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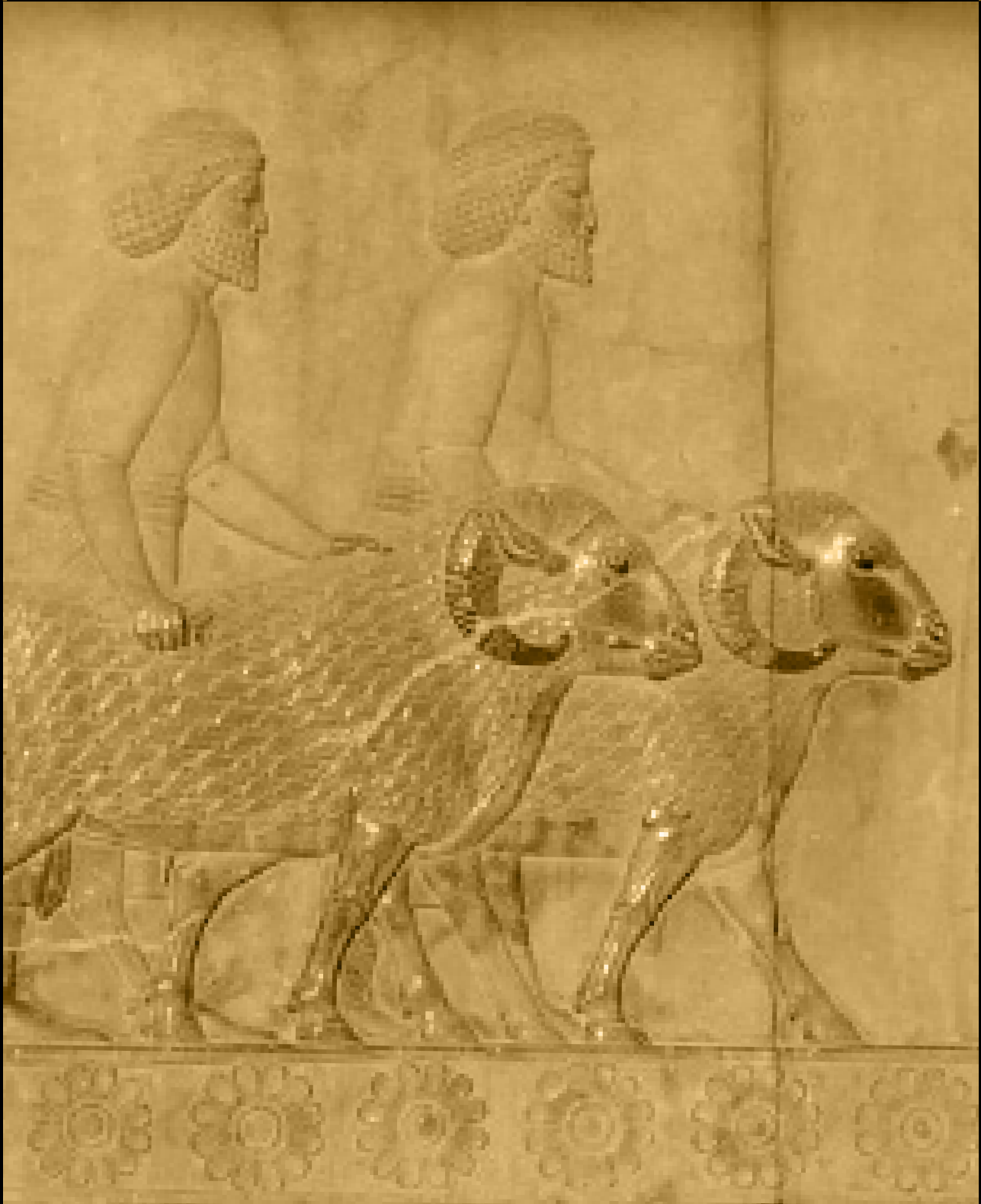
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Detail from above the entrance of Tehran's fire temple, 1286š/1917–18. Photo by © Shervin Farridnejad

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From Yima's Wara to Jamshid's Throne: Persepolis and the Impact of the Avestan Lore

