persians; the Uxii and Elymaei next to the Mardi and the Susians; and the Cossaei next to the Medians and that whereas all four exacted tribute from the kings...”¹²

This passage in which Strabo refers to something said by Nearchus¹³ is up to now the earliest reference known in regard to the Elymaeans, according to which in Alexander's time the “Elymaei” were considered as a plundering group in the neighbourhood of the Susians, who extracted tribute from the Persian (Achaemenid) kings. Strabo also applies Nearchus's term, as “*mountain-dwelling and predatory tribes*”¹⁴ describing Elymais as a mostly rugged country bordering on Susis (the Greek name for Susiana) and inhabited by brigands who waged war

10 Lucian of Samosata (c. 125 AD - after 180 AD) was a writer, rhetorician and satirist who used to write solely in the Greek language. The work from which this citation is taken (p.19) *Quomodo Historia conscribenda sit* (*How to write the History*) shows Lucian's criticism of contemporary historians.

11 *Judith* 1:6 (Ἀριωχ βασιλέως Ἐλυμαίων); *Tobit* 2:10 (εἰς τὴν Ἐλυμαίδα); *Daniel* 8:2 (ἐν Σούσοις τῇ πόλει ἣτις ἐστὶν ἐν Ἐλυμαίδι [‘Elam’ in Hebrew] χώρα).

12 The main study of these tribes remain Pierre Briant (1982) *Etat et Pasteurs au Moyen-Orient Ancien*, in Production Pastorale et Société.

13 Strabo, XI.13.6.

14 *Oreinà kai lēistrikà éthnē* (Strabo, XVI.1.17).

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against the Susians¹⁵.

Following the conquests of Alexander, the Elymaeans are not mentioned in the sources for over a century. In addition to the few brief notes on the geography of Elymais that can be found in some classical surviving manuscripts¹⁶, the Elymaeans seem to appear again on the historical scene in 220/219 BC at the side of Molon, the acting Seleucid satrap of Media, when the revolt occurred against Antiochus III, who invaded Babylonia and Susiana¹⁷. But Strabo's passage considered here¹⁸ has remained a mystery to scholars in his reference to “*thirteen thousand Cossaeans [who] joined the Elymaeans in battle, when the latter were warring against both the Babylonians and the Susians*”. Examining the account of Molon's rebellion in Susiana¹⁹, Strabo's reference to the “Susians” could very well refer to Diogenes, eparch of Susiana, who was posted without success by Xenoetas (Antiochus III's general) to counter the revolt²⁰. On the other hand, by the “Babylonians” Strabo may have meant the Seleucid satrap of Babylonia and his forces. This could be one possibility, but the lack of other literary and epigraphic evidence prevents verification.



Figure 2.1 – Elymaean archer. A detail of Tang-e Sarvak, Block III (Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985).

In 190 BC, Livy refers to an Elymaean contingent present in the Seleucid army at the Battle of Magnesia; 4,000 mixed Cyrtii (Kurdish) slingers and Elymaean archers (Fig. 2.1) stood among the immense force amassed by Antiochus III²¹ for an invasion of Greece, which proved abortive. Appian²² described these Elymaean mounted archers as “*riding on swift camels, who shot arrows with dexterity from their high position, and used very long thin knives when they came to close combat*”.

In 187 BC, the strict conditions imposed by the Romans forced Antiochus III, being short

15 Strabo, XV.3.12.

16 Strabo, XI.13.6, XV.3.12, XVI.1.17-18; Pliny, VI.31.134-136.

17 Polyb., V.40-54.

18 Strabo, XVI.1.18.

19 Polyb., V.48.

20 Nöldeke, 1874, 190.

21 Livy, XXXVII.40.

22 Appian, LXVI.6.32.

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of funds to pay tribute, to attempt to plunder a temple of Bel in Elymais. It is around this unsuccessful raid during which he lost his life, and a similar failed expedition attempted twenty years later by Antiochus IV, that classical sources concentrate their attention when referring to Elymais, but the issue will be addressed in more detail in Appendix 1.

Of particular interest is the period from 145 to 124 BC because it concerns the interval of time covered by the *Babylonian astronomical diaries*, which provide valuable historical information not only about the beginning of the Parthian world and the last years of the Seleucid domination in the East, but especially with regard to the role of Elymais in the 2nd century BC. Of fundamental importance here is the article published by Daniel T. Potts in 2002 in Paris, *Five Episodes in the History of Elymais, 145-124 BC: New Data from the Astronomical Diaries*, in considering the third volume of the astronomical diaries from Babylonia – covering the years from 164 to 61 BC, published by Hermann Hunger and the late Abraham Sachs in 1996²³ – with an accurate examination of the role played by the *Elamite*, as the Elymaeans are called in the diaries, during the two decades that range from 145 to 124 BC.

It is of interest in this regard to consider the events of the spring of 141 BC, where the diaries are in sharp contrast with what is reported by the classical authors, in this case, by Justin. On 9 December, 141 BC, an Elamite contingent marched towards Apamea, “*which is on the river Silhu*”²⁴, for battle. Although Parthian troops were sent out from Seleucia under the command of one Antiochus, “*the general who is above the four generals, who was representing king Arsaces*”²⁵, their success does not seem evident. Rather, on the grounds of having “*made common cause with the Elamite*”²⁶ in the next month he was cursed by the Seleucians and they exacted their revenge by plundering those “*possessions which he had left in the land*”, but this did not

23 Sachs/Hunger, 1996. As also pointed out by Potts (2002) in his article, the work of Sachs and Hunger has certainly revolutionized our understanding about the historical events which influenced the Seleucid and Parthian world during those years, bringing to light information that has allowed us to validate, clarify and in some cases refute conventional points of view.

24 *Apamea-on-the Silhu* has been located by most authorities near modern Kut al-Amara, perhaps a synonym of the toponym *Fam-as-Silh* – Famiya or Fam of the as-Silah district which lay on the canal with the same name - of the Arab geographers, a town located above Wasit on the Tigris, visited by Yaqut in the 13th century (Le Strange 1905, 38). For a more detailed analysis see Potts 2002, 355, footnote 7.

25 Potts 2002, 350. It is interesting to see how a general with a Greek name took the place of Mithridates I. This general is absent in Grainger's Seleucid prosopography (Grainger 1997), but we find him, once again in the diaries, in text # 5 (-140 A. Rev 7') with the name “Antiochus, son of king Ar'abuzana” (see Olbrycht 2010, 239; Potts 2002, 355-356).

26 The fact that Antiochus – Mithridates' general in Seleucia – switched his allegiance with Elymaeans is an intriguing fact, but unfortunately there is no more information about this in the diaries or in other sources.

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alter the fact that the Elymaeans launched a further attack on Bit-Karkudi²⁷, somewhere on the Tigris. The troops sent by Diodotus Tryphon “*general of Antiochus, son of Alexander*” a few months later probably tried to suppress the Elymaean threat. But “*panic of the enemy...this Elamite enemy...*” was still present in these lands during early 140 BC, suggesting that the Elymaean danger had not yet been eradicated.

This brief synopsis of the events of late 141 and early 140 BC shows us in the first place how the Elymaeans were on “bad terms”, obviously with the Parthians but also with the Seleucids, in contrast to what Justin tells us in his *Epitome* where he reports that Demetrius was “*assisted...by auxiliary troops from the Persians, Elymaeans, and Bactrians*”²⁸. Moreover, while Justin clearly shows that Mithridates had not yet conquered Babylonia before leaving for Hyrcania because, on the way back, once having defeated the Elymaeans “*added this nation also to his dominions, and extended the Parthian empire, by reducing many other tribes under his yoke, from Mount Caucasus to river Euphrates*”²⁹, the diary instead – as rightly stressed by Potts³⁰ – reveals a Mithridates already king in Babylonia when it was written in November/December 141 BC. This fact accords with the Parthian conquest of Seleucia in July of the same year, since it is explicitly written that the general in charge of countering the Elymaean offensive “*was representing king Arsaces*” who, as stated in line 34 of the same text, had “*departed from Araqan'ia*”, i.e. Hyrcania³¹.

Taking a leap of about a century, around 65 BC, we find news of a correspondence between Pompey and “*the kings of Elymais*”, without any names, in Plutarch's *Life of Pompey* (36)³². In all likelihood, the king in question is Kamnaskires III who sent ambassadors to the Roman general Pompey, momentarily located in Lesser Armenia. The Elymaeans may have sought the support of Rome against the Parthian king Phraates III (71-57 BC)³³. In the first half of the 1st century AD, we still find the Elymaeans mentioned in Roman sources allied with Tiridates

27 Precise location unknown (absent in Zadok 1985).

28 Justin, XXXVI.1.4.

29 Justin, XLI.6.8.

30 Potts 2002, 354.

31 Old Persian *Varkana* (“Wolf’s Land”), an ancient region on the southeastern shores of the Caspian Sea (Herzfeld 1968, 320; Kiani 1982; Vogelsang 1988).

32 The same episode – but without explicit references – seems to be present in the work of the Roman historian Dio Cassius (2nd – 3rd cent. AD), *Roman History* (XXXVII.5).

33 Bronze coins of Phraates are unique to the mint of Susa, and he may have ruled from there at times to menace the neighbouring Elymaeans.

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in his revolt against Artabanus³⁴.

From the second half of the 1st century AD and throughout the entire 2nd century written sources are completely absent, therefore our primary source – apart from a few inscriptions and several rock reliefs whose dates are difficult to determine - turns out to be the Elymaean coinage. This will be a topic covered more specifically in the course of this work³⁵.

2.2. Secondary Sources in the 17th, 18th and 19th century

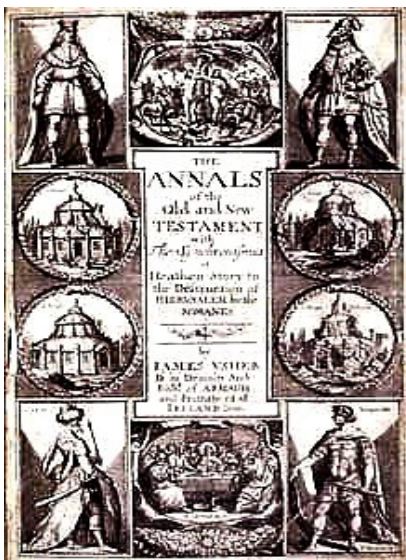


Figure 2.2 – Ussher. *Annales of the World*.

During my research into sources, almost by chance I came across a series of works - three to be exact – of far-reaching historical significance in that their purpose was to cover long periods of time. They could be described as historical encyclopaedias, works that aspire to a monumental character along the same lines of the great classics of the past, and they should be given credit for conserving accounts of documents that are not available, having been destroyed some time after their first draft.

Putting them in strict chronological order, the first I would like to mention is the *Annals of the World*³⁶ (Fig. 2.2), the massive compendium of ancient history by James Ussher³⁷.

It is here in the archbishop's development of the chronological work of many earlier scholars³⁸ – where he tried to provide a framework for historically dating the whole Bible – that he undertook a careful synthesis of historical documents including biblical, Middle Eastern and Mediterranean

34 Tacitus, *Annales*, VI.44. In 36 AD the Parthian usurper Tiridates III, a nominee of the Roman emperor Tiberius, seized most of Mesopotamia from the rightful ruler Artabanus III. But the revolt failed, and Artabanus regained Mesopotamia in the same year.

35 Section 4.5.

36 The original Latin manuscript titled *Annales veteris testamenti a prima mundi origine deducti* (The Annals of the Old Testament, Deduced from the First Origin of the World), was published in two parts, in 1650 and 1654 respectively. An English translation was published in 1658 after the death of the author.

37 James Ussher (1581-1656) was the Anglican archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland (the head of the Anglican Church in Ireland). He was one of the most respected scholars and theologians of his time, and travelled widely in search of original documents, or at least the oldest versions of them he could find. The many books and documents he collected during his life were to form the nucleus of the great library at Trinity College in Dublin. Despite his success as a churchman, Ussher is perhaps most famous for having dated the time of Creation to the evening before 23rd October in 4004 BC, calculating this in his *Annals*.

38 In particular Joseph Justus Scaliger who pioneered the use of the Julian Period in calendar calculations.

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sources, calendar systems of antiquity, Roman history, and any ancient documentary sources he could acquire and verify. In his narration from year to year, Elymais is specifically named with regard to two very clear events. The first is the attempt to plunder the temple of Bel by Antiochus the Great in which the Arsacid king himself lost his life³⁹, while the second describes the failure of Antiochus IV⁴⁰.

The second text that I would like to introduce is the 65-volume universal history published with contributions from several scholars in London between 1747 and 1768. The complete title of the work is *An Universal History from the Earliest Account to the Present Time. Compiled from original authors; and illustrated with maps, cuts, notes, &c. With a general index to the whole*, and – as the title itself suggests – it sought to unify the history of Europe with the stories of the world's other known cultures. The work assigns an entire section to the kingdom of Elymais in which a geographical description is made of the region (using the sources of Strabo and Pliny), emphasizing the propensity of Elymaean people for war and also suggesting the possibility of independence over “*Alexander's life time*”⁴¹. Finally, it briefly narrates the attempts by Antiochus III and IV to plunder their rich sanctuaries.

And at last from the 19th century, it is interesting to note the work in four volumes of William Drummond⁴² entitled “*Origines; Or, Remarks on the Origin of Several Empires, States, and Cities*” (1824). In his work, the author - as was his habit - criticizes classical and commonly accepted theories while introducing something different. As regards Elymais, Drummond begins with a critique of Josephus (I.6.4) by pointing out that the classical author incorrectly translated the word from a Biblical passage (Genesis 10:21⁴³, The Table of Nations) indicating one of the sons of Shem: *Elymos* for Josephus but *Eilam* for Drummond. This passage is important because Josephus regarded Elymaeans (and later the Persians) as being descended from Elymos, but for Drummond, he did not have “*the shadow of an authority for so doing*”⁴⁴, declaring further that the Elymaeans were not descended absolutely from Eilam but rather they were a nation of

39 [3817 AM, 4527 JP, 187 BC (3149)].

40 [3840b AM, 4550 JP, 164 BC (3425)].

41 Vol. IX, chap. XXXIII, sect. X, 148.

42 Sir William Drummond of Logiealmond (1770-1828) was a Scottish diplomat and Member of Parliament, poet and philosopher who devoted himself to the study of Greek and Roman history.

43 בְּנֵי שֵׁם עֵילָם וְאַשּׁוּר וְאַרְפַּכְשָׁד וְלֹד וְאַרְם:

44 Drummond 1824, 306.

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“Cushites”⁴⁵, giving Pliny⁴⁶, Ptolemy⁴⁷ and Stephanus as sources. Then, Drummond affirms how Elymais is a small district of Susiana rather than a separate province, and as the name Elymais derives from the Persian *elmiha*⁴⁸ – which he translated into English as “gate-post” – he advances his theory by stating that if the Greek authors have translated the word Elymais in various ways, “it is more likely that these corrupted names of the district should be derived from the Persian than from any other language”⁴⁹.

2.3. Archaeological Explorations

As early as the 17th century, a number of European travellers with astonishment reported news of significant ancient monuments to be seen throughout the countryside. The first academic-scientific attempt to address one of these monuments was the record of Rawlinson about Behistun (1836-1841). And it is precisely to Rawlinson that we are indebted for his being the first to give notice of Elymaean sites, and this had the unexpected effect of encouraging the young Layard to make his journey, adding to his extensive travels in Iran and describing numerous sites including the reliefs of Izeh-Malamir and Shimbar and the monumental structure at Masjed-e Soleyman. Regarding Rawlinson and Layard – and also for De Bode – they did not conduct archaeological explorations in the true sense of this term. More appropriately, these can be called “accounts of travels” and they will be examined in some detail in Appendix 3.

Instead, in regard to the history of archaeological research in Iran, it may be divided into two periods: before and after the Second World War. The early period can in turn be subdivided into a first phase of mainly French activity⁵⁰ (c. 1884-1931), and a second phase in which

45 Drummond 1824, 306.

46 “*Susianis ab oriente proximi sunt Cossiae*”. This is the passage of Pliny (VI.31) that Drummond led to support his argument. In reality, both before and after, Pliny speaks explicitly of “*Elymais*” or “*Elymaide*”, and due to his accuracy in reporting places and peoples it seems unlikely that he would use the word “*Cossiae*” to refer to the inhabitants of “*Elymais*” without explaining this clearly.

47 In reality Ptolemy (VI.3.3) makes a clear distinction between *Elymaei* and *Cossaei*.

48 According to his theory, Elymais – considered as a small district separating Susiana from Persis – contained the so-called Persian Gates, from which it may have taken its name.

49 Drummond 1824, 307.

50 Regarding Elymais, of considerable importance is the work done by Jacques de Morgan, the French archaeologist and prehistorian, who had a major role in excavations of Susa (1897-1912) as the director of the Délégation en Perse at the time of Naser-ed-Din Shah and Mozaffar-ed-din Shah of Qajar. Particularly of note are the descriptions made by the Egyptologist Gustave Jéquier (1901, 133-143), a member of the mission, who in 1898 visited the plain of Malamir and in particular reproduced the reliefs of Hung-e Azhdar (Hung-i Nowruzi) which he dated to the Sasanian period in agreement with what was done by Layard in 1841. These inscriptions were then studied by V. Scheil (1901, 102-132). Later, after the French mission, the plain of Malamir was also visited by O. Mann in 1902 (*Die Bactiaren und ihre Land*, Westermanns Monatshefte, 1910,

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archaeology in Iran became a multinational affair⁵¹ (1931-1940).

The first excavator to take advantage of the abrogation of the monopoly was the eminent German scholar, Ernst Herzfeld⁵² followed after a few years by Erich F. Schmidt. The third – and in the case of Elymais most important – to benefit from this period of suddenly expanded activity was the doyen of Inner Asian exploration, Sir Aurel Stein. Already in his seventies by the time of his extended – even arduous – archaeological expeditions of the 1930s⁵³, the Hungarian-British archaeologist and explorer sought out, and briefly mentioned, numerous sites – including Masjed-e Soleyman, Bard-e Neshandeh and Tang-e Sarvak – in different parts of southern and western Persia, published later in his “narrative of an archaeological journey”, *Old routes of Western Īrān* (1940).

The modern period can be subdivided into what might best be called the “quiet phase” (1941-1959) and the “explosive phase” (1960-1978).

With the outbreak of World War II, archaeological activities throughout Iran declined considerably. As the only pre-war dig director to return to Persia after the interval of the war years, Roman Ghirshman, the new head of the French mission at Susa, opened separate operations on the “Ville Royale” and the “Ville des Artisans” in 1946 and 1947 respectively. During 1947 he also visited the site of Bard-e Neshandeh⁵⁴ while in 1948 he also led excavations at Masjed-e Soleyman, where he returned later.

Over the same period in so-called “Lower Khuzestan”⁵⁵, Donald McCown – a member of

446).

- 51 Under the terms of a new Franco-Persian accord the monopoly on excavation was brought to an end and in a further welcome development, the French authorities agreed to assist in the creation of a national archaeological museum. A young French architect, André Godard, was posted to Tehran and charged with the latter task. Following strenuous efforts with Prime Minister Moḥammad-‘Alī Forūḡī, he witnessed in November 1930 the promulgation of the Conservation of Antiquities Act. Under the terms of this legislation those objects found on any excavation were to be divided equally between Persia and the expedition that recovered them. In addition, the Act called for the formation of a new Department of Antiquities in direct succession to an earlier Office of Antiquities that appears to have had little authority, and Godard was named to direct the new body, which itself underwent a further name change when it became, in or around 1937, the Department of Archaeology.
- 52 The Persian government duly invited the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago to sponsor a full-scale program of excavations in and near Persepolis itself. The work was initially directed by Herzfeld (1931-34) and later by Erich F. Schmidt (1934-39).
- 53 Between 1932 and 1936, he carried out four expeditions in Persia.
- 54 Site visited in the same year by Godard (1949, 153-162).
- 55 By “Lower Khuzestan”, Alizadeh considers “*the region south of Shushtar and west of the river Karun within the modern Iranian borders*” (1985, 175, footnote 2). In a geomorphological context “Lower Khuzestan” is constituted by a plain which is the south-eastern extension of the Mesopotamian sedimentary basin. In the north and east the plain is bordered by foothills of the Zagros Mountains and in the south by the Persian Gulf.

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the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago – carried out in 1948 the most extensive survey of all in the area, with 44 sites⁵⁶ recorded in the vicinity of Ahvaz and Hawiza. However, these were only the ones visible from roads he could drive along and the material was left unpublished for almost four decades⁵⁷.

Those were also the years in which the celebrated Iranist and linguist Walter Bruno Henning went to Tang-e Sarvak. To be precise, in the spring of 1950 – while he was in Persepolis as a guest of the Iranian government – he had the idea to go to comparatively close Tang-e Sarvak (around 150 km away) in the district of Behbahan⁵⁸ accompanied by his friend M. Rostami, photographer of the Irân Bâstân Museum in Tehran over those years.

The time between 1960 and 1978 has instead been frequently, and rightly, regarded as the period when archaeology in Iran came of age, especially because in this period the regulations governing excavations in Persia underwent many desirable modifications⁵⁹, and moreover the 1960s were the beginning of almost two decades of fruitful international collaboration in which Persian, American, Austrian, Belgian, British, Canadian, Danish, French, German, Italian and Japanese excavators each played a highly positive role⁶⁰.

Also concerning the subject of this study, this period

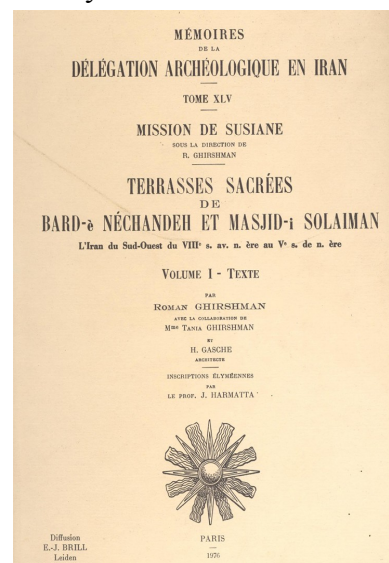


Figure 2.3 – Ghirshman (1976) *Terrasses sacrées de Bard-e Néchandeh et Masjid-i Soleiman*, MDAFI, 45, Paris.

56 He discovered many more sites but he recorded only 105 of them. Of these 105 sites, 44 were discovered in lower Khuzestan (Alizadeh 1985, 176).

57 Ultimately published by Alizadeh 1985.

58 The district of Behbahan was counted sometimes as part of Persis (Fars), sometimes of Elymais (Khuzestan). In Muslim times it mostly belonged to Fars, but now it is part of Khuzestan. The name (Behbahan) was not mentioned in texts earlier than the 14th century. The land that is currently known as Behbahan was part of Aryagan (Argan) city. The latter was destroyed in a natural disaster, most probably massive earthquakes and flooding.

59 Particularly regarding the prevention of clandestine digging and so-called commercial excavations, in which half of the finds were automatically assigned to the person paying for the excavation, who could then dispose of the objects on the open market.

60 In close succession the archaeological branch of the French Institute in Tehran came to be complemented by the presence of both the German Archaeological Institute and the British Institute of Persian Studies, followed, in the mid-sixties, by the foundation of the Asia Institute in Shiraz, and, last but not least, by the establishment of the American Institute of Iranian Studies. Moreover, in December 1972 the Iranian Center for Archaeological Research (ICAR) was founded, under the direction of Fīrūz Bāqerzāda. With the creation of ICAR and with the continued vigour of the field activities of the Department of Archaeology at Tehran University, a whole generation of young Persians suddenly found the opportunity to gain a critical new level of field experience.

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was decidedly prolific. It is essential to mention the excavations of the so-called *terrasses sacrées* of Masjed-e Soleyman and Bard-e Neshandeh made by the eminent archaeologist Roman Ghirshman, who was appointed as head of the French Archaeological Mission in Iran during that period. In 1964 he returned to Bard-e Neshandeh – seventeen years after his first brief visit – to begin a detailed study of the area in three excavations (1964-1966). Subsequently, retired from his task of directing the excavations of Susa in 1967, this French archaeologist of Ukrainian origin returned to Masjed-e Soleyman where he worked until 1972⁶¹. The remains he found on these two terraces were similar to one another and he concluded that these areas were indeed two sacred terraces from the Achaemenian period. He was probably right about the religious character of these areas though he interpreted them as sacred centres of Zoroastrianism, which they were presumably not, as John F. Hansman tried to prove later (1985).

Credit goes to Ghirshman, together with Louis Vanden Berghe, for launching the drafting of the international journal, *Iranica Antiqua*, in 1961. This leading journal on mainly pre-Islamic Iranian art, archaeology and culture in general is still published today. Further, the emeritus Belgian archaeologist made important discoveries in those years, especially regarding the Elymaean inscriptions. During his seventh survey in Iran, he went to Khuzestan (29 July-1 October 1962). His stay at Malamir proved particularly fruitful; he was the first to photograph the Elamite and Elymaean rock carvings (particularly Hung-e Azhdar) in that region. During the eighth campaign (14 May-30 August 1964) he travelled on mule through ancient Elymais, in the Bakhtiari mountains.

Vanden Berghe published numerous articles and books on topics concerning ancient Iran. His fundamental book, *Archéologie de l'Iran ancien*⁶², has for years been the basic publication on pre-Islamic art and archaeology, for students and scholars alike, as well as for a more general public. Nowadays, this monumental work has been revised and corrected thanks to new studies and research, but what is even more relevant – certainly for the drafting of this work – is his *Bibliographie analytique de l'archéologie de l'Iran Ancien* (Leiden, 1979), followed in 1981 and 1987 by Supplément 1: 1978-1980 and Supplément 2: 1981-1985. This work was continued by E. Haerinck and K. G. Stevens: Supplément 3: 1986-1995, and Supplément 4: 1996-2003.

In 1975, Vanden Berghe, Erik Smekens, a photographer at Ghent University, and Ernie Haerinck spent four months in Iran, with the aim of visiting and photographing all of the rock

61 Ghirshman (1976) *Terrasses sacrées de Bard-e Néchandeh et Masjid-i Soleiman*, MDAFI, 45, Paris.

62 Leiden, 1959, 2nd ed. 1966.

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reliefs in the country. This exploration, which brought them to remote places such as Shimbar or Tang-e Sarvak⁶³, resulted in a 1983 exhibition in Brussels titled “*Reliefs rupestres de l’Iran ancien*”. In 1985, also as a result of their 1975 visit, he and Klaus Schippmann⁶⁴ published the monograph *Les reliefs rupestres d’Elymaïde (Iran) de l’ époque parthe*, another work which occupies an important place in studies of Elymais.

Respecting Shimbar and Tang-e Sarvak, one cannot fail to mention the research made *in loco* by the Dutchman Jan Pieter Guépin and the Englishman Adrian David Hugh Bivar. The two scholars were in Iran in the spring of 1962 and together they visited the site of Tang-e Sarvak as the guests of Muhammad Ali Khan Khalili, the chief of the local tribe of the Bahme’i Lurs. After this first visit, Guépin returned to the site⁶⁵ and more specifically above the ravine of Tang-e Sarvak where he discovered ruins which he believed to be the site of the temple of Artemis-Nanaia, frequently mentioned below, which Strabo refers to under the name of Ta Azara. In the meantime, the Emeritus Professor of Iranian Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London), A.D.H. Bivar, travelled towards Shimbar to view the inscriptions – many of them unrecorded – in the valley. Thanks to the hospitality of Muhammad Muradi, headman of the small encampment there, he visited and recorded the inscriptions and sculptures of the 1st and 2nd century of our era at Tang-e Botan and ink graffiti at Pul-i Nagin and Tang-e Chilan, all in the Shimbar Valley region and apparently from the same period as the Tang-e Sarvak monuments. The account of the expedition, *The Inscription at Shîmbâr*, was published in 1964 along with S. Shaked in the Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies (London).

Finally, during these years one can not overlook the protracted efforts in Southern Khuzestan of John Hansman. First in 1965 when searching for the sites of the major cities of Mesene, Charax and Forât, he identified the ruins of Naisan with the ancient city of Spasinou Charax⁶⁶, and then in 1966 he sought to find the ruins of Seleucia on the Hedyphon as he “*followed the whole of the lower Jarrahi by boat and where possible by land*”⁶⁷, but only

63 Site visited in the same decade by Eric De Waele (1972 and 1973) and Hubertus von Gall (1970).

64 The German archaeologist also took great interest in Elymais and not just concerning the rock reliefs. First, during his journey Klaus Schippmann visited the two sacred terraces of Masjed-e Soleyman (1968-1969) and Bard-e Neshandeh (spring 1968), reporting his experience of travelling there in his article *Notizen einer Reise in den Bachtiaribergen* (1970). Furthermore, he surveyed Iranian fire-temples in 1971 and gave his interpretation of two sanctuaries (Schippmann 1971).

65 The opportunity to visit this impervious area was due to the assistance of the National Iranian Oil Company and the Iranian Oil Operating Companies in providing helicopter transport.

66 Hansman 1967, 21-58.

67 Hansman 1978, 156.

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afterwards, thanks to aerial photographs of the upper Jarrahi River⁶⁸, he was able to identify a large site shaped like an irregular parallelogram called Ja Nishin⁶⁹, which he tentatively identified with Seleucia.

With the arrival of the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1978/79, foreign archaeological teams working around Iran went back home, leaving their projects unfinished. In the year 2000, after a gap of more than two decades, Iran was eager to revive its ancient sites and archaeological activities, and reopened its doors to foreign experts.

The arrival of foreign experts reached its peak in this last decade, with more than 50 teams from the United States, Germany, Italy, Belgium, France, Australia, Japan, England, Poland, etc. taking part in excavations and studies of Iranian historical sites.

With regard to Elymais, of great interest is the research conducted by the Iranian-Italian Joint Expedition in Khuzestan⁷⁰, led by Vito Messina and Jafar Mehr Khian. Their work began in the plain of Izeh-Malamir with three campaigns at Hung-e Azhdar, Hung-e Yaralivand and Hung-e Kamalvand, mountain valleys that open up to the foothills of the mountain range of Bakhtiari, the continuation of the Zagros Mountains in the Iranian plateau. The first campaign took place in February 2008, the second during February and March 2009, and the third in April and May 2010. This research aims to acquire new data on rock reliefs at Elymais dated to the Parthian epoch and to explore the areas containing these works, with the use of both traditional survey methods and the most modern technologies such as laser scanning.

2.4. Closing the Gap

This literature review has sought to demonstrate that the area in southwestern Iran, called Elymais in ancient sources, is yet to be subjected to a thorough analysis through archaeological

68 The Jarrahi River in eastern Khuzestan has long been identified with the Hedyphon River mentioned in classical sources (Str. XVI.1.18; Pliny VI.31.135).

69 This site is situated *c.* 80 km south-east of Ahwaz.

70 This project has been developed under a five-year Protocol (Memorandum of Understanding) signed by the Iranian Center for Archaeological Research (*ICAR*) and the Centro Ricerche Archeologiche e Scavi di Torino per il Medio Oriente e l'Asia (*CST*), with the involvement of other institutions such as the Dipartimento di Ingegneria del Territorio, dell'Ambiente e delle Geotecnologie del Politecnico di Torino (*DITAG*), the Dipartimento di Scienze Antropologiche, Archeologiche e Storico-Territoriali dell'Università di Torino (*SAAST*) and the Dipartimento di Scienze dei Materiali dell'Università di Milano Bicocca (*DSM*). The mission is co-financed in Italy by the Ministero degli Affari Esteri della Repubblica Italiana and by the Fondazione CRT di Torino.

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research and study of the material and textual evidence. While this thesis cannot aim for such an undertaking, it does hope to somewhat narrow the specific gap in the scholarship on Elymais and its culture by collating and analysing all the available evidence and findings as a corpus, aiming, after a careful analysis and a critical review, to provide a new general overview regarding Elymaean religious architecture.

3. Methodology

3.1. Method

As stated in the introduction, the first aim of this work is to bring together the diverse known studies concerning the textual, archaeological and artistic record of Elymais, so as to provide a platform for their analysis as a corpus. To achieve this, details of archaeological and historical contexts including locations, excavation reports, grave goods, descriptions of monuments and observations regarding rock reliefs were collected from the limited number of available sources, mostly in the form of short articles. The detail in these sources is extremely inconsistent and occasionally contradictory. Where discrepancies exist between publications, the descriptions provided by the scholars who have personally visited the places, where available, have generally been used in preference to those of secondary commentators except where the field visitors have been clearly proved incorrect. In each case details of these discrepancies are highlighted.

This thesis is structured in topics, and within each topic the main publications and various collected data will be taken into consideration. Further, in view of the difficulty in precisely defining the geographical limits of Elymais, and in view of the bare amount of digs and fieldwork that do not make it easy to classify an archaeological find as Elymaean rather than Parthian, this work will consider only the religious architecture and the rock reliefs that are widely considered to be Elymaean. Specifically – as underlined in the introduction – those sites in isolated areas within the Zagros Mountains⁷¹, having been harder to contaminate with outside influences, are the ones that most meaningfully contribute to this work. The Zagros Mountains as a “cradle” of Elymaean treasure and traditions will be a widely addressed motif in the course of this thesis.

71 Regarding the ethno-linguistic duality between the lowlands and the highlands in the territory of ancient Elam, see scholars such as Amiet (1979), Nissen (2004) and Vallat (1980). With specific regard to Elymais, see also Potts (1999a).

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A further premise to do before going into the real *corpus* of this work concerns the nomenclature used specifically for geographical places and archaeological sites. Terminology issues will continue to vex the Iranian studies until scholars attempt to agree on the terms to be used. In this thesis the various toponyms are written using the most common forms in the academic community in order to facilitate an easier identification of places and monuments. Nevertheless, in some particular cases where there are variances in the nomenclature of sites the reasoning for this has been provided using as a single system of transliteration that of the Encyclopaedia Iranica (*EIr*⁷²). While a full revision of the spelling of all Persian names and their relative uniformity of a single system of transliteration is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Consonants				Vowels	
ء	ʾ	ض	ẓ	اَ	ā
ب	b	ط	ṭ	و	u
پ	p	ظ	ẓ	ی	i
ت	t	ع	ʿ	اِ	a
ث	ṯ	غ	ġ	اُ	o
ج	j	ف	f	اِی	e
چ	č	ق	q	ه	a
ح	ḥ	ک	k	و	ow/aw
خ	k̄	گ	g	ی	ey/ay
د	d	ل	l		
ذ	ḏ	م	m		
ر	r	ن	v		
ز	z	و	v		
ژ	ž	ه	h		
س	s	ی	y		
ش	š				
ص	ṣ				

Figure 3.1 – Encyclopaedia Iranica (*EIr*). System of Transliteration.

72 See <http://www.iranicaonline.org/pages/guidelines>

3. Methodology

A general overview of Elymais, from the etymology of the name to its geography and climate and finally the chronological description of events, is provided in section 4. Indeed, before confronting the question of the monuments and rock reliefs it is of fundamental importance to describe the broader historical-cultural framework in which they were created and modified. Towards this end, there will be a discussion of Elymaean coinage in section 4.5, as underlined in the literature review, as it is an indispensable cultural and religious resource for understanding Elymais and its people. This is not only from the aspect of the succession of kings but also from the artistic-religious point of view; it is a source that cannot be ignored when seeking to understand historical developments in this region of southwest Iran.

Moving into the core of this work, section 5 explores the extent of Elymaean religious architecture by examining the sanctuaries of Bard-e Neshandeh and Masjed-e Soleyman. These religious monuments perfectly reflect the concept of an Elymaean model that was born and developed in the desert areas of the Bakhtiari Mountains, which were discussed in preceding paragraphs. Specific attention is also paid to the question of why these temples are not in the most luxuriant and crowded flatlands but instead in the isolated and bleak highlands. It cannot be simply by chance that such places of worship have traditionally been on common routes taken by Zagros nomadic people.

Section 6, instead, examines a sample of the most important Elymaean rock reliefs which can be considered a dominant element in those lands, dating from the earliest Elamite period. The importance of such reliefs rests on the fact that they link two cultures – Elamite and Elymaean – that could be considered as one following the other, revealing a continuity of artistic, cultural and religious references. On this point, there is major importance in the sacred area of Tang-e Sarvak (section 6.2) which represents the most monumental complex of Parthian rock carvings survived to this day. The dating and interpretation of these reliefs have varied greatly over the years and only recently has a comprehensive analysis of their style, iconography and chronology been achieved, but it is not the aim of this thesis to grapple with such issues, and instead they are noted only when they are deemed relevant to the development of this work.

Finally, section 7 presents a historical analysis of relationships involving Persia,

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Mesopotamia, Syria and Elam, as a foundation for discussing the extent to which Elymaean religious architecture and rock reliefs may have been influenced by other cultures. In particular, section 7.3 (and Appendix 4) will confront the question – as noted in the introduction – of the origins of the people of Elymais, connecting the results of such analysis with the context in which sacred architecture was developed to undoubtedly reflect their religious ideology and worship practices.

3.2. Limitations and Biases

The fundamental limitations of this work are the scarcity of sources and the inadequate excavations, recording and publications of the southwestern Iran during the Parthian era.

Our knowledge of Elymaean history and the study of the various aspects of its political, social, religious, and cultural life in the Arsacid era is limited by the nature of historical sources, reflecting the general issue regarding the Parthian world already addressed at the beginning of our Literature Review. As it has been seen in the previous chapter, the primary group of historical data always consists of narrative sources whose authors present either the entire history of a given state or only selected periods or events, showing them in a cause-and-effect chain. In this particular case, all known records on the history of Parthia, and consequently of Elymais, originated outside the country and in languages of neighbouring peoples with whom Parthians communicated⁷³. Even more than the political biases, the problem with this type of sources is their geographical bias, but in this case we are relatively fortunate as naturally mostly concerned with the eastern borders of the Roman Empire, and thus western borders of the Arsacid reign of which Elymais is part⁷⁴.

Although the primary narrative sources concerning the Elymais are mainly of foreign

73 As widely discussed in the Literature Review, the works by Greek and Roman authors are the most important group of such records. While indispensable, they do not all deserve equal trust. Their authors did not always possess full and plausible information, nor did they necessarily fully grasp the social and political realities of the Parthian state. Moreover, they obviously would have written the history of their enemies - who appeared as barbarians to the Greeks, and to the Romans as a burdensome obstacle in their imperial schemes - not from a favourable or friendly point of view.

74 Surely in this context, the new historical data provided by cuneiform texts of the astronomical diaries make up an *uniquum* as a historical source results from their continuity and the exact dating of their entries. Thanks to the many fragments of those astronomical texts - which originated from the period of the Arsacid rule in Mesopotamia - researchers gained an insight into events entirely absent from other records (Sachs/Hunger 1996; Hackl/Jacobs/Weber 2010).

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origin, this does not mean that no historical records are available from within their kingdom, and so the coinage, obviously quite vague sources themselves, also becomes a part of this issue. Indeed, numismatic sources are indispensable for studies on Elymaean iconography but even the coins can barely tell us much about the social or political life of Elymais and its people.

As can be seen, neither the above quoted literary and documentary sources nor the evidence of coins alone can satisfactorily elucidate the history and culture of Elymais. The reader should thus be well aware of this limitation in historical and cultural evidence while reading this or any other essay regarding the Elymaean civilization.

A separate body of evidence comes from archaeological discoveries. This evidence, though of limited value, nevertheless casts much light on various aspects of Elymaean art and material culture. Excavations at Bard-e Neshandeh and Masjed-e Soleyman which unearthed the remains of Elymaean religious complex have enriched us with knowledge on the material and spiritual culture of the Elymaeans. Other aspects of this culture were studied thanks to the study of the rock reliefs scattered all over the Elymaean territory.

Despite the great variety of sources and their growing body, our knowledge of Parthian and Elymaean history continues to contain important blanks which we are still not able to fill. This apathy towards Arsacid epoch and the resulting lack of comprehensive studies of Elymaean culture is partly due to the fact that, until recently, many researchers neglected the importance of the Parthian period in the history of ancient Iran, treating it as a transition period between the Achaemenid and Sasanid eras, and as such undeserving closer attention. One result of this attitude, prevalent especially in the 19th and early 20th centuries, was belittling and even deliberate destruction of materials and finds from the Parthian era uncovered during excavations in Mesopotamia and Iran.

Accordingly, I have tried to combine and analyse these different sources at my disposal in the hope of clarifying some of the persistent difficulties that have clouded our views of the historical, religious and cultural situation in Elymais during the Arsacid period.

4. Elymais

4.1. Name

In order to deal with the history, culture and religion of Elymais, an important initial step is to establish where the name comes from. The etymology of this word, *Elymais*, can provide valuable insights.

The phonetic similarity of *Elymais* and *Elam*⁷⁵ appears obvious, and *Elymais* – or Ἐλυμαίς⁷⁶ – would not seem other than the graecisation of the Hebrew form עֲלָמַי (Ēlām)⁷⁷. Many who are aware of *Elymais* know of it not so much because of various hints in the classical sources and Mesopotamian diaries – as discussed in the Literature Review – but instead from scattered references in the Bible. Another possibility could be that the word *Elymais* derives directly from the Talmudical אַלְמַי (Almin)⁷⁸. There is a further hypothesis which states that the term has an Aryan origin derived from the term *Ailama*, a supposed corruption of *Airyama*⁷⁹. In this latter case, without dwelling on detailed ethno-linguistic discourse that is not relevant here, a possible Indo-European origin for the name given to this region could be taken to support the argument of those who – like Ghirshman – suggest a Persian origin for the Elymaeans.

In effect, the identification of Elymais and Elymaeans with the ancient Elam and Elamites appears highly probable in light of the Babylonian Astronomical diaries⁸⁰, where Akkadian authors continue to use the terms *Elam* and *Elamites* while the Greek sources speak of *Elymais* and *Elymaeans*.

75 Elam is an artificial construct that attests to the importance of a prominent geographical feature, the Zagros Mountains. In all probability coined by Sumerian scribes, its etymology is very debatable. The term derives from a Sumerian word, *elama* (written with the logogram NIM, which means “high”, supported by the definitive KI, meaning “country”), corresponding to the Elamite word *haltama* or *hal Ha(l)tamti* and to the Akkadian *elamtu/elammatum*, and possibly related to *elûm* or alternatively to *’êlam* of biblical Hebrew (Herrenschmidt, C. 1996; Weissbach, F. H. 1905).

76 Wiesehöfer, J.: *Elymais*; *Brill’s New Pauly*. Antiquity volumes edited by: Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider; [Brill Online](#), 2013.

77 Biblical figure, Shem’s eldest son and Noah’s grandson mentioned in *Genesis* (10, 22), whose descendants lived in this region.

78 *Soncino Babylonian Talmud* (1935-1948), Sanhedrin, Folio 94a. See also Neubauer 1868. The *Talmud Bavli* (Babylonian Talmud) is represented by a series of documents compiled from the 3rd cent. to the 6th cent. AD.

79 See Müller, M. (1861) *Lectures on the science of language: delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain in April, May, & June, 1861*.

80 See Potts 1999a, Table 10.2.

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The absence of Elymaean sources prevents us from knowing how such people designated themselves, but as also occurred with Elam⁸¹ before, this label of *Elymais* was in all probability an indigenous name used by Greek writers who essentially Hellenized a Mesopotamian designation for the highlands to the east. This name could have meant “mountaineers”. So, *Elymais* might also be an indication that *Elam Minor*, the alleged original Elamite homeland between Khuzestan and Fars, is to be distinguished from the so-called *Elam Major*, the wider state comprising the plain of Susiana, formed by the Elamites in the course of their history⁸².

In conclusion, the word *Elymais* encompasses *in sensu stricto* the physical features occupied by a highland, and a political entity and a people who over time interacted with cultures in lowland Susiana (in the present province of Khuzestan in southwestern Iran), while at the same time maintaining strong roots in the Zagros highlands (precisely in the modern province Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad between Khuzestan and Fars).

4.2. Geography

The borders of the region designated under the name Elymais are still not known with precision. The information that the ancient texts provide is conflicting and furthermore the borders of the region changed over time. However, in this short section I will try to place such a region in a geographical context more accurately than Franz Heinrich Weissbach did in the *Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*⁸³. For this scholar, Elymais was simply “a region situated between Babylonia and Persia” and “*de facto identical*” to Susiana⁸⁴.

81 The people of the Iranian highland, a set of ethnically and linguistically diverse groups, never used the term *Elam* to refer to themselves, and the Elamite scribes did not ever use logogram NIM when they wrote in Elamite. As Zadok has stressed, Mesopotamian scribes applied the designation *Elam* to “any highlander from the Iranian Plateau and its piedmont” (Zadok 1987, 3).

82 Potts 1999a, Hansman 1998.

83 This is the title of the greatest encyclopaedia of classical scholarship, known as the *Pauly-Wissowa*. It is an indispensable resource in ancient research. Started by A.A. Pauly (1837-1847) and continued by C. Walz and W. Teuffel (1848-51), then reworked under the direction of G. Wissowa (1893-1909) and subsequently of W. Kroll (1912-1939), K. Witte (1920-1923), K. Mittelhaus (1929-1948) and finally of K. Ziegler (1952), it was finally completed in 1972. Fifteen volumes of supplements and volume indices (1980) were also published, together with an abridged (5 vol., 1964-1975) and partly updated edition, entitled *Der Kleine Pauly: Lexicon der Antike*. Another updated edition followed, *Der Neue Pauly* (18 vol. and a vol. of indices, 1996-2003), with further updates since 2004.

84 Weissbach 1905, V/2 col. 2458.

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As a province that occupied a part of the wider territory of Elam, it is difficult to define the borders of Elymais, because the classical writers speak of it for the most part with great indistinctness. Strabo describes Elymais as a mostly rugged country bordering on Susis:

*“Neighbouring Susis is the part of Babylonia which was formerly called Sitacenê, but is now called Apolloniatis. Above both, on the north and towards the east, lie the countries of the Elymaei and the Paraetaceni...”*⁸⁵

The proximity of Elymais to Susiana is repeated elsewhere by Strabo (XVI.1.17) who stressed immediately after (XVI.1.18) that the Elymaeans' territory was both “*larger and more diversified*” than that of their eastern neighbours, the Paraetaceni⁸⁶. Thus, it could be inferred that he considered Elymais to extend considerably to the north and quite up to the southern boundary of *Greater Media* (XI.13.6), while, in another place, he would seem to consider it simply as one of several provinces which he enumerates to the east of Babylonia (XVI.1.1). The most distinct statement made by the geographer is where he writes that Elymais adjoins Susis (the province of Susiana), while the country around the Zagros and Media adjoins Elymais (XVI.1.17). According to this view, Elymais would include the rugged mountain tract formed by the southern spurs of the Zagros Mountains, to the south of Media and the north-east of Susiana. As reported by Stephanus, it was a part of Assyria in the direction of and near the Persian province of Susis, and the biblical writers appear to indicate that it was sometimes subject to Assyria and sometimes to Babylonia (Isaiah, 22.6; Ezekiel, 32.24). Pliny, on the other hand, extends Elymais to the shores of the Persian Gulf (VI.135), a view supported by Ptolemy (VI.3), placing its northern limit towards Susiana at the river Eulaeus⁸⁷. According to this account, Elymais would cover the

85 Str. XV.3.12.

86 The area of *Paraitakene* (Παραϊτακηνή) and its people were numbered among the various *ghenea* of Media even before being mentioned by Herodotus (*History*, I.101) but without a precise localisation.

87 A river of Susiana, which rises in the mountains to the east of that province, in the district called Dinarún, and, after passing the modern town of Shustar, flows into the Tigris by means of an artificial canal called the Haffar. Its present name is Karun. Iran's largest river, 850 km long and crosses the anticline in Ahwaz, then meanders southwards through the central plain, and joins at Khorramshahr – approximately 110 km southwest of Ahwaz – the Shatt al-Arab (formed by the confluence of the Euphrates and the Tigris in the town of al-Qurnah in the Basra Governorate of southern Iraq) before flowing into the Persian Gulf. There have been some difficulties in identifying the ancient Eulaeus, caused chiefly by the confusion which prevails in much of the ancient geographical writing about the rivers of Susiana. In the lower part of its course it probably represents the ancient Pasitigris. Briant (2002, 381) writes that Nearchus, commander of the Macedonian fleet, agreed to a meeting at Susa with Alexander, thanks to the help of a Persian guide, and sailed up the Pasitigris as far as Ahwaz, then took the Eulaeus up to Susa. For discussion see Hansman 1967, Le Rider 1965, Diakonoff 1985

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country between the Eulaeus, the Oroatis⁸⁸ (the boundary of Persis), and the Persian Gulf.

It is clear from this account that the homeland of the Elymaeans comprised only a part of the present province of Khuzestan⁸⁹. Indeed, lying in southwestern Iran at the head of the Persian Gulf, Khuzestan can be divided into two main regions, the alluvial plain of the so-called “lower” Khuzestan⁹⁰ and the mountainous region of the Zagros-Bakhtiari situated to the north and east of the province. In all likelihood it was identified by classical and biblical writers⁹¹ with Elymais, which became an independent political concept identified by a distinct geographic region, that of the Bakhtiari Mountains⁹², and to distinguish it – as opposed to what was said earlier by Weissbach – from the low-lying country of Susiana. To the Assyrians and the Babylonians, the whole of these lands were Elam. That could be a reason why Hoffmann, over a century ago, suggested that the term *Elymaea* – used by Strabo⁹³ – indicated the Elamite realm of which *Elymais* was a province⁹⁴. This is a reminder of the distinction made in the previous paragraph between Elam *in sensu stricto* as the highlands of Fars, and Elam in its wider, geopolitical sense as southwestern Iran⁹⁵.

and Potts 1999b.

- 88 The modern Tab or Hindyan (Rawlinson 1876, *The Seven Great Monarchies of the Ancient Eastern World*, II, 134), a small stream flowing into the Persian Gulf. The form of the name varies among different writers. Strabo calls it the *Oroatis*, Nearchus the *Arosis*; in Pliny it appears as *Oratis* and *Zarotis*, and in Ammianus Marcellinus (*Rerum gestarum libri XXI*) as *Oroates*.
- 89 Khuzestan is the most ancient Iranian province and is often referred to in Iran as the “*birthplace of the nation*”, as this is the area where Aryan tribes first settled, and assimilated or tried to assimilate the native Elamite population, thus laying the foundation for the future reigns of Medians, Achaemenids, Parthians and Sasanids. The Achaemenids identified Khuzestan as the satrapy of Uja (s.v. ^h*Ūvja* in Kent, *Old Persian*, 175), and for the Seleucid successors of Alexander the Great it was the satrapy of Susiana with its capital at Susa. Most scholars translate the name of *Khuzestan* as “The Land of the Khuzi”, referring to the original non-Semitic inhabitants of the region which for some writers would be the name given by the Iranians to the Elymaeans (Frye 1984, 273).
- 90 See the article by Jan Walstra, Peter Verkinderen and Vanessa M. A. Heyvaert (chapter 11): “Reconstructing landscape evolution in the Lower Khuzestan plain (SW Iran): integrating imagery, historical and sedimentary archives”, published in *Landscapes Through the Lens: Aerial Photographs and Historic Environment*, edited by David C. Cowley, Robin A. Standring and Matthew J. Abicht (2010).
- 91 In the Bible it would seem that it was generally held to be Susis and Elymais, adjoining territories, though the exact limits of the former, also, are not easily ascertained. Indeed, it is not possible to draw certain geographical inferences from literary texts.
- 92 The Bakhtiari Mountains form the central part of the great chain of Zagros and begin just east of the Dez River between the 48th and 49th longitudes. They extend to Bakhtiari, although the region is often considered as including the plain around Dezfūl, Shushtar and Ramhormoz (Ehmann 1975). The area of the Bakhtiari Mountains is characterised by large chains oriented from northwest to southeast, with peaks reaching over 4500 m between winding valleys that lie at an average height of 2000-2600 m. This is the source of the Karun, Dez and Zayandeh rivers and a place of summer quarters (*sardsīr* or *yaylāq*). The winter quarters (*garmsīr* or *qishlāq*) occupy less elevated parts of the mountains, with plateaus, valleys and plains with elevations reaching about 1800-2000 m, including the level plain of Qala-i Tul. The *garmsīr* extends to the low plain of Khuzestan.
- 93 The ancient geographer made use of the terms *Elymais* and *Elymaea* interchangeably.
- 94 Hoffman 1880, 132.
- 95 See Amiet 1979 and Vallat 1980.

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With regard to the administrative structure of Elymais, Strabo (XVI.1.18) – and he is the only one known to have done so – nominates three provinces: *Gabiane* (or *Gabiene*)⁹⁶, *Massabatene*⁹⁷ and *Korbiane*⁹⁸. Although Tarn tried to show how such local administrative structures (or *eparchies*) of the Seleucid period had survived even under a possible Elymaean kingdom⁹⁹, Bengtson said that, on the contrary, the sources that he used were too inconsistent to be able to give such a geopolitical vision of the Elymaean area¹⁰⁰.

If we consider archaeological finds of this period under current research, Elymais may be divided into four main areas of interest: Masjed-e Soleyman (sanctuaries of Bard-e Neshandeh and Masjed-e Soleyman); Tang-e Sarvak (rock reliefs and temple structure); the region of Izeh-Malamir (rock reliefs); and one to the north of Shimbar (rock reliefs). In the course of this work each of these areas will be examined individually, and finally they will be considered together, presumably for the first time. The possibility will remain that between the rugged mountains and steep valleys that characterise the Zagros Mountains new findings may come to light and provide a deeper understanding of the history, culture and religion of this kingdom, which in some ways can appear to have been born from nothing.

To sum up, Elymais had its nucleus of origin in the arid and desolate areas of the Bakhtiari Mountains where in alternating phases of its history it expanded its sphere of influence by dominating the nearby and fertile plain of Susiana and its centre, the ancient city of Susa, and it would promptly retreat in case of need or danger. Furthermore, it was precisely in these relatively inaccessible areas that Elymaeans seemed to feel safer, and in all likelihood this led them to build their richest and most important sanctuaries and areas of worship¹⁰¹ in such places.

96 See also *Gabai* (Weissbach 1910).

97 Weissbach 1930 (s.v. *Massabatike*); for the identification with Medieval Persian Mah-sabadan see Spiegel 1971, 117.

98 Weissbach 1922.

99 Tarn 1930, 132.

100 Bengtson 1964, 2, 30-38.

101 I believe this point has some significance in helping to fully understand the Elymaean world and everything that surrounds it. This issue will be addressed in more detail in the final part of this thesis (section 7.3 and Appendix 4).

4. Elymais



Figure 4.1 – Near East (Vanden Berghe and Schippman 1985). Above.

Figure 4.2 – The most important sites of Elymais. Overlaid Maps (Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, Carte 2, and Google Earth). Below.

Location of Main Sites in Elymais			
Name		Coordinates	
English	Farsi	Latitude	Longitude
<i>Bard-e Neshandeh</i>	برد نشانده	+32°2'7.71"	+49°20'4.13"
<i>Masjed-e Soleyman</i>	مسجد سلیمان	+31°59'1.66"	+31°59'1.66"
<i>Tang-e Sarvak</i>	تنگ سروک or تنگ سروك	+30°58'53.83"	+50°8'17.38"
<i>Shimbar or Shirin Bahar</i>	شیرین بهار or شیمبار	+32°20'40.75"	+49°36'32.30"
<i>Tang-e Botan</i>	تنگ بتان or تنگ بتا	c. +32°25'35.56"	c. +49°42'3.12"
<i>Izeh-Malamir</i>	ایذه - ملامیر	+31°50'8.04"	+49°52'16.86"
<i>Hung-e Azhdar</i>	خنگ اژدر	+31°55'42.15"	49°51'49.03"
<i>Shami</i>	شمی	c. +32°3'34.49" (?)	c. +49°41'55.39" (?)

