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Tol-e Ajori and Takht-e Jamshid: a Sequence of Imperial* Projects in the Persepolis Area

by ALIREZA ASKARI CHAVERDI, PIERFRANCESCO CALLIERI

L'articolo presenta una serie di riflessioni di ampio respiro suscitate dalla scoperta e scavo della Porta di Tol-e Ajori 3,5 km a ovest della Terrazza di Persepolis (Fars).

L'attività della Missione Congiunta Irano-Italiana nel Fars nella piana di Parsa (Persepolis) ha inizialmente portato un contributo decisivo alla individuazione della città di Parsa, la cui presenza non lontano dalla Terrazza era intuibile dalle fonti elamiche e greche. I risultati delle prospezioni geofisiche iraniane e irano-francesi hanno prodotto una conferma dell'esistenza di un insediamento abitato, caratterizzato dai tratti peculiari di un'urbanistica "diffusa". Persepolis, quindi, si conferma un insediamento caratterizzato da altri quartieri oltre a quello reale della Terrazza.

Ma è la Porta di Tol-e Ajori, scavata tra il 2011 e il 2018, ad aver allargato nello spazio e nel tempo l'orizzonte di vita del centro di Parsa. Questa copia della Porta di Ishtar di Babilonia, caratterizzata dalla medesima decorazione di creature fantastiche composte da mattoni invetriati di impasto argilloso, costituisce una attestazione della fondazione di un complesso architettonico di natura imperiale, un "paradiso" analogo a quello di Pasargadae, nell'area di Parsa nel periodo compreso tra il 539 e il 518 a.C., ovvero prima della costruzione della Terrazza da parte di Dario I.

Ĉi tiu verko prezentas larĝaspirajn pripensadojn elvekitajn sekve de la malkovraĵo kaj la pri-fosado de la Pordego Tol-e Ajori situanta je 3.5 km de la Persepola Teraso (Fars).

La kunaktivo de la Irano-Itala Misio en Fars en la ebenaĵo Parsa (Persepolo) ekde la komenco alportis decidan kontribuon al la identigo de la urbo Parsa kies ĉeesto malproksime de la Teraso estis intueciebla per Elamaj kaj Grekaj fontoj. La rezultoj de la iranaj kaj iranaj-francaj geofizikaj prospektoradoj produktis konfirmon pri la ekzisto de loĝestabliĝo karakterizata per specifaj trajtoj de "disvastigita" urboplanismo. Persepolo do konfirmigas kiel loĝloko karakterizita per aliaj distriktoj krom la reala kvartalo de la Teraso.

Sed estas la Pordego Tol-e Ajori, elfosita inter 2011 kaj 2018, kiu plilarĝigis la spactempan vivhorizonton de la centro de Parsa. Ĉi tiu kopio de la Iŝtar-Pordego de Babilono, karakterizita per la sama ornamado de mirindaj estaĵoj kunmetitaj el glazuritaj argilaj brikoj, konsistigas ateston de la fundamento de arkitektura komplekso je imperia naturo, "paradizo" simila al tiu de Pasargadae, en la areo de Parsa en la periodo inter 539 kaj 518 a.K., aŭ antaŭ la konstruado de la Teraso fare de Dario la 1-a.

Introduction

The vast plain surrounded by mountains in central Fars, where is one of the most attractive sites not only of Iran but also of the whole world, Persepolis, has hosted for almost two centuries the ideological centre of gravity of the largest empire in ancient history, the Persian Empire. The foundation by the Achaemenid sovereign Darius I around 518

* We use the term "imperial" to indicate in a more explicit way those manifestations directly commissioned by the Achaemenid emperors, which the term "royal" generally used does not allow to distinguish automatically from generically courtiers of lower rank (cf. Matin 2018).

BCE of the imperial terrace known today in Iran as Takht-e Jamshid—a name which connects it to the heroic world of the Iranian epos—made the delegations of all the peoples of the empire, which we see depicted in the reliefs carved on the facades of the two staircases of the large Audience hall, convene to this plain and this place. For a long time, we have forgotten the exceptionality of this manifestation of the human spirit, contenting ourselves with describing and studying the powerful but elegant architecture and its sculptural representations as if it were a tree capable of living without humus and roots. And instead, humus and roots existed and it was they who allowed the tree to live. This is the reason for the Iranian-Italian project “From Palace to Town,” started in 2008 to descend from the imperial Terrace in search of its humus and roots, without forgetting that the terrace also needed urgent care for its poorly preserved stone.

And when we speak of “roots” we mean two different things: the metaphorical roots that indicate genealogy, that is, the chronological descendants from something previous; and the actual roots that indicate the social and economic background that allowed the life of the Terrace, and that could not but comprise habitation areas.

The research has moved in search of the second type of roots that is the “town” reported by the barely identifiable sources. After identifying some ramifications of the latter, it has also reached and documented the metaphorical roots located in a chronological horizon before that of the Terrace.

This article is written as a four-handed essay to celebrate, from the pages of a glorious title, finally returned to new life, the vitality of the collaboration between Iran and Italy in the field of archaeology and cultural heritage. It aims to quickly retrace the steps taken by the researchers of the two countries on a path already opened by a few enlightened masters, steps arrived with commitment and seriousness to an unexpected goal: the discovery of one of the roots of that Persepolis/Takht-e Jamshid which the whole world knows.

It will, therefore, be necessary to introduce the state of the matter, examining the reasons, including theoretical ones, for the great delay in previous research.

However, the understanding of the semantic value of the term “town” used by all those authors who deny the existence of a city in Persepolis is influenced by the application of a socio-cultural model unsuited to the space-time conditions of 6th century BCE Fars. In all these cases, in the definition of the city of Persepolis during the Achaemenid period, time, geography, territory and historical context have not been calibrated in a correct perspective. The researchers were not able for a long time to understand the need to interpret the evidence in the light of socio-cultural models other than Mesopotamian or European ones: this was a gross error in the interpretation of archaeological evidence because it was based on the notion of “town” with an established and inflexible definition for all ages and places. Achieving the definition of a “Persian conception of urbanism” very different from the Mesopotamian one, but not without affinity in other places and periods (Gondet 2018), is undoubtedly one of the greatest advances in our knowledge of the civilization of Persia in the Achaemenid period. Based on this updated methodological approach, the results of the activities of the Iranian-Italian Joint Mission bring a contribution of new information of enormous weight, which fully confirms the methodological validity of the approach followed.

Previous Researches

In his report on the state of conservation of the Persepolis site, commissioned by the governor-general of the province of Fars in the mid 1920s, E. Herzfeld did not fail to de-

scribe also what he saw in front of him when, from the terrace of Takht-e Jamshid,¹ he observed the plain stretching westwards, rich in remains of the ancient town before they were razed by the progressive intensification of the destructive aspects of agricultural exploitation: “À l’Ouest de la terrasse, vers la plaine, l’étendue de la ville peut être déterminée par la nature du sol, qui se distingue visiblement de celle de la plaine: la couleur de la terre des décombres diffère de celle de la terre végétale naturelle, et toutes les deux produisent des végétations différentes. En outre, le sol jadis occupé par des édifices est parfaitement parsemé de petits éclats de matériaux de construction et de poteries” (Herzfeld 1929-1930: 32).

When in 1986 W.M. Sumner published his seminal article *Achaemenid settlement in the Persepolis plain* (Sumner 1986), based on his surface surveys carried out twenty years earlier (Sumner 1972), Herzfeld’s report, published in French and Persian on a German journal, had been forgotten while the evidence for an inhabited settlement, which could be assumed in the Elamite documents and in the Classical sources, was indeed so scanty to have suggested to some scholars the conception that the Persians during the Achaemenid time could have known only the same nomadic or semi-nomadic settlement pattern which had been postulated for prehistoric times (Hansman 1972: 110; Alizadeh 2003). Scholars were posing the question whether an Achaemenid town had ever existed next to the imperial Terrace of Takht-e Jamshid (Bahadori, Valipour 2019):² the geographic environment was considered as being the reason of the rarity of settlements in Persia (Shahbazi 2012: 123). Darius I’s assertion in the Elamite inscription DPf that he had built his “fortress” (Elamite *halmarraš*) where there had been no fortress before,³ was frequently taken so more than literally, that it was believed that Darius was the first to turn his attention to this fertile plain: on the contrary, Sumner and other scholars in the last quarter of the twentieth century had rightly pointed out that this plain was already frequented in a pre-Darius era. In this regard, it should be noted that the major recent historiographical work on the Persian Empire, by P. Briant, affirms with conviction that Darius’ statement concerned Takht-e Jamshid only and that instead his choice to build his dynastic complex in Pārsa was motivated by the very existence in the plain of the existing town of Matezziš.⁴

In fact Sumner, with keen methodological insight, had proposed to add to the promising results of his field survey (Fig. 1) a study of the toponyms mentioned in the Persepolis administrative documents to match them with the evidence recorded during his survey and to set up the hierarchy of the settlements, based on the comparative frequency of their names on the tablets. At the top of this hierarchy, Sumner placed the provincial capital of Pārsa (Persepolis), which would be composed of an area of c. 25 ha densely

¹ In order to avoid confusion with the name Persepolis, which like the Old Persian form Pārsa indicates different entities, we will call the Imperial Achaemenid Terrace, known in the West as Persepolis, with the Persian name of Takht-e Jamshid.

² A recent contribution published in Iran (Bahadori, Valipour 2019), which follows the same approach of strong skepticism towards the idea of a “town” in Persepolis, should be mentioned: it should be noted, however, that the authors do not seem to be aware of the results of the latest geophysical and archaeological activities on the subject, so the judgment expressed might have been different if this material had been consulted by the authors.

³ DPf § 2 (Elamite only; see Weissbach 1911: 82-83; Schmidt 1953: 63).

⁴ “Le choix de Persépolis s’explique par les développements antérieurs, qui avaient fait de la région un centre palatial et urbain actif et peuplé, en relation avec les centres babyloniens - donc également un centre susceptible d’offrir les bases matérielles (en particulier alimentaires) des gigantesques travaux que le roi et ses conseillers avaient conçus sur la terrasse. [...]” (Briant 1996: 99).

