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Tracing the Lost Fire of Ādur Farnbāg: Archaeological Evidence from Bardestān, Persian Gulf

Fariba Sharifian¹ , Hossein Tofighian² 

Abstract

Fire held particular significance among Zoroastrian Iranians, possessing varying degrees of importance. There were three groups of fire associated with rituals. The most sacred of these was the fire of Bahram, known as the fire of the victorious king, which was to burn perpetually in the fire temples of Ādur Gušnasp, Ādur Farnbāg, and Ādur Burzēn-Mihr under all circumstances. The fire temple of Ādur Gušnasp is located in Takht-i Soleiman, Takab (Northwest of Iran), and Ādur Burzēn-Mihr is situated in the region of Rivand in Khorasan (Northeast of Iran). However, there is a discrepancy regarding the location of the fire of Ādur Farnbāg or the fire temple of the priests. Some researchers, orientalists, and many historical geographical documents have suggested the Karyan region of Fars, but conclusive evidence has not been provided. In the archaeological study of the Bardestān desert region and the Sasanian site of Koyu, a newly discovered seal bearing an inscription referring to the fire of Ādur Farnbāg has proposed a new hypothesis concerning the location of the state fire of Ādur Farnbāg. This paper will introduce the site and the newly found seal, and the reasons for proposing the Bardestān desert region as the location for the fire of Ādur Farnbāg will be discussed. This research was conducted through field surveys and comparative library studies, aiming to address one of the most significant questions in Sasanian archaeology regarding the location of the fire temple of Ādur Farnbāg.

Keywords: Sasanian; Seal; Historical Geography; Fire Temple; Persian Gulf.

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Introduction

During the Sasanian period, alongside the construction of magnificent royal buildings, fortresses, and governmental centers, a specific type of religious structure known as Čārtāqi (four arches), characterized by four entrances and a circular dome on top, flourished and evolved. These religious buildings, often constructed from local materials such as rubble stone and mortar, sometimes featured a portico surrounding the structure that protected the blazing fire in the central altar from the sight of outsiders. Due to the religious unity during the Sasanian era, the fire temples throughout this empire followed a uniform design and pattern (Kleiss, 1973: 17176; Colledge, 1977: 54; Ghirshman, 1983: 14f.) In addition to the prominent governmental fire temples, a greater number of regional and local fire temples have been identified, such as the fire temple of Mohammadabad in Borazjan, the Konari fire temple in the Bandar-i Dayyer (Deyr) County, the Bandian fire temple in Dargaz, Vigol, Shiyan, Palang Gard, Kouh-i Khwajah, Takht-i Soleyman, Mil Milgeh, Qaleh Davar, and Mele Hairamin Turkmenistan, all of which adhered to a consistent architectural structure and elements. Fire held significant importance among Zoroastrian Iranians in ancient times, a fact evident from the custom of keeping the fire perpetually burning (Fekripour, 2006: 45).

The status and significance of the Sasanian fires were not the same, and there were three groups of fires associated with rituals: the fire of Bahrām, the Adurān fire, and the fire of Dādgāh (Mole, 1993: 71). The most sacred of these was the fire

of Bahrām, known as the fire of the victorious king. In these fire temples, such as Ādur Gušnasp, Ādur Farnbāg, and Ādur Burzēn-Mihr, the fire had to burn with blazing flames under all circumstances (Boyce, 2002: 156). The Adurān fire, which included four household fires, ranked next but was not always kept aflame, and its rituals of sanctification and purification were simpler than those associated with the fire of Bahrām. The fire of Dādgāh was the third type of fire in Sasanian fire temples, prepared and purified from a single fire with relative simplicity. The dimensions and grandeur of the fire temple and the shape and size of the altar determined the status of a fire temple. Large and significant fire temples had grand altars, while modest altars were associated with local fire temples or those of lower members of Sasanian society (Tofighian, 2017: 196).

Manifestations of the spread of Zoroastrianism in the Persian Gulf region include several fire altar bases made of limestone, identified by chance through construction projects (Tofighian, 2017: 210-195). Additionally, probable remains of several fire temples have been identified in archaeological studies, of which only the fire temple of Mohammadabad in Borazjan (Yaghmaei, 2009: 25) and the Konari fire temple (Tofighian, 2023) have been documented. Despite the dispersion of fire temples and altar bases along the northern shores of the Persian Gulf, the type and status of the blazing fire in these temples remain unclear. The identification of a short inscription on a Sasanian agate seal provides valuable information regarding the status and rank of some fire

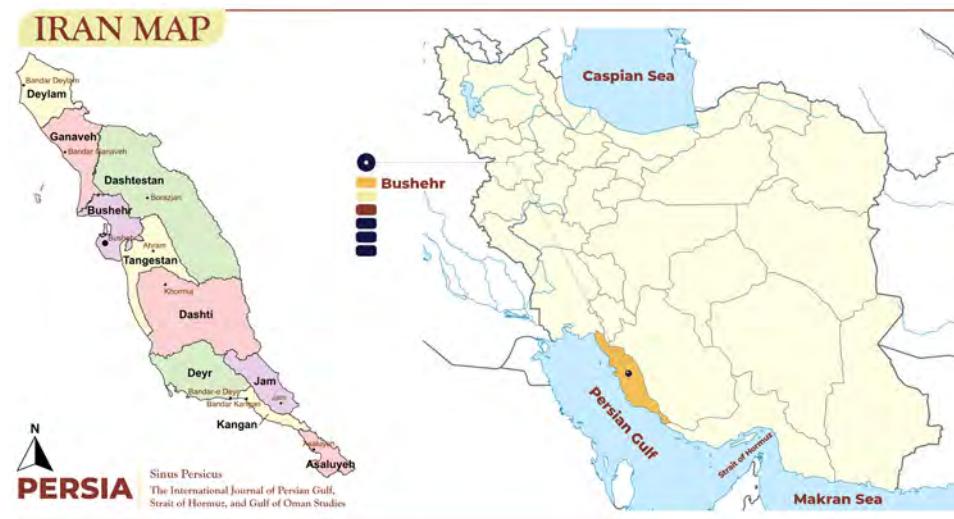


Fig. 1. Map of Iran and Bushehr Province
(Adapted by *Sinus Persicus* from a Map from Wikimedia Commons under a Creative Commons Licence CC BY-SA 4.0)

