

Sassanid fire temple Discovered in Ardašīr Khore, Pars

Milad Vandae¹, Roya Tajbakhsh² and Gholam reza Maghsoudi³

- 1- Young Researchers & Elites Club, Hamedan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Hamedan, Iran
- 2- Department of Archaeology, Hamedan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Hamedan, Iran
- 3- Department of art and architecture, Rudehen branch, Islamic azad University Rudehen, Tehran, Iran

Abstract: In modern studies and in the process of archeological investigations, various objectives are considered; including, in regard with the study of constructions, sometime problems such as styles, architectural characteristics, economic conditions, the power of ruling government, the rate of interests and tendencies of people toward religion, etc, could be understood much better. The Sassanids dynasty is among the historical periods of Iran, when attention to Zoroastrian religion and sensitivity to religious matters and events were considered the most important affairs of the kings and the study of the history of this period partly reveals the reasons for the religious attitudes of the kings. Accordingly, the writer of this article titled: "Archeological study and dispersion analysis of Chahar taq es in Sassanids era in the west and southwest of Fars province" has investigated it in three chapters of archeological studies in the winter 2011, and spring and summer of 2012. In this study, the writer manages to recognize 18 Chahar taq es between the cities of Baladeh, Farashband and Firoozabad. A present article seeks to study the chronological succession of one of the most tacit and outstanding Chahar taq es in this region, that is, Rohini Chahar taq.

[Milad Vandae, Roya Tajbakhsh and Gholam reza Maghsoudi. **Sassanid fire temple Discovered in Ardašīr Khore, Pars.** *J Am Sci* 2013;9(3s):105-114]. (ISSN: 1545-1003). <http://www.jofamericanscience.org>. 16

Keywords: Chahar taq , Atashkadeh(Fire-Temple), Farashband, Zoroastrian Religion, Sassanids.

Introduction

Religious buildings of Sassanid era known as Atashkadeh(Chahar taq) or fire temple are one of the most outstanding architectural examples of above-mentioned era. In this era, in addition to constructing important and large Fire-temples such as Azargoshnasb Fire-temple in Takhte Soleyman(Huff,1983:127-171) and/or Azarbarzin Mehr and Azar Faranbagh Fire-temples(Bundahesh,1999), a large number of Fire-temples were constructed where religious ceremonies were held. In historic texts left from this period, we frequently see the news or the order for building Chahar taq es on the side of the rulers or high rank officials including Shapour I referred to in Zoroasterian inscription(Akbarzade & Tavousi,2007:45), also Tabari's reference(Tabari,2005) to constructing Fire-temple by "Mehr Nerse" vizier of Bahram Goor(Godard,1991:11-84). Having a look at the dispersion of these Chahar taq es shows that in two or at most three provinces of the country, the accumulation of these Chahar taq es has been reported in the western part of it, that is, in Firoozabad and Kazeroon, The number of these Chahar taq es in Fars province is so high that it seems that they outnumber the capacity required for the society population of that period. So far, no complete and supported archeological mapping of the dispersion and the location of these Chahar taq es has been prepared across the province.

Geographical location of Rohni Chahar taq

Farashband town is located in Fars province 172 kms to the west of Shiraz. It is 750 to 850 m above

open seas level. This height has created hot and desert climate there, and most likely the climate of this region in Sassanids era was much more moderate, because it is very difficult to live there from June to October because of hot climatic conditions(Map.1). Remains of Anahita Chahar taq are located at northern altitude 28.39.02 and at eastern latitude 52.09.01 and 830 m above sea level. To have access to this work after travelling along the road from Farashband to Dahroom for 33 kms, we could observe this work(building) on the left side of the road, 200 m far from the road. The writer has managed to identify four other Chahar taq es along this route which each of them will be introduced in separate articles(Vandae,2012:1-14). This Chahar taq is only a part of a large enclosure with appropriate dimensions of 60×120 m. on the east side of the enclosure, there is a seasonal river which is dry nowadays(Figer.1). Only the work accomplished so far in 1961 has been seeing Vanden berghe said(Vandaen berghe,1961:163-198).

Materials Applied

The most important materials used in this building are rubble-stone, mortar(plaster of lime and ashes or sand), chalk and a mortar composed of sand-dried brick and mud which have been used in the internal wall of the small basin or pond. But the use of material at such a large scale and great care in creating such buildings indicates the Sassanids great

interest in making their religious and royal buildings magnificent and immense.

