

The Spatial Formation of the Fire Temple of Zoroastrianism

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Abstract: Zoroastrianism like Buddhism occurs among the beliefs that emphasize a philosophical side. The battle between good and evil lays at the basis of Zoroastrianism. In Zoroastrianism philosophy water, earth and fire are considered holy and worship while looking at fire, light or the sun. The Zoroastrians didn't worship fire, their fire was exalted and, while accepting it as a direction marker, they would pray in front of it. However they believed that it was the light of god or knowledge. Examples of the fire temple which forms the subject of the communiqué may be found in Azerbaijan too and it is said that the name of Azerbaijan is taken from these structures. According to this, Azerbaijan comes to mean the "home of fires". When Azerbaijan accepted Islam, the Zoroastrians migrated from here to India and some scattered to other countries. Today it continues its existence from India as "Parsee temples". The purpose of the communiqué is debating the examples in Anatolia, Iran and India (Mumbai) while examining the architectural form of the fire temple structures and their symbolic characteristics.

Keywords: Religious Architecture, Temple, Persia, Fire Temple

1. Introduction

In various languages the Parsuas (known also as Parsa, Pers or Furs) appeared in political history with the Achaemenid or Achaemenes clan. The Parsuas at the beginning of the 2000s BCE belonged to the great waves of migration that flowed south from east of the Caspian Sea and are called Indo-Iranian. It is thought that the Zoroastrians belonged to this period which experienced separate leaders in the Avesta Gathas (hymns), which are their holy quatrains.

In the 700s BCE there was a prince named Achaemenes at the head of the Parsuas. Because the rulers of the Old Persian Empire esteemed Achaemenes as the ancestor of their house, this dynasty is recognized as the Achamaenids.

In various sources it is stated that nothing is known about the religions of the Achaemenid kings and the Persians of the era. It seems that the Persian god, Ahura Mazda, was identified as the Greek god Zeus. As for the Pahlavi books that discuss the Zoroastrian religion and survive today, it was destroyed by Alexander the Great and again organized centuries later. There have been attempts to achieve results by comparing existing documents.

The religion of the Achaemenid kings is accepted as the religion of the Anshanites after they were taken under the administration of the Anshanites who were more civilized

than they were. After capturing Mesopotamia, they showed interest in the religion of the Babylonians, Assyrians, Ionians, Syrians, Jews and Egyptians. Blending with the Zoroastrian religion which was represented by the Medes, a new religion was created. This official religion rested on the basis of the supremacy of Ahura Mazda next to the old Iranian gods. So Mazdaism can be said of the Achaemenids' religion.

Ahura Mazda was the greatest of all the gods of the Persians. It was He who created the earth and the sky. The king became king with His permission, and it was Ahura Mazda who helped and protected against enemies. Herodotus speaks of animals that were offered to the gods during worship ceremonies. The fire temples that are found on top of mountains for the Ahura Mazda cult have survived until today. In the Persepolis reliefs, as well one meets the fire burning in front of Ahura Mazda deFigtions. It seems that there are portrayals of the temple structure or the altar and the god as Herodotus stated.

Ahura Mazda was in the form of a god that was portrayed in human form in this period. Kingship and the symbol of the winged sun disk that was taken earlier by pharaohs and later by Assyrian kings were given to him by artists (Fig. 4-5-6).

On the Persepolis monuments Ahura Mazda has been

dressed like the Achaemenid kings and depicted as older (with hair and beard), his head crowned and his body winged. Because there was no temple among the ancient Persians, the holy fire scenes too were not shown as being in an enclosed space. Enclosed fire temples were constructed later.

The Achaemenid kings placed their graves on rocks in the mountains unlike the Persian traditions (Fig. 13). However in spiritual and moral approaches, the law of Ahura Mazda was praised as the road necessary for kings and men to follow. To be honest in action, word and thought were what Ahura Mazda wanted. The aforementioned laws were created of truth, the sanctity of life, modesty and trying to do what was within one's capabilities with zeal.