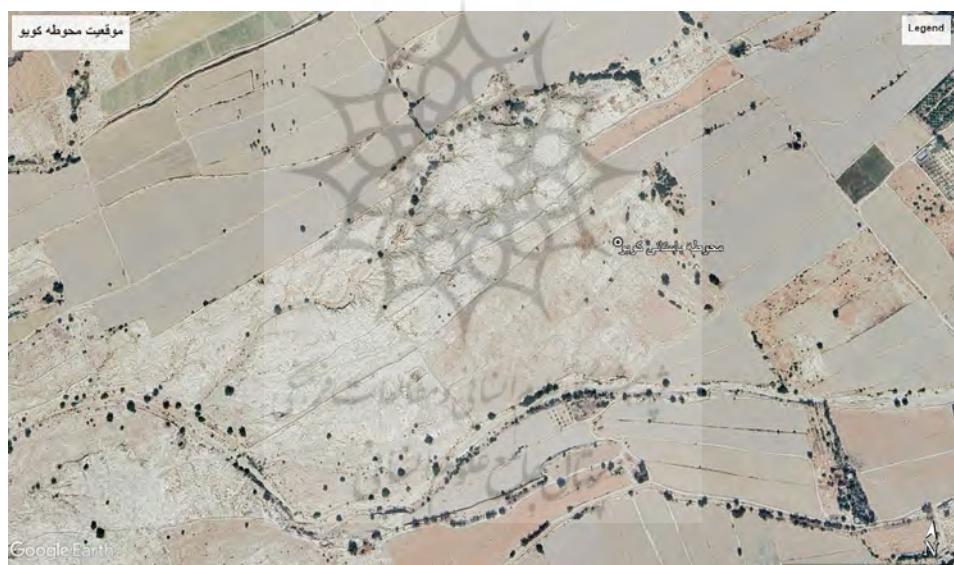


Fig. 2. Approximate Boundary of the Ancient Site of Coyu Among Fertile Agricultural Lands (Google Earth, 2024)

temples in the Persian Gulf region, such as the Bahrām Fire, which was in a fire temple ranked alongside the fire temple of Ādur Farnbāg. However, it is clear that not all fire temples in this region were of Bahrām status, and many could have belonged to local and family fires.

Archaeological surveys along the Persian Gulf coasts in the Bushehr province revealed many fire altar bases. Although some fire temples have been introduced (Tofighian, 2022), there has not been much information regarding the type and significance of the eternal fire in the

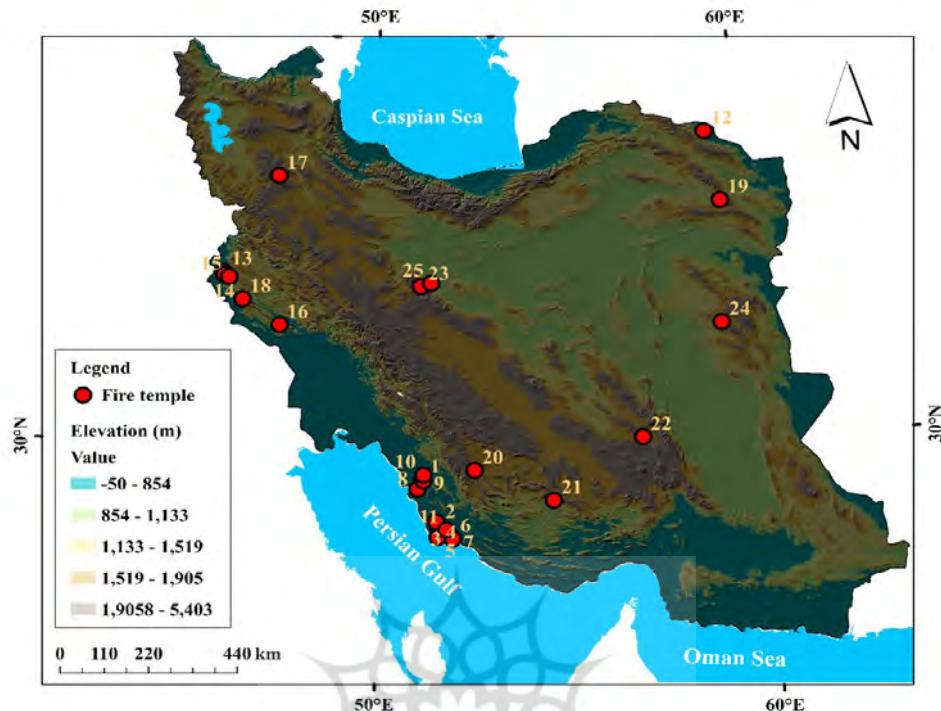


Fig. 3. Fire Temples and Fire Altars Map: 1. Mohammad Abad Borazjan; 2. Konari 1; 3. Konari 4; Konari 5; 5. Narkuh; 6. Bagh-i Morteza Ali; 7. Gharb-i Bardestān; 8. Shah Noradin; 9. Qhale Borazjan; 10. Tol-i Shahid; 11. Khane-ye-Gabri; 12. Bandian Dargaz 13. Palangard of Gilan-i Gharb; 14. Mil Milgah and Khalo in Gilan-i-Gharb; 15. Shiyan in Gilan-i Gharb; 16. Juliani in Abdanan; 17. Takht-i Soleyman in Takab; 18. Chen Zhih in Ilam; 19. Bāzeh Hoor in Khorasan; 20. Tang-i Chek Chek in Fars; 21. Chahartaqi in Darab; 22. Sultan Abad in Kerman; 23. Niyasar; 24. Khane-ye Div in South Khorasan; 25. Khoram Dasht in Kashan.

fire temples along the Persian Gulf. This research discusses the worship of the eternal fire of Bahram as the most significant eternal fire of the Sasanian period in a fire temple associated with the prominent fire temple of Ādur Farnbāg, introduced through a seal and its inscription.