Table 1 – Location of the main Elymaean sites addressed in this thesis with the help of Google technology (Earth and Map).

Undoubtedly, the importance of this mountainous country is primarily the result of its particular location. In the period considered here the main axis of this kingdom seems to have been along the route from Susiana that cut through the Bakhtiari Mountains along the tortuous valley of the Karun (ancient Eulaeus-Pasitigris¹⁰²) via Izeh-Malamir, then heading directly toward central Iran, reaching the plateau and the oasis of modern Esfahan (ancient Gabae)¹⁰³. In the same way as the Elymaeans, their successors in the area, the Kurdish Atabeg and the “modern” Bakhtiari people derived considerable wealth from control of these major trade roads that carried goods from Arabia and India to Susa and vice versa. Another road took a more southerly route through Behbahan and led to the province of Fars.

102 See note 87.

103 Although no longer used as a road, it is still marked by impressive buildings and is known as the “road of the Atabeg”. It undoubtedly existed in part much earlier than medieval times (Layard 1887, 423-424; Stein 1940, 137-141; Ghirshman 1976, 179).

4.3. Climate

In regional archaeological and historical research, considerable importance should be given to the climate, environment, land use potential and natural resources of the region under study.

To reiterate: ancient Elymais and therefore today's location in the southwest of Iran, are characterised by a strong contrast between the dry, flat plain of lower Khuzestan (ancient Susiana) and the Zagros Mountains with their southern range of extensive north-northwest to south-southeast running ridges (anticlinal axes) and deeply incised valleys, connected to each other by numerous transverse gorges¹⁰⁴. The alluvial plain, for which the Zagros Mountains are an important source of sediments, is extremely flat and dry and dominated by three major rivers, the Karun, Karkheh and Jarrahi. They reach their maximum capacity thanks to autumn and winter rains in the Zagros Mountains which cause extensive seasonal flooding of the marshes. Now, even after 2000 years have gone by, the comment that “*marshy*” Elymais was “*also greatly infested with serpents*”¹⁰⁵, does not seem so far away. The area was divided by Alizadeh¹⁰⁶ into three different “climatic zones”, or arid, semi-arid and dry zones following the designations of the lower, intermediate and upper plains. The hot and dry summers are in sharp contrast to the cool, wet winters, but even the coldest temperatures in January are quite a bit warmer than in the highland regions. July is the hottest month, with temperatures reaching an average of 40°C. Ganji¹⁰⁷ classes Khuzestan climatically as part of “the Persian Gulf Zone”, which is generally characterised by higher temperatures than the rest of the country year round. If we may judge by Strabo's account of Susiana, no important change can have taken place, and in fact he defines the climate as “*fiery and scorching*”, emphasising how “*the cause of the scorching heat is said to be high, overhanging mountains on the north, which intercept the northern winds*”¹⁰⁸.

Regarding the Bakhtiari area, it may be described as part of a comparatively humid and mesothermal¹⁰⁹ climate. Its main characteristics are a pronounced seasonality in annual precipitation and cold and snowy winters. In a similar way as chosen by Strabo (XV.3.1) and

104 Translated into Farsi with the term *tang*.

105 Pliny VI.31

106 Alizadeh 1992, 16.

107 Ganji, M. H. (1968) Climate, in *The Cambridge History of Iran: Vol.1, The Land of Iran*, 212-249.

108 Str. XV.3.10.

109 In climatology, the term *mesothermal* denotes certain forms of climate in temperate zones. Winters are generally not cold enough to sustain prolonged snow cover and summers are hot within continental climate regimes such as in Khuzestan.

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Arrian (XXXX.2-4) in describing the geoclimatic situation of this land, modern tribal terminology uses a “vertical” classification which distinguishes four climate zones according to altitude, among which conditions may differ radically: dry and warm coastal lowlands and foothills well-suited for date culture (*garmsîr*, literally “warm land”, up to 900-1300 m); a fertile and populous moderate zone with grape, fruit, and vegetable cultivation (*mo‘tadel*); higher and colder lands suited for summer pasture and cereal cultivation (*sardsîr*, or “cold land”, starting at 2000-2200 m); and an alpine zone (*sarhadd*, or “land at the upper boundary”) with summits rising to 4000 m, dedicated to summer pasture rather than cultivation¹¹⁰.

Using a categorisation such as this one above may be of considerable assistance for our understanding of agricultural potential in antiquity. Due to the exceptional climatic position of the Bakhtiari Mountains and their richness in perennial rivers, this area has always been agriculturally productive and the construction of irrigation works since ancient times has continued with the aim of increasing productivity. Classical sources, for their part, also preserve reports of the scenery of this region. Significantly, it is known from Strabo that wheat and barley crops were abundant, being able to “regularly produce one hundredfold and sometimes even two hundred”¹¹¹, while from Diodorus Siculus we know that sesame and dates were plentiful, and apparently trade had popularised rice there before Parthian rule¹¹². Elsewhere Strabo also confirms the cultivation of rice in Susiana¹¹³ but Potts warns that it is difficult to understand whether Strabo was referring to information of his day or the late 4th century BC when Eumenes would have been marching through Susiana¹¹⁴. He also doubts Strabo's reference that “*the vine did not grow there (Susiana) before the Macedonians planted it*”¹¹⁵ and – as Potts points out – it is known that grapes were cultivated and wine was made in neighbouring southern Mesopotamia from early times¹¹⁶.

110 Alizadeh 2006, 30-31.

111 Strabo XV.3.11. Potts has expressed great scepticism about these claims, arguing that Strabo's “*account of the phenomenal yields achieved for wheat and barley crops strains all credulity*” (Potts 1999a, 358).

112 Diodorus Siculus XIX.13.6. The Greek historian, in fact, refers to the story of a conflict in 318-317 BC between Eumenes of Cardia and Seleucus, where Eumenes during his march through the Susiana “*was completely without grain, but he distributed to his soldiers rice, sesame, and dates, since the land produced such fruits as these in plenty*”.

113 Strabo XV.1.18.

114 Potts 1999a.

115 Strabo XV.3.11.

116 Potts 1997, 69-70, 148-150; 1999a, 358.

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To reach an insight into the particular culture in question and its many facets, it is useful to have an idea of the potential resources of the area – in this specific case, southwestern Iran – since the resources available to the Elymaeans were in some cases shared by a wide range of peoples in the ancient Near East, and in other cases were unique to the region of Elymais itself.

4.4. Chronological Aspects

As for the Parthian state, our knowledge of the beginnings of the Elymais kingdom and its chronology is full of gaps. In this work, discussion of historical evolution will focus attention on the period of presumed attribution of the varied religious monuments and rock reliefs, therefore in broad terms between 200 BC and 224 AD. This is the period during which both the Seleucids and the Parthians tried, with or without success, to conquer Elymais, until its final capitulation to the Sasanids.

*Throughout the corners of the world.
Countries were parcelled and seized.
Two hundred years passed thus.
As if the world had no king.¹¹⁷*

Before this key period, Alexander the Great's defeat of the Achaemenids cleared the way for the emergence of small independent or semi-independent kingdoms throughout the Near East. Even if the region had a certain sense of political and cultural unity, his premature death in 323 BC and the resultant state of confusion brought great sociopolitical and cultural changes in Iran, including the relative growth of these small kingdoms due to the lack of a centralising force.

After the death of Alexander the Great, wars erupted among his surviving generals – the so-called *Diadochoi* – who fought over inheritance of his great empire. A major conflict occurred between Eumenes of Cardia and Antigonus the One-Eyed, who in 316 BC defeated and put to the sword both Eumenes and his troops, between Susiana and Media. According to Diodorus, Antigonus “*advanced with his army and came to Susa, the capital*” where he decided to establish Seleucus as “*satrap of that country*” (XIX.18.1). A little over a decade later in 301 BC¹¹⁸ the same Seleucus defeated Antigonus in the battle of Ipsos and took complete control of Susiana and Media. From this moment Seleucus and his descendants reigned, and they were known as

117 From Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*.

118 According to Assar (2004-2005, 27), Elymais came under Seleucid jurisdiction in the spring of 311 BC at the return of Seleucus I Nicator of Egypt (footnote 1).

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Seleucids. During this period Susiana was, therefore, entirely a Seleucid satrapy, of which Elymais was most probably a part¹¹⁹, although in these mountainous lands the Seleucid influence would have been limited. Indeed it was the Elymaeans, with the other tribes recounted by Nearchus¹²⁰, who exercised power¹²¹.

Seleucus I was responsible for renaming Susa as Seleucia on the river Eulaeus¹²² where he also began minting coins. He was assassinated in 281 BC and his son Antiochus I (281-261 BC) – who was credited with the founding or refounding of a large number of cities in Asia (e.g. Seleucia-on-the-Hedyphon¹²³) – succeeded him. Under his reign, there was relative calm in Iran but this did not continue under his successors, Antiochus II (261-246 BC) and his son Seleucus II (246-226 BC). During the latter's reign, the Ptolemaic king Ptolemy III (246-221 BC) was able to conquer much of the Seleucid empire¹²⁴. There is a widely discussed hypothesis that “*he had subdued Mesopotamia and Babylonia and Susiana and Persis and Media, and all the rest of the country as far as Bactriana*”, as the Adulis¹²⁵ inscription asserts (known through the copy made by Cosmas Indicopleustes¹²⁶), but various scholars regard this as improbable¹²⁷.

It appears that Elymais was a calm region during this period and the ancient texts do not speak of separatist tendencies, but certainly this interruption of Seleucid power resulted in a revolt in the Upper Satrapies that lasted for some years. Seleucus II tried in vain to reconquer the satrapies and finally, after the brief reign of Seleucus III (226-223 BC), Antiochus III the Great (223-187 BC) appeared on the scene, one of the most important of the Seleucid monarchs.

As soon as he came to the power, Antiochus III had to confront a dangerous revolt led by Molon, the satrap of Media (222 BC) who was contrasted in this case by his brother Alexander,

119 Assar (2004-2005, 27) directly considers Elymais as a satrapy and names it as such (see note above).

120 See Literature Review, *Ancient Sources*.

121 Strabo, XI.13.6.

122 See footnote 87.

123 See Hansman 1978.

124 The Third Syrian War, 246-245 BC.

125 An ancient centre on the Red Sea 50 km SE of Massawa, Adulis was a maritime port during the reigns of Aksum and Meroë, and developed trade with Ptolemaic Egypt. It declined and was abandoned in the c. 7th AD. A few of its monuments, such as a large throne, are recorded in a codex by Cosmas Indicopleustes (c. 6th AD) in the Vatican Library. Excavations have revealed a monumental altar and other Hellenic buildings.

126 A merchant and traveller from Alexandria in Egypt. Around 520 AD his voyage took him to Ethiopia, east Africa, India (hence the epithet, “Indian navigator”) and Ceylon. On his return he gave up commerce to become a hermit. From his pen has come *Topografia Cristiana*, written probably between 535 and 547 AD, in which Cosmas defends the biblical conception of the cosmos against the Greek cosmology, which he regarded as heresy.

127 Will 1979, 251; Potts 1999a, 357.

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the satrap of Persis, and Molon succeeded in conquering a large part of Mesopotamia and Susiana with the exception of Susa itself. It took a couple of years for Antiochus to suppress the revolt (220 BC) and in the following years he re-established Seleucid power due largely to campaigns in eastern lands against the Parthians and the Greco-Bactrian state.

Soon though, Antiochus III had to confront an adversary that would bring about his downfall: Rome, which in those years began to intervene in the affairs of eastern Mediterranean countries. In 190 BC the Seleucid emperor and his army of more than 70,000 men were crushed in the battle of Magnesia near Mt Sipylus on the plain of Lydia (modern eastern Turkey) by 30,000 Romans and their allies. It is notable that among the ranks of the enormous army of Antiochus III there were Elymaean archers¹²⁸, as catalogued by Bar-Kochva among the “*auxiliaries from subject or semi-independent nations or tribes*”¹²⁹, and he furthermore asserts that they were not “mercenaries” as they were dubbed by Weissbach¹³⁰.

A number of scholars regard the year 190 BC as a crucial date in the history of Elymais. Nöldeke sees it as the turning point – a kind of *terminus post quem* – for Elymaean independence that was possible, according to the German scholar, only after the weakening of Seleucid power in the defeat at Magnesia. He offers as proof an enigmatic passage of Strabo¹³¹, who saw Cossaeans and Elymaeans opposed to Babylonians and Susians, as discussed earlier in the Literature Review. Alfred von Gutschmid seems to share the same opinion, and he sees in the defeat at Magnesia – and the following act of aggression by Antiochus III against an “old” ally in an attempt to sack the temple of Bel – the stage in which the Elymaeans began to detach themselves from Seleucid power and to establish their autonomy¹³². Given that the Elymaeans did not try to attain independence from Seleucid authority before the defeat at Magnesia, this hypothesis gains strength. There remains doubt, though, as to whether it was this moment or the following attempt at sacking by Antiochus III that pushed Elymais towards independence. Indeed, according to some scholars it may have been the death of Antiochus IV in 164 BC that provided the decisive impulse¹³³.

128 Livy XXVII.40. Fig. 2.1.

129 Bar-Kochva has also noted how “*various national contingents mentioned in the great campaigns generally included mercenaries, allies, allied-mercenaries, and subject-vassals, but the status of very few contingents can be established with certainty*” (Bar-Kochva 1976, 48).

130 Weissbach 1905, 2464.

131 Strabo, XVI.1.18.

132 Von Gutschmid 1888, 39.

133 Sellwood 1983, 307; Wiesehöfer 1994, 124; Potts 1999a, 384.

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More than the defeat at Magnesia, it was the following treaty of Apamea¹³⁴ (188 BC) that caused Seleucid power to wane. However, a seemingly great opportunity for Elymaean consolidation ran into the reality of Arsacid power, which at the time was establishing itself in Iran. Seleucids or Parthians, there was no difference for the Elymaeans, as both were menaces to avoid or if needed, to be fought off.

The treaty of Apamea brought severe impositions which reduced Antiochus III to a financially disastrous position, and led to his attempt – a suicidal one – to sack the Elymaean temple of Bel¹³⁵ in 187 BC. After his death at the hands of Elymaeans defending their sacred places, Seleucid rule in the east did not cease completely, as demonstrated by the coins that the Seleucid mints at Susa and Ektabana continued to produce until the loss of Susiana and Media to the Parthians.

After the brief reign of Seleucus IV (187-175 BC), Antiochus IV *Epiphanes*¹³⁶ came to the throne (175-164 BC), a son of Antiochus III just as his predecessor was, and he seems to have wanted to follow in the footsteps of his father by organising another military campaign in the east. But even on this occasion the result was not positive. Seeking revenge, the Seleucid sovereign tried to invade Elymais but once more the Elymaeans defended their religious places and their land from the foreign threat, throwing back the invading king, who soon after died (probably from an illness) at Gabae (Esfahan). After his death, the Seleucids collapsed into devastating civil wars which were encouraged by the Romans and the Ptolemies. The desperate attempts by these two Seleucid kings are in complete contrast with the politics of their predecessors, who paid attention to local sensibilities.¹³⁷

134 See note 24.

135 Mørkholm for his part believes that this action was meant to demonstrate a reassertion of Seleucid authority after the disaster and humiliation at Magnesia (Mørkholm 1966, 29). If this was the case, it seems nonetheless strange that such a demonstration of force was made against those who fought at the monarch's side against the Romans.

136 *Antiochos IV Theos Epiphanes Nikephoros* ("Antiochos, God Manifest, Carrying Victory"), nicknamed *Epimanes* ("the Mad"). He was probably called Mithridates in his youth after his maternal grandfather (Antiochos III's son called Mithridates is mentioned by Livy XXXIX.19). The death of his oldest brother Antiochos in 193 BC presumably permitted the change of name.

137 Perhaps it was because of the sympathetic and cordial administration by the Seleucids that the Elymaean temples were able to accumulate so much wealth during the period before Antiochus III.

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The death of Antiochus IV signalled a slide into the final collapse of Seleucid power in Iran and Mesopotamia, but their authority in Elymais does not seem to have ended immediately. A series of coins minted at Susa in the names of Demetrius I (162-150 BC) and Alexander Balas (150-145 BC) demonstrate that at least until around 150 BC Susa was still in Seleucid hands. However, the situation changed with the arrival of Alexander Balas, who declared himself son of Antiochus IV and therefore his direct successor. Through cuneiform records we know that Alexander Balas defeated Demetrius I to the north of Syria – where the latter probably died – but it is difficult to affirm if this occurred before or after Alexander Balas took Susa. It is widely agreed among scholars that the internal struggles in the Seleucid court, first with the assassination of Antiochus V by Demetrius I and then the arrival of the usurper Alexander Balas, inspired a previously unheard of man to liberate Elymais in 147 BC¹³⁸. The man was Kamnaskires, founder of the Kamnaskirid dynasty which lasted in Elymais for almost 150 years.

So it was that in the middle of the 2nd century BC the Elymaean kingdom came into being favoured by the struggles between Seleucids and Parthians. The history of the kingdom is much the same as the history of the region, although many details are obscure. The Elymaean leaders are known to us almost exclusively through their coins. References to them in classical texts are rare. The number and order of the kings are matters of contention among experts, and are still under investigation. The first to be identified is Kamnaskires I Megas Soter (the Great Saviour), whose name seems to be Elamite¹³⁹, although we know nothing about him other than that he was

138 Allotte de la Fuÿe (1919, 46) gives 162 BC; Hill (1922) the 2nd century BC; De Morgan (1923-1936, 195-201) reports c.150 BC; Le Rider (1965, 75, 349-361; 1969, 18-22; 1978, 35) gives 147 BC; Mørkholm (1965, 151) suggests that the date could not be earlier than c. 145 BC; Strauss (1971, 119, 137-140) believes c. 150 BC; Fischer (1971, 169) reports 163 BC; Churchill (1978, 8,17) gives c. 163 BC; Houghton (1983, 101) c. 147 BC; Sellwood (1983, 307) gives c. 147 BC; Alram (1986, 137-139) reports c. 147 BC; Hansman (1990, 1; 1998, 373) gives c. 147 BC; Potts (1999, 384; 2002, 353) accepts 147 BC; Assar (2004-2005, 54; 2006, 93) gives c. 149-148 BC; van't Haaff (2007, 4-5) reports 147 BC.

139 Henning (1952, 165) has also suggested that the name Kamnaskires, of several kings of Elymais, could have been a dynastic title and not a personal name. This scholar thought that such a term might have been derived from a word whose pronunciation would have been approximately *kabneškir* – the legend, written in a form of aramaic, was *kbnškyr* – a word derived from a more ancient Achaemenid-Elamite title, the *kap-nu-iš-ki-ra* (see also Henkelman 2008, 26), or the “treasurer”. In any case, the only epigraphic evidence concerning the kingdom of Kamnaskires is found on coins. Henning also suggested that during the Achaemenid period the chief duty of the satraps of Susiana was to protect the royal treasure stored at Susa and therefore they probably used a local word in the Elamite language for “treasurer”. Harmatta (1981, 209; see also Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 15) has gone so far to suggest that Kamnaskires I may have been the treasurer of the Elymaean temple of Bel which Antiochus III attempted to raid and that he assumed the title of “king” after this disastrous expedition. It is interesting to note that an inscription in Aramaic characters bearing the words “[*kbnš*] *k [y] r mlk'...*”, translated by Harmatta as “*Kabnashkir the King*” (Harmatta 1976, 289-300) was found at the site of Bard-e Neshandeh, Henning dates this inscription to circa 180-160 BC. The inscription is lacunous, however, and as there is such a wide range of possible translations, choosing just one should be done

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the king.

In any case, even though Kamnaskires I inaugurated his reign at Susa with a coin issue, the exact date when this new political order was formed in Elymais remains a mystery. Further, the finding of two tetradrachms in the name of Kamnaskires, with evident divergences in iconography and royal titlature, have created problems among scholars regarding how many kings in Elymais were called *Kamnaskires* and what was the sequence of their corresponding coinage. Briefly and without plunging too far into these historical debates, in the academic world there are two principal points of view: that expressed by Assar who sees the two rulers named *Kamnaskires* – one with the epithet *Megas Soter* and the other one with *Nikephoros* (the Bearer of Victory)– as being the same person; and then there is the diametrically opposed view of van't Haaff who sees the two different coin issues as depicting two distinct historical personalities, Kamnaskires I Megas Soter and Kamnaskires II Nikephoros¹⁴⁰.

The chronology and background of these kings and their Seleucid and Parthian opponents also remain as continuing points of discussion among scholars. In general what seems clear is that around 147 BC the two Seleucid kings, Alexander Balas and Demetrius II Nicator, were fighting each other for power. During this internecine war that led to the defeat and assassination of Alexander Balas by Ptolemy VI, Kamnaskires took advantage of a power vacuum when Demetrius II moved troops to fight in Syria against Egyptian forces, and he created an independent reign and issued his inaugural coinage at Susa with the epithet of *Megas Soter*. The new king soon headed for Babylon, which he plundered as is unequivocally demonstrated by the Babylonian Astronomical diaries in October/November 145 BC: “*Kammashkiri, king of Elam – i.e. Kamnaskires I of Elymais – marched around victoriously among the cities and rivers of Babylonia*”¹⁴¹. It is most likely that this was a raid aimed at sacking and not an expansion of the Elymaean dominion¹⁴², but surely this prompted a punitive intervention by Demetrius II.

with considerable care. Moreover, as Potts suggested “*when Henning wrote his study of the Tang-e Sarvak inscriptions the Elamite onomasticon was largely unstudied. Today, as a result of Zadok's publications (1984; 1991), it is much easier to isolate probable Elamite elements in Kamnaskires which could be suggestive of alternative etymologies*” (Potts 1999a, 386). As it read in Zadok (1991, 226) “*The latest Elamite onomastic survivals are contained in Greek [...] and *Καμνασκιρης (Aram. Kbnškyr; LB Qa-bi-na-aš2-ki-ri; 77 B.C. and later)*”.

140 This thesis – ahead of studies that may come in the future – will employ the classification by van't Haaff that sees two different historical figures represented in the two coinages.

141 Potts 2002, 350.

142 Assar 2004-2005, 57.

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Numismatic evidence shows a counter-attack by the Seleucid king straddling the years 145 BC and 144 BC, forcing Kamnaskires to set up his court elsewhere. But his stay was short, as the partisans of Alexander Balas proclaimed his son, Antiochus VI Dionysius, the rightful heir to the throne. The new conflict allowed the Elymaeans to take back the throne at Susa.

The following 10 to 15 years were chaotic but gave the Elymaeans control of their own realm even if a Parthian viceroy (Phraates) and three usurpers of uncertain origin (Okkonapses, Tigraios and Dareios) also ruled in Elymais at various times. As to who governed at Susa and for how long, these questions remain very debatable. Information is scarce and circumstantial, and any proposed chronology can only be confirmed by future research. Regarding the usurpers, Le Rider (1978, 35) affirms that Okkonapses – and not Hyknapses as previously thought¹⁴³ – reigned shortly before Mithridates I occupied Susa in 139-138 BC, and not *c.* 162 BC as once suggested¹⁴⁴. Assar¹⁴⁵ instead dates his usurping to 144-143 BC¹⁴⁶, while van't Haaff¹⁴⁷ shares the opinion of Le Rider in placing the rule of Okkonapses in 139 BC. However, it is possible that after his expulsion from Susa by the Seleucids after the autumn of 145 BC, Kamnaskires returned to Susa – regardless of whether he found or did not find the usurper Okkonapses – and began minting coins with the title of *Nikephoros*, so if this is the case we would have to regard as accurate the hypothesis that the first two Elymaean coin issues concern the same king.

From this point until the end of 141 BC, Elymaean history fell into a kind of “Dark Age”, in that no dated coins nor literature regarding this period have come to light. It can only be supposed that Kamnaskires reigned without opposition in the interim. But if so, this situation changed dramatically with the conquest of Babylonia in July 141 BC by the Arsacid king Mithridates (165-132 BC)¹⁴⁸, creating another chaotic period where the Parthians, Seleucids and Elymaeans fought each other. The Elymaeans were apparently strong enough to campaign against Babylonia, creating panic and fear, but they were not strong enough against the Parthians.

143 Le Rider 1965, 346.

144 Le Rider 1965, 346; see also Sellwood 1983, 307

145 Assar 2005, 59-60.

146 Assar's hypothesis (2004-2005, 57-58) is based on a stylistic and qualitative assessment of the images struck on the coins.

147 Van't Haaff 2007, 4-5.

148 Sachs and Hunger 1996, 134-135, No. -140A.

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Contrary to what was written by Justin¹⁴⁹ in a string of blunders¹⁵⁰, from the Babylonian diaries it is known that the Parthians invaded Elymais around 140-139 BC¹⁵¹ following their conquest of Babylonia in 141 BC. Elymais was thus pacified after Mithridates' triumph and he probably placed his son Phraates on the Elymaean throne as a ruler subservient to the Parthian king. It must be emphasised that no battle was fought at this time between Elymaeans and Parthians¹⁵² even if the Arsacid king succeeded where preceding Seleucid attempts had failed: that is, in sacking the “legendary” Elymaean temples¹⁵³.

From cuneiform tablets it appears that after 138 BC Parthia was in serious trouble, and a new ruler (perhaps a local king or a usurper) called Tigraios took power in Elymais in 138-137 BC. Around the same period, a former *eparch*¹⁵⁴ of southern Babylonia under Antiochus IV by the name of Hyspaosines seized the same opportunity to secede from outside domination, to constitute a state of his own, known as the kingdom of Characene. If on the one hand the Babylonian diaries recount how Hyspaosines at the end of 138 BC launched a raid “*against the Elamite enemies*” into the “*lower Sealand*”¹⁵⁵ creating “*panic in Elam, happiness and agreement in Babylonia*”¹⁵⁶, on the other hand they make us aware how in 133 BC (September/October) he was considered as a “*friend of the Elamite enemies*” and therefore he was an “*enemy*”¹⁵⁷. What happened in the interim is not hard to guess. The wish by Hyspaosines to obtain independence was seen by the Parthians as a betrayal and the sovereign of Characene was considered a rebel ally of the Elymaean enemies.

Here then came an audacious raid by the Elymaeans – allied with their neighbours the Characeans – against Parthian forces in a campaign in Babylonia. This prompted the removal of the commander of the Parthian army in Babylonia, Philinus, who was deemed incompetent in opposing the Elymaean incursion. Theodosius was put in charge and he oversaw a comprehensive defeat of the allied Elymaeans and Characeans near Susa. Admittedly the source text, the diary

149 Justin, XXXVI.1.4; XLI.6.8.

150 Topic analysed in the Literature Review.

151 The absence of Parthian coinage and the presence of Elymaean coinage before 141 BC eliminate the possibility that Mithridates could have invaded Elymais before his conquest of Mesopotamia (Assar 2006, 93).

152 Potts 1999a, 388.

153 For further information see the Appendix 1.

154 The term *eparch* (Greek: *ἐπαρχος*, *eparchos*) designates an eparchy's governor. An *eparchy* was one part of a tripartite provincial system used by the Seleucids in all the lands east of the Euphrates. See Tarn 1938, 1-4.

155 The borderland between Mesene and southwestern Khuzistan (Potts 1999a, 390).

156 Potts 2002, 356.

157 Potts 2002, 357.

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for December/January 133-132, is difficult to follow, yet it seems that the son of Kamnaskires, Orya (or Urya as it reads in the diaries) played a part in the Parthian attack in Elymais. In the corresponding note of the Babylonian diaries it is written that “...*Urya the son of K]amnaškiri, the Elamite enemy, who had revolted against his father... lived in Babylonia, organized against their [Elymaean] troops...*”. He therefore carried out a punishing expedition in Elymais and may well have been accompanied by Theodosius. The conflict seems to have ended with the capture of the Elymaean ruler – the “usurper” Tigraios mentioned earlier – who was taken to Babylonia. However, there is no more information about what happened after the Parthian victory in Elymais, nor about the fate of Urya until he was put to death during the reign of Artabanus I¹⁵⁸ in Surru¹⁵⁹.

Parthia ruled directly in Elymais from 133 BC until 127 BC. The reign of Phraates II had a short interruption in 130-129 BC when Mesopotamia and Elymais were occupied by Seleucid forces under Antiochus VII, the brother of Demetrius II, before falling back into Arsacid hands when Antiochus VII was killed by the militia of Phraates II¹⁶⁰. After the death of the Arsacid king a new usurper, Dareios, reigned in Elymais for some months in 127-126 BC before being deposed by a new Parthian ruler, most likely Bagasis (a paternal uncle of Phraates II), who governed for some months during the period of transition between Phraates II and Artabanus I¹⁶¹.

After the loss of Susa to the Parthians in 126 BC, there is a gap in the coinage of Elymais for about half century until 80 BC and unfortunately the Astronomical diaries are also silent about the political circumstances of Elymais during this period. The only clear reference regarding the situation in Elymais comes during late 125 BC and early 124 BC and it refers to the Elymaean characteristic of not accepting foreign domination. In this specific case the diaries describe the military campaign when “*King Arsaces (perhaps Artabanus I) [...] departed to the area of Elam opposite Pittit, the Elamite enemy, for fighting*”, adding a little later that the Elymaean army of 15,000 men was defeated. Notably, Pittit – the Elymaean commander – bore a name which may be easily identified etymologically as Elamite¹⁶². After that defeat, there are no accounts in the next few years of revolts against Parthian authority in Elymais and this suggests that Artabanus I

158 Babylonian diaries December/January 125-124 BC.

159 A place between Nippur and Uruk (Dal Monte 1997, 141).

160 Houghton 1983, 101; Assar 2004-2005, 81.

161 Assar 2004-2005, 81.

162 Zadok 1984, 35; Hinz and Koch 1987, 225, s.v. *pittit*.

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in his brief reign¹⁶³ may have appeased the Elymaean desire for independence, but if so this lasted only for a short time.

Indeed, many years after the Elymaean military activity mentioned earlier, the Astronomical diaries bring to light further evidence of Elymaean assertiveness. In the first few months of 77 BC the Arsacid king Orodes I¹⁶⁴ (c. 90-80 BC) “went [to] *Elam and fought with Kamnaskires, the king of Elam*”, and the defeated Elymaean king in question was undoubtedly Kamnaskires III¹⁶⁵, who appears on his coins with his wife Anzaze¹⁶⁶. It is precisely these coins that show the Elymaean king in possession of Seleucia on the Hedyphon from 82 to 81 BC¹⁶⁷ and ruling before and after the Parthian campaign in 77 BC¹⁶⁸. No historical data for this period is known apart from the coinage, leaving yet another difficult gap for scholars to fill.

In the following years coins are virtually the only source available for considering Elymaean history. We know that during the 1st century BC the struggle for power in the Arsacid court brought the young Arsaces XVI – one of the children of Mithridates II – to establish his authority at Susa (77 BC). There is the possibility that Kamnaskires III may have allied himself with the young prince against Orodes I to seek revenge for his humiliation a short time before¹⁶⁹. Indeed., the existence of the coinage of Kamnaskires III until 73 BC and also of Kamnaskires IV (63/62-53/52 BC) appears to demonstrate that Arsaces XVI gave independence or semi-independence to Elymais, perhaps in gratitude for the help he received against Orodes I¹⁷⁰. However, it must be emphasised that between the last coin issue of Kamnaskires III and the first of Kamnaskires IV there is a gap of around 10 years in which there is no mention of the Elymaeans apart from correspondence in 65 BC between the Roman general Pompey and “*the kings of Elymais*” for whom though, Plutarch, in his *Life of Pompey* (36)¹⁷¹, does not provide any names. In any case, this seems to suggest an effort by the Elymaeans to attract Roman support

163 He died a few years later at the end of 122 BC from the effects of a poisoned arrow while fighting the Tochari hordes (Justin XLII.2.2).

164 The identification of the Parthian Orodes I with “*Arsaces*” is made possible by comparing diaries of the preceding years 80-78 BC and the following 76 BC where there are explicit references such as: “*Arsaces who is called King [Or]odes and Isp[ubarza] [his sister] the Queen*” (McEwan 1986, 93; Assar 2006b, 76).

165 For the Parthian campaign in Elymais see McEwan (1986), *A Parthian campaign against Elymais in 77 BC*.

166 Examples are known from Bard-e Neshandeh, Masjed-e Soleyman and Susa.

167 Van't Haaff 2007, 15. See also Le Rider 1965, 190.

168 Assar 2006b, 79; van't Haaff 2007, 16.

169 Assar 2006b, 82.

170 Assar 2006b, 82.

171 See also note 32.

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against the Arsacid Phraates III, who also minted bronze coins at Susa¹⁷².

From a study of coin iconography in that period, van't Haaff hypothesises that after the brief occupation of Susa by Kamnaskires IV in 57-55 BC, another war against the Parthians may have broken out that obliged the Elymaean king to strike his last dated issue (53-52 BC) at a travelling court mint. The numismatist further suggests that Kamnaskires IV may have retaken Seleucia before dying, perhaps in battle, which would explain the first dating in the same year 53-52 BC¹⁷³ of his successor Kamnaskires V, who reigned for nearly two decades (53-35 BC).

After Kamnaskires V a new dynasty – called by scholars the Elymais Arsacid dynasty – started to rule from *c.* 25 BC until the end of the Elymaean kingdom in 228 AD¹⁷⁴. As noted by van't Haaff¹⁷⁵, the first Elymais Arsacid coins seem to be from a transitional period and maintain strong similarities with preceding coins (Last Kamnaskirid), but at the same time they also have clear Parthian influences. The transitional period in question seems to be from 33 BC until the end of the 1st century AD and involves various kings who have not been individually identified. The changeover between the two dynasties, the Last Kamnaskirid and the Elymais Arsacid, is a point of much controversy and is the subject of current research among many numismatists¹⁷⁶. In any case, the latter dynasty was likely to have been a vassal of Parthia, which placed members of its own royal family on the Elymaean throne as can be seen in the names on the coins, and they ruled intermittently from Seleucia on the Hedyphon and Susa. Obviously during this period, even if Elymais sought to maintain relative independence, Parthian influence was strong especially in cultural matters, and it is reflected in the style of rock reliefs and coinage.

Le Rider in his meticulous study of Elymaean coins¹⁷⁷ theorises that several decades after the Parthian invasion the Elymaeans began to mint their own coins again, as the geography of Pliny¹⁷⁸ relating to a political situation existing prior to 45 AD would seem to place the Elymaeans of that period in control of much of eastern Khuzestan but not of the city of Susa. Le

172 Hansman 1998, 374.

173 Van't Haaff 2007, 16.

174 Van't Haaff 2007, 18.

175 Van't Haaff 2007, 18.

176 Vardanian 1986; Bell 2002; van't Haaff 2007.

177 Le Rider 1965, 426.

178 Pliny, VI.135-136.

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Rider also believes that the Elymaeans retook Seleucia on the Hedyphon from the Parthians sometime after the conquests of Mithridates I and that, thereafter, Seleucia served as the Elymaean capital until the mid 1st century AD. Indeed, after 45 AD in the reign of the Arsacid king Gotarzes II¹⁷⁹, there does not seem to have been any Arsacid minting of coins at Susa, and this absence combined with the reappearance of Elymaean coins after this date, suggests that the Elymaeans may have taken effective control of the city and turned its active mint to their own use¹⁸⁰. Hansman and Potts believe that the Elymais Arsacid dynasty began minting its coins in Susa in 70-75 AD¹⁸¹ while Vardanian hypothesises that a complete reunification of Susa and Elymais occurred even later under the reign of Kamnaskires-Orodes, roughly in the second decade of the 2nd century AD¹⁸². It is interesting to note that a few years before in 36 AD, Tacitus¹⁸³ informs us that during the quarrel between the Parthian usurper Tiridates III (who was placed on the throne by the Roman emperor Tiberius) and the rightful sovereign Artabanus III, the Elymaeans were allied with Tiridates III. However, the revolt failed, and Artabanus regained Mesopotamia in the same year. Some scholars have suggested a possible alliance with Trajan together with the kingdom of Characene when this Roman emperor was preparing to invade Mesopotamia.¹⁸⁴

In brief therefore, around the end of the 1st century AD, a cadet branch of the Arsacid dynasty, the so-called ‘Arsacid’ line starting with Orodes I, began minting coins in the style of the Kamnaskirids in Elymais, both at Seleucia and Susa. Without going into exhaustive detail on the succession of kings, Orodes I was followed by the above-mentioned Kamnaskires-Orodes and then Orodes II and Phraates. Very little is known of the kings of Elymais after Phraates. Another king, a certain Osroes, could have been the same as Osroes I, the Arsacid emperor known to have temporarily used the Susa mint to issue bronze coins to pay his army¹⁸⁵. The figure of another king, Orodes III¹⁸⁶, was accompanied on the reverse of some of his coins by the bust of a woman,

179 Gotarzes II (c. 40-51) and not Vardanes (c. 39-45) as previously thought (LeRider 1965, 461; Potts 1999a, 397).

180 Le Rider 1965, 426.

181 Hansman 1998, 374; Potts 1999a, 397.

182 Vardanian 1986, 117.

183 Tacitus, VI.44.

184 Nodelman 1960, 110.

185 Coins of Osroes depicting the frontal portrait of the king were probably copies of, or identical to, coins of the Arsacid king by the same name, some of whose influence can be seen on the coins of some later Elymaean rulers (Le Rider 1965, 429-430; Hansman 1998, 375).

186 This Orodes may be the king of Elymais at Susa identified in a fragmentary inscription from Palmyra in Syria dated 138 AD (Hansman 1998, 375, Potts 1999a, 401) which mentions “*Susa*” and a certain “*Worod*”, i.e. Orodes. The inscription commemorates the assistance given by a citizen of that city to a Palmyrene merchant

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identified with a proto-Pahlavi legend as Ulfan, and she may have been his consort.

Numismatic evidence may be occasionally complemented by other data. This is the case with a series of rock inscriptions written in Aramaic and located at Tang-e Sarvak, regarding a king called Abar-Basi and another called Orodes, who may be the king identified on coins as Orodes IV who ruled *c.* 165–170 AD. Henning proposes this sequence of events: Abar-Basi ruled in Elymais and after this king died, Bel-Dusa, the high priest of Bel, installed his own son Orodes on the throne¹⁸⁷. Furthermore, a square stone stele found at Susa¹⁸⁸ shows a seated nobleman wearing a crown and a standing figure wearing Parthian clothing, both of whom grasp a ring, with an inscription at the top of the coin between the two figures that states: “*Artabanu, the king of kings, son of Walagaši [Volagese], the king of kings, built this ‘erection’ which [is that] of Khwasak, the satrap of Susa*”¹⁸⁹. The stele is dated to the 14th of September 215 AD¹⁹⁰ and therefore under the reign of Artabanus IV (*c.* 216-224 AD). It is particularly interesting to note the title “*satrap of Susa*” given to Khwasak. As suggested by Potts¹⁹¹, this latter figure may have been an Elymaean with considerable authority in Susiana, in that Artabanus IV is known to have minted coins only at Ekbatana and not at Susa¹⁹².

Accounts of the rise of Ardashir I – founder of the Sasanian dynasty – mention another Orodes, the “*king of Khuzestan*” who was assigned by Artabanus IV to check the advances of Ardashir I around 222 AD. The operation was unsuccessful, forcing Artabanus IV himself to get involved. His defeat ceded control of Khuzestan and then all of Iran to the Sasanian dynasty (224 AD)¹⁹³. Elymais, including Susiana, capitulated to the Sasanian state, which largely abolished the Arsacid style of local autonomous polities and consequently the right to issue coins.

What emerges clearly from this brief and general treatment of Elymaean history is that

colony, probably established at Susa in this period (Seyrig 1941, 253-255).

187 Henning 1952, 166-176.

188 Mathiesen 1992, 2, 168-169.

189 Henning 1952, 176.

190 “*Year 462, month of Spandarmat, day of Mihr*” (Henning 1952, 176).

191 Potts 1999a, 401.

192 Sellwood, 1980, 290.

193 *Battle of Hormizdaghan* (an area between Esfahan and Nihawand) fought by Ardashir and the Arsacid king Artabanus IV. The Parthian king was killed by Ardashir. The epic tradition adds that the latter broke the head of the great king with his foot (see Ferdowsi, *The Epic of the Kings*, London 1973, 252-282), a macabre detail more likely to be a legend originating from a relief of the investiture of Ardashir at Naqsh-e Rostam

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many of its geopolitical aspects are still under discussion. Gradually, parts of the puzzle are coming into place and more light is being thrown on obscure areas. This comes through the work of scholars such as Hansman, Potts, Dabrowa, Assar, van't Haaff, and several others who have integrated the results of research on rock reliefs, cuneiform tablets and reinterpretations of known documents to create new insights into the geopolitical and cultural history of the Elymaean region.

Even more data is forthcoming from new research but one should bear in mind that in any case these discoveries might not provide solutions to many questions on the history, culture and religion of Elymais.

4.5. The Evidence of the Coins

Generally, coinage is the only group of finds to be dated with relative certainty which covers both the entire Parthian era and the Elymaean period. The variety of this coinage – including representations and legends on the coins – supplies numerous hints about the internal history of the Elymaean state, although many difficulties involved in this type of evidence prevent their full interpretation. Numismatic sources found during archaeological excavations, such as the deposit of Bard-e Neshandeh, are also indispensable for studies on Elymaean iconography.

Despite the fame of its capital Susa in the Achaemenid period and the importance of its mint under the Seleucid dynasty, the numismatics of Elymais in the post-Seleucid period is obscure and poorly studied even if the Elymaean coinage does suggest certain developments in the history of the region. Indeed, information on the coinage of Elymais is scattered among a limited number of specialised publications, starting with the first and by now outmoded study *Monnaies de l'Élymaïde* by Allotte de la Fuÿe in 1905¹⁹⁴, continuing to the most recent and well-accepted studies by Assar and van't Haaff, but there are still many thorny problems remaining to be settled before it may truly be said that we understand the coinage of Elymais.

Essential numismatic publications in this field include Hill (1922), de Morgan (1923-

194 This French numismatist revisited and corrected his first study in his article in 1919, *Les Monnaies de l'Élymaïde. Modification au classement proposé en 1907.*

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1936), Sear (1982) and Alram (1986). The first two cover the range of Elymaean coinage known at the time, but are incomplete and outdated, while Alram is only interested in Elymaean coins with a name inscribed on them. Elymaean coinage surely makes up the main source of knowledge regarding the succession of Elymaean kings during the first two centuries AD, represented in the most important collections from the foundation deposit of Bard-e Neshandeh and the numismatic finds at Susa in 1900.

The succession of the Elymaean kings over this period has been studied for more than a century but the order and identity of many of them remain far from clear. The most important studies of this period have been published over the years by Le Rider (1965), Augè, *et al.* (1979), Vardanian (1986), Hansman (1985; 1990), Dobbins (1992), Bell (2002), Assar (2004-2005) and van't Haaff (2007).

Undoubtedly, the most recent, refined and complete studies have been developed by these latter two scholars, Assar and van't Haaff. While the first devotes himself to specific short periods, credit should be given to van't Haaff, who has made a new endeavour to compose a full corpus for the coins of the native rulers of Elymais by bringing together all new and old material in one place, 77 years after this was first attempted¹⁹⁵. Pieter Anne van't Haaff's *Catalogue of Elymaean Coinage* will probably become the reference book on the subject for years to come. In his book, he considers Le Rider and Augè as important sources of information and the author is very much aware of the recent chronologies of Vardanian and Assar, generally including them in his catalogue even if in some cases he distances himself from them. As mentioned above, he prefers to distinguish Kamnaskires I *Megas Soter* from Kamnaskires II *Nikephoros*¹⁹⁶ and places the brief coinage of Okkonapses after the reign of Kamnaskires *Nikephoros* rather than before, as Assar does. Further, the degeneration of the reverse types during the period (*c.* 25 BC – AD 228) is – according to van't Haaff – due to an intentional break with the earlier tradition and not to the incompetence of the engravers, since they were able to cut good obverses¹⁹⁷. The Arsacid dynasty is reconstructed on the basis of Vardanian's sequence with a few modifications¹⁹⁸.

195 The previous such attempt was made in the *Numismatique de la perse antique*, published by J. de Morgan in 1930.

196 Van't Haaff 2007, 4.

197 Van't Haaff 2007, 19.

198 Van't Haaff 2007, 21-26.

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It is nevertheless to be emphasised that even if it is wonderful to finally have a complete corpus for the rulers of Elymais, readers should show due caution in accepting the chronology and iconographic interpretations presented in this catalogue. While it is true that van't Haaff has provided an enormous service for those such as this writer who study and analyse the minor dynasties of the post-Seleucid Near East, many questions remain open and further studies will be needed before we can approach a full understanding of the coins of Elymais and the history of Elymais.

5. Elymaean Religious Architecture

5.1. Introduction

This section provides an introduction to Elymaean religious architecture, including a brief overview of relevant publications, information on archaeological context, and a description of the two most important temple sites in Elymais during the Arsacid era: Bard-e Neshandeh (section 5.2) and Masjed-e Soleyman (section 5.3). These extensive sacred complexes belonged to an architectonic typology that is noted in the literature as *sacred terraces*, that is, places of worship created on summits which were shaped and confined by walls – mostly made up of irregularly shaped blocks of stone, arranged with care – to create flat areas of ground for the building of platforms, altars, bases for statues and indeed complete temples.

Since the beginning of the 20th century a number of scholars have visited Bard-e Neshandeh and Masjed-e Soleyman, but systematic analysis only began in the first excavation in 1964 by a French team headed by Roman Ghirshman, who subsequently completed his research with two other missions up to 1966. A careful examination of the data, though, reveals that his dating of the religious complexes is not at all reliable.

Accordingly, also the religious attribution proposed for various buildings by Ghirshman would need to be revisited, but this will be considered in the final part of this thesis.

5.2. Bard-e Neshandeh

5.2.1. General Aspect

The site of Bard-e Neshandeh is on a 675 m high peak overlooking the valley of Karun, one of the largest river basins in Iran. Around 10 km south-southwest from Bard-e Neshandeh there is the city of Masjed-e Soleyman, sited a little more than 90 km northeast of Ahwaz, the capital of Khuzestan. Bard-e Neshandeh appears to visitors as being in a landscape that is hostile, arid, and desolate, devoid of vegetation, to which must be added the almost total absence of

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water, despite the closeness of the Karun River just 9 km away. All of this gives the area a particular atmosphere of rare severity. Nature seems to have abandoned this region, where there is a lack of basic needs for supporting life¹⁹⁹.



Figure 5.1 – Bard-e Neshandeh. Aerial view of site from the north-west (Ghirshman 1976, Pl. II).

The name of the site (برد نشانده) in the Bakhtiari dialect means “fixed stone” or “signal stone” where the word *bard* is a synonym of the Persian *sang* = “stone” and *nešānde* is the past participle of *nešāndan* = “to fix into the ground as a signal”, “to stick”²⁰⁰. It owes its origin to a column of the nearby temple, taken by caravanners in the distant past and driven into the ground to act as a reference marker at the shore of the body of water they used. Nonetheless, the water taken from this pond is not from a spring; it is rainwater. The community of Bard-e Neshandeh

199 Archaeological evidence shows us how a severe lack of water would have been constant in this area from the first settlement onwards: the ruin of the fortified house of a village chief, for example, was flanked by three large cisterns, and even the small village had at least one, while there seems to have been a small pond on the sacred terrace, precisely between the northwest stairway and the podium. Another pool of brackish water is currently used by the nomadic Bakhtiari tribe; two times each year they stop here to draw water during their traditional transhumance through the region. Until recently caravans that connected Susiana and the oasis of Esfahan also stopped here for the same reason.

200 Professor Mario Casari, *La Sapienza* University of Rome. Personal Communication.

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was strongly tied to rainfall because this was the foundation for the sparse harvests that served to feed the village's inhabitants. In any case, the major activity for the community was raising livestock. They also had a most lucrative position, living in an area that was an obligatory stop on an important caravan route where it was possible to get water supplies, and in which there was an important religious centre, renowned in all the country and attracting numerous pilgrims. These traditions remained intact in Iran until the end of the 19th century, during times when automobiles were not yet circulating, when people moved in caravan groups and when pilgrimages to religious centres, as well as markets and fairs, were the only attractions for country and city folk.

5.2.2. Archaeological Context

The site of Bard-e Neshandeh covers an area of around 700 m long and 250 m wide and it is composed of three distinct parts separated at some distance from each other. Starting from the “raised stone” (or “erected stone”), a palatial complex is situated 100 m to the west, isolated on a small terrace; and 200 m to the east of this complex there are large sacred terraces set into the mountain while 100 m to the north of the palace there are the ruins of a village, or “lower town”, including about one hundred houses and a large cistern for water storage (Fig. 5.2).

The French archaeologists were marginally interested in the palace area, drawing a plan for only the most recent phase, dating this to probably around the early Islamic period, without studying the older phases. The dating of the last phase was made possible by the discovery of some fragments of brown or grey glazed pottery, with decorations in black, from the 9th century AD. The construction of circular and semi-circular towers may be assumed as a *terminus post quem* for the Sasanid epoch. Indeed, these fortifications are not attested in the Arsacid period²⁰¹.

The French excavations were concentrated in the area they thought would be the most interesting: the religious complex noted in the Iranian world as “*sacred terrace*”.

The religious complex was actually built in two terraces (upper and lower) delineated by a dry-wall substructure with rectangular buttresses. It is approximately 157.20 m long. Three construction phases were identified, with phases I and II concerning the upper terrace and phase III concerning the lower terrace (Fig. 5.5).

201 Ghirshman 1976, 10-11.

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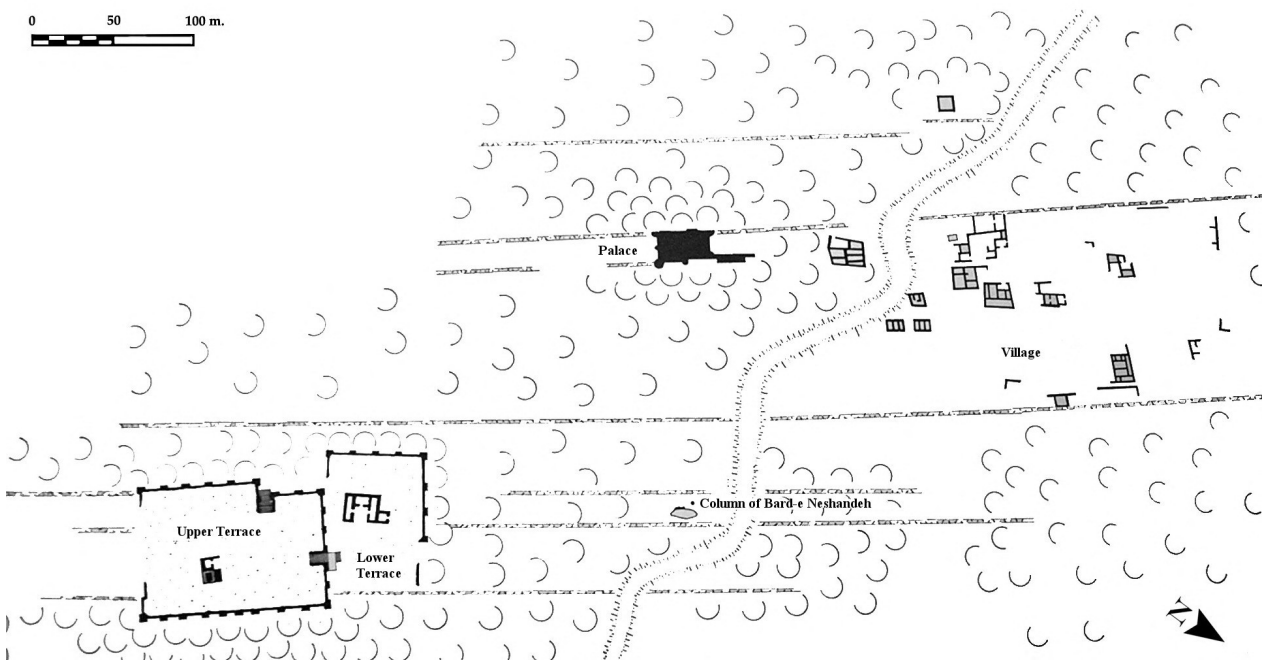


Figure 5.2 - Bard-e Neshandeh. General Situation (Ghirshman 1976, 8, Fig. 2.). Modified.

During *phase I*, the upper terrace, rectangular in shape, measured 67.50 m long by 45.30 m wide on the southeast side and 42.50 m on the northeast side. The southeastern façade, against the mountain, had seven rectangular overhangs, while the south-west side had eight and the north-east side nine. On the north-west façade, there was an access staircase, about the size of 3 × 3.22 m – nowadays entirely destroyed – between the third and fourth overhang to the north. Another staircase (2.2 × 0.93 m), made up of five steps, opened on the north-east façade. It was also destroyed, most likely during the terrace’s enlargement in phase II²⁰². At the centre of the terrace there was a square podium with an exterior facing of stone blocks on reduced dimensions, which in this earliest phase measured 5 × 4.97 m. The ensemble would surely have given an impression of clear homogeneity, although this did not stop it being destroyed²⁰³.

In *phase II*, the terrace was extended to reach a length of 106.50 m and a width ranging

202 This, according to Ghirshman’s hypothesis, was the stairway that served as an exit for cult followers at the end of religious ceremonies. Remaining with the French archaeologist’s interpretation, this hypothesis is based on the idea that all the sacred terraces on which sanctuaries were constructed were provided with at least two stairways, one for arrivals and another for departures: according to him, visitors did not leave the sanctuary along the road that was used to come into it (Ghirshman 1976, 155) On the model of age-old traditions such as the Assyrian and Babylonian ones, particularly of the feast of the *BĪT AKĪTU* (^{bīt}*akītu* = house of the *akītu*, i.e. house of the feast of the *akītu*) of which there is evidence even among the Elamites (Ghirshman 1976, 61).

203 Ghirshman identifies Gaumata – the presumed usurper, evoked by Darius in the Behistun inscription for the destruction of Achaemenid temples – as the destroyer of the sanctuary (Ghirshman 1976, 175). In reality, the discoveries suggest a later period. A more likely hypothesis is that the cause of such destruction may have come from strong earthquakes, many of which have affected Iran over time.

5. Elymaean Religious Architecture

from 75.45 m in the southeast to 68.70 m in the northwest. The reasons behind this work of “reconstruction” may have been various: the increased importance of the local prince, the growing fame of Bard-e Neshandeh as a place of worship, or secular and religious authorities having more economic resources²⁰⁴. However, the modest community living here almost doubled the surface of the sacred terrace. The entire enlargement was completed with the use of hundreds of rough unprocessed stone blocks. This type of block was also found as filling in the walls of the nearby palace. This factor led Ghirshman to suppose that the most recent phase of such a palace had been built since the abandonment of the sacred terrace, almost surely in the early centuries of Islam²⁰⁵. Even at this stage, there were two staircases: one, in poor condition²⁰⁶, on the southwest and another, of exceptional monumentality, on the northwest. The latter is divided into two flights of stairs, separated by a large socle which runs along the base of the wall substructure, and its dimensions bear witness to its importance. At the corner between the socle and the eastern wall there is a small chapel, located to the left of the staircase at the same level of the socle, with a niche (1.05 × 1.25 m) with the same thickness of the overhang (Fig. 5.3), which Ghirshman²⁰⁷ erroneously interpreted as an *ateš-gāh*²⁰⁸. To the left of the niche there is a block of



Figure 5.3 – Bard-e Neshandeh. Niche (Ghirshman 1976, Pl. XIII, 1). Above.