The Persian people recognized Ahura Mazda and separately worshipped five elements. The first of these was that there were two kinds of light: daylight (sun) and night light (moon). The other four elements were fire, water, earth and wind. While the people were worshipping these, they would carry out sacrifices and hold ceremonies on the top of high mountains without sanctuaries and without mihraps (directional niches). For the sacrifice to be accepted, the priest had to be tranquil and pray for all the Persian people. During this time the Magian¹ (the priest was known as a Magian) would read the chants and the book and inform their god. After the prayer, the person who owned the sacrifice would take the meat to his house and because the spirit of the sacrifice belonged to god, the meat wouldn't be separated in the name of god.

In his account, Strabo discusses the Persians' temples at Mitra and Anahita. The worshipping of fire included a series of rituals. Pieces of dry wood would be piled up in one place and, pouring oil on top, it would be set alight. The fire couldn't be blown on and the person who blew on it or threw something on it would be killed.

The Magians' burial practice was different from that of the Persians. The Persian dead would be covered with wax and buried in the ground. As for among the Magians, the skeleton that remained after the body had been eaten by animals would be isolated from the earth, smeared with unguent and buried in this condition. Later the Persians built open circular graves on uninhabited mountains. On these structures which were called towers of silence, the dead were left for the birds to eat.

Another important influence of the Magians was the gathering of the Avesta² which was the holy book of the Zoroastrian religion in the Sassanid period and bringing it together on the agenda. The customs and ways that are gathered in the Avesta became the official religion in Iran in the third century BCE (Günaltay, 1987; Masters).

After the Persian Empire was destroyed, the Zoroastrian religion declined in the face of Hellenic culture. They saw a lot of pressure from the Arabs in the eighth to the tenth centuries. A portion known as the Parsees, escaping from Alexander, established India's city Mumbai and settled there. (<http://blog.milliyet.com.tr/zerdustler--atesin-cocuklari/Blog/?BlogNo=384995>).

2. Methodology

Nowadays we find extensive complete investigations in Iran's archeological literature, which address all periods of occupation of a geographical or political site. These sorts of investigations are carried out because there has been a serious shortage of studies aimed understanding historical regions. This paper firstly explores the basic characteristics of the fire temples. This provides us general review. On the other hand this is followed by the identification of the planning efforts, regulations and symbols. This study has focused on architectural elements, spatial formation, symbolic characteristics and diffusion areas of the fire temples

3. Architecture

The Achaemenid kings decorated their capitals with structures that would show their wealth. But it is thought that the structures that influenced the art of this period were Chaldean and Assyrian. The Zoroastrians did not attempt to make the place of the deity boastful through showy buildings. In all of the inscriptions they've left, they described that their need was for the patronage of Ahura Mazda. This approach ensured that the buildings that belonged to the old civilization would be protected and nothing would be lost. Because there was no temple among the Persians, the decorations in the palaces of Egypt were applied in the royal palaces. It is thought that the column capitals' source was the Assyrians – because of the impressions on the Assyrian banner that occurs in the ruins of Korsabad. The horns on their foreheads seen on the Assyrian banner must have been turned into the column capitals by adding the two oxen standing back to back. With the invasion of Alexander the Great, the Greek architectural style became influential (Fig. 16-18, Günaltay, 1987; Mohammedifar; Motarjem).

In religious architecture in ancient Persia, graves and sanctuaries never held an important place; only royal graves were important. In altars, one meets a few architectural variations.

A need wasn't especially felt for covered buildings because of the form of the religious ceremony in which the holy drink, sacrifice and prayers were next to a burning fire (Fig. 1-2-3-14). As for the continuation of the sacred fire, variations appeared because of the requirements of the space.

- 1 Open air altars: in order for the people to be able to see from afar, they were on a high platform and under a dome. The people would gather in front of this and offer their votive offerings.
- 2 Only in the characteristic of an altar or the indication of the foundation.
- 3 Covered fire temples that were taken inside a building, a place of prayers for the priests or a comprehensive place of worship open to the people (Fig. 14).

The large Sassanian fire temple is in Azerbaijan. The rulers would walk here from the capital and visit it.³

¹ Herodotus states that the Magians were one of the seven clans of the Medes. According to some of the Greek writers the Magians were seers who knew the religious ceremonies and traditions. So they considered themselves the real representatives of the Zoroastrian religion. This situation was evaluated as hereditary; in order to become a Magi, it was necessary to be from a Magian father.

