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A New Evidence of Achaemenid Site between Persepolis and Susa, Iran

Alireza Askari Chaverdi¹ 

Abstract

The period of Darius I Achaemenid and his son Xerxes, owing to the construction of Persepolis, is one of the most important periods of cultural exchange in the ancient world. Achaemenid satrapies operated in a regular and coordinated network from the Nile to the Indus Valley and from Oxus to the Mediterranean. At the same time, this network became efficient through the construction of ancient roads, and the roads management system defined the function of this network in the direction of control and monitoring accompanied by the regular management system on each plain. It is very important to identify the route of the royal road in the Achaemenid period from Persepolis to Susa and Sardis in Asia Minor. The author has identified an ancient site in the archaeological survey in the southwest of Iran where there are signs of Carian stonemasons in a stone torus. The identification of newly discovered evidence for the first time from this site is important and effective in understanding the relations of Persepolis with the Anatolia region and the presence of Asia Minor masons in the construction of the royal road in ancient Persia.

Keywords: Stonecutters, Chah Mur, Royal Road, Persepolis, Susa.

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Introduction

An Archaeological survey of Achaemenid sites from Persepolis to Susa and Sardis in Asia Minor can identify the map and the route of the royal road between these important power centers in the ancient world and give a perspective on their historical relations. The era of Achaemenid ruler Darius I and his son Xerxes, owing to the construction of Persepolis, is one of the most important periods of cultural exchange in the ancient world. Achaemenid satrapies operated in a regular and coordinated way from the Nile to the Indus valley and from Oxus to the Mediterranean. The construction of roads made this administrative network even more efficient since the roads management system defined the function of this network as well as its control and monitoring on each plain. One of the main communication axes during the Achaemenid Empire was the road linking Persepolis to ancient Susa. In recent archaeological investigations, the author could identify an ancient site of the Achaemenid period between these two centers as fitter marks on the explored torus stone indicated the presence of Anatolian masons in the construction of this Achaemenid architecture (Fig. 1).

Survey

While embarking on from Persepolis towards the west on the route to Susa, we reached the center of Sepidan Plain at a distance of 100 km. We saw a hill with dimensions of 400 x 500 meters and a height of 124 meters in the middle of this plain. Further, a natural spring was flowing at the foot of the hill, surrounded by the houses of the present-day Chah Mur village (Fig. 1). The ancient mound was located at this place but is now leveled with the surrounding land as a result of

ploughing the ground to create a modern garden (Fig. 2). In the course of such activity, a piece of gray torus of the Achaemenid stone masonry was revealed from this place.

The Site and Stonecutters

The archaeological site of Chah Mur lies close to the village of Chah Mur, some 3 km northwest of the modern-day city of Dalin, at latitude 30°05'984", longitude 052°08'896" with 1941m average altitude from the sea level.

This torus is 51cm in diameter and its body is 10.5cm long (Fig. 3). On top of the torus, there is a smaller torus base with a height of 1.5 cm and 43.5cm diameter (Fig. 3). The surface of the upper part of the torus is well polished and the mason's marks are cut on it. It was observed that this gray torus had been polished excellently and delicately which indicates the skill of the masons.

The lower part of the torus base was hammered until its surface was perfectly leveled (Fig. 3). Its edge was fine smooth with toothed chisel and then it was delicately polished. According to Tilia's report, the torus base was smoothed down even further with sand and abrasive stones (Tilia, 1968: 80). The base worked smooth on the contact planes without a little projection or clear-cut anathyrosis because the torus supported wooden and not stone column in this way of treating the contact plane (Tilia, 1968: 81).

Results and Discussion

The presence of mason's marks on the surface of this torus is significant, as marks in the shape of a double-axe and a merlon were among the most official stonemasonry marks in the Achaemenid period in Persepolis (Fig. 3). A mark similar to the merlon can be Persian and even

