

Archaeological Analysis of the Architectural Structure Depicted on the Coins of the Fratarakā of Pars and Its Comparison with Ritual Architecture (Case Study: Collections of the Sepah Bank Museum and the Tamashagah-e Pol)

Mohammad Bahramzadeh¹ , Aboutaleb Moghasem² ,
Moslem Rezaiee³ 

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Abstract

The coins of the local rulers of Pars (the Fratarakā) are among the most significant archaeological sources for reconstructing the political, religious, and cultural conditions of the region during the Seleucid period. Beyond their economic value, these coins contain visual and symbolic elements that reflect the continuation of Achaemenid traditions and the formation of the political identity of the local rulers. One of the most prominent iconographic elements is the depiction of a building on the reverse of some of these coins, a motif that has long attracted scholarly attention. Despite previous studies, the architectural nature and function of this structure remain subjects of debate in Iranian numismatic and archaeological research. This study aims to examine and clarify the architectural identity and function of the structure depicted on the coins of the first and second groups of the Fratarakā rulers. To this end, the study introduces the relevant coin groups and analyzes their visual features in order to resolve existing ambiguities regarding the nature of the structure. The central research question asks what type of building is represented on these coins and to what extent it can be compared with known examples of ancient Iranian ritual architecture. The methodology is descriptive-analytical and based on a comparative approach. Data were collected through museum-based study of the coin collections housed in the Sepah Bank Museum and the Tamashagah-e Pol, in addition to library research and previous scholarly works. These data were then compared with known architectural examples from the Achaemenid and post-Achaemenid periods. The findings indicate that the depicted structure has a ritual and religious character and, in certain structural and symbolic aspects, is comparable to the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht monument at Naqsh-e Rostam. Furthermore, the study shows that over time, due to technical changes in minting methods, the artistic quality and architectural detail of the motif gradually diminished. These results suggest that the depiction of this structure not only reflects ancient Iranian religious and architectural traditions but may also signify the continuity of religious and political legitimacy among the local rulers of Pars in the post-Achaemenid period.

Keywords: Fratarakā of Pars, numismatics, ritual architecture, Sepah Bank Museum, Tamashagah-e Pol, Kaaba-ye Zarthosht.

1. Iranology Foundation, Tehran, Iran (Corresponding Author). **Email:** MohammadBahramzade@gmail.com
2. Department of History, Faculty of Humanities, Najafabad Branch, Islamic Azad University, Najafabad, Iran.
3. Department of Archaeology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.

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Introduction

Numismatics is the discipline devoted to the study and collection of various media of exchange, including coins, banknotes, tokens, and other instruments of trade (Borumand, 2012: 2). In French, this field is referred to as Numismatique (Shahbazi Farahani, 2007: 15). Numismatics is considered one of the significant branches of archaeological studies (Sarfraz & Avarzmani, 2008: 3) and represents a prominent example of interdisciplinary research. The study and analysis of coins draw upon diverse fields such as semiotics, linguistics, chronology, and geography, as well as natural sciences including chemistry and physics (Borumand, 2012: 2). Nevertheless, the data obtained from numismatic studies are not always entirely clear or definitive. Therefore, their use in reconstructing historical events must be approached with considerable caution (Frye, 2003: 294–296). However, this does not diminish the importance of numismatic research. Coins constitute some of the few surviving material remains from the past that provide valuable information about history, the economy, and political structures. Numismatic studies are conducted on the basis of scientific methods, logical analysis, and inference; yet, due to the scarcity of written historical sources, many conclusions derived from such studies remain at the level of hypotheses that require further examination and verification (Frye, 2007: 271–272). The term “coin” in Persian carries several meanings, including a device for striking money, minted metal currency, the second nail, the dinar, and also a straight and smooth path. In a more technical sense, a coin is a piece of metal—usually disc-shaped—made of materials such as gold, nickel, copper, or aluminum, which is minted by governments in a specific form and size. The issuing authority determines and guarantees its value and circulates it as money (Shahbazi Farahani, 2007: 13). Bayani defines a coin as a piece of metal of a specific weight upon which an official or governmental mark is engraved, guaranteeing its standard and weight (Bayani, 2010: 18). Tabatabaei describes a coin as the impression produced on pieces of metal by means of a die (a negative mold made of a hard metal such as iron), which is stamped onto the metal through the pressure of a lever or hammer (Torabi Tabatabaei, 1992: 172). Abdi similarly notes that “a coin is usually a round metallic object with a standard weight that is generally minted in large quantities by governments” (Abdi, 2012: 50). Coins of the local rulers of Pars constitute valuable documentary evidence for reconstructing what is often regarded as a “dark” or obscure period in the history of the region. These coins belong to a transitional era in which Pars stood between the legacy of Achaemenid traditions and the political and cultural transformations of the Seleucid and Parthian periods. Accordingly, an examination of the motifs and symbols employed on these coins can provide significant insights into the political thought, religious beliefs, and artistic tendencies of the local rulers of Pars. One of the most important iconographic elements appearing on certain coins of the Fratarakā of Pars is the depiction of a structure or building on the reverse. This motif has long attracted the attention of numismatists, archaeologists, and historians, and diverse interpretations have been proposed regarding