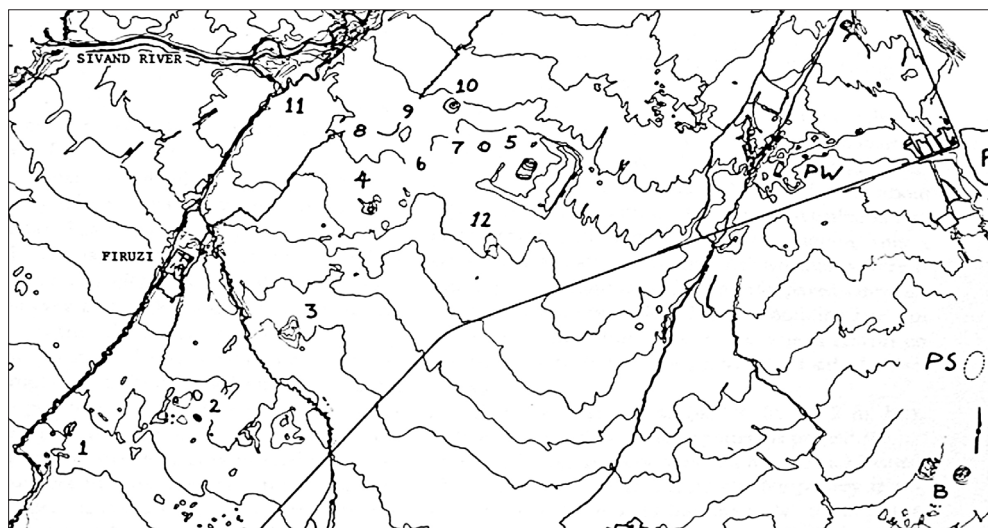


Fig. 1 - Plan of the Achaemenid settlement in the eastern part of the Persepolis plain according to W.M. Sumner. After Sumner 1986: 8, fig. 4.

built at the site of Persepolis West, *c.* 1 km to the West of Takht-e Jamshid, and a larger area of *c.* 600 ha, centred on the present village of Firuzi, with a number of isolated *tepes* bearing traces of a more elaborate architecture using cut blocks stone of Achaemenid workmanship (Sumner 1986: 8-9): this settlement would correspond for Sumner with the toponym of Matezziš mentioned in the Persepolis Fortification Tablets (Sumner 1986: 23). While Persepolis West is comparable to ordinary Near Eastern town sites, Firuzi shows a more dispersed, open topography and included sumptuous buildings (Sumner 1986: 9).

New information on these areas was provided by G. Tilia and A.B. Petterson Tilia, who directed the IsMEO studies and restoration activities at Persepolis from 1965 to 1979 (Fig. 2): the two scholars were often informed of important discoveries during agricultural activities in the Marvdasht plain, and carried out urgent surveys recording the available information, also acquired through limited diggings (Tilia 1978b).

Although not directed to the investigation of the town of Persepolis, A.A. Tadjvidi's excavations in the so-called "Southern Area" (*Barzan-e Jonubi*: see Tadjvidi 1976a; 1976b) added fundamental data on the extension of the official buildings in the area immediately at the foot of Takht-e Jamshid, confirming that the town was distant from the official area, which we define with the Iranian-French geophysicists "Royal Quarter," including the whole fortified area on the Kuh-e Rahmat and on Takht-e Jamshid as well as the buildings adjacent to the latter which also were inside the probable fortifications lines (Mousavi 2012).⁵

⁵ A stratigraphic sounding in the area of Building E of the Barzan-e Jonubi has not detected levels immediately before the one contemporaneous to Takht-e Jamshid (Abdi, Atayi 2014) and also recent radiocarbon dating on samples from these environments indicate a date between 500 and 400 BCE (personal communication by Morteza Djamali), thus confirming that occupation of this area starts with Takht-e Jamshid, as Darius I affirms.

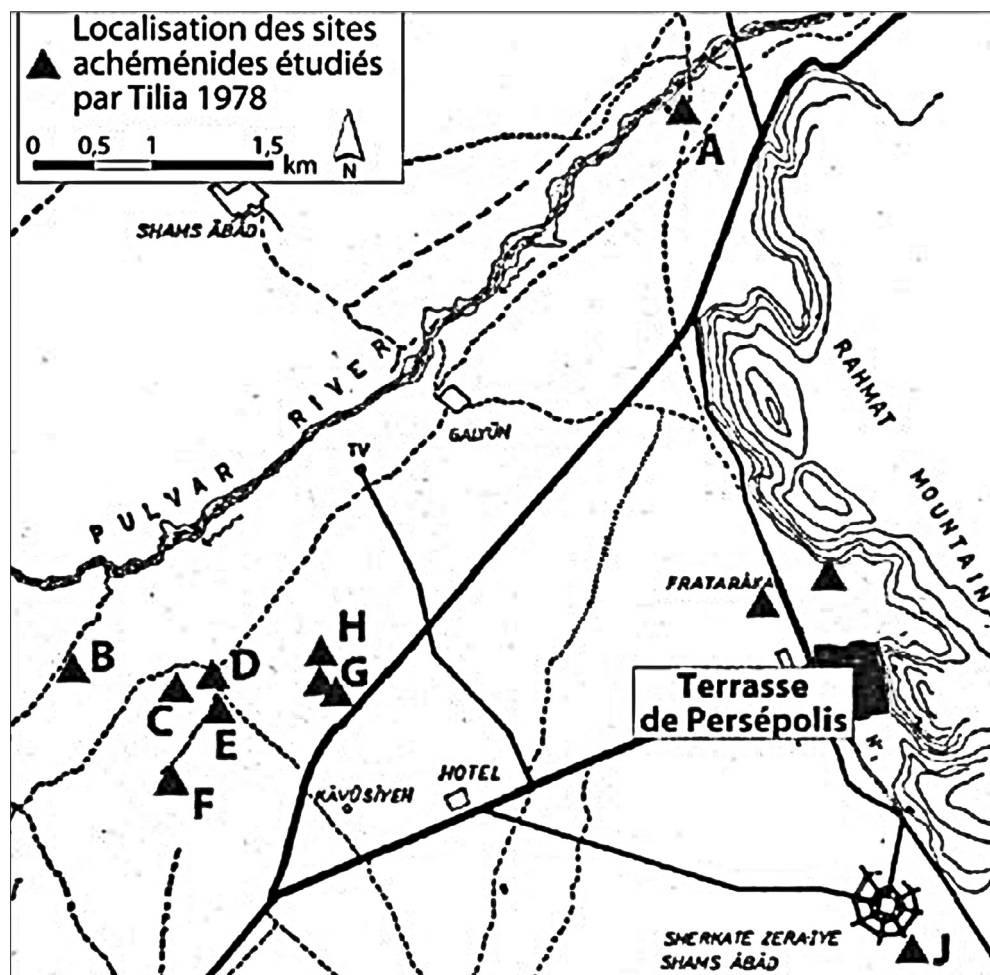


Fig. 2 - Plan of the Firuzi sites studied by G. and A.B. Tilia. After Gondet 2011: pl. 25.

Recent Investigations: Geophysics and Excavations (2003-2019)

A comprehensive discussion on Persepolis town based on facts and not only on personal hypotheses, however, only started to be possible with the availability of the results of new geophysical and archaeological investigations carried out in Persepolis after the introduction of geophysics in Pasargadae, prompted by R. Boucharlat in 1999 (Boucharlat, Benech 2002; Boucharlat 2003b).

It has been thanks to the efforts of the Parsa-Pasargad Research Foundation, at that time directed by M.H. Talebian, that this new perspective has opened up: in the area of Persepolis West geophysical surveys were carried out with different methods by an Iranian and an Iranian-French team from 2003 to 2008 and resumed within an Iranian-Italian project from 2009 (Fig. 3). The scientific importance of these investigations, being a possible solution to the many questions remaining unanswered, was immediately evident when they started throwing new light on what is appearing as a “Persian conception” of urbanism—a completely new topic compared to previous studies on imperial architecture

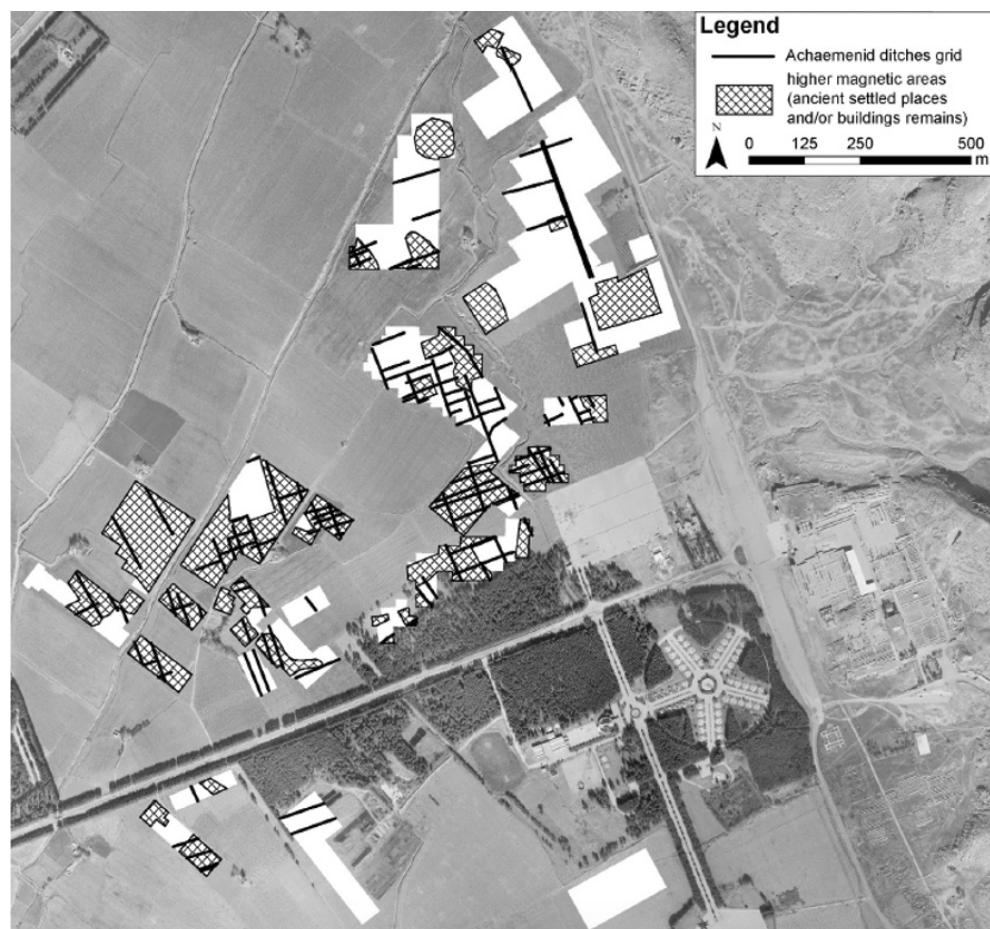


Fig. 3 - Comprehensive reconstruction sketch map of the Achaemenid/post-Achaemenid layout in the site of Persepolis West in the light of the magnetic surveys results obtained by the Iranian-French and the Iranian-Italian mission (2008-2013). After Gondet, Mohammadkhani 2017: fig. 20.

(Boucharlat 2003a; Mohammadkhani 2004; Boucharlat, Feizkhah 2007; Boucharlat, Mohammadkhani 2008; Gondet et al. 2009; Boucharlat, de Schacht, Gondet 2012; Askari Chaverdi, Callieri, Gondet 2013; Gondet, Mohammadkhani 2017).