Figure 5.4 – Bard-e Neshandeh. Bas-relief (Ghirshman 1976, Pl. XIII, 3). Below.

204 Ghirshman 1976, 18.

205 Ghirshman 1976, 10-11.

206 Much of its degradation comes from the fact that there is a steep incline towards it from the terrace, and this has acted as an outlet for rainwater. For these reasons Ghirshman asserts that this stairway would not have been present in the original plans but would have been added later (1976, 19). (1976, 19).

207 Ghirshman 1976, 21.

208 *Āteš-gāh* means literally “place (*gāh*) of fire (*teš*)” (Huff 1975, 243-254). It must be emphasised that the French excavations were made during the 1960s, when the theory of A. Godard (1938) and K. Erdmann (1941), regarding Iranian religious architecture, was still in vogue. This theory described fire temples as being characterised by only two buildings. The first was the *čahār-tāq* (four arches), that represented the central area where a cult of fire was celebrated, with a planimetric definition by Godard that became synonymous with the term itself, fire temple, and this consisted of four pillars connected by arches which in turn were surmounted by a cupola. The building was frequently made of stone and for this reason remained relatively intact over time.

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stone of some interest, with a bas-relief of a libation scene (Fig 5.4), most likely representing a local prince, his garment with a lozenge pattern²⁰⁹. In the course of this phase, the previously destroyed podium was rebuilt, increasing its dimensions (6.90 × 6.82 m). The new face of the podium was made up of much larger blocks than those used previously, but the work was less thorough than in the primitive podium, probably because the project was hurried because of the need to re-establish religious services that had been interrupted.

During *phase III*, a lower-level second terrace (74.15 × 56.50 m) was joined to the upper terrace with an access staircase in line with the main one (NW) of the upper terrace. On the second terrace, a temple was built on an axis moved towards the south-west. It included an almost square tetrastyle area, surrounded by three elongated rooms with no direct communication between them and was preceded by a porch with two rows of eight columns connected to the main staircase by two paved paths.

During this phase, the podium, destroyed by uncertain means, was reconstructed a second time, but in this case its original square shape was no longer observed (7 × 10.45 m). Leaning against the southwestern wall of the podium, a small building (likely to have been a sacristy) was erected, with a room preceded by a covered atrium.

The second was the *āteš-gāh*, where the fire itself was kept, a structure also of stone and surmounted by a cupola with all four sides closed. This theory did not have the benefit of a close reading of the *Avesta*, the Zoroastrian sacred text. If this text had been consulted, it would have been clear that the *čahār-tāq* could not have been placed in the open air because the sacred fire could not be exposed to the rays of the sun. This theoretical framework was rebutted in the 1970s by the German archaeologist D. Huff (1975), who revisited and revised an old theory of E. Herzfeld (1941), which drew on textual evidence to suggest that the fire temple was made up of a closed building in which the *čahār-tāq* was separated from the outside either by walls which closed in the arches or by domed corridors. Huff speaks of the *čahār-tāq* not as a synonym for fire temple but as a fundamental structure inside a much more extensive religious complex, and it could have been, as he defined it, a “Sanctuary of Fire”. He maintains as a central point of his theory the idea that not all the *čahār-tāq* could be linked to the structure of an Iranian temple, and that their dating should not be limited just to the Sasanid era. Indeed, in the Islamic period the typology of the *čahār-tāq* was taken up and used by the new religion as a sanctuary, a place of pilgrimage, situated over the tomb of a saint (*emāmzāde*). Further, the German archaeologist has sought to highlight some common guidelines through which it could be possible to more coherently interpret the various historic buildings in Iran (Huff, 1993)

209 The bas-relief is not in a good state of conservation and is made up of five figures, among whom the central figure is a prince, moved slightly to the left and holding in his right hand a container from which emerges a liquid (the object of the libation); on his left there is a priest, recognisable because of his particular garments and by the small branch he holds in his left hand. The other figures do not have particular characteristics of note. The bas-relief, probably unfinished and appearing to be quite irregular, particularly in the placement of the figures, gives the impression of having been made a long time after the creation of the terrace of phase II, on a block of stone found *in situ*. Its placement gives it a particular significance: at the base of the main stairway on which pilgrims came up to reach the sacred terrace for religious ceremonies, its viewing came before the ritual up on the podium (Ghirshman, 1976, 23). In any case, religious scenes such as this one are widely known in western Asian art, with examples from Palmyra to Gandhara, and they are represented in Iranian art from the Achaemenid period onwards.

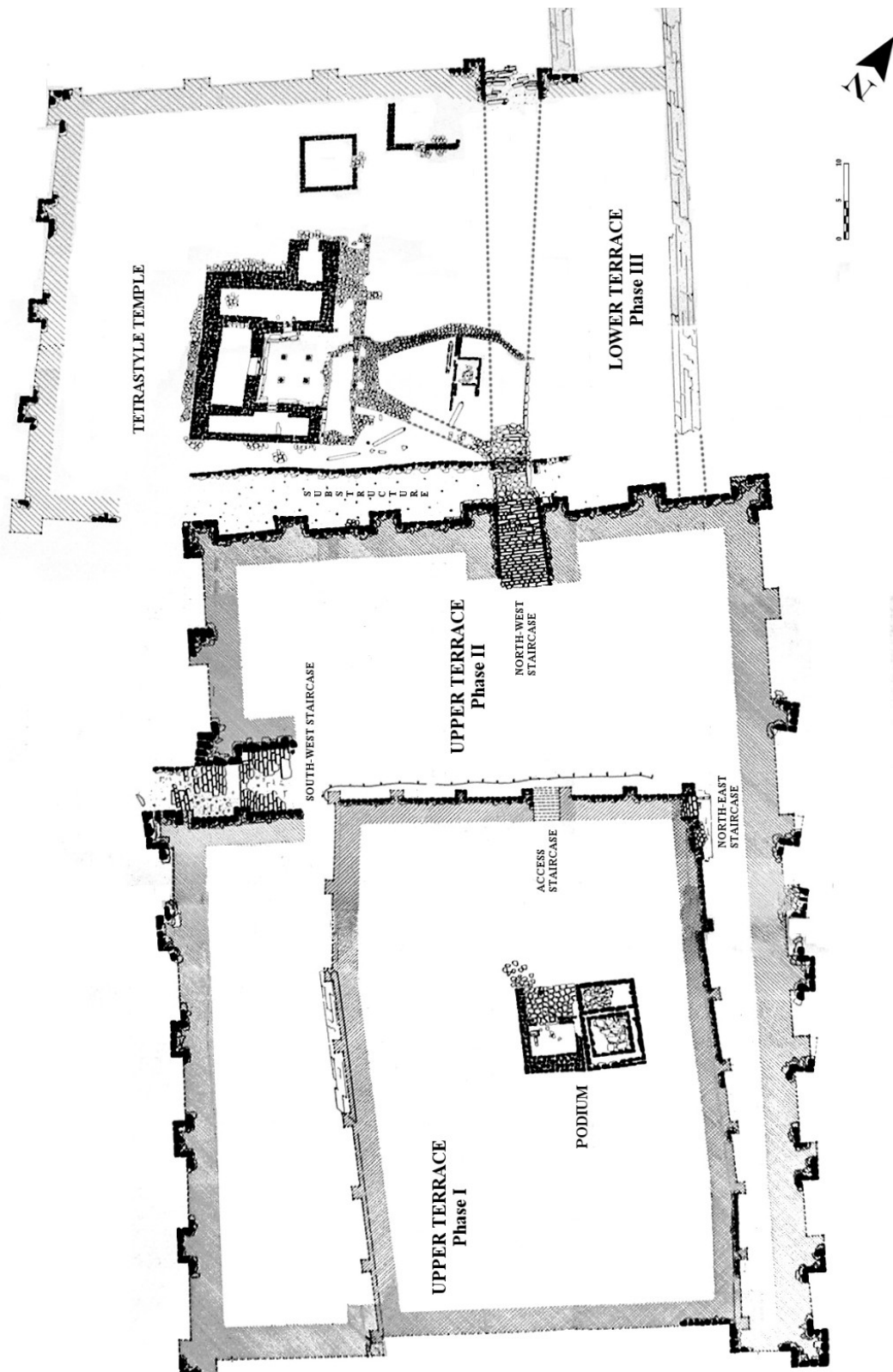


Figure 5.5 – Bard-e Neshandeh. Site plan (Ghirshman 1976, Plan I). Modified.

5.2.3. Monumental Architecture

As mentioned previously, in phase III a second and lower terrace was added onto the religious complex of Bard-e Neshandeh. The difference in level between the two is 7.79 m²¹⁰ and there is an access stairway on an axis with the main stairway (northeast) of the higher terrace. On this new lower terrace, which took the sacred area of Bard-e Neshandeh to a total length of 157.20 m and moved it towards the southwest with respect to the previous axis, a *tetrastyle temple* was built and it was connected to the main stairway by two paved paths. Beyond these two layouts, the area facing the temple, which may be defined as a “parvis”, or in other words a consecrated space in front of a sacred building, brings to light the stone foundations of a structure (9) with a presumed rectangular base for which a function is not yet established, situated between the two paths among numerous fragments of columns and capitals (Fig. 5.6).

The aforesaid temple measures 22.20 m in front and 20.60 m on the rear wall with each of the side walls 7.50 m long and it has along the northeast façade a porch (6) with its floor raised approximately 0.10 m to 0.15 m above the floor of the external area. On the plan, this flooring appears to be made of beaten earth, at least as regards the part in front of the room 5 and the entire east corner²¹¹, delimited on all sides by a row of stone slabs which were placed horizontally on the paved area in front. Such a low step allowed the floor of the portico, under the cover of a roof supported by pillars and within the area of the temple, to remain dry when rain fell; therefore, while the facing area was paved, the area of the portico with all probability did not need to have a complete paving in stone²¹². Thanks to a careful analysis of the photographic documentation, it is possible to also note that area 5 is higher by a few centimetres with respect to the pavement of the portico. Presumably, a superficial observation may have led Ghirshman to identify this difference in level as a presumed wall, for which, though, there is no evidence (Fig. 5.6).

210 Ghirshman 1976, 39.

211 This possibility, which would require a verification *in situ*, diverges from the description of Ghirshman that considers the paved floor in its entirety (1976, 41).

212 An analogous situation is comparable in several Buddhist monasteries in northwestern Pakistan, where the floors of the porticos, apparently similar to those in Elymaean temples, were not paved because they were protected by a roof and separated from the facing area by a low step elevated above the level of the external space (Callieri, 1987). The relatively higher level of the edge of the porticos in the Pakistani monasteries may be explained by the fact that in those areas (Swat) there is more rainfall than in Iran.

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According to the French archaeologist, the portico was made with two rows of eight columns each, with those in the second row leaning against the wall of the façade²¹³. However, by close observation of the photographic documentation, it can be seen that the columns, or the remains of them, number only fourteen and not sixteen. Indeed, two columns are not present in the second row in front of room 5 – the third and fourth starting from the east – as though at that point there was a wall against which the columns would have rested. Such a wall is absent in the elevation – as we can see in the photographic documentation of the French archaeological mission – with the exception of a line of stones that Ghirshman considered to be foundation stones; this led him to hypothesise that such a wall existed in an original phase and was deliberately knocked down at the time of the abandonment of the temple when its hypothetical deconsecration was undertaken to transform it into an iwān²¹⁴.



Figure 5.6 – Bard-e Neshandeh. Tetrastyle Temple (Ghirshman 1976, Pl. XXIII).

213 Ghirshman 1976, 41.

214 An iwān is an architectural model common in Mesopotamia and the Iranian world in the Arsacid period; it has a rectangular plan with one of the shorter sides opening to a courtyard, with a self-supporting barrel-vaulted roof having inclined segments (not radial segments). This building system exploits the self-supporting nature of the materials to eliminate any need for scaffolding. It was a most successful architectural format, bringing major advantages that rendered it ideal for regions with major fluctuations in temperature.

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In support of his conjecture, he tendered the examples of temples in Penjikent in Sogdiana (modern Tajikistan) which had suffered the same fate²¹⁵. In reality, careful observation of the proportions of the structure and the distances between the columns and the wall, leads to the conclusion that the suggested wall did not exist, and that the line of stone blocks would have been a kind of long threshold for this structure, that we may interpret as a vestibule opening to the northeast on the portico.

Through the above-mentioned porch there is access to the area 5, with its almost square plan (9.20×7.25 m), including four columns symmetrically arranged at the centre. This space is surrounded by three rooms of elongated plan, independent of each other and raised in comparison to it. They communicate with the central chamber through doors, one per room. It is likely the areas 1 (9×3.30 m) and 3 (10.70×3.10 m) were reached through three steps, while the small quantity of graphic documentation does not allow verification of the number of steps for room 2 (10.60×2 m). Additionally, room 3 has a stone socle leaning against its southeastern wall. A fifth room (4), much smaller than the others (2.40×3.30 m) and depicted by Ghirshman as a sacristy²¹⁶, is located on the north side of the temple and is accessible only from the outside (NW). It should be emphasized that the measurements of these rooms are approximate because Ghirshman does not provide them, and those reported in this article have been acquired from the plan that he published (Fig. 5.7).

In line with this fifth room, there is another a few metres to the northwest, isolated and with a squared plan (8), and then to the north of this one, also just a few metres further, there is another room with a probable rectangular plan (7). These isolated structures, with paved thresholds and consisting of just one internal space each, are explained by Ghirshman as possibly being quarters for temple guards²¹⁷.

5.2.4. Pottery and Associated Goods

The discoveries made in this religious complex are most varied, ranging from jewellery and small artefacts in metal and terracotta, to coins and architectural finds. To facilitate classification, these discoveries will be subdivided according to the phases of construction which

215 Ghirshman 1976, 40.

216 Ghirshman 1976, 40.

217 Ghirshman 1976, 39.

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characterise this site – as seen before – so they may be placed in an appropriate historical context.

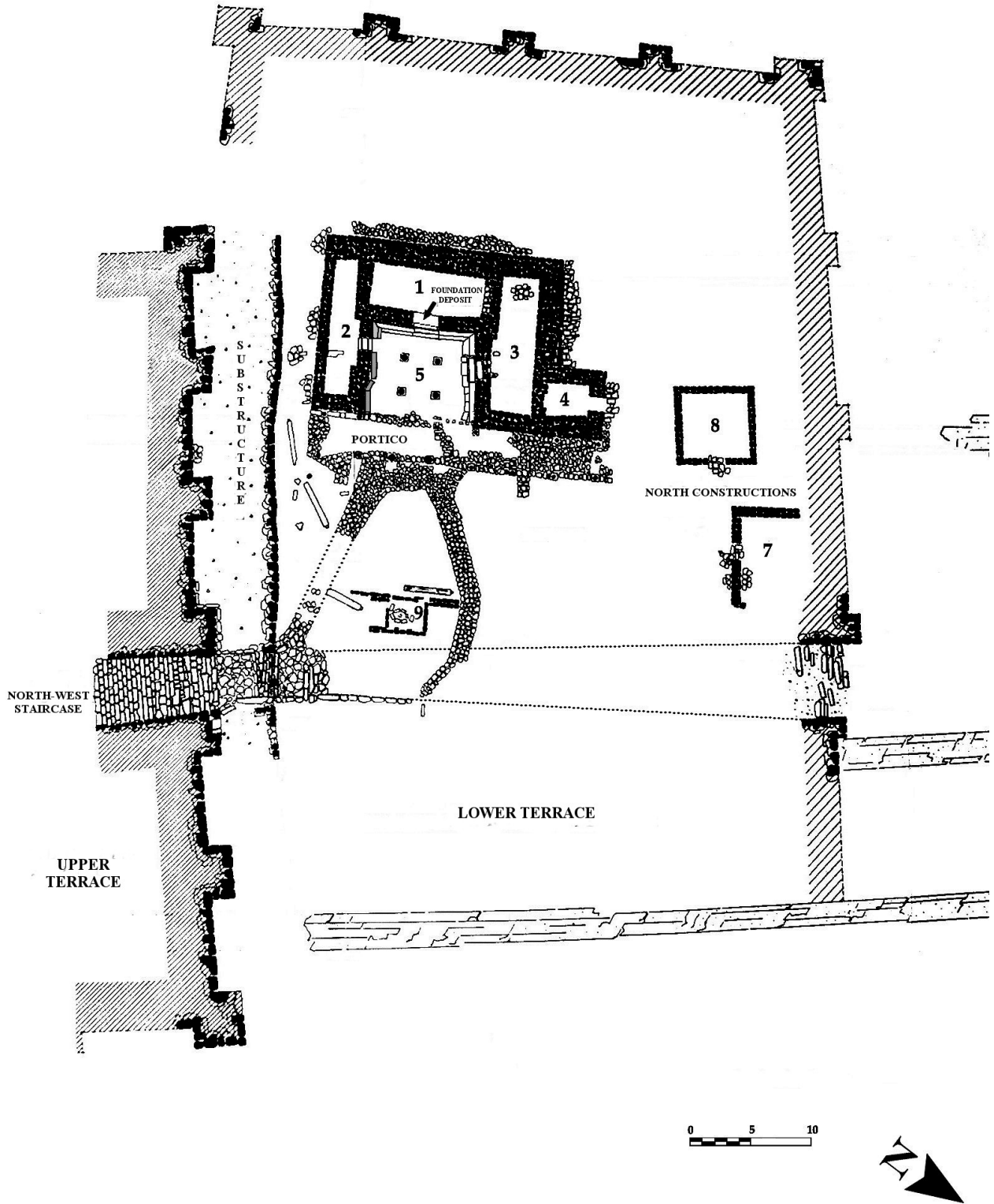


Figure 5.7 – Bard-e Neshandeh. Temple plan (Ghirshman 1976, Plan II). Modified.

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As regards the *phase I*, the most interesting finds are undoubtedly coins: ten silver drachmas of which four have images of Alexander the Great, one of Antiochus III, one of Antiochus IV and two of Kamnaskires I²¹⁸. They were found next to the wall substructure, possibly left there by pilgrims visiting the shrine. Other discoveries, along the northeastern wall substructure, were mainly jewellery, small perfume bottles and ceramic pilgrims' flasks²¹⁹ (Fig. 5.8), as well as fragments of terracotta figurines showing a male figure – perhaps a horseman – and the head of an animal.

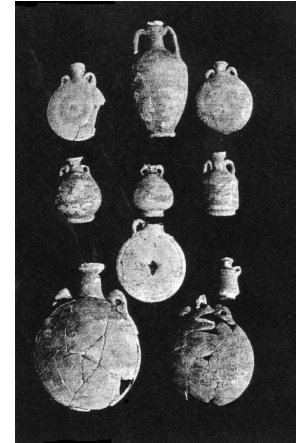


Figure 5.8 – Bard-e Neshandeh. Pilgrims' Flasks (Ghirshman 1976, Pl. XL, 1).

For *phase II*, some metal artefacts were found in the excavation of the podium including a small gold plaque with rounded corners on which a male figure is represented²²⁰, a bronze bracelet decorated with a head of gazelle on one end, and a small bronze mirror adorned with concentric circles²²¹. By contrast, stone artefacts were mostly found scattered and piled up²²², because the terrace had been transformed into a crop field and farmers had removed the remnants of stone to allow the passage of ploughs for wheat cultivation. Among many pieces of mutilated sculptures²²³, often reduced to quite small fragments, were found two sculptures in the round of male busts, parts of bas-reliefs, arms and feet from statues, and a head that came perhaps from a lion, with a collar indicating that it was domesticated²²⁴. Another discovery was a prominent sculpture of a male figure (Fig. 5.9) depicted in a ritual gesture²²⁵,

218 Interestingly, these findings are in sharp contrast with the historical dating by Ghirshman, who imputes the end of this phase to Gaumata (Ghirshman 1976, 175).

219 *Pilgrim flask* is a typical form of liquid container widely distributed in Iran, with an ovoid body and a short neck on which there are often one or two handles. One of the sides was usually made flat so that it could be placed against a wall or tied to the flank of a pack animal.

220 According to Ghirshman (1976, 28), this small golden plaque could be from the pre-Achaemenid era (7th - 6th cent. BC). Considerable numbers of this type of object are in the Oxus Treasure in Bactria, where they represent images of worshippers voicing supplications to their divinity.

221 This mirror is not unique. Another was found in the lower terrace, and another two at Masjed-e Soleyman, one of which was in the temple of Heracles. Of these four mirrors attributed to central Asiatic-oriental nomads (north Caucasus, south Russia, and Danube region), Ghirshman believes the oldest are from Bard-e Neshandeh, and the more recent and less elaborate ones are from Masjed-e Soleyman (Ghirshman 1976, 29).

222 There is one exception, a rectangular block found near the highest step of the southwest stairway, decorated with a bas-relief of a warrior with a beard and a moustache, and holding a bow in his right hand. For Ghirshman, this would be the first and only altar known from the Parthian era (Ghirshman 1976, 30).

223 Ghirshman (1976, 31) is convinced that the fragments came from statues situated in the upper part of the higher terrace and that at the time of the destruction of the sanctuary they were broken up on the spot and rolled down the northwest stairway until they finished their descent on the base that separates the two ramps of the stairway.

224 Classical sources, in particular Aelian, speak of the existence in Elymais of a temple dedicated to the goddess Anahita, where trained lions could be seen (Aelian, *De Natura Animalium*, 12.23).

225 His right arm bears a small branch, while the left arm is bent at the elbow with the palm of the hand, now

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adorned with a beautiful jewel made up of a long necklace supporting a circular medallion set between two trilobate mounts²²⁶.

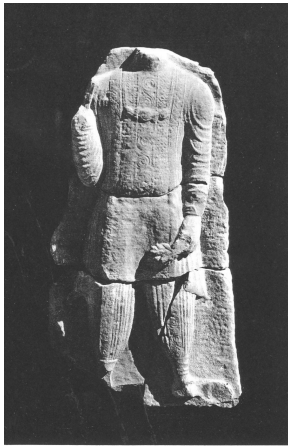


Figure 5.9 - Bard-e Neshandeh. Male Figure (Ghirshman 1976, Pl. XXV).

There were further discoveries of numerous fragments from sculptures in the round, with many heads of statues sharing common characteristics such as short curled hair, beards and moustaches, as well as prominent eyebrows and large open eyes with the irises and pupils in relief. This particular treatment of the eyes is not matched in fragments from statues at Masjed-e Soleyman.

Among the finds worth emphasising during the *phase III*, there is surely the important Aramaic inscription (Fig. 5.10) on the face of the podium which carries the writing “[*kbnš*] *k[y]r mlk*’...” studied and translated by Harmatta as “Kabnashkir the king”²²⁷. Another noteworthy discovery is the foundation deposit²²⁸ that dates the last restoration of the tetrastyle temple to the end of the 2nd century AD. It was unearthed during the 1966 excavation

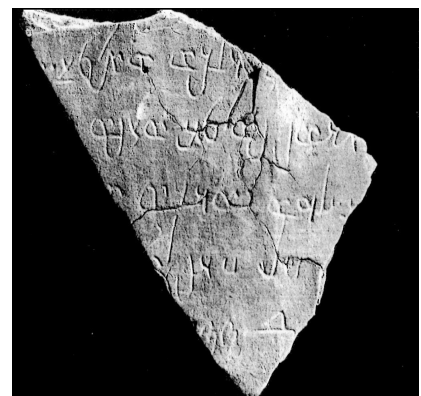


Figure 5.10 - Bard-e Neshandeh. Inscription (Ghirshman 1976, Pl. XXXV, 4).

missing, turned to the front. This ritual gesture was widely known in the Near-Eastern world from the most ancient times onwards. Sumerians gave it the name of *šū-gāl*, or “raise the hand”.

226 This is a specifically Parthian ornament.

227 Harmatta dates this inscription at *c.* 180-160 BC (1976, 289-300). If the dating is correct, it may refer to Kamnaskires I and this would then imply his control over the site.

228 The foundation deposit contained 4,735 coins, mostly Elymaean bronze presumably from Susa, but also included 165 Elymaean tetradrachms in silvered bronze, 4 obols and some Parthian coins which offered accurate items of dating. In particular, it should be mentioned that there was a Kušān coin of Kaniška (*c.* 127-155 AD) and some Arsacid coins, six of which were issued by sovereigns Vologases III, IV and V, covering a period ranging from 124/5 to 190/1 AD. On these latter coins, dating is clearly legible: the two in bronze of Vologases IV, the first of which refers to 173/174 AD or 174/175 AD, and the second to 175/176 AD; a silvered bronze tetradrachm of Vologases III from 124/125 AD; and a coin of Vologases V datable to 190/191 AD. Amid the Elymaean series of this deposit a very small number of coins was found, attributable to the last kings of Elymais, the so-called “*rois incertains*”. These kings were so named because, unlike their predecessors, their names did not appear on coins minted by them. Commonly, they are placed at the turn of the last quarter of the 2nd century and the early 3rd century - just behind the Sasanid conquest - without the certainty of a correct dating and succession (Augé, Curiel & Le Rider 1979, 38). Generally, the issuing of small bronze coins was commonplace, and for this reason it is of interest that only five examples were in the deposit of Bard-e Neshandeh. The “rarity” of these particular coins here is in stark contrast to the extraordinary abundance of previous issues. Accordingly, this suggests that the foundation deposit was made in a period in which the first mintages of these “*rois incertains*” were not yet widely distributed - certainly before the end of the 2nd century AD - and where the coins of their predecessors still circulated abundantly (Augé, Curiel & Le Rider 1979, 38-39).

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Figure 5.11 - Bard-e Neshandeh. Historiated Column (Ghirshman 1976, Pl. XXIV, 5).

under the top step of the elongated room 1. The foundation deposit also contained other items, especially jewellery, with an outstanding cornelian engraved with a helmeted female head, which Ghirshman identified as Athena²²⁹.

Leaving aside this deposit, the internal area of the temple was not particularly rich in objects while outside the opposite was true; these finds were very numerous, above all in front of the temple where votive objects were presumably left.

At this point mention should be given to the discovery of a historiated column²³⁰ (Fig. 5.11) and a capital near the area in front of the portico. Beginning with the column, one of its surfaces is decorated with a series of four reliefs – three of which are placed one above the other – that show four standing figures represented frontally²³¹.

The historiated column seems to have been completed with the capital that was found almost intact near the lower terrace. Capitals from the Parthian

229 Ghirshman 1976, 40.

230 The typology of historiated columns, a model at first unknown among westerners, was most probably as Ghirshman suggests, a constant architectural element in the region of ancient Elymais. Indeed, beyond the site under examination here, remains of this type of column were found at Masjed-e Soleyman and at Izeh-Malamir. Nevertheless, the example from Bard-e Neshandeh is the only one so far found nearly intact in Iran. Many historiated columns have been found in Asia Minor, particularly in Anatolia at Ephesus, and they are defined by Charles Picard as “*colonnes historiées a la base*” or “*bomospeira*” (1961, 388-393). For Ghirshman (1979, 44), they not to be confused with those found in Parthian temples, keeping in mind that the motifs of the subjects are quite different.

231 Ghirshman, when dwelling on the theme of the decoration on the column, believes that the figure in the middle, the larger one, could represent a local prince, a founder of the temple, while the two below him would seem to be his children. With regard to the figure at the top, Ghirshman considers him to possibly be an officiator at a sacrifice. The scholar also affirms that the prince appearing in this manner, that is, having his image represented at a certain height – a concept that is not just non-Greek but also anti-Greek – refers to a theme of Achaemenid inspiration (the sovereign represented in prayer high on the façade of the tomb-palace), demonstrating his superior rank and declaring his devotion to the divinity. Further, comparing the figures on the column at Bard-e Neshandeh with those sculpted on rock walls at Izeh-Malamir, he recognises in the pose of the figures a kind of lay sentiment rather than religious; this conforms to the old tradition in the Persian court, known already in the Achaemenid period, that prevented mortals, ordinary people, from being empty-handed in the presence of the sovereign. In reality there is not an evident similarity with the reliefs at Izeh-Malamir, unless Ghirshman is referring to the rock relief at Hung-e Azhdar where there are various characteristics in common. Ghirshman also believes that the images on the historiated column follow the same spirit and the same inspiration of all the portrayals found on the consoles of the columns, pillars and façades of the Parthian buildings at Hatra and Dura-Europos. According to him, in fact, the statues placed on these consoles had found a new expression in the historiated columns of the Arsacid temples, “*dont l'idée est la même dans le domaine artistique [...] de cette formule architectonique en faveur de l'Iran proprement dit*” (Ghirshman 1976, 44).

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period – showing human figures associated with each monument – differed from Achaemenid capitals, where the preference was for figures from the animal world (lions, bulls, giraffes), and also differed from Roman capitals, where floral decorations were preferred. Here then, Ghirshman puts forward his theory that the sanctuary showed human-form images of divinities, to whom the religious complex was dedicated, as well as showing images of the individuals who created it²³². Each of the four sides of the capital carries an image of a personality enclosed by two scrolls.

One of these personalities is seated on a throne, seeming to grasp a spear in the right hand and holding a kind of cup in the left hand; Ghirshman identified this figure as female and in particular as the goddess Anahita (Fig. 5.12, 2). On the opposite face of the capital there is a male personality with moustache and beard, wearing a smooth cuirass on his chest over a tunic, with a spear held in the left hand and a shield in the right hand. A Phrygian cap is placed on his head and this prompts Ghirshman to identify him as the Persian god Mithra (Fig. 5.12, 1). The figures on the remaining sides of the capital are both represented with long fully-pleated tunics, and their right hands appear to be making a gesture of veneration. In accordance with Ghirshman, one of the figures could be the founder of the temple and the other could be the founder's ancestor (Fig. 5.12, 3-4)²³³.



Figure 5.12 – Bard-e Neshandeh. Historiated Capital (Ghirshman 1976, Pl. XXIV, from left to right: fig. 1, 2, 3, 4).

A second capital was found near the capital discussed above. The fact that it has only three decorated sides suggests that it could have been the capital of the column facing the

232 Ghirshman 1976, 45.

233 According to Ghirshman, among Parthian princes there would have been a tendency to represent their image on one side of official art and the image of an ancestor on the other side, which, as occurred in the Roman world (*ius imaginum*), served to legitimise the holding of power or the occupation of a post.

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historiated column, and was placed against the wall of the sanctuary.

Among other items found outside the sanctuary we can consider a bronze statue representing a male character – probably of princely rank²³⁴ – holding a cornucopia²³⁵ in his left hand. There were also numerous fragments of small statuary and metal objects.

Smaller objects fundamental for the dating of the religious centre at Bard-e Neshandeh include a few of the fragments of earthenware found by the French expedition during the clearing of the lower terrace and the cleaning of the paved paths used by worshippers to reach the temple.

5.2.5. Past Interpretations

After the first and brief mention of the site by J.M. Unvala²³⁶, who reported the name of the area with the native term *Bot-neshāndah* – or the “guiding idol” – there was a succession of visits by scholars and travellers to the site of Bard-e Neshandeh.

The first archaeologist to visit and describe it, even if only incidentally, was Sir Aurel Stein²³⁷ who was, however, much more interested and attracted by Masjed-e Soleyman, as were other scholars and travellers such as Maxime Siroux²³⁸ and Kurt Erdmann²³⁹.

The French scholar André Godard visited the site in 1947²⁴⁰ and he remained most interested, to the extent that he wrote an article about it in 1949 for the important periodical *Āthār-e Īrān*²⁴¹. He dates with some certainty the religious complex of Bard-e Neshandeh to the Arsacid period, taking as his basis that the structure found on the higher terrace (the podium) was not at all a fire temple²⁴², for if it were it would have been dated to the Sasanid era. Regarding the

234 Ghirshman 1976, 47.

235 *Cornucopia* or the horn of plenty. With rare exceptions, abundance and power go together. The sense and the idea of power attributed by the ancients to the horns of animals led them to regard these as symbols of good fortune. The Greeks connected the origin of the horn of plenty to the myth of the goat Amaltea, whose milk fed the infant god Zeus. The grateful god gave her horns the power to bring about an abundance of all the good things in the world (Charbonneau-Lassay 1994, 401-402). The Romans also made a horn into a symbol of Fortune and examples of this are apparent in imperial art. A sculpture on this subject has been found on the site of Masjed-e Soleyman

236 Unvala 1928, 86.

237 Stein 1940, 160-161. Sir Aurel Stein went to southwest Iran in the late 1930s, and even though he was more interested in the nearby religious complex of Masjed-e Soleyman, he stopped briefly at the site of Bard-e Neshandeh, giving it a brief description. He dated the complex to the Parthian era – basing this on a sculpted limestone head with Hellenistic traits found in a nearby field – and dated the fortified house of a local chief, some 200-300 m west of the sacred terrace, to the Sasanid period (Stein 1940, 161).

238 Siroux 1938, 160.

239 Erdmann 1941, 225.

240 The same year of the first inspection by Ghirshman.

241 *Annales du Service Archéologique de l'Iran* (Godard, 1949, 153-162).

242 The Fire Temple, a religious building that is widely regarded as the Iranian temple *par excellence*, came about as a response by Zoroastrian clerics to the diffusion, initiated by Artaxerxes II (404-359 BC) and continued in

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lower terrace, Godard dwells most briefly on what he defines as “*une sorte d’estrade ou ne subsiste aucun reste ou trace de construction*”²⁴³. This so-called platform – with no apparent signs of construction – was in reality where there were hidden remains of the tetrastyle temple, not yet excavated²⁴⁴.

Roman Ghirshman went for the first time to Bard-e Neshandeh in 1947, at the time of his first visit to Masjed-e Soleyman, thanks to an engineer in an Anglo-Iranian petroleum company, H. Harmer, who was passionately fond of archaeology. The two sites took on great importance for Ghirshman, indeed after this brief initial encounter he returned seventeen years later for a more thorough study that extended into three excavation campaigns (1964-1966). Later, his study will also make use of the work done by C. Augé, R. Curiel e G. Le Rider on coin discoveries at the two sacred terraces of Bard-e Neshandeh and Masjed-e Soleyman (1979).

As the years passed, other scholars took interest in the site, such as Vanden Berghe, who saw in the ruins of the Elymaean temple “*les restes des colonnes en pierre qui soutenaient le toit d’un triple ivān*”²⁴⁵, limiting himself to recording the discovery of a head from the Parthian era. However, the report of the French excavations²⁴⁶ is the most important and comprehensive source of information for anyone wishing to take an interest in the Elymaean religious complex at Bard-e Neshandeh, even if in many instances this information may be imprecise or inexact. Ghirshman follows descriptions of the site, and the activities and the discoveries in it, by launching himself into interpretations and hypotheses regarding the use and the dating of the religious complex, and regarding the architectural structures within it: the podium (on the higher terrace) and the tetrastyle temple (on the lower terrace). He interprets the higher terrace as a place destined for the worship of Mazdean divinities, in particular for the cult of Ahuramazda, whose sacred fire, displayed during rites at an altar on the podium, would have been kept, originally, in a niche in

the Seleucid and Parthian eras, of temples designed to hold religious images. These latter temples were defined as “*dwelling of the dēv (evil beings)*”, as the clerics regarded the images, especially those sculpted in the round, as being an empty form which evil could take over (Callieri 1997).

243 Godard, 1949, 159.

244 Godard supposed that the lower terrace was a gathering place for worshippers, where the officiating priest prepared the crowd for the ceremony that would take place on the higher terrace. His hypothesis was, in effect, that the ceremony could have taken place in two different times, first on the lower terrace and then on the higher terrace (Godard 1949).

245 Vanden Berghe 1966, 65.

246 Ghirshman 1976.

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the chapel at the bottom of the northwest stairway (phase I e II)²⁴⁷ and afterwards in the sacristy attached to the podium (phase III). This proposition by the French scholar would seem to be founded on the writings of Herodotus regarding the religion of the Persians.

As regards the tetrastyle temple on the lower terrace, Ghirshman interprets it as a temple dedicated to the divinities Anahita and Mithra, who along with Ahuramazda form the Divine Triad that is fundamental to the Mazdean religion²⁴⁸. It is, in any case, appropriate to state that many of the interpretations of the French archaeologist are not adequately supported by archaeological data.

We shall see shortly how the hypotheses of R. Ghirshman came to be refuted, above all regarding the datings, by the work undertaken by E. Haerinck on pottery finds in Iran (1983). Other important scholars who have been interested in analysis of the sacred terraces at Bard-e Neshandeh include Schippmann (1971), Downey (1988) and Kleiss (1998).

5.2.6. Dating

For the dating of the religious complex, Ghirshman – in the light of certain finds of small artefacts²⁴⁹ – felt he could place the commencement of the podium on the upper terrace in the 7th - 6th century BC²⁵⁰ and he regarded its activity as continuing until the end of the 1st century of Sasanid domination²⁵¹. This interpretation followed because the podium – as seen in the preceding section – was considered by the French archaeologist as a place for worship of Ahuramazda. For dating of the tetrastyle temple on the lower terrace, Ghirshman traces it back to

247 Identified afterwards as an *āteš-gāh*. This hypothesis was refuted by Schippmann (1971), because according to him an *āteš-gāh* had to be closed on all sides, but the niche had one side open.

248 Probably Ghirshman arrives at this hypothesis based on the capital of the historiated column discussed earlier. To be precise, he interprets two of the four figures on the sides of the capital as representing the goddess Anahita and the god Mithra. This, along with the finding of the paved path that connects the northwest stairway with the portico of the temple, leads Ghirshman to describe how, in his opinion, Mazdean worship would have been organised on the sacred terrace at Bard-e Neshandeh. He suggests that the ceremony took place in two distinct and consecutive stages: at first, worshippers arrived on the lower terrace where they moved towards the temple of Anahita and Mithra, leaving offerings; and then, following the paved path, they arrived at the northwest stairway, walking up to the higher terrace to finally reach the podium by way of another small stairway placed on an axis with the previous one, and here there were the rites in honour of the principal god of the Mazdean Triad, Ahuramazda (Ghirshman 1976, 50)

249 A small gold plaque found near the podium and some pottery pieces found in the soil between phase I and phase II.

250 Ghirshman 1976, 28; in another context he speaks of the 8th - 7th cent. BC (Ghirshman 1976, 50).

251 A hypothesis substantiated, in his opinion, by the finding at Masjed-e Soleyman of some coins from the time of Shapur II (309-379 AD) (Ghirshman 1976, 50).

5. *Elymaean Religious Architecture*

at least its last restoration at the end of the 2nd cent. AD²⁵² because of coins found in a foundation deposit in the temple²⁵³ – discussed in the previous paragraph – while he suggests a date for the abandonment of the entire complex around the 4th century AD²⁵⁴.

Dating of the Elymaean complex to the Achaemenid era, at least regarding its first phase, created many doubts for the German archaeologist, Klaus Schippmann²⁵⁵. He believed it appropriate to date the complex to the Seleucid-Parthian era²⁵⁶, because there were numerous discoveries – particularly in numismatics but also in pottery – that suggested exactly this epoch. He began from the premise that three small objects (a votive plate, a part of a weapon and a jewel), were perhaps traceable back to the time of the Medes or Achaemenids, but in reality – as affirmed also later by Haerinck – they were too few to be able to convincingly push the time scale towards such an ancient date. Schippmann in his most recent article re-examines the classical sources to relate them to the buildings on the terraces of the sacred complex at Bard-e Neshandeh and he identifies the presumed temple of Ahuramazda – according to Ghirshman represented on the podium of the upper terrace – as being the temple of Bel (the Semitic equivalent of Ahuramazda) that Antiochus III tried in vain to sack in the year of his death in 187 BC²⁵⁷.

The analytical study of pottery found in the soil of the site between phase I and II, conducted by Ernie Haerinck (1983), has permitted its dating from the end of the Achaemenid period to 150 BC. Haerinck refutes the dating by Ghirshman as being too ancient because of so few finds coming from the pre-Achaemenid era, suggesting instead a later date, with all probability at the end of the Achaemenid epoch and the beginning of the post-Achaemenid phase²⁵⁸. This dating by Haerinck accords with the eight Hellenistic coins and the two of Kamnaskires I found at the base of the substructure wall of this phase

For the tetrastyle temple on the lower terrace, Ghirshman, as seen earlier, suggests a dating in the first two centuries AD, which seems more than plausible, above all in the light of the previously mentioned coin deposit found inside the temple. The hypothesis formulated by

252 Ghirshman 1976, 40.

253 Footnote 228.

254 Ghirshman 1976, 50.

255 Schippmann 1971, 251-259.

256 In accord with what was suggested by Godard thirty years previously (Godard 1949, 153-162).

257 Vanden Berghe and Schippmann, 1985, 17.

258 Haerinck, 1983, 13.

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Schippmann and Vanden Berghe identifies it first with the temple of Artemis and its attempted sacking by Antiochus IV, and then with what Strabo called *Ta Azara*, but when confronted with present-day discoveries this hypothesis does not appear reliable²⁵⁹.



Figure 5.13 – Bard-e Neshandeh. Aerial view of site from the north (Ghirshman 1976, Pl. IV)

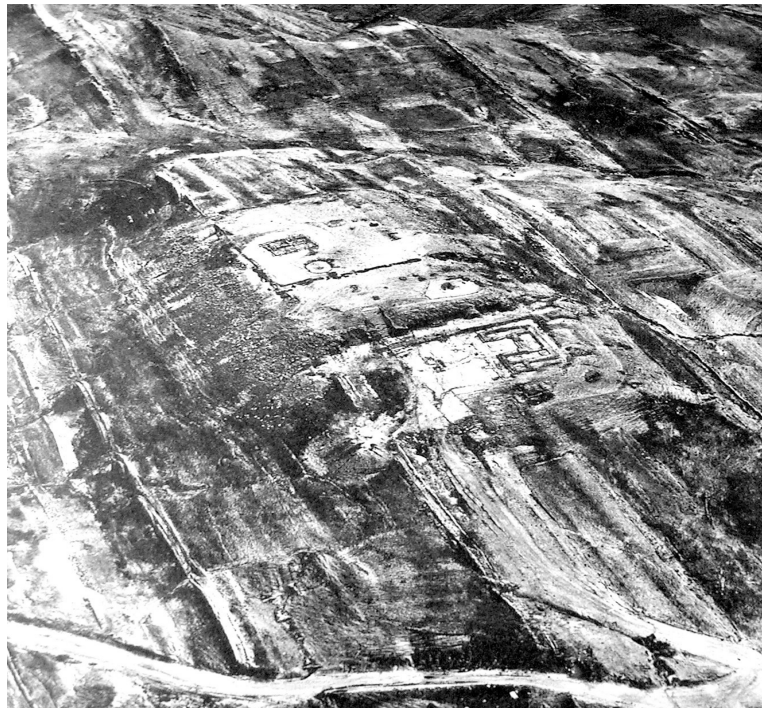


Figure 5.14 – Bard-e Neshandeh. Aerial view of site (Ghirshman 1976, Pl. V).

259 Vanden Berghe e Schippmann 1985, 20.

5.3. Masjed-e Soleyman

5.3.1. General Aspect

*From Samangan to Kenareh through Chaloos
Over the green stones of the Mountains of Zagros
Under the starry sky of the city of Kerman
To reach the oil fields in the hills of Masjed Solaiman²⁶⁰*

Masjed-e Soleyman²⁶¹ – مسجد سليمان – is situated in the north of Khuzestan province and has common borders with Esfahan and Chahar Mahal va Bakhtiari provinces. It is an important area of winter quarters for Bakhtiari tribes (in Persian: *Ashayer-e Bakhtiari*), people with an estimated population of 206,121 in 2006.

The name of the city is thought to have its origins in a belief of local inhabitants that the ruins of a temple are the *Irsoleyman*, which means “Mosque of Solomon”.

Masjed-e Soleyman is famous for having the first modern oil wells of the Middle East²⁶². The main modern settlement formed about 100 years ago as a result of petroleum industry development in the Middle East when the first negotiations for the establishment of the Anglo-Bakhtiari Oil Company were in progress between William Knox D'Arcy representatives and Bakhtiari tribal leaders (Khans).

There is a local tradition – discussed by scholars such as Ghirshman – that the ancient

260 Excerpt from Manouchehr Saadat Noury's poem, *My Iran*, published Sept. 15, 2009 online at Iranian.com.

261 Masjed-e Soleyman – also written in other ways such as Masjed Soleyman, Masjed-e Solaymān, Masjed Soleiman, and Masjid-i-Sulaiman – is known in the petroleum industry by the acronym *M.I.S.*

262 Oil was discovered at Masjed-e Soleyman on May 25, 1908, in the region of Naftoon at the centre of this city, a discovery that changed it and the whole of Iran, both economically and socially. The centenary in 2008 was marked by celebrations.

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name of the city was *Parsumash*²⁶³, the place where Cyrus²⁶⁴ was born as the son of a local ruler named Cambyses. This tradition could be a relatively recent speculation.

During the Middle Ages it was called *Talghar* (or *Tolqor*), the name of a land in the vicinity of Karun river. Later on the city was called *Jahangiri*²⁶⁵, then *Naftoon*²⁶⁶, and finally, after the visit of Reza Shah Pahlavi²⁶⁷, Masjed-e Soleyman from 1926.

When Arabs attacked this region, they intended to destroy the fire temple in this city, but they encountered resistance. Another popular tradition says that Moses established the *Sar Masjed* fire temple to develop his religion and it was respected by the population.



Figure 5.15 – Masjed-e Soleyman. View of site from the south-east (Ghirshman 1976, LI, 1).

Sar-Masjed Fire Temple – بنای تاریخی سرمسجد – is the name attached to the sacred complex at Masjed-e Soleyman. The original pre-Islamic name is unknown; its modern name has been derived from its location on top of a hillock overlooking a locality called “Sar-Masjed”²⁶⁸ (Fig. 5.15).

263 The location of *Parsumash* is still disputed by scholars. Between the 9th and 7th centuries BC, an Aryan tribe known as Parsua moved from Zagros to the Khuzestan plain and perhaps Masjed-e Soleyman was one of the places where they settled. This tribe lived as shepherds and horse trainers, and established the city of Parsua, which probably they pronounced Parsumash. Remnants of monuments dating back to that time indicate that Parsumash was located on a hilltop. In addition to the inscriptions of Assyrian King Sennacherib (8th century BC) mentioning Parsumash – which tell us that in 691 or 690 BC the Parsumash and Anzan attacked the Assyrian city of Halule – there are 7th century BC inscriptions of his grandson, King Ashurbanipal (668 - c. 627 BC) that also mention the nation of Parsamash or Parsumash, which was apparently located along the western slopes of the Zagros and Bakhtiari mountains bordering on Elam and perhaps extending as far south as the region around present day Masjed-e Soleyman.

264 It is possible that a certain Kurash of Parsumash mentioned in a Neo-Assyrian text of Assurbanipal (668–627 BC) is identical with Cyrus I (Brosius 2006, 7).

265 Nowadays, the name *Jahangiri* remains to indicate a rural district (*dehestan*) in the region of Masjed-e Soleyman.

266 This is a term now given to a cemetery located southeast of the city, and also given to a local football team that bears the name Naft Masjed Soleyman F.C.

267 The Shah (ruled 1925-1941) visited the city in 1926 and he suggested to the Iranian parliament that the city’s name be changed to Masjed-e Soleyman, a suggestion taken up within the year.

268 According to Masud Soltani – the director of the Masjed Soleiman Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organisation (*MSCHTO*) – the monument has been under 24-hour security watch to protect the ancient site from intruders, including looters. Further, as it has not benefited from attention to maintenance – the same applies at Bard-e Neshandeh – the site is at a critical stage, and indeed Soltani rang the alarm bells three years ago, declaring: “*The ancient monument requires urgent attention; its surface needs to be restored to protect it from further*

5.3.2. Archaeological Context

A massive stone structure 100 km east-southeast of the ancient city of Susa (Shush), situated on the first spurs of the Zagros Mountains at an altitude of around 400 m, the sacred complex of Masjed-e Soleyman unfolds across an extended irregular surface (c. 134 × 140 m)²⁶⁹, and it is much more elaborate than the previously discussed site at Bard-e Neshandeh (Fig. 5.20). In fact, here the terraces can be numbered as six²⁷⁰. An imposing substructure wall, made from stone blocks of various shapes and sizes (Fig. 5.16) and with rectangular projections at uniform distances from one another – along similar lines to Bard-e Neshandeh – supports a broad artificial terrace that is accessible by a main stairway on the northeast corner and by other smaller stairways on the north and south sides.



Figure 5.16 - Masjed-e Soleyman. Substructure wall (Ghirshman 1976, Pl. LII, 2).

Ghirshman identified four distinct construction and occupation phases in the complex. An initial archaic phase of *époque perse*²⁷¹ – itself divided into two periods – had just a single terrace (I) of 91.4 × 54 m on whose southern sector, according to Ghirshman²⁷², there would have been a podium for outdoor worship, while a room with a rectangular plan (2.70 × 1.15 m, and 2 m high)

destruction and the whole structure is in need of strengthening". He also affirmed: "Due to the importance of the Sar-Masjed Fire Temple [...] we have asked the Khuzestan CHTO to pay more attention to the edifice" (Masud Soltani, *The Circle of Ancient Iranian Studies*)

- 269 These measurements are not in Ghirshman's text and are approximate as I have calculated them directly from his plans. The maximum distance north to south extends from the projection on which stairway B was built, to the projection identified by Ghirshman as terrace III; for the east to west axis, this extends from the entry to stairway H until the so-called Western Sanctuary. It is striking that Ghirshman (1976, 55) reports only terrace measurements of the most ancient phase (terrace I, 54 × 91.5 m) but does not continue with more comprehensive measurements, reporting only the fact of an extension of the terrace that took place towards the north and the west (Ghirshman 1976, 72).
- 270 Ghirshman 1976, pl. III. In reality though, the fundamental basis of the complex is formed by two broadly extended terraces (I and V), while the other terraces are much more limited in size and do not seem to be other than small structural additions made at various times during the history of the sacred structure.
- 271 Ghirshman even refers to the presumed installation in this site of a Persian tribe towards the end of the 8th and the beginning of the 7th century BC. The site would have been chosen – again according to the French archaeologist's hypothesis – because it was located in a valley close to a small watercourse (a landscape typical of this region), thus in a different situation to the site of nearby Bard-e Neshandeh, where the only water source was rainfall. The village would have been near a spring – nowadays dried up – which gave its name to a section of the modern city about 2 km from the sanctuary, *Chashmen Ali* or "Spring of Ali". This village extended to the east and moreover to the south where there was a bare hill that Ghirshman thought may have covered the remains of a chieftain's dwelling (Ghirshman 1976, 55).
- 272 Ghirshman 1976, 61.

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with a roof of large slabs – one of which (1.60 × 1.15 m) was discovered by Ghirshman still *in situ* – was made into a section of the northern foundation wall, to be precise, on the northwest corner (Fig. 5.17). This environment was erroneously interpreted²⁷³ by Ghirshman²⁷⁴ – as occurred also for the niche at Bard-e Neshandeh (section 5.2.2) – as an *ateš-gāh*²⁷⁵, a place where fire was kept for subsequent ritual exposure on the podium. The presence of four flights of steps suggested to Ghirshman²⁷⁶ the history of a ceremony that would have followed the same process as on the superior terrace at Bard-e Neshandeh²⁷⁷, with worshippers most likely going up on the northeast corner using the spacious stairway A²⁷⁸ and then descending to leave the sanctuary by the minor stairways B (southeast corner) and C-D (south side)²⁷⁹. The second construction phase of terrace I was thought to be the time of rebuilding of the podium²⁸⁰ – visible at the time of



Figure 5.17 – Masjed-e Soleyman. Room, northwest corner (Ghirshman 1976, Pl. LII, 3, above; Pl. LIII, 3, right; Pl. LIII, 4, left).

discovery by Ghirshman – as was the widening of the terrace itself with the reconstruction of the southern substructure wall.

The French archaeologist further hypothesises that after Alexander the Great's conquest of Iran and the subsequent rise of the Seleucid reign after his death, Macedonians installed a garrison at Masjed-e Soleyman, positioning it on an important commercial route that led from the north to Gabiane and its centre of Gabae²⁸¹. This theory was based on the finding of numerous

273 The hypothesis advanced by Ghirshman (1976, Bard-e Neshandeh: 21, Masjed-e Soleyman: 61-62) identifying niches within the exterior facades of terraces at both Bard-e Neshandeh e Masjed-e Soleyman as fire-temples, or *ateš-gāh*, appears inadmissible (see footnote 208). The niches, given that they are near access stairways and that they do not have flues, would seem “*far more likely to have sheltered oratories for cult-image*” (Boyce-Grenet 1991, 47).

274 Ghirshman 1976, 62.

275 See footnote 208.

276 Ghirshman, 1976, 61.

277 See footnote 202.

278 It is 24.40 m in length and made up of 20 steps.

279 Ceremonies unfolded in all probability around a podium as at Bard-e Neshandeh., although no trace has so been found of such a place; the one discovered by Ghirshman (1976, 62) is to be identified with the reconstruction of the same podium that occurred during phase II in terrace I. Ghirshman connects the disappearance of the podium with the confirmed destruction of the most ancient podium of Bard-e Neshandeh (footnote 203).

280 Ghirshman 1976, Pl. VI.

281 Identified as the area of modern Esfahan (Hoffmann 1880, 132; Weissbach 1910) as discussed in earlier chapters.

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figurines in Greek style of cavalry riders wearing the Macedonian *kausia*²⁸². Further, according to Ghirshman²⁸³, during this second construction phase – named by him as the *époque séleucide* – Masjed-e Soleyman had a fundamental function in the politics of the Seleucid kings for the internal administration of Iran, in particular in the mountainous region of Elymais²⁸⁴.

Whether it involved Macedonians or not, the fact remains that there was new construction which brought an expansion of the terrace towards the north and west. In a northerly direction, there was construction of terraces II, III e IV – flanking the north side of terrace I – and they allowed for ascent to the superior terrace (V) by three levels²⁸⁵ through the use of five stairways, of which four (H²⁸⁶, J²⁸⁷, K²⁸⁸, L²⁸⁹) were placed one after the other, and the fifth (G²⁹⁰) allowed for direct access to stairway IV. A further three stairways (E²⁹¹, F¹²⁹², F²²⁹³) provided direct access to the superior terrace (V)²⁹⁴. All this array of stairways, levels and terraces could well be an indication of a great influx of worshippers periodically visiting the sanctuary. On terrace III a small building was also found and named as “northeast construction” by Ghirshman²⁹⁵, with two rectangular rooms not opening to each other and with different entries both posted on the north side, which the archaeologist identified as a possible home for the temple guards²⁹⁶ of the same

282 Ghirshman 1976, 79-80.

283 Ghirshman 1976, 71.

284 This hypothesis appears odd – to say the least – in the light of descriptions of Elymais and its inhabitants passed down from ancient sources which have been discussed in some detail in the Literature Review and in Chapter 4. Suffice it to say that there is an account of Nearchus as passed down by Strabo (XI.13.6), in which the Elymaeans are described as scarcely inclined to accept the presence of foreigners on their territory, a fact that led them to exact tribute from Achaemenid kings or from anyone wanting to cross their land. Given this, the possibility that they may have lived side by side with a community of Macedonian soldiers and, moreover, at a sacred place – as suggested by Ghirshman – is difficult to believe.