its nature, function, and symbolic meaning. Some scholars have regarded it as the representation of a religious building; others have interpreted it as a symbol of political authority and local legitimacy; and still others have examined it in connection with architectural and ritual traditions inherited from the Achaemenid period. The diversity of these perspectives suggests that the structure was not merely decorative, but rather carried substantial meaning and function within the ideological and symbolic system of the Fratarakā rulers. The importance of this issue becomes more evident when the depicted structure is compared with examples of ritual architecture in ancient Iran, particularly monuments such as the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht at Naqsh-e Rostam and the Zendan-e Soleyman. The formal and conceptual similarities between the motif on these coins and certain ritual structures may indicate the continuity of political and religious traditions in the region of Pars. Through such associations, the Fratarakā rulers may have sought to link their authority to the Achaemenid heritage and thereby reinforce the legitimacy of their rule. In this context, coinage—serving as an official and widely circulated medium—would have been an effective instrument for communicating these ideological messages to society.

The present study aims to conduct an archaeological analysis of the architectural structure depicted on the coins of the Fratarakā of Pars and to compare it with examples of ritual architecture. Drawing upon numismatic evidence, archaeological data, and comparative analysis, the research seeks to clarify the nature and function of this structure. The main research question is: what type of building is represented on these coins, and to what extent can it be associated with known patterns of ritual architecture in ancient Iran? Addressing this question may open new perspectives for understanding the religious worldview, strategies of political legitimation, and the continuity of artistic traditions during the period of the Fratarakā rulers of Pars. The main issue addressed in this study concerns the nature and function of the structure depicted on the coins of the Fratarakā of Pars and the extent to which it can be associated with the ritual architecture of ancient Iran. In addition, it is necessary to examine whether this motif served merely as a decorative element or whether it conveyed deeper meanings such as political legitimacy, the continuation of Achaemenid traditions, religious beliefs, and the local identity of Pars. Therefore, an analysis of this motif can contribute significantly to a better understanding of the position of the Fratarakā rulers, their religious beliefs, and their relationship with the traditions of ritual architecture in ancient Iran.

Research Objectives and Significance: The primary objective of this research is to analyze the coinage of the Fratarakā of Pars. These coins constitute rare surviving visual and material evidence from a region and period for which historical documentation is relatively limited and fragmented. Consequently, they serve as vital primary sources for reconstructing the political and cultural history of Pars during the post-Achaemenid period. The architectural motif depicted on these coins is among their most significant iconographic features; its careful examination may help clarify aspects of ritual belief

and the strategies of political legitimation employed by local rulers. Furthermore, comparing this structure with examples of ritual architecture in ancient Iran—particularly monuments such as the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht—may indicate the continuity of religious and architectural traditions from the Achaemenid period into later eras. This is a crucial area of inquiry, as it suggests that the Fratarakā rulers sought not only to maintain political continuity with the Achaemenid past but also to reinforce religious and symbolic connections to that heritage through artistic expression. The necessity of this research is underscored by the existence of diverse and sometimes contradictory interpretations regarding the nature of the depicted structure. A comparative archaeological analysis of this motif will help synthesize existing viewpoints and provide a more precise interpretation of the building's function and symbolic meaning. Moreover, this study will contribute to broader scholarship in numismatics, art history, ritual architecture, and ancient Iranian studies.

