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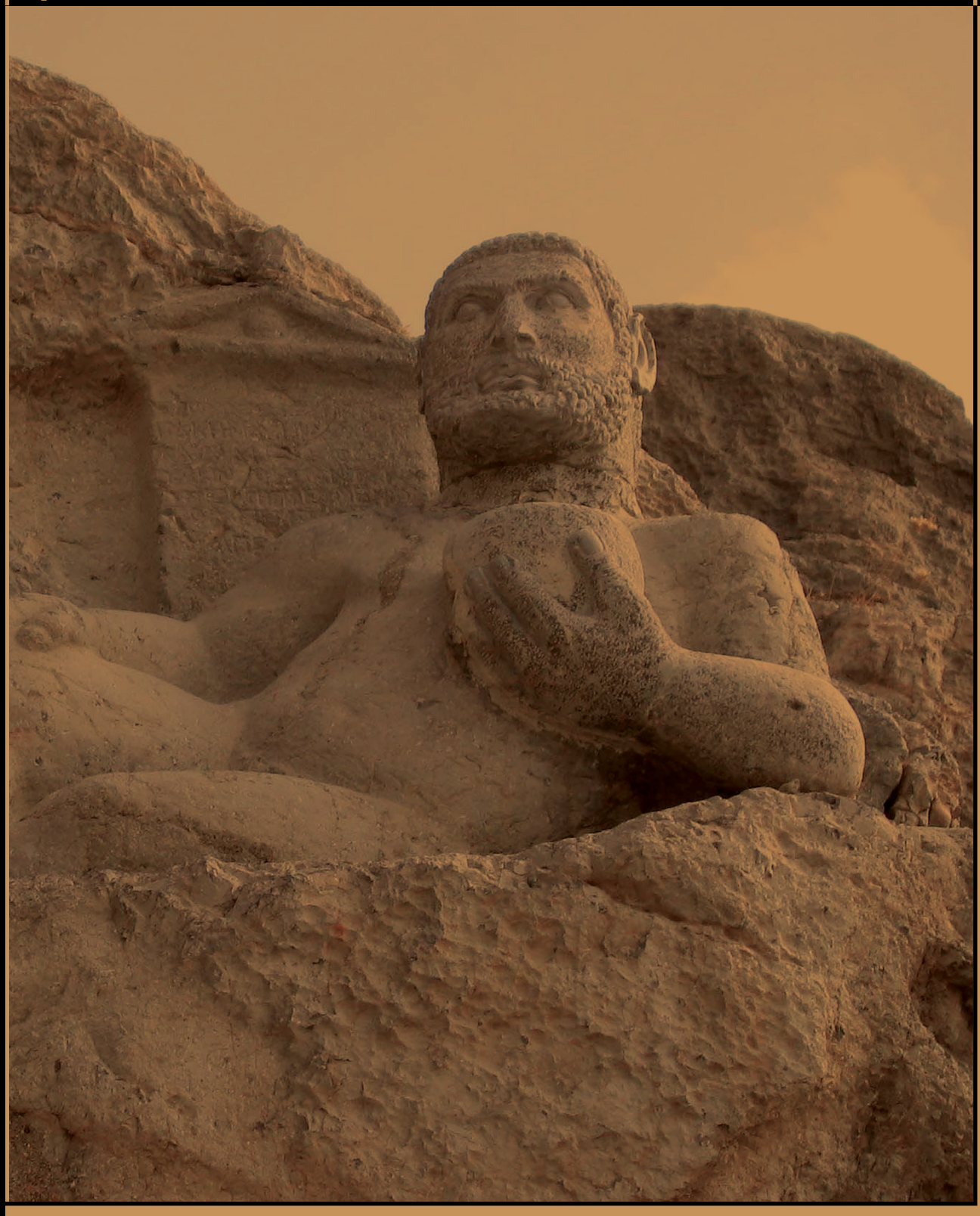

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Detail from above the entrance of Tehran's fire temple, 1286š/1917–18. Photo by © Shervin Farridnejad

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A Note on the Temple of Anāhīd-Ardašīr at Estakhr and the *Martyrdom of Abbot Baršebyā*

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& Sajad Amiri Bavandpour (Independent scholar, Tehran)

In a recent article, the first author (Shavarebi) collected epigraphic documents, classical sources, and Islamic historico-geographical literature on the Temples of Anāhīd at Estakhr (Middle Persian: *Staxr*), the religious capital of the Sasanians in their heartland Persis/Pārs, and discussed, in the light of archaeological evidence, the possible locations of these temples at or near the ruins of the Sasanian city of Estakhr (Shavarebi 2018). After the publication of that article, however, the second author (Amiri Bavandpour) noticed the significance of a passage from the Syriac *Martyrdom of Abbot Baršebyā* (*BHO* 146) for the problem of locating the temples, of which the first author was unaware while writing his article.