285 There is a difference of around 5.30 m between lower ground level and the superior terrace (Ghirshman 1973, 73).

286 This has three steps around 18.35 m wide. Even with smaller steps than those on stairway A, it seems it would have been destined to receive large crowds.

287 Formed as stairway H with three steps, the dimensions, though, are reduced (9.15 m).

288 K is in two parts: the lower part has five steps 18.50 m wide and the higher part has two steps, 13.40 m for the first one and 12.40 m for the higher one.

289 This is 12.10 m wide and distributed over four steps.

290 G is made of 14 steps set between a buttress (H) and the substructure wall of terrace III. This stairway has a lower part of four steps 9.90 m wide and a superior section of 10 steps 8.45 m wide.

291 This is the stairway closest to the mountain, made of four steps 5 m wide.

292 This has five steps 4.37 m wide.

293 According to Ghirshman (1976, 73), this is a later extension made of 14 steps 2.60 m wide.

294 Ghirshman suggested that ascent to the sanctuary would have been along the stairways H, J, K e L, thus keeping the main access on the northeast corner (as occurred with stairway A of terrace I), while descent would have been made along the other four stairways (E, F¹, F², G), all on the north side, the area that for the French archaeologist would have been the Macedonian quarter (Ghirshman 1976, 73).

295 Ghirshman 1976, 74.

296 Ghirshman 1976, 74.

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type as rooms 7 and 8 of Bard-e Neshandeh.

During this second construction phase, on the west side a low and long north-south wall²⁹⁷ – flanking the western limit of the most ancient terrace (I) – separated this latter terrace from a new and broader extension (terrace V) which was also slightly higher, and on which rose two temple buildings with walls of irregular stone blocks and earth and two other smaller buildings with secondary functions. On the southeast corner of this new terrace stood the so-called “Grand Temple” that Ghirshman placed in a third structural phase in the sanctuary (*époque parthe*)²⁹⁸, but an older structure was also revealed, beneath the initially visible surface, that he dated to the Seleucid era, with the attribution of this temple – for reasons that will be confronted shortly – to the Greek goddess Athena Hippiia²⁹⁹. Around 30 m³⁰⁰ northwest of the “Grand Temple” and connected to it by a paved path, there were the remains of a multi-room rectangular structure interpreted by Ghirshman as a temple of Heracles, basing this on the finding of pieces (head, torso and legs) of a statue of Heracles strangling the Nemean lion³⁰¹.

Other structures discovered on terrace V included a further “northwest construction”, whose few remains were found close to stairway L on an axis with the portico of the “Grand Temple”. There were two rooms whose use remains obscure, due to the scarcity of items found here and attributable to them³⁰². Close to the “Grand Temple”, about a dozen metres to the west,

297 This wall is defined as “symbolic” by Ghirshman (1976, 76), and in his opinion it had the function of dividing the old terrace, along with the podium for Iranian fire worship, from the new area of worship used by the Macedonian community, in this way favouring the birth of Hellenistic-Parthian culture in the region (Ghirshman 1976, 76). In my debatable view – as recorded in footnote 284 – such cohabitation seems practically impossible in the light of ancient sources, which show the region of Elymais as being scarcely disposed towards the presence of foreign people in this territory (see section 2.1 and 7.3).

298 Ghirshman 1976, 77.

299 The name *Hippeia* (Hippia) seems to have its roots in the Mycenaean period and was always used in a context of cavalry and military power. It seems that from ancient times these functions were linked to Athena, who was often given the epithet, “of the Horses”. According to myth, Athena showed humanity how to tame horses and she gave to Bellerophon – the conqueror of the Chimera – a golden bridle for his horse Pegasus. Horses were a sign of nobility, an indicator of the cavalier class and their military capacity. Athena Hippiia was probably the protecting goddess of this class. For this reason statues of cavaliers were normally dedicated to this goddess and placed in their sanctuaries.

300 Ghirshman (1976, 90) reports the distance between the two temples as being 15 m, but examination of the plan that he published seems to indicate a greater distance (Ghirshman 1976, pl. III).

301 This was the first of the 12 Labours of Hercules. The lion was a legendary beast which could not be killed with weapons because its golden fur protected it. Its claws were sharper than swords and could cut through any armour. Hercules was required to bring King Eurystheus the skin of this invulnerable lion, which terrorised the hills around Nemea. When Hercules first attacked the lion at Nemea he realised immediately that his arrows were useless. He followed the beast to a cave and blocking one of the two entrances, he confronted it, using his immense force to strangle the lion but losing a finger during the struggle.

302 Ghirshman (1976, 101) suggests a dating to the Seleucid era because of the existence of a head of the Egyptian deity Bes (Ghirshman 1976, pl. CX, 6) – half man and half lion – which is well known from excavations at

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excavations revealed a small building – “southern construction” – with two rooms not connected with each other and with their entrances facing the side of the “Grand Temple”³⁰³ (Fig. 5.19).



Figure 5.18 – Aerial view of site from the east (Ghirshman 1976, Pl. LI, 2).

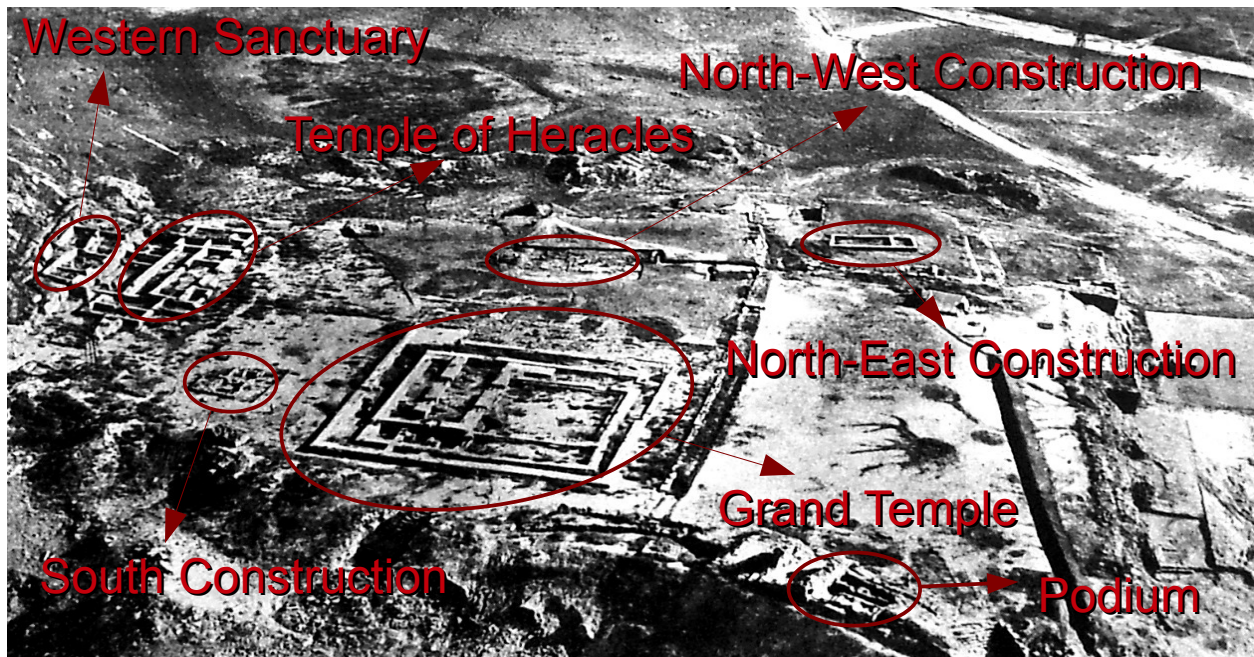


Figure 5.19 – Masjed-e Soleyman. Aerial view of site from the south (Ghirshman 1976, Pl. LI, 3). Modified.

Susa.

303 Ghirshman (1976, 118) suggests the rooms in this building were constructed at different times: first, the smaller room (1.80 × 1.60 m) and then the larger (2.90 × 2.20 m), providing a Parthian date based on relics found. He offers this picture even if he also suggests that one of these rooms, identified by him as a possible habitation for temple guards, may have existed in the Seleucid era.

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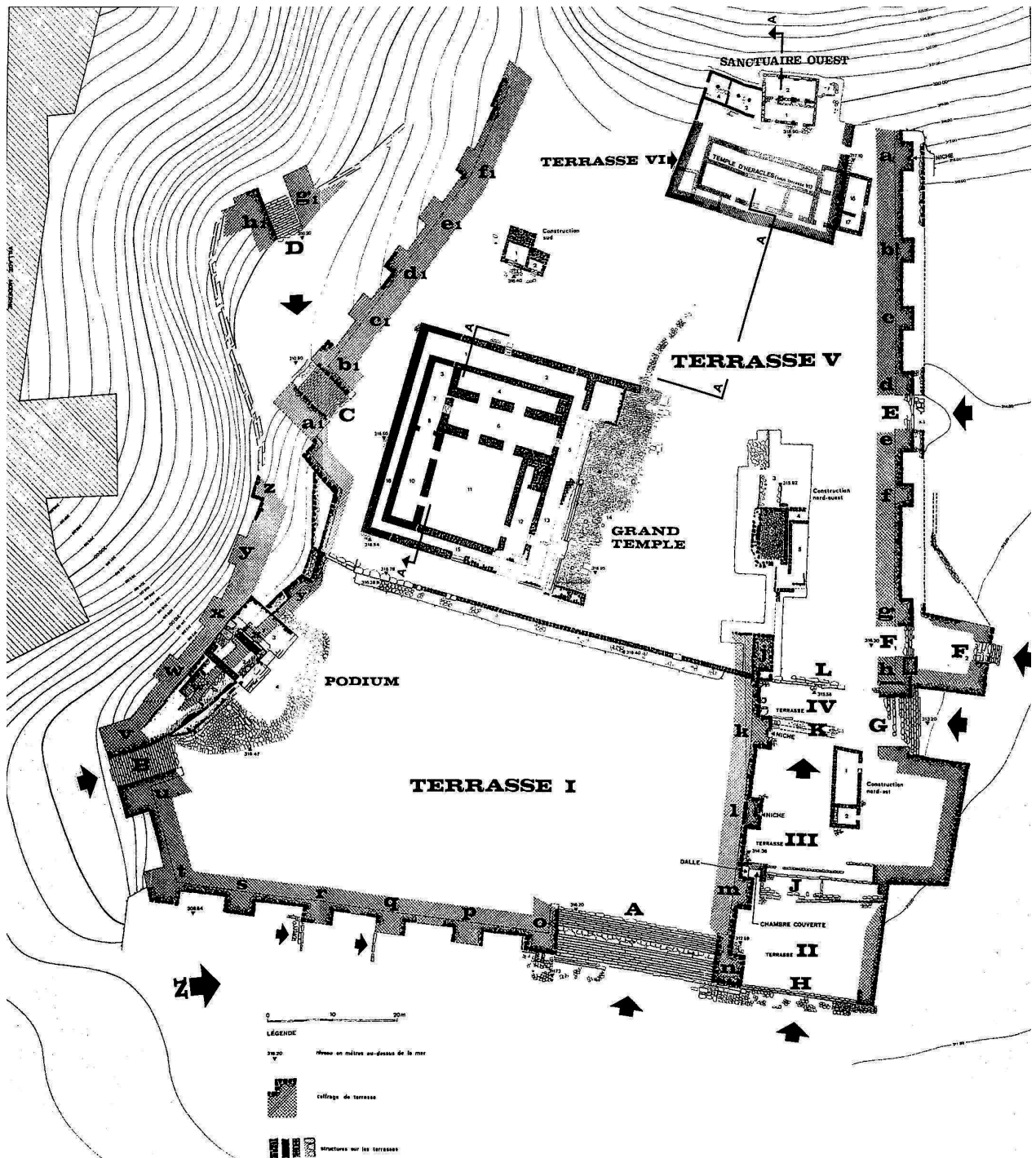


Figure 5.20 – Masjed-e Soleyman. Site plan (Ghirshman 1976, Plan III).

5.3.3. Monumental Architecture

When Ghirshman began work at the “Grand Temple” – aiming to discover if under the visible temple of the Arsacid period there could be earlier constructions – he first had to enter into an agreement with the Archaeological Service of Iran. This agreement permitted excavation but it did not allow walls to be touched and it did not allow work that would compromise the state of the monument, and crucially, it limited the number of excavations³⁰⁴.

The plan of the first phase of the “Grand Temple” cannot be determined under the current state of research and this thesis will not seek to produce new propositions regarding a preceding phase to the one examined in this work. It can be briefly said that according to Ghirshman the planimetry of this temple – attributed by him to Athena Hippias – would not have been much different from the Parthian one, because one of the few permitted surveys allowed him to become aware of how the two construction phases of the walls were placed one on top of the other in some areas. It is clear that more detailed studies and new excavations are needed to cast new light on the most ancient phases of not just this temple but the whole complex, given that the last

investigations were conducted by his French team in the 1960s.

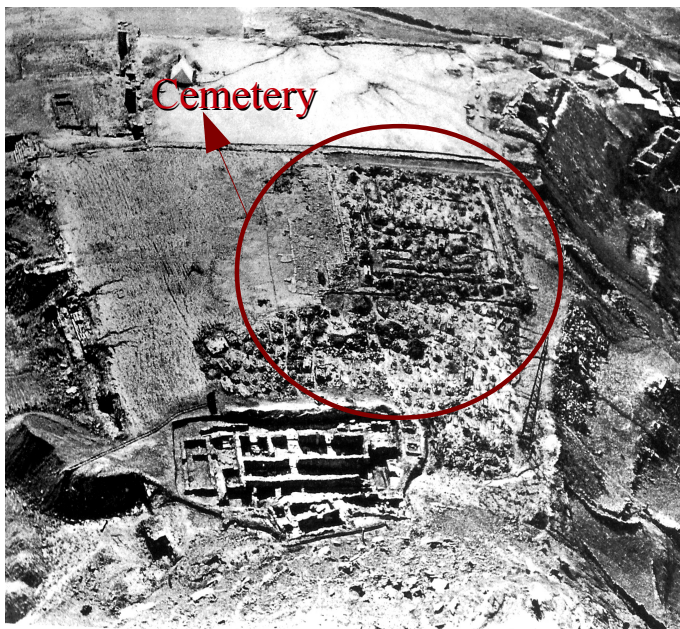


Figure 5.21 – Masjed-e Soleyman. Cemetery (Ghirshman 1976, Pl. XLV).

After the original structure – in the Parthian temple –, Ghirshman recognised four successive structural phases (I, II, IIIa and IIIb), among which he regarded phase IIIa (Fig. 5.22) as presenting the most complete plan³⁰⁵, despite the destruction caused by the digging of graves for a modern cemetery which occupied a major proportion of the sanctuary³⁰⁶ (Fig. 5.21). The temple of

304 Ghirshman 1976, 77.

305 Ghirshman 1976, 105.

306 A major problem for Ghirshman was precisely the fact that this cemetery covered most of the southern area of

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the Parthian period reveals – apart from its southeast orientation – undoubted Mesopotamian influences in its quite unusual planimetry. The perimeter was found to be roughly square (31×33.08 m) with a corridor of varying width³⁰⁷ running along all four sides isolating the central block of the sanctuary from the outer wall. Four entrances were shown to lead into this outer corridor: one on the eastern corner, preceded by three steps and seeming to have been the main entry; another on the same main facade on the northern corner (much disturbed by the digging of graves); another on the southeast corridor, and practically in line with this, a fourth entrance on the northwest side. The northeast facade was particularly elaborate. Ghirshman envisioned a portico (14) of 34.52 m between the two doors of the main northeast wall, completely paved and having three lines of columns³⁰⁸ placed on bases, each made up of a thick torus which a scotia separated from another one much thinner; and these were built on squared plinths (50.53 cm) that were still in place – as was the case at Bard-e Neshandeh – at the time of the French excavations. The principal entrance, located near the northeast corner, had a protruding threshold and a line of three steps (benches) that framed the main door. In the northwest corner of this facade there was a low podium (4.90×3.75 m) to which access was given by three steps on the east side. A second door on the north facade led from the podium into the isolating corridor. From the main door, through corridor 13, the way ahead was in a long narrow vestibule (12) of 10.20×3.10 m, and through a door in line with the other two there was access to a large court (11) surrounded on all four sides by narrow benches. The cella-antecella unit was on the western side of the court, occupying the breadth of the vestibule and the court. Access came through a set of identical doors (1.80 m) placed on the same axis and opening into antecella 6 (16.92×4.28 m) and then cella 4 (15.80×2.58 m). The temple was thus characterised by a bent-axis approach. Under the paving of the antecella, in the northeast corner, excavators found a large water jar; a drain from outside the sanctuary channelled water into it. Two altars rested against the rear wall of the cella in a

the terrace. He defined this obstacle as almost insurmountable, but it was overcome after a plea was made to the Shah. The Shiite religion in Iran permitted relocation of graves older than 30 years, and the Shah granted the request because he did not want to limit archaeological work that could bring prestige to all of Iran (Ghirshman 1969, 484).

307 The corridors on the NW (1-2) and NE (5-13) were larger, respectively 3.05 m and 2.40 m and built with a bench that ran along their interior walls. Corridors on the SW (16) of 1.45 m and SE (15) of 1.25 m were instead of smaller dimensions, and perhaps because of space restrictions and the need for ease of access they were not built with benches. All of this brought Ghirshman (1976, 105) to think that the difference in dimensions indicated a difference in importance, supported by the fact that the NW and NE corridors framed the most important sectors of the temple, the facade with the main entrance and the most sacred area with its cella (4) and antecella (6).

308 The 21 columns were arranged in rows of eight, seven and six columns, as counted from outside moving inwards.

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direct line with the doors, while between the court and the isolating corridor (16) on the south side there was a long room which could be entered only from the court through two doors. A second room (9) after it occupied the space of a combined antecella-cella, and was accessible only from room 10. Ghirshman suggested that the two rooms may have been sacristies. In a phase that apparently came afterwards (IIIb), some changes were made, among the most significant of which seemed to have been the removal of almost all the benches, as well as the creation on the short sides of the antecella of two doors, one which opened into corridor 5 and the other which allowed communication with room 9³⁰⁹

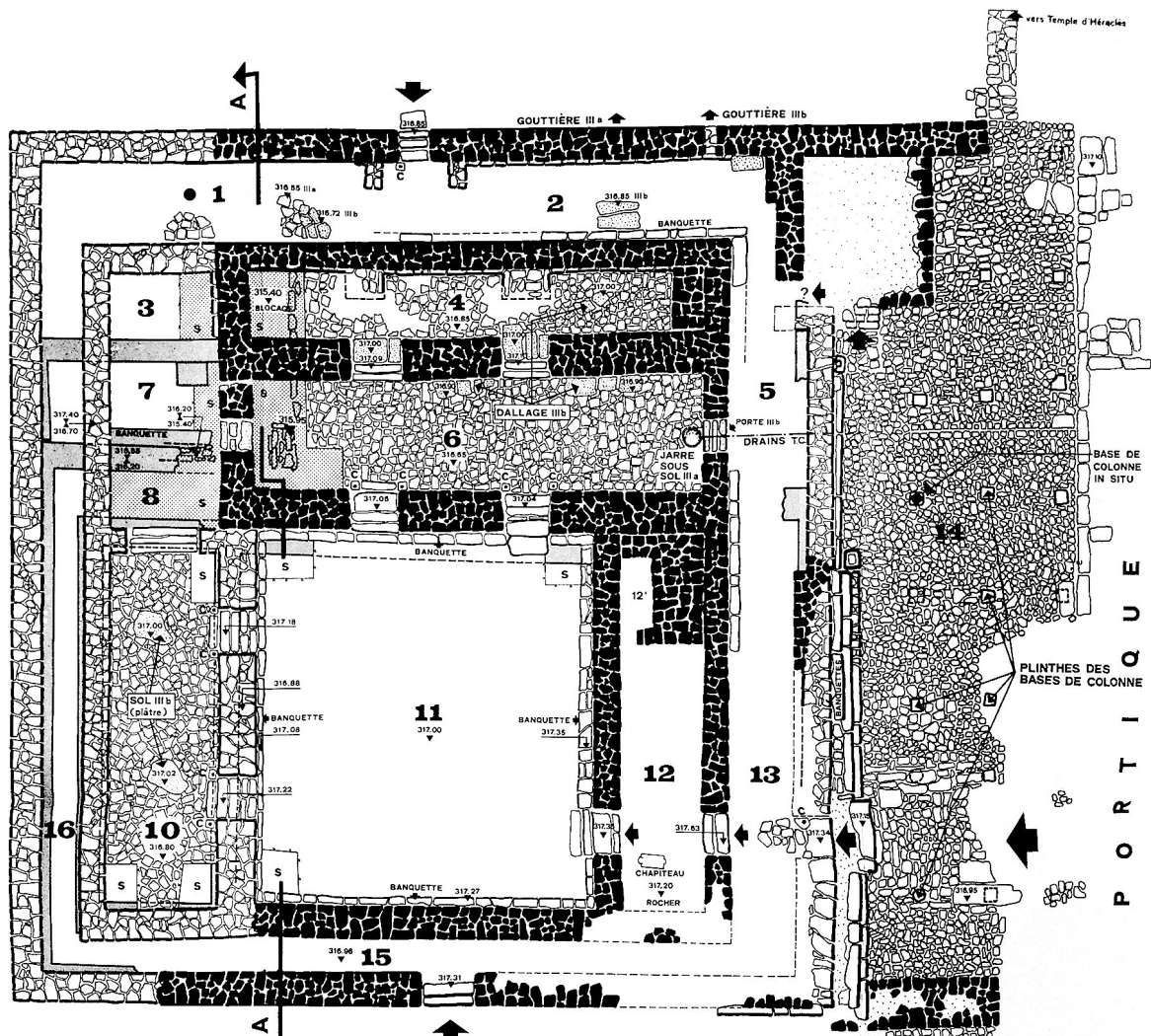


Figure 5.22 – Masjed-e Soleyman. “Grand Temple” plan (Ghirshman 1976, Plan VII).

309 Ghirshman 1976, 107.

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On the upper part of the terrace stood a smaller temple – which in contrast with the “Grand Temple” was not affected by the cemetery³¹⁰ – supposedly dedicated to Heracles (Fig. 5.23). This temple (17.08 × 8.03 m), roughly faced east and had a rectangular plan consisting of a long antecella (5) measuring 13.10 × 3.40 m, a cella (6) of 17.05 × 2.50 m and an additional room (13) that opened to the outside. This latter room – perhaps a sacristy³¹¹ – was situated between the antecella and the northern wall of the temple, thus reducing the length of the antecella. As in the “Grand Temple”, access here to the antecella came through two doors of 1.65 m and the other of 1 m. Three steps with the top level marked by some graffiti were identified by Ghirshman as low benches, and were made of large slabs running along the external wall of the antecella³¹². A single door – in line with the one that opened into the antecella – opened in its turn into the cella. This door was also flanked by two bases, probably for statues. The small room 13 (3.65 × 3.3 m) – north of the cella – may have been used as a sacristy, and it had the particularity of opening only to the outside, that is on the southeast side like the antecella. The northwest wall of the cella seemed to have also been adjacent – as reported by Ghirshman³¹³ – to an older construction which was 17.10 m long and 2.95 m wide, perhaps from the Persian epoch³¹⁴, when the temple probably rested against the mountain. In a subsequent construction phase the temple had a further six rooms added, probably because the principal structure became too small to hold all worshippers or votive statues³¹⁵. Two sets of two communicating rooms (14-15 and 16-17) were located on the northeast side of the temple, that is, the side made up of one short side of the cella and one of room 13.

The dates are not known for these changes, but what seems evident is that the small temple of Masjed-e Soleyman had many modifications during its long existence. They were

310 The graves in this case began from the southern corner (Ghirshman 1976, 119).

311 Ghirshman 1976, 90.

312 Ghirshman (1976, 91) compares them with the terraced rooms (*salles aux gradins*) at Dura-Europos in Syria, and as such these would have included benches for people attending sacred rites. The difference is that these rooms in Dura-Europos were real environments within a temple and not simply steps at the entrance. Ghirshman (1976, 91) further suggests a similarity between these steps/benches and those present at the temple of Ai Khanoum in Afghanistan, where, however, the steps form the base of the temple, and this fact undermines the hypothesis that they could have been used as benches by spectators (Downey 1988, 132). The French archaeologist speculated that the steps of the Temple of Heracles may have been an addition in the Parthian era and so would not have been present in the original phase (Ghirshman 1976, 189).

313 Ghirshman 1976, 90.

314 This date would be given by the finding of red earthenware of the same type found at Susa from the same period (Ghirshman 1976, 91).

315 Ghirshman 1976, 119.

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probably not caused by violent destruction – as perhaps occurred in the “Grand Temple” in its most ancient phase – but rather came through diverse restorations which caused it to disappear in the Sasanid era under terrace VI, replaced by the more modest “Western Sanctuary” characterised by an innovative vaulted roof.

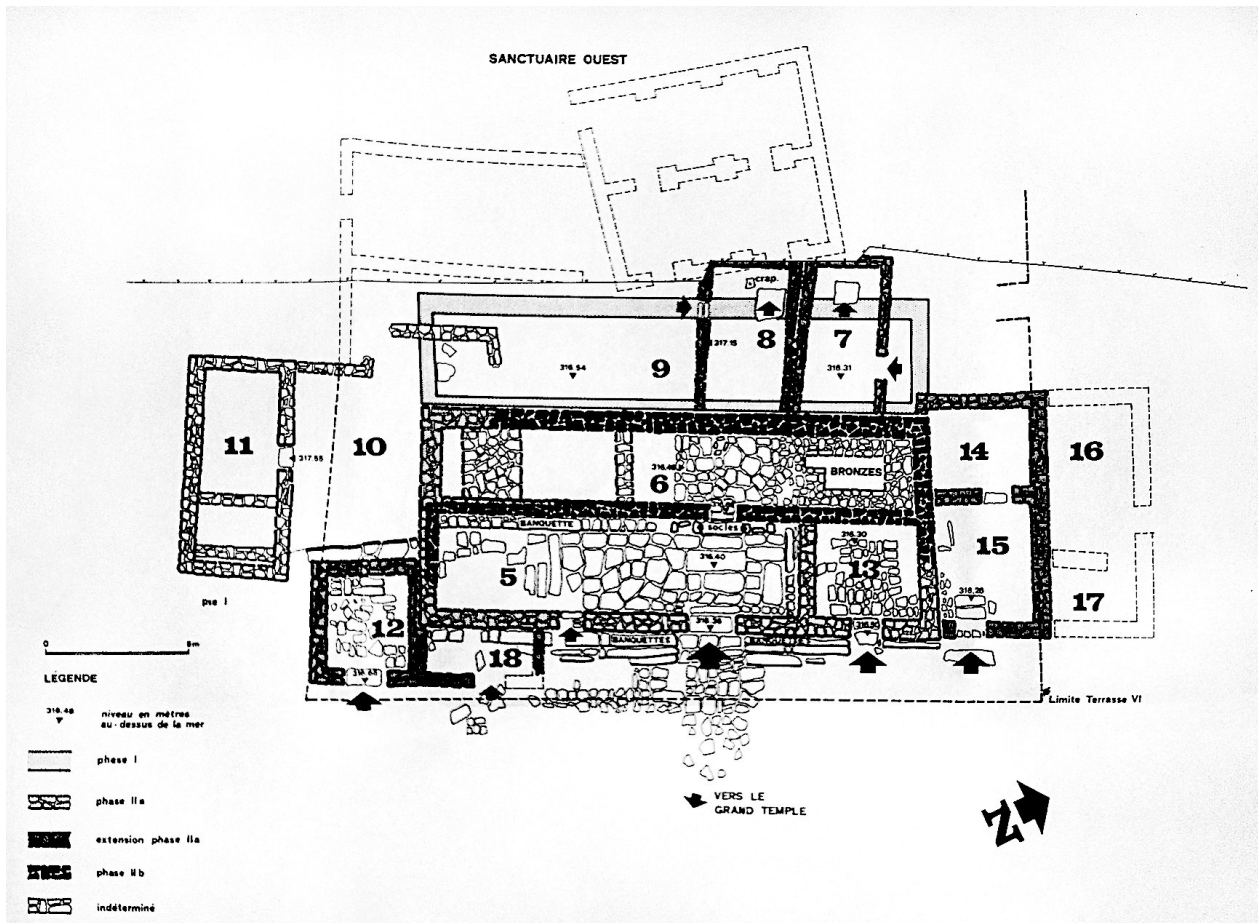


Figure 5.23 – Masjed-e Soleyman. Temple of Heracles plan (Ghirshman 1976, Plan VIII).

5.3.4. Pottery and Associated Goods

Items found at Masjed-e Soleyman were quite numerous and were amassed especially in and around the two temples. There is no doubt that objects considered as votive offerings and found among the various rooms of the sanctuaries are the most numerous and the most varied. There was a large number of simple³¹⁶ terracotta figurines found in the “Grand Temple” – dated by Ghirshman to a presumed Seleucid era – portraying cavaliers wearing the *kausia*³¹⁷, some as

316 The large number of such figurines surviving here would indicate the scarce interest taken in them by looters.

317 “...a Central Asian type of woollen hat resembling the caps worn today by Afghans and Pakistanis from the northwestern part of Pakistan, originally introduced into Greece in the wake of Alexander's Central Asian

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single figures and at other times in compositions with nude female figures (Fig. 5.24). Ghirshman drew a connection from the male terracotta figures to Macedonian cavaliers, in particular the *amphippoï*³¹⁸ – in this way advancing his theory of the presumed presence of a Macedonian contingent at Masjed-e Soleyman – while he saw in the female figures a representation of the goddess Athena, to whom he attributed the oldest phase of the temple. On the other hand, though, it would be difficult to believe that a completely nude representation of Pallas Athena would have been made, as this would



Figure 5.24 – Masjed-e Soleyman. Cavaliers wearing *kausia* in composition with naked female figures (Ghirshman 1976, Pl. CXII, 1).

have been far removed from the classical iconography of the goddess and her chaste beauty. According to Ghirshman, other references to the goddess were found: in a small bronze plaque of a female bust with aegis and spear, having a most accentuated femininity; in a bronze head with helmet discovered on the western exterior wall of the “Grand Temple” – just like another small plaque also in bronze and finely incised with a representation of Pegasus (Fig. 5.25), which in the Hellenistic era was often depicted on the helmet of the goddess –; and in a further small votive plaque from a later time found in the same temple, showing Athena standing beside Artemis³¹⁹.



Figure 5.25 – Masjed-e Soleyman. Pegasus (Ghirshman 1976, Pl. XCVIII, 1).

Among other finds in the sanctuary and attributed by Ghirshman to the Seleucid era, emphasis can be given to some cult items such as a few theriomorphic jars, and other items for everyday use such as earrings, bracelets in bronze and iron, containers for beauty products in white alabaster, musical instruments, lamps

conquest” (Potts 1999a, 371).

318 *Amphippoï* (ἄμφιπποι) i.e. two-horse cavalry, horsemen provided with a remount. They were archers who changed horses when their first mounts tired. They probably did not risk taking two horses side by side into battle, but would have likely taken them together when marching to battle. The *amphippoï* would have ridden one horse during their advance, then changed to the fresher horse for the battle, and if necessary changed back to the first horse to continue in battle.

319 P. Bernard in a communication at the Louvre Museum made note of the true identity of this deity, erroneously indicated previously by Ghirshman as Anahita and Mithra (Ghirshman 1976, 117-118).

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and candelabra, a few pilgrims' flasks³²⁰, and one of the bronze mirrors adorned with concentric circles which was of the kind also noted in the discoveries at Bard-e Neshandeh³²¹ (Fig. 5.26). These objects found in this layer appear to be the modest remains of temple furnishings and their style surely does not contradict the proposed Seleucid date, but would also be compatible with the early Parthian period.

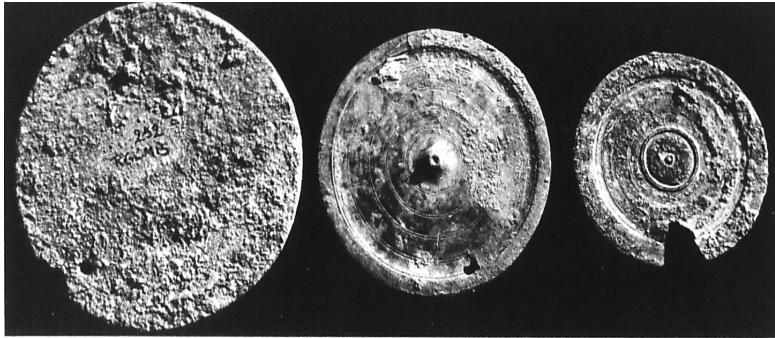


Figure 5.26 – Masjed-e Soleyman. Bronze Mirrors (Ghirshman 1976, Pl. CIV, 5-6-7).

A Parthian dating, furthermore, can be given to elements of statues discovered at the “Grand Temple”, such as two heads sculpted in the round with their hair represented in curls, one head having a beard and moustache while the other is

smooth-faced, and also acephalous – i.e. headless – figures of goddesses attested at Susa from this period. Other small objects, mostly in bronze but quite few in number, were found in court 11 where the digging of many modern graves would have benefited looters and led to the loss of valuable and interesting items.

Ghirshman attributes various capitals of columns to the portico of the “Grand Temple” even if none of them were found *in situ*. The first was discovered near the entrance to the temple and appears to reflect Achaemenid tradition in that – being cut in one piece with the superior part of the column – it consists of two addorsed protomes of animals with prominent feminine breast shape and legs ending in hooves. The heads, though, are missing, but the French scholar suggests nonetheless that the figures represent sphinxes³²². He also attributes another capital, severely damaged and found in the temple of Heracles, to the “Grand Temple” because this latter temple was the only one to have a colonnade³²³. The subject of the capital was a feminine bust repeated identically on three faces of the capital, the fourth being left smooth perhaps because this side was placed against a wall as in the case of the capital – discussed earlier – at Bard-e

320 See footnote 219. The rarity of these discoveries caused Ghirshman to think that this presumed Seleucid sanctuary was scarcely visited by Iranian worshippers (Ghirshman 1976, 87).

321 See footnote 221.

322 Ghirshman 1976, 110.

323 Ghirshman 1976, 111.

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Neshandeh³²⁴. The feminine figure is interpreted by Ghirshman – without adequate proof and thus remaining in the field of supposition – as representing Anahita, to whom the archaeologist believes the temple was dedicated in the Parthian era³²⁵. A third capital was found further away in the Western Sanctuary, and it carried a classic western decoration of acanthus leaves between two lyre volutes. If Ghirshman's attribution of all three capitals to the “Grand Temple” is correct, surely this would be a case of a remarkably eclectic construction.

Certainly, one of the most interesting discoveries in the religious complex of Masjed-e Soleyman is the statue of Heracles, where the demi-god is represented nude (Fig. 5.27). This statue has three distinct parts – head, torso and legs – found by the French mission some days apart at the edge of terrace VI, and these pieces had probably been used there as structural reinforcements. Measured



Figure 5.27 – Masjed-e Soleyman. Statue of Heracles (Ghirshman 1976, Pl. LII, 1).

in its entirety, the statue is 2.40 m tall including the base³²⁶, and shows the nude hero facing forward as he strangles the lion of Nemea. As a whole, though, the statue lacks intensity as it was carved in two parts: the superior section was carved in the round while the lower section was done in relief. It further seems to have been a statue for a facade, probably placed against a wall, in that the rear side is completely flat apart from the head, whose details are richly defined



Figure 5.28 – Masjed-e Soleyman. Heracles, details of the head (Ghirshman 1976, Pl. LXX. 3-4-5).

including at the back. This fact clashes with the above-mentioned hypothesis advanced by Ghirshman – for whom this statue was a further reminder of the Heracles of Hatra³²⁷ – and as such he imagined it being at the entrance to the sanctuary. The

324 See section 5.2.4.

325 Ghirshman 1976, 112.

326 Ghirshman 1976, 91.

327 Ghirshman 1976, 93-94.

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mutilated head (Fig. 5.28), however, does allow recognition of some details such as the possible presence of a diadem and short curled hair, as well as a thick beard with moustache, and holes in the earlobes which presumably indicate the use of earrings³²⁸. As for the rest of the statue, the hero's chest is grasped by the front paws of this small lion³²⁹ in a position that is quite unusual in classical iconography.

Another head of Hercules with a calm and severe expression which leaves no sign of emotion was discovered in the antecella of the temple, but the body was not found. Ghirshman went on to begin a list of objects and sculptural fragments he believed were connected with worship of the demi-god, but only a few of these really appear to be part of that cult. One example is the bas-relief discovered in the antecella of the temple that shows a “probable” Heracles feasting semi-reclined – with quivers at hand – on a *kline*³³⁰ with his right arm raised and holding a cup in his left hand (Fig. 5.29). This figure



Figure 5.29 – Masjed-e Soleyman. Male figure (Heracles?) on a kline (Ghirshman 1976, Pl. LXXXVI, 1).

immediately echoes the Hercules of Behistun³³¹ discovered by Ali Hakemi³³² during road

328 Earrings on male figures were extraneous to Greek culture and so, as suggested by Ghirshman (1976, 93), their presence could help to place the statues in the Arsacid period.

329 The species of lion in southwest Iran was smaller than the African lion.

330 *Kline* (κλίνη) was an ancient piece of furniture similar to a divan and used in the Greek and Roman tradition during symposiums, that is, the final part of banquets when copious wine drinking began. In reality, the practice of banqueting while reclining on furniture arranged as a triclinium seems to have been of eastern derivation and did not originate in Greece. Indeed, we know that in Homeric times the Greeks would eat while seated, and it is interesting to note that for the deities of Olympus – with the exceptions of Dionysus and the demi-god Heracles – figurative representations maintained a Homeric era style. The first evidence available of the custom of banqueting while reclined comes from Assyrian art. A famous relief from the palace of Ashurbanipal (669-627 BC) shows a sovereign reclining on a high *kline* as he holds up a cup in his right hand, while a queen is seated on a throne at the feet of the *kline*; two long lines of servants, cupbearers and musicians converge towards the couple.

331 The Behistun (also spelt Bisotoun, Bistoon, Bisitun, Bisutun) Historic Site is in the northwest Iranian province of Kermanshah on a branch of the Aryan Trade Roads (also called the Silk Roads), a portion of which became the Royal Road of Darius I, the Great. Within the site is Mount Behistun along whose side is also carved – in addition to the statue of Hercules – the famous rock relief of Darius. This mountain is seen by some scholars (including Ghirshman 1976, 95) as possibly being the Mount Sanbulos mentioned by Tacitus (XII, 13), who recounts how “... *Gotarzes, at a mountain by the name of Sanbulos, was offering vows to the local deities; the chief cult being that of Hercules, who at fixed intervals warns his priests by dream to place beside his temple a number of horses equipped for hunting. These, after being furnished with quivers full of arrows, run loose in the forest glades, and only at night return, panting hard, and with quivers emptied. In a second nightly vision, the god points out the course he held through the forest, and all along it wild beasts are discovered strewing the ground*”.

332 Hakemi, A. (1958), *Moʻjassama-ye Herkūl dar Bīsūtūn*, in *Maʻjalleh-ye bāstānšenāsi* [The Hercules relief at Bisutun], 3-4 (1959-60), 3-12.

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construction in the late 1950s, and it carries a Greek inscription giving the date of 148 BC. Also of interest are a series of bronze items that Ghirshman links with the twelve labours of the hero, such as a bronze finger from the victory over the lion of Nemea, five deer identified with the deer of Cerinea, a pendant with two protomes linked to the mares of Diomedes, and so on. Of particular note are discoveries of figures such as Silenus, Maenads and Satyrs connected with the worship of Dionysus³³³, and most probably these were difficult to produce in local ateliers.



Figure 5.30 – Masjed-e Soleyman. Male figure with tiara (Ghirshman 1976, Pl. LXXV, 1).

Other discoveries in the temple of Heracles include the heads of a royal couple found in the courtyard of the sanctuary, and they were probably part of a bas-relief that has not been found. The presumed king wears a high oval tiara, which is most unusual and perhaps unique, marked by two symbols – one of which appears to be an anchor – separated by a vertical bar (Fig. 5.30). Ghirshman interprets this symbolism as the unification of temporal and religious power in one figure, supposing that the Elymaean kings were also chief priests³³⁴. As regards the presumed queen, of particular interest is her hair “à la mode occidentale”, to use the phrase of Ghirshman³³⁵. Also noteworthy, finally, are two figures – one of them found in

the Western Sanctuary – represented with cornucopias and quite similar to discoveries at Bard-e Neshandeh.

5.3.5. Past Interpretations

The western scholar acknowledged as being the first to indicate the site of the Masjed-e Soleyman ruins was the British officer Henry Rawlinson³³⁶, who did not go there in person, but he wrote that he “heard [...] of the ruins of a great building, upon the banks of the Kuran, a short

333 These beings, halfway between man and wild animals, were part of the thiasos (θίασος), the court following Dionysus and celebrating the god with generally unrestrained processions, song, and dance. Hercules participated in the Dionysian procession for a short time after he was defeated by the god in a drinking challenge, and for this reason the cults of the two were often associated.

334 Ghirshman 1976, 123.

335 Ghirshman 1976, 124.

336 See Appendix 3.

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distance below Súsán, which was named *Masjidi-Suleimáni-Buzurg*³³⁷: by the *Bakhtiyáris* it was usually likened to the superb remains at Kangáwer, and it doubtless, therefore, marks the site of another of the wealthy temples of Elymais³³⁸. He proposed an identification³³⁹ of the sanctuary with the “*Dianae templum augustissimum illis gentibus*” recorded by Pliny³⁴⁰, not letting an opportunity pass to take a romantic path when searching to associate discovered and explored Elymaean sites with episodes in historical sources³⁴¹. “*The description of the ruins given by Major Rawlinson of these ruins [...] greatly excited my curiosity*³⁴²”, was how Layard wrote in November 1941, only to then be quite disappointed, to the extent of calling them “*insignificant*³⁴³”. His quite concise description – in some ways superficial – led him to interpret the site as being a place for a fire temple from the Sasanid era³⁴⁴. He made note of the presence of an artificial terrace and of traces of foundations for a building, emphasising the absence of columns and architectural ornaments or inscriptions on all types of materials³⁴⁵. It is to be emphasised that such a description – above all with the use of the phrase “*sometimes called by the Lurs the Masjidi Suleiman*”³⁴⁶ – led Hansman to believe that Layard had not heard the ruins described in this way and was simply going back over references made by Rawlinson³⁴⁷.

As occurred at Bard-e Neshandeh, even more so at Masjed-e Soleyman various explorers and scholars came over the years to offer diverging interpretations which were more or less well-based. A brief list of these visitors could include: Unvala³⁴⁸, Godard³⁴⁹, and Erdmann³⁵⁰ who

337 Also worthy of note is the not completely clear distinction that Rawlinson makes: “*Masjidi-Suleimán, or sometimes Masjidi-Suleimáni-Kuchuk to distinguish it from another ruin, named Masjidi-Suleimáni-Buzurg, which I shall hereafter speak of, and represent, without doubt, one of the ancient temples of Elymais*” (Rawlinson 1839, 78). See Schippmann 1971, 234-236 for further clarification.

338 Rawlinson 1839, 84.

339 Rawlinson 1839, 86.

340 VI.31.135.

341 See Section 2.2.

342 Layard 1846, 81.

343 Layard 1846, 61-62.

344 Layard 1894, 340.

345 See also Schippmann 1971, 236. Layard added how the Bakhtiari tribes still anticipated the discovery of King Solomon's hidden treasure in the palace, describing their astonishment that this discovery had not been made, as well as their fear of having disturbed supernatural beings in the location. He also described several legends relating to Masjed-e Soleyman, told to him by some of the Bakhtiari tribesmen (Layard 1894, 341-342).

346 Layard 1846, 62.

347 Schippmann 1971, 227. A discussion regarding places outlined by Rawlinson and Layard, and their related descriptions and interpretations, is developed in-depth by Schippmann in his book on the fire temples (1971, 226-227, 234-236).

348 Unvala 1928, 86-87.

349 Godard 1949, 153-162.

350 Erdmann 1941, 29.

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referred to Masjed-e Soleyman as a fire temple; Herzfeld, who spoke of it as a sanctuary³⁵¹; Vanden Berghe³⁵², who catalogued Masjed-e Soleyman as an Achaemenid fortification; Siroux³⁵³ and Stein³⁵⁴, who avoided using the attribute of “fire temple”, preferring to refer to sanctuaries which had places of Zoroastrian worship.

Later, during the 1960s, Roman Ghirshman of the *French Délégation Archéologique en Iran* had a “gentlemen's agreement” with the Anglo-Persian Oil Company to carry out “*une modeste mission archéologique*” at Masjed-e Soleyman and the neighbouring Bard-e Neshandeh³⁵⁵. Ghirshman believed the sacred terraces at these sites were built by a Persian tribe after they came to this area of the Zagros Mountains around the 8th-7th cent. BC³⁵⁶. In general, he supposed that this Persian tribe learned how to build the terraces when they were still living in northwest Iran under the control of Urartian³⁵⁷ rulers³⁵⁸ and used the terraces as places for Zoroastrian worship throughout the Achaemenid period³⁵⁹ (Fig. 5.31). As discussed earlier, the French archaeologist further hypothesised the possible presence of a Macedonian garrison – or rather, a Macedonian settlement – at Masjed-e Soleyman, emphasising how underneath the “Great Temple” there would be an older structure, noted only through limited investigative digs, dated to the Seleucid period and dedicated to Athena Hippias³⁶⁰. He believed such a structure or structures would be like those described by Strabo as having been destroyed by a Parthian king³⁶¹, on the basis of the discovery inside and near the temple of two possible images of Athena and a series of votive terracottas of Macedonian cavaliers. The use of so few small discoveries as a

351 See footnote 208.

352 Vanden Berghe 1959, 64-65.

353 Siroux 1938, 157-159.

354 Stein 1940, 162-163.

355 Ghirshman 1976, *Preface*.

356 Ghirshman 1976, 55.

357 Urartu was one of the numerous kingdoms of the first millennium BC that rose and flourished in Anatolia (now Turkey) after the destruction of the Hittite state around 1200 BC. The kingdoms had their own languages, ethnicity, religion and local cultural materials. In their inscriptions, the Assyrians of Mesopotamia referred to the Urartians as their northern enemies from the 11th to 7th century BC. The oldest Urartian written document, a stone inscription at Van (previously known as Tushpa), registers the first reference to their state. The Urartians moved east across the Zagros Mountains of northwest Iran, where many texts inscribed in stone at various sites, such as Hasanlu, Agrab Tepe, and Bastam, report their conquests and other local successes.

358 For Ghirshman, this would have been proved by the building methods used on the terraces, where walls were made of rough stone (Ghirshman 1950, 215; Stonach 1974, 246). This hypothesis did not in the slightest convince the German scholar, Schippmann, who regarded them as “*eine schlecht gelungene Nachahmung*” – a poorly realised imitation – of the terraces of Pasargadae and Persepolis (Schippmann 1971, 248).

359 Ghirshman 1976, 281-282.

360 Ghirshman 1976, 89.

361 Strabo XVI.1.18.

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means of determining the deity to whom a temple was dedicated seems dubious, and yet for the moment it is probably better to leave the question open.

Ghirshman's discovery, though, of a statue of Heracles and of various other finds near a smaller temple led him to identify this structure as a sanctuary for the Greek hero³⁶². During the following Parthian period, Ghirshman argued, the “Great Temple” at Masjed-e Soleyman would have been used – given the discovery of an image on a bronze plaque in the antecella – as a place of worship for the Iranian deities Anahita and Mithra, as also demonstrated by the temple cella which had two entrances and two altars. The smallest temple was attributed by Ghirshman as being dedicated to Verethragna, with whom the Greeks identified Heracles³⁶³. As emphasised by Ghirshman³⁶⁴, if his theory were correct, this would be the first place of worship for a Greek deity in Iran (Fig. 5.32).

Ghirshman's theories were initially accepted and shared but – even though they had some appealing facets – they soon seemed to be lacking solid foundations, as noted in the reservations expressed from the 1970s onwards by Schippmann. In his complete study on “*Die iranischen Feuerheiligtümer*”³⁶⁵ the German scholar affirmed without hesitation that on the terrace of Masjed-e Soleyman – and also on Bard-e Neshandeh – there were no structural remains or discoveries of any kind that could be linked with places of Zoroastrian worship. He further believed that these complexes were used as independent Elymaean sanctuaries not connected with Zoroastrianism³⁶⁶.

In reality, as has been well deduced by John Hansman³⁶⁷ and Mary Boyce³⁶⁸, the religious sphere in Elymais did not belong to the Iranian world, but rather showed independent characteristics. Iconographic interpretation of the numerous reliefs at Masjed-e Soleyman – as at Bard-e Neshandeh – cannot leave out of consideration a complete examination of all the figurative evidence, in particular the many rock reliefs in the region that suggest a local Pantheon

362 Ghirshman 1976, 191.

363 Ghirshman 1976, 195-196. As further emphasised by Potts (1999a, 373), it would be interesting to broaden the discussion regarding Greco-Iranian religious interactions with the aim of understanding if, for example, in this case the representations of a Greek Heracles in an Iranian-Elymaean context could reflect the spontaneous worship of a Greek deity in Iran, or an assimilation with the Zoroastrian deity Verethragna or with a local deity. See also Bivar and Shaked 1964.

364 Ghirshman 1976, 101.

365 Literally translated, *the Iranian fire sanctuaries*.

366 Schippmann 1971, 248.

367 Hansman 1985, 229-246.

368 Boyce-Grenet 1991, 35-48.

in which connections prevailed with the Semitic world of Mesopotamia.

5.3.6. Dating

As discussed above, the hypotheses put forward by Ghirshman in recent decades have tended to be rejected as being too tenuous. To begin with the supposition by the French academic that a terrace was already sacred during the Achaemenid period thanks to the arrival of a Persian tribe in the time straddling the 8th and 7th century BC, Schippmann has emphasised the basic impracticability of this idea – as no Achaemenid or preceding discoveries have been made at the excavations at Masjed-e Soleyman and Bard-e Neshandeh – suggesting instead a Hellenistic or Parthian dating for the items found on site³⁶⁹ This point is evidently supported by successive publications regarding ceramics discovered at the excavations, which seem to favour a foundation date earlier than the Parthian period.

Even the presumed presence of a Seleucid garrison at Masjed-e Soleyman with a consequent enlargement of the terrace – as postulated by Ghirshman³⁷⁰ – seems destined to remain as just a mere hypothesis, as no trace of such a colony has been found³⁷¹. It is to this time that the French archaeologist takes the dating of the primitive phase of the “Grand Temple” (or “Temple Antérieur”) – as seen in preceding paragraphs – thought by him as having been dedicated to Athena Hippias, and the smallest sanctuary where the finding of a statue of Heracles, from the Parthian era, led him to link it to the hero. Moreover, Ghirshman even suggested that evidence of such a Greek religious cult could have been from the era of Antiochus I (280-261 BC), without offering any justification for such a proposition.

The dating to the Seleucid period of the extension of the terrace and the first foundation of the two temples resting on this terrace, is largely based on small finds that came to light during the French excavations, mainly votive offerings such as terracotta objects, bronze figurines, jewellery and pottery. However, this material is not considerable and the hypothesis dating them to the Seleucid period would need to be overhauled³⁷². Furthermore, it must not be neglected that

369 Schippmann 1971, 248 and 257.

370 Ghirshman 1976, 72.

371 Ghirshman also affirms that if there were an expectation of there being temples and chapels for Greek deities as well as homes, none of these were found (Ghirshman 1976, 72).

372 There was an interesting personal comment made by David Stronach, as reported by Susan B. Downey in her book “*Mesopotamian Religious Architecture. Alexander through the Parthians*” of 1988, where the Scottish archaeologist affirmed that during his many visits to Masjed-e Soleyman – while excavations were still under way – there was no pottery found that could be classified as Seleucid (Downey 1988, 131).

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even the numismatic evidence³⁷³ fails to support such a dating to the Greek period. Indeed, all the six Greek pre-Roman coins found on the terrace of Masjed-e Soleyman – along with later coins of Elymaean, Parthian and Sasanian manufacture³⁷⁴ – were in an advanced state of deterioration when discovered, which suggests they were made well before their arrival on the site and, moreover, were probably in circulation for quite some time³⁷⁵. As is the case with Bard-e Neshandeh, at Masjed-e Soleyman the study of ceramic evidence conducted by Haerinck suggests a dating in the 3rd and early 2nd centuries BC.

In the light of factors studied and discussed up to this point, it seems evident that the iconographic, architectural and cultural reasons adduced as a base by Ghirshman to date the foundation of the terrace to the period of the pre-Achaemenid and Achaemenid (*époque perse*), and for dating the extension of the terrace along with the first phase of the temple structures to the Seleucid period (*époque séleucide*), are flimsy³⁷⁶. In this projection, the Parthian era (*époque parthe*) would have been responsible for most of the distinguishable structures, while the last phase of the principal temple and the “Western Sanctuary” would have been from the proto-Sasanid period (*époque sassanide*). If any of the finds may link the foundation of the open air terrace to the Seleucid period, the dating for the temples brought to light would most probably be in the late Arsacid period, with their destruction datable to the beginning of the Sasanid period. I would, however, not exclude a priori that further excavations on the site of Masjed-e Soleyman – especially focused on structures under the two visible temples – could lead to possible new interpretations and dating. It plainly cannot be ignored that the last and so far only excavations of this site – as its “neighbour” at Bard-e Neshandeh – were indeed those conducted under Ghirshman in the 1960s. Assuredly, new and more exhaustive studies of these sites using the most advanced technologies would be able to cast fresh light on this region of southwest Iran, following discoveries made in recent months under the auspices of the Iranian Center for Archaeological Research and the Archaeological Excavations and Research Center of Turin³⁷⁷.

373 A silver drachm from Lampsacus of the late 4th century BC; a silver drachm of Alexander I Balas (150-145 BC) coming from Seleucia on the Tigris; a bronze obol of the same king coming from Susa; two bronze obols of Tigraios (c. 138/137-133/132 BC); a bronze obol, possibly from Susa, of Antiochus I.

