

Fire Temples at Sassanid Era

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Abstract: Fire temples mean different places and/or religious constructions in which all followers and believed people of Zoroastrian made fire and performed their religious ceremonies. Although there are some Zoroastrian temples belonging to pre-Sassanid period, but the formation of these centers returns back mainly to Sassanid time. The real goal of this research is to study any religious architecture of Sassanid time and why public beliefs in Zoroastrian had great effects in architecture and how the religious leaders made required situation for religious architecture such as temples and/or four-dams by inviting people to Zoroastrian ideas. Rather than booklet studies and benefiting from different books and translation, it has been used in this essay from field studies and also three important and official temples in Iran including: Azar Goshnasb, Azar Barzin Mehr and Azar Faranbagh. We have visited different temples at different states and then current temples at India at Pouna & New Delhi cities and Chinese temples as well. Generally we may say that all these temples are similar with each other of course with little differences. It seems that the fire place for followers to worship is similar. Different professors studied this item including Professor Schatzer and others. According to the researches of these people, we may find new information about the structure and architectural form of temples. Fire is holy in Zoroastrian believes and all followers have been instructed to worship it accordingly. All Zoroaster's thoughts have been collected in a holy book under the title of "Avesta". For this purpose, Sassanid kings managed to establish different temples and/or four-dam structure throughout their domain area with similar and harmonized architectural forms. But each temple was allocated to a special class of society from worshipping point of view and for maintenance of holy fire in it. On the other hand, by studying and researching these places and religious structure we may find complete and new information in addition to make clear any religious and political relations and culture of Sassanid society accompanied with a new way for researchers to find historical works, classic architecture and cultural heritage of ancient Iran.

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1. Introduction

Some domestic and foreign researchers and investigators made different studies and considerations about architectural structure of temples in the past. In addition to Christian Sen, famous Scandinavian researcher who has written his major great work under the title of "Iran at Sassanid time" and Jackson's Travel account, Touraj Daryaei made a beautiful research about Sassanid time for the last time at U.S.A in 2005 whose efforts have been written in a book under the title of "Sassanid Kingdom".

It is for many years that Newman Rodelf is researching on destroyed parts of Takht-e-Soleiman where Azargoshnasb temple has been turned off as the most important and major Sassanid temple.

A group of Poland researchers had made some researches on Azar Barzin Mehr temple at Khorasan Razavi under the leadership of Ms. Barbara at Moscow University. A great number of other professors will compare different Iranian & Chinese temples as well.

Upon official acceptance of "Zoroaster Religion" by Ardeshir Babakan, founder of Sassanid

dynasty at 3rd Christian century, all priests found a special acceptance and respect. Ardeshir ordered to collect all Avesta copies and therefore Zoroaster religion had a lot of effects on architecture and urban planning with special samples in establishment of temples.

The records of establishment of temples in Iran may return back to primary Pars (Akdamenishian). This is because we may find some temples in highlighted drawings of kingdom graves and in Rostam picture on top of which the holy fire is burning. Their form is superficially an imitation of temples of other nations of Western Asia. It was in fact a table on which the victim would be placed. Then we have two great temples based upon a processed profile and Rostam drawing made from integrated stones. The upper side of which is toothed and relying upon four columns with special plans. But it was necessary to construct a building to keep last fire from natural factors. (Rack Anvala, 1928), (Shahvari, 2011)

Little by little it was specified in Zoroaster religion that if the sun does not ray on fire. Therefore a new style was created in construction of temple: A

completely dar room in middle of a building as the fire place.

Niasar Kashan temple is one of the buildings belonging to this period and one of the great changes of architecture in Sassanid age with a lot of signs of Roman dam –making methods in it (Pour Amini, 2005).

Priests may performed five –times prays of day and all religious jobs at temples, especially at the time of six-folds holidays named as “Gahan Bar” at special seasons. (Shiva, 2011)

There was a special condition for the festival. Some people who do not include in clergymen group were entitled to enter into temples and were obliged to read “Fire pray” there. All people believed that if a person go and read worship fire pray at temple, he/she may find a lot of wealth and greatness (Daryaei, 2008).

The architectural form of temple was a four-side building with four bending gates at all its four sides based on this dam-form four sided space. Therefore it is famous for this reason. Sometimes we have these four-dams individually but sometimes with related corridors and spaces. In all temples we have a fire-place on middle part of the temple with continuous burning of holy fire in it. Generally all temples have 8 gates and different 8-angle rooms (Christian sen, 2008).