² In the Old Persian sources about the Avesta, it was written on 120,000 oxen hides and sent to the Persepolis palace treasury. When Alexander burned the Persepolis palace, the Avesta also burned. After he had the second copy translated into Greek, Alexander had that one burned also. The Avesta in the Sassanian period was gathered from the memories of the Magians.

³ While the ruler was praying after the visit, he would offer his sword to the fire. He would swear to protect the integrity of the country, and he pledged for himself excellence of mind and power. The fire in the religious sense is the symbol of the human will. The approach of the ruler to the door of the fire temples expresses the beginning for the creative life.

3.1. Architectural Elements

The building material is generally stone and in places where transport and workmanship were difficult, adobe and brick too are encountered. In order for the brick material to be stable, baked bricks were applied on the outside and adobe on the inside. The measurement of the brick materials changes between 36/ 9-18 cm. In the one-piece stones, one encounters seven meters in height. In the foundation system one encounters examples in which adobe was used, in the columns, marble/stone and in the ceiling, wood. On top of the roof covering, a thick earth layer is found. One finds buildings on which dome and vault coverings have been used.

The extent of the natural conditions in the country and the Persian kings affected the physical appearance of the buildings. The effects on the spirit and eye were not neglected. The tombs and reliefs carved between earth and sky were the continuation of this depiction. The royal monuments couldn't be followed unless heads were raised upwards (Fig. 12-15-16-18). In the same form, the existence of a large and powerful threshold in front is seen in front of the Sassanid palaces.

Iranian architecture in the antique period the area of diffusion, although it extended from Central Asia to the Aegean Sea, remained bounded. Architectural buildings were mostly in the vicinity of the Persian Gulf and in Upper Mesopotamia. The squinch dome that the Sassanians applied was used in Roman and Byzantine architecture and the vaulted structure was used in Europe too.

Iranian architecture spread the influence that it got from its neighbors to northern Mesopotamia and Anatolia. Because its borders extended from the Indian Ocean to the Aegean Sea, it carried the influences that it took from Mesopotamia to the western world and these created examples for Romanesque and Gothic architecture.

3.2. Architectural Comparison

The stone architecture not seen in Mesopotamia and Anatolia developed among the Persians. Egyptian influence is seen in the formation of columns. The brick and dome architecture in Mesopotamia was put in order in Iran. The glazed bricks and faience seen in Mesopotamia were Persian influenced. It is thought that Iranian architecture influenced Asia Minor and sculpture and architecture spread from here to Europe and the Islamic world.

In Mazdaism which was the Persian religion, the great god Ahura Mazda was the symbol of goodness and light. He is seen in the form of light. He is the light's eye and he is found with the goddesses of fire, earth and water at his side (Fig. 10). As for Ahriman, he is the symbol of evil and darkness. Fire is burned to defeat darkness. There is no sculpture in this religion; it is a spiritual system. As for the dead body, it is neither buried nor burned so that it doesn't defile the earth, fire or water.

Columns are the characteristic of ancient Persian architecture. If there were Roman capitals among the Sassanids, the Persians had their own architectural formation; the plain capital was made up of a simple abacus. As for the decoration, geometric forms, plant motifs and depictions of humans and animals were used.

While the flat beam was used very frequently among the Persians, the arch, dome and vault were used among the Sassanids (Ünsal, 1974).