This research addresses important questions related to Zoroastrianism along the Persian Gulf coasts. The most significant of these questions is: Given the identification of several fire altar bases and fewer fire temples along the Persian Gulf, what importance and status did the eternal fire in these fire tem-

ples hold within the hierarchy of Zoroastrian religion? Were the fire temples along the Persian Gulf local religious structures, or did some of them have a national status, with their eternal fires holding national and provincial significance? Based on the hypotheses of this research and the study of an inscription obtained from a Sasanian seal, it can be stated that the eternal fires in some of the fire temples along the Persian Gulf held the rank of the fire of Bahram, particularly in first-class fire temples such as the fire of Ādur Farnbāg temple. However, it can be imagined that most



Fig. 4. The Leveled and Destroyed Surface of the Ancient Site of Koyu Among Agricultural Lands (Tofighian, 2022).



Fig. 5. Architectural Remains at the Ancient Site of Koyu (Tofighian, 2022)

of the fire temples in this region had local and familial functions and held a lower status and rank. Given the exten-

sive distribution of fire altar bases and the possible remains of fire temples in the region, it seems that this area had a



Fig. 6. Remnants of Architecture and Stone and Mortar Walls in the Ancient Site of Koyu (Tofighian, 2022)



Fig. 7. Traces of the Walls and Architectural Spaces at the Ancient Site of Koyu (Tofighian, 2022)

centrality and importance in worshiping Zoroastrianism along the northern shores of the Persian Gulf.

Research Methodology

The research methodology in this article involves an archaeological survey of the Persian Gulf coasts and historical investi-



Fig. 8. Multiple Floors of Architectural Spaces in the Ancient Site of Koyu (Tofighian, 2022)

gations, with a data collection approach that includes library studies and archaeological surveys in the city of Bandar-i Dayyer alongside the discovered Sasanian seal studies, considering fire temples in the Sasanian era. As a result of archaeological investigations along the Persian Gulf coasts within the Bushehr province, many fire altar bases have been identified. Additionally, some fire temples have been introduced; however, there has not been much information regarding the type and significance of the eternal fire in the fire temples along the Persian Gulf. This research discusses the worship of the eternal fire of Bahram as the most significant eternal fire of the Sasanian period in a fire temple associated with the prominent fire temple of Ādur Farnbāg, introduced through a seal and its inscription.

Literature Review

Along the Persian Gulf coasts, only the fire temple of Mohammadabad Borazjan has been excavated by Ismail Yaghmaei and introduced in a brief article (Yaghmaei, 2009: 23). Additionally, the fire temples of Konari 1, Konari 4, Konari 5, Narkouh, Bagh-i Morteza Ali, and the fire of the west of Bardestān in Bandar-i Dayyer have been introduced by the author (Tofighian, 2023). The fire altar bases along the Persian Gulf include the altar base of Imam Zadeh Shah Noor al-Din, the altar base of Borazjan Castle, the altar base of Tol-i Shahid (Zarei, 2000; Hozhabri *et al.*, 2025), and the altar base of the Khan-i Ghabri site in Bushehr province, which were identified by the author during a survey and identification program of the Persian Gulf coasts in 2004 (Tofighian, 2017: 210-195). The fire



Fig. 9. Circular Stone Tools, Polishing Stone, Mortar Stone, and Millstone Uncovered from the Ancient Site of Koyu (Tofighian, 2022)

temple of Bandian in Dargaz was excavated by Mehdi Rahbar (1998, 1999, 2008, 2024), and the fire temple of Palang Gard in Gilan-i Gharb was studied by Khosravi and Rashnou (2012). The fire temples of Mil Milgeh and Khalo Khalo in Gilan-i Gharb were studied by Moradi (2009), the fire temple of Shiyan in Gilan-i Gharb by Hassan Rezvani (2005, 2006), the fire temple of Julian in Abdanan by Mohammadifar and Motarjem (2011), Takht-i Soleiman by Huff (2002: 293), Chen Zhih in Ilam by Vanden Berghe

(1977: 182), Hour by Labaf Khaniki (Labaf Khaniki, 2014: 85), Tang-i Chek Chek of Fars by Vanden Berghe (1961: 180), the four-arch structure in Darab (Miroshedji, 1980: 157), Sultanabad in Kerman (Vanden Berghe, 1984: 94), Niasar (Hardy, 1938: 163), the house of Div by Hashemi (2010: 79), and Khorram Dasht in Kashan by Heydari and Sarukhani (2016: 349) have all been subject to archaeological excavations. The first research on fire altar bases in the Fars region was conducted by Askari Chaverdi, who identi-



Fig. 10. A Seal Made of Agate and the Impression of the Seal Discovered from the Ancient Site of Koyu, Featuring an Inscription and an Emblem in the Central Section (Diameter 10 to 12 Cm and Thickness 2 Mm) (Tofighian, 2022)

fied fire altar bases in more than ten sites in southern Fars (Askari Chaverdi, 2012: 228-199, 2010: 40). The fire altar bases in western Iran were introduced by Ali Beigi in the context of introducing the Cham Namesht altar base (Ali Beigi, 2012: 202-196). Other discovered fire altars in various sites in Iran have been studied and introduced by the respective excavation leaders of those sites (Mo'tamedi, 1992; Mostafavi, 1968; Nauman, 1995; Mousavi, 1995; Askari Chaverdi, 2013; Azarnoush, 1994; Bucharlat & Lecomte, 1987; Kleiss, 1992; Bucharlat et Lecomte, 1987; Rahbar, 2008; Gaube, 1980; Vanden Berghe, 1961; Schippmann, 1972; Keall, 1981) (Fig. 3). The Bandian Dargaz Fire Temple is one of the most important fire temples of the Sasanian period, which has been archaeological excavation by Mehdi Rah-

bar and provides us with a lot of information about the structure and architecture of Sasanian fire temples (Rahbar, 2024, 2025).