The created art by Sassanid and resulted from religious effects in architectural structure is equal with the art of 2nd Rome Emperor and Buissons and even with more priority. A great number of temples were made at Sassanid time. But we have three temples as the most important temples of Sassanid time as follows all belonging to three social levels:

- 1-Azar Faranbagh temple located at Fars state and belonging to clergymen and priests
- 2-Azar Goshansb temple located at Azerbaijan state belonging to armies, aristocrats and kings.
- 3-Azar Barzin Mehr temple located at Khoasan state and belonging to farmers

Azar Faranbagh temple – It is one of the most important temples of Sassanid time with first position in this period and specially belonging to clergymen and priests with special centralization. This temple is one of the greatest and highlighted temples of Sassanid time and one of the most triple temples of Zoroastrians belonging to priests. (Figure 1)

2. Material and Methods

As the ancestor of Ardeshir Babakan, Sasan was the guardian of this temple. Sassanid people were especially interested in this religious temple.

There is not a common idea about geographical location of this temple. Hertsfeld believed that Farnbagh temple was located at Kenargan area which was named as Neishabour plain (Moghaddasi, Version 3). But this temple is located on Karian village according to Williams Jackson’s travel account and valuable work of Professor Arthur Christian Sen.

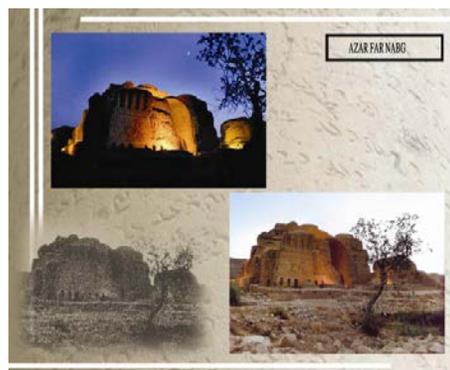


Figure 1: Azar Faranbagh temple

After a great way in Fars state, I , as the writer entered into Jovim city and discussed the matter of visiting this temple with civil authorities including mayor of Jovim – Eng. Bohlooli. They led me towards Karian village. I visited all remained works there which were named as Azar Franbagh temple with a height of 20m from main road on Karian village and changed into a mass of soil without any special works.

The major drawing of temple was in trapezoid form in which the front sides had a width of 5m and a height of 7m. There was a balcony with a height of 1.5m in front part with a triangle hole at top of this balcony at 3m height of the wall. Brick & clay were again the major materials for construction of these temples like other architectural works of Sassanid. On the top of the temple we may see different works of corridor and room all destroyed internally. There are different works on an encryption in Pahlavi language about spending about 30,000 dinar as building costs. Azar Faranbagh temple is also named as Karian temple in different references. It may supplied the required fire of other temples. In other words, the required fire of other temples was supplied through this temple. This was because it was a habit to revive the fire of low-importance temples by the fire of three other great temples (Christian Sen, 1921).

Azargoshnasb temple: It is one of the most famous and considerable temples of Sassanid age located at West Azerbaijan and 49km Northeast of Takab. Currently this village has changed into a city due to

great number of domestic and foreign visitors and tourists.

This temple is only belong to aristocrats, kings and armies while Sassanid kings went to worship on their foot and after crowning from Tisfoun (Capital of Sassanid) and granted a lot of their war booties.

Most of East & West researchers confirm that most kings went to that temple on their foot and at the time of crowning and granting a lot of gifts.(Figure2&3)



Figure 2: Azar goshnasb temple

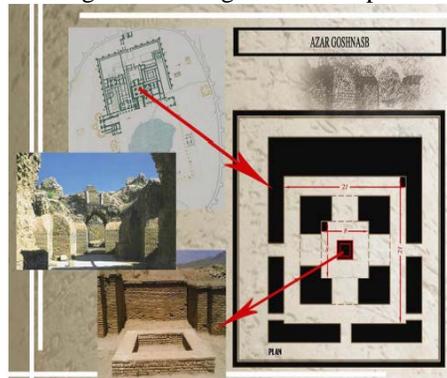


Figure3: the plan of Azar goshnasb temple

This item has been clearly stated in Jackson's travel account. Even as a famous geographic, Ibn Khordad stated that: "All Sassanid kings went to Azargoshnasb from Tisfoun for worshipping". (Ibn Khordad, version 6).