3.3. Spatial Formation

Some of the temples found in a settlement were inside holy precinct walls and were rectangular in plan from the outside. There is the rectangularly planned naos (shrine) part in which is found the fire altars (in the Zoroastrian religion) which is considered holy in the middle of the centrally planned interior, the statue (Hellenistic and Buddhist beliefs) or the stupa (Buddhist belief). The naos part was surrounded with corridors with ritual purposes (Fig. 14). The corridors went around the central naos part sometimes on three sides and sometimes on four. The central naos part would sometimes have four pillars and sometimes there would be a pronaos (vestibule) with pillars and without in front of the naos or a portico. The courtyard is located in front of these. Some of the temples have been raised, set on a slope in the form of terraces or in step form. The first known fire temples in Central Asia, ever since the Bronze Age, had the appearance of a fortress from the outside and were spread over a wide area. The temples were strengthened with strong, high walls and towers and, opposed to its interior organization not having a symmetrical and axial organization, the courtyard area that was taken towards the center was the holiest area of the temple where the fire ceremony was held. According to Çeşmeli's study, if the temple architecture of the Ancient Era in Central Asia with its four pillars, central plan and corridor surround which are the most characteristic features in these temples is considered the continuation of the fire temples in Iran, then as its roots they are dated to the Margiana-Bactrian

Bronze Age temples in Central Asia. In comparison with the central courtyard and surrounding corridor organization seen in the religious architecture and civil architecture ever since the Bronze Age in Margiana and Bactria, the design with the central enclosed space and surrounding corridor is seen in civil architecture alongside religious architecture ever since the Antique Age. One sees that the architecture of the centrally planned temple with surrounding corridor in axial symmetric order was applied in the Buddhist and Zoroastrian temples built in the Early Middle Age. These temples sometimes have been evaluated as they are alone and sometimes in a complex or monastery. The interior of the temples in this period were decorated with statues, reliefs and frescoes with subjects of Buddhism, Hinduism and Zoroastrianism (Çeşmeli, 2014).

4. Symbolic Characteristics and Diffusion Areas

Four – fire, air, water and earth – represents the holy number of Zoroastrianism. According to what has been written, the areas that were to be sanctified were made beside earth that was burned by lightning that fell from the area and, because the region was on the Silk Road, rooms were built in which disciples and visitors could stay alongside the worship areas.

The places in which the visitors would stay in general settlement characteristics appeared as fortresses and were constructed so that the doors were on a low level that opened on the fire temple from inside and the windows ensured the burning earth was seen while lying in bed. The buildings for accommodations were evaluated as a retreat-ordeal cell unit for those on pilgrimage. Today their existence is still protected in Baku and Azerbaijan.

While entering and leaving the low doors, respect is offered by bowing and as for the window that looks on the burning earth, they were made to provide views of the burning earth from the place where the disciples who were undergoing the ordeal were laying on unslaked lime or tied to a chain.

The dervish who came to the temple later had the tradition of serving others who had undergone the ordeal earlier. However when the Azeris accepted Islam, the Zoroastrians were cast out and the last remaining Zoroastrians migrated to India. But still on special days they use the temple for worship (Ünsal, 1974).

In Mesopotamia which influenced the history of mankind deeply in the years 600-500 BCE, the Medes put an end to the Assyrian Empire and then the Persians attacked the exhausted Medes, erasing them from history and conquering Anatolia as far as the shores of the Aegean Sea. In this geographic region in which polytheistic religions were believed, the priest who worshipped Ahura Mazda (in Arabic he was known as Hürmüz.) and refused to worship Mitra and Anahitaya who were other gods was called Zarahustra and later Zerdüş. The priest was the representative of Ahura

Mazda, the skies, the ground, the water, six heavenly beings (the six known planets and the angels which he represented), the universe of spirits and justice. In the relief of the eagle-winged man which decorated the door of the fire temples tied to this approach, the wings which were created of three rows of eagle feathers (Fig. 5-6-7-15) represent the three basic principles of the Zoroastrian religion: “good thought, good speech, good work” (<http://blog.milliyet.com.tr/zerdustler--atesin-cocuklari/Blog/?BlogNo=384995>).

The ideological and symbolic meaning of the fire has been combined with each other in the classic eastern states from ancient times. The best known example is the god Agni who is encountered in India’s Vedic period inscriptions. This god has been personified as twins; especially a physical fire is the language of the flame or it is the fire of the messenger who will ensure that the flame of what has been sacrificed and this fire’s smoke reach the celestial gods. On the other hand he himself is a god. The holy fire was praised in various forms. “*Ah Agni, holy fire, cleansing fire, you sleep in the tree, you rise with your sparkling flame, you are the divine spark. You are the fortunate spirit of the sun and hidden everywhere*”. In later religions Agni was pushed into the background but his function in rituals continued. If every believing Hindu’s body were given to the flame on the bank of the holy Ganges, a special happiness was felt about this.