Research Question and Hypothesis: To gain a clearer understanding of the Fratarakā coinage preserved in the Sepah Bank Museum and the Tamashagah-e Pol, the following research question is proposed: What type of structure is depicted on these coins, and to what extent can it be associated with known patterns of ritual architecture in ancient Iran? Addressing this question will contribute to reconstructing the history of the local rulers of Pars (the Fratarakā) during the Seleucid and Parthian periods. The hypothesis of this study is that the structure depicted on the coins likely represents a symbolic rendering of a ritual or religious building, such as a fire temple or sanctuary. In terms of form and function, it may be related to established models of ritual architecture in ancient Iran, particularly monuments such as the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht and the Zendan-e Soleyman. This relationship does not necessarily imply a precise architectural depiction; rather, it suggests the continuity of Achaemenid architectural traditions, religious practices, and legitimizing symbols under the rule of the local dynasts in the post-Achaemenid period. The main objective of this research is to identify and analyze the structure depicted on the reverse of the coins belonging to the first group of the Fratarakā. The collections of the Sepah Bank Museum and the Tamashagah-e Pol were selected for several reasons: they are state-owned collections that deserve wider academic introduction; they contain a rich assemblage of coins attributed to the local rulers of Pars; they are accessible for study; and, importantly, no independent research focusing specifically on the architectural motif within these collections has previously been conducted.

Research Method: The research employs a descriptive-analytical method with a comparative approach. In the first stage, samples of Fratarakā coins that depict an architectural structure are examined regarding their form, composition, architectural details, and the placement of the motif on the surface of the coin. Subsequently, the characteristics of this structure are compared with known examples of ritual architecture in ancient Iran, such as the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht at Naqsh-e Rostam and other stone monuments in the region of Pars. Data have been collected through library sources,

scholarly articles, archaeological reports, numismatic catalogs, and museum records. The literature review encompasses historical sources, western-language references, and recent numismatic studies. Key sources include the catalogs of the Sepah Bank Museum and the Tamashagah-e Pol, specifically those detailing coins attributed to Bagadat, Vohubarz (Oborzos), Ardeshir I, Autofradat I, Darius I, and Autofradat II. This methodology integrates numismatic and archaeological data to present a precise interpretation of the structure depicted on these coins.