As one of the famous Islamic researchers, Masoudi confirms the ideas of Ibn Khordad and stated about Azargoshnasb in 10th century that:

"Today there are lots of strange works in that building as different signs of sky spheres and moon, stars, land, sea and residential parts, vegetables, animals and other strange things. The kings had a temple in this city which was respectable even for Iranian dynasties. It was named as Azarkhavash. Azar meaning "Fire" in Persian language and "Khavash" means Yankout".

At the time of crowning, all Iranian kings went to that temple for worshipping respectfully and granted lots of gifts ". (Ibn Khordad,).

It is generally understood that how much religion was powerful and influencing at that time and how much the policy makers were under the effect of religion.

Azargoshnasb means "Horse Fire", "Kingdom fire" and /or "Chevalier fire" which was supporting the chevaliers and respectable as a symbol of great unity.

In his book under the title of "Iran at Sassanid time" Professor Artur Christian Sen writes: "Azargoshnasb means kingdom fire which is located at Azerbaijan city at Iran" (Christian Sen, 2008).

The name of Azargoshnasb has been repeated in Avesta contents, history books of ancient Iran and writings of Greece and Rom historians. It has been repeated also in Shahnameh Ferdowsi about 70 times.

It is understandable from writings of historians that Azargoshnasb temple is a sign of unity between religion and government and a symbol of Sassanid government which was powerful due to the unity with religion.

Architectural properties of Azargoshnasb temple

Applying of brick and stone in this building is the most important element in establishment of this temple. This means that the foundation and even the balcony and surrounding gaps of temple have been established with stone worked stones.

But the magic point of this building is applying of brick even after installation of stones for the walls. And sometimes in contrast they applied the bricks at lower part of stone worked stones and it has not been recorded in Sassanid architecture industry up to now.

From the viewpoint of Professor Newman there are four different types of bricks in this building from which the greatest type is normal bricks of Sassanid time with dimensions of 30 *30 cm and diameter of 8cm. The remained are smaller and in different sizes from which the greatest bricks seem to be made in next dynasty.

The other element of the architecture of this temple is applying of wooden coils. This architectural method is named lost coil in Persian language and Cojrage in France. It means to apply woods among any gaps and walls and making a coil for more power of the building and prevention from destroying of any gaps.

There are four doors towards surrounding corridors in the area of the temple. The width of this corridor is about 2.80 m. This corridor has two small & great doors by the north which the middle door has a width of 1.5m and has been located at the opposite

door and at north part of the temple and main gate. There is a corridor with stone walls and a width more than 5m towards an avenue of the gate. The smaller entrance place located at northeast of corridor has a width of 1m. There is a gate with a width of 1.30m at East part. The West side of corridor is similar to northern side which is open towards a free space of the river along with a smaller corridor at southeast part. But in contrast with other drawings of temples there is not an entrance at west part of the temple without any companion. There is a school at left side of temple with a house on the back for the professors. Perhaps this school was special for mathematics. There is an observatory at the back of temple and besides which there is a place of worshipping of Anahidia as the Goddess of water (Pirnia, 2005).

Diameter of mouth of corridors is 2.5m with a thickness of arches of these corridors for 80cm and a height of 7m from the bottom of corridors.

The bases and height dam are most important in architecture of Azargoshnasb temple. Therefore most of Sassanid architectures made most of them with more powerful materials like stone, gypsum and brick and a mortar like cement.

It was impossible for any drilling inside the temple up to 1964. But after that a group of people accepted to drill domestic works of the temple with following results:

“The central arc of the temple is a great and interesting saloon made completely from red and/or yellow bricks at Sassanid time which is very powerful. Even after a lot of centuries its walls and four columns have been remained as well (Sarafraz, 1970).

Gypsum works are obvious on the walls and great dam of this temple. If it is possible to believe any writings belonging to the ancestors we can say that a lot of beautiful images on doors and walls belong to hunting ceremonies of kings and their crowning.

There are different rooms in Azargoshnasb temple.

There is a square room in center of the temple like a four-dam architecture with a fire place as well.

The second room was named as “Yazshen – gah” in which the fire was kept when it was hidden for worshipping.