The results of geophysical prospections let the information acquired reach a critical mass for the first research on the aspects and characteristics of the “urban layout” of Pārsa, the latter finally being confirmed not only as limited to the imperial citadel of Takht-e Jamshid.⁶ This progress of field investigations was singularly paralleled by an acceleration of the work of reading and interpretation of the thousands Elamite administrative tablets from the excavations of the Oriental Institute in Chicago at Takht-e Jamshid (Henkelman, Stolper 2013). The results of field work provided feedback to the de-

⁶ It is certainly noteworthy that in 2003 R. Boucharlat defined this whole area, the Terrace of Takht-e Jamshid and the two sites of Persepolis West and Firuzi as “Royal Area” (Boucharlat 2003a: 265-266), emphasizing the relationship between the two sectors, the Terrace and the town which nevertheless depends on the imperial area, unlike the rest of the Marvdasht plain.

ductions of the scholars reading the Elamite documents PFT, who suggested not to limit the toponym of Pārsa to Takht-e Jamshid alone and to consider that it also defined an adjacent inhabited area of which Matezziš was perhaps a part (Stolper 1984: 307; Henkelman, Kleber 2007: 170).⁷ The study of the documents represented a turning point in the understanding of the society, religion and culture of Fars during the Achaemenid period: in the same way, the new geophysical work opened a new phase in the history of research on Persepolis, and archaeological studies could concentrate on the topographic and environmental context of Takht-e Jamshid and on the location in the adjacent plain of the town of everyday life of Pārsa mentioned by the written sources.

The Town of Pārsa

As regards the area around Sumner's site of "Persepolis West," the picture traced on the basis of the geophysical surveys has been largely confirmed by the Iranian-Italian joint excavations carried out in 2008 and 2009, following the indications provided by geophysics at Persepolis West, which have produced entirely consistent actual archaeological evidence (Askari Chaverdi, Callieri 2012; 2015; 2017a).

In the area between Takht-e Jamshid and Persepolis West, geophysics located a regular grid of linear long magnetic anomalies which was interpreted as a network of ditches or canals (Aminpour 2017: 7, fig. 4). This interpretation was confirmed by the excavations which exposed a stretch of a ditch dug in the soil exactly in correspondence of one of the long anomalies discovered by geomagnetic surveys (Fig. 4). The radio-carbon dating of one bone sample from the lowest of the deposits filling the ditch has given a time range of *c.* 500-400 BC, which allows us to interpret the ditch as an ancient feature going back to the Achaemenid period occupation of the plain (Colliva 2017; Iori, Karami 2017).

Another relevant architectural feature attributed to the Achaemenid period and exposed in that area, is a stretch of a wall running from North-West to South-East, and apparently corresponding to an anomaly visible in the grid outlined by geophysics surveys for a length of more than 200 m. The wall is built with a foundation of large stones and a superstructure of very compact pressed soil (*chineh*). The fact that this structure is built in *chineh* and that its line can be seen in the geomagnetic survey for a long stretch, suggests that it possibly represented an enclosure wall (Asadi, Galuppi 2017).

Further to the west, in the area where Sumner had situated the mounds of Persepolis West now largely razed, geophysics located an area of strong magnetism interpreted as an indicator of kilns and other craft activities and the levelled remains of a settlement with mud-brick structures and its artefacts (Boucharlat, Mohammadkhani 2008). Excavation in this area found an area of dumps spanning from the Achaemenid through the Post-Achaemenid periods and a kiln of a peculiar type (Mercuriali 2017), likely to be used for producing the white colouring matter (fluoroapatite) detected on the buildings of Takht-e Jamshid (Askari Chaverdi et al. 2016; Laurenzi Tabasso, Lazzarini 2017; Ridolfi et al. 2018) (Fig. 5). This is the only evidence of a district of the settlement brought to light by the two excavation seasons at Persepolis West.

⁷ As for the relationship between Matezziš and Persepolis West and/or Firuzi, Sumner is not always consistent, and we must wait for S. Gondet's rigorous analysis before archaeology reaches a conclusion similar to that of epigraphy (Gondet 2018: 191, fn. 20).

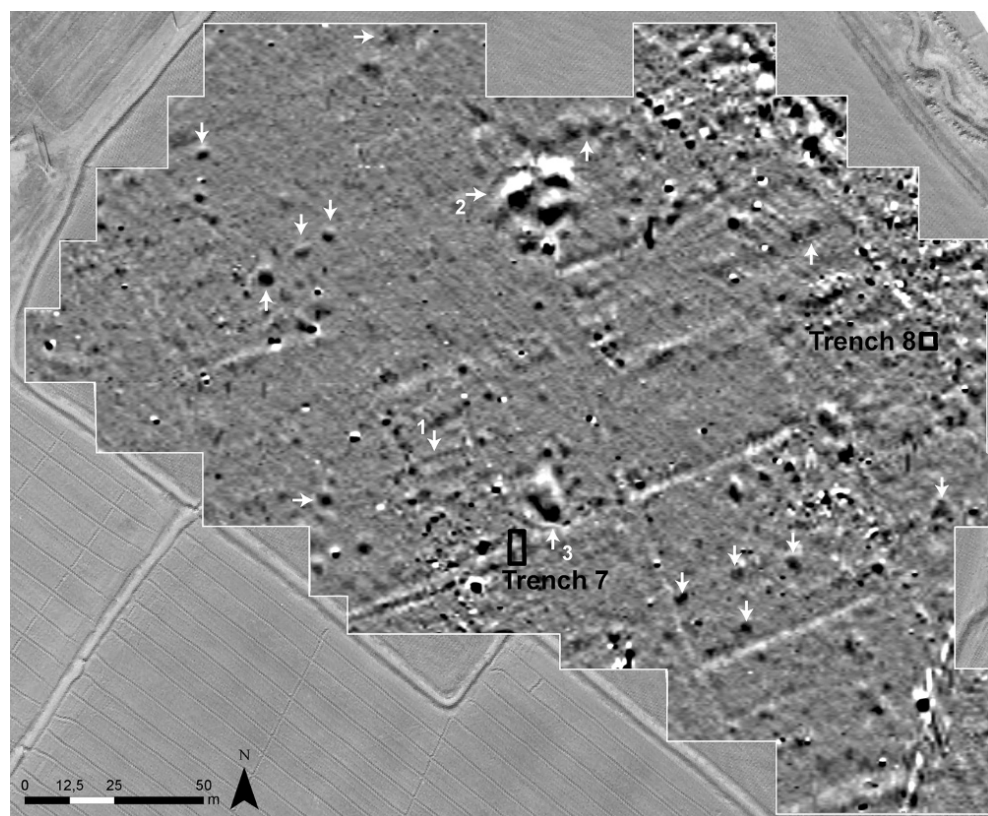


Fig. 4 - Persepolis West: The results of geophysics and the location of excavations in the area with canals (Area C). After Aminpour 2017: fig. 4.

From the craft area of Persepolis West eastwards there were a few other built areas mainly known through geophysical surveys, up to a belt of gardens around Takht-e Jamshid, which was probably compensating the absence of vegetation on the terrace itself, largely built on the rock bed of the Kuh-e Rahmat. This feature matches with the reconstruction proposed by S. Gondet for the town of Persepolis (Fig. 6), which alternated densely built-up areas with large green zones hosting the aristocratic or imperial settlements within gardens, “un nouveau modèle de « ville paradis » marqué par une ample ouverture de l’espace urbain et la prédominance des espaces paysagers non-construits” (Gondet 2018: 203).

This situation also extends to the area north of Takht-e Jamshid, immediately north of the so-called Fratarakā Temple, where the geophysical prospections of the Iranian-French mission have identified an impressive architectural complex, which due to its plan and size has been considered intended for official activities (Gondet, Mohammadkhani, Askari Chaverdi 2018). To the west this complex is limited by the regular network of canals that indicate the green belt that separated the city from the “Royal Quarter.” The picture is completed with the area to the south of the “Southern Area,” called by the Iranian-French team “Persépolis Sud,” practically razed but recognised in the past (Gondet 2018: 199).

What is particularly interesting is the fact that the terrain organisation in the area from Takht-e Jamshid until the westernmost limits of Persepolis West is governed by the main

axes of the former, thus showing that the planning of this part of the settlement was contemporary to the Takht-e Jamshid (Gondet, Mohammadkhani 2017: 25). There is, however, a significant difference between the Persepolis West reconstructed by Sumner as having an extensions of barely 25 ha, and the larger settlement identified by geophysics, to the point that the Iranian-French team more correctly defines it as “Persépolis Nord-Ouest” (Gondet 2018: 199).

The second area where Sumner placed the town is named Firuzi after the village extending at its middle (Fig. 7). Here both Sumner and the Tilias recorded a number of isolated buildings scattered over an area of c. 600 ha which to the north touches the monumental complex of Dasht-e Gohar and the royal necropolis of Naqsh-e Rostam (Tilia 1974).

As better specified by S.

Gondet, this area is in fact composed by two very different sectors, Firuzi South and Bagh-e Firuzi (Gondet 2011: 266).

In the former, the sites belonging to what Gondet calls Firuzi South, now totally disappeared, presented in the 1960s a surface showing a dense texture of eroded mud-brick walls forming *tepes*. Firuzi South is therefore likely to have represented the second built-up part of the town along with Persepolis West (Gondet 2011: 316-318). Bagh-e Firuzi, instead, which Gondet aptly subdivides in two sectors, West and East (Gondet 2011: 318-323), includes a number of isolated small *tepes* or surface sites characterised by the presence of cut-stone architectural elements of Achaemenid type, less dense than in Persepolis West, which suggested to Sumner the existence in most of these sites of buildings belonging to the Persian aristocracy installed in large green areas (Sumner 1986: 4, 28).

On the whole, the picture of Pārsa traced by the Iranian-French surveys is that of a diffused settlement, lying in the plain at the foot of the imperial citadel (Takht-e Jamshid with its extension in the South Quarter) and separated from it by a belt of gardens which were protected by an enclosure, alternating built-up spaces with large green areas. The Iranian-French team has proposed to read in this peculiar evidence a “Persian conception of urbanism” very different from the Mesopotamian one, but not without affinities in other places and other periods, such as for the capitals of the Mongolian empires or the towns of Central American civilisations (Gondet 2011: 616; 2018: 205).