The god Altar which was the animation of fire in Iranian mythology was in a natural site. It was accepted throughout all of the Iranian community as a clean formation. Comparing the connection between India and Iran, the practices connected with the sanctity of fire are completely different. In Iran uniting the body with fire is accepted as an insult and sin. The thought that the fire is clean has been protected by the Zoroastrians, Iranians and Yazidis for centuries. The temples that protect the fire are also found in Central Asia and the Caucasus (Tokarev, 2005).

According to historical sources and archaeological evidence, it is understood that different beliefs lived in Central Asia before Islam. Alongside the local beliefs of Central Asia, beliefs that came from geographical areas such as Iran, Mesopotamia, India, Anatolia and Greece sometimes effectively mixed with local beliefs. Zoroastrianism which the cult of fire that had a rooted past in Iran and Central Asia and would be the center of this cult later became one of the influential belief systems of the region throughout the pre-Islamic period. In the region that had become acquainted with new culture together with Hellenism that came from the west Hellenistic belief lasted for a rather long time.

In Central Asia which entered a political and cultural connection with India a while later, Buddhist and Hindu beliefs that came from the south were assimilated. The second wave that came from the West was Christianity. Especially prior to Islam, Syrian Orthodox Christianity spread in Central Asia and, aside from these beliefs, cults attached to some gods were influential over the people in the region. The cults with the greatest influence whose gods appeared at the fore like Mithra, Anahita, Nana, Shiva (= Vayu ‘Veşparkar’) and Zurvan (=Brahma) lived in Central Asia. Aside from these beliefs that

especially had an impact on the local cultures, the belief in Shamanism had a deep effect on the nomads.

According to archaeological evidence, the first temples in Central Asia remained from the Bronze Age – from 2000. The remains of these temples have survived from the Margiana (South Turkmenistan) and North Bactria (South Uzbekistan) regions. In 2000 BCE in Central Asia, one sees the hegemony of Indian-Iranian groups. While a part of these groups were nomadic, one part led a settled life. In this period in Central Asia in particular the fire and the haoma-saoma (holy plant, alcohol and god) cult appeared and probably the Zoroastrian religion spread around 1000 BCE (Fig. 19-20, Çeşmeli, 2014; Shenkar,).

5. Conclusion

The symbolization of the fire and man’s relationship with fire happened through the social nature of fire and social intervention.

Today too a place of respect has been given to fire. For C. Levi-Strauss fire was a “mediator” between raw and cooked food, and at the same time it is one of opposite members like ‘fire-water’ or ‘carving-rubbing’”.

According to the historical point of view, the form of the means of human relations became the limitation of activities and tribe or family bounded them through the rules related to fire. Fire was bordered with the chain of relative and family members.

During the later expansion process of relational forms, the symbolic meaning of fire narrowed but wasn’t eliminated. We see that, outside of religious buildings, the example of the symbolic character of fire still continues to our day and the Olympic flame in sports games that expresses the wish for peace among wide groups of people is carried from one country to the next.

As for the buildings that are the fire’s location, ever since the Bronze Age they have been shaped by various additions over time and the secondary spaces that were added to the sacred area where fire was found included other functions alongside those used as the spaces in which holy plants and alcohol were made. Because of existing functions, the buildings were always placed on a high location and in a form that looked in the four major directions. As for the fire altars that were placed in the center of the courtyard, they were located in the center of the space in “pergola” style.

In the Ancient Era, beliefs like Zoroastrianism, Hellenism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity and temple buildings began to be seen. Ever since the first century Buddhism and Hinduism began to spread to Central Asia from India and in this development, through the influence of the Parthians and the Sassanids, the fire temples continued to exist. The unchanging four-pillar organization of the fire altar created the naos space of the temples that appeared in later centuries. As for in temples in cities, with the addition of various functions up to the recent period they continued their existence with spaces organized around the central space (Fig. 7-8-9-11).



Fig. 1. Fire temple in Ani antique city-Turkey.