Literature Review

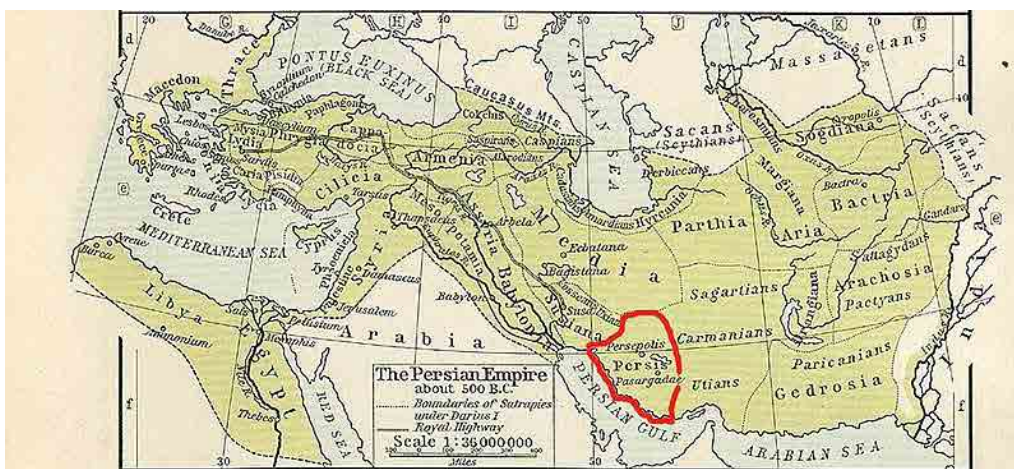
The earliest systematic study of Persid coinage appeared in Joseph Pellerin's nine-volume work, *Recueil de médailles de peuples et de villes* (1763–1770). Subsequently, [Joseph Hilarius Eckhel \(1794\)](#) expanded the corpus of known Persid coinage in his three-volume work, *Doctrina Numorum Veterum*. Nearly fifty years later, [Wilson \(1841\)](#) published a study on coins from Afghanistan in which, due to the presence of Aramaic inscriptions, he erroneously attributed Persid coins to the Sasanian period ([Potts, 2007: 272–273](#)). The French scholar Allotte de la [Fuye \(1906\)](#) made one of the first attempts to classify these coins in his research. Later, [George Hill \(1922\)](#) published the first relatively comprehensive catalog in Volume 28 of the *Catalogue of the Greek Coins in the British Museum* (section titled “Arabia, Mesopotamia and Persia”). Hill divided the coins of Pars into four periods: the first period comprises the coins of the Fratarakā; the second period includes coins in which the title Fratarakā changes to mlk’ (“king” in Aramaic); the third period begins with the conquest of Pars by Mithridates I of Parthia; and the fourth period concludes with the coins of Ardeshir IV, son of Manuchehr III. Almost simultaneously with Hill's catalog, [Jacques de Morgan \(1923\)](#) published a work on the numismatics of the Middle East in antiquity and the medieval period ([RezaKhani, 2012: 29–30](#)). Since then, research on Persid coinage has continued intermittently. [Našter \(1968\)](#) discussed the etymology of the term Fratarakā, while [Robert Göbl \(1983\)](#) published notes on the numismatics of Pars. In 1983, David Sellwood contributed a discourse on the coinage of Characene, Elymais, and Pars to *The Cambridge History of Iran*. Subsequently, [Michael Alram \(1986\)](#) published *Nomina Propria Iranica in Nummis*, a comprehensive study focusing on Iranian proper names found on coins. Josef Wiesehöfer's *Die ‘dunklen Jahrhunderte’ der Pars* ([1994](#)), translated into Persian by Hooshang Sadeghi in 2009, utilized available numismatic and historical evidence to establish a chronological framework for the region. In 2008, Oliver D. Hoover published a study on the chronological sequence of the rulers of Pars. Other scholars—including Antonio Panaino, Arthur Houghton, Catharine Lorber, and Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis—have contributed studies on the style and iconography of Persid coinage, exploring their links to Parthian and Hellenistic numismatics and their iconographic connections to Achaemenid traditions. Among Persian-speaking scholars, researchers such as [Yaghoub Mohammadifar & Alireza Khounani \(2014\)](#), Amir Amirinejad,

Salahuddin Maroufi, Maryam Rahman Setayesh, Sahar Rastegarinejad, and Masoumeh Bagheri Hassan Kiadeh have investigated various aspects of Persid coins. However, none have addressed the specific core subject of this study. Bahramzadeh et al. (2018), in their article “Archaeological Analysis of the Structure Depicted on the Coins of the Local Rulers of Pars (Fratarakā),” examined the visual characteristics of these coins and proposed a hypothesis regarding the nature of the depicted structure. Their work is the closest in scope to the present research, as it focuses on the same architectural element. The current article, however, introduces the specific Fratarakā collections held in the Sepah Bank Museum and the Tamashagah-e Pol and, by integrating historical and archaeological evidence, aims to reach a more comprehensive conclusion regarding the function of the building engraved on these coins.

Analysis of Research Findings

Political Geography of Pars

A small region adjacent to the Persian Gulf was known in antiquity as Pars and is today called Fars. During the reign of the Achaemenid kings, Pars was one of the important provinces of the empire, bounded by the Persian Gulf to the south, Khuzestan to the west, Media to the north, and Baluchistan to the east (Sami, 1954: 21). During the Seleucid and Parthian periods, this region enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy, to the extent that its rulers minted coins in their own names and exercised considerable authority (Harper, 2013: 98). In the Seleucid period, the administration of Pars was entrusted to rulers who referred to themselves as Fratarakā; however, during the Parthian period, with the expansion of their political power, they adopted the title of “king”. These local rulers, who regarded themselves as the successors of the Achaemenids, maintained a semi-independent form of government (Rastegari-Nejad et al., 2013: 47). Since they ascended the throne with the approval or appointment of Seleucid and Parthian monarchs, they have also been referred to in the sources as the “local rulers of Pars”.