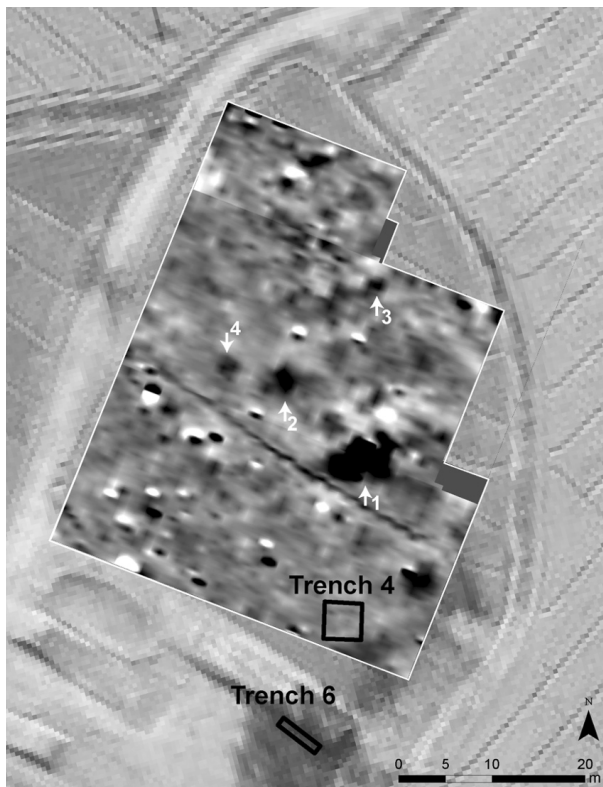


Fig. 5 - Persepolis West. The results of geophysics and the location of excavations in the craft area (Area B). After Aminpour 2017: fig. 5.

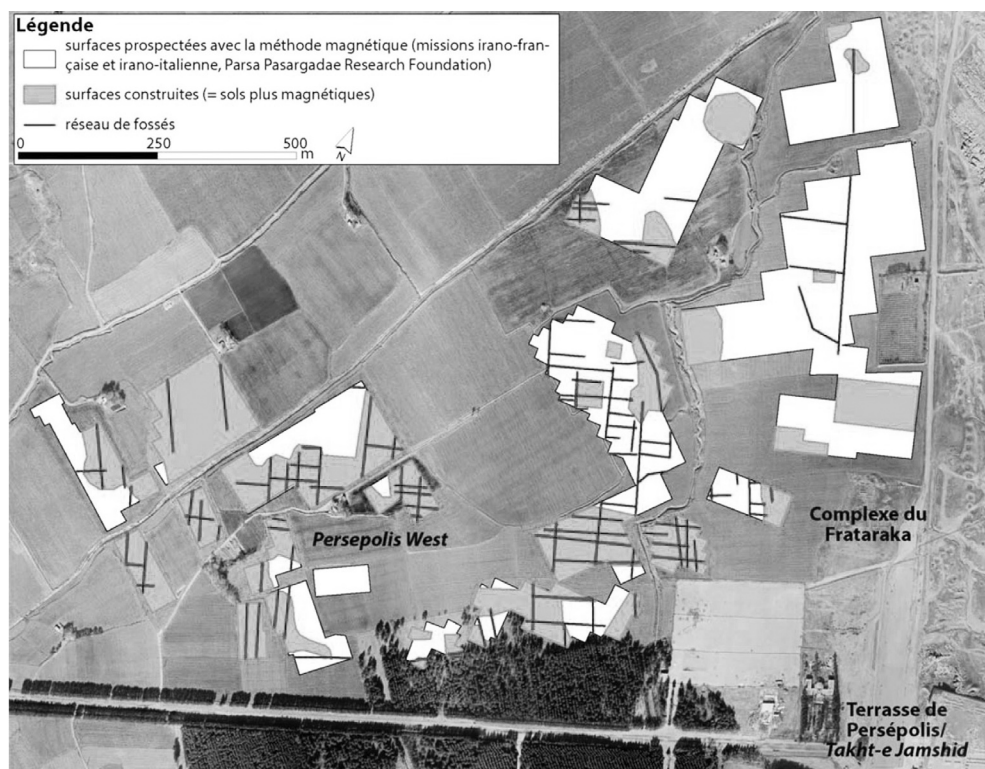


Fig. 6 - Persepolis West: general plan. After Gondet 2018: fig. 5.

The Complex of Tol-e Ajori at Bagh-e Firuzi

Yet, having finally shown the existence and the character of the town of everyday life not far from Takht-e Jamshid is only part of the result of the explorations in the plain of Pārsa. In addition to this confirmation, which concerns the era of Darius I and his successors, the overall view of the history of the imperial occupation of this sector of the fertile Marvdasht plain has become clearer thanks to the excavations of the Iranian-Italian Joint Archaeological Mission in Fars in the Bagh-e Firuzi East area and specially the site of Tol-e Ajori, 3.5 km to the west of Takht-e Jamshid, where a monumental gate was excavated from 2011 to 2018.

Going beyond what Sumner was able to propose, today we have collected enough data to tentatively assign to the different zones of the settlement not only a dating but also an attribution of political rank and a social classification, in order to identify possible areas of imperial relevance.

The Tol-e Ajori gate, a copy in larger dimensions of the Neo-Babylonian Ishtar Gate, built in baked and mud-brick (Fig. 8), with the same plan and the same decoration in glazed plain and reliefs bricks as the Ishtar Gate, stands out as the main monument of the area which, thanks to its exceptional characteristics, makes it possible to distinguish the Bagh-e Firuzi East area to which it belongs from the area of Pārsa centred on Takht-e Jamshid, not only for its chronology but also for its function (Askari Chaverdi, Callieri,

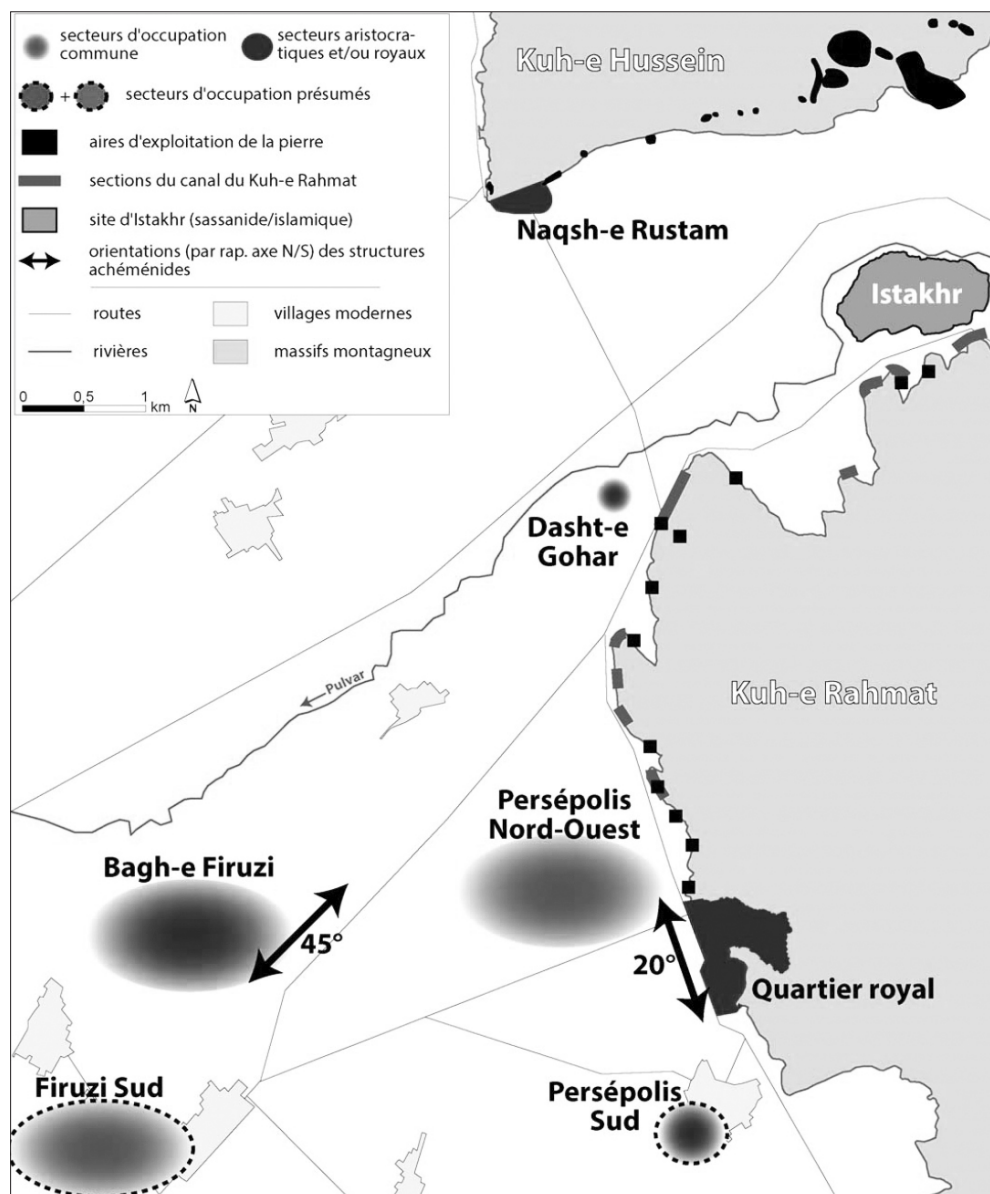


Fig. 7 - The area to the West of Takht-e Jamshid (Quartier royal), showing the position and the orientation of the sites of Firuzi South, Bagh-e Firuzi and Persepolis West (Persépolis nord-ouest). After Gondet 2018: fig. 4.

Gondet 2013; Askari Chaverdi, Callieri, Matin 2016; 2017; Askari Chaverdi, Callieri forthcoming).

For the moment, the only source of abundant chronological information for the area of Bagh-e Firuzi East is its excavated monument, i.e. Tol-e Ajori. The recent work of correlating the stratigraphy of all the excavated trenches and their phases has led us to define the life periods of the gate, starting from the earliest one: thanks to the study of the ma-



Fig. 8 - Tol-e Ajori. Zenithal view of the excavation Trenches Tr. 1, Tr. 2, Tr. 4, showing the various blocks which form the walls. Photo A. Eghra', © Iranian-Italian Joint Archaeological Mission in Fars.

terials, it is now possible to propose a precise, albeit tentative, relative chronology, valid for the monument as well as for the whole complex to which it belongs.

The plan of the building excavated at Tol-e Ajori has been identified as an oversized copy of the southern section of the Ishtar Gate of Babylon, with which it also shares the metric module of the bricks of about 33 cm side. Furthermore, while the part that was excavated corresponds to the southern section of the Ishtar Gate, linear magnetic anomalies in the field north of the *tepe* suggest that there was also originally an analogue to the northern section of the Babylonian gate now not visible on the surface (Fig. 9).