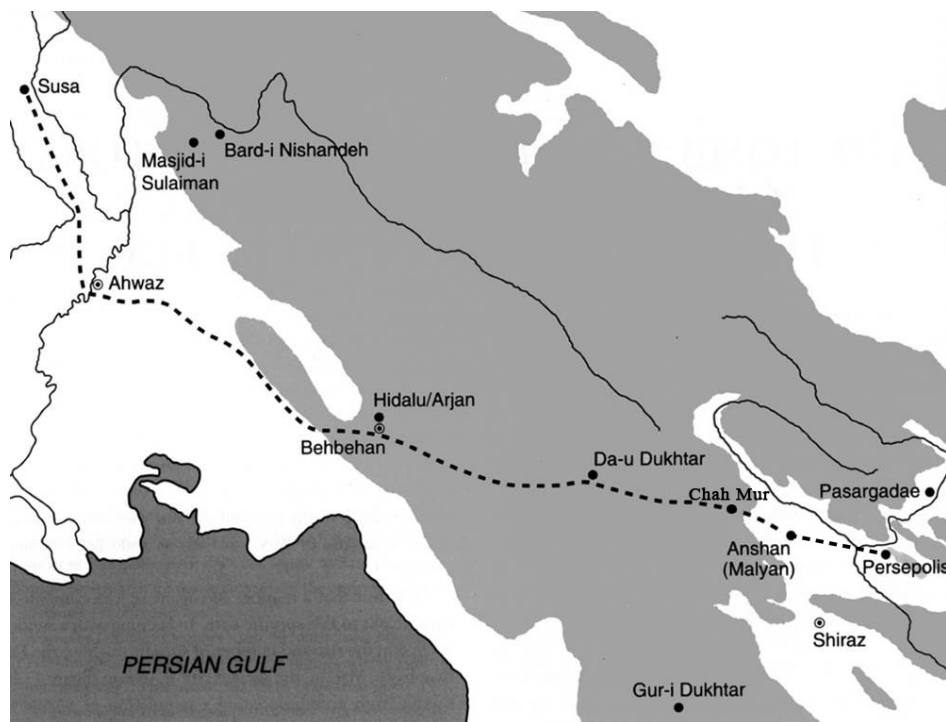


Fig. 1. Location of Chah Mur Site in Persepolis to Susa Road.

refer to the function of a building. However, using the double-axe is the most traditional manner of mason's mark on the torus of the treasury of Persepolis. According to Michael Roaf, Nylander, Eric Schmidt and Tilia, this type of stonemasonry marks is related to one or a group of stonecutters (Schmidt, 1957; Nylander, 1965; Tilia, 1968; Roaf, 1983). Based on the similarity of stonecutters' marks of Persepolis with Lydian alphabets, Nylander concluded that the masonry marks explored from Apadana in Susa could also be related to Anatolian workers (Nylander, 1975: 6, Pl. XXXIV). On the surface of this base torus, two types of stonemason marks are used, and for this reason, it shows that two stonemasons cut this column base together. The double-axe mark has been identified in dozens of base torus in Persepolis, with some of them having the most important and

famous alphabet of Carian stone masons of Anatolia (Roaf, 1983). In addition, the use of this type of Carian marks has been identified in Lasos, Saqqara, Kaunos, and Memphis. This symbol is found in hand-woven carpets of Asia Minor that is one of the most famous symbols of Carian rugs (Kucukeren, 2019: 192-3). In accordance with Carl Nylander, nearly 180 samples of masonry marks have been explored from Persepolis, as well as in the clay tablets excavated from the Persepolis treasury, where the presence of Carian stonecutters from the Anatolian region is particularly mentioned (Nylander, 1965: 49-55).

In terms of the stonecutting manner and fitter marks, the torus found at the Chah Mur site is very similar to the 10 torus of group 6 (VI) in the treasury of Persepolis. In the 5th and 6th group, Michael Roaf has identified Lydian stone



Fig. 2. Achaemenid Site at Chah Mur, 2008 (Archive, ICHTO, Fars, Iran).

cutters through the letters of the Lydian alphabet (Roaf, 1983: 74-65). The double-axe in Group 6 is one of the important characteristics of Carian masons, which has been found not only in Persepolis but also in Anatolia as well as Egypt (Kucukeren, 2019: 192). The presence of 72 masons and goldsmiths from Caria of the Anatolian region in the tablets of the Persepolis treasury shows that those workers were paid in the form of cash draft called *Shekela* in the ninth month of the 19th year of the reign of Xerxes (Cameron, 1948: PI XXIII, p 143. No.37). These Carian workers accompanied by another group of Lydian transported cedar from Lebanon to Babylon and from there to Susa (Cameron, 1948: p 143).

Conclusion

Based on the chronology of column bases at the Persepolis treasury, the con-

struction period and the stonemasonry's impression on torus explored recently from Chah Mur can be dated back to around 490 to 480 BC i.e. the period of Darius I (521-486 BC) and Xerxes I (486-465 BC). Carian masons were present in the construction of the Apadana building in Susa, as Darius I mention them (Karka) in an inscription of this Palace (Nylander, 1965: 49-55). Therefore, the simultaneous presence of Carian stonemasons in Persepolis and Susa shows that they were involved in construction activities at both administrative centers. With the discovery and recognition of this new site, Chah Mur, found on the route to Persepolis, it is clear that Carian masons of the Anatolian region were involved not only in Susa and Persepolis, but also in construction projects between these two important Achaemenid centers, probably on the route toward the



Fig. 3. Torus base, Chah Mur. Bottom and Surface of Torus:
There Are Two Fitter Marks on the Upper Surface.

royal road. Identifying the Achaemenid sites on the route from Persepolis to Susa and Sardis in Asia Minor can be helpful in recognizing the map of the royal road between these important centers of power during the Achaemenid period and

also lead to show the historical relations of the past empires.

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