Map 1: Map of the empire of the local rulers of Pars (Bahramzadeh et al., 2018: 39).

Coins of the Local Rulers of Pars

Study and Analysis of the Coins of the First Group of the Local Rulers of Pars

- Coins of Ardeshir I

Obverse: The coin depicts the bust of the king wearing a distinctive cap with a projecting brim. This felt headdress covers not only the forehead but also the cheeks and neck. In the lower part of the face, this covering functioned as a padām (mouth-cover), intended to prevent human breath from polluting the sacred fire. The edges of the cap extend down to the chin; however, the mouth itself is not covered. It appears that during religious ceremonies, this lower section of the covering would have been drawn upward (Hill, 1967: 199; Bahramzadeh et al., 2018: 39). Reverse: The reverse motif corresponds to the patterns of the “second series of Bagadat” and depicts the king in an attitude of worship before a structure (Hill, 1967: 199; Bahramzadeh et al., 2018: 39).



Fig. 1: Coins of Ardeshir I (Sepah Bank Museum).

- Coin of Vohubarz

According to the research of the late Shapur Shahbazi, the coin under discussion (Fig. 2) has been attributed to Vohubarz (Shahbazi, 1999/1378: 22). The coinage attributed to Vohubarz includes tetradrachms, silver drachms, and fractional denominations (Ibid: 22). In terms of physical form, these coins display a markedly dish-shaped (concave-convex) fabric; that is, the obverse surface is concave, while the reverse is convex (Hill, 1967: 199). Despite this characteristic, these specimens may be regarded as among the most beautiful and symbolically meaningful Iranian coins. On the obverse, the bust of Vohubarz appears in right profile. He wears the Iranian headdress known as the tiara, which typically covers the head, ears, and chin and is adorned with a diadem band. On the reverse, an image of a sanctuary with a double-leaf door is depicted. The large roof beams (farasps), with their projecting rounded ends, are clearly shown, and the cornice of the structure is decorated with a row of circular motifs. Above the sanctuary, the head of a fire altar with blazing flames is represented. According to Shahbazi, this image may symbolize the threefold sacred fires of the Iranians—fires associated with the three traditional social classes: warriors, artisans, and priests. On the tetradrachms, a winged human figure is shown flying above these three fires; this crowned and winged figure resembles those depicted on the tombs of the Achaemenid kings. In this composition, Vohubarz himself—wearing the same headdress—stands to the left of the sanctuary. He raises his right hand in a gesture of reverence toward the fire altars, while holding a

bow in his left hand, with one end resting on his foot. To the right of the altar appears a standard with a square panel decorated with a four-pointed star and pendant, bell-like ornaments. Between the standard and the sanctuary, an Aramaic inscription is engraved, read as: “WHWBRZ PRTRK’ ZY ’LH’,” meaning “Vohubarz, fratarakā of the gods” (Shahbazi, 1999/1378: 22–23; Bahramzadeh et al., 2018/1397: 38).



Fig. 2: Coins of Vohubarz (Tamashagah-e Pol).

- Coins of Autofradat I (Vadfradat I)

On most coins issued by this ruler, he is depicted raising his right hand toward a structure, while holding a double-curved bow in his left hand, with one end resting on the ground. Above this structure, the figure of a winged man is visible, appearing either to rise from it or to hover above it. This motif is well known from the Achaemenid period. Some scholars have interpreted it as a representation of Ahura Mazda, while others, citing the coins of Vadfradat and other later rulers of Pars, interpret it as a symbol of khvarenah or “Divine Glory”.