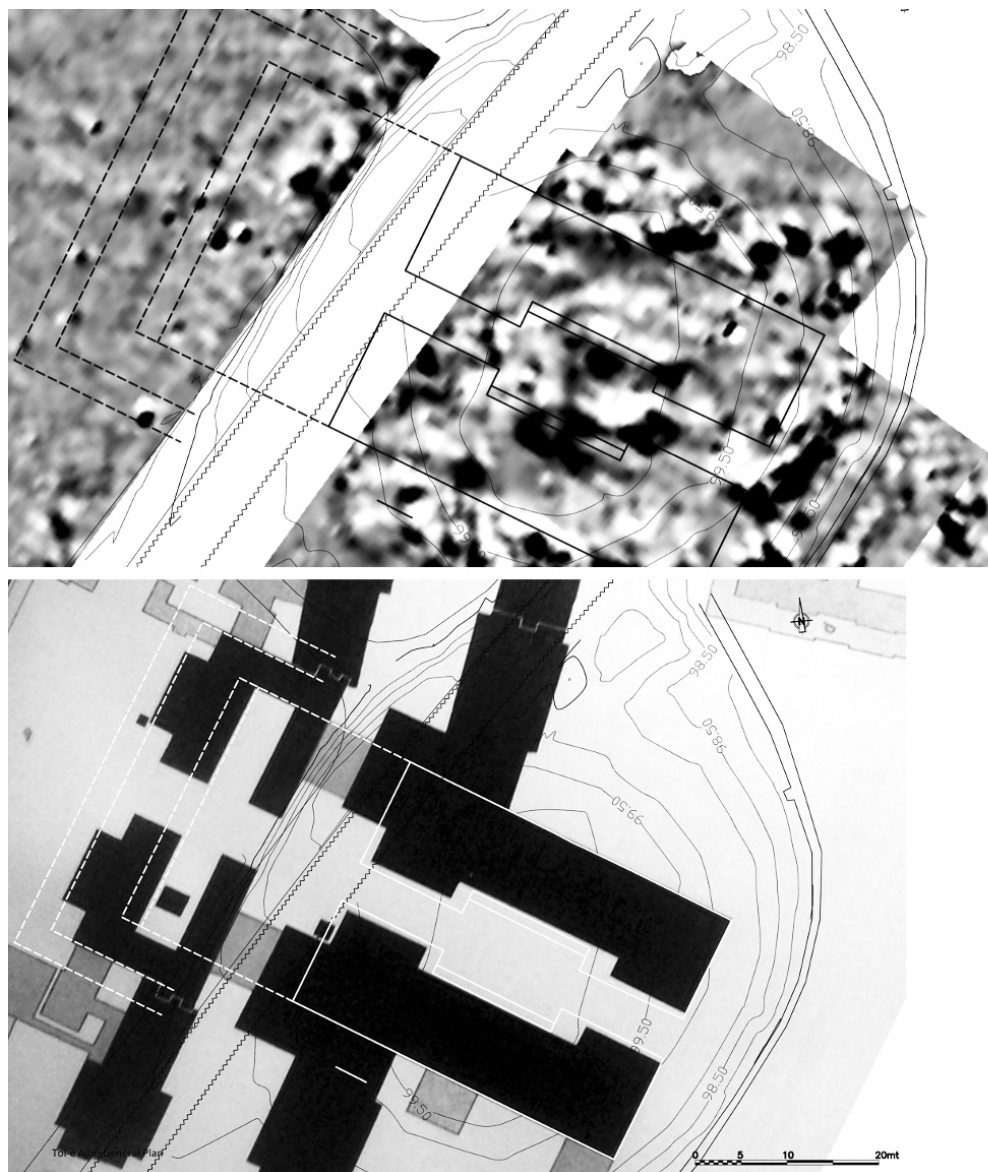


Fig. 9 - Tol-e Ajori. Superimposition of the Babylon Ishtar Gate on the geophysics and sketch plan of the Gate of Tol-e Ajori. Drawing S.S. Tilia, © Iranian-Italian Joint Archaeological Mission in Fars.

We also found that the decorative and figurative patterns of its glazed bricks faithfully replicate those of Babylon, which are now in the Pergamon museum in Berlin. First of all, the sections of decoration with flat glazed bricks preserved *in situ* in the sections of masonry that escaped the intensive mediaeval looting have a decoration that corresponds in its entirety to the one present in Babylon (Fig. 10). In addition, the larger part of finds deriving from the layers of collapse which started from a severe earthquake is represented by fragments of relief glazed bricks belonging to the original decoration

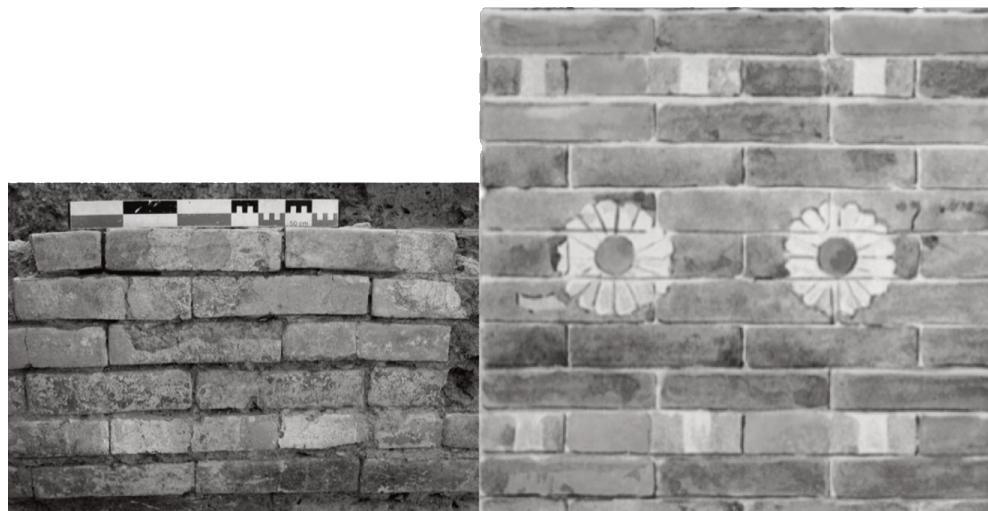


Fig. 10 - Tol-e Ajori flat glazed bricks *in situ* decoration (left) and corresponding decoration on the Babylon Ishtar Gate.

of the Gate.⁸ The rectangular panels decorated with the two motifs of the bull (Fig. 11) and of the *mushkhushshu* snake-dragon (Fig. 12), which in a large number supposedly decorated the Tol-e Ajori as they did on the Babylon Ishtar Gate, are gradually being reconstructed with the new evidence which comes to integrate the Babylonian scheme.

Also the study of the fitters' marks painted on the upper surface of each glazed bricks to assist the mason in assembling the bricks to compose the decorative and figurative motifs, reveals the absolute similarity with the system discovered on the Babylonian bricks and understood in its structure by R. Koldewey: the study of some bricks found *in situ* confirms the reconstruction of their use proposed by the German scholar (Koldewey 1914: 104-105, fig. 65; Matin 2017: 236-239).

As regards the dating of the Gate, we must first examine the findings from the excavation, starting with radiocarbon dating analysis.

Thanks to the support of the Franco-German project "Paleopersépolis" directed by Morteza Djamali at IMBE, Aix-en-Provence-Marseille, five large animal bone samples from Tol-e Ajori—four of which from the secondary occupation—were subjected to radiocarbon dating, carried out at the Laboratory of the Second University of Naples in Caserta (Fig. 13).

The time span within which the dating of the samples is possible is particularly wide and goes well beyond the period that best justifies from a historical point of view the Babylonian presence in Persia, i.e. from the conquest that Cyrus made of the city of Babylon in 539 BCE (Haerinck 1997).

⁸ The study of bricks, in particular glazed bricks, is conducted with ample space to archaeometry, in order to be able to frame materials and production techniques: important subjects such as the presence of unglazed relief bricks, the interface between the relief decorated part and the body of the brick, the various states of preservation of the glaze and the decaying of the original colour, are being understood thanks to the collaboration of Prof. Maria Letizia Amadori and her portable XFR fluorescence instrument and optical microscope, while some specific questions on the clay body of the bricks have been investigated by collecting data and information analysed both by her in the University of Urbino and in Esfahan Art University by Prof. Amin Emami.

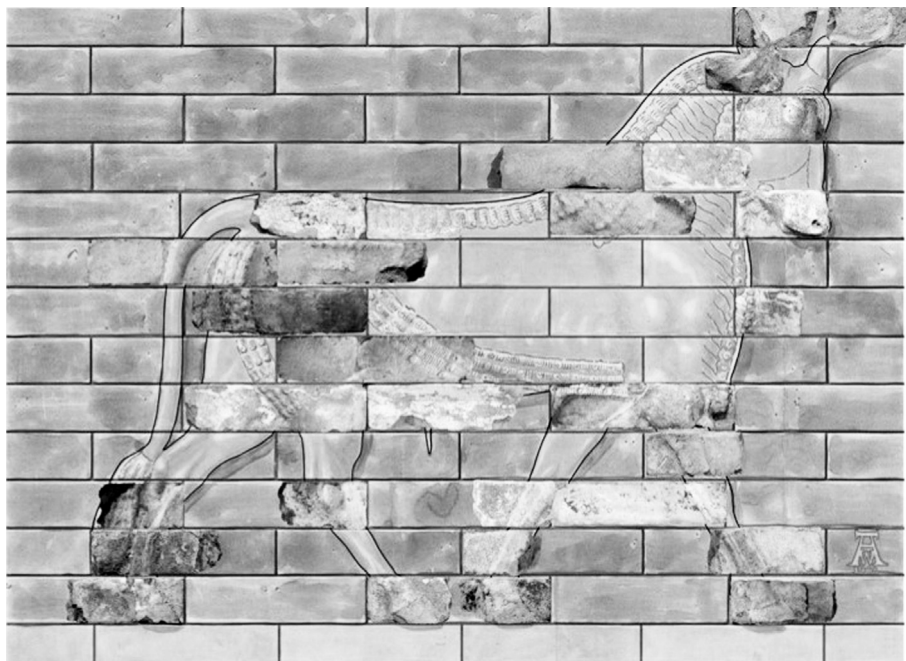


Fig. 11 - Insertion of the fragments of glazed bricks from Tol-e Ajori in the reconstructed scheme of the Babylonian panel with a bull motif in profile to the right. Concept R. Eshna'ashari, elaboration I. Arlotti, © Iranian-Italian Joint Archaeological Mission in Fars.

