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## FLUTED CONICAL PEDESTALS FOR ALTARS FROM THE PERSIAN GULF COAST: BARDESTAN

**Keywords:** Bardestan, altars, Persian Gulf, conical pedestals

### Introduction

As a fountainhead of ancient Iranian empires, in particular during the Achaemenid and Sasanian periods, ancient Fars (Persis) with its Persian Gulf coast is of paramount importance if we are to understand ancient Iranian culture. Multiple historical sources speak of religious rituals particularly as regards fire veneration, alluding especially to the presence in Fars of fire temples of utmost importance, such as the one hosting the fire of Zoroastrian priests. A series of *chahartaqs* have also been discovered here in archaeological surveys and excavations of the region, which represent major fire temples of Sasanian and early Islamic dates.<sup>1</sup> The author's recent fieldwork recorded several fire sanctuaries and stone fire altars across Fars and the Persian Gulf hinterland.<sup>2</sup> In the present paper, two stone pedestals from the Persian Gulf coast in various state of preservation are presented, pertaining to the Zoroastrian devotional rituals. Both pedestals seem to belong to the hourglass-shaped type bearing fluted floral decoration known from inland Fars.

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<sup>1</sup> Azarnoush 1984, 167-200; 1989, 651-682; Vanden Berghe 2000, 19-20; Mostafavi 2002, 104-107; 2003, 249-259; Askari Chaverdi and Kaim 2013, 317-324.

<sup>2</sup> Askari Chaverdi 2006, 2010, 2011, 2013; Askari Chaverdi and Azarnoush 2004.

## The finds

### *Bagh-e Morteza Ali, Bardestan*

The archaeological site of Bagh-e Morteza Ali (Garden of Morteza Ali) lies in the Bardestan port of southern Bushehr Province (Fig. 1). The chance discovery we present here was made during the construction of a road near Morteza Ali Garden in the Bardestan port. Fortunately the finds are fairly intact apart from some chippings and fractures. Two stone elements belonging to a flaring conical pedestal with typical elegant floral flutings were retrieved from the site (Fig. 2; Fig 3.A and Fig. 3.B).

The lower of the two elements has a comprehensive maximum height of 72 cm and a bottom diameter of 92 cm; 32 flutings cover the flaring shaft above a plain base thick band. The shaft ends with a protruding tenon necessary to be fitted with the upper part of the pedestal. This second element, with a maximum diameter of 46 cm, consists of a plain cylinder having in its middle a projecting ring with rounded profile limited by two low fillets on both the upper and lower surfaces. The importance of the pedestal should not be underestimated, for aside from remaining intact it preserves the detachable upper portion similar to the specimen from Kalat-e Behrestan.<sup>3</sup>

### *Luhak, Bardestan*

At an archaeological site in the village of Luhak near the Bardestan port in southern Bushehr Province (Fig. 1), excavators recovered what seems to be the lower part of an hourglass-shaped stone pedestal (Fig. 4.A). The 42 cm high fluted pedestal has a lower diameter of 91 cm and upper diameter of 45 cm. Some 32 characteristic floral flutings occur on its body above a plain base thick band (Fig. 4.B). The top surface has a central depression for a joint to be inserted with the other elements forming the pedestal.

## Discussion

Both pedestals from these two sites on the coast of the Persian Gulf are the same type. They are characterized by a similar plain base, flaring shaft, and they bear stylized floral fluted decorations. That they are pedestals of fire altars is supported by the intriguing evidence from the Bandian fire temple near Dargaz in Khorasan, where a gypsum hourglass-shaped fire altar was found intact thanks to successive fillings of the cella.<sup>4</sup> Both the lower and upper portions of the altar's pedestal bear the same regular floral fluted ornamentation. The two recently discovered stone

<sup>3</sup> Askari Chaverdi 2011, 32-33, fig. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Rahbar 1999, 319-320.

fluted conical pedestals has led Bandian to classify them as elements of fire altars.<sup>5</sup>

Extensive surveys in southern Fars have recorded similar fluted conical pedestals at a number of sites.<sup>6</sup> Those within the boundaries of Lamerd and Mohr Counties include: Imamzadeh-ye Hasel, Khafruyeh and Chah Kour in Alamarvdasht, Tol-e Shabestan, Kalat-e Behresatn, Tomb-e Bot, Sargah, and Behdeh.<sup>7</sup> The bulky assemblages of finds stemming from surveys in southern Iran<sup>8</sup> contain fairly large, often decorated, stone fragments that can be associated with religious rites by virtue of comparisons made with remains excavated at other sites.<sup>9</sup> These fragments frequently consist of hourglass-shaped pedestals with rounded bases and conical or constricted cylinder shafts marked by elegant vertical flutings.

Palm branches may have served as the models for these flutings. Ancient Iranian sacred texts exalt the palm tree as consecrated,<sup>10</sup> and it was for this reason that the motif is attested in many stucco decorations and is common on the façades of Sasanian buildings.<sup>11</sup>

Since palm trees are endemic to southern Iran, given the peculiar ecology of the area, I believe that flutings of the palm branch type originated in this region, from where it gradually disseminated throughout the country during the Sasanian period.