374 For the numismatic findings see Augè *et al.* 1979, 12-17.

375 Augè *et al.* 1979, 16.

376 Hannestad and Potts 1990, 115.

377 See Section 6.3.

5. Elymaean Religious Architecture

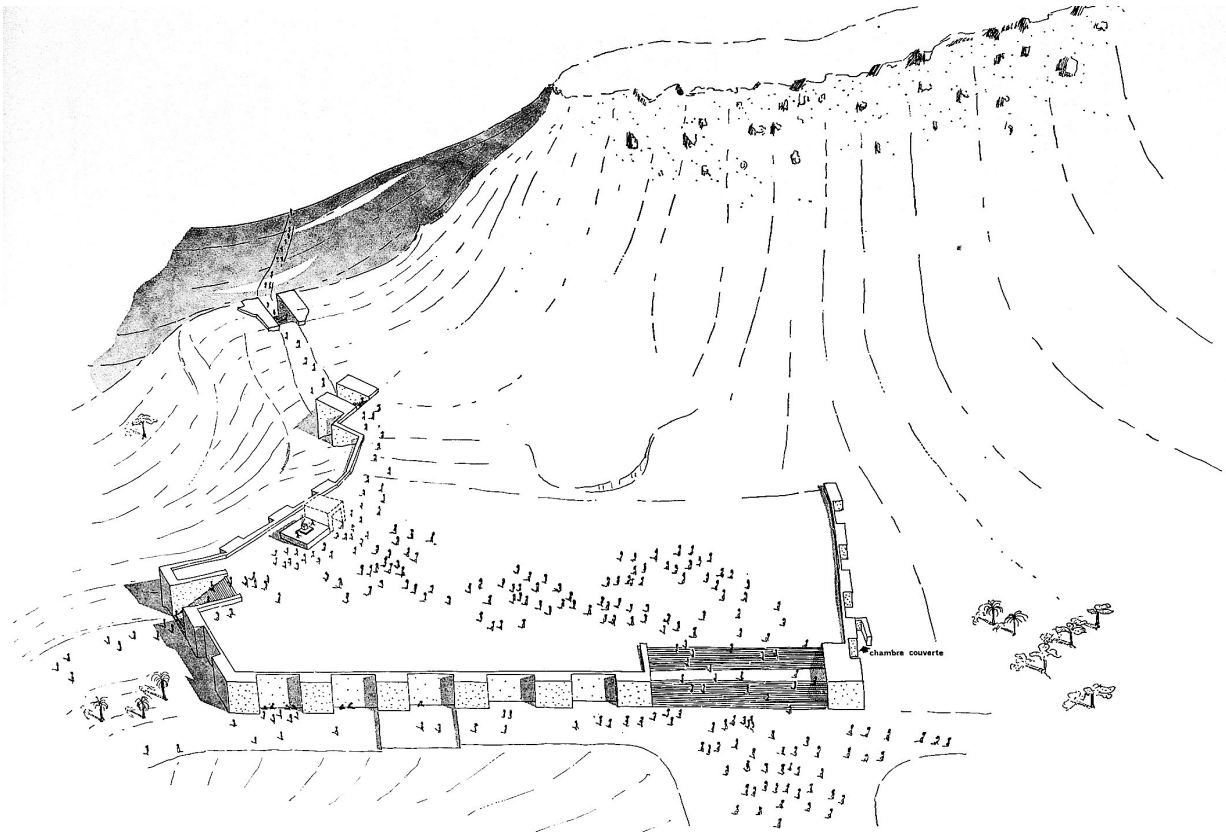


Figure 5.31 - Masjed-e Soleyman. Reconstruction époque perse (Ghirshman 1976, Fig. 29).

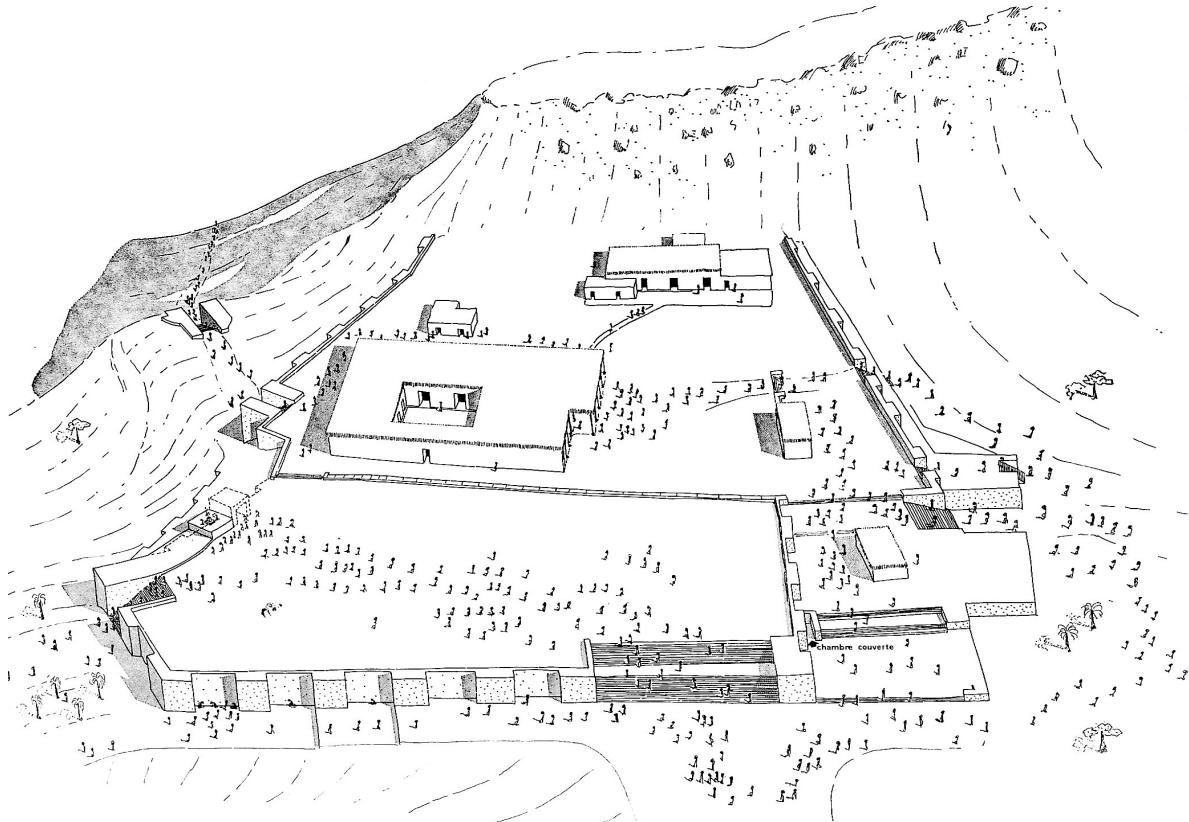


Figure 5.32 – Masjed-e Soleyman. Reconstruction époque parthe (Ghirshman 1976, Fig. 42).

6. Elymaean Rock Reliefs: The Sacred Area of Tang-e Sarvak

6.1. Introduction

Excluding fragments of discovered statuary art – discussed in the previous chapter – at the sites of Bard-e Neshandeh and Masjed-e Soleyman, monumental art in Elymais is made up of a series of rock reliefs in the mountainous area to the east of the Khuzestan lowland between the Bakhtiari Mountains and the central part of the Zagros, which perpetuate a most ancient tradition, the Elamite culture³⁷⁸.

In archaeology, rock reliefs have always been an important source of data, portraying scenes from ancestral traditions, as well as history, culture, civilisation and art in each community. They have been used as representations of ancient concepts, beliefs, ceremonies and rituals. Rock carvings have also been used to recount stories of ancient victories, great achievements and artistic finesse, as well as events in politics, religion and social life in every civilisation. In the same way, they have been employed as a means of satisfying a desire for immortality in governments of the past. Rupestrian inscription was always among the most frequent of activities in the ancient Near East. The prevalence of this tradition in the Parthian era brought about the creation of a considerable number of rock reliefs in their territories, of which the major part in the autonomous realm of Elymais probably came about through the work of a school of rock carvers flourishing precisely in this region. The Elymaean rock reliefs can be considered as the most important ancient artworks of the Parthian era, moreover as they are distinguished by a variety of characteristics including frontality, spirituality, linearity, solidity and static realism.

These rock carvings – rediscovered over the past two centuries on the Bakhtiari plateau – cover a period of time from the Elamite to the Parthian eras. After attracting the attention of Sir Austen Henry Layard³⁷⁹ – the first explorer to discover an Elymaean rock relief in modern times –

378 Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 99.

379 The first modern mention of the presence of inscriptions and rock reliefs in Elymais was given by H. C.

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these sculptures have been subjected to a series of studies by scholars of diverse nationalities. These have been works of the highest order, which have provided a cataloguing of the reliefs on the basis of iconographic and stylistic criteria, and they have permitted an initial chronological articulation of the carved scenes. However, many aspects remain to be clarified and the documentation so far is often made up of photographic images or drawings made on site which – even if they are of excellent quality – do not always allow a detailed examination of the subject matter. Further, there are very few cases of topographic and archaeological exploration of the places where these works were realised.

All of the Elymaean rock reliefs and separate stones are scattered throughout the region of the Bakhtiari Mountains. Given the difficulty of drawing the precise geographic confines of the Elymaean kingdom, it is not always a simple matter to classify a relief as being Elymaean rather than Parthian³⁸⁰. At present, there is general agreement among scholars to consider as Elymaean the rock reliefs existing in the area bordered on the north by the Shimbar Valley and on the south by the district of Behbahan³⁸¹. In this area extending lengthwise through the Zagros Mountains chain, reliefs can be considered such as the various examples at Hung-e Azhdar – also improperly known as Hung-e Nauruzi (footnote 808) – as well as at Hung-e Yaralivand, Hung-e Kamalvand, Tang-e Botan, Kuh-i Taraz and Tang-e Sarvak, which are only a few of the places where Elymaean rock reliefs have been found. To these may be added the most recent discoveries in Kuh-e Mongast and Shrinow-Mowri, giving a total of 14 monuments still *in situ* known up to now³⁸². Nonetheless, these examples continue to present problems of interpretation and chronology in that it is not clear what relationships they have with the places where they are located.

Rawlinson (1839, 84) regarding the cliffs and boulders of Izeh-Malamir and Shikaft-e Salman, sourced from information provided by Bakhtiari tribesmen. The English officer, as discussed earlier, did not visit the location, as far as we know. The first European known to have seen these reliefs was Layard, who in 1841-1842 discovered the relief of Tang-e Botan near Shimbar (Layard 1894, 106-114). See also Mehr Kian 2000, 57-59. The Belgian scholar L. Vanden Berghe and the German scholar W. Hinz were able to discover some other Elymaean reliefs before the Islamic revolution. The Iranian archaeologist Ali Akbar Sarfaraz also discovered the relief of Kal-e-geh in Masjed-e Soleyman, while J. Mehr Kian has discovered the greatest proportion of the Elymaean reliefs presently known and he has also published the most recent list of the monuments still *in situ* in the province of Khuzestan (Mehr Kian 2000, 67). Mehr Kian discovered six new rock reliefs between the Susan plain and the Izeh plateau, some of them still unpublished (Mehr Kian 1996, 64-61; 1997, 67-72; 2001, 293-298).

380 Mathiesen 1992, 1, 9.

381 See footnote 58.

382 Mehr Kian 2000, 67

6. *Elymaean Rock Reliefs: The Sacred Area of Tang-e Sarvak*

In this chapter I will limit myself to confronting and describing the dynamics and the problems involved the most important reliefs of Elymais corresponding to the area of Tang-e Sarvak. In the Appendices, I also address two other poles of major development of these rupestrian works: the panel of Tang-e Botan in the valley of Shimbar (Appendix 5); and the rock relief of Hung-e Azhdar corresponding to the plain of Izeh-Malamir (Appendix 6).

The Parthian rock reliefs of Elymais share a certain amount of similarity with respect to their subjects, and they are of particular importance as, above all, they constitute the most outstanding group of Parthian sculptures in Iran, given that only four other reliefs of the Parthians are known to us in all of Iran outside Elymais: one at Sar-i Pul and three at Behistun. Moreover, their specific characteristics mark them apart with respect to the other sculptural works in other regions of the Parthian world.

The evident iconographic and stylistic connections of the various Elymaean reliefs have brought about their classification within a regional ambit as specific productions intended to satisfy the requirements of local elites, while the rigid frontality of almost all the represented figures has suggested a chronology of their execution from the end of the 1st century BC to the beginning of the 3rd century AD, even if a period limited to the 1st and 2nd centuries AD is generally preferred³⁸³. Hans Erick Mathiesen has assigned the *corpus* of the Parthian reliefs to four different chronological groups – with the most of Elymaean reliefs in the last three groups (*see table below*) – which stretch from *c.* 250 BC until 225 AD. In any case, and notwithstanding progress in research, their precise meanings and the relationships among them remain unclear.

383 Mathiesen 1992, superseding Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985.

6. Elymaean Rock Reliefs: The Sacred Area of Tang-e Sarvak

Period (approx. data)	Kuh-i Taraz	Tang-e Sarvak	Tang-e Botan	Hung-e Azhdar	Hung-e Kamalvand	Hung-e Yaralivand
Early (250-0 BC)				reliefs, left side		
Middle (0-150 AD)						
Late Ia (150-190 AD)	relief	ANb, AWa, AWbα, BS' left, CE, CN	Groups III-IV			
Late Ib (190-200 AD)		AWc, BN, BS' right	Group II		relief	relief
Late II (200-225 AD)		ANa, ANW, AWbβ, D	Group I	relief, right side		

Table 2 – Chronology of the Elymaean Rock Reliefs (according to Mathiesen 1992³⁸⁴).

6.2. Tang-e Sarvak³⁸⁵

6.2.1. General Aspect

The archaeological site of Tang-e Sarvak (locally Sawlek) – تنگ سروک or تنگ سروک – on the edge of Behbahan plain in the province of Kohgiluyeh va Būyer Aḥmad – confinante a nord con il Khuzestan – lies in a belt of villages occupied by sedentary members of the Bahma'ī e Garmsīr tribe. It is located in a gorge – called Sarvak or Soolak³⁸⁶ – in the mountainous area of the the Bakhtiari, approximately 50 km north of Behbahan city.

There is a seasonal stream descending from the surrounding slopes through the narrow

384 In sections to come, this thesis will make use of the work undertaken by Mathiesen, who in his study, *Sculpture in the Parthian Empire*, published in 1992 in two volumes, surely provides the most recent and detailed discussion regarding the chronology of the rock reliefs in Elymais.

385 Henning 1952, 151-178; Seyrig 1970, 113-116; De Waele 1975, 59-79; Vanden Berghe 1983, 50-52, 123-125; Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 59-79; Kawami 1987, 88-110; Mathiesen 1986, 153-176; *idem* 1992, 130-149 and selected bibliography; Vardanian 1997, 151-161; Von Gall 2000, 319-359; Haerinck 2003, 221-228.

386 The official name of the valley is *Tang-e Sarvak*, i.e. “the gorge of the little cypresses”. *Soolak* or *Sawlek* is a local dialect form. The name seems to have recent origins, probably referring to the gorge (*tang*) that leads in from the west. The mountain including this gorge – next to Kūh-e Moshteh – is called *Kūh-i Sarvak* or “the mountain of the little cypresses” (Henning 1952, 153). This mountain pass contains a forest of zarbīn trees (*Cupressus sempervirence var. horizontalis*) called Jangal-e Sūlak/Sarvak covering an area of c. 1,000 hectares (see Hūšang A'lam 2011, in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, s.v. *cypress*).

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gorge in winter and spring, while it is dry in the summer and autumn. At an altitude of *c.* 1200m, the site is reached only after a long climb, and it has four freestanding boulders with their rupestrian reliefs, comprising 13 panels³⁸⁷ and various inscriptions in stone alongside the tortuous path which continues to the southeast part of the gorge³⁸⁸.

The valley of Tang-e Sarvak was probably a sacred area and was surely of great importance to the people of Elymais, as is indicated by the large collection of rock reliefs from the Parthian era. There are some who hypothesise that here there was an open-air sanctuary or a place where Elymaean kings were crowned and buried³⁸⁹. Such hypotheses are as much fascinating as they are not demonstrable, given that there has not yet been any architectural discovery made in this area. Of course, this does not exclude the possibility that in the future more thorough archaeological investigations may bring to light hitherto unknown structures or monuments, and indeed this prospect continues to stimulate the curiosity of anyone who imagines that there could exist, beneath these desolate landscapes, a key for interpreting barely understood events in history.

To return to the rock reliefs: their distribution is in four independent blocks, termed A, B, C and D³⁹⁰ (Fig. 6.1). For A there are the reliefs ANa, ANb, ANW, AWa, AWb α , AWb β , and AWc; regarding B there are BW, BN and BS; for C there are instead CE and CN; while for D there is only D. Entering the valley from the west³⁹¹, the first monument encountered would be B – in particular BW – and then BS would be passed before the approach to monument A. At this point it is not clear if the way forward was towards monument C or D³⁹².

387 One of these reliefs (to be precise, BS) perhaps should be regarded as having two sections, thus creating a total of 14 reliefs instead of 13 (Mathiesen 1992, 2, 131).

388 For a description of this path see Stein 1940, 103-113.

389 See Section 6.2.3 and 6.2.4.

390 Henning 1952. De Waele (1974) offers a new enumeration of the reliefs (Monument B=I, A=II, D=III and C=IV). This system is followed by Vanden Berghe and Schippmann (1985) while Mathiesen prefers the cataloguing of Henning in that he regards De Waele's as being too complicated. Concerning the abbreviations used to indicate the various reliefs, the first upper case letter indicates the monument (A, B, C, D), the second upper case letter refers to a cardinal compass point (North, South, East, West), and the lower case letters which follow indicate an upper or lower register (a=above; b=below). In the case of relief AWb (monument A; direction West; lower register) – where there are two reliefs in the same register – the letter α is used for the one on the left and β for the one on the right. In some cases the compass points given by De Waele (1975) and Vanden Berghe and Schippmann (1985) differ from those given by Henning (1952).

391 According to De Waele 1974, this approach from the west would be the natural way of entering the valley.

392 Vanden Berghe and Schippmann (1985, 79) and Haerinck (2005) identify the third block with D, but Mathiesen (1992, 2, 130) instead identifies it with C. See the general layout (De Waele 1974, 263; and fig. 6.1).

6. Elymaean Rock Reliefs: The Sacred Area of Tang-e Sarvak



Figure 6.1 – Tang-e Sarvak. Overlaid Maps (De Waele and Google Earth). Modified.

Coordinates of Tang-e Sarvak's Boulders		
<i>Blocks</i>	<i>Coordinates</i>	
Numbers	Latitude	Longitude
<i>Block I (TS 01)</i>	+30°58'45.39"	+50°7'46.89"
<i>Block II (TS 02)</i>	+30°58'49.02"	+50°8'30.33"
<i>Block III (TS 03)</i>	+30°58'49.59"	+50°8'30.84"
<i>Block IV (TS 04)</i>	+30°58'41.76"	+50°8'43.01"

Table 3 – Coordinates of Tang-e Sarvak's Boulders³⁹³.

Mathiesen emphasises that the western faces of the various rock surfaces would presumably have been the most important and the first used. He believes that as time passed and once these western surfaces were totally covered, the other surfaces were used and decorated³⁹⁴. There would seem to be an exception in monument C, which because of the nature of the landscape is the first to be seen from the north. Certainly, a study of the positioning of the reliefs cannot be considered in isolation, but must be combined with technical considerations and stylistic criteria.

The sculptures are not particularly refined, with the figures carved in a rather crude and flattened manner which represents them in a quite static style. Even if there are some details to be seen in a few cases, they are severely damaged and almost all the representations of personalities have been defaced. The current state of conservation leaves the way open for a divergence of opinion regarding the identities of some of the figures and how the scenes could be interpreted. For example, there is doubt over how many female personalities³⁹⁵ are represented. There are also disputes over how many deities are depicted and who they may be. Furthermore, iconography was limited to classical themes in official Arsacid art, revolving around motifs of ritual offerings, divine investiture of the sovereign, sacred banqueting, courtiers' homage, hunting and duelling on horseback, ceremonies and scenes of worship and adoration.

393 The coordinates were kindly provided by Pr. Gian Pietro Basello during his visit of the site in January 2014.

394 Mathiesen 1992, 2, 131. This is also the basic idea of Debevoise (1942) and Henning (1952, 173).

395 Von Gall (2000) vs Haerinck and Smekens (2003).

6. Elymaean Rock Reliefs: The Sacred Area of Tang-e Sarvak

The personalities in general are not represented in life-size dimensions but rather larger, although some smaller ones do occur. The figures making up the various scenes are placed alongside each other. They appear isolated in a fixed and absolute frontality. They lack a sense of active participation in the dramatic unfolding of action, which therefore remains only suggested. Besides the frontal representation, other common characteristics include bidimensionality and a rhythmic repetition of gestures. The horses are also represented in the ancient Assyrian-Achaemenid image of galloping, with their rear hooves on the ground and their front hooves in motion.

This thesis does not aim to dwell on the numerous problems regarding interpretation of the site at Tang-e Sarvak, nor will it examine each relief in detail, but rather it will seek an overall vision of the area and discuss in depth when issues regarding the site could help in providing a more comprehensive explanation of Elymais and its people.

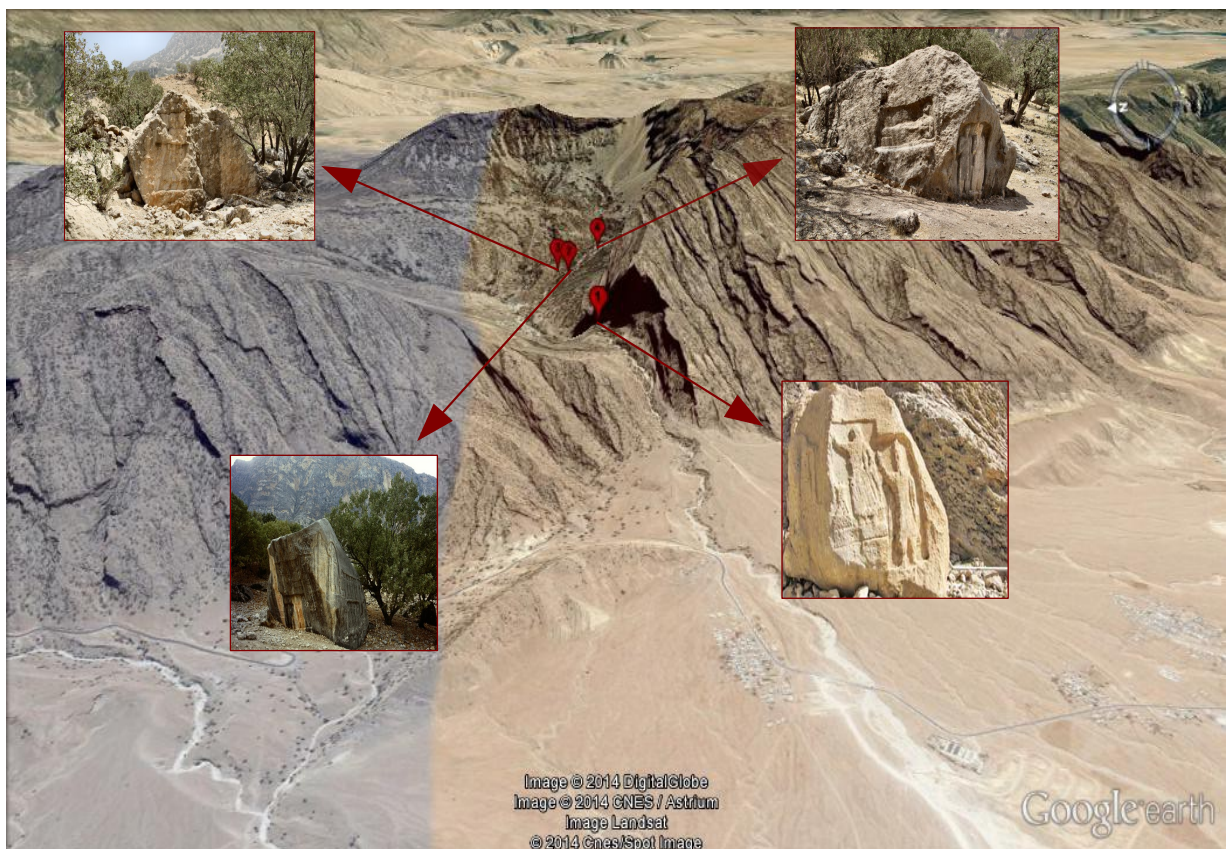


Figure 6.2 – Tang-e Sarvak. 3D View of the site (Google Earth). Pictures online at: [bahar newspaper](#) (1), [seeiran.ir](#) (2), [le moustique en elymaide](#) (3-4).

6.2.2. Archaeological Context

In the cataloguing and description of reliefs at Tang-e Sarvak there are – generally speaking – two schools of thought: one which is simply based on the classification of single blocks of rock and the order in which these blocks are encountered when climbing the gorge³⁹⁶; and the other which instead groups the reliefs in time segments by carefully studying particulars of technique and style³⁹⁷.

I will seek to deal with this topic by taking into account both ways of thinking. During this chapter I will try to describe the reliefs associated in single blocks³⁹⁸ with the aim of providing an easier understanding and localisation of these works, then using if needed the presumed order in which they were executed, in this case following the lines suggested by Mathiesen³⁹⁹.

*Block I*⁴⁰⁰. This is the first block (h. 3.70m) – carved on three sides – encountered at the site after about 20 minutes on foot, coming from the entrance of the gorge at the west⁴⁰¹. On the northwest side (BS⁴⁰²) two male personalities are sculpted in different places⁴⁰³ (Fig. 6.3). It

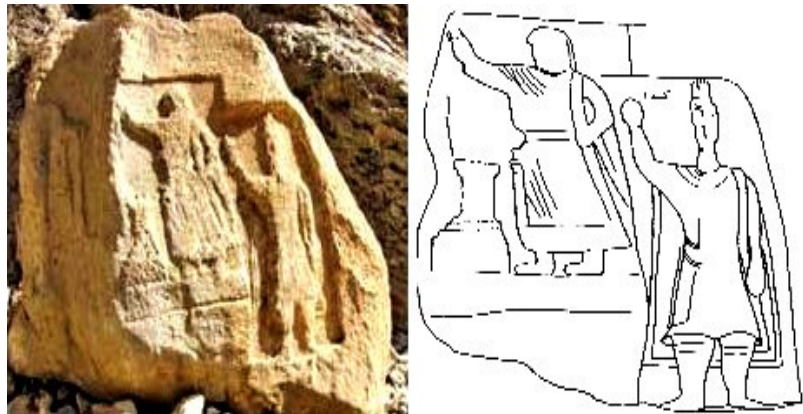


Figure 6.3 – Tang-e Sarvak. Block I, relief BS (drawing in Vanden Berghe and Schippman 1985; picture online at: [bahar newspaper](#)).

396 Henning 1952; De Waele 1974; Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985; Haerinck 2005.

397 Kawami 1987; Mathiesen 1992.

398 For designating the blocks and reliefs in relation to compass points, I will follow the classification given by De Waele (1974) and by Vanden Berghe and Schippmann (1985), which in some cases differs from what is given by Henning (1952), and for this reason both denominations will be assigned, when needed, to each block or relief to allow for ease of comparison in any future study.

399 Mathiesen 1992, 1-2.

400 Monument B of Henning (1952).

401 See footnote 391.

402 Henning 1952. It is noteworthy that both Kawami (1987, 191) and Mathiesen (1992, 2, 132) divide the relief BS into two parts attributed to two different chronological periods, supposing that the left part would have been made first. Debevoise (1942, 89) dates the relief to the 3rd century BC while Colledge (1977, 90) suggests the 2nd century BC for all the BS relief.

403 Stein 1940, 111; Henning 1952, 159; De Waele 1974, 258; Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 60; Kawami 1987, cat. no. 32; Mathiesen 1992, 2, 137-138, 144-145.

6. Elymaean Rock Reliefs: The Sacred Area of Tang-e Sarvak

is not clear from photographic documentation if the figure on the left (h. 1.50 m) is standing or seated on a throne. On his left is an object which could be identified as an altar; he seems to be turned towards it (with his head and feet) and this leads some scholars to interpret this figure as a priest⁴⁰⁴. He wears an ankle-length tunic and a headdress which is difficult to make out⁴⁰⁵.

The personality on the right (h. 1.95m) seems to have a cloak or jacket over his tunic and a tiara on his head. His left arm hangs down beside his body while his right arm is lifted in a sign of veneration, perhaps directed towards the personality on the left⁴⁰⁶. There is an inscription to the left and above the head of this second figure⁴⁰⁷.

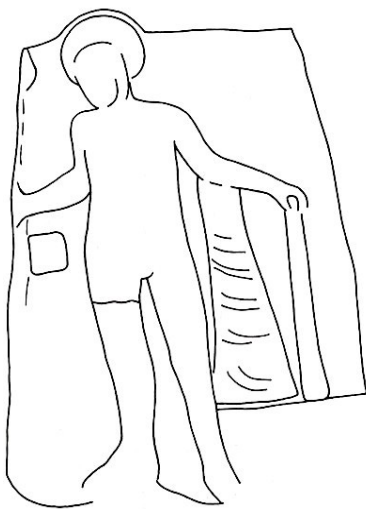


Figure 6.4 – Tang-e Sarvak. Block I, relief BW (drawing in Vanden Berghe and Schippman 1985).

On the north side (BW⁴⁰⁸) – the first relief to be seen when approaching from the west – there is a nude male personality⁴⁰⁹ posed completely frontally, apart from his head which seems slightly turned towards his right shoulder⁴¹⁰ (Fig. 6.4). His left hand seems to hold a conical object – perhaps a club – and descending from his left elbow there is a piece of cloth or perhaps a stylised lion skin, which leads to an interpretation of the personality as Heracles, Verethragna, Bel or as another local deity interpreted as Heracles⁴¹¹.

Finally on the eastern surface (BN⁴¹²) there appear to be two male figures (2.0 m on the right and 1.90 m on the left)

404 Stein 1940, 111; Henning 1952, 159; De Waele 1974, 258; Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 60. There is partial disagreement within the opinion of Mathiesen (1992, 2, 144-145), who justly underlines that given the impossibility of understanding if such a personality is seated on a throne or standing, if the first hypothesis were correct then it would be at the least unusual to find this personality seated on a throne and officiating at a sacrifice at the same time. His explanation is that the artist possibly wished to give the personality a double function, as priest and king. A connection could be drawn to this from the hypothesis with which Ghirshman identified the symbology of the high oval tiara on the head of the “king” in the bas-relief at Masjed-e Soleyman (Ghirshman 1976, 123). See also footnote 334.

405 Vanden Berghe and Schippmann (1985, 62), *capuchon*.

406 Mathiesen 1992, 2, 138.

407 Inscription 6 (Henning 1952, 159); Inscription 1 (Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 62). The translation given by Mathiesen (1992, 2, 138) is: “*This is the image of Orodes assuming the throne (or taking the stool)*”, even if the Danish scholar admits that the only certain word is the name.

408 Henning 1952.

409 Henning 1952, 159; De Waele 1974, 257; Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 62; Kawami 1987, cat. no. 44; Mathiesen 1992, 2, 141.

410 Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 63, fig. 7.

411 Mathiesen 1992, 2, footnotes 98-99.

412 Henning 1952.

6. Elymaean Rock Reliefs: The Sacred Area of Tang-e Sarvak

both of whom stand frontally and with their feet apparently in profile⁴¹³ (Fig. 6.5). Both wear tiaras, with the personality on the right – for some scholars⁴¹⁴ – seeming to wear a mural crown. Between the two stands a kind of column, rounded at the top, whose interpretation is quite varied: as a baetyl⁴¹⁵; as a tiara placed on a small column⁴¹⁶; and finally as an altar⁴¹⁷. The relief shows an encounter between two people wearing tiaras – and even though no wreath can be seen – it could be interpreted as a representation of an investiture⁴¹⁸.

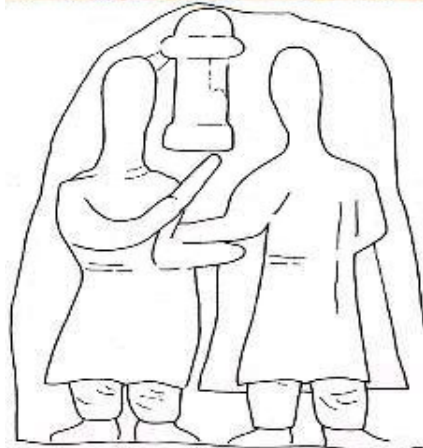


Figure 6.5 – Tang-e Sarvak. Block I, relief BN (drawing in Vanden Berghe and Schippman 1985; picture online at: panoramio.com)

*Block II*⁴¹⁹. The second block of rock – around 1.3 km from the first block – is certainly the most imposing (h. 8.6 m), the most representative and decidedly the most important of the monuments at Tang-e Sarvak, given the complexity and quality of the reliefs⁴²⁰ and further, the presence of five inscriptions. This block is decorated on two sides (NW and NE) and on the northern corner.

The northeast face has two registers, upper and lower. The *registre supérieur*⁴²¹ (ANa⁴²²) includes four persons – a man resting on a kline surrounded by two sitting figures and one standing – all represented larger than life-size⁴²³ (Fig. 6.6). The man lying on his left side on the kline, which is depicted with three legs in the form of an eagle, rests his left elbow on a kind of cushion and holds in his left hand what

413 Henning (1952, 160) and Hansman (1985, 239) seem to recognise four personalities, differing with De Waele (1974, 258), Vanden Berghe and Schippmann (1985, 64), Kawami (1987, cat. no 33) and Mathiesen (1992, 2, 142) who indicate only two of them.

414 Henning (1952, 160) and Hansman (1985, 238). This hypothesis is refuted by Mathiesen (1992, 2, footnote 73).

415 Henning 1952, 160.

416 Fukai 1960, 143.

417 Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 64; Mathiesen 1992, 2, 138.

418 Mathiesen 1992, 2, 138 and footnote 77.

419 Monument A of Henning (1952).

420 “These reliefs have been executed in the most characteristic and remarkable style of all Tang-e Sarvak [...] works showing exactly this style are found only in Elymais-Susiana” - Mathiesen (1992, 2, 133) referring to some of the reliefs in this block (ANa, ANW, AWbβ).

421 Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985.

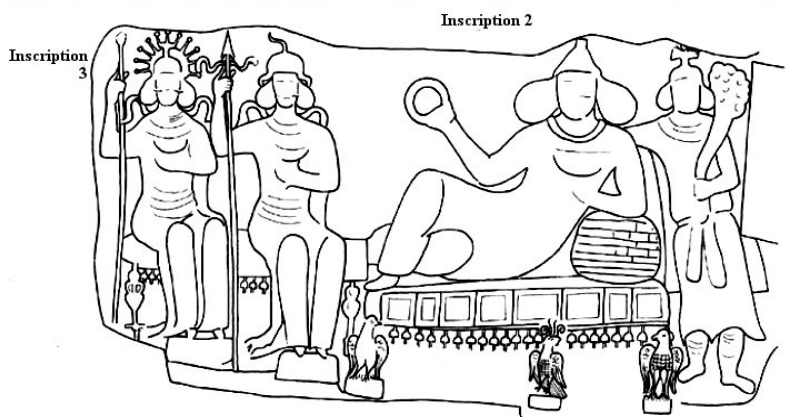
422 Henning 1952.

423 Stein 1940, 195; Henning 1952, 155; Ghirshman 1956, 108; De Waele 1974, 259; Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 67; Kawami 1987, cat. no. 38; Mathiesen 1992, 2, 134-135.

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could be a drinking bowl.

His right hand instead holds up a ring, while his right leg is bent over his left leg. His hair is dressed in large bunches at the ears – a characteristic typical of all personalities in the reliefs – while he wears a headdress with a knob at the apex. On the right of the relief, there is a standing figure holding a cornucopia in the left hand. The headdress is a kind of “rounded, top-pointed helmet(?) with a T-shaped decoration at the apex”⁴²⁴. On the left side there are two figures seated on a kline or a double throne, both of



whom have the same posture with heads and chests represented frontally and the legs slightly turned to the right. In the right hand of the figure on the left there is possibly a sceptre topped by a sphere, while the person on the right holds a spear in the right hand. The identification of these two seated figures – made difficult by erosion of facial details – has also given rise to many controversies, above all regarding the gender of the figures. Further, their nature, as humans (vassals, warriors) or as divinities (two males, two females, or a male and a female), remains highly contested⁴²⁵. There are two inscriptions also present⁴²⁶.

Figure 6.6 – Tang-e Sarvak. Block II, relief ANa (drawing in Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985; picture online at: iranatlas.info).

424 Mathiesen 1992, 2, 132. Also according to the Danish scholar (1992, 2, footnote 19) this *helmet* recalls the plaster reliefs of Dura-Europos (Downey 1977, cat. nos. 126).

425 The most exhaustive and complete article regarding interpretation of these two figures is surely the one written by Ernie Haerinck in 2003, *Again in Tang-i Sarvak II, NE-side. Goddesses do not have moustaches and do not wear trousers*.

426 Inscription 1 (Henning 1952, 156; or Inscription 2 for Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 68) is found above the scene while Inscription 4 (Henning 1952, 174; or Inscription 2 for Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 68), which has been destroyed, is on the left. See Mathiesen (1992, 2, 134-135) in relation to the two different translations of Inscription 1 (Henning 1952, 169 vs Bivar and Shaked 1964, 287). Further, while Kawami (1987, 198) believes that Inscription 1 should not be connected with relief ANa, Mathiesen affirms entirely the opposite (1992, 2, 134).

6. Elymaean Rock Reliefs: The Sacred Area of Tang-e Sarvak

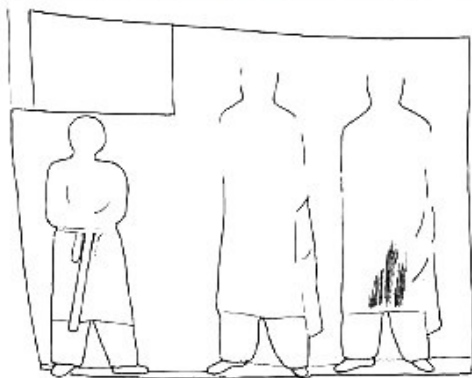


Figure 6.7 – Tang-e Sarvak. Block II, relief ANb (drawing in Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985; picture online at: [le moustique en elymaide](http://le.moustique.en.elymaide)).

The lower register (ANb⁴²⁷) instead is made up of three figures who are probably male (1.62 m for the person on the left and 2 m for the two on the right)⁴²⁸ (Fig. 6.7). Situated at ground level and sculpted fairly deeply into the rock, the relief is quite eroded but it seems to have important similarities with CN.

The northern corner (ANW⁴²⁹) includes a large standing figure of a man⁴³⁰, the tallest at Tang-e Sarvak (2.80 m), who is shown in front of a kind of stepped altar with a beribboned conical object, presumably a *baetyl*⁴³¹ (Fig. 6.8). His right arm is elevated, perhaps in a *signe d'adoration*⁴³², while his left arm is bent to the chest as if holding an object. The face is depicted entirely frontally – as is all of this personality – with clearly visible large eyes having incised irises and pupils, and with a moustache and beard. The hair is gathered at the ears in

large bunches in the same manner as is depicted on relief ANa. This figure has earrings and a conical headdress bearing vertical and horizontal lines and a knob at the top. Under the presumed altar there is an inscription⁴³³ and another⁴³⁴ can be noted above his right hand.

427 Henning 1952.

428 Stein 1940, 106; Henning 1952, 157; De Waele 1974, 259; Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 73; Kawami 1987, cat. no. 34; Mathiesen 1992, 2, 140-141.

429 Henning 1952.

430 Stein 1940, 108; Henning 1952, 157; Ghirshman 1956, 108; De Waele 1974, 259; Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 75; Kawami 1987, cat. no. 39; Mathiesen 1992, II, 135-136.

431 Stein 1940, 108; Altheim and Stiehl 1952, 32, 34; De Waele 1974, 262, footnote 21; Mathiesen 1992, 2, 136. The word *baetyl* derives from the Greek βαίτυλος (*baetylus*), and this derives from *bēt el*, Semitic for “the house of god”. A *baetyl* was a sacred stone - ancient sources seem to speak of some as being meteorites - supposed to be animated by divine life. Such a sacred stone would have come to signify the god itself.

432 Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 75.

433 Inscription 3 (Henning 1952, 174; or Inscription 4 in Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 76). As for the dispute over the correct translation of the inscription, see Mathiesen 1992, 2, 136 and footnote 58.

434 This inscription (Inscription 5 in Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 76) was not noted by Henning, and De Waele (1974, 262, footnote 20) does not provide a copy or a translation, but he affirms that this engraving would demonstrate that inscription 3 (see footnote above) had no connection at all with the standing figure. This hypothesis has been rebutted by Mathiesen (1992, 2, 147, footnote 59).

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The northwest face includes three registers (Fig. 6.8). The upper register (AWa⁴³⁵) has nine figures of whom seven are standing and two are on thrones (the first and eighth personality from the left). The surface is much eroded, with a severe loss of detail, but the first enthroned figure on the left seems to be represented frontally with a possible sceptre in his right hand and his left arm is bent to the chest, while he is wearing a long tunic and appears to have a beard and abundant head hair as is the case with the following five figures – possibly of a lower social order – who are all represented in the same way, frontally, standing, and with the same garments. The fifth figure – seventh from the left – is larger than the others and has his ground-line lower than theirs. The eighth figure is seated on a throne similar to the first, but at a lower level. The ninth figure is the most damaged and the most difficult to describe, but it should be noted that below this last personality there is an inscription⁴³⁶

The middle register (AWb⁴³⁷) is divided into two reliefs⁴³⁸ (Fig. 6.8). The one on the left (AWbα⁴³⁹) has six figures, four large and two small, all presumably male⁴⁴⁰. The relief is much eroded and many details have been lost. The figures are placed on a rectangular surface which has an extension on the left side, containing the two smallest figures, and above this is an area of rough rock that remains untouched. These last mentioned figures are quite severely damaged, but it can be determined at least from the photographic documentation that the four larger ones are better conserved and appear to be represented slightly in profile with one arm raised⁴⁴¹. It is interesting to also note a minor dispute between Kawami and Mathiesen about the dating of this relief⁴⁴².

The relief on the right (AWbβ⁴⁴³) is placed in the only space available on the northwest face – precisely, at the bottom on the right⁴⁴⁴ – and represents a male figure (h. 1.85m) fighting a

435 Henning 1952.

436 Inscription 2 (Henning 1952, 171-172; or inscription 6 in Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 79). See also Bivar and Shaked 1964, 287; Kawami 1987, 190; Mathiesen 1992, 2, 149, footnote 115.

437 Henning 1952.

438 Henning 1952, 158; Mathiesen 1992, 2, 146, footnote 3.

439 Henning 1952.

440 Stein 1940, 107; Henning 1952, 158; De Waele 1974, 269; Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 78; Kawami 1987, cat. no. 30; Mathiesen 1992, 2, 142.

441 It is debatable as to which arm this could be, right or left, as the scarcity of detail makes it unclear if the personalities are represented from in front or from behind.

442 Kawami 1987, 188; Mathiesen 1992, 2, 148, footnote 100.

443 Henning 1952.

444 Stein 1940, 107; Henning 1952, 158; De Waele 1974, 260; Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 78; Kawami 1987, cat. no. 40; Mathiesen 1992, 2, 136.

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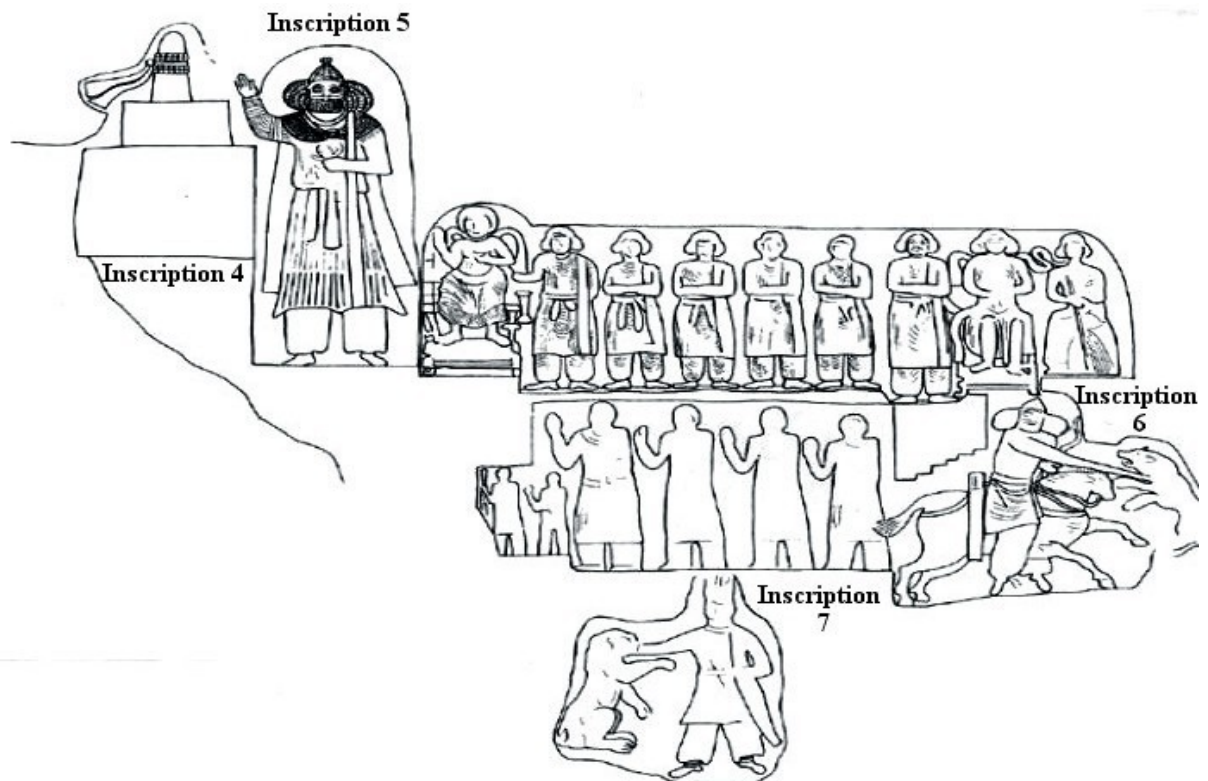
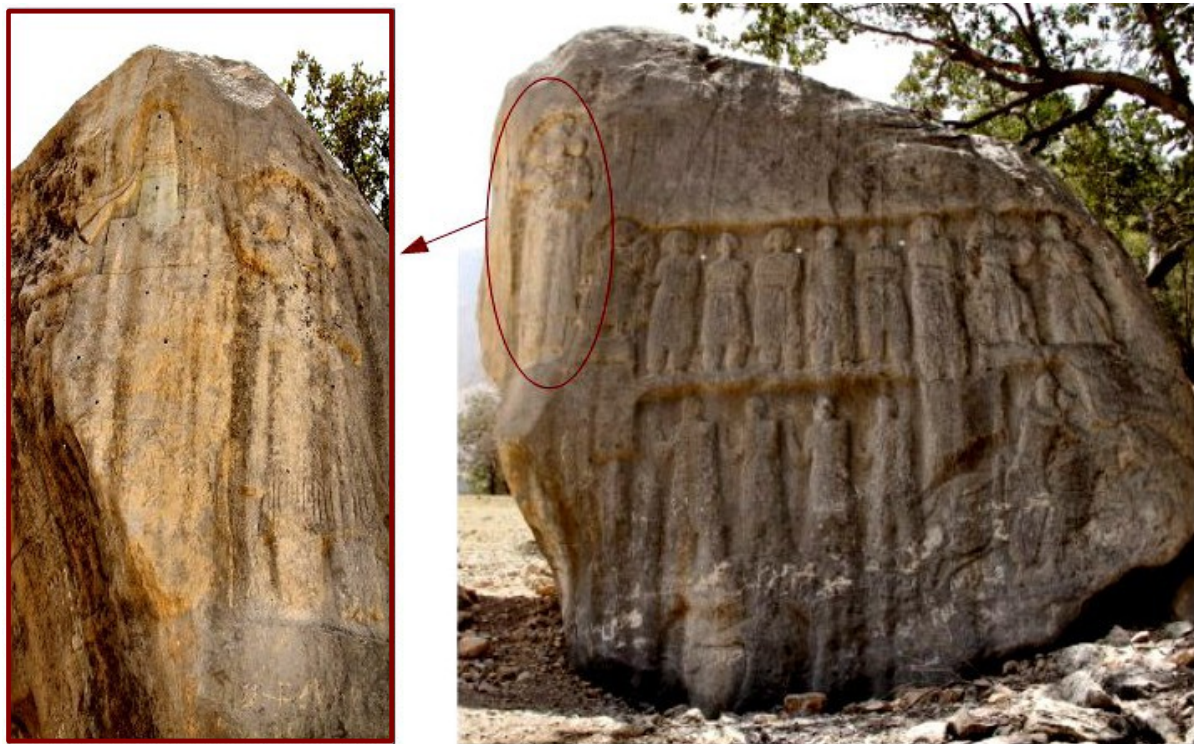


Figure 6.8 – Tang-e Sarvak. Block II, reliefs ANW, AWa, AWba and AWbβ (drawing in Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985; pictures online at: [le moustique en elymaïde](http://le.moustique.en.elymaide)). Modified.

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wild animal. The area where this scene is sculpted – made at a later time than AWb α – was probably not large enough, and that is why the two reliefs are slightly overlaid, with the tail of the horse in AWb β touching the last personality on the right in AWb α . The man on horseback has his face represented frontally, with his hair gathered in typical style with a large bunch on each side of his head, and he has a conical headdress. In his right hand he holds a weapon, probably a long sword, with which he pierces an animal represented in profile and on its rear legs, which could possibly be a bear⁴⁴⁵. The horse has a relatively small head compared with its body, and seems to carry a quiver on its right flank behind the horseman

To complete this description, the lower register (AWc⁴⁴⁶) shows a man with a tiara (1.80 m) grasping a lion with his hand at its throat⁴⁴⁷. Above his head is an inscription which says: “*this is the image of [...] assuming the throne (or taking the stool)*”⁴⁴⁸. The name has been erased⁴⁴⁹.

*Block III*⁴⁵⁰. This block is about 30 m northeast of Block II. At one time, the right side of the sculpture became detached and fell in front of the block, remaining unknown. The panel is 2.20 m high and the amount remaining shows an equestrian combat⁴⁵¹ involving three small figures and a horseman (Fig. 6.9). This man and his horse – both protected by armour – are directed to the right. His head and chest are represented

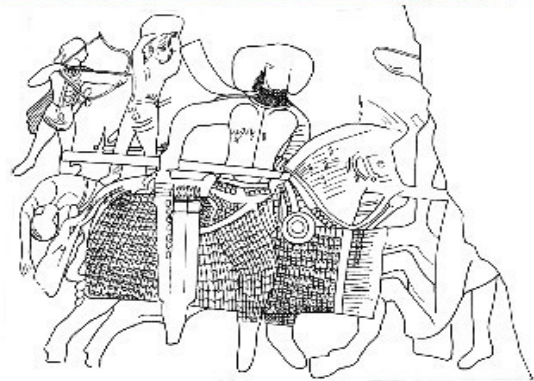


Figure 6.9 – Tang-e Sarvak. Block III, relief D (drawing in Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, picture online at: [le moustique en elymaide](http://le.moustique.en.elymaide)).

445 Henning (1952, 158) interprets the animal as a lion while Vanden Berghe and Schippmann (1985, 78) and Mathiesen (1992, 2, 136) speak of a bear hunt.

446 Henning 1952.

447 Stein 1940, 108; Henning 1952, 158; De Waele 1974, 260; Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 79; Kawami 1987, cat. no. 35; Mathiesen 1992, 2, 138-139.

448 Mathiesen 1992, 2, 138; see the transcript in Henning (1952, 170).

449 Henning (1952, 158, 173) declares that the gap in the inscription is too large for the name *Orodes* but *Abar-basi* would fill it to perfection. Mathiesen is perplexed by this affirmation (Mathiesen 1992, 2, 148, footnote 79).

450 Monument D of Henning (1952). Regarding divergence on such identification between Vanden Berghe and Schippmann and Mathiesen, see footnote 392.

451 Stein 1940, 110; Henning 1952, 161; De Waele 1974, 260; Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 79; Kawami 1987, cat. no. 41; Mathiesen 1992, 2, 132-133.

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frontally, and his long legs shown in profile are covered with the same elegant sheet metal armour protecting the horse. His right hand holds a long spear with which he seems to impale an enemy on the right of the relief, while behind him – on the right side of the horse – there are a bow case and a quiver. On the left side of the relief, above the hindquarters of the horse, there are three men represented in smaller scale, with heads and legs shown in profile. The man on the left has a cape and he is bending his bow towards the right, while a sword hangs at his left side. On his right there is another personality holding both arms above his head, perhaps holding a stone or a similar object. The spear of the horseman passes in front of his legs. A third figure lying beneath the others, with his head and arms seeming to hang lifelessly, could be a cadaver.

This relief is certainly the most complex and sophisticated work at Tang-e Sarvak, and perhaps in all of Parthian Iran⁴⁵². This estimation takes into account not only its details of technique and style⁴⁵³ but also its rather unusual composition. Unfortunately the loss – from natural events or from deliberate action⁴⁵⁴ – of the right side does not allow a complete understanding.



Figure 6.10 – Tang-e Sarvak. Block IV, relief CN (drawing in Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, picture online at: [le moustique en elymaïde](#)).

*Block IV*⁴⁵⁵. This block is about 410 m from Block III and is decorated on two sides. The northern face (CN⁴⁵⁶) includes two male figures (1.72 m and 1.80 m) standing frontally and wearing belted tunics and loose-fitting trousers⁴⁵⁷ (Fig. 6.10). They each have their right arms bent to the chest. The two figures are located at ground level and were carved fairly deeply in the rock in an approximately rectangular niche. Interpretation is uncertain; Henning⁴⁵⁸ considers the figures as

452 Kawami 1987, 108.

453 Mathiesen (1992, 2, 132) emphasises how “*the style of D is unique*”.

454 The rock reliefs of Tang-e Sarvak, like many others, have been severely damaged and not only by natural causes. They have suffered over the centuries from the destructive actions of mankind. Even nowadays the reliefs are occasionally stoned by nomads passing by, in a sign of their superstitious beliefs about evil spirits (Mehr Kian 2000, 62). Small stones thrown at the reliefs can often be found in front of the sculptures.

455 Monument C of Henning (1952).

456 Henning 1952.

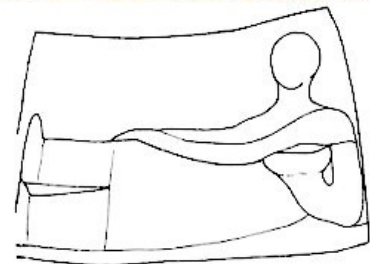
457 Stein 1940, 104; Henning 1952, 160; De Waele 1974, 271; Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 82; Kawami 1987, cat. no. 36; Mathiesen 1992, 2, 140.

458 Henning 1952, 160.

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guardians but they could also be priests⁴⁵⁹. Colledge⁴⁶⁰ suggests a dating between the 1st and 2nd centuries AD.

The east face (CE⁴⁶¹) instead has a male figure⁴⁶² lying presumably on a kline⁴⁶³ (Fig. 6.11). The relief is severely damaged and its interpretation remains uncertain. It could be associated with a religious ceremony or – according to Mathiesen – it could represent part of a funeral banquet, given that Tang-e Sarvak seems to have also been a burial place for Elymaean sovereigns⁴⁶⁴



6.2.3. Pottery and Associated Goods

No significant finds have been made around the reliefs at Tang-e Sarvak and this is above all because these areas have not been excavated, even though the importance of the site is recognised. There has been no research, or assembly and study of pottery fragments or other items here. There has not even been any attempt to make a stratigraphic probe into the surface layers around the reliefs. All we have are vague indications of some building structures – mostly reduced to ground level – at Khoda Tsharan⁴⁶⁵ and reported by J. P. Guepin⁴⁶⁶. Through personal research, I believe that these structures could be identified with the Emamzadeh Mama Zeynab⁴⁶⁷ in that there seem evidently⁴⁶⁸ to be both “*the walls [...] of dry-stone masonry*” and perhaps also “*the tumulus situated close to the hills*” of which Guepin⁴⁶⁹ speaks. It remains inexplicable that no study has

Figure 6.11 – Tang-e Sarvak. Block IV, relief CE (drawing in Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, picture online at: [le moustique en elymaïde](#)).