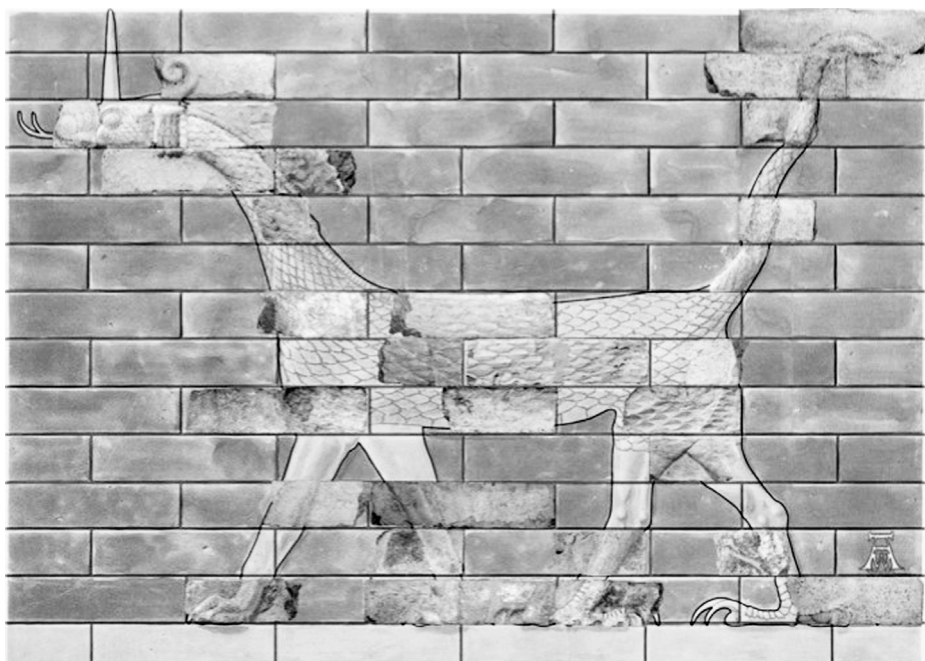


Fig. 12 - Insertion of the fragments of glazed bricks from Tol-e Ajori in the reconstructed scheme of the Babylonian panel with a *mushkhushshu* motif in profile to the left. Concept R. Eshna'ashari, elaboration I. Arlotti, © Iranian-Italian Joint Archaeological Mission in Fars.

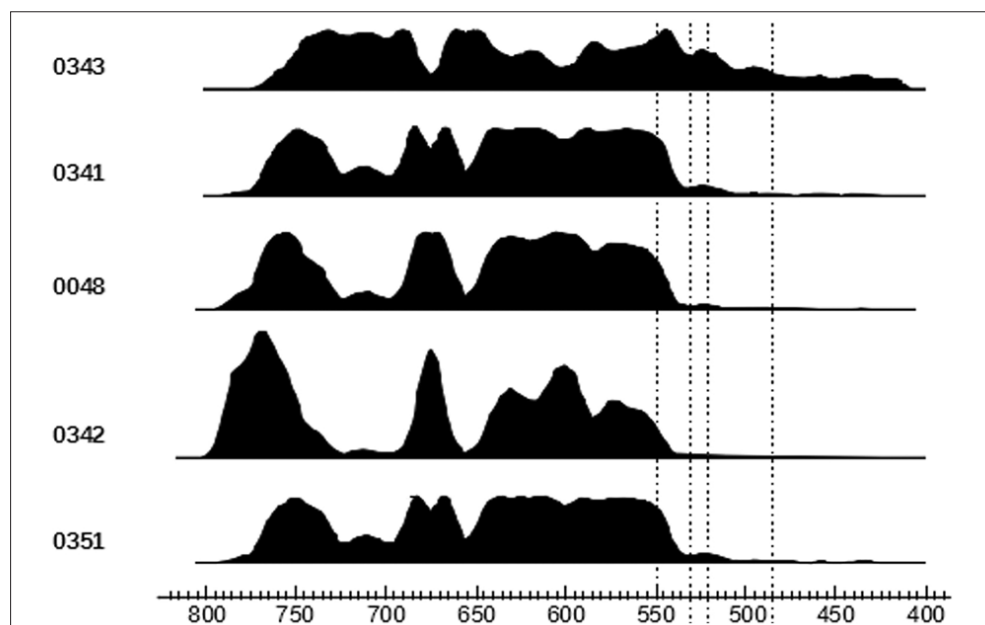


Fig. 13 - Diagram with the results of the radiocarbon dating on samples from Tol-e Ajori. Drawing M. Djamali, © Iranian-Italian Joint Archaeological Mission in Fars.

While more than one colleague has encouraged us not to exclude the last decades of the Neo-Elamite kingdom, the lack of other chronological data of such antiquity leads us to be more cautious and to exclude a pre-Achaemenid dating for this building. Therefore the significant part of the curves for three of the samples belonging to the secondary occupation is reduced at their end, i.e. around 540 BCE: to this date we must add the shift caused by the so-called “apparent age” of the burial, due to the fact that the samples were composed of bone, bringing the lower limit to 530 BCE. The low reliability of radiocarbon for the Iron Age in Iran suggests some caution in accepting the quantitative datum to the letter, but the concurrence of the dates is nevertheless a clue in favour of high dating.

Other chronological clues provided by the findings do not lack. Among these, the epigraphic evidence occupies a relevant place, amounting to thirteen fragmented bricks with cuneiform inscriptions drawn with glaze on the bricks surface (Fig. 14). To date, only Elamite or Babylonian logograms or syllables have been attested, while no Old Persian inscription has been found so far at Tol-e Ajori (Basello 2013; 2014; 2017). This absence of the Old Persian, although statistically weak because it could soon be denied, remains for the moment significant in the consideration of all the data. Most important for the dating of the construction of the Gate, however, is the fact that the palaeographic aspects of the thirteen fragments show an affinity not with the writing style of the two languages in the Achaemenid inscriptions of Darius I and his successors, but rather with the signs of the Neo-Elamite and Neo-Babylonian periods (Basello 2017: 270, 272), a fact that confirms that the Gate belongs to an Early Achaemenid⁹ phase.

⁹ We use here, in an absolutely conventional way, the terminology proposed by Stronach (1997). Sumner also specifies that “in the following discussion ‘Early Achaemenid’ refers to sites believed to be earlier than the initiation of construction at Persepolis, c. 520 BC” (Sumner 1986: 7, fn. 10).

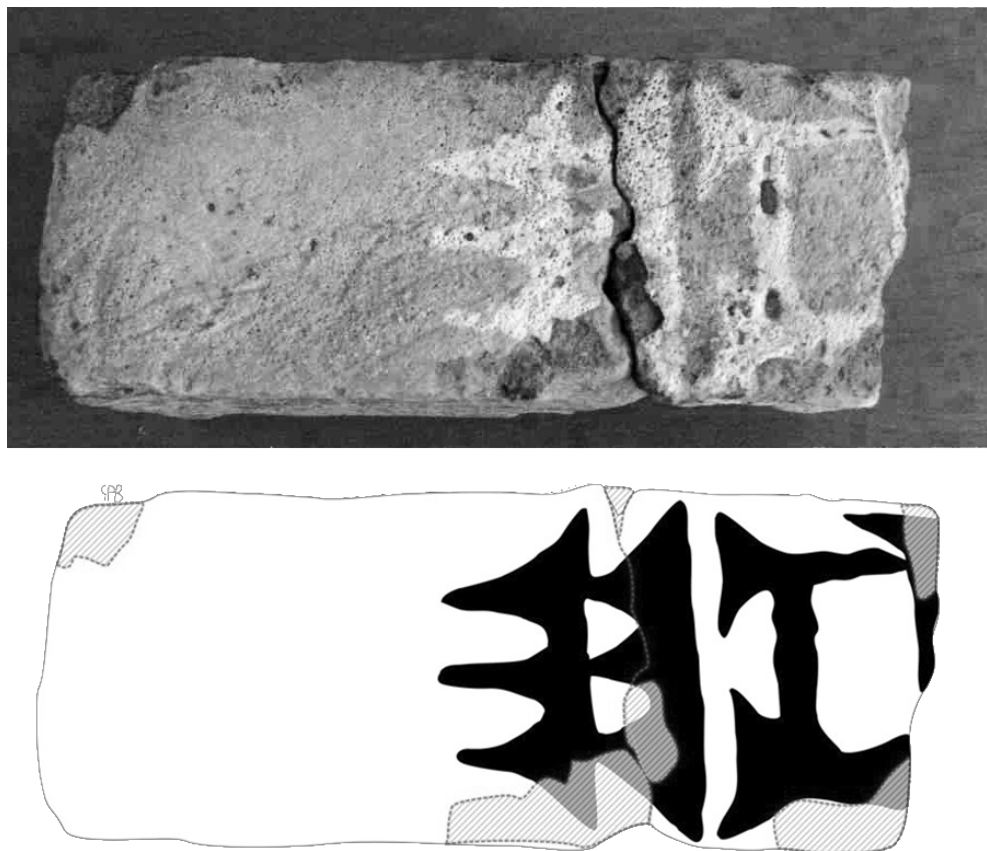


Fig. 14 - Fragment of glazed brick with cuneiform inscription. Photo © Iranian-Italian Joint Archaeological Mission in Fars.

The chronological indications provided by the other excavation finds, rather disorienting if taken individually, acquire greater consistency when examined comprehensively. Thus, the study of ceramics is yielding some very useful early results. The sherds found in the levels of secondary occupation after the abandonment of the Gate, although few in number, nevertheless contain materials that can be traced back to the Late Plain Ware, the dating of which unfortunately varies in a long chronological interval between the 6th and 1st centuries.¹⁰ In the same layers subsequent to the end of the first period of occupation, bronze arrowheads of the Achaemenid type have also been found.

It should also be taken into account that, since a violent earthquake following the first phase of pillage and abandonment caused the major destruction of the Tol-e Ajori monument, the absence of clear signs of strong earthquakes at Takht-e Jamshid suggests either that the damages had been repaired completely and exhaustively so as to conceal them, or that the Terrace had not yet been built at the time of the seismic event which destroyed Tol-e Ajori, which appears more plausible after all.

¹⁰ Ceramic fragments from the medieval Islamic period (9th-13th centuries CE) found on the bottom of the several robber pits which were identified during the stratigraphic excavations have also allowed dating the episodes of looting that produced the removal of a considerable part of the baked brick masonry.

In addition to this intrinsic data provided by findings from the excavations, we must also consider other elements indicating that Tol-e Ajori was built before Takht-e Jamshid.

The tradition of masonry and architecture of Tol-e Ajori has its roots in Mesopotamia, although the typological conception of a monumental gate leading to the palace area also recalls that of Pasargadae with the R Gate.

The glazed brick technique of Tol-e Ajori belongs to a more archaic craft tradition than that of Takht-e Jamshid or Susa bricks, which are undoubtedly the result of a tremendous advancement in technical knowledge (Razmjou 2004; Amadori et al. 2017; 2018; Daucé 2010: 329-330). Moreover, its imagery composed only of mythical creatures differs from that of Takht-e Jamshid and is rather reminiscent of the Palace S of Pasargadae. The most important of these evidences is the presence of the *mushkhushshu* motif, which is totally absent in Pasargadae, as well as in the abundant imagery of the Takht-e Jamshid terrace and Susa and only present on impressions on clay of late Babylonian seals used in the Persepolis archive (Garrison 2009: 46).

All the elements that have just been mentioned, therefore, strongly suggest a foundation of Tol-e Ajori Gate before the construction of the imperial citadel of Takht-e Jamshid by Darius I, possibly in the time lapse between 539 BCE and 518 BCE. If these elements in isolation cannot support a reliable dating of the monument, their convergence is a mutual confirmation and therefore gives the proposed dating a high verisimilitude. This is why other dating proposals, based on individual elements such as those discussed by Kai Kaniuth,¹¹ do not have the same solidity, although we are aware that other elements will come in the future to allow a better precision.