All the mentioned rooms at this temple have four-dam architecture.

These rooms had special applications. For example a great part of war booties were kept in these rooms. All rooms made by stone worked stones with various arches made by bricks.

According to new findings, there are different balconies made by bricks in one of the mentioned rooms only for further worshipping.

It is assumed that total rooms are the center of worshipping Anahita in which water has a special respect.

According to the obtained results of drillings in 1960 a lot of columns of corridors have been found which are known as “Special architecture form” for palace constructions.

On the other hand, there is a “Eating saloon” for kitchens and great services.

The central yard at north part of the temple is also a place with estimated area of 500m² which has been decorated with 15 cubic columns at three parts of the building at east, west and north parts with 2.5m intervals. Columns made with stone worked stones with a length of 2m and width of 160cm.

As it was common in that place at that time, all angle columns applied at angles of the area with simple columns from them. These columns have generally double arcs from both sides, one towards neighboring walls and connected each columns to the other on the other. Therefore they could provide a yard at north part of temple which has been located like a portico.

The role of Takht-e-Soleiman in temple morphology

There is a great collection under the title of Takht-e-Soleiman besides such a religious architecture which has been registered as the 4th historian works by UNESCO Organization. There is a river surrounding it which may provide 44liter of water /second and has not been dried through the history.

A great number of palaces have been constructed around this building. Due to the presence of this river like a circle the surrounding environment has been changed into a nice landscape and with powerful agricultural & gardening activities while the water may pass from north and south and it is useful in morphology of the products. Yaqout Hamavi states about the greatness of this river as:” Water is continuously exits by seven basins for turning seven mills as well”. Now there is a deep place with a lot of sediments belonging to 1000 years ago (Pirnia, 2005)

Perhaps it is possible to say that it is the only river without any living creature in it due to great amount of limestone and non-potable water even for human beings. Depth of river is about 120m and up to now three persons died in it without finding their corpses. According to the ideas of a local leader who has lived there for 45 years Germans entered into the river with lots of advanced equipment in 2005 but they could not move downwards for more than 30m.(Figure4)

Since there are lots of stones with a lot of holes, river may attract any particles and even living creatures.

According to the speech of the same person about thousands fish were poured into this river within last years with a weight of 1kg. But after a little time all of them disappeared even for a corpse and/or living condition of them.



Figure4: Plan and picture of Takhte-Soleyman collection

This is one of the major strange items of this river which has been remained like a secret. Most of specialists claim that it is probable to have water ways to other parts on the middle of the river towards which the mentioned fish have immigrated accordingly.

The river inside the temple has a great role. This is because we have major temple at its center with the most important spaces on this axle.

This temple was subject to a lot of changes and deformations and even destructions. But it has kept its real identity.

It was destroyed thorough campaign of Heraclius against Khosro Parviz but it was renovated again. It had no more prosperity at the time of Arabs attacks and was destroyed little by little. But even after a great period of time, the only remained effects

of this temple are main four walls which are correct but the other parts have a lot of damages.

Azar Barzin Mehr temple

Azar Barzin Mehr is recognized in the name of Mehr Barzin and as one of all three important temples of Sassanid age. It has been located on 40km of Northwest of Sabzevar in Khorasan Razavi state in Rivand village affiliated of Davarzand and at north part of Fooshtengh village with exact geographical position mentioned on the figure 5.



Figure 5: the map of Sabzavar city and Azar Barzin Mehr temple

In contrast with two other temples of Sassanid age (Azargoshnasb & Azar Faranbagh), this temple belonged to farmers and is located exactly on the top of the v alley and hard to move heights. Sometimes the heigh of temple from current river bottom is about 100m.

The mentioned temple is exactly located on a mountain in the name of "Rivand" and/or "Rivas" in different areas. Its location is like a "Ziggurat". The architectural style of temple is somehow similar to other Sassanid temples (Cultural Heritage & Tourism Department of Sabzevar city).

The real elements of applied architecture include stone four-dams and different columns at cross section of arcs along with great stone columns at its center.

Since the mentioned temple is located on a rocky mounting, smoothing functions have been applied for construction of the building. Therefore in those parts lowr than ground level there are some primary stone arrangement and in other parts there are rock effects for "Foundation" and "Bases". Then due to such a great difference, the primary level of columns and in special heights it has been balanced with scraps stones.