459 Mathiesen 1992, 2, 140.

460 Colledge 1977, 92.

461 Henning 1952.

462 Henning 1952, 161; De Waele 1974, 261; Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 84; Kawami 1987, cat. no. 37; Mathiesen 1992, 2, 141.

463 It is somewhat similar to the rock relief at Masjed-e Soleyman, which was discussed briefly in section 5.3.4. See also footnote 330.

464 Mathiesen 1992, 2, 141.

465 This is near the village of Māmā Zeynab – called Zainab by Guepin (1965-1966, 25) – some 5-6 km northeast of Tang-e Sarvak in the Bakhtiari Mountains.

466 Guepin 1965-1966, 25-26; Potts 1993, 352.

467 Location: latitude: 31°1'0.88", longitude: 50°10'40.08".

468 From the use of satellite images displayed on Google Earth and Google Maps.

469 Guepin 1965-1966, 26.

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been made in the area. At this moment we can only add our voices to the request made by Guepin in 1966 for “further exploration [...] in particular a formal survey of the site is very desirable”⁴⁷⁰.

6.2.4. Past Interpretations

The site of Tang-e Sarvak was first discovered when Baron C. A. de Bode – First Secretary of the Russian embassy in Tehran – passed through Behbahan on his tour across Fars and Khuzestan in January 1841. He followed a suggestion of the *de facto* local governor Mirza Kúmo, who drew his attention to the existence of rocks sculpted with inscriptions in a mountain gorge a few dozen kilometres north of Behbahan. Being immediately aware that no news of these antiquities had so far reached the Western World⁴⁷¹, de Bode visited the beautiful and desolate valley on 29 January, spelling its name *Tengi-Saúlek*, describing its reliefs, making sketches of some of them, and copying inscriptions – all of this in the course of an afternoon – and he published his findings in a book⁴⁷². De Bode soon realised that the location was exceptional, and he considered it to be sacred⁴⁷³. The report from De Bode attracted some attention and Tang-e Sarvak was then visited on several occasions in 1853 by Eḥtešām-al-Dawla⁴⁷⁴, who published drawings of the carvings and the inscriptions⁴⁷⁵. The reliefs were also mentioned briefly in handbooks, such as by Friedrich Spiegel in his *Eranische Altertumskunde*⁴⁷⁶, or by Ferdinand Justi in a note in the *Grundriss der Iranischen Philologie* – who accepted a superficial hypothesis of De Bode⁴⁷⁷ – and affirmed that *Tenk-i Saulek*⁴⁷⁸ was without shadow of doubt the city of Seleucia/Soloe mentioned by Strabo⁴⁷⁹. This hypothesis was soon refuted by Henning⁴⁸⁰. In 1892-1893 Foršāt-al-Dawla⁴⁸¹ wrote a brief note on the rock reliefs, confirming the presence of

470 Guepin, 1965-1966, 26.

471 De Bode 1845, 363-364.

472 De Bode 1845, *Travels in Luristan and Arabistan*. Baron de Bode also brings to our attention the existence of a possible route from Tang-e Sarvak to Esfahan, showed to him by one of his guides (de Bode 1845, 364). Such information is most interesting and would be connected with discussion regarding Elymaean control of commercial routes passing through the Zagros Mountains, which seems to have been the basis for its wealth and power. See section 4.2.

473 De Bode 1845, 360-361.

474 His full name is *Eḥtešām-al-Dawla Solṭān Oways Mīrzā* (1839-92). He was governor of Kohgīlūya and Behbahan in 1865.

475 Eḥtešām-al-Dawla (1895), *Fars-nameh-yi Nasiri*, 263.

476 Spiegel 1878, III, 820. The name of the site is written incorrectly as *Teng-i Salek*.

477 De Bode 1845, 365, footnote.

478 Justi 1896-1904, II, 486, footnote 5.

479 XVI.1.18.

480 Henning 1952, 176-177.

481 Mīrzā Moḥammad-Našīr (or Našīr-al-Dīn) Ḥosaynī Šīrāzī better known by his pen name Foršāt-al-Dawla (1854-1920) was a poet, scholar, and artist. He was among the first Persian scholars of modern times to take a serious interest in the language and history of ancient Persia. In this field his most well-known work is *Ātār-e*

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“remains of ancient buildings on its top”⁴⁸², and in 1917 Hassan Husaini Fasayi made his preliminary drawings of the site⁴⁸³. Even if the reliefs obviously belong to the Parthian era – indeed, they constitute the principal series – it is strange that such a well informed scholar as Herzfeld would write: “...there are no other Arsacid sculptures [than those at Mount Bisutun] of any importance known in Iran”⁴⁸⁴. The first photographs were published by Sir Aurel Stein in 1936, taken during a journey that he made – despite unfavourable weather conditions – from Lindeh to Tang-e Sarvak, where he stayed from 7 to 9 January, 1936⁴⁸⁵. Stein limited his assessment to interpreting the site as a seasonal retreat for Elymaean sovereigns⁴⁸⁶.

Stein’s publications raised interest across the scientific world. In 1950, W. B. Henning went to Tang-e Sarvak with M. Rostami – a photographer at the Irân Bâstân Museum in Tehran – who was able to take better images than previously available, which Henning published in his study called *The Monuments and Inscriptions at Tang-i Sarvak* in 1952, interpreting the site as a sacred place where the kings of Elymais were crowned in the 2nd century AD: for him, it was a religious sanctuary dedicated to Bel or Nanaia⁴⁸⁷. He based this interpretation on analysis of inscription 1⁴⁸⁸ of Monument A, which carries the name of *Bel-dusha*, and in Henning’s opinion this indicated the name of a priest officiating in the worship of Bel⁴⁸⁹.

In the 1960s and 1970s there was renewed interest in the site, which was visited by Louis Vanden Berghe (1962) and by Bivar and Guepin (1962), with this latter scholar seeking to identify the ruins of Khoda Tsharan near Tang-e Sarvak as the temple *Ta Azara*⁴⁹⁰ of which Strabo spoke⁴⁹¹. Then came also Eric De Waele (1972 and 1973), and Louis Vanden Berghe, Ernie Haerinck, and Erik Smekens (1975). Hubertus von Gall went to the site on several occasions (1970, 1979, 1996, and 1999). In 1985, Vanden Berghe and Schippmann published a book together, *Les reliefs rupestres d'Elymide (Iran) de l'époque parthe* in which they offered a total revision of the reliefs but did not confront the problem of the inscriptions. Two years later, Trudy Kawami published the book, *Monumental Art of the Parthian period in Iran*, in which she

⁴⁸² ‘*ajam*, a collection of more than fifty drawings of various historical sites of Persia, especially Fars (1935).

⁴⁸² Forṣat-al-Dawla (1892-1893), *Ātār-e ‘ajam*, 411.

⁴⁸³ Forsat-od-Dowleh 1934.

⁴⁸⁴ Herzfeld 1935, 57. In the same way Erdmann, K. (1943), *Die Kunst Irans zur Zeit der Sasaniden*, 46.

⁴⁸⁵ Stein 1940, 103-113.

⁴⁸⁶ Stein 1940, 113.

⁴⁸⁷ Henning 1952, 176.

⁴⁸⁸ Footnote 426.

⁴⁸⁹ Henning 1952, 173.

⁴⁹⁰ Guepin 1966, 25.

⁴⁹¹ XVI.1.18.

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seemed to ignore the book of Vanden Berghe and Schippmann. She hypothesised that the spectacular mountainous conformation of Tang-e Sarvak would have been ideal as a place for Zoroastrian worship⁴⁹², and she surmised that there could have been a later change in the nature of the sanctuary, so that in the 3rd century AD it could have become a shrine of kingship in Elymais⁴⁹³. In 1986 Mathiesen published an article on Tang-e Sarvak, incorporating it into his broader *Sculpture in the Parthian Empire* in which he considered the valley of Tang-e Sarvak to be sacred, hypothesising the possibility that here there could have been coronations and burials of Elymaean kings⁴⁹⁴.

As seen in the course of writing this section, many of the interpretative problems regarding the reliefs at Tang-e Sarvak come from the lack of detail caused by the heavy erosion suffered by these reliefs – and as we shall see, they are not the only problems. That is why, therefore, to provide a better interpretative analysis, new data must be acquired and not only with traditional methods, but also with the most advanced systems of exploration such as GPS surveying and laser scanning. This technology allows detailed examination of worked surfaces and very precise impartial measurements of the depth of sculpting in different parts of represented scenes. At the same time, it is also possible to monitor erosion in exposed surfaces⁴⁹⁵. This new technology – used by the Iranian-Italian Joint Expedition in Khuzestan – is producing excellent results on the reliefs at Izeh-Malamir.

6.2.5. Dating

Dating of the reliefs at Tang-e Sarvak is based on the inscriptions found there and remains uncertain; in general though, the reliefs are placed between the 1st and 3rd centuries AD⁴⁹⁶.

According to Neilson C. Debevoise, it would seem obvious from the position of the reliefs

492 Kawami 1987, 90.

493 Kawami 1987, 105.

494 Mathiesen 1992, 2, 131

495 This latter technology, with graphic acquisition and representation of three-dimensional objects of various sizes, produces information of a notably complex nature, that is, three-dimensional digital models which are most accurate representations and which include objective measurements of real objects. The digital geometric description of an object is particularly detailed, and the scanner is even able to reveal the photographic mapping of the object under scrutiny. In a few words, these systems unveil previously hidden details.

496 Henning 1952, 151-178; Altheim and Stiehl 1952, 96-97; Ghirshman 1962, 54; 1976, 194, 242; Schlumberger 1970, 155; De Waele 1974, 75-78; Colledge 1977, 90, 92; Herrmann 1977, 82; Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 86; Kawami, 88-89; Mathiesen 1992 (see table 4).

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on Block II that they were sculpted at different times. The scholar suggests a chronological sequence starting with AWb α as the oldest and dated to the 1st century BC, continuing until the final point at ANW towards the end of the Parthian period and the beginning of the Sasanid era. He hypothesises a dating of BS in the 3rd century AD⁴⁹⁷.

Henning also supposes that Block II would have been associated with two successive sovereigns, Abar-basi and Orodes, dating the monuments dedicated to the first king (AWa; AWb β)⁴⁹⁸ to c. 150 AD and those of Orodes (ANW, ANa, ANb, BS, BW, BN)⁴⁹⁹ to c. 165-170 AD⁵⁰⁰.

Colledge instead follows the chronology suggested by Debevoise, considering the first relief to be AWb α , followed by AWA, AWb β , AWc and AWN. His analysis of ANa and ANb suggests a dating based on stylistic criteria of c. 150-225 AD, together with Block III-IV, while for Block I he suggests a dating of the 2nd century BC⁵⁰¹.

Only recently, in the last 20 years, has there been a comprehensive analysis which places the Elymaean reliefs in a broader context of Parthian and Syrian-Mesopotamian art from the last centuries BC and the first centuries AD. Mathiesen for example – as mentioned in preceding sections – has divided the reliefs at Tang-e Sarvak according to their style into four groups which would presumably represent four successive phases in Parthian sculpture.

<i>Late Parthian Ia</i> (c. 150-190 AD)	Group 1 (c. 170-190 AD)	CN, ANb, CE, BW, AWb α , AWA, BS' left side.
<i>Late Parthian Ib</i> (c- 190-200 AD)	Group 2 (c. 190-200 AD)	BS' right side, BN, AWc.
<i>Late Parthian II</i> (c. 200-225 AD)	Group 3 (c. 200-220 AD)	ANa, ANW, AWb β .
	Group 4 (late 220 AD)	D.

Table 4 – Mathiesen's chronology and division of the reliefs at Tang-e Sarvak.

497 Debevoise 1942, 90, 97, 100.

498 Henning 1952, 173.

499 Henning 1952, 175.

500 Henning also provides alternative dates, such as the possibility of considering Orodes as the last king of Elymais (200 AD), thus dating Abar-basi to 180 AD (Henning 1952, 178, footnote 2).

501 Colledge 1977, 90, 92.

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It must be noted that such a division is not considered as indicating absolute contemporaneity of works included in each group.

Even Kawami⁵⁰² has placed the reliefs in four groups, but she suggests some differences with respect to the groups drawn up by Mathiesen. Her first group is dated to the 1st century BC and later, the second between the 1st-2nd centuries AD, the third to the 2nd century AD and finally the fourth to the beginning of the 3rd century AD. However, it should be emphasised that Kawami's basis for constructing this distribution of the reliefs is not as firmly grounded as that chosen by Mathiesen⁵⁰³.

In the absence of inscriptions referring to specific personalities, the identification of particular Elymaean kings bristles with perils, and therefore the same applies to the dating of the various reliefs at Tang-e Sarvak. There continues to be much disagreement among experts when they confront these problematic issues.

6.3. New Discoveries

After almost half a century of inactivity, finally, systematic research has been undertaken again thanks to a five-year accord (*Memorandum of Understanding*) signed in 2008 by the *Iranian Center for Archaeological Research* (ICAR) of the *Research Organization of Iranian Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization* (ROCHHTO) and the *Centro Ricerche Archeologiche e Scavi di Torino per il Medio Oriente e l'Asia* (CST), and this research is producing wonderful results. I do not refer only to the study and acquisition of fresh information at rock reliefs at Izeh-Malamir through the use of new and more powerful technology such as laser scanning⁵⁰⁴. In fact, as recently as the end of 2013⁵⁰⁵ a discovery was made by the joint Italian-Iranian mission led by the collaboration of Vito Messina and Jafar Mehr Khian in Khuzestan, of a structure “*entirely built from rectangular bricks*”— interpreted by a member of the

502 Kawami 1987, 88-89.

503 Mathiesen 1992, 2, 145-146, Haerinck 2003, 221.

504 This new type of analysis involved the sculpted surface of the boulder being divided into a grid on which many markers were placed, to allow the scanner to recognise its position in a 3D model. For example, the surface of the Hung-e Azhdar relief was divided into 34 squared sectors and around 15,000 markers were placed on the surface. The scanner itself never touched the surface of the rock, so the process was not destructive.

505 To be precise, the news appeared in newspapers and on internet sites from 10 November 2013, as the announcement was made on Saturday 9 November.

6. Elymaean Rock Reliefs: The Sacred Area of Tang-e Sarvak

team as “*an altar or a small platform for worship*” – placed on a broad platform made of “*large stones without mortar*”⁵⁰⁶ at the site of Kaleh Chendar⁵⁰⁷. After a preliminary inspection of this site in 2012, a comprehensive excavation season followed in 2013 and the mission was able to dig six trenches in two weeks. The discoveries included the above-mentioned structure found in trench 3 currently interpreted as a temple, and in trench 6 an ancient tomb was found – perhaps used by a family over as much as 100 years – which “*represents a style of burial*” consisting of “*a small rectangular room with a stone structure*”⁵⁰⁸.

The materials brought to light and analyses of them are the subject of continuing study. As we wait for more results to be officially published, I believe it is right to emphasise how important this international co-operation has been, as it represents an important step forward, made with the aim of opening up new and increasingly interesting prospects for understanding the still unexplored Elymaean world.

506 Interview with J. Mehr Khian, which can be found online at: tehrantimes.com.

507 It is surely of great interest and importance that the discovery was made near the village of Shami.

508 See footnote 506.

7. Elymaean Religious Architecture and Rock Reliefs in Historical Context

7.1. Introduction

Research and analysis of Elymaean discoveries in this thesis have indicated that the architectural and artistic traditions of Elymais were culturally unique in the ancient Near East. Its people did not limit themselves to passively following the guidelines of more extended and established traditions in the region, but gave new life to an independent and thriving style which was subject to developments and changes and able to satisfy local needs. The corpus is quite surprising as it used elements from geographical areas usually considered as separate, such as the Syro-Mesopotamian, Iranian or Elamite regions, uniting them in an original way.

The final section (7.3) will place the Elymaean tradition within an Elamite cultural frame, and seek to demonstrate how Elymaean religious culture may be connected with Zoroastrianism only with some difficulty. A careful consideration will follow and aim to analyse if the important Elymaean religious sites discussed earlier are indeed an inherited tradition from Elamite ancestors, or if they may be Iranian-Zoroastrian places of worship, as suggested by some scholars⁵⁰⁹

7.2. Elymaean Religious Architecture and Rock Reliefs in Iranian, Syro-Mesopotamian and Elamite interactions

With the goal of understanding the connections of these important cultural poles in relation to the development of the realm of Elymais, it would be of fundamental importance to have a vision of the complex exchange system mechanisms in Iran. This relied, above all, on the alternating orientation of Susiana, situated at the junction of the antithetic worlds of the Iranian plateau and Mesopotamian plain. It is peculiar that even though the plain of Susa was a major centre for over four millennia it has been long considered by many Near East scholars to be an area of marginal importance. In reality, throughout history it has played a very important role in the life of the great Iranian empires, as both an administrative centre and an agricultural

509 *In primis* Ghirshman 1976.

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province⁵¹⁰. Principally though, Susiana was important because of its geographic position, having its northern and northeastern borders at the foothills of the Zagros Mountains, and its southern border at the head of the Persian Gulf. For most of its history it was a theatre of conflicts, not just between rival states in Mesopotamia and on the Iranian plateau (e.g. Elam), but also between the states and nomadic tribes of the Zagros. However, at the same time, Susiana had a decisive role as a centre of interaction and as a meeting place for all these cultures and populations. As a result, the situation would have created the uniqueness of the local culture of Elymais – which in alternating phases had Susiana under its dominion⁵¹¹ – of being capable of moving freely from Mesopotamian planimetric layouts to Elamite and Achaemenid stylistic influences⁵¹², and finally to Parthian statuary.

The plain around the city of Susa – the western part of the ancient realm of Elam – has always been considered as an eastern appendix of the Mesopotamian plain and as such was considerably influenced by this latter region in a “pendulum pattern”, where occasionally Mesopotamian influence was notable and every so often it was totally refused, thus leading to conflicts of varying intensity. As a consequence, the fact that the sanctuaries analysed in this work⁵¹³ are to be found in the mountainous area of Elymais with Susiana on its eastern border – tied to the fact that the tradition of Mesopotamian religious architecture thrived during the Seleucid and Parthian eras – suggests the presence of a local tradition with evident Mesopotamian influences in Elymais⁵¹⁴. Temples based on Mesopotamian precepts continued to be built during Seleucid-Parthian times and in Iran the only evidence of this currently comes from the sanctuaries of Masjed-e Soleyman and Bard-e Neshandeh. These two, furthermore, have the particularity of being on broad platforms built of rough stone, a feature which recalls the monumental

510 “Under the two great pre-Islamic Iranian empires, that of the Achaemenids and that of the Sāsānids, *Khūzistān* was firmly under the control of the central government. To the Achaemenids, it was the province of *Uvaja*, and Susa was the administrative capital of the empire; for the Sāsānids, it formed part of the “super-province” (*pādghōs*) of *Nēm-rōz* (the South), and was divided into seven *kūras*” (Savory 1979, 80-81).

511 See Chapter 4.

512 There was an important and productive combination at the end of the 7th century BC of the Elamite and Assyrian traditions which led to a “revitalisation” of the Elamite traditions themselves (Alvarez-Mon 2012, 756), contradicting the vision of those who saw these in dramatic decline. Furthermore during the Achaemenid reign, elements of Greek and Iranian art were mixed together to create a complex blend which characterised the artistic tradition of Iran at the time of the rise to power of the Arsacids. The conquest by Alexander the Great furthermore brought “a fresh wave of Greek art and [...] Hellenistic style” (Kawami 1987, 31). Both these traditions – Elamite-Assyrian and Achaemenid – can be noted at times in Elymaean art.

513 See Chapter 5.

514 Downey 1988, 76.

7. Elymaean Religious Architecture and Rock Reliefs in Historical Context

Achaemenid architecture of Pasargadae and Persepolis⁵¹⁵ in a context that is therefore specifically Iranian⁵¹⁶, but with construction methods that for some scholars are reminiscent of the Urartian tradition⁵¹⁷. Others academics believe instead that similar terraces reflect nomadic culture – perhaps Iranian – of worship in open air precincts and closed temples⁵¹⁸. If such temples, as it seems, were founded on Mesopotamian layouts, then the cultural mix appears complete, confirming the eccentric position of Elymais with respect to the Iranian plateau.

With regards to Masjed-e Soleyman, the Great Temple has a rather unusual plan even if it does appear to have a link with the religious architecture of Babylonia. The nucleus of the construction follows a Mesopotamian bent-axis scheme with an antecella-cella unit of the same width behind a court. The particular nature of this scheme is that the nucleus is enclosed by a circumambulatory⁵¹⁹ corridor, a characteristic not attributed to Mesopotamian times and possibly based on Iranian traditions.

The base layout of the Elymaean temple is comparable with those in the temples of Anu-Antum, within the vast complex of Bit Rēš, and Irigal at Uruk. However, while within these Mesopotamian sanctuaries there is only one doorway opening into the antecella and then the cella, at the Great Temple there are two. Furthermore, there are no niches in the cella at Masjed-e Soleyman, but two altars are placed against the furthest wall of the cella and aligned with the doorways. Between the nucleus of the sanctuary and the external wall there is also a corridor which isolates the central zone from the outside. At Masjed-e Soleyman this corridor runs uninterrupted around all sides of the central block, while at Irigal and Anu-Antum there are differences. The temples at Uruk in fact have a corridor on only two sides of the central sanctuary area, with courts on the other two sides.

The Irigal and Bit Rēš temples were much more elaborate than the Great Temple at

515 This theory was rejected by Schippmann (1971, 248), who regards the Elymaean terraces as poor copies of the original Achaemenid constructions.

516 It is interesting to note in this context the article by W. Kleiss in 1998, *Terrassenanlagen in der iranischen Architektur*. Here the topic of the structure of the terraces in the Iranian environment is analysed in much detail, with particular emphasis given to the sacred terraces in Elymais (Kleiss 1998, 243-252).

517 Ghirshman 1950, 215; Stronach 1974, 246. See also footnotes 357 and 358. As a personal reflection, I want to emphasise that in most cases such presumed cultural influences or associations are created more by the history of study than by real historical phenomena. So then, instead of an “Urartian tradition” it would be more consistent to speak of “construction techniques documented in Urartu” where stone – as in Elymais – was an easily found building material; this was the opposite of what occurred, for example, in Mesopotamia, and so could have favoured construction techniques which have been revealed as quite similar.

518 Shenkar 2007, 178.

519 Ghirshman (1976, 189) – as emphasised in Section 5.3.3 – underlines how such a corridor would have been used for circumambulation, differing from the corridors in the temples of Uruk.

7. *Elymaean Religious Architecture and Rock Reliefs in Historical Context*

Masjed-e Soleyman, having many additional subsidiary rooms around the various courts. Then, the principal entrance at Irigal was apparently perpendicular to the entrances to the cells – as was the case at Masjed-e Soleyman – even if at both Irigal and Bit Rēš the entrance of the principal court was on an axis with the doorway of the chief cella.

The small temple of Hercules, instead, could be seen as a simplified version of the Great Temple. The antecella-cella block is quite similar, also having a typically Mesopotamian elongated rectangular form, even if in this case there is no court.

The temples of Masjed-e Soleyman do not simply repeat the planimetry of the Babylonian sanctuaries but they make modifications, probably in response to the needs of local Elymaean cults. Additionally, in the portico of the Great Temple there is an identifiable Western touch, that in contrast is not present in the temples of Uruk, Dura-Europos and Aï Khanoum. Ghirshman considers the layout of the sanctuaries at Masjed-e Soleyman – made up of an antecella and cella of the same length – to be similar to those in Dura-Europos and Aï Khanoum, thus emphasising how the temples of Elymais filled the architectural gap between Mesopotamia and Central Asia. Paul Bernard⁵²⁰ – basing this argument on the excavations at Masjed-e Soleyman – believes that Seleucid Iran served as a transfer point between Mesopotamia and Bactria⁵²¹.

If the temples at Masjed-e Soleyman seem evidently similar to Mesopotamian religious structures, the same cannot be said for the tetrastyle temple at Bard-e Neshandeh, whose function is still debated.

For some scholars⁵²² in fact, the plan of this temple is not based on Mesopotamian layouts but instead on a plan developed probably in Iran⁵²³. This conclusion came about through the interpretation of room 5 in the tetrastyle temple, which was considered to be a cella with a square plan, having its roof supported by four columns placed in the centre, and flanked by three elongated rooms (1, 2, 3) considered to be of secondary importance. The American scholar Susan

520 Bernard 1976, 266-270.

521 To confirm such a supposition, it would first be necessary to accept the certainty of Ghirshman's hypotheses, which date the first phase of the temple of Hercules and the Great Temple to the Seleucid period, and which consider the almost unknown first phase of this latter temple to be planimetrically similar to the more visible phase of the Parthian era (Sections 5.3.2 and 5.3.3). Uncertainty about the theories of Ghirshman suggests that caution needs to be taken when considering these data (Section 5.3.5 and 5.3.6).

522 Ghirshman 1976; Downey 1988, 134-136.

523 Downey 1988, 136.

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B. Downey⁵²⁴ considers this type of room to be very common, from Iran and central Asia to the region of Hauran⁵²⁵, and compares it – not always in a pertinent way – with a series of other religious complexes (Fig. 7.1) from Ayadana⁵²⁶ in Susa through to the temple of Baalshamin at Sî⁵²⁷ (Hauran), taking into account central Asian temples such as Bactrian examples at Surkh Kotal (north Afghanistan) and at Takht-i Sangin (Tajikistan), a Buddhist one at Mohra Maliran (Pakistan), or the Parthian temple at Mansur-Depe (Turkmenistan), and further, the Zoroastrian temples at Penjikent in Sogdiana (Tajikistan) and Kuh-i Khwaja in Seistan⁵²⁸. A further comparison, even if it is somewhat strained, is with the so-called temple of Fratarakas⁵²⁹ at Persepolis, excavated by E. Herzfeld in the 1930s. If it is indeed true that here there is also a square room (room 5) with four column bases flanked on three sides by narrow elongated spaces⁵³⁰ not linked to each other, the temple at Persepolis differs from the Elymaean temple by having a podium which could have supported a statue. Despite this, the planimetry is different, as noted also by Downey, above all because at Persepolis, and not at Bard-e Neshandeh, between the portico and the square room there opens one of three elongated spaces, and it could have functioned as an antecella.

524 Here Downey follows what was proposed by Schippmann (1971), who believed that this type of planimetry – having in common a square or slightly rectangular room with a roof supported by four columns, at times identified as a cella and sometimes as a subsidiary element – originated in Iran and was used by numerous religions, including Buddhism in central Asia, with a large number of variations (Schippmann 1971, 480-499).

525 Hauran is the name for a geographic region and a people in an area extending from southwestern Syria into northwestern Jordan. The name comes from Aramaic *Hawran*, “cave land”.

526 In this case, Downey (1988, 135-136) revives a hypothesis of Ghirshman (1976, 197-200), noting though that while the environment of the Ayadana was circled by a corridor which permitted communication, this did not occur at Bard-e Neshandeh. Furthermore, it should not be overlooked that given comparisons with the dwellings at Aï Khanoum, a residential and not religious function could also be hypothesised for the Ayadana in Susa.

527 The site of Sî – Greek *Seeia*, Aramaic *she‘i*, “platform” – is in modern Jabal al-Druze, an elevated volcanic region in southern Syria. See Kropp 2010.

528 *Seistan* or *Sakastan* is a border region of eastern Iran (Sistan and Baluchistan) and southwestern Afghanistan (Nimruz). Sistan was once the homeland of Sakas, a Scythian tribe of Iranian origin.

529 The temple takes its name from a local dynasty, known as the *Fratadāra* (“Keepers of the Fire”, a reading that changed to *Fratarakā*, “Rulers”). This denomination came from an affinity between the image of a person in priestly garments on one of the two jambs brought to light in the complex, with the image on the reverse of some of the coins minted by this dynasty. Both the dating and the function of this temple, NW of the Achaemenid terrace, are strongly debated. In any case, it is important to emphasise that the ruins interpreted by Herzfeld as one complex dedicated to syncretist Iranian-Hellenistic cults of the local dynasty, are in reality two distinct complexes separated by a road. Of these, only the one on the NW, taken as a point of comparison by Downey, can be interpreted as a place of worship (Callieri 2003, 155) even if P. Bernard compares the square plan with four central columns and rooms on three sides at Persepolis, with the plan of the Hellenic houses at Aï Khanoum. The reuse of stone architectural elements coming from the nearby terrace at Persepolis and the presence of a type of column base unknown in the Achaemenid era, probably give a dating to the post-Achaemenid (Callieri 2003, 162).

530 These spaces were considered by the American scholar as corridors (Downey 1988, 134).

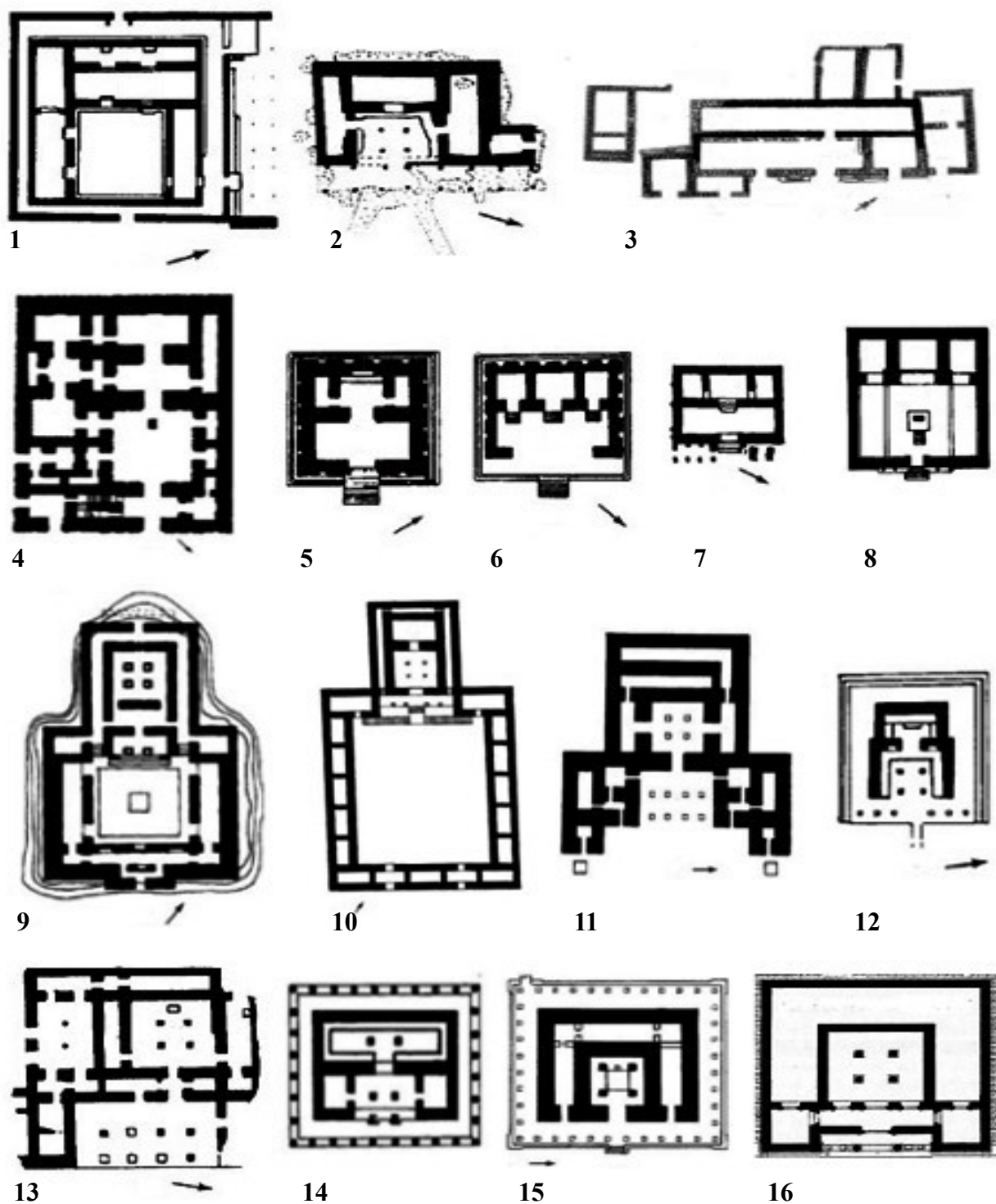


Figure 7.1 – Plans of buildings discussed: (1) Masjed-e Soleyman, Great Temple; (2) Bard-e Neshandeh; (3) Masjed-e Soleyman, Temple of Heracles; (4) Anu-Antum; (5) Ai Khanoum, “Temple with Indented Niche”; (6) Ai Khanoum, “Extramural Temple”, earlier phase; (7) Dura-Europos, Temple of Artemis; (8) Dura Europos, Temple of Zeus Megistos; (9) Susa, Ayadana; (10) Kuhl-i Khwaja; (11) Takht-i Sangin; (12) Pendjikent; (13) Persepolis, “Temple of Fratarakas”; (14) Mohra Maliaran; (15) Surkh Kotal, Temple A; (16) Hauran, “Temple of Balshamin.

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In reality, however, I consider that all of these comparisons – suggested first by Ghirshman and then by Downey – are built, on a basically groundless architectural interpretation of room 5 at Bard-e Neshandeh. This room, in fact, came to be considered as the cella of a fire temple – a kind of *čahār-tāq*⁵³¹ – whose planimetry included a central square room closed on all four sides, with four central columns supporting the roof, and flanked by three elongated side rooms. In effect, after a close analysis of photographic and planimetric documentation, room 5 would not appear to be a cella of a Zoroastrian temple, but in all probability a vestibule opening to the portico of a temple which is similar to Mesopotamian models. This hypothesis can be supported by considering that the NE wall of this room – reconstructed and reported in his plan by Ghirshman (Fig. 7.2) – in all probability did not exist in the first place, thus leaving the way open for a new architectural and religious interpretation of the whole edifice⁵³² (Fig. 7.3). Reconsidered in this way, what was originally regarded as the cella of a Zoroastrian temple would seem to be a vestibule opening to a portico that has the contemporaneous functions of court and antecella, while the three rooms around it could be interpreted not as service rooms but as cellae of a temple, for which the architectural reference is clearly the Mesopotamian world⁵³³ (Fig. 7.4).

On the other hand, as aforementioned, the tradition of forms taken by Mesopotamian temples during the Seleucid and Parthian periods varied according to their regions, and in the case of Elymais demonstrating a certain vitality and strength of local control.

531 See footnote 208.

532 From direct observation of the plan published by Ghirshman (1976, Plan II), it can be noted how the distance between the intercolumniations and between the columns and the side walls is approximately the same on the NW, SW and SE sides, while on the NE such proportionality is certainly less because of the closeness of the columns and the presumed reconstruction of the wall proposed by the Ukrainian-born French archaeologist. Further, observing the limited photographic documentation of the French mission, it can be noted that the lines of stone blocks placed against the walls on the NW and SE sides of the room under consideration extend until the flagstoned threshold of the portico, which is structurally improbable if the existence is assumed of the elevation of the wall on the NE side. Finally, it is important to emphasise that the line of columns against the NE wall of the temple is not made up of eight elements as proposed by Ghirshman, but rather of only six, as the two columns which would have stood against the hypothetical wall of room 5 are in fact clearly absent in the plan and in the photograph. Further, examining the three rectangular rooms (1, 2 and 3) on the east, south and west sides of room 5, considered until now as places of secondary importance, it can be observed how their pavements are elevated more than half a metre above the pavement of the central room, and how each of them has its own entrance reachable by a few steps from the pavement of the square room. As well, if it is considered that these rooms are not open to each other, it does seem possible to attribute a greater importance to them, more than has been given to them up to now, and furthermore, their use during worship seems confirmed by the presence of a socle inside room 3, which could imply the existence of a cult statue in this room (Fig 7.4).

533 See preceding footnote.

7. Elymaean Religious Architecture and Rock Reliefs in Historical Context

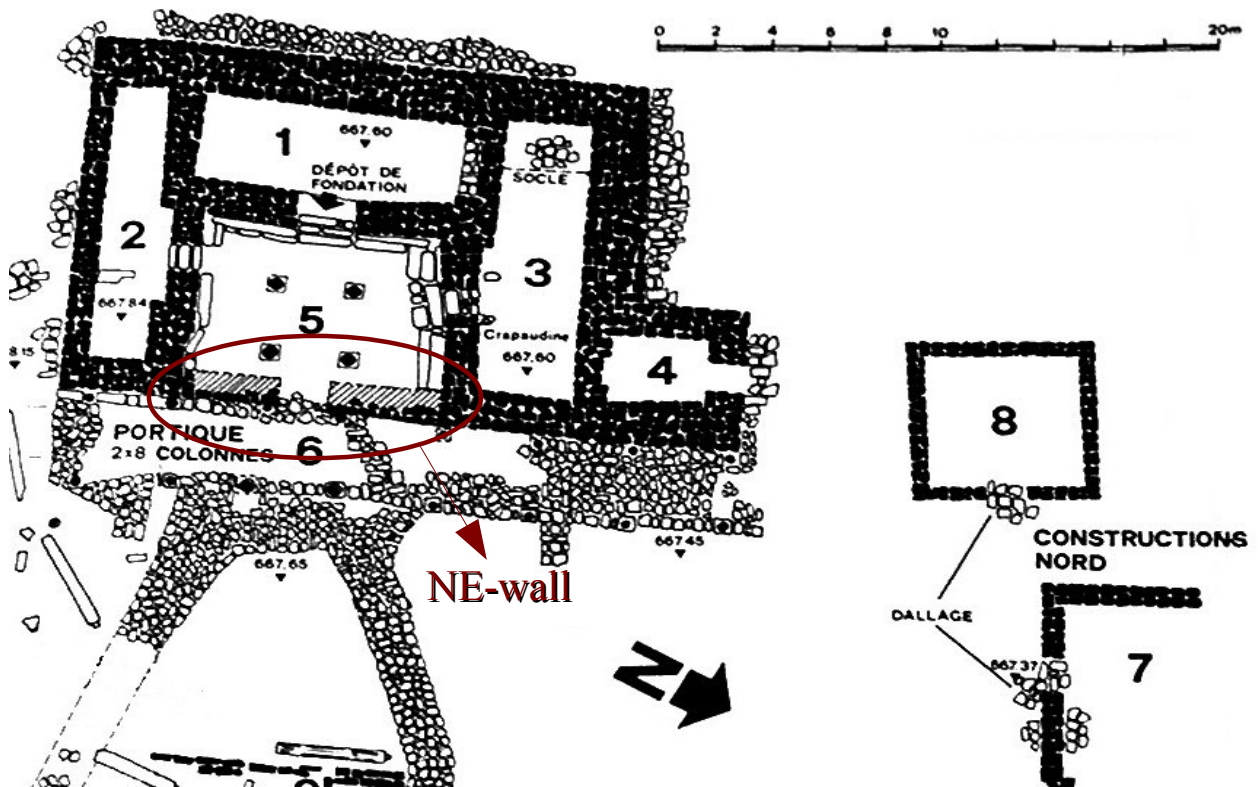


Figure 7.2 – Bard-e Neshandeh. Tetrastyle temple plan (Ghirshman 1976, Pl. II).

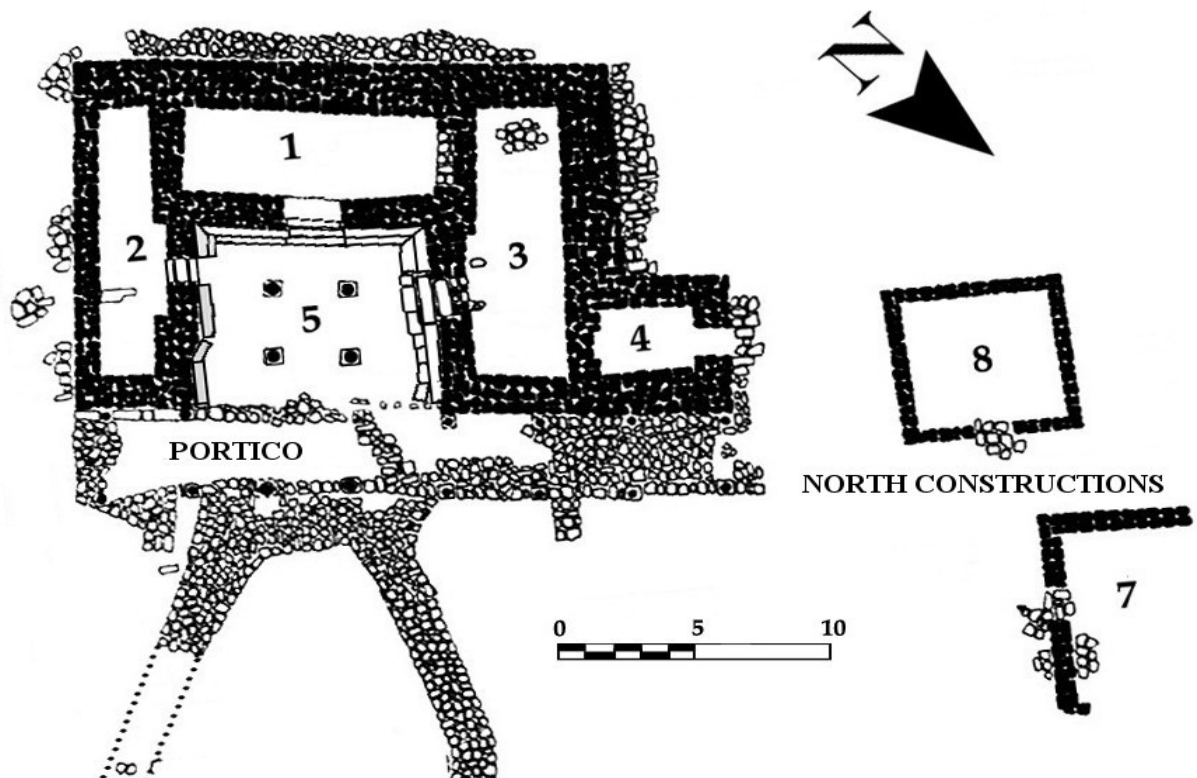


Figure 7.3 – Bard-e Neshandeh. Tetrastyle temple plan's personal reinterpretation without NE-wall.

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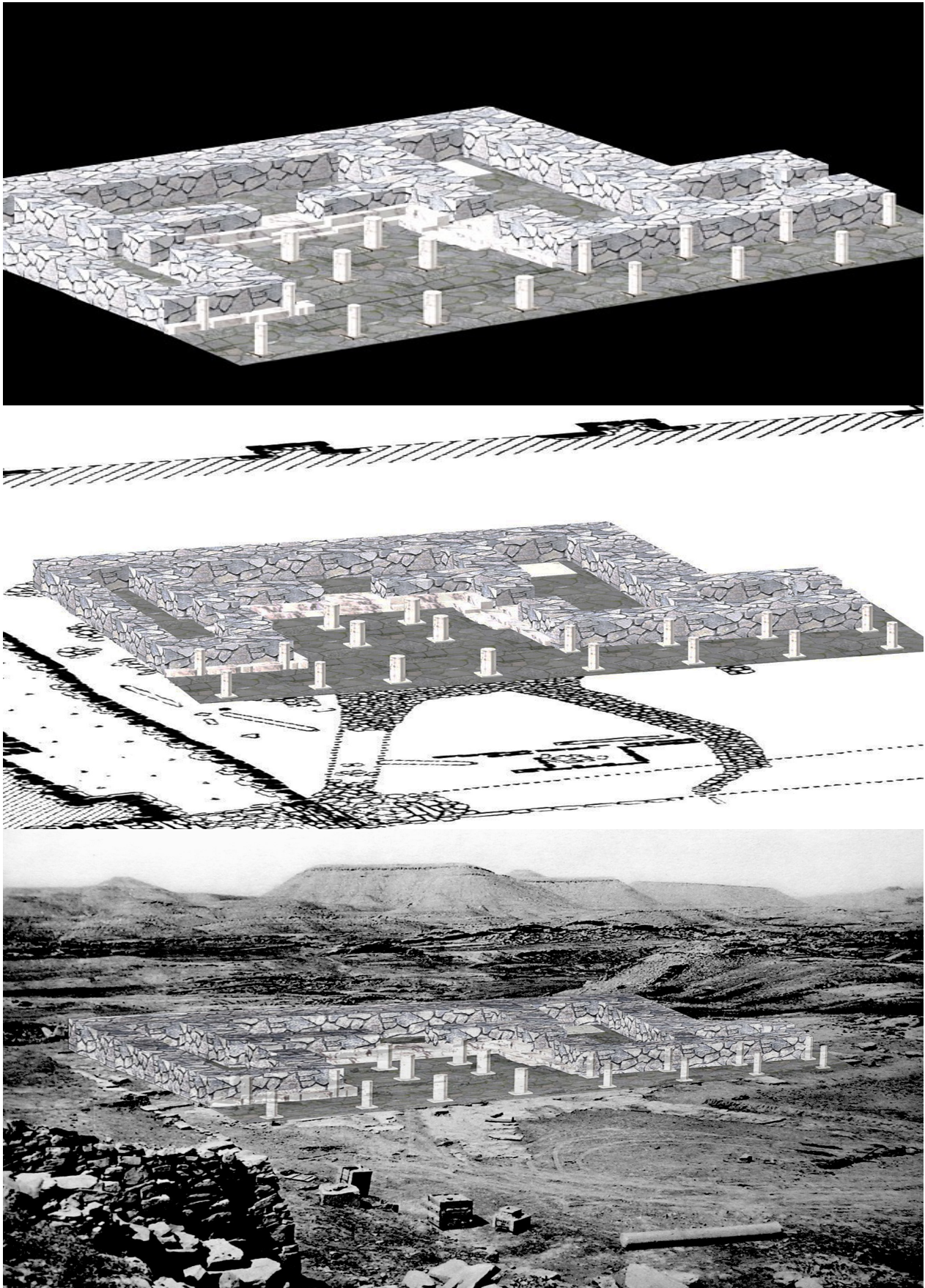


Figure 7.4 – Bard-e Neshandeh. Reconstructed axonometric projection of the tetrastyle temple.

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With regards to rock art, Elymais in general is marked by eclecticism, a bringing together of influences from preceding local traditions with Greek motifs and elements from earlier Near Eastern cultures; a recombination which produced new artistic forms. Normally, Elymaean rock art has been studied and catalogued as Parthian art, but there are strong and clear influences from Elamite, Achaemenid, and Syro-Mesopotamian sources, without forgetting a Western touch given by the Greek elements.

The Elymaeans surely knew about Elamite art, given that some of the most significant reliefs of Elymais, such as those at Izeh-Malamir, are indeed sited in concomitance with Elamite reliefs – for example at Shekaft-e Salman, Kul-e Farah and Shah Savar – while at Hung-e Azhdar one block has an Elamite relief on one side and an Elymaean relief on another⁵³⁴. Even Achaemenid art contains various elements of Elamite art which are becoming more evident as researches continues⁵³⁵, but it would be difficult to establish whether the Elymaeans inherited these forms directly from the Elamites or through the mediation of Achaemenid art.

In their detailed treatment of Elymaean reliefs, Vanden Berghe and Schippmann suggest some elements of Elamite and Achaemenid tradition which took shape in Elymaean art⁵³⁶. Among these was the limiting of iconographic themes, where immobility and monotony of subjects dominated. While Elamite art mostly developed religious themes – such as scenes of adoration or offering – Achaemenid art had more hieratic and official court themes, appropriate for the glorification of kings. In Elymaean rock art there is instead a noticeable heterogeneity, beginning with scenes which are markedly religious such as those at Tang-e Botan⁵³⁷, where the panel represents a sacrifice made in the presence of a deity when taking an oath⁵³⁸, and additionally scenes that are completely secular such as those at Hung-e Azhdar⁵³⁹ where an Elymaean ruler pays homage to a sovereign – presumably Parthian – on horseback. Homage to a foreign sovereign – in this case Achaemenid – by local governors and foreign delegations is well

534 See Appendix 6.

535 Alvarez-Mon 2010.

536 Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 100-106.

537 See Appendix 5.

538 Mathiesen 1992, 2,129.

539 See Appendix 6.

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represented on the steps of the Apadana at Persepolis. Even themes of hunting⁵⁴⁰ and equestrian combat⁵⁴¹ seem to be designs which are closely linked to Achaemenid⁵⁴² and Near East art. The relief of the “Orodes”⁵⁴³ of Tang-e Sarvak instead shows a lay scene, the investiture of a king in the presence of local deities (Fig. 6.6). The reclining figure resting on one elbow – identified as king Orodes⁵⁴⁴ – is quite common in Iran in the Parthian era even if it seems to have been limited to representing Hercules⁵⁴⁵. In all likelihood – especially in Mesopotamia – such a representation was also used for human figures⁵⁴⁶ as seen in the examples of the relief of Vologeses at Hatra⁵⁴⁷, or the sepulchral stele at Dura-Europos⁵⁴⁸ and on Kharg⁵⁴⁹ Island in the Persian Gulf. The representation of reclining figures with legs crossed is an image not indigenous to Iran but its presence in Elymais is not surprising given the influence that Mesopotamia had over the region in culture and art. It could have happened that a classical characteristic of the Greek hero Hercules came into contact in Elymais with the Mesopotamian model attributed to humans living or dead, and would have made this heroic post acceptable for kings⁵⁵⁰. With regards to the two seated figures⁵⁵¹ to the left of Orodes, they can be reasonably identified as deities⁵⁵², specifically assumed to be a sun deity and a war deity. Due to the limited knowledge of religion in Elymais it

540 Relief AWbβ on Block II (Fig. 6.8). Hunting scenes have a long tradition in the Near East and are often associated with royalty, even if non-royal hunters in equestrian scenes appear in Elamite and Achaemenid glyptics as well as in the reliefs at Pasargadae, Persepolis and Susa. Hunting on horseback, however, seems to have had an aura of nobility, and it was the royal sport of Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (Kawami 1987, 105). There are also significant similarities between some Assyrian reliefs of lion hunting and the Elymaean relief AWC, on Block II.

541 Tang-e Sarvak, Block III (Fig. 6.9). Other than the Achaemenid statuary art, armoured warriors on horseback are represented in the Near East in the 7th century BC reliefs of Ashurbanipal (Barnett-Forman 1960, pl. 120) even if a representation of a completely armoured horse and rider with a spear seems to be known only from the 3rd century AD at Dura-Europos (Ghirshman 1962, 51). It cannot be excluded that this heavily armoured equestrian warrior may be identified as a *cataphractarius* of the Persian army.

542 Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 102.

543 NE side of Block II, in Section 6.2.2. For bibliography footnote 423.

544 This name is present in Inscription 1 (Henning 1952, 156) between the reclining figure and the two seated figures on the right. See footnote 426.

545 Images identifiable as representing Hercules are at Masjed-e Soleyman, Behistun (footnote 331) and also at Tang-e Sarvak in CE on Block IV (east side; fig. 6.11).

546 See footnote 330.

547 Mathiesen 1992, 2, cat. no. 212.

548 Mathiesen 1992, 2, cat. no. 193.

549 Mathiesen 1992, 2, cat. no. 91.

550 See also Kawami 1987, 98.

551 Frontal representation of seated personalities is rare in Parthian Iran while it is very common in Mesopotamia and Syria, as in the reliefs at Hatra, Dura-Europos and Palmyra.

552 Vanden Berghe and Schippmann (1985, 72) resolutely refute such a hypothesis because on Inscription 1 (Henning 1952, 156) there is only the name of the king and not of the deities. However, as is rightly emphasised by Mathiesen (1992, 2, 147, footnote 37), deities were probably so well known that it was not necessary to write their names.

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is now nearly impossible to identify the two deities, whose gender is still debated⁵⁵³. Logically speaking it would be possible to identify the figure with a radiant halos⁵⁵⁴ as being a sun god – even if also identification is problematic⁵⁵⁵ – while the second seated figure is usually considered as a war goddess, in particular Athena-Ishtar⁵⁵⁶. The last personality, and no less enigmatic, is the standing figure on the



Figure 7.5 – Male figure with cornucopia. From left to right: Bard-e Neshandeh (Ghirshman 1976, Pl. XXXVII, 2), Masjed-e Soleyman (Ghirshman 1976, Pl. LXXIX, 2) and Tang-e Sarvak (detail, fig. 6.6).

far right of the relief with the right arm raised as if to embrace the sovereign while the left hand holds a cornucopia⁵⁵⁷. This personality seems to recall a bronze figurine found at Bard-e Neshandeh and similar reliefs at Masjed-e Soleyman (Fig. 7.5), interpreted by Hansman as portrayals of the Semitic god Bel, with the cornucopia possibly symbolising the connection of this figure with classical deities such as Zeus or Jupiter and consequently with concepts of creation and abundance⁵⁵⁸.

Hansman offers a similar interpretation of the personality depicted at Tang-e Sarvak (Fig. 7.5), but considering the modest position and physical size it is difficult to classify this figure as the main god of the Elymaean pantheon⁵⁵⁹. It is probable that, it could represent a minor deity,

553 On differing opinions about the gender of the two figures, see Haerinck 2003.

554 The rayed halos, unusual in Parthian Iran, are well known in Mesopotamia and Syria on gods and goddesses, and not exclusive to any one of them in particular. The sign of celestuality is however, normally associated with solar deities.

555 The sun god in Elam was Nahhunte, who had a Mesopotamian counterpart in the Semitic Shamash; in Iranian culture though, the only deity who could probably be syncretised with these two is the sun goddess Mithra (Boyce 1982, 2, 28; Hansman 1985, 236).

556 Hansman 1985, 233. Identified by some scholars as Anahita with the attributes of Athena (Seyrig 1970, 115-116). In reality this hypothesis is tenuous, as it would have been difficult to represent Anahita as an armed goddess, given that in the Iranian religion she was primarily a goddess of fertility and not a goddess of war like Athena or Ishtar.

557 The *cornucopia* is a classical symbol probably borrowed by eastern religions from the Greeks and Romans, and represents abundance and fertility (*cornu* means “horn” and *copia* “abundance”). It is associated not only with Zeus and Hercules, but also with other mythological deities, above all Tyche, the goddess of fortune and prosperity. If the horn was turned upwards, it could symbolise Dionysus and also Demeter, the goddess of earth, agriculture and fertility.

558 Hansman 1985, 243-244. In all cases Ghirshman interprets them not as deities but as princes (Ghirshman 1976, 47).

559 Hansman (1985, 237) believes that this personality can be identified with the Semitic god Bel on the basis of Inscription 1. Here, in fact, appears the name of *Bel-dusha*, which for Henning could indicate the name of a priest officiating at the worship of Bel (Henning 1952, 173). A term derived from the Akkadian *bēlu*, Bel in this

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perhaps Tyche⁵⁶⁰. As a whole, this relief at Tang-e Sarvak seems to be a synthesis of religious and secular images.

In contrast to reports by Vanden Berghe and Schippmann regarding an absence of religious scenes in Elymaean art⁵⁶¹, considerable interest has been raised at Tang-e Sarvak by reliefs BN⁵⁶² (Fig. 6.5) and ANW⁵⁶³ (Fig. 6.8) where there appears to be a baetyl or *bet-El*⁵⁶⁴. This sacred stone is a distinctly non-Iranian element, typical of northern Mesopotamia and above all Syria, “*the homeland of the baetyls*⁵⁶⁵”. Its presence indicates the scene has a religious character and is conducted in the presence of a deity. The diadem circling the baetyl, then, signifies that the deity residing in the *bet-El* – or “house of god” – is the king of the gods or another god who confers royalty⁵⁶⁶. It is difficult to understand who it may be even though Hansman suggests it could be the principal god Bel⁵⁶⁷. Undoubtedly, not all scholars are in agreement in interpreting this element as a baetyl, and when suggesting a hypothesis the conditional tense remains obligatory⁵⁶⁸.