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In a recent article I tried to demonstrate how to make sense of what Herodotus' reports on the actions of the Achaemenid king of kings, Xerxes at the Hellespont and its structural relation to the story of the primordial king, Yima (Daryaei 2016: 4-9). The idea was that if we have a deep knowledge of the Iranian lore and tradition, one can decipher foreign sources for the Iranian world in a better way and one can distinguish between fact and fiction (Daryaei 2012: 28-43). The present essay continues the topic under the general theme of what I call the "Yima Paradigm," and attempt to provide a possible answer as to why the Achaemenid ceremonial capital Persepolis, (Greek) *περσέπολις* / (Persian) *Pārsa-* / (Elamite) *Ba-ir-ša* (Mousavi 2012: 9), was to be called *Taxt-e Jamšīd* (Yima's Throne). Naming places and buildings, and associating them with prophets, kings or heroes is an interesting tradition in the Iranian world, which can provide clues as to the historical continuity and ruptures in historical memory. Cyrus the Great's tomb (Mousavi 2013: 31), which later came to be known as the tomb of Solomon's mother (Ghabr-e mādar-e Soleymān), or Pasargadae's tower (Zendan-e Solyeman), or the cluster of Achaemenid and Sasanian rock reliefs facing the city of Ištakhr as Painting or Imprint of Ruštam (Naqsh-e Ruštam), or the Cube of Zoroaster (Ka'be-ye Zardušt) for the rectangular structure opposite the Achaemenid tombs and Sasanian rock reliefs are examples of such naming convention.

None of these names we know are or should be associated with these structures, but people in their own time named them based on their world-view, at a time when real place-names were forgotten. Persepolis, as it is known, was the magnificent Achaemenid ceremonial capital which was built mainly during the time of Darius the Great and his son Xerxes, in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE. We know, based on an inscription from the fourth century CE that the early Sasanians called the place *Sad-Stūn*, “One Hundred Columns” (Daryaei 200: 107-114 : Mousavi 2009: 82). This in itself is significant in that in the Elamite tablets we also come across this name (*i-ia-an* “columned hall”), which gives us a very interesting continuity in naming. But by the time we come across Classical Persian texts, the place is known as Jamšīd’s Throne, or the “Shining Yima’s Throne,” i.e., *Taxt-e Jamšīd*. How did Persepolis then become known as *Taxt-e Jamšīd*? What was the reasoning for which this great palace came to be associated with Yima / Jamšīd in late antiquity? Two scholars, I. Gershevich and A. Sh. Shahbazi have given important details and reasonings for the naming of Persepolis as *Taxt-e Jamšīd*. While both make sound suggestions, and differ in their interpretation, I would like to provide yet another clue for the naming of Persepolis as *Taxt-e Jamšīd*.

By the late Sasanian period Persepolis had been already called *Taxt-e Jamšīd*. This inference is based on a references in the *Šāhnāme* of Ferdowsī which mentions Persepolis as *Taxt-e Jamšīd*, when Zakhāk is on the march towards the palace (Shahbazi 1977: 202).

سوی تخت جمشید بنهاد روی چو انگشتی کرد گیتی بروی

2

Furthermore, in the Persian epic, the location of Zakhāk’s nightmare at the palace is mentioned to be “*Sad Sotūn*” (One Hundred Columned) Hall (Shahbazi 1977: 202), which matches our early Sasanian reference to the place:¹

که لرزان شد آن خانه‌ی صد ستون

Shahbazi’s supposition is that since the *Šāhnāme* or the *Book of Kings* is ultimately based on the Sasanian *Xwadāy-nāmag*, the palace must have also been known as *Taxt-e Jamšīd*. Of course there are some four centuries in-between the composition of the two texts and one must be cautious, but the idea is acceptable. Shahbazi suggests that the naming of Persepolis as *Taxt-e Jamšīd* is because the “sculptures” recalled the story of Jamšīd’s legendary throne, where the delegates came to pay homage, while the king is lifted into the sky (Shahbazi 1977: 204). This is based on the belief that already the story of Jamšīd’s ascent into the heavens on his throne (*taxt*) was popular and hence the identification as such. I differ with Shahbazi on this point and would like to posit another suggestion. I. Gershevitch on the other hand suggests that long after the destruction of Persepolis, the building the terrace looked like a mound and was likened to Jam’s throne, i.e., Mount Jamagān. According to him, the *Sārūka* “palace” or “cave” was then believed to have been built below it (Gershevitch: 1974 67-68).

1- *Šāhnāme* I 27 ff and 37. که لرزان شد آن خانه صد ستون A. Sh. Shahbazi, AMI 10, 1977, p. 202.