Description of Chahar taq Collection

As it was mentioned before, this collection is located 200 meters far from the road. The building is located along the northwest South-east line and the remainder width of the building 23.6 meters and its length is 24.65 meters (Map.2). This collection consists of an enclosure of around 100×200 m area and only the line of disturbed (irregular) walls around the main space is identifiable (Figer. 2).

The remains of the main building consists of two large Chahar taq es the larger Chahar taq is fortunately relatively intact and only some part of its bashn has been demolished; but the small (minor) Chahar taq to the west has been completely demolished and its chapira has been wholly destroyed. This complex consists of a special type of yard in the middle which is unique in its type in Sassanids era and it is a prototype of Islamic period mosques with a cournt in the middle to reach the yard, nine 10-meter doors have been provided, of course, at first you must pass the half-ruined Chahar taq in the western part of the complex. For this Chahar taq only architectural function but not religious one could be considered. In two eastern and western sections of the yard are two halls (A&B) which you can enter the halls. Also, in the southern section are two other decorative arches on two sides of the smaller Chahar taq es inside the yard (dimensions of all rooms, yard, passageways (vestibules) and dome have been presented in (Map.3) The main dome is located in the northern section and there have probably been stairs to reach there from the yard side.

The larger dome has been surrounded by rooms numbered from I to VII. At first, two halls (Hall C.D) are observed on the left and right which hall D has leads to eastern section rooms, but nothing remains of it today. But, hall C in northern section consists of three rooms (I, III, V) with different dimensions whose entrances are completely similar to the hasps inside the yard, but with different and room III opens to it as the only entrance route to rooms are symmetrically seen in the eastern part of the building which include rooms II, IV, VI; room VII is also a part of supplements in eastern section in which only this some room is identifiable. The plan of the main dome consists of four arches joined to the walls of neighboring rooms which are transferred to chaptra by. It is possible to observe examples of these in other Chahar taq es of the region including; beside Siah kal (Vandae & Jafari, 2012:1-14), Malek, Jarre, and Nagharreh Khane (Vandae & Shadrrouh, 2011:1-16). This dome like other domes of Sassanids era is style crust and its main section has been demolished (Figer.3).

Without doubt, in splendor period, plaster-molding decorations existed on all sections of this collection, because several layers of chalk (plaster) along with ashes could be observed both in some parts of and in layers excavated illegally under one of the pillars of the main Chahar taq .

Unfortunately, many sections including; western section of the yard (Hall B), roofs of all rooms and the small dome have been destroyed. In the eastern section of this collection, only the lines of walls have remained (Figer.4). In three-dimensional reconstruction of this complex, the shape of the complex at splendor period could be incarnated clearly (Figer.5). This complex has special characteristics from architectural aspect including; location of yard in the middle, two small and large domes, symmetric plan, location of a probable veranda in the southern section of the main dome leading to the yard, the hall around the main dome and a large area; also, the main point is the appropriate construction of the building and its architecture that has caused it to be one of the most intact complexes of Chahar taq es in Iran in spite of its old age, over 1500 years, high constructive load and human and natural pressures.