Natural and Historical Geography of Bardestān

Bardestān is one of the newly established cities in Bushehr Province, situated at a latitude of $27^{\circ} 52'$ and a longitude of $51^{\circ} 57'$. Its elevation is 15 meters above sea level and 5 kilometers from the Persian Gulf coastline. Bardestān lies 5 kilometers north of the port city of Dayyer. The region is bordered to the east by the Galle-dar area, to the north by the Senna area, and to the west and south by the Persian Gulf. Historically, the main settlement of this area was the village of Bardestān, later becoming the administrative center of



Fig. 11. Coin of the 1st Century AD. King Nambed, Struck in A Pool Uncovered (Right) and Another Coin from Koyu (Diameter 1 cm) (Tofighian, 2022).



Fig. 12. Ornamental Stone Gutters from Koyu (Tofighian, 2022)

the port of Dayyer (Bandar-i Dayyer). On the city's eastern front lies the archaeological site of Bardo, while the western front features the remnants of a fire temple and several large and small cisterns (Tofighian, 2022).

During the Sasanian period (224–651 AD), Bardestān was part of the region of Siraf in the province of Ardashir-Khwarrah. In the Qajar era, under the rule of

Mohammad Khan Dashti, it was one of the five blocks of the Dashti area. In the Sasanian period, the region from Bardestān to Lāristān was referred to as Irāhestān. According to the book of *Fars-nameh Naseri* (1998: 145), Bardestān was part of one of the Dashti blocks and is mentioned as the Bardestān region, encompassing the mid-south and east areas (Kaki). Its length extended from the



Fig. 13. A Platform Base Around the Base of the Fireplace from Koyou (Tofighian, 2022)

village of Rize to Noder, more than 9 farsakhs, while its width stretched from the port of Dayyer to the village of Abdan, measuring 7 farsakhs, with a large mountain situated in between (Farsnameh Naseri, 1998: 9). The travelogue of Nearchus, the famous commander of Alexander the Great, which documented the coasts of the Persian Gulf from Sindh in Pakistan to the Euphrates in Iraq, is one of the earliest historical geography sources that mentions the historic port of Bardestān. In this travelogue, compiled by William Vincent, a location on the northern shores of the Persian Gulf named Osizān is referenced, which is likely the histor-

ic port of Bardestān (Vincent, 1797: 390). Volume three of the book of Cambridge History refers to a place called Asizān and Erizān, identifying it as the nucleus of Siraf (Laghart, 2018: 34). To the north of Bardestan city lies the fertile alluvial lands known as Sahari Bardestān, providing a suitable foundation for the presence of archaeological sites. Among these fertile areas, the archaeological site of Koyu, covering several hectares, attracts attention. This large Sasanian site, which has been significantly damaged and levelled, is located amidst agricultural lands growing vegetables (Tofighian, 2022).



Fig. 14. Several Stone Bases Belonging to the Fire Temple from Koyu (Tofighian, 2022)

The Ancient Site of Koyu and the Newly Discovered Sasanian Seal

The archaeological site of Koyu, also known as Gotel Gabri, is situated in a large plain called Bardestān deserts (Sahari-i Bardestān), within fertile agricultural lands. The site of Koyu is located at coordinates $27^{\circ} 53' 57.90''$ N and $51^{\circ} 58' 45.75''$ E, with an elevation of 16 meters above sea level. This site extends approximately 1.43 kilometers in a northeast-southwest direction and 654 meters in a northwest-southeast direction, located 1.895 kilometers southeast of the village of Lumbadan Pāin, 2.077 kilometers southeast of the village of Lumbadan Bālā, 3.70 kilometers northeast of Bardestān city, and 6.871 kilometers northeast of Dayyer port and the coast-

line. The archaeological site of Koyu is approximately 1.635 kilometers from the Asaluyeh-Borazjan highway and about 3.479 kilometers in a straight line to the southern Zagros mountains.

The archaeological site of Koyu, with an approximate area of 74 hectares, is located amid fertile and alluvial lands in Bardestān. Agricultural lands and off-season vegetable cultivation surround the site. The site's surface lacks vegetation and is characterized by clay and alluvial soil with scattered pebbles. In the western and southwestern fronts, severe erosion of the clay soil has led to the formation of tree-lined waterways. The abundance of freshwater and the fertility of the rocky soil provide a conducive environment for off-season agriculture. Large portions of



Fig. 15. Fragments of the Lower Tray at the Base of Fire Fireplace from the Koyu (Tofighian, 2022)

the archaeological site of Koyu have been flattened and damaged due to the expansion of agricultural lands, and the surface shows numerous signs of human and environmental destruction (Fig. 1 and 2).

The archaeological site of Koyu comprises a large expanse of clay and rocky land, which, due to destruction and levelling by farmers and opportunists, appears as a flat area with slight elevations. Remnants of architecture, foundations of buildings, and walls made of pebbles and mortar can be observed throughout this site. To divide and appropriate the land, the surface has been graded for soil compartmentalization using construction machinery (Fig. 4-8). Cultural materials and pottery are scattered across the surface of the site. Unfortunately, the pottery found on the surface exhibits limited diversity, suggesting that cultural materials have been collected from the site. Although pottery is scarce, stone tools are abundant. Numerous fragments of mortars, hand mills, and sandstone vessels are scattered across the surface (Fig. 9).

The prevalence of these items indicates agricultural life in ancient times in

this fertile plain. Residents have collected many cultural materials and are currently in the possession of the local authorities. Some of these cultural materials have been entrusted to the investigating team for archaeological studies. Among these are a seal inscribed from the Sasanian period, several coins, and a few ornamental stone gutters, a platform base around the base of the fireplace, several small stone bases belonging to the fire temple, and fragments of the lower tray at the base of the fireplace (Fig. 5 to 11).