The Gate has a clear topographical connection with the adjacent monumental building of Firuzi 5, lying c. 360 m to the South-East of Tol-e Ajori, appearing thanks to the Iranian-French surveys and the Iranian-Italian limited excavations as an imposing palatial structure, unfortunately very damaged—perhaps unfinished—and known only through some stone foundations for pillar bases (Gondet 2011: 292 ff.; Askari Chaverdi, Callieri 2013). The axes of the two structures, as well as those of the anomalies located by geophysical surveys in the field surrounding them and representing ditches or canals, share the same orientation (Fig. 15).

The third feature of this complex is the adjacent structure built in blocks of well-cut limestone, registered as Sang-e Surakh (Fig. 16), interpreted as a bridge crossing a canal, which was again briefly explored in 2017 (Askari Chaverdi, Callieri forthcoming). In order to evaluate the possibility that the structure was indeed a bridge and that there was a connection between this structure and Tol-e Ajori, it was taken advantage of the discovery of two drainage canals on the South-East side of Tol-e Ajori. A topographic survey was made of their levels and of Sang-e Surakh. Indeed, it seems that there was a slope from Tol-e Ajori northwest side to its southeast side and then that the slope continued towards the south to Sang-e Surakh. This fact strengthens the perception of the Sang-e Surakh structure as pertaining to the same architectural project as Tol-e Ajori and Firuzi 5. The fact that Sang-e Surakh shares with the monumental building of Firuzi 5 a refined use of cut stone masonry, in close association with the brick built gate of Tol-e Ajori, suggests that two different architectural traditions developed side by side in the area of Bagh-e Firuzi East in a probably single architectural complex.

¹¹ K. Kaniuth states that Tol-e Ajori was built “possibly as late as the early 5th century BC” (Kaniuth 2018: 351).

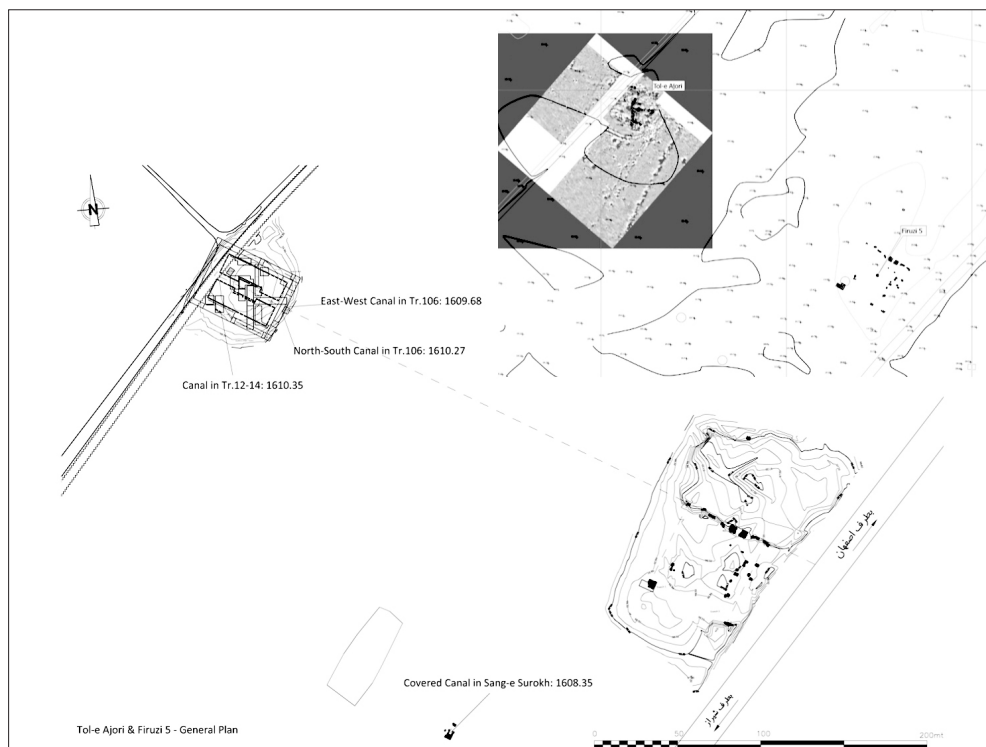


Fig. 15 - Plan of the area of Bagh-e Firuzi East, showing the consistent orientation of the buildings at Tol-e Ajori and Firuzi 5, and of the canals discovered by geophysics. Drawing S.S. Tilia, © Iranian-Italian Joint Archaeological Mission in Fars.

The Gate has also been shown by recent excavations to be linked to a mud-brick wall at a right angle with it, unfortunately completely destroyed during the levelling of the fields surrounding the *tepe*, to the extent that it is not visible from the geophysical survey (Askari Chaverdi, Callieri forthcoming). Unlike other pieces of evidence of a similar nature, for which the absence of fence walls was reported (Gondet 2018: 202), we can assume that it was a fencing wall of the complex described above: perhaps elsewhere such fences existed but, also due to the fact that they were built in mud-brick, they disappeared altogether.

It is difficult to understand the relationship of this discovered complex with the other sites, likewise classified by Sumner as “Achaemenid” on the basis of their stone architecture (Sumner 1986: 4), standing in the sector of Bagh-e Firuzi West (Fig. 17), the function and chronology of which has never been addressed in a comprehensive manner. Most of these sites have never been the subject of proper archaeological research¹² and it is thus very unsafe to uncritically consider them coeval. Thus, the Iranian-Italian Archaeological Joint Mission in the Autumn 2019 has started a new multidisciplinary project,

¹² In addition to Sumner’s succinct description and to the information coming from the geophysical prospections, the only more detailed information are those published by A.B. Tilia, mainly related to documentation of sites that came to light during agricultural works, and by S. Gondet, who carried out new surface reconnaissances (2011: 277-290).



Fig. 16 - Bagh-e Firuzi East: Sang-e Surakh. Photo Iranian-Italian Joint Archaeological Mission in Fars.

led by Emad Matin and Luca Colli, with the aim to collect complete documentation of all the sites in Bagh-e Firuzi West region and to determine their chronology, function and pertinence to the land planning of Takht-e Jamshid or to that of Bagh-e Firuzi East (Askari et al. 2020).

At the same time Tol-e Ajori also stands out as the main preserved monument belonging to a planning of the territory different from that illustrated for the area of Pārsa centred on Takht-e Jamshid. The orientation of the grid to which the Gate, Firuzi 5, Sang-e Surakh and the adjacent canals belong agrees with that evidenced in the fields among the Bagh-e Firuzi sites by geophysical surveys which acknowledged the existence of long linear anomalies attesting to a network of ditches or canals. Noteworthy is the fact that the orientation of these lines differs from those of the area nearer to Takht-e Jamshid (Fig. 7),

being shifted by 65° towards East from the axis of the Royal Quarter of Takht-e Jamshid (Gondet 2018: 201): it seems clear that two land-use planning schemes were carried out in two different phases, as also understood by S. Gondet (Gondet 2011: 324; 2018: 201).

The Complex of Tol-e Ajori as a Testimony Prior to the Terrace of Takht-e Jamshid

The overall interpretation proposed by Sumner for Pārsa/Matezziš joins the area of Persepolis West, topographically linked to Takht-e Jamshid, and that of Firuzi, which includes Tol-e Ajori and Firuzi 5 belonging to a previous phase.¹³ Despite the lack of the recent information on which we can rely today, Sumner had at his disposal both the data collected twenty years earlier in person during his reconnaissance, mainly concerned with protohistoric times, as well as the important discoveries made by G. and A.B. Tilia in the 1970s and the brilliant use made of them by D. Stronach in his 1978 publication of Pasargadae excavations. In particular A.B. Tilia had amply demonstrated that the various buildings brought to light in Bagh-e Firuzi and Takht-e Rostam, for their masonry tech-

¹³ In fact, Sumner (1986: 9) also raises the question of a chronological succession: “The contemporaneous occupation of these sites cannot be unequivocally established on present evidence. It is nevertheless reasonable to suppose that the fine early buildings continued in use, perhaps with altered functions, after the production shops and associated habitations were constructed”.

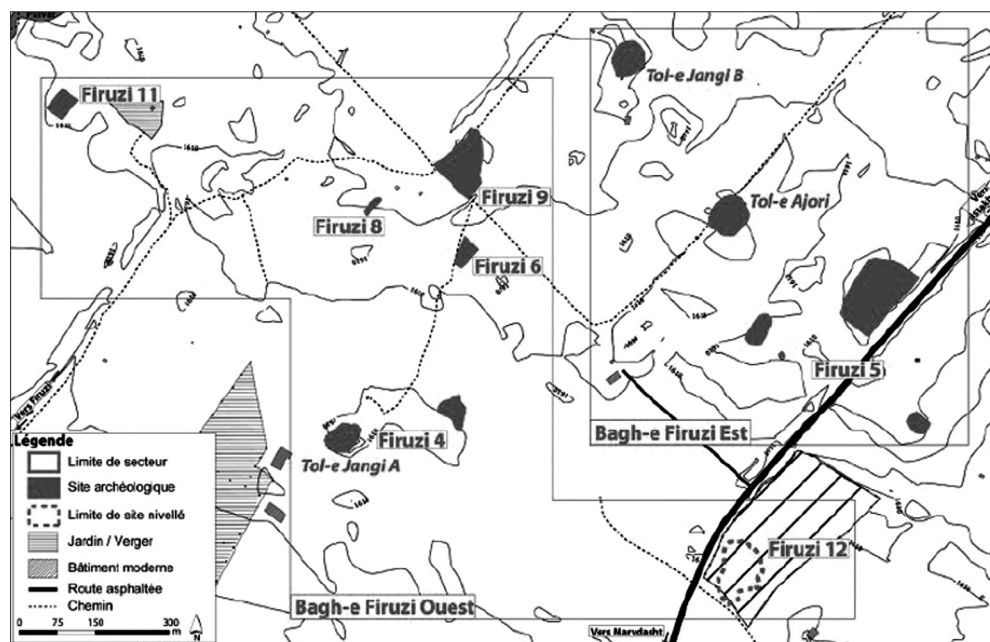


Fig. 17 - Plan of the area of Bagh-e Firuzi, showing the suggested division in Bagh-e Firuzi East and Bagh-e Firuzi West. After Gondet 2011: pl. 28.

nique and architectural style, were more similar to the architecture of Pasargadae than to that of Takht-e Jamshid and therefore had to be dated to the period of Cyrus or Cambyse (Tilia 1974; 1978a).