There is a type of "Pouring mortar" for smoothing the bottom of the building and then "cement" was used in bottom which is a combination of gypsum and limestone and soft sands.

The four-dams structure is leading to a small corridor at Northeast part which was probably the main entrance and/or a part for gathering. This

corridor was connected to a corridor for any entrance / exit purposes.

The relevant plan of temple is like a square on bottom part up to the columns but the evidences show that a dam was located on these columns and arches. In order to change this plan, some "Fillpoush" used at right angles of the building and the remained on four columns of it. (Ditrish, 1986).

This ear ring may easily change a square into a circle form.

In order to establish a temple firstly the columns have been structured. The arches are horseshoe form and for reducing the height there is a reduction in "Mane" distance. Then we have dams by adding some powerful structures and with stone filled arches among them in order to have completely surrounded of architecture space (Godar, 2004).

Scrap stone and a combination of gypsum and limestone are the applied materials for construction of this temple. But regarding the hard-moving situation and great height of building up to river, it was so much difficult to transport materials and water to the heights.

The form and technique of arrangement of stones at Azar Barzin Mehr temple is like a horseshoe and similar to its contemporary buildings like northern & southern gates of Takht-e-Soleiman.

This palce was subject of study and primary investigation of an archeologist group in 1977. Then it was registered by State's Cultural Heritage Organization in the name of "Khaneh Dive" under Reg. No. 4035. Although there is a name of Azar Barzin Mehr temple in Pahlavi contents but there are some differences between archeologists and researchers about geographical place of this temple. Although the first archeologists have visited this place and named it as Azar Barzin Mehr temple due to some unique architectural evidences and archeological contents, but it is necessary to have deeper archeological studies for proving this thesis.(Figure 6)

According to some different references, Professor Arthur Christian Sen has written in his book under the title of "Iran at Sassanid time" : "Azar Barzin Mehr or temple of farmers was located at East part of country on rivand mountains at northwest of Neishabour. Lazar Farpi has named Rivand village as Moghan village. Jackson believes that the place of this temple was Mehr village on the way of Khorasan and with similar distance from Miandasht and Sabzevar. (Christian Sen , 2008).

After that one of our own researchers, Dr. Ali Ashraf Sadeghi, has specified, in a paper under the title of "Location of Azar Barzin Mehr" in 6th version of "Name of Ancient Iran" magazine , the

exact location of Azar Barzin Mehr temple at Rivand mountatin after considering all Arabic & Persian references for specifying the above-mentioned areas like History of Neishabour, Ahsano Taghsem, Mojam Ol Boldan, Shahnameh, Beihaghi history, Asrar Altohid and Zinolakhbar. (Name of Ancient Iran magazine, 6th version, Essary about exact location of Azar Barzin Mehr.

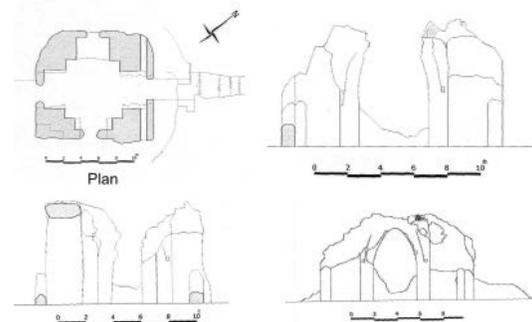


Figure 6: the plan and picture of Azar Barzin Mehr temple

In spite of all presented ideas, as an Iran Specialist, India specialist and professors of Indian / Iranian languages, William Jackson considered its place near to Mehr village on the way of Khorasan to Neishabour and from among Sabzevar dessert. (Jackson, 1921).

From total ideas of Iran specialists and what has been mentioned in different Persian /Arabic resources and with regard to all specifications of Azar Barzin Mehr in Rivand, it has been located on the back of Goshtasban. Dr. Sadeghi concluded that Dam means a temple. Since there is a temple in this village it was named as "Deh" meaning temple. Today this village is named as "Jonbad" and included in Kizghan village affiliated of Sheshtmad section of Sabzevar city. It is named as Gonbad by all native people.

Today "Raba Zaja" is named as Zaja which was previously included in Gonbad village and was a small village out of Sheshtmadan section and its center was Sheshtmadan beside Kizghan. Dr. Sadeghi

has specified the limits of the considered temple and transferred the duty of finding its exact place and remained item for the archeologists (Jam Jam newspaper,2008).