Small pond (Basin), place visited by pilgrims

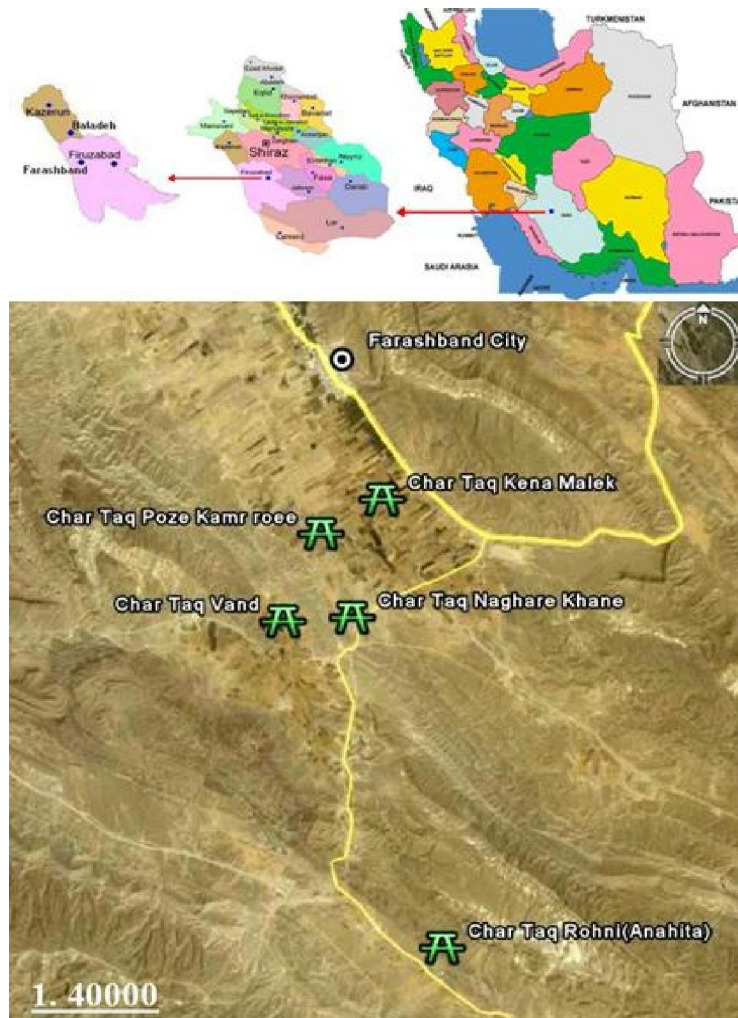
There is a basin resembling (underground) water cistern 25 meters to the south. On the West of the main building which is the most important factor in attributing this enclosure to Izad Anahita, this basin has a unique form and shape (Figer.6). The basin has a rectangular form of 14.5×6.2 meter. A two-meter high wall surrounds it and its ceiling like the ceiling of the main building has been buit in arch form. Unfortunately, this ceiling has been demolished, but some parts of this arch could be seen in the north-west walls of the building (Figer.7).

Chronology (calendar), Function and comparison

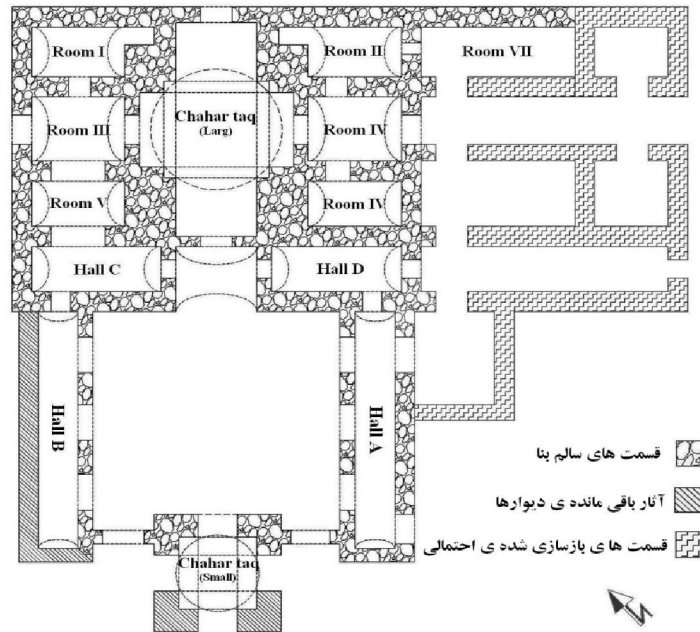
Unfortunately, much pottery was not obtained around this enclosure and few pieces of pottery obtained do not indicate a clear or certain date, and the only interesting point is the single example of seljuks' indicator pottery which has been obtained from this enclosure (Figer.8). Sassanids period and Mazakian religion or its new modified form, Zoroastrian religion, was considered the formal religion of Zoroastrians (Vandae, 2011). Numerous coins of Sassanid represent kings before fire – place praising fire (Widengren, 2003:59). Our views on Sassanids fire-temples rely on the studies of “Godar” and “Erdman”. Based on their views, these Chahar taq es are sacred and developed buildings. They are open (unroofed) places that were previously used for praising by Persians (Mohammadifar & Motarjem,

2011:82). These Chahar taq es were visible from four directions such as “Vanden berghe” and “Schippmann” (1971) and “Group” questioned this view. The reason for this change of view was the excavations conducted in several fire-temples including; Kouh Khajeh, Takhte Soleyman, Bandian Dargaz(Rahbar,1998:213-125), etc, which challenged the view or hypothesis that Sassanids fire-temples have only single structure and it was revealed that other structure in the plan of these buildings should