Stronach, for his part, had accepted this proposal and stated that “[...] the plain of Persepolis [...] was centre of early Achaemenian building activity both during and directly after the reign of Cyrus,” and had used in a “prophetic” way a phrase that only much later was proved true: “the cliffs of Naqsh-e Rostam were already not far away from an unfinished ‘garden capital,’ akin to that at Pasargadae, at the time that Darius came to the throne” (Stronach 1978: 135). Also, W. Kleiss acknowledged Tilia’s discoveries with great interest but restricted their attribution to Cambyse alone, who intended to build a new royal residence in Pārsa on the model of the one built in Pasargadae by Cyrus (Kleiss 1980: 205).

In the series of interventions aimed at underlining the existence of an important pre-Darius settlement, following the work of the Tilias, we must certainly highlight the paper that Sumner presented at the Annual Meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America in December 1982, and which will later become his 1986 article from which our discussion started. The precious information on the terrain provided by Tilia and Sumner was in turn elaborated by M. Stolper (1984: 306), who availed himself of R.T. Hallock’s interpretation of Matezziš, the place most frequently met on the PFT tablets after Pārsa as being located “immediately adjacent to Persepolis” and ranking as “the most important site, after Persepolis, in the Persepolis area” (Hallock 1977: 127). Thanks to the complex of these evidences, Stolper (1984: 307, fn. 29) described the plain between Kuh-e Rahmat and the Polvar river as “a single complex of settlement, covering ca. 150-200 ha. of relatively low density, but with the “architectural trappings of a considerable political centre,” in Stronach’s wording an “unfinished garden capital””.

Stolper (1984: 307) states that Matezziš “was already the chief place in the region before the reign of Darius and so before the construction of Persepolis began”. But beyond this, Stolper’s analysis, starting from the publication of some Babylonian texts found in the Persepolis Fortifications, adds to the discussion the evidence consisting of eleven Babylonian texts of legal nature, unfortunately of uncertain origin, dating back to the reign of Cambyses and Bardiya and referring to the presence of Babylonian temple workers in a place that in Babylonian is called Ḫumadēšu: this is a place which R. Zadok (1976: 69-70), in his turn guided by a suggestion by I. Gershevitch, equated with the Old Persian Uvādaicaya of the Bisotun inscription, corresponding to the Elamite Matezziš. Thus, these texts demonstrate that Matezziš “was the home of an enclave of Babylonians during the reign of Cambyses” (Stolper 1984: 307).¹⁴

The consensus on these identifications and on Matezziš’s location in the Persepolis area today seem to have overcome the initial doubts that in response to Hallock had led to the formulation of alternative proposals (Hansman 1975; Zadok 1976). Therefore we deem it not too risky to follow Stolper, Sumner and Henkelman in accepting their proposal: but even if this hypothesis would prove to be unfounded, the documentation on the other sites is in any case sufficient to be able to affirm that the presence in Fars of Babylonian workers, which in Tol-e Ajori is documented by material evidence, is confirmed by sources.

Returning to Sumner’s intervention, he had stated that most of the aristocratic buildings in Bagh-e Firuzi belonged to a territorial planning before Darius I’s reign. Sumner (1986: 4) believed that although no ceramic assemblages dating back to the early Achaemenid period had yet been singled out in Fars, the settlement system discussed in his paper was “assumed to represent the cultural landscape in the Persepolis plain and surrounding districts from a date soon after the end of Cyrus’ reign until the social and economic changes following Alexander’s conquest” (Sumner 1986: 7). Based on the above discussions, according to Sumner, Matezziš should have already been an important town during the reign of Cambyses, if the rebel Vahyazdata was brought here in 521 BCE to be executed: “At that time the town of Matezziš (Persepolis West) was inhabited and the elite dwellings at Firuzi and Dasht-e Gohar were already standing” (Sumner 1986: 28).¹⁵

¹⁴ The use by Persian sovereigns of Babylonian temple labour, a Babylonian custom inherited from the conquest of Babylon, has been attested since the time of Cyrus with regard to the site that in Greek sources is called Taoke: this site is identified by W. Henkelman with the Tamukkan of the Elamite texts of Persepolis and also with the Tahmaka of the Babylonian texts mentioning the Babylonian workers sent there (Henkelman 2008: 116-117; see Tolini 2008). Another place in Fars where Babylonian workers were employed, this time during the reign of Cambyses, is Matnānu, identified with the place of Matannan mentioned in the Persepolitan texts (Stolper 1984; Henkelman, Kleber 2007: 164).

¹⁵ We find it interesting to report Sumner’s entire passage to show how close his reconstruction was to what subsequent research is demonstrating: “Matezziš was already an important town during Cambyses’ reign, with a cosmopolitan population including Babylonians recording legal contracts in their own language and traveling back and forth to the cities of Mesopotamia. [fn. 125: Zadok (supra n. 94 = 94 R. Zadok, “On the Connections between Iran and Babylonia in the Sixth Century B.C.,” *Iran* 14 (1976) 61-78; Stolper (supra n. 92) 307 n. 31]. Further, it is reasonable to suppose that the rebel Vahyazdata was at Matezziš when Darius’ general, Artavarnya, arrived at Rakkan in the spring of 521 BCE to quell the revolt. The first battle was no doubt fought near Rakkan or Matezziš in the plain below the future site of Persepolis. Later, after the second battle, fought somewhere to the southeast beyond Neyriz, Vahyazdata was brought back to Matezziš for execution. [fn. 126: R.G. Kent, *Old Persian: Grammar, Texts, Lexicon* (American Oriental Series 33, 1953) DB III. #40-44]. At that time the town of Matezziš (Persepolis West) was inhabited and the elite dwellings at Firuzi and Dasht-e Gohar were already standing. When Darius ordered the construction of Persepolis, Matezziš suddenly became a boom town, host to hundreds of foreign workers, brought in with their families for the great

Not everyone has accepted these proposals unconditionally. S. Gondet, in fact, in 2011 expressed a different opinion, denying that the buildings of Bagh-e Firuzi and the palace of Dasht-e Gohar are contemporary. This opinion stems from his observation that the orientation of the tomb of Takht-e Rostam and that of the large building of Dasht-e Gohar coincide: since J.-C. Bessac and R. Boucharlat revised the attribution of Takht-e Rostam to Cambyses and put forward the hypothesis of its construction by Darius I for his father Hystaspes—also shared by W. Henkelman—Gondet proposes that Dasht-e Gohar also dates back to Darius' time and is an extension of his imperial foundation (Gondet 2011: 338-339). Indeed, this attribution to the reign of Darius I of architectural elements substantially similar to those of Pasargadae as well as of some of the buildings of Borazjan, attributed to the time of Cyrus the Great, raises an important question of method in the definition of the concept of “early Achaemenid style,” which is the subject of E. Matin's doctoral thesis, currently being prepared for publication (2018).

For our part, however, without going into the substance of dating Dasht-e Gohar for which we are unable to provide new elements, recent information makes it preferential the chronological boundary proposed by Stronach and accepted by Stolper for the beginning of the imperial constructions in the plain of Pārsa, “both during and directly after the reign of Cyrus,” rather than the reign of Cambyses alone as proposed by Sumner.

The proposed dating for Tol-e Ajori also confirms the explanation of the existence of these two different territorial plans mentioned for Pārsa/Matezziš on the basis of a chronological succession. Since Takht-e Jamshid was created by Darius I, the phase of Tol-e Ajori/Firuzi 5, with many features indicating an earlier date, would then be dated in the first Achaemenid period, confirming the interpretations of Hallock, Tilia, Stronach, Stolper, Sumner and Henkelman-Kleber.

Also with regard to the functional interpretation, the attribution of the Gate of Tol-e Ajori to an imperial sphere, certain for the intrinsic characteristics of the monument and confirmed by the presence among the fragments of cuneiform inscriptions of the word “king” in Babylonian and Elamite, allows to orient the interpretation of the entire complex in a solid way towards a similar imperial sphere: also the presence of Babylonian workers in Tol-e Ajori can be fully explained in the light of a practice which regarded imperial activities (cf. *supra*). Thus the set of data obtained at the end of the excavations leads us to see in the complex of Bagh-e Firuzi East, accessible through the gate of Tol-e Ajori and perhaps centred on the building of Firuzi 5, not so much a diffuse urban quarter as proposed by Sumner as an imperial complex, similar to the vast *paradeisos* of Pasargadae, with which it shared the presence of a monumental gate, a large palace and a bridge: according to Stronach's intuitive definition, “an unfinished ‘garden capital’.”

The regularity of the alignments between all the components of the Bagh-e Firuzi East complex, from Tol-e Ajori to the building of Firuzi 5, from the Sang-e Surakh to the canals identified by geophysics in the large intermediate space, reveals an accurate

project. By the time of the Persepolis Fortification texts, spanning the 13th to 28th year of Darius (509-494 BCE), the peaceful quiet of the Firuzi gardens was shattered by the crack of masons' hammers and the roar of kilns firing ornamental glazed bricks. One might go on to describe the growth of Matezziš into a great city along classic Mesopotamian lines, but the texts and the archaeological evidence do not support such a reconstruction. Persepolis-Matezziš was not a great city on a par with Babylon, or even Susa. Given time it might have grown into a city comparable to its local predecessor, Elamite Anshan, but Alexander foreclosed that possibility and Sasanian Istakhr became the next great city of Fars. Matezziš remained a simple provincial town, temporarily galvanized by the construction of Persepolis, itself never more than the spiritual center of the empire” (Sumner 1986: 28).

drawing, in Stolper's words "the architectural trappings of a remarkable political centre," not unlike the one recorded in Pasargadae and Takht-e Jamshid, which constitutes another characteristic of marked imperial imprint.

From a historical point of view, the most obvious reason for building such a demanding monument as the monumental gate of Tol-e Ajori could be the intention of Cyrus the Great to celebrate in his homeland his exceptional conquest of Babylon: the Babylonian orientation shown by Cyrus' cylinder in Mesopotamia would be confirmed, if not strengthened, in his homeland. However, the chronological elements at our disposal do not allow us to define more precisely the dating of the complex. It is not excluded that among the fragments of glazed bricks still to be studied there is one with the name of that "king" mentioned on two of the inscriptions found. But even without this further discovery, Tol-e Ajori is still an exceptional confirmation of a monumental project of the first Achaemenids in the place where its presence had already been recognized thanks to the Babylonian and Elamite tablets, and where later Darius I would have built Takht-e Jamshid from 518 BCE onwards. Tol-e Ajori's discovery finally allows us to see with our own eyes what until now was only imaginable, albeit with verisimilitude, and gives us a "colourful" glimpse at a completely new historical setting at the dawn of the Persian Empire.

Thanks to this new vision, which manifests itself after ninety years of activity in the field and in the epigraphic archives, we realize that we are only at the beginning of our understanding of the city of Pārsa: multidisciplinary archaeological researches must continue. At the same time, the Iranian-Italian Joint Archaeological Mission and the Iranian authorities are fully aware of the importance of the Gate of Tol-e Ajori for the history of mankind, and are committed to ensuring that visitors to Persepolis can soon begin their visit from this first monument and better understand the great variety of Persian architecture.

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