Based on new evidence that I have uncovered in the past few decades, it is certain that fire rituals were commonly practiced across Fars and the hinterland of the Persian Gulf, and that the flutings applied to fire altar pedestals were inspired by an indigenous tree.<sup>12</sup>

## Acknowledgments

This publication, however brief, is due to the efforts of Mr. Akbar Andishgar and Mr. Zoubairi, whom I wish to thank for having collected these fluted conical pedestals as part of their surface survey of both sites and presented them to the Mayor's Office in Bardestan along with the help of locals including the Cultural Heritage Office of Bushehr. Preliminary graphic documentation was carried out by Mr. Rakhshandeh Khu. A more diffused publication of these objects, presenting their features in greater detail, will be provided in a forthcoming article.

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<sup>5</sup> Rahbar 1999, 320.

<sup>6</sup> Askari Chaverdi and Azarnoosh 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Askari Chaverdi 2011, 27-39; 2013, 199-228.

<sup>8</sup> Askari Chaverdi 2006, 2010, 2011; Askari Chaverdi and Azarnoush 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Boucharlat 2014, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Doustkhah 1998, 945.

<sup>11</sup> Schmidt 1937, PL. CLXXII; Kröger 1982, 142, Taf. 59; Azarnoush 1994, 101.

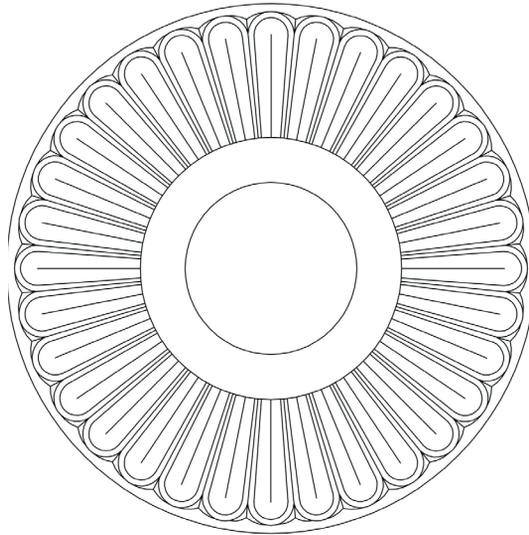
<sup>12</sup> Askari Chaverdi 2011.



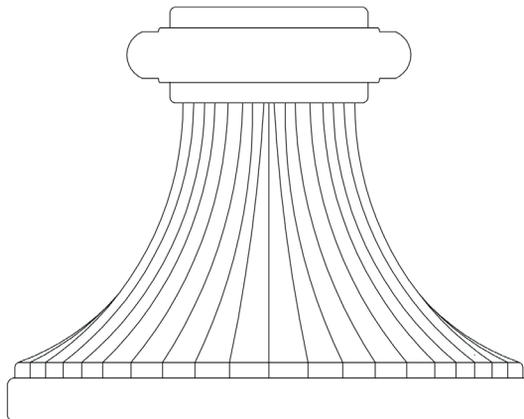
**Fig.1. Map of the Bardestan area in Bushehr Province.**



**Fig. 2. Fluted conical pedestal from Bagh-e Morteza Ali, Bardestan (Dayer County).  
Photo by Zoubairi.**



**Fig. 3.A. Zenithal view of fluted conical pedestal from Bagh-e Morteza Ali, Bardestan. Drawing by M. Rakhshandeh Khu.**



**Fig. 3.B. Front view of fluted conical pedestal from Bagh-e Morteza Ali, Bardestan. Drawing by M. Rakhshandeh Khu.**



Fig. 4.A. Fluted conical pedestal from Luhak, Bardestan (Dayer County). Photo by Zoubairi.

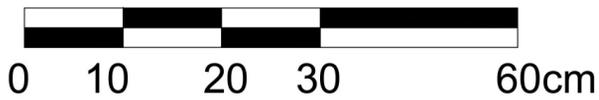
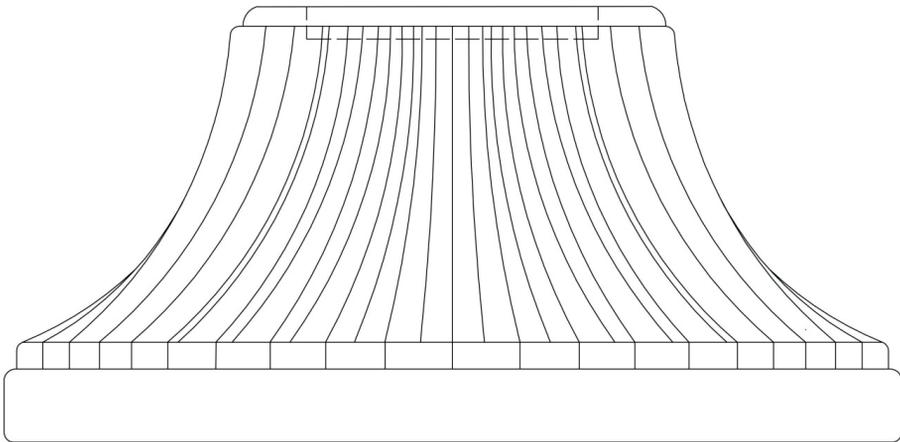


Fig. 4.B. Front view of the fluted conical pedestal from Luhak, Bardestan. Drawing by M. Rakhshandeh Khu.

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## Abstract

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