The aforementioned article attempts to determine the possible locations of the two temples of Anāhīd mentioned by Kerdīr, the Zoroastrian senior priest of the third century, in his inscription on the Kaʿba-ye Zardošt (KKZ 8), where he asserts that the Sasanian King Wahrām II (r. 276–293) appointed him to the office of āyēnbed "master of customs/ceremonies" and *pādixšāy* "warden, sovereign" of two sanctuaries at Estakhr, namely, the ādur ī Anāhīd Ardašīr "Fire of Anāhīd-Ardašīr" and that of *Anāhīd ī bānūg* "Anāhīd the Lady" (Chaumont 1960: 347, 356; Gignoux 1991: 59, 69).

The older temple, i.e. the Fire of Anāhīd the Lady, was probably originally an Achaemenid sanctuary of the Iranian goddess of water, founded by the Achaemenid King Artaxerxes II (r. 404–359 BCE) (Boyce 1998: 646). According to the third book of the *Chaldaica* of the Babylonian priestly scholar Berossus, quoted by Clement of Alexandria in his *Protrepticus* V.65 (*cf. FGH* 680 F 11), Artaxerxes II was the first to set up anthropomorphic statues of "Aphrodite Anaïtis" to be worshiped, *inter alia*, at Persepolis or in Persis ([ἐν]

Πέρσαις). The most plausible location for this sanctuary is, as proposed by the first author, the northern building of the so-called "Frataraka Complex", northwest of the Persepolis Terrace (Shavarebi 2018: 185–189). At this place, ruins of a temple with four column-bases and a stone plinth, probably once supporting a lost statue, have been unearthed by Ernst Herzfeld in 1932. Amongst the mobile inventories discovered at this site are five fragmentary votive inscriptions, naming Greek deities in the genitive case, two of which are interpreted as Hellenistic equivalents of the Iranian Goddess Anāhīd the Lady: ΑΡΤΕΜΙΔΟΣ and ΑΘΗΝΑΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΑΣ (Herzfeld 1935: 44; *idem* 1941: 275).

This temple should have been replaced, in the post-Achaemenid time, with a newer building south of the "Frataraka Complex", i.e. the so-called "Window Temple" (Shavarebi 2018: 185–189 with further references). This is probably the "House of Fire of Anāhīd" (بیت نار أناهيذ), which was guarded, according to Ṭabarī, by the Sasanians' ancestors (ed. de Goeje 1881-82: 814; Nöldeke 1879: 4; *cf.* Chaumont 1958: 155–158). Most probably, the "house of fire" (بیت نار) at a distance of one parasang from the city of Estakhr, which was visited and described by the mediaeval historiographer Mas'ūdī in the tenth century (ed. Barbier de Meynard 1865: 76–77), is also this very place near Persepolis.

The second temple, i.e., the Fire of Anāhīd-Ardašīr, should be identified with the "House of Fire of Ardašīr" (بیت نار اردشیر), where, according to Ṭabarī, the last Sasanian King Yazdgerd III (r. 632–651) was crowned by the nobles of Estakhr (ed. de Goeje 1881-82: 1067; Nöldeke 1879: 397; *cf.* Chaumont 1958: 164; Boyce 1998: 646). This temple was probably founded and consecrated by Ardašīr I (r. 224–241), the founder of the Sasanian Empire, and hence named after him.

In his description of the Friday Mosque of Estakhr, the tenth century geographer Maqdisī quotes a legend of his time that the place had been a "house of fire" (بیت نار) in the past, i.e. in pre-Islamic times (ed. de Goeje 1906: 436). Archaeological excavations at the site carried out by the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago in the 1930s showed that the mosque was built with columns of the Achaemenid type. This led to the *a priori* assumption that there existed a pre-Islamic sanctuary that became incorporated into a mosque after the Islamic conquest of the city (Herzfeld 1935: 48; *idem* 1941: 276; Schmidt 1939: 106; *idem* 1970: 49, n. 111). Further re-examinations of the architectural remains, however, revealed that the early Islamic city of Estakhr, in the eastern part of the site, should be distinguished from the Sasanian city, located to the west, and the building in question is an early Islamic construction, originally founded as a mosque in the seventh century, albeit using ancient materials brought from elsewhere (Whitcomb 1979; *idem* 2008).