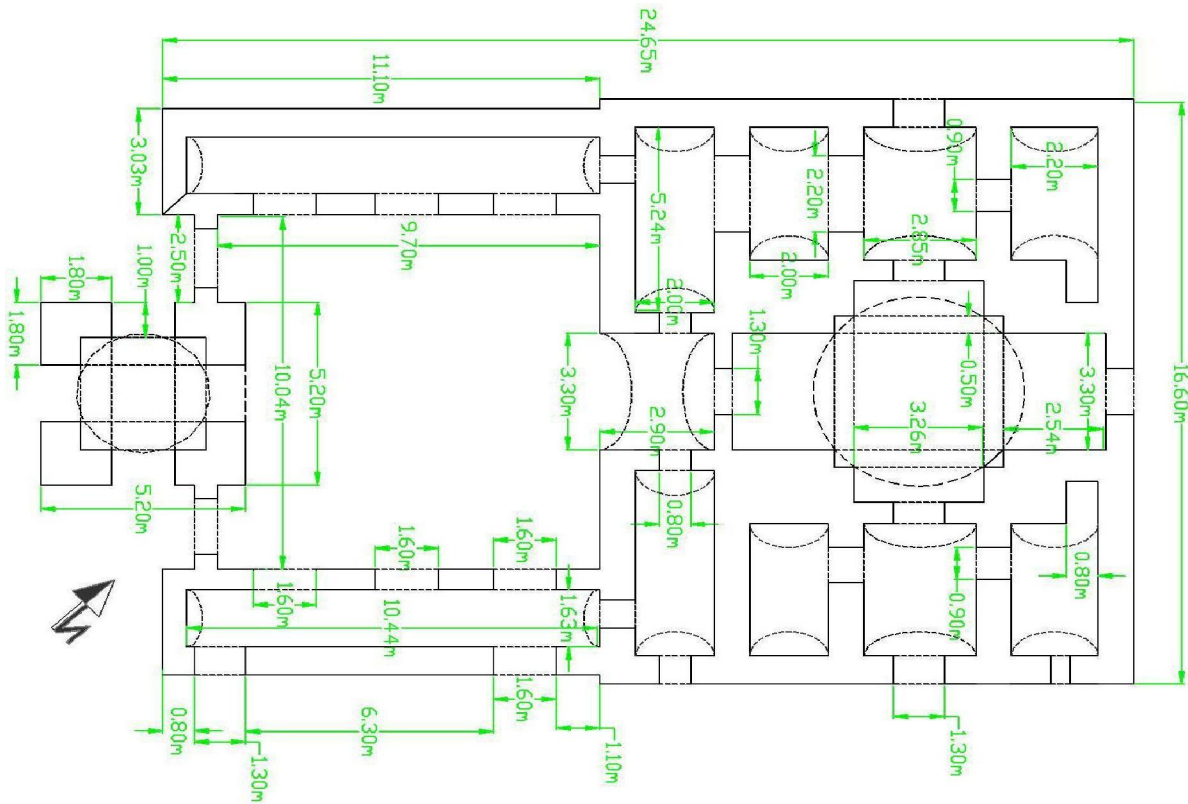
be looked for(Huff,1974:247). These lines or statements on 18 Chahar taq es in Farashband and Firoozabad, the theories of Vandenberg and Huff were confirmed by researchers based on numerous reasons which will be described at appropriate place and time. In other Chahar taq es such as: Nojin, Baba Najm pond, Konar siah collection, Kohnaroue and Darbaloot(Chah anjeer), such basins could be observed(Figer.9).



Map1: The location Firoozabad city and the political geography of Farashband



Map 2: Plan the works of Chahar taqi Rohni debris and divide the dome, halls and rooms (Map by: writer)



Map 3: Map of Fire Temple, contains all of the Dome, Hall and Rooms (Map by: writer)



Figur 1: A panoramic image of the Chahar taqi Complex: Down: space inside courtyard; up: View of the northeastern part(Photo by: Writer)