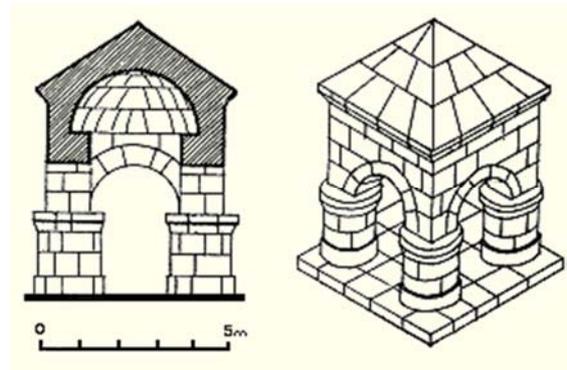


Fig. 2. It is a typical fire temple <http://firetemple.persianblog.ir/>.

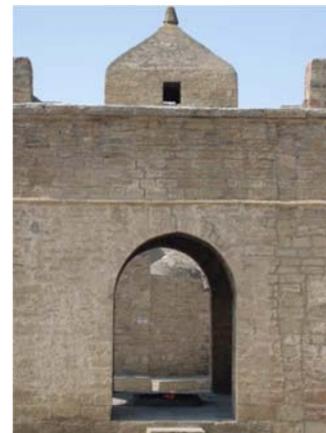


Fig. 3. Fire temple-altar –Baku.

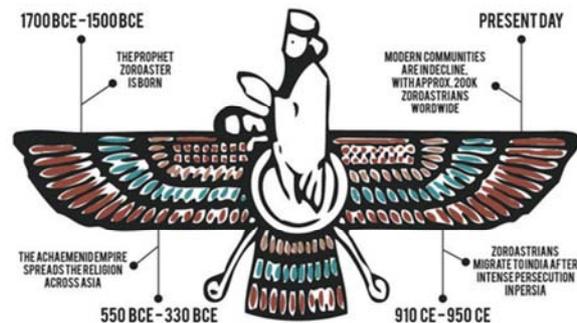


Fig. 4. Ahura Mazda symbol.



Fig. 5. Yezd Fire temple-Ahura Mazda-Iran.



Fig. 9. Ahura Mazda symbol Mumbai-India.

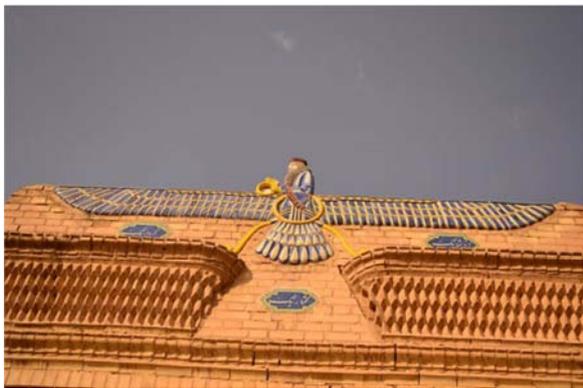


Fig. 6. Ahuramazda-Firetemple in Mumbai- India.



Fig. 10. Ahura Mazda symbol wiht sun.



Fig. 7. Ahura Mazda on facade Agiary Mumbai.



Fig. 8. Ahura Mazda symbol with wings -Mumbai.



Fig. 11. Persian temple in Mumbai India.



Fig. 12. Symbol on column-Persopolis.



Fig. 13. Rock tombs.