Le Strange refers to the desert of Mandastan and the passage of the Sakan River through it in his book "Lands of the Eastern Caliphate", asserting that this river is the same one mentioned by Nearchus in his travelogue (Le Strange, 1905: 272). This desert is the same Sahari Bardestān, a fertile and water-rich plain. This fertile plain can support human communities throughout history, and the archaeological site of Koyu has developed within this favourable natural context. Based on the analysis of pottery collected from the surface of the Koyu archaeological site, the Sasanian period can be determined. Torpedo Jars,

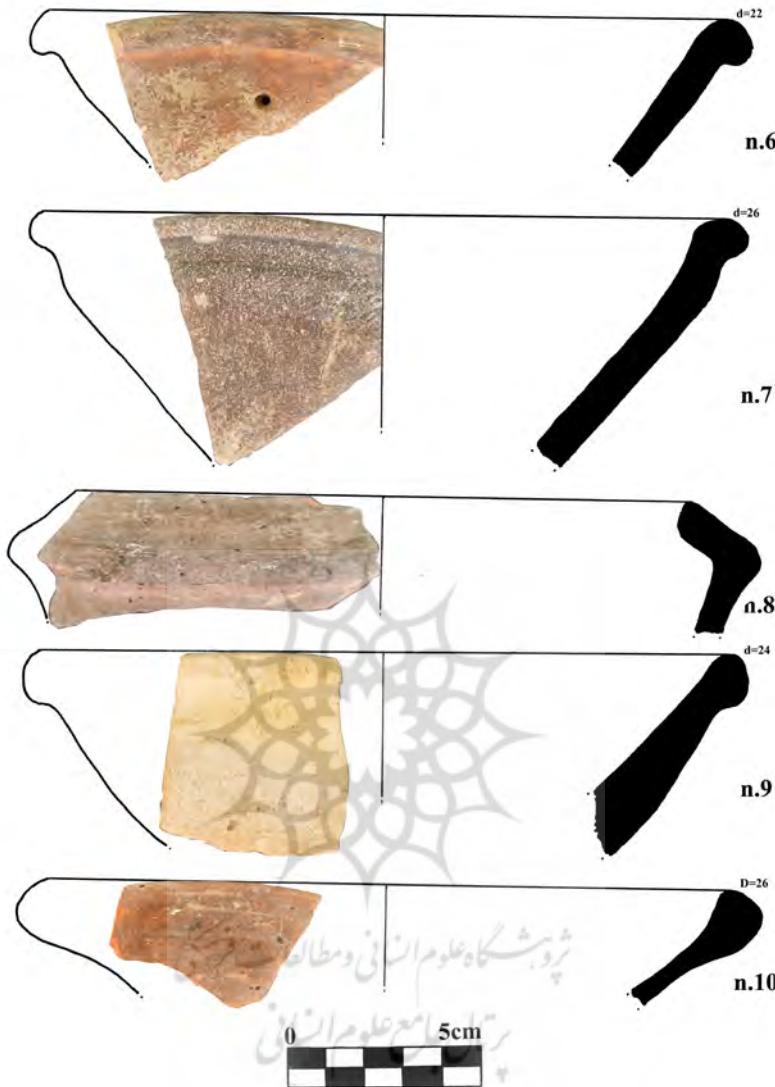


Fig. 16a. Selected Pottery from the Ancient Site of Koyu (Tofighian, 2022)

red pottery with black coating, beige or orange pottery with white coating, and turquoise-glazed pottery are among the Sasanian ceramics (Fig. 16a, b, c). Additionally, the identification of a seal inscribed in Pahlavi script referencing the fire temple of Ādur Farnbāg is an-

other piece of evidence confirming the Sasanian period for the Koyu archaeological site (Fig. 12-15). However, two coins from the first century CE suggest an earlier date for the Koyu archaeological site, potentially extending back to the Parthian period (Fig. 11). A more

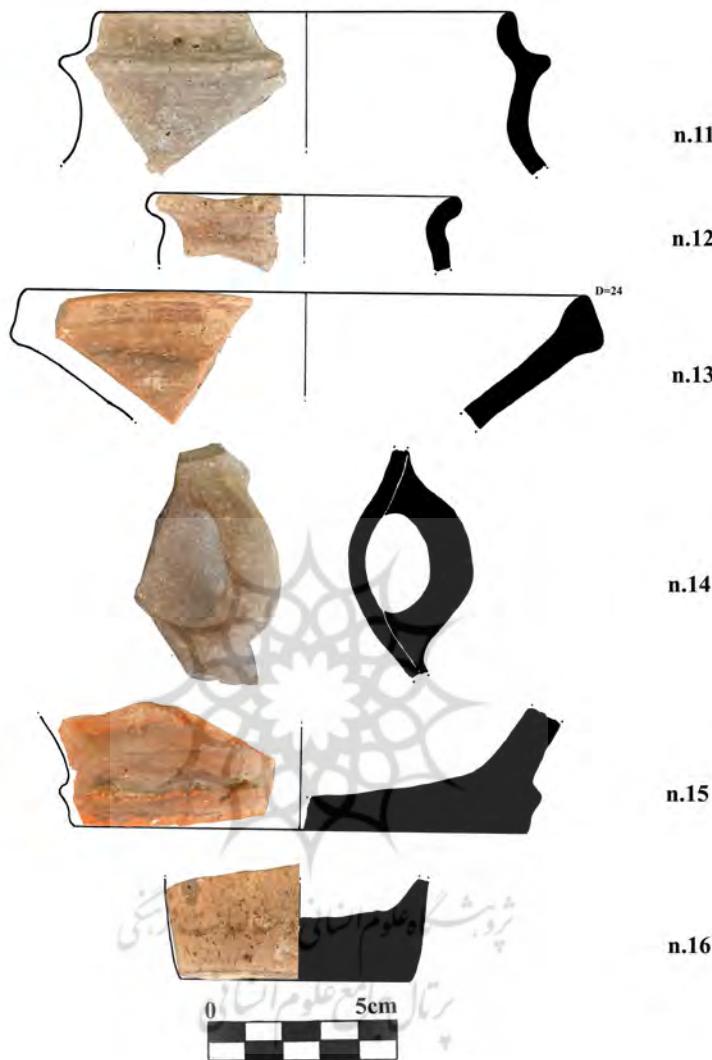


Fig. 16b. Selected Pottery from the Ancient Site of Koyu (Tofighian, 2022)

precise dating for the Koyu archaeological site necessitates archaeological excavations. Unfortunately, this site lacks adequate protective status and has been severely damaged, leveled, and appropriated. Given the significance of this archaeological site, it is recommended that further archaeological surveys, site

delineation, and boundary proposals be conducted, followed by extensive archaeological excavations.

