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Unveiling the secrets of Persepolis

A new era for the ancient city

After 17 years of archaeological excavations and research at the ancient city of Parse (2008-2024), within the framework of the 'From Palace to Town' project, significant portions of this historical city have been identified.

Alireza Askari Chaverdi, director of the Persepolis World Heritage Site, writes, "The discoveries of this major research project have changed the landscape of the first-degree buffer zone of Persepolis, and we are striving to add 1,000 hectares to the Persepolis World Heritage site, transforming a larger part of the first-degree buffer zone of Persepolis into the Persepolis site."

Persepolis, the magnificent city of ancient Iran, boasted a beautiful gate comparable to the Ishtar Gate of Babylon. This gate, located in the oldest part of the city, three kilometers west of the Persepolis palaces, was constructed at the beginning of the Achaemenid era. The gate was built with bricks and mud, and its entire facade was adorned with colorful glazed tiles. A blue ceiling decorated the walls, featuring beautiful lotus flowers and combined animal panels that added to the splendor of the entrance to the most beautiful city of the ancient world. The artistic concepts used in these panels, with geometric, plant, and animal motifs, drew inspiration from the creation of ancient Mesopotamian myths, particularly the god Marduk.

During years of field research and documentation, excavation, geophysical surveys, reading the new cuneiform inscriptions from the gate of Parse, and conducting numerous tests on the materials found in Parse, all documented evidence suggests that we can now add approximately 1,000 hectares of newly discovered ancient artifacts to the Persepolis site.

This new horizon is the product of 17 years of research by Alireza Askari Chaverdi and Italian professor Pierfrancesco Callieri, along with a team of specialists and graduate students from Iranian and

European universities, and experts from the Persepolis World Heritage Site.

Over 50 experts have contributed to this project, which is being presented for the first time. New horizons for Persepolis are being opened with these discoveries, and the scientific details and values of these findings will be presented to the public with the aim of developing the Persepolis World Heritage site sustainably: The discovery of numerous Achaemenid palaces and buildings in the first-degree buffer zone of Persepolis, the discovery of a 50-hectare industrial area for the arts in the northwest of Persepolis, the discovery of part of the city plan of Parse and its irrigation systems, and finally, the discovery of the gate of Parse in the Firuzi area, which contains a 600-hectare area of ancient artifacts.

The gate, a beautiful structure with a northwest-southeast orientation, is approximately 20 degrees off the east-west axis. The gate measures 29.06 meters (north-south) X 39.06 meters (northwest-southeast) and is formed by a wall 10.47 meters thick, which encloses a space 8.00



meters wide and 14.33 meters long. Access to this room was possible through two corridors, each 4.63



meters wide and 12.24 meters long. The discovery of Babylonian and Elamite cuneiform inscriptions and the building's function revealed that this was a monumental gate. This magnificent gate,

construction of Persepolis during the reign of one of the first two Achaemenid kings. It is likely that the purpose of building this gate was to commemorate the conquest of Babylon in 539 BCE during the reign of Cyrus the Great. The gate was built entirely of bricks and mud: The facade of the walls was decorated with glazed tiles. The lower part of the walls featured geometric and floral patterns. The numerous glazed tiles found in the ruins of the gate indicate that the entire surface of the walls was decorated with mythological animal motifs, including the bulls and the mushkhushshu (a creature from ancient Mesopotamian mythology). This gate provided access to a royal garden (paradise) that included a large palace, the ruins of which are now located in the Firuzi 5 area.

With the conquest of Babylon in 539 BCE, the first Achaemenid kings trans-

ferred important symbolic elements from the mythological land of Babylon to Pars. Symbols such as the motif of the god Marduk, known as mushkhushshu, formed a significant part of the architectural decorations of this gate. Cyrus the Great attributed his victory and the legitimacy of his power in Babylon to this god on his famous cylinder seal. The discovery of this ancient mythological symbol in Persepolis is one of the most astonishing archaeological discoveries of the Achaemenid period. This significant archaeological achievement is the result of 17 years of systematic excavations at one of the most important archaeological sites in Parse, known as the Tal-e Ajori. Despite the severe destruction of this site, the systematic excavations and meticulous documentation of the findings enabled the interpretation and understand-

ing of the stratigraphy of the remaining ancient ruins. Technical designs of the motifs and scientific knowledge of the construction techniques made it possible to reconstruct the original shape of the gate in real scale. Finally, the 3D reconstruction of the gate provided a scientific interpretation and analysis of the cultural and artistic values of this magnificent gate in the Firuzi paradise of Parse.

This project is the result of international cooperation between Iran and Italy in the field of cultural heritage, specifically between the University of Shiraz and the University of Bologna. International cooperation and support from institutions in both countries, particularly the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its affiliated organizations, the Research

Institute of Cultural Heritage and Tourism, the Institute of Archaeology, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran, the Deputy of Cultural Heritage, the General Directorate of World Heritage Sites, especially the Persepolis World Heritage Site, in cooperation with the Italian side, the University of Bologna, Italy, the International Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Studies in Rome (ISMAO), the Flaminia Foundation in Ravenna, Arte Academia, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and international cooperation in Rome, Light House, Bologna, the University of Urbino, and the University of Shiraz, have contributed to the progress of this project. As the project is completed, it will be possible for tourists to visit the gate of Parse after the completion of the restoration and conservation plan.