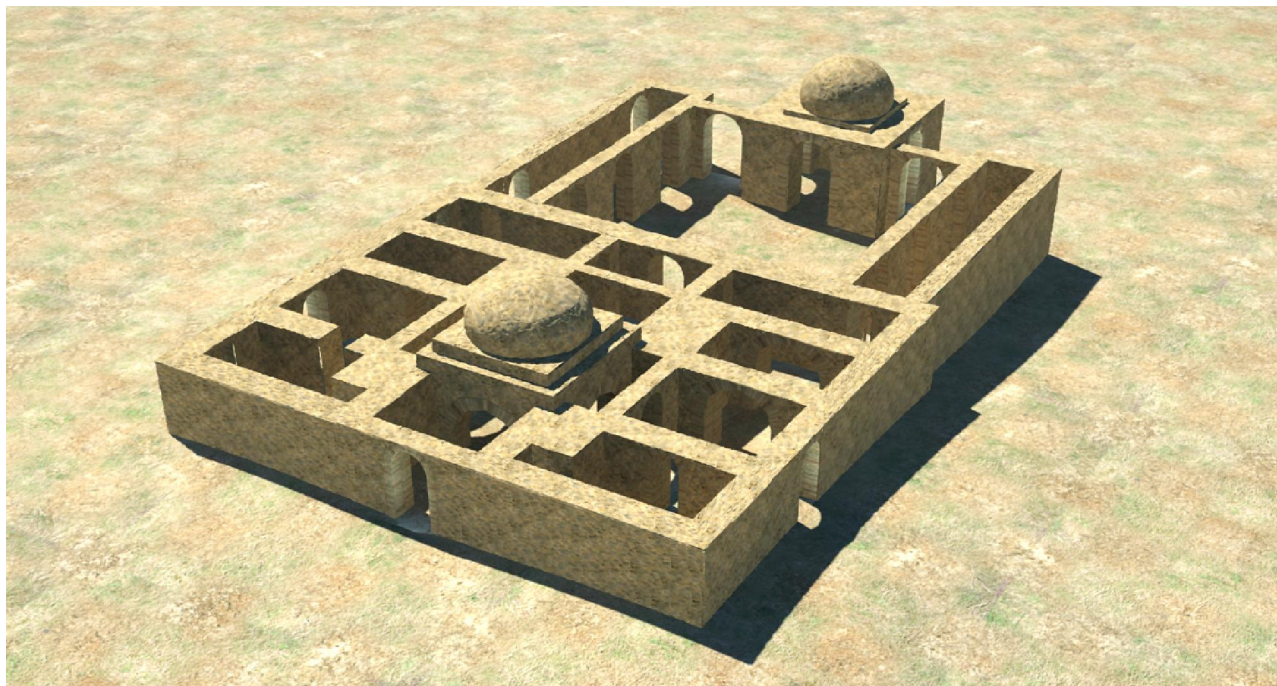
Figur 2: Chahar taqi Complex Rohni, A view of the courtyard wall and arches of decoration Hall and Small domes(Photo by: Writer)



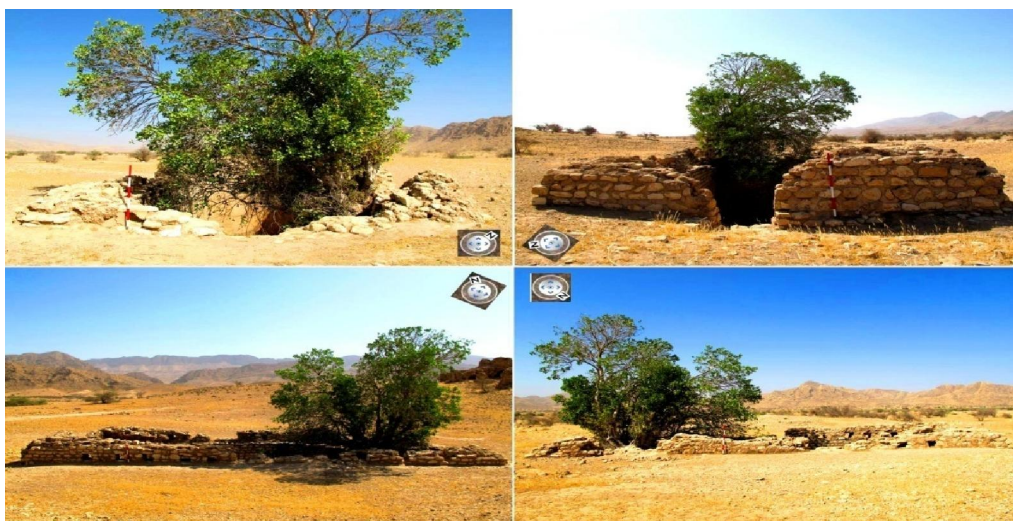
Figur 3: The Great Dome(Original) (Photo by: Writer)