Sasanian Seal

The identification of A newly seal from Koyu, belonged to the Sasanian period, referring to a person with a religious po-

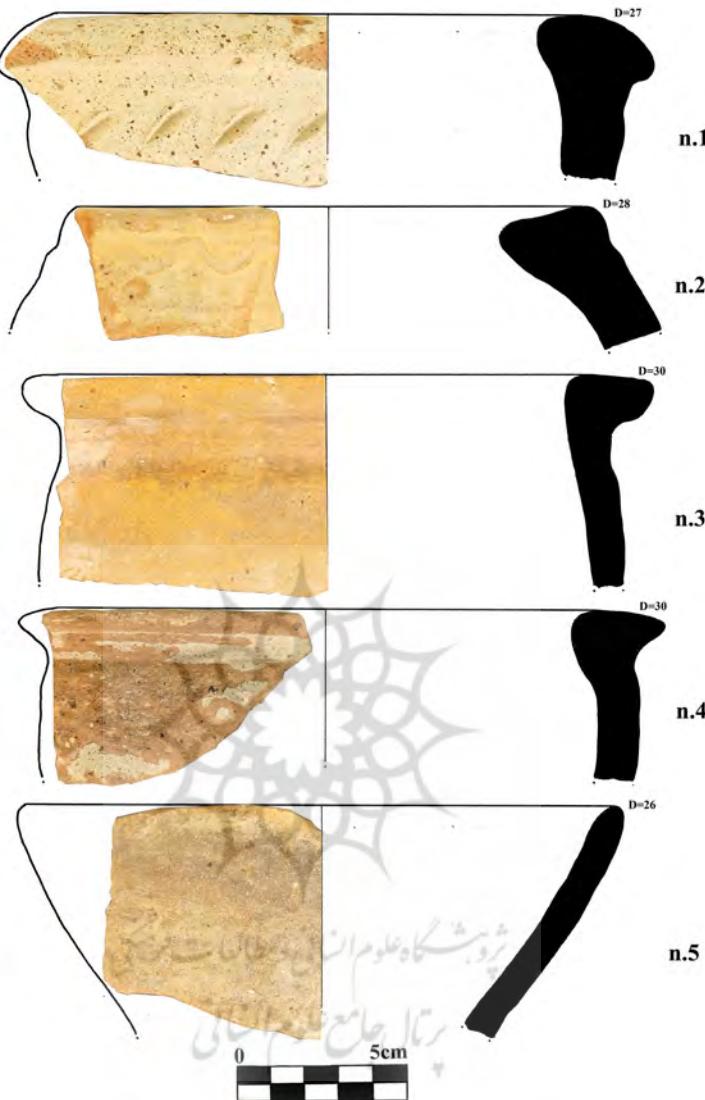


Fig. 16c. Selected Pottery from the Ancient Site of Koyu (Tofighian, 2022)

sition associated with the fire of Ādur Farnbāg, highlights the significance of the Koyu archaeological site in the archaeological studies of the northern Persian Gulf coast (Fig. 4). This seal, made of red agate, has a convex back with a diameter of 6 mm and a weight of 0/74 grams in which a threaded hole is em-

bedded. The seal is a Sasanian Nishan seal. Symbolic signs on Nishan seals have abstract concepts that are pretty difficult to understand.

Nishan seals or monograms are seals in which words or abbreviations are mixed based on a design or a pattern. It is almost impossible to separate some

monograms and specific designs from geometric patterns. (Frye, 1973: 54).

While some believe that monograms on Sasanian seals are related to the surrounding inscription, Frye emphasises that there may or may not be a connection between the alphabetic signs and their accompanying inscription. (Gyselen, 2007:87-88).

Lokunin (Borisov & Lukonin, 1963: 195) believes these signs may be special signs for fire temples engraved on the seal of Mowbedan (Zoroastrian clerks). Göbl (2005: 67) considers most of these seals to belong to the clergy class. These seals were used to seal administrative documents in fire temples.

The monogram of the studied seal in this research consists of a crescent, on the top of the monogram, and two linear elements which may represent the letters "w" and "r" and two other signs as two embedded hooks, which forms an almost symmetrical pattern, look like the image of the heart that leads to a pattern similar to the letter "a" on one side and another pattern similar to the letter "d" can be seen on the opposite side, so the monogram used in this Nishan can be read as Ādur (Fig. 10).

The seal's inscription is engraved on the margin of the seal and around the monogram, from 1 o'clock to 12 o'clock. According to the author, the following reading is more likely:

Transcription: pl'd-'whrmzd pn'h 'L 'thš
Y plwbg.

Transliteration: Frāy-ōhrmazd panāh ō
ātaxš ī farrbay.

Translation: Frāy-ōhrmazd (the protector) of the fire of Farnbāg.

The identification of this Sasanian seal, which refers to an individual with a religious position associated with the fire of Ādur Farangbakh, underscores the significance of the Koyu archaeological site in archaeological studies along the northern coast of the Persian Gulf.

1. Rim, reddish-brown clay body, sand chamotte, white slip in two layers, wheel-thrown, fully fired, relief teardrop motif under the outer rim—Sasanian period.