Another sacred place, probably also dedicated to Bel, and having a pronounced religious character is in Tang-e Botan⁵⁶⁹ in the valley of Shimbar where, in a scene with nine personalities, at least four deities can be clearly distinguished, all sculpted according to the same Greek model:

eastern Semitic language is equivalent to Ba'al in the Semitic northwest – identified in Greek with the term Belos and in Latin with Belus – and means “lord”. This title was frequently used as a suffix for the names of deities (as for example in a later period with Malakbel, a deity of the ancient caravan city of Palmyra). Further, beginning in the neo-Babylonian period, Bel was at times identified in the western Semitic cult with the Babylonian god of the sky, Marduk (Drijvers 1976, 9-10).

560 Von Gall 1970, 211, Genius or Tyche. Tyche (Τύχη from τυγχάνω = “to meet”, “to achieve”, or as an intransitive = “to obtain in destiny”, “to ensue”), was Luck, all the good or bad which came to someone or ensued without his active participation, and for this reason also known as “Destiny”, “Chance”. She was the presiding guardian deity governing the fortune and prosperity of cities. Hellenistic cities increasingly venerated their own versions of Tyche, represented with a mural crown, shaped as in the walls of the city. Epic myths are not recorded for her, and her figure was dominated by an abstract and conceptual character. Therefore, to portray her there were only a few stable attributes intended as being more or less allegorical, among them the cornucopia, which were also particular characteristics of other related deities.

561 Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 103.

562 Block I, east surface.

563 Block II, north corner. Here the baetyl is tied with a fillet.

564 See footnote 431.

565 Hansman 1985, 239.

566 Henning 1952, 160.

567 Hansman (1985, 239) in this case re-proposes a theory of Henning, which suggests an association between the relief BN at Tang-e Sarvak and the scene of investiture at Firuzabad from the Sasanid epoch, identifying the Iranian god Ahuramazda on the Sasanid relief with the Semitic Bel of the Elymaean relief (Henning 1952, 160).

568 Mathiesen 1992, 2, 136 and 138.

569 See Appendix 5.

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Heracles⁵⁷⁰. It is also worth noting how this relief – along with some at Tang-e Sarvak – applies a characteristic of both Elamite and Achaemenid rock art, and that is to represent long lines of personalities or dignitaries on the models, respectively, of Kul-e Farah⁵⁷¹ and Kurangun⁵⁷², and the monumental stairs at Persepolis.

Some Parthian influence⁵⁷³, instead, may be seen in the clothing and styling of the hair. According to the rock reliefs, common clothing in Elymais included a long tunic, in a horizontal lozenge pattern, which extended to the knees and was tied at the waist by a belt, as well as loose pleated trousers and another characteristic of Elymaean reliefs, a rolled-up cloak on the left shoulder which probably indicated a particular social class⁵⁷⁴.

Representations of hair are in two types: arranged in two large round bunches with spiral curls at the ears (typical of whoever had a diadem or headwear; fig. 7.6); and in the classic *halo*⁵⁷⁵ shape, with hair in concentric curves indicating curls.

An *uniquum* in the panorama of Elymaean art is instead the life-size bronze statue found near the sanctuary of Shami⁵⁷⁶. There are no bronze material comparable with this statue portraying a noble⁵⁷⁷ (Fig. 7.7) – probably from a local dynasty – but is still possible to find parallels in some aspects. Above all, the position of the gesture, with the right hand raised, is widely known in Syria and Mesopotamia⁵⁷⁸, particularly at Hatra. Assuredly, the distinctive style of the bronze of Shami derives from the impact of the Hellenistic art within the visual traditions of the Near East,



Figure 7.6 – Bronze of Shami. Head (online at: crystalinks.com).

570 This interpretation of the relief is not completely agreed upon. For a more specific analysis of the varying interpretations proposed, see Appendix 5.

571 Alvarez-Mon 2013.

572 Alvarez-Mon 2014.

573 In reality, many of the characteristics indicated here as Parthian are taken from Achaemenid art, as can be seen on the reliefs of the Apadana at Persepolis.

574 Mathiesen (1992, 2 121, footnote 1) – following the suggestion of Ghirshman (1976, 22) – identifies this element as a distinctive sign of a priestly class. But no one can deny that it could also indicate the king, or perhaps the king with priestly functions, as seemed typical in Elymais (see footnote 404).

575 *Halo*: (Greek: ἅλας; also known as a nimbus, aureole, glory, or gloriolate) is a ring of light which surrounds a person in art. It has been used in the iconography of many religions to indicate holy or sacred figures, and in various periods has also been used in images of rulers or heroes. In this case, it is understood as the circular-ovoid shape given to the hair of the various personalities, recalling the form of a *halo* or nimbus or aureole.

576 The small sanctuary of Shami – i.e. شمی – excavated by Stein in the late 1930s is one of the archaeological vestiges of Elymais related to the Seleucid era, and for this reason it has not been examined in detail for this

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even if in reality the Greek influence in Elymais was quite limited. The cause of this is to be found in the fact that while the plain areas of Syria, Mesopotamia and Susiana were more inclined to absorb new traditions and cultures, the mountainous regions of the Zagros were more inclined to maintain their ancestral traditions.



Figure 7.7 – Bronze of Shami (online at: crystalinks.com).

This is why there were only a few Greek elements in the reliefs of Elymais, among which we certainly note the cornucopia and the model of Heracles – whether standing and holding a lion skin, clave and bowl or reclined on a kline – used in syncretic representations of local deities. The bulk of Elymaean rock art maintained its frontal, static and linear character, completely ignoring what the Hellenistic influence could offer in terms of perspective, realism and suggested movement.

Perhaps the Elymaean achievement lies in the ability to select from art produced by other peoples the elements best suited to its purposes and to create from these diverse elements an art that responds to the varying needs of the rulers of the Elymaean kingdom.

text, but only in terms of a comparative analysis. This does not diminish the great importance of this place in Elymais: in the barren uplands of the Bakhtiari Mountains, within a crude rectangular enclosure and set on stone foundations, a parallelepiped altar was made of bricks and two paved areas were made of the same material. Seven stone bases have been found, not *in situ*, for the statues of bronze and marble of varying sizes whose remains have been found in the area, deliberately smashed to pieces. The large quantity of charcoal and ash suggests there was a wooden covering, perhaps only a partial one, over the statues. Among the statuary in bronze, apart from a few works of certain Arsacid age – among which there is the famous statue of the “Parthian” prince – and apart from fragments which may have belonged to images of Greek deities (Zeus? Dionysus?), there are also parts of a head of a probable Hellenistic sovereign, which could prove that the sanctuary existed in the Seleucid period. The date of the destruction of Shami is difficult to determine because no coins or inscriptions have been found. This does not exclude the possibility that future more detailed analysis of this area may provide new details on this enigmatic site of Seleucid Elymais. See Stein 1940, 130-135, 141-149; Schippmann 1970, 233; *idem* 1971, 227-233; Ghirshman 1976, 236-238; Sherwin-White 1984, 160-161; Kawami 1987, 57-59; Boyce-Grenet 1991, 42-43; Mathiesen 1992, 2, 165-168..

577 The only Iranian counterpart of the bronze of Shami seems to be a stone statue lacking indications of provenance. It was recorded as part of the Rabenou Collection in New York in 1992 in a book by Mathiesen (1, 49, cat. no. 224).

578 For more in-depth analysis of religious gesturing associated with the “lifting of the hand” in Mesopotamia, there is an interesting book by Frechette (2012) *Mesopotamian Ritual-prayers of “Hand-lifting” (Akkadian šuillas): An Investigation of Function in Light of the Idiomatic Meaning of the Rubric*. See also footnote 225.

7.3. The People of Elymais: Elamites or Persians?

At this point – after placing the architectural-artistic culture of Elymais within a context of much vaster traditions – a question should arise: *where have the Elymaeans sprung from?*

Going backwards in time, it has been noted that after the destruction of the Elamite realm – with the sack of Susa – in 647 BC by the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal, Elam seemed to endure a slow and progressive abandonment of its urban centres, a political fragmentation into many small realms, and disappeared from historical records⁵⁷⁹. In deep contrast with this “apocalyptic” image, a new model is emerging which suggests a much more stable scenario in the Elamite state even after its defeat, supporting the scheme that sees Elam at the centre of a process of acculturation – defined as *Elamite-Iranian*⁵⁸⁰ – which brought about the genesis of Persia and therefore the formation in Fars of the Achaemenid empire⁵⁸¹. Furthermore, there could be confirmation of continuity from Elamites to Persians recorded by Flavius Josephus (1st century AD). This Roman historian of Jewish origin, in fact, commenting on Genesis (10:21) in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, connected the Elymaeans to the Persians, specifying that the former were the progenitors of the latter. He writes: “*Ἐλμος μὲν γὰρ Ἐλμοαίους Περσῶν ὄντας ἀρχηγέτας*⁵⁸² *κατέλιπεν*”⁵⁸³, which literally means “*Elymos then left [as descendants] the Elymaeans, who are the founders of the Persians*”⁵⁸⁴ where the word *Elymaeans* could reasonably be considered as an ethnonym corresponding to the inhabitants of Elymais. If on the one hand this affirmation of the Elymaeans as “founders” of the Persians seems incomprehensible if not anachronistic, then on the other hand, in the light of the new theory discussed above, it would appear to be decidedly appropriate.

It must not be forgotten that while the *Babylonian astronomical diaries* referred to Elymais and its people with the terms *Elam* and *Elamites*, the classical Greek and Roman sources did precisely the opposite, hiding beneath the Graecized name *Elymais* the legacy of the much more ancient tradition of Elam⁵⁸⁵. Having said this, it would be understandable that in his time

579 De Miroshedji 2003.

580 Henkelman 2008, 1.

581 Liverani 2003, 10; Alvarez-Mon and Garrison 2011.

582 The Greek word ἀρχηγέτης can be translated as “first leader, esp. founder of a city or family; chief, later governor” (Liddell & Scott, 1968).

583 Flavius Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, I, 6.4.

584 Basello 2004.

585 In this regard, refer to Section 2.1.

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Josephus Flavius would have used the term which the classical authors used for the existing inhabitants (Elymaeans) of those remote places, to indicate in reality their ancestors (the Elamites) as the founding people of the Persians.

But even if they probably came from the same stock, the Elymaeans and Persians took diametrically opposed paths, mainly because of geography – such as the Zagros Mountains with their isolated valleys and narrow gorges – which fostered marginalisation and cultural isolation⁵⁸⁶. Relations between the two peoples seemed moreover to have never been idyllic, as demonstrated by the fact that Elymaeans collected tribute from the great Achaemenid kings, this being at least a doubtful event if the Elymaeans were to be considered as Persians. And yet these facts are not surprising, as the Elamites – who dominated these places for more than 2,000 years before the arrival of Cyrus the Great in the 6th century BC – often created problems for the Achaemenids, above all because they refused to passively accept foreign impositions, such as the cult of Ahuramazda. In the great rock inscription of Behistun, indeed, there is recorded the concern of Darius in having to dispatch a considerable number of Persian troops to Elam to suppress a revolt caused by the imposition of worship of Ahuramazda and its rejection by the Elamites⁵⁸⁷. Of course, not all of the people of Elam were so hostile, indeed the “good” Elamites – perhaps coming from Susiana and more disposed towards cultural integration – were rewarded by the Achaemenids and employed at Persepolis. However, this desirable and strategic area was brought under Persian dominance by Cyrus, and perhaps there may have already been a significant Persian population there at the time, as shown by the so-called Acropole texts from Susa (end of 7th or beginning of 6th century BC)⁵⁸⁸. This expansion must have drawn new groups of Elamite scribes and other workers from Susa to Fars – at least to focal points such as Persepolis – where however they are never explicitly mentioned in administrative documents⁵⁸⁹. This could be explained in the light of a full integration of Elamites and Persians, where presumably the scribes of the Persepolis Fortification (PF) archive – the most important source regarding the process of Elamite-Iranian acculturation – did not consider the Elamites as a “separate” or “foreign”

586 This characteristic has endured until modern times in the Bakhtiari people.

587 Inscription of Darius the Great at Behistun, DB 72 (5.14-7). See Boyce (1982, 127).

588 See Henkelman 2003.

589 See, on this point, the table of foreign workers present in Persepolis in Henkelman and Stolper (2009, 274-275; regarding s.v. *Elamites*, 303).

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population⁵⁹⁰. Also from the viewpoint of onomastics – as much as this may be valued⁵⁹¹ – we can find people in the PF archive with both Elamite and Iranian names occupying all kinds of positions in the economy of Persepolis.

Duality⁵⁹² has always been a characteristic of these lands. Ethno-cultural dualism between the plain of Susiana and the high ground of Anshan⁵⁹³ was not just an expression of politics but in all probability reflected a diverse reality⁵⁹⁴. The bipolarity of Elam resurfaced in an apparent way through the Achaemenids until the Parthian era in Elymais. The hostility of Susiana towards its hinterland – associated with valleys (e.g. Shimbar and Izeh-Malamir) on the Iranian plateau and known under the name of Elymais – does not seem to be less than a replica of what had occurred between Mesopotamia and Elam starting from the 3rd millennium BC, when autochthonous dynasties remained securely in the hinterland while Susiana fell into the hands of Mesopotamian empires. Taking refuge in the Bakhtiari Mountains in case of necessity or danger was typical of the Elymaeans – as has been described previously⁵⁹⁵ – and Susiana was only under the domination of Elymais in alternating phases. It is well-known that the Greek or Hellenised people of Susa were frightened by the fearsome Elymaeans, who sought to dominate the plain as it was their only outlet to the west.

Elymais – like Elam – did not readily accept outside authority. For this reason, even if there were alternating phases of being subjected to domination – first under the Seleucids and later under the Parthians – a strong autonomy was maintained. The fact that the kings of this region struck their own series of coins⁵⁹⁶ is a clear sign of the independence of the Elymaean

590 See Henkelman 2008, 343-350. See also Henkelman 2003, 80.

591 The linguistic appurtenance of a name does not in general guarantee its ethnicity.

592 Amiet (1979, 195-204) speaks explicitly of ethnic dualism but perhaps it would be more appropriate to follow Potts (2005, 2) and apply the term cultural diversity, as suggested by reading Franz Boas (1940) who “*explicitly warned of the dangers of conflating what he referred to as ‘race, language and culture’, which we might nowadays prefer to call biological, linguistic and cultural diversity*” (Potts 2005, 2). Dualism could have been further reflected at a linguistic level in the co-existence of languages in Elymais: Aramaic in the plain area and Elamite in the mountainous regions (Henning 1952, 166). Specifically, see Appendix 4.

593 *Anshan* (or *Anzan*) is the name of an important Elamite region in western Fars and of its chief city (to be probably identified with the archaeological site of Tell-e Mayan), from the 3rd millennium BC onwards, forming one of the core areas of highland Elam (Potts 2011). Akkadian and Sumerian texts first record the land of Anshan. Elamite rulers of the 2nd millennium BC traditionally took the title King of Anzan and Shushan (Susa), Anzan being the Elamite rendering of Anshan.

594 Amiet 1979, 197.

595 See Chapter 4.

596 See Section 4.5.

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rulers. All of this is a sign of a deeply-rooted political power in the territory as well as a profound awareness of cultural identity, probably so inherent and consequently impossible to be eliminated in the people of these arid and mountainous lands.

As discussed earlier, Elymaeans were cited quite frequently in ancient texts but never as Persians, indeed the writers would habitually distinguish between the two peoples⁵⁹⁷. More proof of this distinction comes from analysis of numismatic documentation, in particular in studies of symbology. One example would be given by some coins of the kings Mithridates I⁵⁹⁸ (171-138 BC) and Phraates IV⁵⁹⁹ (c. 37-2 BC), where next to the heads of the kings there are a lunar crescent and a star (in some series the symbols were used singly), elements referring to astral symbology which is typical of Mesopotamian and Elamite culture. According to Hansman⁶⁰⁰ the use of this symbology meant that the Parthian kings – generally believed Zoroastrians – felt the need to legitimise their sovereignty by way of the authority of local deities. If this association is correct, such an expedient would not have been necessary if the Elymaeans were Persian Zoroastrians. From an objective point of view, nearly all the Elymaean coins carry one or more symbols which appear to have religious connotations, but their attribution is a complicated issue⁶⁰¹.

One factor complicating analysis and study of the origin of divine symbols lies in the fact that over time the symbols may come to be associated with different deities. Symbols often do not continue in memories with the original reason for which they were created, and accordingly, new meanings are often created for them. Further, symbols and rituals of a religion are frequently borrowed and modified by other religions for their own use, such as the Greek model of Hercules as discussed earlier, in a process called syncretisation. It is probable that at first the Elymaeans would have adopted deities from their culturally similar neighbours, the Sumerians, the Elamites and the Semitic cultures of Mesopotamia, and then would have syncretised these with deities such as Zeus and Heracles or Artemis and Athena from more distant cultural poles in Greece and

597 Beginning with Nearchus who, through a report handed down by Strabo, affirmed how “*there were four predatory tribes and that of these the Mardi were situated next to the Persians; the Uxii and Elymaei next to the Mardi and the Susians; and the Cossaei next to the Medians*” (Strabo XI.13.6). See Section 4, specifically 4.2.

598 Le Rider (1965): silver drachma, series n°191.

599 Le Rider (1965): silver drachmae, series n°192-193-194-195-196-197-198-199-200.

600 Hansman 1985, 231-232.

601 The leading study of this topic is the article by Hansman in 1985, *The Great Gods of Elymais*.

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Rome, in combinations including elements from local cults of Bel, Nanaia/Ishtar and other deities.

On this point, it would be intriguing to reinterpret the monuments discussed beforehand from this perspective. So then, the sanctuaries at Masjed-e Soleyman and Bard-e Neshandeh – eliminated from the list of places of Zoroastrian worship⁶⁰² – could have been dedicated to local deities for whom it would be possible to hypothesise Mesopotamian connections. In particular, the tetrastyle temple at Bard-e Neshandeh – in light of the new interpretation⁶⁰³ given in the preceding section (Fig. 7.4) – could be seen as place of worship for a local divine trinity, given that it is possible to hypothesise the presence of three typically Mesopotamian rectangular elongated cellae arranged around the central vestibule. The idea of such a triad could gain strength from considering relief ANa at Tang-e Sarvak (Fig. 6.6) where on the left side there are two deities – probably a sun god and a god of war – while on the right edge, in the act of embracing the crowned king, a bearded third deity holds a cornucopia (Fig. 7.5). Even if the inscriptions at the site suggest the presence of the cult of Bel, the dimensions and the position of this latter personality on the relief suggest his identification as a minor deity⁶⁰⁴, different to what is on the reliefs and in the statuary at Masjed-e Soleyman and Bard-e Neshandeh where this bearded personality with his cornucopia has been interpreted as Bel⁶⁰⁵. The worship of Bel or of a local syncretic deity undoubtedly appears to have been well established in the territory of Elymais – as has been demonstrated both in written sources⁶⁰⁶ and in some of the inscriptions beyond those found at Tang-e Sarvak – where mention is made of an altar of Bel also at Tang-e Botan in the valley of Shimbar.

In conclusion, there are some signs – discussed in this thesis – which could show how the Elymaeans may have been the descendants of the Elamites. If so, then as was the case for their ancestors, the Elymaeans demonstrated that they were strongly attached to their culture and their land, and even with the inevitable penetration of the Mazdean religion in the Achaemenid era

602 Schippmann 1971, 498.

603 See footnote 532.

604 Hansman (1985, 243) identifies this personality with Bel, iconographically comparing him with Zeus sitting on a throne and holding a cornucopia, an image appearing on the reverses of some Seleucid coins of Demetrius I, struck at Seleucia on the Tigris (Hansman 1985, 236-237)

605 Hansman 1985, 243; Boyce-Grenet 1991, 47.

606 The ancient sources speak extensively of the famous temple of Bel which Antiochus III sought in vain to sack in 187 BC and at which he lost his life (Diod. Sic. XXVIII.3; Str. XVI.1.18; Justin XXXII.2; Porph. FGrH, II, no. 260; Euseb. 253; St. Jerome, XI.17-19). See also Section 2.1.1.

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they continued with all probability to be faithful to the traditions of their religious beliefs. In this way, Mesopotamian cultural influence – which can be seen in art and architecture – remained substantial even in the post-Achaemenid era. Zoroastrianism seems to have encountered a rigid barrier in the mountainous area of Elymais, which was decidedly within the Semitic-Mesopotamian sphere of influence. It was receptive to some external stimuli – such as Hellenistic and Syro-Mesopotamian – but despite two centuries of Achaemenid domination, the impact of Zoroastrianism in these lands was moreover of an intellectual character and was limited mostly to the urban centres of Susiana, which were much more welcoming in this respect. It is not surprising that the Zoroastrian Parthian kings were equally harsh in dealing with the temples of Babylon and Elymais – in this latter case along the same lines as the Seleucid kings – nor is it surprising that the Elymaeans were so tenacious in defending their sacred places of worship against foreign impositions.

8. Conclusions and Further Directions

8.1. Conclusions

As this thesis has shown, the later history of Elam during the Hellenistic and Arsacid period was centred on a cultural and administrative entity called Elymais, which from 140 BC to 224 AD had alternating phases of independence, attested by its coinage. While the flat area of Susiana – western Elymais – attracted Greek immigrants and others to take up opportunities in agriculture and commerce, the more impervious mountain territory in the southwest Zagros Mountains – eastern Elymais – plausibly maintained a certain isolation, as demonstrated by a robust local art tradition⁶⁰⁷. Here, differing from that occurring in the plain area around Susa, there was virtually no Greek influence and Parthian tradition was quite limited. Various kings encountered many difficulties when trying to extend their rule into this region, as demonstrated by religious architecture and by rock reliefs in a style distinctly different from comparable monuments in other parts of the Parthian realm.

There has been a view that historical, archaeological and philological data seem to attest a link of continuity between the Elymaeans and the ancient people of Elam, consequently placing Elymais within the Mesopotamian sphere of influence due to an intense relationship interconnecting Elam and Mesopotamia, including the rapport of *odi et amo* at the base⁶⁰⁸.

In reality, there is no certain proof of this association. It cannot be said that “common sense” always coincides with historical fact that it is often much more complex. Having made this point, however, there is the possibility that the Elymaeans could have been part of an Elamite “confederation” – at first isolated in the rough mountain areas east of Susiana – perhaps in some ways excluded from the Elamite-Iranian process of acculturation that subsequently brought about

607 Dabrowa 1998, 421.

608 The ancient state of Elam maintained strong and continuing diplomatic and cultural relations with Mesopotamia, from where it probably also learned about agriculture (Sellwood 1983, 306), from the Chalcolithic period (the end of the 5th millennium BC) until the birth of Elamite writing in the phase of Uruk and Jemdet Nasr (the end of the 4th millennium BC). Not to be forgotten, Susiana often fell into the Mesopotamian orbit because of numerous wars, as occurred during the third dynasty of Ur, the last of the Sumerian reigns (2011-2004 BC). In this period Sumerian was the written language in Susa, and documentation attests links with all of the regions of Iran.

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the genesis of Achaemenid power. As indicated by the distribution of coins and by the richness of their temples, the Elymaeans seem to have prospered – on equal terms with their neighbours in Characene – controlling commercial ports in lower and upper Khuzestan and regulating the flow of goods from Arabia and India to Susa⁶⁰⁹. Furthermore, the fact that their temples and rock reliefs are not found in the more lush and populated plain areas but rather in the arid and isolated valleys of the Bakhtiari Mountains, could indicate that this latter zone – beyond simply being a part of their territory – was a more secure home for their treasures and perhaps for their local traditions, much more difficult to corrupt if placed in such remote regions. It is very important to highlight that these religious sites are found on the traditional routes taken by nomadic people of the Zagros. It is inconceivable that the Elymaeans would have built such sanctuaries in unstable areas; it is much more probable that the nomadic tribes periodically crossing these areas would have respected and protected the sites from outside “contamination” and from their “relatives” on the plains.

Historically speaking, the Elymaeans appear to be the only population living in these territories in the Arsacid period, until the conquest by Ardashir in 224 AD marked the end of Elymais as a political state. In the highly centralised Sasanian empire founded by Ardashir there was no room for local kingdoms.

8.2. Further Directions

From evidence regarding the religious “space” and monuments associated with it, as outlined in the course of this thesis, it may be deduced that Elymais during the Arsacid period – and probably also in preceding ages – would have been of crucial importance in the historical-cultural dynamics of this border area (now Khuzestan) between the Mesopotamian plain and the Iranian plateau. The relevance of the region and its political position, in my view, have been generally underestimated and overlooked, in comparison with the attention paid to Susa and the surrounding plain during the same historical period. Even in the brilliant work by Wouter Henkelman⁶¹⁰ on relations between Elamites and Iranians, there is no mention made of Elymais or of its people apart from in a purely incidental way⁶¹¹. And when this occurs the Elymaeans are

609 Alizadeh 1985, 184.

610 *The Other Gods Who Are: Studies in Elamite-Iranian Acculturation based on the Persepolis Fortification Tablets* (2008).

611 See Henkelman 2008, 647, s.v. *Elymaioi* and *Elymais*.

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considered simply as a tribe, “an important ‘outside’ party with whom the agents of the Persepolis administration could exchange or trade surpluses”⁶¹². If it is true that Henkelman’s text deals with periods preceding the area of interest to this thesis, on the other hand he considers zones such as Izeh-Malamir, Ramhormoz and Behbahan – which were to become pivotal points in the Elymaean realm – describing their fundamental importance in the process of acculturation between Elamites and Iranians⁶¹³. He affirms that “it is equally possible that the remaining Elamite population of the highlands was responsible for the apparent cultic continuity at the sites”⁶¹⁴, without, however, taking into consideration that this so-defined “remaining Elamite population of the highlands” might be probably the Elymaeans or their original nucleus. Of course, what I have hypothesised is basically a logical conjecture that could be revealed as unfounded, but it is difficult for me to believe that the Elymaean culture – evidently strong and well-established in most of the territory in question – could have sprung from nothing in the 3rd-2nd century BC. In essence, according to what has been seen during the course of this study, there appears to be more than just a simple tribal character in the area that became the realm of Elymais.

On this point, it would be interesting to go beyond the time scale limits of this thesis. The presumed end of the Elamite realm is in the 7th century BC while the first mentions of the Elymaeans – even if they come indirectly⁶¹⁵ – are in the 4th century BC. If there was continuity from the Elamite civilisation to the Elymaean one⁶¹⁶, we are confronted by a gap of around 300 years which remains almost completely obscured. If we also consider that the most continuous accounts relating to Elymais come only in the 2nd century BC⁶¹⁷, the panorama becomes even more complex. A more in-depth treatment of the topic – in the expectation of new data from archaeological missions in the field⁶¹⁸ – would allow light to be cast on a series of historical issues, and so potentially provide further evidence supporting the theory of a rebirth – political, economic and cultural – in Elam moving into the Achaemenid era⁶¹⁹.

612 Henkelman 2008, 117.

613 Henkelman 2003; *idem* 2008.

614 Henkelman 2003, 76.

615 Strabo (XI.13.6) reporting a testimony of Nearchus, admiral of Alexander the Great.

616 See Section 7.3.

617 See Appendix 1 regarding two failed attempts at sacking by Antiochus III and IV and another by an Arsacid king (Mithridates); also see Section 4.4 concerning the beginning of Elymaean coinage under Kamnaskires I.

618 The *Iranian-Italian Joint Expedition in Khuzistan* will probably return to the field in November 2014. Personal Communication from Vito Messina.

619 Henkelman 2008.

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It would be particularly interesting to undertake specific analysis of the central areas of Elymais such as Izeh-Malamir, which seems to show the presence of a new sociopolitical authority representing the Elamite highlands – beginning from the 9th century BC⁶²⁰ – as demonstrated by a series of Elamite reliefs without parallel in the Near East, on a par with those from Elymaeans a few centuries later.

As observed in previous chapters, this thesis has shown there is a need to clarify the relationships in Elymais that brought about the birth and development of an artistic-architectural style incorporating an eclectic combination of various traditions: Mesopotamian, Elamite, Iranian, Syrian and Parthian. Given that there is a rather limited amount of material available. It is to be hoped that in the future new and more detailed research, excavations and scientific analysis will be undertaken to provide new possibilities for understanding the Elymaean culture, and thus place discoveries in a clearer context. Many noted scholars have avoided getting involved in problems related to Elymais, probably considering them of trivial importance. I believe instead that when, finally, future research leads to the publication of more detailed and up-to-date studies, this will place Elymais under a new light, greatly increasing interest in the region within the academic world. In time, archaeologists in diverse areas and specialisations will therefore be encouraged to use their theoretical and practical skills to aim for a clearer understanding of the historical-artistic elements of these lands.

Moreover, a broadening of comparative analysis – including detailed photographic and line-drawing documentation – would lead to deeper and more comprehensive research into the temples and rock reliefs. Such study is needed to accurately determine chronological sequences and to establish what relationships existed among the various sites inside and outside Elymais. Not to be forgotten, the coinage and succession of the Elymaean kings which – even though there has finally been a comprehensive study of them in the work of van't Haaff – still present many thorny problems waiting to be resolved⁶²¹.

A precise and meticulous mapping is needed of the various sites and finds connected to the Elymaean kingdom, and in my opinion it is of vital importance for the geospatial collocation of the region. Work conducted on this point during this thesis (Table 1 and 3) is just a first step⁶²²

620 Alvarez-Mon 2012, 754. See also Alvarez-Mon 2013, 227.

621 See Section 4.5.

622 As it has not been possible to go to the region, information technology sources such as Google Maps and

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towards a more precise study, but it does allow for a basic geographic understanding

Elymais offers some of the more exciting possibilities for future research, providing a vast spectrum of opportunities for study due to the fact of dealing with a culture that is as important as still little-known, and from the chance to revise outdated studies. Leaving aside for now the thought of new excavations of religious structures (the last were in the 1970s) – because agreements would have to be made with the Iranian government and they would be hard to obtain – there are other possible areas of study. On the one hand, there would seem to be a need for a new study of the Elymaean language and its origin that would allow a better understanding of the various rock inscriptions of which Elymais is rich, and on the other hand, a more modern cultural study seeking to understand the presumed religious symbology in Elymais and the existence, or not, of a pantheon of local deities.

Finally, I would like to conclude this treatment of the Elymaean reign by confining myself to citing Pliny⁶²³ who in his own way, perhaps involuntarily, offers a picture of life in Elymais that goes beyond an impenetrable archaeological, epigraphical and religious vision of those lands:

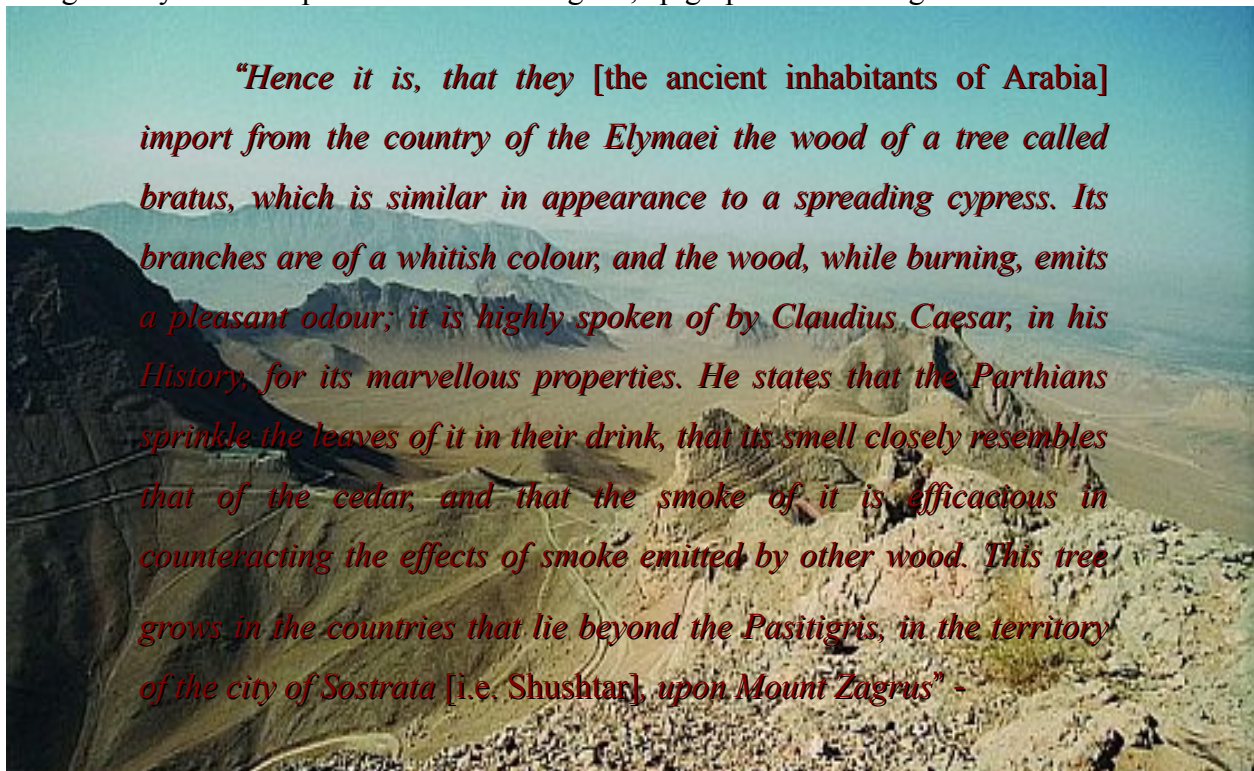


Figure 8.1 – Bakhtiari Mountains (online at: 30-days.net).

Google Earth have been used.

623 Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, XII, 38-39.

Appendix 1

Temples and Plunders

As mentioned during this work, the wealth of Elymaean temples and looting or attempted looting of them was the main focus of interest for several classical authors. This interest was also widely shared by biblical writers.

The first episode to consider is the attempted attack on the temple of Belus/Bel/Zeus by Antiochus III the Great in 187 BC, due to the desperate economic conditions⁶²⁴ deriving from the Treaty of Apamea⁶²⁵ (188 BC). The Arsacid sovereign, in fact, aware of the riches in the Elymaean temple, “...a large store of silver and gold...”⁶²⁶, in an attempt to take the locals by surprise “... brought up his army one night...”⁶²⁷ and attacked with the hope of carrying off the contents; but his intentions became known and he was killed⁶²⁸ with most of his army by the local people⁶²⁹.

The location of the Bel temple in Elymais has long puzzled scholars. W.B. Henning believes that the temple is present at Tang-e Sarvak, an important group of rock reliefs located north of the district of Behbahan, basing his hypothesis on the presence of a name, *Bel-dusha*, on Monument A, which in his opinion may indicate the name of a priest officiating at the worship of Bel⁶³⁰. Later, A.D.H. Bivar and philologist S. Shaked speak of “the altar of Bel” present on an inscription at Shimbar/Tang-e Botan even if their dating of the find to the 2nd century AD⁶³¹ is

624 See also I Maccabees 3.31.

625 The Seleucid defeat at Magnesia (190 BC) brought with it the imposition of severe penalties. Not only Anatolia was lost, the Seleucid elephant corps impounded and naval movement restricted, but also reparations of 15,000 talents of silver were due. This was to be paid in a series of instalments: 500 talents immediately, 2,500 talents upon ratification of the treaty of Apamea, and 12,000 talents thereafter in the form of annual tribute of 1,000 talents of silver per year for the next twelve years (Mørkholm 1966, 22-37).

626 Diod. Sic., XXIX.15.

627 Justin, XXXII.2.

628 There is a different version by the Roman historian Sextus Aurelius Victor (4th cent. AD) who says that Antiochus was assassinated by some of his own people, whom he had punished for being drunk at a feast (*De Viris Illustribus*, 54). Important from the point of view of the historical dating is the notation of Zonaras which stresses “in the consulship of Gaius Flaminius and Aemilius Lepidus, Antiochus died and his son Seleucus succeeded him” (I.9.21; Dio, I.19.65).

629 Diod. Sic., XXVIII.3; Str., XVI.1.18; Justin, XXXII.2; Porph. FGrH, II, no. 260; Euseb., 253; St. Jerome, XI.17-19.

630 Henning 1952, 173.

631 Bivar and Shaked 1964, 272.

three centuries later than the episode of Antiochus III thus circumventing any association with the temple attacked by him⁶³². More recent is the theory of Schippmann and Vanden Berghe, which suggests that the sanctuary of Bel is the podium found on the upper terrace of the religious complex of Bard-e Neshandeh, excavated by Ghirshman and interpreted by him as a place dedicated to Ahuramazda⁶³³. This theory, however, entails accepting the assimilation between the deity Belus⁶³⁴/Bel-Zeus⁶³⁵/Jupiter⁶³⁶ – as it is explicitly called in the sources – with the Iranian deity Ahuramazda. According to Herodotus⁶³⁷, such an Iranian god is recognizable under the name of Zeus⁶³⁸, and it is interesting to note also the association between Jupiter/Zeus and the Semitic sky god Bel-Marduk⁶³⁹ (in Babylonia also identified with the planet “Nibiru” or Jupiter)⁶⁴⁰. There are some scholars who see in the worship of Bel a possible syncretism with a “traditional Elamite god”, who is not named but is associated with the Classical symbol of a cornucopia⁶⁴¹.

“About this time it was that king Antiochus, as he was going over the upper countries, heard that there was a very rich city in Persia, called Elymais⁶⁴² and therein a very rich temple of Artemis, and that it was full of all sorts of donations dedicated to it; as also weapons and breastplates, which, upon inquiry, he found had been left there by Alexander⁶⁴³, the son of Philippus, king of Macedonia.”

632 Despite such evidence related by them, the two scholars remain convinced that the site of Shimbar is most reliably identified as the place where the king died (Bivar and Shaked 1964, 287).

633 Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 17.

634 Strabo, XVI.1.18.

635 Diod. Sic., XXIX.15; XXVIII.3. It may be of interest to consider how the Greek historian in two places refers to the same Elymaean temple, first associating it with Zeus (XXVIII.3) and then to Bel (XXIX.15), indicating that early in the 1st century BC the association between these two gods was very strong.

636 Justin, XXXII.2.

637 Herodotus, I.131.

638 Although, Herodotus surprisingly does not mention the Persian name of the supreme god – while he does mention the main goddess – there should be no doubt that “Zeus” equals “Ahuramazda” (see also Briant 2002, 248).

639 It is clear that in Greek treatments of the Babylonian religion, Bel was assimilated with Marduk (Kuhrt and Sherwin-White 1987).

640 On the connection between Marduk and Jupiter, see the Babylonian text quoted in M. Jastrow (1915), *The civilization of Babylonia and Assyria*, Philadelphia, 442.

641 Hansman 1985, 245.

642 The text should therefore be corrected to read as in the Revised Version (British and American), “*in Elymais in Persia there was a city*”.

643 Undoubtedly – as Alizadeh points out (1985, 179, note 16) – it is noteworthy that there were no reports of a meeting between Alexander and Elymaeans in the journey of the Macedonian king to Persepolis.

Here is how Josephus in his *Jewish Antiquities*⁶⁴⁴ reports the second but no less bold attempt to plunder an Elymaean temple by Antiochus IV Epiphanes, perhaps motivated by a sense of revenge after the fate of his father⁶⁴⁵ Antiochus III about two decades before. But even in this case the Arsacid ruler had to reckon with the hostility of the Elymaean people who “*opposed him very courageously*”⁶⁴⁶ and also as no battle was effectively fought “*he was beaten off his hopes; for they drove him away from the city*”⁶⁴⁷, forcing him to retire to Tabae⁶⁴⁸ in Paraitakene⁶⁴⁹ where he died, whether from divine retribution for his assault on the “*temple of Artemis in Persia*”⁶⁵⁰ or simply from illness⁶⁵¹, in November of 164 BC⁶⁵².

The deity in question is not clear and several ancient authors refer the tale of Antiochus IV's expedition respectively to the temple of Artemis⁶⁵³/Venus⁶⁵⁴/Diana⁶⁵⁵/Nanaea-Nanaia⁶⁵⁶/Anahita⁶⁵⁷ and while some scholars - given the similarity of these two expeditions - have questioned whether they were two distinct events⁶⁵⁸ - Holleaux has asserted that there is no possibility of confusing names and events, providing conclusively the historical character of both episodes⁶⁵⁹. The French scholar also ventured an identification of the deity in question, stating that the Iranian Anahita might be represented in both Greek and Roman sources either with Aphrodite or with Artemis⁶⁶⁰. If this were the case it would be curious at the least that classical writers such as Polybius and Arrian, who were well informed about the cult of Anaitis (Anahita), would still have chosen to refer to the deity of the temple in Elymais - attacked by Antiochus -

644 Josephus, XII.9.1 v.354. In this passage, the Roman historian of Jewish origin almost copies the Book of Maccabees verbatim (I Maccabees 6.1-4).

645 Potts instead defines Antiochus IV as “grandson” of Antiochus III (1999a, 383).

646 Jos., XII.9.1 v.355.

647 Jos., XII.9.1 v.355.

648 Polyb., XXXI.9; Porph. FGrH, II, no. 260, F 56.

649 Probably Gabae, i.e. Esfahan (Potts 1999a, 383), although other scholars suggest a location near Ekbatana (Gera and Horowitz 1997, 250, no. 71).

650 Jos., XII.9.1 v.358; Porph., FGrH, II, no. 260, F 53. Here Josephus reports something that he attributed to “*Polybius of Megalopolis*” (Jos. XII.9.1, v.358), then stating later that “*it is much more probable that this king died on account of his sacrilegious plundering of the temple at Jerusalem*” (Jos. XII.9.1, v.359). The same event is described by Porphyrius – and then from St. Jerome – in reference to the temple of Diana.

651 App., 11.66; St. Jerome, XI.36.

652 Mørkholm 1966, 171.

653 Polybius, XXXI.9; Josephus, XII.358-359

654 Appian, 11.66.

655 Pliny, VI.31.135; Porphyrius, FGrH, II, no. 260, F 53 and 56; St. Jerome, XI.36; Zonaras, IV.20.

656 II Maccabees. In Maccabees I.13-17, it is worth noting the hypothesis of Dr. G.R. Farhad Assar (2004-2005, 28, note 7) in accord with this passage referring to the sacking of Antiochus III, rather than to that of Antiochus IV Epiphanes while the verse IX.1-2 mistakenly relates to a pillaging raid on Persepolis by Antiochus IV.

657 Aelian, XII.23.

658 Bartlett 1973, 82; Green 1990, 512.

659 Holleaux 1942; see also Mørkholm 1966, 170ff.

660 Holleaux 1942, 268.

with the names of Artemis and Aphrodite. On the other hand though, Hoffmann, drawing on biblical texts, believed that the Semitic goddess Nana – or Nanaia – would have been most credited for the episode in which Antiochus IV lost his life⁶⁶¹. Surely Nanaia is the deity most attested in Greek inscriptions of Susa⁶⁶², a fact that probably led Tarn to believe the sanctuary stood precisely in Susa⁶⁶³. But this hypothesis was already anticipated and consequently refuted by Hoffmann about half a century before⁶⁶⁴, because he had noticed that if the attack had occurred in Susa in all probability Polybius would have reported the event. Then, there is the theory of Vanden Berghe and Schippmann that recognizes the sanctuary in question as the tetrastyle temple on the lower terrace of Bard-e Neshandeh⁶⁶⁵, that Ghirshman interprets as a place of worship for the Zoroastrian deities Mithra and Anahita⁶⁶⁶.

The third episode regarding the looting of an Elymaean temple appears in a passage of Strabo that has long baffled scholars. The Greek historian describes how

*“...in later times the king of Parthia, though warned by what had happened to Antiochus, hearing that the temples in that country contained great wealth, and seeing that inhabitants were disobedient subjects, made an invasion with a great force, and took both the temple of Athena and that of Artemis, the latter called Azara, and carried off treasures valued at ten thousand talents”*⁶⁶⁷.

So where both of the *Antiochi*, father and son, had failed, “someone else” succeeded. Many scholars have attributed these actions to Mithridates I, linking this event with his invasion of Susiana in 139 or 138 BC⁶⁶⁸, of which Justin also writes⁶⁶⁹. During this military action the

661 Hoffmann 1880, 131-132; see also Tarn 1938, 463-466.

662 The Susa inscriptions are an important source of information on religion during the Seleucid era. Four texts (Potts 1999a, Table 10.1.14, 18, 22, 24) refer to Nanaia, while a fifth (Potts 1999a, Table 10.1.15) refers to a goddess that is probably her as well.

663 Tarn 1938, 463.

664 Hoffmann 1880, 131.

665 Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, p. 20 Although this would contrast with the dating that Ghirshman gives to the temple, 1st-2nd cent. AD (1976, 225).

666 Ghirshman 1976, 196-197.

667 Strabo, XVI.1.18.

668 Nodelman 1960, 87; Guépin 1965-1966, 19; Hansman 1978, 154; Harmatta 1981, 207; Assar 2006.

669 Justin, XLI.6.

Arsacid king also took Seleucia-on-the-Hedyphon⁶⁷⁰. But there is also the possibility that such an event occurred much later, as indicated by Nöldeke more than a century ago⁶⁷¹.

If the temple of Athena strangely has not attracted the attention of many scholars – it is briefly mentioned by Harmatta⁶⁷² who hazards an association with the sanctuary of Masjed-e Soleyman – there has been great interest instead in the temple of Artemis, in all probability the same as the one involved in the failure of Antiochus IV – called by Strabo τὰ ἸΑζάρια⁶⁷³. The Greek geographer unfortunately does not give us precise information about the place where the temple could be found – e.g. if in lowland Khuzestan or highland Fars – thus leaving ample space for various conjectures by scholars over the years. There is an interesting association – to be evaluated cautiously, though – in the article “*On the position of Susa*” in “The philological museum”⁶⁷⁴, where this temple is associated with the cult of Anahita through a connection between the name *ta Azara* and *Zaratis*⁶⁷⁵, the latter being considered as another name of the goddess. The Dutch scholar Jan Pieter Guépin – who dedicated an entire article to this subject⁶⁷⁶ – assumes that Azara is to be found in a remote valley near the rock reliefs of Tang-e Sarvak, giving strength to the theories of de Bode⁶⁷⁷, Henning⁶⁷⁸ and Le Rider⁶⁷⁹. But these reliefs are probably to be dated to the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries AD (c. 150-225 AD⁶⁸⁰) and obviously appear to have nothing to do with the sanctuary of Artemis mentioned by Strabo. Tarn instead considers Azara's temple as the same one that Antiochus IV sought to plunder, which would be in the Greek *polis* of Susa. Probably both scholars have neglected – unlike Hoffmann – the testimonies of Arab geographers such as al-Muqaddasi and Yaqut who mention the existence of a town called Azar near Ram-Hormuz on the route to Ahwaz⁶⁸¹. Even al-Muqadasi indicates a town called *Hazâr* or *Âzâr Sâbûr* near Shiraz, in the heart of ancient Elam⁶⁸². Godard many years

670 Str., XVI.1.18.

671 Nöldeke 1874, 192. See also Potts 1999a, 394-395.

672 Harmatta 1981, 207.

673 Strabo, XVI.1.18.

674 Hare and Thirlwall 1833, 192.

675 The link is made between τὰ ἸΑζάρια (*ta Azara*) and τὰ Ζάρια (*Zaratis*).

676 *A contribution to the location of Ta Azara the chief sanctuary of Elymais* (1965-1966).

677 De Bode 1845, 360.

678 Henning 1952, 177. Actually, Henning held well back from identifying the sanctuary of Tang-e Sarvak with the temple mentioned by Strabo. He literally says that “*it would be wrong to identify Tang-i Sarvak with Azara; for the remains at Tang-i Sarvak are later by three hundred years than that ancient Nanai temple; but we may regard Tang-i Sarvak as the successor to the destroyed Azara, which no doubt lay nearby*” (1952, 177).

679 Le Rider 1965, 354.

680 Mathiesen 1992. See also Section 6.2.

681 Hoffmann 1880, 133; Sprenger 1864, 65.

682 Le Strange 1905, 280.

Appendix 1

later suggested it was the temple of Bard-e Neshandeh, while Ghirshman – and Harmatta – identified the plundered temple with the site of Shami⁶⁸³.

683 Harmatta 1981, 207.

Appendix 2

A List of Classical Authors

The following list indicates texts which relate directly or indirectly to Elymais and its people⁶⁸⁴. They are given here in approximate chronological order, along with any abbreviations or short reference forms that will be used for titles and authors' names:

- **Herodotus (Hdt.)**, after 450 BC, *Historiae*.
- **Polybius (Polyb.)**, 2nd cent. BC, *Historiae*.
- **Diodorus Siculus (Diod. Sic.)**, mid-1st cent. BC, *Bibliotheca Historica* (Historical Library).
- **Trogus Pompeius**, early 1st cent. BC, *Historiae Philippicae* (as later summarized in the *Epitome* by a certain **Marcus Junianus Justinus [Justin]**)⁶⁸⁵.
- **Strabo (Str.)**, early 1st cent. BC, *Geographia*.
- **Livy**, at the turn of the 1st cent. BC and 1st cent. AD, *Ab Urbe condita* (History of Rome).
- **Quintus Curtius Rufus (Curt.)**, mid-1st cent. AD, *Historiae Alexandri Magni*.
- **Pliny the Elder (Pliny)**, mid-1st cent. AD, *Historia naturalis*.
- **Titus Flavius Josephus (Jos.)**, second half 1st cent. AD, *Antiquitates Judaicae* (Jewish Antiquities).
- **Plutarch (Plut.)**, c. 46-120 AD, various of the *Bíoi Paráλληλοι* (Parallel Lives).
- **Tacitus (Tac.)**, second half of 1st cent.- early 2nd cent., *Annales*.

684 Presentations of all authors writing on the Parthians and collection of fragments from their works are now available in a very useful 3-volume work, see Hackl/Jacobs/Weber 2010.

685 Tarn (1951; 44-45) believed that the detailed account of Parthian history contained in books XLI and XLII of the lost *Historiae Philippicae* of Pompeius Trogus derived from a second Greek author, distinct from Apollodorus. Much of their content survives, though greatly abbreviated, in the *Epitome* of Justin, a work therefore indispensable for historians of Parthia, even though the failings of the epitomator are frequently blamed.

- **Appian (App.)**, 2nd cent., *Syriaca* (The Syrian Wars).
- **Claudius Ptolemaeus (Ptol.)**, mid-2nd cent., *Geographia*.
- **Arrian (Arr.)**, mid-2nd cent., *Indica*.
- **Cassius Dio (Dio)**, end 2nd cent.- early 3rd cent., *Historia Romana* (Roman History).
- **Aelian (Ael.)**, early 3rd cent., *De Natura Animalium* (On the nature of animals).
- **Philostratus (Phil.)**, mid-3rd cent., *Vita Apollonii* (Life of Apollonius of Tyana).
- **Porphyrius of Tyre (Porph.)**, second half of 3rd cent., *Adversus Christianos* (Against the Christians)⁶⁸⁶.
- **Eusebius of Caesarea (Euseb.)**, end 3rd cent.- early 4th cent., *Chronicon* (Chronicle).
- **St. Jerome**, 4th-5th cent., *Commentary on Daniel*.
- **Stephen of Byzantium (Stephanus Byzantinus)**, c.6th cent., *De Urbibus*.
- **Zonaras**⁶⁸⁷ (**Zon.**) end of 11th cent. – first half of 12th cent., *Epitome Historiarum* (Extracts of History)⁶⁸⁸.

686 The whole work was banned when the Roman Empire became officially Christian, and all remaining copies were publicly burnt in 448 AD. Some passages about the historical basis of the book of Daniel have survived, because they were quoted in St. Jerome's commentary on Daniel (4th cent. AD). See Jacoby, F. (1923-1958), *Die Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker* (FGrH), II (260). Online at: [Brill's New Jacoby](#).

687 A Byzantine chronicler and canonist, under Emperor Alexis Comnenus, he was commander of the imperial bodyguard and first secretary of the imperial chancery. Later he became a monk at Hagia Glykeria (one of the Princes' Islands now known as Niandro).

688 In his work Zonaras clearly followed Cassius Dio.

Appendix 3

Travel Accounts

Over the centuries few explorers have ventured into the arid and at times inaccessible lands of Khuzestan, and at first they were mostly noble adventurers, telling their stories of quests for fame and glory⁶⁸⁹. It should not be forgotten that while it is true that the 19th century brought scientific innovation to archaeology with the discovery and demonstration of the principles of uniformitarian stratigraphy (which determines the age of fossil remains by the stratum they occupy) by men such as William Smith, Georges Cuvier, and Charles Lyell with his *Principles of Geology* (1830-1833), on the other hand archaeological research in remote and mysterious areas such as these in ancient Persia was still conducted mostly by wealthy aristocrats belonging to certain elite circles who were for the most part interested in making sensational finds.

This is the context that is relevant to the article by Major Rawlinson⁶⁹⁰, *Notes on a March from Zohab*⁶⁹¹, published in 1839 in the *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society (JRGS)*, where the British officer makes us aware of stories he heard from the nomadic Bakhtiari tribe – during his stay in April 1836 at Qala-i Tul⁶⁹² – which revealed the existence of inscriptions and rock reliefs Izeh-Malamir⁶⁹³ and the ruins of the temple of Masjed-e Soleyman⁶⁹⁴. It should be emphasized that Rawlinson never went to these places. A few years later these stories from Rawlinson pushed the most intrepid Austen Henry Layard⁶⁹⁵ towards Iran, eager to investigate the

689 It would be interesting to conduct a thorough research of sources to unearth who else, European and not, went to these areas from the end of the Roman era until the early 1800s.

690 Sir Henry Creswicke Rawlinson, 1st Baronet (5 April 1810 – 5 March 1895) was a British East India Company army officer, politician and Orientalist, sometimes described as the Father of Assyriology. His first relevant activity was to copy the trilingual inscriptions of Darius I and Xerxes I at Mount Alvand (Elvend) near Hamadān in April 1835.

691 The complete title is *Notes on a March from Zohab. At the Foot of Zagros, along the Mountains to Khuzestan (Susiana), and from Thence Through the Province of Luristan to Kirmanshah, in the Year 1836.*

692 About 15 km south of the modern city of Izeh.

693 Malamir, a diminutive of Mal-Amir (Residence of the Emir). From the 8th century, this name was transformed into Izeh or Izaj, which means “capital”. This city located north-east of the province of Khuzestan became the capital under the Atabegs' (or Atābaks) dynasty of the Great Lurs. From 1935, during the Pahlavi era, it became officially Izeh, but the population continued to call it Malamir or Izeh-Malamir. The historical name of Izeh during the neo-Elamite era was Ayapir, evoking the inscription of Kul-é Farah.