In spite of valuable and semi-completed researches, Dr. Ali Ashraf Sadeghi could not point out exactly to the place of temple at Sabzevar at Rivand village. A group of Iranian & Poland archeologists may recently found new items which may clear any wage items about the presence of temple at Rivand village. This group of archeologists could specify the exact place of the temple at Rivand Mountain upon a lot of researches and by the use of previous studies and researches.

According to the findings, a lot of architectural remained found which show that a lot of people were living there who may found their required water through these constructions. There was another bore inside the temple for renovation of the plan and specifying its position.

After continuation of their researches and frillings, this group found a platform of remained items which was decorated with gypsum fillers. Due to its position near to west wall of temple, it is probable to consider this platform as a space for performing religious ceremonies and /or other formalities.

On the other hand and as a result of drilling and boring, it is specified that this building has a lot of special beauties and decorations at its prosperity time. While all walls had a gypsum coverage with probable gypsum decorations on ceiling. The gypsum coverage of the body is a witness of current drillings.

On the other hand this made some other bores near to the building whether there are any appendixes to it or not. As a result, they could find the base of the wall which makes this theory more powerful that there are some appendixes at northeast and/or north and east parts of this building. A major part of the area and surrounding buildings have been ruined within last years, but there are some remained cases of surrounding stone arrangements for more access to the river and upper side of the mountain up to east part of the building.

Any presence of diffused ceramics around the area makes this theory more powerful that this building was used even up to Saljoughian time. But after that, there is no more effects of it. It is probable that a minor group of Zoroastrian immigrated to that area.

According to the findings of Iranian & Poland archeologists, up to now a lot of coins belonging to Khosro Parviz time and also ceramics may confirm the establishment of this building at Sassanid time. Furthermore the remained of famous architecture of "Patave" as the worshipping place of

Zoroastrian clergymen have been recognized through these considerations.

Due to hard to move situation of the way of Azar Barzin Mehr temple and after immigration of Zoroastrians from the mentioned area, it has not yet been used and most parts of it have been ruined as well.

Right now there is a team appointed by Cultural Heritage Organization of Khorasan Razavi Province under the title of "Revival project of Azar Barzin Mehr Temple" in order to renovate and rebuild it according to the previous architecture style. Ali Hassan Abadi, as a member of this group says:" Since three arches of this building are completely ruined and only one of them is remained, we have fixed all columns to the ceiling dam with a special method and in order to revive this remained ceiling. He added:" Through performing our survival functions, we could find different findings about an access way from river up to the temple".

He pointed out that mentioned access way was recognized at a height of 100m from Rivand river bottom and stated that:" The access way was recognized from northern part of Temple Mountain towards southeast frontier of temple and ending to peak of the mountain.

By specifying that mentioned way has been smoothed according to all findings, he stated that:" This way is ending to the peak point of the mountain while the entrance frontier is located at northeast part of the temple.

According to the speech of an archeologist, there is a limitation on the bottom of the temple mountain which is currently located below soil and stones and could be the burned place of side spaces of temple. As a result any presence of side spaces could be confirmed in next investigations.

He believes that all temples of Sassanid time have side structures for required functions in ceremonies and special days and social applications. The investigations of archeologists may provide new information for us in future and make clear more angles about the style of architecture at that time.

This temple is included in Iranian Cultural Heritage and registered in the list of national works as well.

4. Discussions

Following results would be obtained from all presented discussions in this essay:

- 1- Temples are the most important religious centers and conceptual spaces at Sassanid time
- 2- Religion has a great role in architectural form of temples at Sassanid time.

- 3- There is a little difference between architectural form of temples at Sassanid time with current temples at India and ancient China.
- 4- The most important elements in establishment of temples are brick, stone and wood.
- 5- Gypsum works and applied decorations on the walls and dams of temple show the greatness of architecture in Sassanid time.
- 6- The most important elements in foundation of buildings and structures were mortar of gypsum and cement.
- 7- It was really common to use filpushes and dam arches in architecture of Sassanid time.
- 8- In spite of all made researches on different temples of Sassanid time by a lot of foreign researchers and also State's Cultural Heritage Organization, there is a hidden secret in architectural style and other relevant elements which would be cleared in other researchers in future.

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