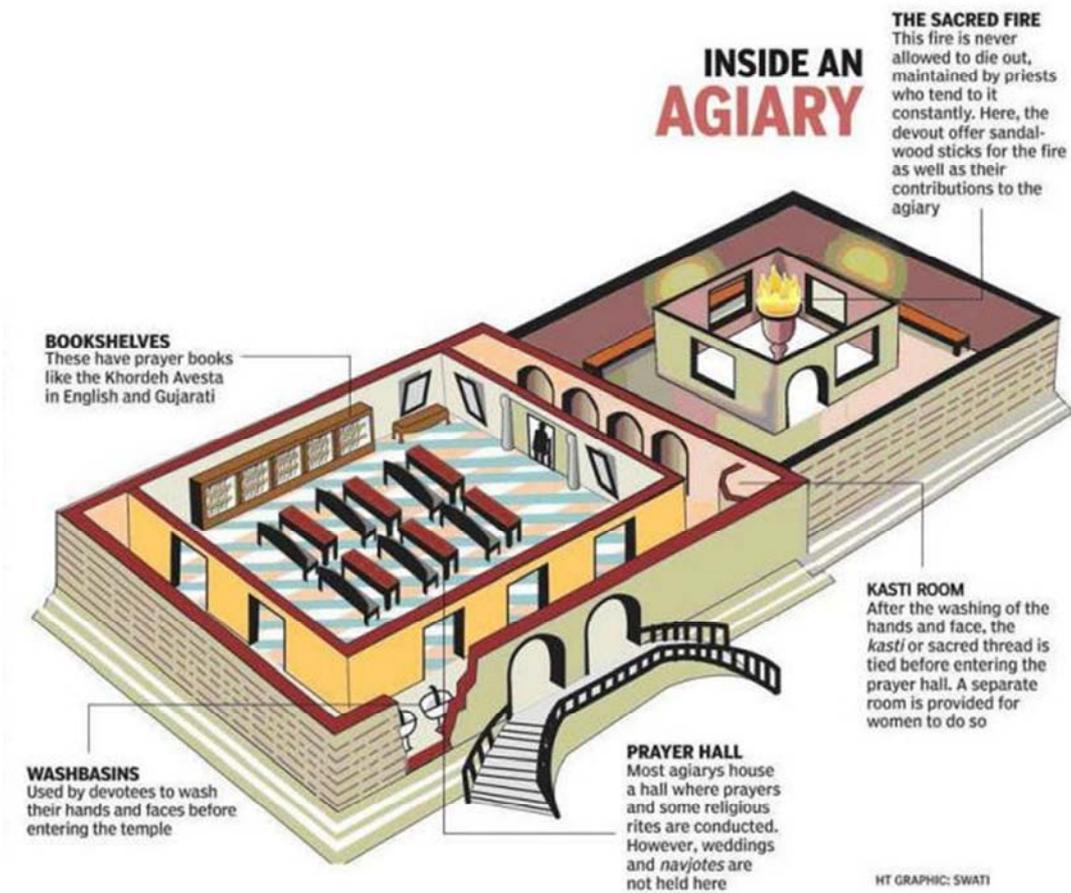


Fig. 14. Altar in fire temple.



Fig. 15. Ahura Mazda column Persopolis.



Fig. 16. Persian abacus –Persopolis.



Fig. 17. Ahura Mazda relief-Persopolis.



Fig. 18. Palace ruins-Persopolis.



Fig. 19. Middle Asian temple in antique age, Çeşmeli 2014.

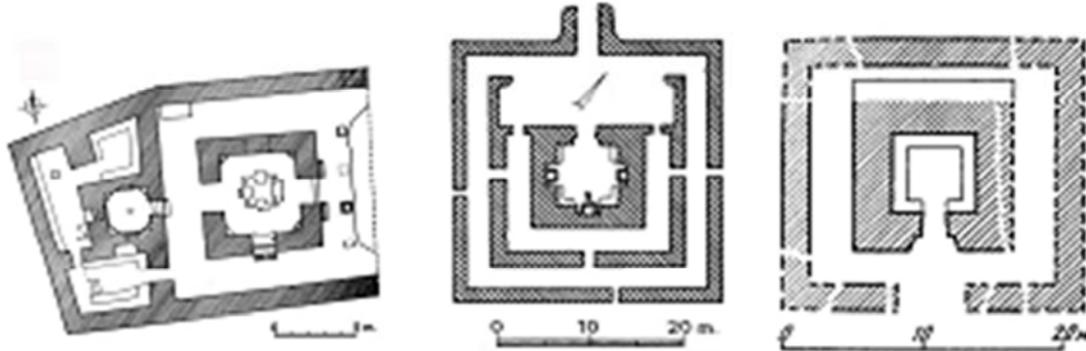


Fig. 20. Middle Asian temple in early middle age, Çeşmeli 2014.

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