2. Rim, brick-colored clay body, sand chamotte, dark beige slip, wheel-thrown, fully fired, relief wavy motif under the rim. 4th to 10th century AD (Kennet, 2004: 78-79; Priestman, 2013: 412 & 683, pli; 2022: 163, fig 7: h-I; Whitcomb, 1985: 117, fig. 117, fig. 42).

3. Rim, dark brick-colored clay body, sand chamotte, light brown glaze, wheel-thrown, fully fired.

4. Rim, red clay body, sand chamotte, milky slip, wheel-thrown, well-fired. Sasanian period.

5. Rim, burnt brown clay body, sand chamotte, burnt brown slip, hand-made, poorly fired. Late Sasanian - Post-Sasanian (Azarnoush, 1994: 199, f. 175 c-f; Whitcomb, 1985: 111, f. 40-42; Alizadeh *et al.*, 2014: p. 111, b-c; p. 175, b).

6. Rim, beige clay body, sand chamotte, dark red slip, wheel-thrown, well-fired, with a patch hole. 4th to 10th century AD (Kennet, 2004: 78-79; Priestman, 2013: 412 & 683, pli; 2022: 163, fig 7: h-I; Whitcomb, 1985: 117, fig. 117, fig. 42).

7. Rim, dark beige clay body, sand chamotte, dark brown slip, wheel-thrown, well-fired.

8. Rim, red clay body, fine sand chamotte, burnt brown slip, wheel-thrown,

Table 1. Chronology and Dating of Koyu Pottery

Pottery Piece Number	Type of Pottery	Suggested Date	Source and Comparison
No. 1, 2	Pottery with Pea-colored clay and white coating	Sasanian Era	Tofighian, 2022: 142, Fig. 7 & .173, Fig. 3, 214, Fig. 5
No. 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 13, 15 & 16	Pottery with orange clay and black coating	Sasanian Era	Kennet, 2004: 78-79; Priestman, 2013: 412 & 683, pl; 2022: 163, Fig. 7: h-I; Whitcomb, 1985: 117, Fig. 117, Fig. 42, Tofighian, 2022 142, Fig. & 187, Fig. 9, 195, Fig. 5 and 6, 223, Fig. 5. Tofighian, 2022: 232, Fig. 5
No. 11, 14	Pottery with Gray clay and gray coating	Sasanian Era	Priestman, 2005: 174 & 393, pl. 11; Priestman & Kennet, 2023: 354, Fig. IV.1

well-fired (Kennet, 2004: 78-79; Priestman, 2013: 412 & 683, pl; 2022: 163, fig 7: h-I; Whitcomb, 1985: 117, fig. 117, fig. 42).

9. Rim, beige clay body, sand chamotte, beige slip, wheel-thrown, well-fired.

10. Rim, red clay body, smoked red slip, wheel-thrown, well-fired.

11. Base, gray clay body, sand chamotte, gray slip, wheel-thrown, well-fired, raised band under the rim. 4th to 6th century AD. (Priestman, 2005: 174 & 393, pl. 11; Priestman & Kennet, 2023: 354, fig. IV.1)

12. Rim, dark beige clay body, sand chamotte, dark brown slip, wheel-thrown, well-fired.

13. Rim, red clay body, sand chamotte, burnt red slip, wheel-thrown, poorly

fired. 4th to 10th century AD. (Kennet 2004: 78-79; Priestman, 2013: 412 & 683, pl; 2022: 163, fig 7: h-I; Whitcomb, 1985: 117, fig. 117, fig. 42)

14. Handle, dark gray clay body, sand chamotte, hand-made, well-fired.

15. Base, red clay body, sand chamotte, dark red slip, wheel-thrown, well-fired. 4th to 10th century AD. (Kennet, 2004: 78-79; Priestman, 2013: 412 & 683, pl; 2022: 163, fig 7: h-I; Whitcomb, 1985: 117, fig. 117, fig. 42)

16. Base, dark brown clay body, sand chamotte, light brown slip, wheel-thrown, well-fired.

Discussion

The fire temple of Ādur Farnbāg is one

of the three important fire temples of the Sasanian period, and there is disagreement regarding its location. Some researchers propose the Karyan region in Ardashir Khoreh, Fars. Among European archaeologists, de Menasce (1964), Herzfeld (1936), Boyce (1983, 1968, 1975), Gnoli (1965), Duchesne-Guillemin (1953), Kellens (1991), and Schippmann (1971) have identified the Karyan area as the location of the Ādur Farnbāg fire temple (Vanden Berghe, 1959: 486), in his study of Laristan, introduces the location of the Karyan fire temple in this region (Vandenbergh, 1959: 486), and Schippmann suggests southern Jahrom as the site of this fire temple (Schippmann, 1971: 94-86). William Jackson has made significant efforts to prove the existence of the Karyan fire temple in Laristan, using Pahlavi texts, historical geographical sources from the early Islamic centuries, and archaeological studies to introduce the ruins of the Karyan area as the site of an important Sasanian fire temple (Jackson, 1921: 106).

In historical geographical sources of southern Fars, areas from Karyan to the historical ports of Siraf and Najirum were considered part of the Ardashir Khoreh region (Maqdasi, 1906: 47 and Istakhri, 1972: 100). During the Islamic period, Laristan encompassed a vast area from southern Fars to Siraf, Kish, Gavbandi, Hozu, and Lengeh (Hosseini Fasaei, 1998: 900 and Askari, Kaim, 2012: 348). For the first time, Maqadasi mentions the Karyan fire temple in his book *Ahsan-o-Taghasim fi Marefat-al-Aghalim*, noting that a sacred fire exists within it (Maqdasi, 1906: 135). Masoudi reports that when

Muslims conquered this area, the Zoroastrians transferred the sacred fire to other parts of Fars (Masoudi, 1995, Volume 2: 399), and Istakhri also made references to the Karyan fire temple and the transfer of the sacred fire (Istakhri, 1972: 106). Ibn Balkhi, at the end of the fifth century, refers to numerous fire temples in the city of Karyan (Ibn Balkhi, 1995: 325), and Hamdallah Mostofi mentions the grandeur and magnificence of the Karyan fire temple in the eighth century AH (Mostofi, 1983: 175).