This observation leaves the question open as to whether the Temple of Anāhīd-Ardašīr was located within the bounds of the Sasanian city of Estakhr. To date, no architectural remains of a sanctuary have been discovered in the western part of the site. This has paved the path for development of a speculative hypothesis identifying the temple described by Mas'ūdī with the grotto of Naqsh-e Rajab, where three early Sasanian reliefs and an inscription of Kerdīr are engraved in the rocks (Bier 1983: 315; Kaim 2008: 6–8; for a criticism of this hypothesis, see Shavarebi 2018: 189–190).

There are, however, a number of early Sasanian decorative elements, including remains of columns, pilaster capitals, and moulded cornices, among the archaeological finds from the periphery of the Friday Mosque (Bernard 1974: 284–288). A Sasanian sculpted building block was also later discovered at a short distance northeast of the mosque (Bier 1983). This evidence suggests two possible conclusions: either the eastern part of the site was not built from scratch as an early Islamic city, but had already been a quarter of the Sasanian city (*contra* the theory of Whitcomb 1979); or there was a major effort to dismantle pre-

Islamic monumental edifices and bring their voluminous architectural elements to the eastern city to be reused in the new constructions of the early Islamic times. Discussion of the difficulties involved with both these conclusions is not within the scope of the present paper. Whichever of these possibilities—or perhaps both together—is the case, the discovery of a Sasanian sculpted stone block depicting part of a female figure on its front surface provides tempting, though not conclusive, grounds to consider that it was a fragment of a portrayal of the goddess Anāhīd which had once dressed a wall of the Temple of Anāhīd-Ardašīr in the Sasanian city of Estakhr (Shavarebi 2018: 190–192).

Returning to the literary sources, we find an account of Ardašīr I's eastern campaign, listing the cities he conquered, in the Islamic historiographical tradition. In the early 230s, Ardašīr extended the eastern frontiers of his young empire by defeating local rulers of Sakastān and Khorāsān, and conquering their lands (see Alram 2007; Shavarebi 2017). On his way back from Khorāsān to Pārs, he made a short stop in Marw, where, according to Ṭabarī, he "killed a number of people and sent their heads to the House of Fire of Anāhīd" (ed. de Goeje 1881-82: 819; Nöldeke 1879: 17). Here, once again the "House of Fire of Anāhīd" (بیت نار أناهیذ) is mentioned, but its location is not indicated. Still one of the two temples of Estakhr is most probably meant, since we do not know of any other temple of Anāhīd in Iran under Ardašīr I. Whether the heads were sent to the old Temple of Anāhīd the Lady or the new Temple of Anāhīd-Ardašīr is not clear, although the temple name mentioned here is same as the name of the old temple in Ṭabarī's context, i.e the "House of Fire of Anāhīd", not the "House of Fire of Ardašīr".

It is not mentioned who the victims of Ardašīr's slaughter in Marw were. As we can infer from Ṭabarī's narrative, Marw had already been conquered by Ardašīr before he returned to the city and killed these people. The killing of these people had, therefore, probably nothing to do with his capture of the city. It is quite plausible that the victims did not belong to any political resistance, but were of a different faith to Ardašīr's. A possibility is that they were from the nascent Christian community of Marw. There is literary and archaeological evidence of the increasing presence of Christianity in the city of Marw and its vicinity as early as the rise of the Sasanians in the third century (see Comneno 1997: 28–33; Nikitin 2001; *idem* 2015; for an updated survey of the archaeological evidence of Christianity in Central Asia, see Ashurov 2015).

A rather similar account appears in the *Martyrdom of Abbot Baršebyā, Ten Fellow Brothers, and One Magus* (*BHO* 146), a Syriac hagiographical text written by an anonymous author sometime between the second half of the fourth century and the middle of the sixth century (Smith 2016: 192 suggests a date in the sixth century). The text is preserved in four manuscripts, the oldest of which goes back to the middle of the sixth century.[1] The evidence of stylistic elements affords the possibility to consider this text as well as the *Martyrdom of Miles* (*BHO* 772) and the *Martyrdom of Daniel and Wardā* (*BHO* 245) as works of the