In the Middle Persian texts *War ī Jamkard* (Yima-made enclosure) achieves an interesting and eschatological association, where at the end of time the Sōšyāns will appear. Not only Persepolis' religious function alters, but its location also shifts from the East to the province of Persis. In the Zoroastrian encyclopedic book, the *Bundahišn* (XVII.220-221 / Pakzad XXXIII.36) it is stated that after the terrible winter which destroys the world:

pas abāz-ārāyišnih ī mardōm ud gōspand az war ī jam-kard bawēd ī ēn kār pad nihuftagīh kard ēštēd (Pakzad 2005: 367)

“Then the rearranging of people and cattle will take place from the Yima-made enclosure, that for this function has been built in concealment”

In a sense by associating the location of the savior with that of Persepolis, brings the Achaemenid palace into a sacred landscape. This association is clearly provided in the *Bundahišn* (Chapter XIV.199-200), where the location of “Yima-made enclosure,” is given in such a manner:

gūr ud war ī jam-kard mayān ī pārs pad sarwāg. ēdōn gōwēnd kū jam-kard azēr ī kōf ī jamagān (Pakzad 2005: 343-344)

Gōr and Yima-made-enclosure is in the middle of Pārs by Sarwāg. It is said that the Yima-made (enclosure) is under the Jamāgān Mountain.

As Gershevitch had noted, already in the late Sasanian period it was believed that Jamšīd's Wara was in Pars / Fars and that it was under Mt. Jamakān. In the early Islamic geographical works Mt. Jamakān was also placed in Pars and so it appears that the Kuh-e Rahmat was identified with Yima or Jamšīd's wara and Persepolis next to it was seen as Jamšīd's throne (1974: 68).

Thus, if Persepolis was associated with Yima and his throne, why may have this association been given to the monument? Shahbazi suggests the story of Yima's ascension to the heavens and the reliefs as a possible answer. I have another suggestion, a sort of anthropological observation. I had the privilege of staying over at Persepolis from 4:00am to the opening of the site at 10:00am all by myself. It is these moments that one lives for and never forgets the rest of his or her life. I had much time to sit and to admire the monument, but also think about its purpose and function, especially the Apādānā, when I began to think why those in the past called this place Taxt-e Jamšīd or “Yima's” or “Jamshid's Throne.” Let us look at the textual material for Jamšīd or Yima in the Zoroastrian tradition. Our most important and detail tradition is found in the *Wīdēwdād* (Anti-Demonic-Law), specifically Fragard 2.

According to this tradition, Ahura Mazda tells Yima to prosper and enlarge the world and protect it. With a golden goad and a golden whip he ruled and enlarged the world again and again, three time (Skjærvø 2012 : Panaino 2013: 80), but the world had become filled with humans and animals. Then Ahura Mazda tells Yima who is renowned in *Airyānəm Vaējō* (Expanse / Stretch of the Aryans / Iranians) (E. Benveniste 1933-1935: 265-274 : MacKenzie 1998), that a winter will come, a winter that is hard,

crushing upon the earth. The snow will fill the earth to the highest mountains. Ahura Mazda instructs Yima to build what the *Wīdēwdād* calls a *Wara* (Sanskrit *Valā* “fortress” Panaino 2012 : 114, ft. 10) and (*Wīdēwdād* II.2.25.B):

*u-š pad āgenēn tōhamg abar bare az pahān ud stōrān mardōmān sagān wayān ud ātaxš-iz
suxr sōzag*

Bring together there the seeds of animals, small and large and men, dogs, birds, and blazing red fires (Moazami 2015: 58-59)

Those familiar with the Noah’s ark tradition, but more importantly the Gíglamesh tradition at once see the resemblance. But what is the relation between *Wīdēwdād* Fragard 2 with the Persepolis? One only has to walk before the Apādānā and put aside our knowledge of the Achaemenids and the association with them. That is if we erase in our minds of what we know about the structure and forget the Achaemenids as part of the Sasanian political and cultural program, we can certainly have another view of what the reliefs are portraying. What one sees is readily the paring (Middle Persian *dōgānag*) of rams, other animals and people with plants beautiful object in the material world, being taken to a place (Fig. 1).

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These scenes along with the story of Fragard II of the *Wīdēwdād*, where the collection of the best in the world placed into the *wara* is related, match well. One should remember that at the time a huge stone monument, half buried, with scenes of things being loaded or placed would have been seen in line with the Yima-made enclosure story. I believe it was assumed that Persepolis was the throne of Yima in late antiquity, because it was thought that the reliefs of the *Wīdēwdād* tradition was carved on it and below was the place of Yima, hence the naming, Taxt-e Jamšīd for the ceremonial palace of Persepolis .



Fig. 1 Freeze from Persepolis

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