694 Rawlinson 1839, 84.

695 Sir Austen Henry Layard (5 March 1817-5 July 1894). Descendent of French Huguenots, Layard is chiefly known for his excavations in northern Iraq between 1845 and 1851. He worked mainly at the Assyrian sites of Nimrud and Nineveh, in the North-West Palace of Assurnasirpal II (883-859 BCE) and the South-West Palace of Sennacherib (704-681 BCE) where he found many stone bas-reliefs and colossal stone figures, as well as

suggestion of the English officer that in ancient times there were two cities with the name of Susa: the Greek Susa at Shush on the River Karkheh and the Biblical Shushan where Daniel had his vision, at Susan on the upper reaches of the River Karun⁶⁹⁶. As occurred previously with Malamir and Masjed-e Soleyman, Rawlinson could not visit Susan himself but Layard could – despite the hostility of the local tribes – and he found at Susan, just over 50 km to the east of Masjed-e Soleyman and more than 150 km from Shush, some ruins and a tomb, reported to be that of Daniel. Since there was not anything on a scale to justify identifying this site as ancient Susa, Layard therefore argued convincingly that Susan could not be Susa⁶⁹⁷.

Layard described his travels in Khuzestan in a long article⁶⁹⁸, for which he was awarded the gold medal of the Royal Geographical Society, and in a much later memoir, titled *Early Adventures in Persia, Susiana and Babylonia* (1887). Copies of several inscriptions are included in his *Inscriptions in the Cuneiform Character* (1851). In addition to much valuable archaeological and historical information, Layard's writings are an important source for the state of the Bakhtiari tribe⁶⁹⁹ in the early 1840s and their relations with Manučehr Khan, the governor of Esfahan. But Layard also met a number of European travellers, among whom the Russian diplomat Clement August baron de Bode, the first informant about the rock reliefs of Tang-e Sarvak and whom Layard saved from a probable attack by Mohammad Taqi Khan and his tribe⁷⁰⁰. Moreover, in his writings Layard frequently refers to desolate hills, ancient mounds, bridges, dams, and roads, old caravanserais, destroyed castles, and the ruins of settlements, many of which he wrongly attributes to the Sasanian period (224-650 AD). His tale of escape, kidnapping, theft, lion hunting, duels and treasure hunts would seem the perfect script for a Hollywood movie. Of greatest interest, however, are his descriptions of ancient rock reliefs in the Plain of Izeh⁷⁰¹ (Malamir) and in the Valley of Shimbar (Šembār) because he, as he stressed in his

large numbers of cuneiform tablets and small objects in bronze, glass, ivory and other materials. Many of these objects are now in the British Museum.

696 Layard 1894, 164.

697 Layard 1842; 1846, 61-62, 91-94; 1887, I, 11-12, 399-424.

698 *A Description of the Province of Khuzestan* (1846).

699 He spent most of this time in Khuzestan (Kūzestān) and Luristan (Lorestān), staying with members of the Bakhtiari tribe. He had a particularly good relationship with Mohammad Taqi Khan, the chief of their Čahār Lang division. Interestingly, he describes the Bakhtiari as great warriors, knights, rebels and thieves in practically the same words used – as above – by Nearchus and reported by Strabo (XI.13.6; XV.3.12; XVI.1.18; see also Livy, XXXVII.40; Appian, LXVI.6.32) to describe the Elymaeans. Stressing their pride in considering themselves as pure Iranian of Persian blood, they were probably descendants of the peoples who inhabited those inaccessible regions from ancient times onwards (1894, 163-163).

700 Layard 1894, 210.

701 For the precise location, see De Waele (1981, 48, fig. 2).

memoir⁷⁰² was the first European to have visited these monuments. Moreover, he also describes his discovery of two Parthian reliefs in a gorge, called Tang-e Botan⁷⁰³ and his “disappointing” encounter with the ruins of the legendary *Musjedi Solomon Bozurg*⁷⁰⁴.

Around the same time, even the previously mentioned Baron de Bode went to the plain of Malamir (7 February, 1841) and later published his two-volume work *Travels in Luristan and Arabistan*, including a description with abundant sketches of the reliefs at Shikaft-i Salmān's cave⁷⁰⁵.

I mention in passing some of the 19th century travellers who crossed Malamir, aided by the new trade route that led from Ahwaz to Esfahan across the Bakhtiari Mountains, and who cited the reliefs and inscriptions: G. Haussknecht (1868), A. Houtum-Schindler (1877)⁷⁰⁶, H. L. Wells (1881), F. Houssay (1885), H. B. Lynch (1890) and G. N. Curzon (1890).

It should be pointed out that while these travellers mentioned the ruins, study of them was not part of their missions, which were concentrated on political, military and economic affairs, often dominated in this century by the lure of oil.

702 Layard 1887, I, 342, 353.

703 Tang-e Botan is specifically the name of the place where the bas-reliefs of the valley of Shimbar are.

704 Masjed-e Soleyman (Layard 1894, 178 and 340).

705 De Bode 1845, 30-34.

706 He was banned by the tribesmen because he tried to copy inscriptions, as was the case with Layard.

Appendix 4

The People of the Zagros

*“I spent all my life working in Iran. I don't mean the Iran of today - I mean Greater Iran that extended all the way from China to the borders of Hungary and from Outer Mongolia to Mesopotamia...”*⁷⁰⁷

The Iranian sense of identity, both historically and territorially, can be seen as a collective feeling of belonging to the historic lands of Iran. It evolved from a common historical experience and cultural tradition among the peoples who lived in *Irânzamin*⁷⁰⁸ and who shared in Iranian mythologies and legends. This picture changes radically closer to the Zagros among the people who inhabit these lands. Today, indeed, tribal groups such as the Kurds, Lurs and Bakhtiari dominate the Zagros Mountains. As discussed earlier, the complex geography here created refuge areas for marginalised populations and served to divide and isolate, in the past, newly arriving populations who sought settlement or transhumance.

The consequence was that the tribes of these areas, in particular the Bakhtiari, constituted a state within a state and one result was fierce disputes with the Iranian government over the last century and a half. The tribes' organization, power, and way of life were considered incompatible with national modernisation and Iranian rulers pursued varied policies towards them over the years⁷⁰⁹.

But who are these Bakhtiari? Are they the successors of the Elymaeans we read about in the classical sources? Not much is known about their ethnicity. Some scholars see them as the

707 Richard Nelson Frye, interviewed by Asieh Namdar, CNN, 20 October 2007.

708 The Iranian term refers to the regions of south, west, and central Asia that have significant Iranian cultural influence and have historically been ruled by Iranians. It roughly corresponds to the territory on the Iranian plateau and its bordering plains, stretching from Iraq, the Caucasus, and Turkey to the Indus River of Pakistan. It is also referred to as Greater Persia, while the Encyclopaedia Iranica uses the term “Iranian Cultural Continent”.

709 Even in the 1960s after a long period in which Iranian authorities had alternately warred and bargained with the tribes, the new policy was to feign ignorance of their existence.

descendants of the Kurds⁷¹⁰ and others argue that the Bakhtiari are the “Great Lurs” and the Elamites the “Ancient Lurs”, identifying the name *Lur* with the Lullubi⁷¹¹ of the 3rd millennium BC⁷¹². But these statements do nothing but replace one question with another, namely: who are the Kurds and the Lurs?

It is difficult to locate similar tribes mentioned in ancient texts. This is partly because the tribes were (and are) transhumant, spending the winters in the lower-lying plains and the summers in the mountain pastures; partly, too, because tribal groups have often moved from one region to another; and partly because different groups are given similar names, although in Greek and Roman texts these may in fact be merely descriptive.

If we consider the history of this region, what can be understood about these tribes is at best a broad outline, although a little more is known from the period “Atabeg” in the second half of the 12th century, and perhaps we could follow the reasoning of D. Ehmann⁷¹³ who does not see one ethnic unit in the Bakhtiari but rather an ensemble of Iranian, Arab, Armenian and Mongol elements. In another hypothesis – based on an account in the *Tarikh-i Guzidah* (or Select History) written by Hamdullah Mustawfi of Qazwin in 1330 AD – they are believed to have migrated to the central Zagros region from Syria in the 10th century AD. On the contrary, as can be seen in the stories of Layard⁷¹⁴, they considered themselves of pure Iranian or Persian blood⁷¹⁵ (in physical and moral qualities) and this led the French adventurer to suppose their direct descent from peoples who had lived in those remote territories since ancient times (Elymaeans?), describing them as great warriors – in particular horsemen – as well as thieves and rebels. The lands had always been considered “*a nursery of soldiers*”⁷¹⁶, inhabited by “*predatory peoples*” who “*rely on*

710 Melkonian, V. (1960), Bakhtiyārī. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, I, 985.

711 “Ancient group of tribes that inhabited the Sherizor plain in the Zagros Mountains of western Iran. A warlike people, they were especially active during the reign of the Akkadian king Naram-Sin (reigned c. 2254–c. 2218 bc) and at the end of the dynasty of Akkad (2334–2154 bc). The Lullubi were apparently subjugated by Naram-Sin, who commemorated his triumph on a masterpiece of Mesopotamian sculpture, the Naram-Sin stele; the tribes, however, soon regained their independence and resumed harassment of southern Mesopotamia, helping to bring an end to the Akkadian empire. Later overshadowed by their more powerful neighbours, the Lullubi remained a source of unrest almost to the end of Mesopotamian history” (Encyclopaedia Britannica, s.v.).

712 Von Eickstedt, E. (1961), *Türken, Kurden und Iraner seit dem Altertum: Probleme einer anthropologischen Reise*.

713 Ehmann 1975.

714 Layard 1894, 162-163.

715 Bakhtiari folk-history narrates that they are the descendants of Fereydoun, a legendary hero of the Persian epic, *Shahnameh* (The Book of Kings, or Epic of the Kings), written by the great poet Ferdowsi.

716 Strabo, XVI.1.18.

*the ruggedness of their mountains*⁷¹⁷.

If the origin of a relatively “recent” people such as the Bakhtiari still remains an enigma, it is exponentially more difficult to categorize the Elymaeans. At least, what does seem clear now is that after the sack of Susa by Ashurbanipal’s army in 646 BC, Elam perhaps fragmented into many smaller reigns of which, in all probability, Elymais was a direct descendant. This topic discussed more thoroughly in section 7.3. What can be said now is that archaeological work in Khuzestan⁷¹⁸ has revealed how the occupation of that area was much denser and extended during the Parthian period compared to preceding times. In particular – mainly thanks to a study of pottery⁷¹⁹ – it has been shown that only one people occupied this area during the last century of the 1st millennium BC, the Elymaeans.

Living in that long stretch of mountains, they earned their livelihood from raising livestock and by taking opportunities to rob strangers, but also by establishing their control over all the southern passes of the Zagros and devoting themselves to the art of war. Indeed, they were celebrated – as well as the Elamites in the previous centuries – for their skill in archery. They were reputed to be great warriors and were often hired as mercenaries to fight in the wars of others. As an autonomous and combative people, they were characterised by a strong sense of identity which did not easily accept foreign domination. Strabo bears testimony to the fact that the Elymaeans, together with other neighbouring peoples, were even able to exact a yearly tribute from Achaemenid kings⁷²⁰. They were sometimes in league with these neighbours: to the north with the *Cossaeans* (or *Kossaeans*), who demanded a “travel fee” for whoever wanted to use the mountain road linking Susa with Laodicia and Ectabana; to the east, with the *Paraetaceni*, masters of the highlands above Gabae (Esfahan); and to the southeast instead they bordered with the Uxians, who held the famous “Persian gates”.

Nothing is known of Elymaean language during the Greek period, and that is why to go further with a linguistic discussion it is necessary to take into consideration the Elymaean inscriptions in following periods. Henning⁷²¹ was the first to decipher and interpret Elymaean

717 Strabo, XV.3.12

718 Wenke 1975-1976, 98-99, 115, 124, 133; Alizadeh 1985, 178-179.

719 Alizadeh 1985 178-179

720 Strabo, XI.13.6.

721 Henning 1952.

inscriptions on coins and rock reliefs in Khuzestan, the language proving to be a form of Aramaic, in particular a form of the Middle Aramaic script (Mandaic) which is closely related to that used in Mesopotamia in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD⁷²². As pointed out by Henning himself, the ideograms present on the later Elymaean tetradrachms and the inscription at Tang-e Sarvak are not in Aramaic but rather their presence “*may have been an Iranian dialect or it may have been a surviving form of Elamite... Perhaps the lowlands of Khuzistan were peopled by speakers of Aramaic while in the highlands to the north an Iranian (or Elamite?) language was spoken; and the mints of the Kamnaskires dynasty, to accommodate both national groups, issued coins with legends in both languages for local circulation*”⁷²³. As appropriately stressed by Potts⁷²⁴, if the deduction of the famed Iranist was correct about the two languages – Aramaic in low-lying areas and Elamite in mountainous regions – Elymais would indeed be a new example of ethno-linguistic duality in Elam⁷²⁵.

There would then be the interesting question of the language known as *khuzi* of which the Arab geographers of the 10th century AD⁷²⁶ mention the existence in Khuzistan and that seems to have nothing to do with Aramaic, Persian, Hebrew or Arabic⁷²⁷. It is not the primary purpose of this thesis to examine in depth the issues of ethno-linguistic context, for that reason I will borrow the words of the Russian orientalist Igor’ Mikhaïlovich Diakonoff who states as “*whether it was a peripheral Iranian dialect like Kurdish or Lūrī, or an Aramaic dialect like Mandaic of Southern Iraq, or really a remnant of ancient Elamite, remains uncertain*”⁷²⁸.

722 Klugkist 1986, 166

723 Henning 1952, 166.

724 Potts 1999a, 386.

725 See Amiet (1979) and Vallat (1980).

726 In addition to information provided by al-Istakhri and Ibn Hawqal, it is in *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadim (c. 987 AD) which is written one of the oldest evidence of Islamic era on the linguistic situation in Iran, by the words of Ibn al-Muqaffa’ (d. 757 AD) according to whom “*la langue pârsi [comprend] le pahlavi, le dari, le pârsi, le xuzi et le soryâni. [...] Le xuzi est la langue que parlaient les rois et les nobles dans le privé et dans les moments de jeu et de plaisir, et avec leur entourage*” (Lazard 1971, 361). Al-Muqaddasi gives a rather negative view of *khuzi*, also reporting a comment attributed to Muhammad which asserts “*the khuzi is the language of the devil*” (Cameron 1948, 18, footnote 115). See also Basello 2004.

727 Reference in Schwarz 1896-1929, 406. See also Cameron 1948, 18, footnote 115; Spuler 1952, 243, footnotes 2 and 3; Diakonoff 1985, 24 and Potts 1999a, 415. The Professor Gian Pietro Basello in a personal communication suggests to derive this language from Greek, rightly pointing out as Susa – in many respects – became a “Greek” city.

728 Diakonoff 1985, 24.

Appendix 5

Tang-e Botan⁷²⁹ in the Shimbar Valley

General Aspect

The archaeological site of Tang-e Botan⁷³⁰ – تنگ بتا or تنگ بتان – is in a valley set into the mountain of Kuh-e Della⁷³¹ on the way to the plain of Shimbar (or شیمبار) around 50-55 km northeast of the city of Masjed-e Soleyman. The name *Shimbar* is a contraction used in the Bakhtiari dialect for the Persian term *Shirin Bahar* – شیرین بهار – which literally means “Sweet Spring”. This title fully reflects the beauty of this verdant area, which is endowed with much vegetation and water resources as well as pastures for the migrating season.

The concentration of constructions, rock reliefs and inscriptions in the valley of Shimbar draws attention to the importance of this locality. Moreover, the presence of areas dedicated to terracing on the hillsides – attesting to intensive agriculture⁷³² – reinforces such a hypothesis. The role of this site in ancient times is certainly intriguing, in that here – just as at Tang-e Sarvak – there has not been a comprehensive analysis, and this is another area that could hold particularly interesting details of the history of Elymais and more besides. The discovery of this type of rock relief in Elymaean style – i.e. Tang-e Botan – could imply the presence of a religious site moreover confirmed by a possible designation given by one of the personalities “*who is (keeper of) the altar of Bel (?)*”⁷³³. Furthermore, the combination here of elements of Greek, Semitic, Iranian and Elymaean iconography and nomenclature does raise stimulating questions regarding interpretation and dating, not just of the reliefs but the entire area which due to its position and configuration could have played a most important role on the chessboard of Elymaean politics.

729 Bivar and Shaked 1964; Vanden Berghe 1983, 50, 121-122; Vanden Berghe, Schippmann 1985, 46-53; Kawami 1987, 73-74; Mathiesen 1992, II, 125-130 and selected bibliography.

730 The Gorge of the Idols (Bivar and Shaked 1964, 265).

731 In the region of Khuzestan, Chahar Mahal va Bakhtiari.

732 Traces have been found of the cultivation of vines and pomegranates and other fruit trees (Bivar and Shaked 1964, 285), which now grow wild in an area which still seems productive and is well watered by springs and streams.

733 Inscription III (Bivar and Shaked 1964, 272, 276-277). For an alternative reading, see Sznycer (1965, 7) and Kawami (1987, 181). See also Altheim and Stiehl (1966, 69), who instead rule out a mention of Bel.

Archaeological Context

In the gorge of Tang-e Botan there are two reliefs around 25 m from each other⁷³⁴, the first at the entrance to the valley and bearing the figure of only one personality, while the second relief is in the valley itself and has twelve figures, probably the “idols” referred to in the name of the site⁷³⁵. This latter relief has nine personalities sculpted life-size and three of smaller dimensions, and at first sight they all may appear to form a continuous group, but in reality – on closer inspection – they are revealed as five distinct groupings with repetition and variation of the same theme. Leaving the second relief and following the same path leads to the ruins of a construction which could be identified as a temple⁷³⁶

Returning to the first relief, this has the figure of a male one metre high standing in a frontal position. His right arm is bent with his hand level with his shoulder, while his left hand seems to be at his left hip. His hair seems to be dressed in the typical *halo* shape. The erosion is so advanced that it is impossible to make out facial details, even if Mathiesen hypothesises the presence of a beard⁷³⁷. This personality wears a knee-length tunic with an apparent rolled-up cloak⁷³⁸ on the left side of his body.

The second relief is divided into five groups of which three include two personalities each (I, III, IV) and two have three each (II, V). All are represented in fixed and absolute frontality with a characteristic by now typical in Elymaean reliefs: they have been deliberately defaced (*see picture below*).

The two figures in *Group I* are male. From the left, the first personality (1.85 m) is represented nude. His right hand seems to hold a club and his left hand is placed on his chest, perhaps holding a shallow cup⁷³⁹. Facial details are missing but the head is clearly crowned with a

734 Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 51.

735 See footnote 515.

736 Bivar and Shaked 1964, 280

737 Mathiesen 1992, 2, 125.

738 This is a common element in the reliefs of Elymais and it could indicate the distinctive sign of a particular social class (Mathiesen 1992, 2, 129).

739 Bivar and Shaked 1964 268; Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 50; Mathiesen 1992, 2, 125.

Appendix 5

diadem⁷⁴⁰. In the top left corner there seems to be a small axe⁷⁴¹. The second personality (1.80 m) has his right hand placed on the left arm of the naked figure and his left hand seems to grasp a rolled-up cloak. There is a kind of small altar between the figures and there is an inscription between their heads⁷⁴².

Group II has three personalities of which the first on the left (1.95 m) is represented nude while the other two (1.95 m and 2.0 m) are clothed⁷⁴³. As before, the nude figure seems to hold a club in his right hand and in his left hand, a cup held at chest level. The face is missing while his hair seems to be dressed in a *halo* shape. There is a diadem on his head and tied at the back with an ample ribbon. There are two men standing on his right. Both have the same hairstyle as the nude personality and even if their faces are damaged it seems the man on the left has a short beard. Both these men wear tunics and hold rolled-up cloaks at their left sides. The clothed man on the left holds his right hand close to the hip of the nude personality while the clothed man on



Appendix 5 – Tang-e Botan (picture online at: taryana.ir).

740 *Diadema*, a head ornament. In ancient tradition, it was invented by Dionysus. Priests and diviners wore, as a symbol of consecration, a headband which served to indicate a religious character, even in objects and animals. As an emblem of sovereignty the diadem is a particularity of Asiatic royals, first of all the king of Persia, who tied his turban with a purple band interwoven with white. Alexander the Great adopted a form of white ribbon decorated with gold, with fringes at the extremities descending to the nape of the neck. This was inherited from Hellenic kings. The Arsacids had four succeeding orders of diadem. Romans detested the white ribbon, considering it to be a sign of those who aspired to be tyrants.

741 Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 50, Mathiesen 1992, 2, 126.

742 Inscription I, which states *Sptw the stwr 'wky the Elder (?) who is b'sybh, son of Swl* (Bivar and Shaked 1964, 272). Other scholars (e.g. Szyner 1965, 3) have sought to translate the word *Elder* instead as *Inspector* or *Senator*; even if such a translation had already been refuted by Bivar and Shaked (1964, 274).

743 Bivar and Shaked 1964, 269; Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 50-51; Mathiesen 1992, 2, 127-128.

the right holds his right arm bent near the upper arm of the man at his side. Between the nude personality and the man at left there is a conical object, presumed to be an altar⁷⁴⁴, and an inscription can be noted between their heads⁷⁴⁵. There are another two inscriptions between the two clothed figures⁷⁴⁶.

As in Group I, *Group III* also has two personalities (from the left, 1.95 m and 1.86 m)⁷⁴⁷. The nude figure on the right seems to correspond with the figure in Group II in his standing posture, attitude and position of the arms. Even the hair and the diadem with its ribbon at the back of the head are identical. The man on the right is dressed the same as the personalities in Group II, and like them he also has a rolled-up cloak on his left side. His right arm is directed towards the upper arm of the nude personality, while his left arm is at his left side. Between these figures at the bottom there is an altar, and at the top there is an inscription⁷⁴⁸.

Group IV also includes a nude figure (on the left, 1.95 m) and a clothed man (on the right, 1.75 m)⁷⁴⁹. The nude personality seems identical to the one in Group III. The clothed man has his right arm lifted to the left shoulder of the nude male and his left hand is beside his left hip. Between these two figures there is an altar, and as in the other groupings, it seems to float in the air. There are no inscriptions.

The last group – *Group V* – is formed of three figures (1.10 m) all dressed in long tunics, not appearing to have trousers or rolled-up cloaks, and standing frontally⁷⁵⁰. Apparently, all these figures seem to hold their right arms uplifted and the left arms are kept by their left sides. These figures are placed on a panel lower than the previous group but the ground-level position is similar.

Pottery and Associated Goods

For Tang-e Botan and the area of Shimbar in general, there is a similar discourse applied here as was previously enforced to Tang-e Sarvak and adjacent areas⁷⁵¹. Bivar and Shaked give

744 Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 50. Bivar and Shaked (1964, 269) interpret this object as a mortar for use in the *haoma* ceremony. This hypothesis has been refuted by Vanden Berghe and Schippmann (1985, 50, footnote 120).

745 Inscription II translated as *Srwwk, who is b'sybh, son of Smwm* (Bivar and Shaked 1964, 272).

746 The one at the top is inscription III. The one at the bottom – inscription IV – states: *These are the images which Sptw prepared, son of S's, from 'yrsy* (Bivar and Shaked 1964, 272).

747 Bivar and Shaked 1964, 269; Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 51; Mathiesen 1992, 2, 128.

748 Inscription V translated as *Orodes the Great, who is b'sybh* (Bivar and Shaked 1964, 272).

749 Bivar and Shaked 1964, 269; Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 51; Mathiesen 1992, 2, 128-129.

750 Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 51; Mathiesen 1992, 2, 129.

751 Section 6.2.3.

notice of the ruins of a construction near the reliefs that could be identified as a sanctuary, as well as the remains of terrace cultivation. The site appears to have been known to the Bakhtiari tribes in the 1960s⁷⁵² under the name *Qal'eh-ye Dokhtar*⁷⁵³ or *Qal'eh-yi Dukhtar*⁷⁵⁴ which is a much used designation of historical constructions in rural Iran. There does not appear to be any evidence of there being a fortress here⁷⁵⁵. The problem arises here as it does at Tang-e Sarvak, of there being no exploration, study or probe of the area up to now. Moreover, the area seems rich in potential discoveries⁷⁵⁶. The consequence is that we are groping in the dark when trying to confront the key subject of the historic-religious role played by the area of Shimbar and the Elymaean sites in general in the Zagros Mountains.

Past Interpretations

The ancient sculptures and inscriptions at Shimbar were discovered in 1841 by Sir Austen Henry Layard and reported for the first time in his study, *A description of the province of Khuzestan*⁷⁵⁷. The British archaeologist's visit to Shimbar and Tang-e Botan followed the same pattern as those of others, being hasty and arduous. Nonetheless, Layard was capable of making an accurate hand-drawn copy of the Tang-e Botan inscriptions – which he interpreted as Pahlavi – as well as describing the reliefs⁷⁵⁸ and reporting the presence of the remains of foundations and constructions which he believed to be Sasanid⁷⁵⁹. Naturally, Layard's work was sufficiently accurate for its time in the mid-19th century but it was not complete and more material was needed to provide a more detailed picture of the site. It is difficult to believe that his discovery did not attract much attention in the academic world up to 1930, when photographic documentation⁷⁶⁰ of the main relief at Tang-e Botan was published by Herzfeld⁷⁶¹. The famous iranologist seemed to be aware of the inscriptions even if the passage in which he speaks of them

752 One of the significant difficulties encountered in writing this thesis has been seeking to correlate names and transliterations given to sites in studies of 20-30 or more years ago with those applied now.

753 *Qal'eh Dokhtar* ("The Maiden Castle") is a castle built by Ardashir I in 209 AD. It is located on a mountain slope near the Firouzabad-Kerman road.

754 Bivar and Shaked 1964, 280.

755 Bivar and Shaked 1964, 280.

756 Bivar and Shaked 1964, 281-285.

757 Layard 1846, 84.

758 Layard 1846, 84-85.

759 Layard 1846, 86.

760 A photograph taken by R.G. Monypenny, the British consul at Ahvaz, between the end of 1928 and the beginning of 1929.

761 Herzfeld 1929-1930, 71.

is not fully clear⁷⁶². In 1935, the Russian historian Mikhail Rostovtzeff briefly confronted the question of this relief at Tang-e Botan, and – keeping in mind the nudity of the personalities – he maintained that they were an assembly of deities⁷⁶³ and their worshippers. A more plausible interpretation comes from Neilson C. Debevoise, who hypothesises the presence of a “*king, his court, attendant gods, and the royal children*”⁷⁶⁴, and in time he was a source of inspiration for a detailed study of the site conducted by Bivar⁷⁶⁵ and Shaked, published in 1964 and titled *The Inscriptions at Shimbar*. Their article is primarily focused on the inscriptions, but without forgetting the importance of the context in which they have been found, such as the surrounding area and the nature of the monuments of which they are a part. In this attempt to write a comparative analysis, Bivar and Shaked – for palaeographic reasons – not only emphasise a similarity with the inscriptions at Tang-e Sarvak but also identify them as transcriptions of an little-known Elymaean language⁷⁶⁶ which could moreover have points of contact with the language spoken at Palmyra⁷⁶⁷.

The two scholars first suggested a division of groups in the panel, and they interpreted the scene represented on the relief as the act of taking an oath by a local dignitary in the presence of a deity, possibly belonging to an Iranian cult⁷⁶⁸. The possibility seems to be excluded of it being the scene of an investiture⁷⁶⁹, while if the translation given of the word *b'sybh* – present in the inscription – in “*(is) in oath or while taking an oath*”⁷⁷⁰ is correct, the relief could refer to an oath-taking connected with a sacrifice taking place in a religious area.

If the clothed personalities can be seen as local dignitaries⁷⁷¹ or priests⁷⁷², the nude figure identified by Bivar and Shaked could be a representation of the Iranian god Verethragna in the

762 Herzfeld 1929-1930, 71; Bivar and Shaked 1964, 266, footnote 8.

763 Rostovtzeff 1935, 258.

764 Debevoise 1942, 102.

765 Bivar stayed at Shimbar in 1962 and was courteously welcomed by Muhammad Muradi, chief of the small encampment at Tang-e Botan, who also acted as his guide in the gorges of Shimbar. Bivar reported the details of his journey (Bivar and Shaked 1964, 266-268).

766 Bivar and Shaked 1964, 271, 279.

767 Bivar and Shaked 1964, 280. Making reference to Seyrig (1941, 256).

768 Bivar and Shaked 1964, 269. The two scholars further suggest that the repetition of the same scene would be tied to the fact that it deals with separate events sculpted at intervals of several decades, with the oldest being on the left (Bivar and Shaked 1964, 269-271).

769 Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 51. Such a conclusion is based on the absence in the relief of the passage of the diadem, the symbol of investiture. Mathiesen (1992, 2, 130, footnote 19) suggests that the presence of the diadem is necessary only *in connection with secular appointments* and therefore not in a religious context.

770 Bivar and Shaked 1964, 273, after a suggestion by W. B. Henning.

771 Bivar and Shaked 1964, 269; Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 51.

772 Mathiesen 1992, 2, 129.

guise of his Greek equivalent, Hercules⁷⁷³. This hypothesis was shared by Ghirshman⁷⁷⁴, Vanden Berghe⁷⁷⁵, Schippmann⁷⁷⁶ and Kawami⁷⁷⁷. Specifically, it is not difficult to assume that this latter personality – which represents in all probability the same deity in all four groups⁷⁷⁸ despite there being a few small stylistic differences – would have been based on the same model, presumably as a representation borrowed from the classical world of the demigod Hercules. And yet, representation does not necessarily imply identification. As has been convincingly expounded by Hansman⁷⁷⁹, the religion of Elymais and its deities belong most probably to the Semitic world rather than the Iranian world⁷⁸⁰, and it is possible, even if it remains purely a hypothesis, that the nude personality could be identified as Bel⁷⁸¹. This hypothesis is supported by Bivar and Shaked, and in their article they suggest a cult of Bel existed in the area in question⁷⁸².

Dating

The rock reliefs at Tang-e Botan (Shimbar) are generally dated to a period between the 1st century BC and the beginning of the 3rd century AD. Precisely, Group I is considered to be the first created, between the 1st century BC and the 2nd century AD – apparently because it seems more “Greek”⁷⁸³ – while the other groups follow in time, from the end of the 2nd century AD to the beginning of the 3rd century AD. In any case, an absolute dating of the groups is still a matter of debate.

773 Bivar and Shaked 1964, 268.

774 Ghirshman 1976, 122, 204.

775 Vanden Berghe 1983, 50. Vanden Berghe assisted by Haerincq (1981, 87) interprets him also as “*un roi defunt heroisé dans la personne d'Héraclès*”. It is to be emphasised that Vanden Berghe visited the site on several occasions (1962, 1964, 1968, 1975).

776 Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 50.

777 Kawami 1987, cat. no. 20.

778 On this point, see Downey (1969, 13) who – on the contrary – hypothesises the presence of various deities on the relief, identified by their diverse hairstyles. In reality, if on the one hand there could be small differences in hairstyle – keeping in mind that the state of erosion is so advanced that it is difficult to be sure – on the other hand it does seem strange that various deities would have been represented with the same attributes, as in this case with a club in their right hands and a cup in their left hands at chest level. See also Szyner (1965, 2) who suggests a different deity only for Group II.

779 Hansman 1985. It is to be noted that Hansman also visited Tang-e Botan and Shimbar in 1963 when he took part in the “Khuzestan Development Service” at Ahwaz and provided further photographic material to Bivar and Shaked (Bivar and Shaked 1964, 265, footnote 1).

780 See also Mathiesen 1988, 208; *idem* 1992, 2, 129; Boyce-Grenet 1991.

781 Mathiesen 1992, 2, 129.

782 Bivar and Shaked 1964, 268 (also footnote 13), 286; Hansman 1985, 237. See Inscription III and footnote 734.

783 This idea is based on a traditional view of Parthian art, where the more a monument seems “Greek” the more it is regarded as ancient, while the more it seems primitive and simple the later it is taken to be (Ghirshman 1975, 232-237; Kawami 1987, 182). The reality is that the question is still open as to whether this characteristic – taken on its own – could be a valid criterion for dating (Mathiesen 1992, 1, 47).

Debevoise⁷⁸⁴ attributed the reliefs at Tang-e Botan to the Parthian period, in particular suggesting that they must have been made before the 3rd century AD and probably were from the 2nd century AD. Many researchers of Parthian art shared this hypothesis, among them Downey⁷⁸⁵ and Colledge⁷⁸⁶. Bivar and Shaked⁷⁸⁷, attesting the palaeographic similarities between the inscriptions at Tang-e Botan and those at Tang-e Sarvak, dated the reliefs to the 2nd century AD – a line of thought also shared by Szzyrmer⁷⁸⁸ and Guepin⁷⁸⁹ – with Group I considered as older by a generation with respect to the others. The same has been said by Ghirshman⁷⁹⁰ and Kawami⁷⁹¹, who consider Group I as being from the 1st century AD and the others to be later, from the end of the 2nd century AD to the beginning of the 3rd century AD. H. von Gall⁷⁹² also believes that the reliefs would be contemporaneous with those at Tang-e Sarvak, proposing a dating at the end of the 2nd century AD or the beginning of the 3rd century AD. Harmatta⁷⁹³ instead suggests a dating that goes from the last decades BC for three successive generations until *c.* 75 AD. This accords with the opinion of Vanden Berghe⁷⁹⁴ – and Vanden Berghe and Schippmann⁷⁹⁵ – for a dating of the monument between the final decades BC (*c.* 75 BC) and 200 AD. Mathiesen⁷⁹⁶ instead maintains that all the groups are to be dated from the end of the 2nd century AD and the beginning of the 3rd century AD. In particular – after his own specific analysis of the sculpting style – he further maintains that Group IV and Group V would have been the first made and they correspond with Group 1 at Tang-e Sarvak (*c.* 170/180-190 AD)⁷⁹⁷, while Group I at Tang-e Botan would have been realised at the beginning of the 3rd century AD and thus would have been the last of the groups to be made⁷⁹⁸.

784 Debevoise 1942, 102.

785 Downey 1969, 13.

786 Colledge 1977, 92; *idem* 1986, pl. VIIIc.

787 Bivar and Shaked 1964, 271-272.

788 Szzyrmer 1965, 3.

789 Guepin 1965-1966, 23-24.

790 Ghirshman 1975, 237. This interpretation is suggested – according to the French archaeologist – by the different head of hair that Hercules is shown with in Group 1, compared with the other groups.

791 Kawami 1987, ca. no. 20.

792 Von Gall 1970, 305.

793 Harmatta 1976, 295, 303.

794 Vanden Berghe 1983, 50, 122.

795 Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 52.

796 Mathiesen 1992, 1, 45-47; 2, 130.

797 See Table 2.

798 Mathiesen 1988, 209. This hypothesis is based on a comparative analysis which includes Group I at Tang-e Botan, Group 3 at Tang-e Sarvak, the statue of Hercules at Masjed-e Soleyman and the stele of Artabanus V at Susa (Mathiesen 1992, 2, 130).

Appendix 6

Hung-e Azhdar⁷⁹⁹ and the Plain of Izeh-Malamir

General Aspect

The remote valley of Izeh⁸⁰⁰ – in Persian ایزه – is in northeast Khuzestan around 55 km⁸⁰¹ east of the city of Masjed-e Soleyman, and its name was also given to the city and county of this region. Also known by the name Malamir⁸⁰² (ملامیر) – or Izeh-Malamir – the area is on a provisional list of UNESCO World Heritage sites⁸⁰³ and is formed by a small almost oval-shaped valley surrounded by mountains of the Zagros chain. There are two small lakes in the valley at an altitude of *c.* 840 m, but there is no large permanent stream, with the Karun River being the nearest at *c.* 15-20 km east of the city.

Despite its isolation, the valley of Izeh is on the geographic borderline between the lowlands of the Khuzestan plains and the highlands of the Zagros range and dominates one of the few principal natural passages through the Zagros, making it a key junction point for various ancient routes going north to the plain of Shimbar and east in the direction of Esfahan⁸⁰⁴.

799 Vanden Berghe 1963b, 155-168; *idem* 1983, 120-121; Von Gall 1969-70, 301-302; Schlumberger 1970, 40-41; De Waele 1975, 61; Downey 1977, 285; Harmatta 1981, 200-219; Vanden Berghe and Schippmann, 1985, 32-38; Mathiesen, 1985, 191-196; *idem* 1992, 1, 17-19; 2, 119-121; Kawami, 1987, 119-125; Invernizzi, 1998, 219-259.

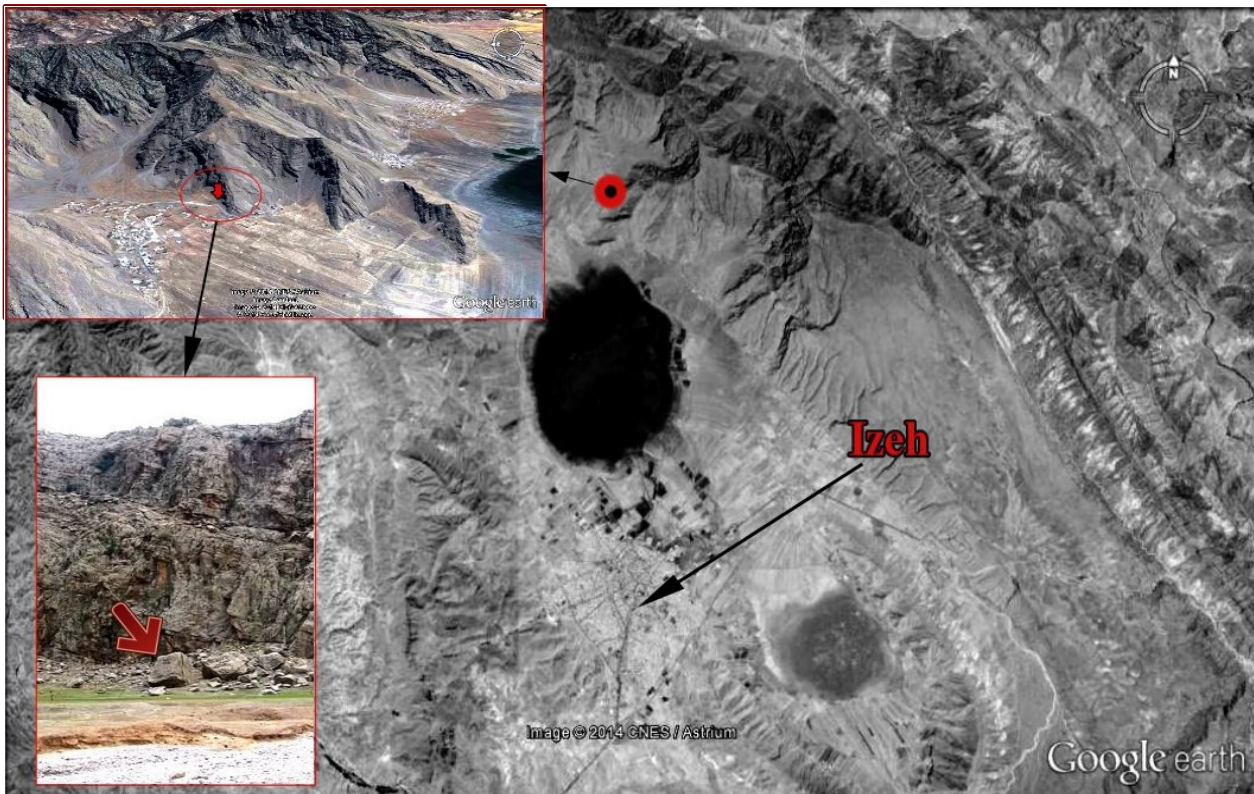
800 Also known under the names Izaj, Iza, Ida, Ideh, Idaj, Aydaj.

801 It may be incidental, but it is still worthy of note that the valley of Shimbar, the plain of Izeh and the temple of Masjed-e Soleyman are practically equidistant from each other – *c.* 50-53 km – and they form a near-perfect equilateral triangle.

802 In the early first millennium BC, the region was part of a local state called Ayapir, which was subjugated by the Elamite Empire. The exact name of Izeh after the Elamite period until the advent of Islam is unclear. Indeed, during the Parthian and Seleucid eras the kingdom of Elymais was established but – as discussed in the *Literature Review* – this was a name given to it by classical sources. We still do not know how the Elymaeans called themselves and their realm. At the time of the Arab conquest in the 7th century, the territory was called Izeh, but under the Arabs the Persian “h” was replaced with the Arabic “j”, and as Arab speakers can’t pronounce the Persian “z”, they called this town Idhaj (or Idaj). After the local dynasty of the Atabegs of Great Lorestan (Lor-e Bozorg), it was called Malamir or Malmir (king’s house or capital); this name was used until 1935 but after that and with the government’s approval, it changed again to its present name of Izeh. However, it is sometimes called Izeh-Malamir. See also footnote 71.

803 <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5269/>

804 Wright 1979, 33-128.



Appendix 6 – Izeh-Malamir and Hung-e Azhdar (Google Earth). Picture (in the bottom-left corner) online at: izehcto.persianblog.ir (modified).

Because of its relatively inaccessible position and given its control over important commercial routes, Izeh was an area where a series of small local states formed over the centuries. Recent archaeological explorations have revealed a succession of significant demographic cycles from the 5th millennium BC to the 14th century AD⁸⁰⁵. Archaeological discoveries have further shown clearly that settlements can be traced back to the Palaeolithic era, and contain relics from societies such as Elamite, Parthian-Elymaean, Sasanid and Arab; but human history here is marked by long periods of discontinuity which have made the region practically disappear from historical documents.

In the light of the time scale examined in this work, the concentration of Elymaean reliefs and ruins suggests that the Izeh plain would have played a most important role during the Seleucid and Parthian periods. A more detailed investigation of the region would be needed to explain why and how so many archaeological finds are grouped here.

An accurate approach will now be taken to the Hung-e Azhdar rock relief near the

805 Wright 1979, 33-128; de Miroschedji 2003, 17-38.

northern end of the valley⁸⁰⁶ (*see picture above*), which among them all is the one stimulating most interest because of conflicts apparent in both the iconography and the style of the figures making up the scene depicted in the relief.

Archaeological Context

The relief of Hung-e Azhdar – i.e. خنگ اژدر⁸⁰⁷ – portrays a scene of investiture or perhaps of homage, sculpted on the surface of an enormous boulder on the east side of the valley of this name. Often in the past, archaeologists have erroneously called the site *Hung-e Nauruzi* (or *Nowruzi*). In reality, though, *Nauruzi* does not indicate a place-name but is, rather, the name of a clan in the Bakhtiari tribe which had its winter encampment in the valley⁸⁰⁸.

The relief is *c.* 5.4 m long and *c.* 2.1 m high and is to be found unexpectedly on the face of the boulder not directed towards the open valley but instead towards the mountain slopes, that is, on the more hidden side, as if it were not meant to be seen. The choice of this side does not seem to derive from the condition of the surface on the more visible side – which has a large area suitable for carving – and where indeed there is another relief of a smaller size. This smaller relief is divided into two registers. The surface is heavily eroded, but on the lower register perhaps seven figures in profile can be discerned advancing solemnly towards a personality seated at the left side of the register. Its iconography recurs in reliefs of the Elamite era, characterised by long processions of people, and comparison with glyptic items has opened the way for a proposed dating to the 20th-18th centuries BC⁸⁰⁹.

The relief from the Parthian era is in a better state of conservation, on the left of the scene it shows a bearded horseman proceeding to the right, followed by an attendant on foot (a page, perhaps), and on the right side four standing male figures. The horseman and his attendant are in

806 About 10 km north of the city of Izeh.

807 The inhabitants of these valleys, the nomadic Bakhtiari people, pronounce *x* or *kh* as the letter *h*, and this is a reason why the word *hung* is pronounced as *khong* or *xong* (Mehr Kian 2000, 57, footnote 3). This is why there is sometimes confusion when transliterating the name of the site, which in some cases is translated as *Xong-e Azhdar* or *Khong-e Azhdar* (also *Khung-e Azhdar*). In this thesis, to facilitate a more rapid and simple identification, I have preferred to write the name of the relief in the form most well known at the academic level, that is, *Hung-e Azhdar*.

808 This information was gathered on site by W. Hinz (1963, 169) and then by De Waele (1975, 61, footnote 1).

809 Vanden Berghe (1963a, 38-39) suggests a first dating at the end of the 3rd millennium and a reading of the scene as homage to a king on his throne. Later, the same scholar suggests a chronology in the 20th-18th centuries BC and a re-reading of the seated figure as a deity (Vanden Berghe 1983, 27, 103).

Appendix 6

profile, while the standing figures are completely frontal. The horseman has at the nape of his neck a diadem with long floating tails and he seems to be wearing a tunic with a long cape on his shoulders. With his left hand he probably controls the reins and he holds an unidentified object in his right. The attendant behind him is hard to decipher, perhaps because of the poor state of conservation of the stone on this section of the relief, or perhaps because the figure may not have been finished. The four frontal figures – seeming to render homage to the horseman – are dressed in typically Iranian loose-fitting trousers and long tunics. The first two on the left have their hair arranged in a similar manner with large bunches at their ears, while the other two figures on the right of the relief have their hair arranged in a *halo* shape. The figure at the centre also seems to have been given prominence with his larger size – certainly standing higher than his three standing companions – and with the presence of a diadem whose tails float to the right of his face. His left hand is also placed on the hilt of a long sword. The figure on his left seems to have a rolled-up cloak at his left shoulder, with his right hand raised and holding an object, while his left hand is also placed on the hilt of a sword. The two other standing figures have their arms folded. Two birds – perhaps small eagles – are flying, one towards the horseman and the other towards the central standing figure, with each bird holding a wreath either in its beak or in its claws.



Appendix 6 – Relief of Hung-e Azhdar (Messina-Mehr Kian 2011, fig 4).

The Hung-e Azhdar relief is the most significant example of the anomalies existing in the realisation of Elymaean sculptures. It is a work of major interest within the historic and artistic contexts of ancient Elymais, as the iconography and style are quite different from the norm. Indeed, while the male figures on the right half of the relief are sculpted frontally and wear typical Iranian garments, the horseman and his attendant are the only figures completely in profile, a characteristic which at the current state of research does not seem to have exact parallels in Parthian art. It should be emphasised that the horseman is represented in the manner of a king from Hellenistic or early Parthian times, with short hair and a fringe on his forehead, and with a diadem and cape fixed at the neck. The sculpting work also seems to be different in the two halves of the scene, with the horseman more prominently in relief with respect to the frontally-facing figures.

Pottery and Associated Goods

The archaeological history of Izeh-Malamir remains largely unknown. As discussed previously, ruins and archaeological finds beginning at the Palaeolithic era show that the area would have always had a prominent role over time. For the Parthian era in particular, a new critical vision is emerging of the varying aspects of Elymaean and Seleucid-Parthian history, taking into account the relief mentioned above, together with recent archaeological surveys and the sanctuary of Shami *c.* 15 km northwest of the valley, as well as the relief and monumental remains at Tisiyun-Mehrnan⁸¹⁰ *c.* 10-15 km to the north.

With regard to the relief at Hung-e Azhdar – going beyond problems related to the sculpting technique and the style of the figures – there are several questions remaining to be clarified, and one was touched on above: was there a particular reason why the relief was sculpted on the hidden side of a boulder on the mountain slope as if it were made to be not visible from the valley? Furthermore, could it be that the relief is to be considered as an isolated element or one that formed an integral part of one or more buildings placed near the boulder? Only excavations can confirm or deny such possibilities, even if it seems reasonable to think that near the Elymaean rock reliefs – as seen at Tang-e Sarvak and Tang-e Botan⁸¹¹ – there were possible

810 See the article by Mehr Khian (2003).

811 Without forgetting, as mentioned earlier, the nearby presence of the sites at Shami and Tisiyun.

sanctuaries⁸¹² of an open-air type⁸¹³.

After the paucity of previous investigations, a preliminary exploration of the surrounding area was finally undertaken in three seasons of excavations by the *Iranian-Italian Joint Expedition in Khuzestan* (2008, 2009, and 2010)⁸¹⁴. With the aim of uncovering any possible archaeological traces, such as pottery fragments, an area limited to c. 4,400 m² was explored, with three small stratigraphic digs made near the sculpted boulder. The results so far have revealed a most disturbed archaeological context – above all caused by the discovery of non-authorized excavations – but with the finding of some pottery fragments, iron arrowheads, an engraved ring, terracotta figurines representing horses, and other stone structures similar to platforms. A classification was drawn up of the pottery finds which revealed nine different classes of material used⁸¹⁵.



Appendix 6 – Excavation at Hung-e Azhdar (Messina-Mehr Kian 2011, fig. 12).

Past Interpretations

The first traveller to write notes about the ancient monuments at Izeh-Malamir – defining it as “*perhaps the most remarkable place in the whole of the Bakhtiyári Mountains*” – was the Englishman Layard. When Layard visited the region in 1841-1842, Mohammad Taqi Khan was preparing a Bakhtiari revolt against the central powers in Tehran. However, Layard achieved his aims and as can be seen in his writings he was able to visit the rock reliefs of Kul-e-Farah, Shekaft-e Salman e Hung-e Azhdar⁸¹⁶. The next to come to this latter site was a member of the

812 Invernizzi 1998, 226.

813 There seems to have been a distinctive characteristic of the religious practices in the Elamite highlands, where ritual processions and religious ceremonies were conducted in open-air sanctuaries (Potts 2004; Alvarez-Mon 2013, 229). It is reasonable to believe that the Elymaeans – as their likely descendants – would have continued some of the practices of their ancestors, perhaps making modifications as normally happen in similar cultures over the course of centuries.

814 Messina and Mehr Khian 2011, 215-231.

815 Messina and Mehr Khian 2011, 223.

816 In his work, Layard refers to Hung-e Azhdar only with the term *Hong*, which in his opinion at the time indicated the valley where the relief was found (Layard 1846, 79).

French archaeological mission in Persia, G. Jéquier, in October 1898.



Appendix 6 – Comparison between Mithridates I's portray on coins and horseman at Hung-e Azhdar (picture online at: parthia.com).

As the years have passed, the peculiarities and inconsistencies of the relief have brought many scholars to question themselves about this work at Hung-e Azhdar, and still today interpretation of the scene – based on historic and stylistic criteria – is far from clear, while many unresolved questions have been raised about the presence of figures sculpted in such different ways.

Comparisons with portraits on coins of Mithridates I (141-138 BC.) have prompted some scholars to suggest a possible identification of the horseman with this king⁸¹⁷ and to interpret the scene as homage given by a king of Elymais – perhaps Kamnaskires II⁸¹⁸ – and his entourage to the great Arsacid dynasty⁸¹⁹. In any case, this interpretation is uncertain and according to other scholars the horseman could also be considered as a type of ancestor portrayal⁸²⁰, or even identified as a Seleucid king such as, for example, Demetrius II (first reign 146-139 BC.; second reign 129-125 BC)⁸²¹.

Vanden Berghe maintains that identification of the horseman as Mithridates I would be reinforced by the fact that the Arsacid king conquered Elymais in 140-139 BC and therefore the

817 Wolski (1976, 284) mentions an inscription of Mithridates I at Hung-e Azhdar while Harmatta (1981, 200-210) claims to have even made out an inscription in the area ahead of the front legs of the horse, proposing this reading: *Mithridates king of the kings*. There does not now seem to be any trace of this inscription on the surface of the relief, and if it should prove to have really been there, by now it would be completely eroded (Messina and Mehr Khian 2011, 217). See also Haruta (2003, 473) who also suggests that “*something oval like a human head is depicted beneath the left foreleg of the horse just like in Ardaxšīr's reliefs at Naqš-e Rostam*”.

818 See footnote 140.

819 Vanden Berghe 1963b, 155-168; *idem* 1983, 120-121; Schlumberger 1970, 40-41; Vanden Berghe - Schippmann 1985, 36. However, the hypothesis that the central figure is a local ruler is not generally accepted, as demonstrated by the fact that both Colledge (1977, 92) and Tawil (1979, 95) consider this figure to probably be a deity.

820 Kawami (1987, 124) is convinced that the man on horseback would be an ancestor honoured by the four men on the right. This ancestor – as emphasised by both Kawami and Mathiesen – could be Kamnaskires II Nikephoros even if the resemblance between the coin images of the Elymaean king and the representation on the relief is not strong enough to suggest support for such identification (Kawami 1987, 124; Mathiesen 1992, 2, 120). It would be true, however, that if the relief is considerably later than the 2nd century BC – the era of Kamnaskires II and Mithridates I – the features of his face would have been lost and substituted according to the artistic fashion of the time in which the relief may have been sculpted (Kawami 1987, 124).

821 Invernizzi 1998, 234-241.

relief could be a commemoration of the annexing of Elymais by the Parthian empire⁸²². Schlumberger is not sure about this identification of Mithridates I even if he believes Hung-e Azhdar has the oldest of the Elymaean reliefs. He further considers the difference in styles between the left and right sides of the relief to be an expression of the eclecticism of Greco-Iranian art⁸²³. Weidemann⁸²⁴ is also doubtful about whether the figure could be Mithridates I and the same applies to von Gall⁸²⁵, and also to De Waele⁸²⁶ who believes that the difference in styles could be attributed to the existence of two schools of sculptors, one local (right side) and another coming from outside the region (left side). A more likely possibility is suggested by Mathiesen⁸²⁷, who believes that the original idea of the relief would have been to represent an Elymaean prince honouring Mithridates I and the original concept would not have been too far from the form that the relief acquired when it was completed. The Elymaean ruler, in fact, was given a stature suitable for a king on equal terms with the Parthian sovereign, and not that of a humble and obedient vassal.

Dating

These varied interpretations completely change the historical context in which the relief was commissioned and realised: a late-Hellenistic or early Parthian chronology⁸²⁸ allows a placement of the execution of the scene – at least, the part including the horseman and his attendant – in the context of the conquest of Elymais by Mithridates I (c. 140-139 BC), or in the decades immediately afterwards, while a late-Parthian chronology (2nd-3rd centuries AD)⁸²⁹ seems rather to support reference to a commission or subsequent addition made by a local king⁸³⁰. Not to

822 Vanden Berghe 1963b, 155-168; *idem* 1983, 120-121. This hypothesis (shared also by Schmidt 1970, 139) is based also, and above all, on the presumed similarities between the standing figures on the right of the relief and the bronze statues at Shami. These statues could have come from one of the sanctuaries sacked by Mithridates I during his conquest of Elymais (see Appendix 1).

823 Schlumberger 1970, 40.

824 Weidemann 1971, 148.

825 Von Gall 1970, 308.

826 De Waele 1975, 61, footnote 2.

827 Mathiesen 1992, 2, 121.

828 Vanden Berghe 1963b; *idem* 1983, 120; Von Gall 70, 308; Schlumberger 1970, 40; Weidemann 1971, 148; De Waele 1975, 61, footnote 2; Ghirshman 1976, 233, 275; Vanden Berghe and Schippmann 1985, 36; Smith 1988, 101-102.

829 Kawami (1987, 124) is convinced that the relief would have been made at one time, the stylistic differences would be therefore insignificant, and it should be dated to the 2nd century AD, if not to the beginning of the 3rd century AD. Invernizzi (1998, 258) seems to opt for a longer chronological span, between the 1st and 3rd centuries AD. See also Colledge (1977, 92), Downey (1977, 65) and Herrmann (1977, 65).

830 Mathiesen (1992, 2, 120-121) believes the right part of the relief would be an addition made in the 3rd century AD, added to an unfinished work begun during the reign of Mithridates I.

Appendix 6

be forgotten, there are some scholars such as Debevoise⁸³¹ who suggest a dating in the Sasanid era⁸³².

831 Debevoise 1942, 103.

832 Hüsing 1908, 56; Erdmann 1969, 58. Schmidt (1970, 140) date the standing figures to the 2nd century AD but date the horseman to the Sasanid era.

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