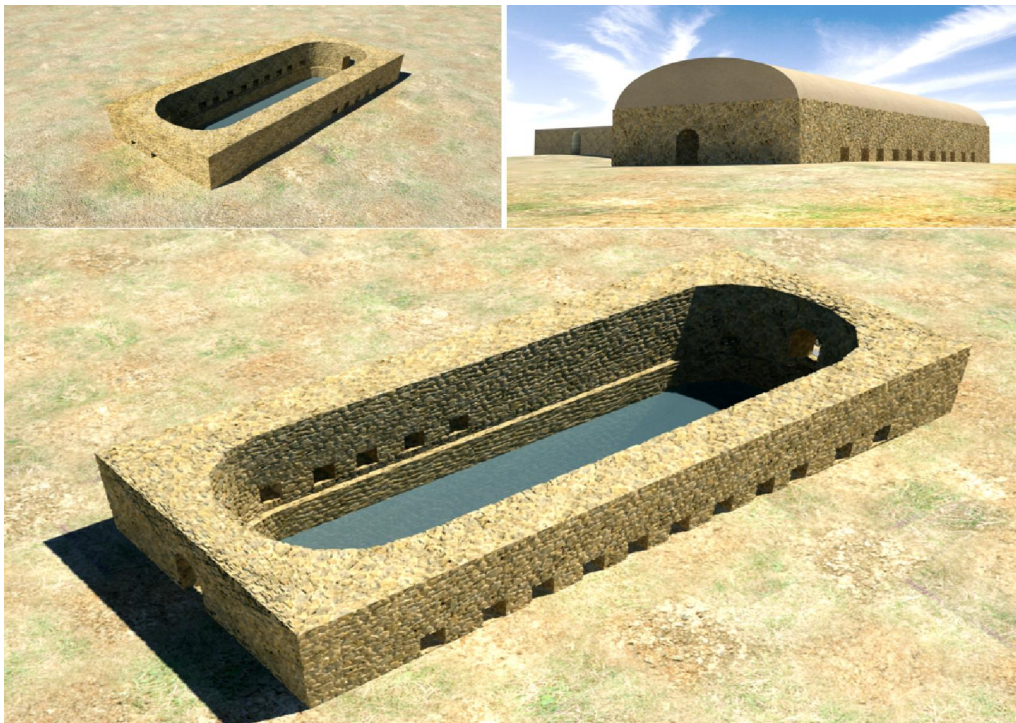
Figur 4: I: Room IV; II: Rooma II, IV, VII; III: part of wall destruction out the series the southeastern side; IV: Hall A(Photo by: Writer)



Figur 5: Three-dimensional reconstruction of the northern entrance view
(Reconstruction of of the: writer)



Figur 6: The pool Ziarati located in the southeast Complex the main(Photo by: Writer)



Figur 7: Three-dimensional reconstruction of ponds Ziarati and deep the boom time that has been filled with water



Figur 8: The Pottery around the site



Figur 9: Example of a religion other Small pond around the other Chahar taqi area: I: Small pond Tall-e Chahar taqi, II: Small pond Nojin Chahar taqi, III: Small pond Kouhnao Chahar taqi (Photo by: Writer)

Conclusion

The Chahar taqi of Rohni is one of the most famous Chahar taq es in Farashband region which in Sassanids period, it was considered a part of Ardeshir khoreh region. Due to the lack of archeological excavations, the exact date could not be determined for it, but given special architecture of the building with two Chahar taq es, the yard in the middle of the building which is a prototype of Islamic mosques and also the form of the dome, this work could be attributed to the late centuries of Sassanids ruling and early Islamic era, that is, the centuries from 5 to 8 A.P. could be considered for its construction, since, considering the existence of Islamic glazed pottery, which is an indicator of its flourishment in the period after Sassanids, and through obtaining a piece of Seljuks pottery, perhaps, the flourishment of this collection could be extended up to 10th and 11th centuries(P.A.), but this could not be

expressed unless organized archeological excavations are conducted.

Of course, this probability should not be ignored, that the intact and firm plan of this Chahar taqi proves that the fire-temples of Sassanids did not have only one Chahar taqi in the middle, but they had a lot of supplements and numerous spaces for the presence of priests or worshipers! In addition, some of the fire-temples belonged to royal families or courtiers and only they were allowed to use them and these fire-temples were mostly built beside their palaces.

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11/15/2012