Askari Chaverdi, based on the hypotheses of these researchers and the archaeological survey of the Faryab region, suggests the Qaleh Goli site as the location of this fire temple. He considers three sites—Qaleh Goli, Qaleh Shahne-shin, and Qaleh Tashi—as suitable areas for searching for the fire of Ādur Farnbāg, with Qaleh Goli being the most promising due to its large area and surrounding moat, which he believes is the precise location of the third important fire temple of the Sasanian period (Askari Chaverdi and Kaim, 2010: 368-347). Askari supports his hypothesis, which he has derived from William Jackson, by referring to geographical historical sources like Hudud al-Alam, which mentions a structure with defensive walls and the passage of the Islamic army across the moat to conquer the Ādur Farnbāg fire temple.

In archaeological studies of southern Fars, the presence of numerous Sasanian period artifacts indicates many population centers in this area along the back-shores of the Persian Gulf. Abundant findings in Hajiabad (Azarnoush, 1994), cultural remnants in 44 Sasanian sites

in the Lamerd and Mehr plains (Askari Chaverdi and Azarnoush, 2004: 18-1), and numerous Sasanian artifacts in the Karyan plain (Askari Chaverdi, 2010) demonstrate the significance and special status of southern Fars during the Sasanian period. Although today, the shores of the Persian Gulf in Bushehr Province are considered separate from Fars, in the past, the Fars region extended to the shores of the Persian Gulf. In the eastern counties of Bushehr Province, including the counties of Kangan and Dayyer, numerous historical artifacts have been identified and registered, with a significant portion belonging to Sasanian-era sites, castles, and ports (Tofiqhian, 2023). In the archaeological surveys of the shores of Bandar-i Dayyer County, several large Sasanian sites and castles were identified and registered. Among these artifacts, the Koyu site from the Sasanian period holds greater importance. This site, covering several hectares in the region's fertile lands known as Sahari Bardestān, has considerable potential for Sasanian settlements. Although this site has been severely damaged and leveled, cultural remnants, including pottery fragments, stone tools, glass pieces, and architectural remains, are observable. Before the field surveys began, the discovery of a piece of a seal made of red agate by one of the locals drew the attention of the investigating team to this important Sasanian site. The discovered seal, which was likely mounted on a ring, has a smooth, round surface and features an inscription in Pahlavi script around its edge. In the center of the seal is a symbolic design from the Sasanian period. The signifi-

cance of this seal is greatly enhanced by the mention of the fire of Ādur Farnbāg in its inscription, suggesting that this seal may provide a clear indication of the location of the fire of Ādur Farnbāg in the ancient site of Koyu within the Bardestān region, which is part of Bandar-i Dayyer in Bushehr Province. Near the Koyu is another ancient site called Bordo, which has a large capacity for the existence of important fire temples of the Sasanian period. The Bordo site has recently been archaeologically excavated and dated to the Parthian and Sasanian periods (Rostami *et al.*, 2025).

Conclusion

During the Sasanian period, the institutions of government and religion were intertwined, with Zoroastrianism considered a state religion. This connection was manifested in the structure of the four-arch fire temples and the ever-burning fire in the fire pits. Fire temples served as symbols of national unity and adhered to a uniform model in the construction and worship rituals of Ahura Mazdā throughout the Sasanian Empire. The northern shores of the Persian Gulf, as the southern part of the Fars province, were of great importance as the imperial capital of the Sasanian dynasty. In this region, numerous fire temples and stone fire pits adorned with spoon motifs held a special status. The role and significance of fire temples in the religion and economy of the Sasanian kingdom were so elevated that the reverse side of coins from this period featured depictions of fire pits as economic and financial symbols. The large number of fire temples

and stone fire pits along the northern shores of the Persian Gulf, particularly in the Sahari Bardestān region, indicates the special status of this area concerning governance and the flourishing of Zoroastrian practices. The fires of Sasanian fire temples were categorized by importance, including the fire of Bahram, the fire of Adurān, the courtroom fire, and household and personal fires. The fire of Bahram, as the most important eternal flame, was worshipped in major fire temples such as Ādur Gušnasp, Ādur Farnbāg, and Ādur Burzēn-Mihr. In addition to identifying Sasanian fire temples and fire pits along the northern shores of the Persian Gulf (the southern parts of Fars province), the discovery of an agate seal with an inscription in Pahlavi script around its edge and governmental symbols from the Sasanian period in its center reflects the special status of Zoroastrianism and the provincial rank of some fire temples in this region.

Given the reference in the discovered inscription from Bardestān to the fire of Farnbāg, it can be imagined that in the Koyu site and the Sahari Bardestān region, which has a dispersion of numerous fire pits and remnants of several fire temples, some of these fire temples likely held governmental and provincial significance and were considered first-class. Although the fire temple associated with this seal has not yet been identified, it

was likely a provincial fire temple where the fire of Bahram was kept burning. Identifying the exact location of this fire temple requires further studies, archaeological surveys, and scientific excavations in the Koyu site and the area where this Sasanian seal was discovered.

Based on the analysis of pottery collected from the surface of the Koyu archaeological site, it belongs to the Sasanian period. Torpedo Jars, red pottery with black coating, beige or orange pottery with white coating, and turquoise-glazed pottery are among the Sasanian ceramics. Additionally, the identification of a seal inscribed in Pahlavi script referencing the fire temple of Ādur Farnbāg is another piece of evidence confirming the Sasanian period for the Koyu archaeological site. However, two coins from the first century CE suggest an earlier date for the Koyu archaeological site, potentially extending back to the Parthian period. A more precise dating for the Koyu archaeological site necessitates archaeological excavations (Fig. 11). This site lacks adequate protective status and has been severely damaged, leveled, and appropriated. Given the significance of this archaeological site, it is recommended that further archaeological surveys, site delineation, and boundary proposals be conducted, followed by extensive archaeological excavations.

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