1- The mid-sixth century manuscript belongs to the collection of the Vatican Library (Vat. Syr. 160: fol. 103). The other manuscripts are kept at the Vatican Library (Vat. Syr. 161: fols. 64–65; from the ninth century), the British Library (Add. 14,645: fol. 322–323; dated from 936), and the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (Or. Oct. 1257: fol. 43; dated from 1863, copied from a lost ninth century manuscript from Diyarbakır). The text was first edited on the basis of the Vatican manuscripts and translated into Latin by Stefano Evodio Assemani in 1748 (*ASM* I: 93–95). In the nineteenth century, M. l'Abbé François Lagrange published a French translation of the text on the basis of Assemani's Latin translation (Lagrange 1852: 79–81 [1871²: 78–79]). Later in the nineteenth century, Paul Bedjan edited the text using the manuscripts of London and Berlin (*AMS* II: 281–284). Bedjan's edition has recently been translated into English by Kyle Smith (2016: 193–195). A new study and Persian translation of this text and a number of other Syriac acts of martyrs is the subject of a forthcoming work by the second author of the present paper (Amiri Bavandpour).

same author. In these three texts, the execution of Miles, bishop of Susa, *ca.* 340/341, is used as a base date for giving the dates of other events.

The *Martyrdom of Abbot Baršebyā* describes the story of Baršebyā (literally "Son of the captivity"), abbot of a monastery in Persis at the time of Šāpūr II (r. 309–379). Baršebyā was executed on the order of the Zoroastrian *mowbed* of Estakhr around 342. The text provides detailed information about events connected to the torture and execution of Baršebyā and his religious brothers. It also indicates the location of events, which may serve as a new piece of evidence for the question of the location of the temples of Anāhīd at Estakhr. The relevant passages from the *Martyrdom of Abbot Baršebyā* are excerpted in the following:

> [...] ܗܝܕܝܢ ܦܩܕ ܘܐܦܩܘܗ ܐܢܘܢ ܠܒܪ ܡܢ ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܐܝܟ ܕܢܬܩܛܠܘܢ. [...] ܠܪܫܝܗܘܢ ܕܝܢ ܐܥܠܘ ܐܢܘܢ ܠܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܘܬܠܘ ܐܢܘܢ ܒܗܝܟܠܐ ܕܐܢܗܝܕ ܐܠܗܬܐ ܕܦܪܣܝܐ ܐܝܟ ܕܠܚܙܬܐ ܘܕܚܠܬܐ ܕܣܘܓܐܐ. ܘܦܓܪܝܗܘܢ ܐܟܠܘ ܚܝܘܬ ܒܪܐ ܘܦܪܚܬܐ ܕܫܡܝܐ. ܘܡܢ ܒܬܪ ܐܬܚܙܝܬ ܒܗܘܢ ܚܝܠܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܡܣܓܝܐܐ ܘܗܘܬ ܬܕܡܘܪܬܐ ܪܒܬܐ ܒܟܠܗ ܐܬܪܐ ܘܡܬܠܠܗ ܡܣܓܝܐܐ ܐܬܬܠܡܕܘ ܠܫܪܪܐ.
>
> (Edition: Bedjan, *AMS* II: 282–283)

> *... [H]e [= Mowbed of Estakhr] ordered that they [= Baršebyā and his religious brothers] be taken to the outskirts of the city to be executed. ... Then they [= Zoroastrians] brought their [= Christians'] heads into the city [= Estakhr] and hung them upon the temple of Anahid, the goddess of the Persians, to display them for the masses in order to deter them. Wild animals and birds of the heavens devoured their bodies.*
>
> (Translation: Smith 2016: 194–195)

The text does not specify to which temple of Anāhīd the heads of Baršebyā and his religious brothers were sent, but it is clear that they were brought *into* the city (ܐܥܠܘ ܐܢܘܢ ܠܡܕܝܢܬܐ), i.e. this "Temple of Anahid" (ܗܝܟܠܐ ܕܐܢܗܝܕ) was located *inside* the city, not somewhere in the vicinity. It leaves no doubt that the temple in question should not be identified with the grotto of Naqsh-e Rajab or any similar site outside the city of Estakhr. Theodor Nöldeke was the first scholar to notice the reference of this text to the Temple of Anāhīd at Estakhr, in his opinion, in connection with Ardašīr I (Nöldeke 1879: 4, n. 2). Should the Sasanian Temple of Anāhīd-Ardašīr be meant in this text, it would support the conclusion that this temple was located *inside* the Sasanian city of Estakhr, where architectural elements of monumental edifices, including a sculpted stone block, have been discovered (*vide supra*; also Shavarebi 2018: 190–192). However, since it is not entirely certain whether these elements are found *in situ*, we cannot mark the precise position of this temple.

Ultimately, with regard to the new archaeological project at Estakhr (see Fontana 2018), we should look forward to new discoveries leading to a better understanding of the architectural elements at Estakhr and, hopefully, a more precise determination of the position of the Temple of Anāhīd-Ardašīr.

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