Calmeyer and Shahbazi have further emphasized that whenever the crown of this monarch differs from that of the winged figure depicted above him, the hovering being is, in fact, an embodiment of the khvarenah—the royal glory of one of his ancestors. On this basis, the winged man depicted on the Fratarakā coins can be understood as a symbol of the new ruler’s claim to the legitimate succession of the Achaemenid kings in Pars. In this context, it is important to note that the winged man wears the Achaemenid crenelated crown, whereas the king himself is depicted wearing the tiara. As noted above, the scene depicted on the reverse of this ruler’s coins clearly recalls the façade of the tomb of Darius I at Naqsh-e Rostam, where the three elements—the king, the fire altar, and the winged man—appear in a tripartite composition (Wiesehöfer, 2009/1388: 81–82).



Fig. 3: Coin assemblage of Autofradat I (Vadfradat I), (Sepah Bank Museum).

- Coin of Bagadat

Bagadat, who is regarded as the first local ruler of Pars, issued two types of coins. The coin examined in this study (Fig. 4) belongs to the second type. Obverse: The king's portrait, with a short beard and moustache, is depicted in right profile. His headgear, on both the obverse and the reverse, is distinguished by its pointed tip. A comparable example of this type of headgear can be observed in the relief on the sarcophagus of the satrap of Sidon (Gall, 1972: 278; Bahramzadeh et al., 2018: 37). Reverse: According to Wieschöfer, Bagadat on the obverse still wears the "royal" tiara adorned with a diadem, whereas on the reverse he is depicted with a projecting tiara (Wieschöfer, 2009: 77). Examination of the sequence and varieties of Bagadat's coinage indicates that the coins whose reverse shows the ruler standing before a "structure" are later than those depicting the ruler seated on a throne. It is also noteworthy that on the reverse of the second type of coins, Bagadat wears a tiara decorated with a diadem—an element that later became a common feature among all rulers of the first period. Moreover, the image of the ruler standing before a "structure," appearing in this or similar forms, is repeated on nearly all coin types of the Fratarakā rulers (Ibid: 77). In studies of the development of the Urchin dome and the factors influencing the formation of an architectural symbol, this motif has been interpreted as originally representing a fire altar depicted on a coin dating from the sixth to the fourth centuries BCE. Furthermore, on one Seleucid coin, three fire altars of the same form appear on top of a structure that has been suggested to represent the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht. Likewise, on the reverse of a coin of Vohubarz, the ruler is shown standing before a large building with three fires burning on its roof, while performing an act of reverence toward them (Saeidian et al., 2012: 121; Bahramzadeh et al., 2018: 37). Ghirshman also writes that the triad of Ahura Mazda, Mithra, and Anahita—worshipped during the Achaemenid period—apparently remained important during the Parthian era. According to him, although explicit textual evidence from within Iran is lacking, positive written testimony has been preserved in Armenia, where ancient historians mention temples containing three altars dedicated to these three deities. If this tradition is traced back to the Achaemenid period, it may be suggested that the two altars located in the open spaces of Naqsh-e Rostam and Pasargadae, together with a third altar erected near the tower-temple, belonged to the same triad. Likewise, the three fires burning on the three altars depicted atop the tower-temple on the coins of the kings of Pars under Parthian suzerainty may represent this very triad (Ghirshman, 2011).



Fig. 4: Coin of Bagadat (Sepah Bank Museum).

Analysis of the Coins of the First Group of Local Rulers of Pars

The coins of the first group of local rulers of Pars include those of Bagadat, Vohubarz, Ardeshir I, and Autofradat I. In this group, the depiction of the structure appears relatively clear and is rendered in greater detail.

A) Coin of Ardeshir I

Recent studies have identified Ardeshir I as the first local ruler of Pars, while Autofradat I and Bagadat have been presented as rival claimants.

Table 1: Analysis of the Coin of Ardeshir I (Authors, 2026)

Section	Feature	Interpretation
Obverse	The ruler wearing a projecting (distinctive) cap	Indicates the political–religious status of Ardeshir I; it may also allude to ritual purity and respect for the sacred fire.
Reverse	The ruler shown in prayer before a structure	Represents the early formation of the visual tradition of Frataraka coinage; it signifies an act of worship and the king's connection with sacred affairs.
Ruler's attire	A head covering that conceals the mouth and chin	Associated with the performance of religious rituals; the <i>padām</i> was used to prevent the pollution of the sacred fire.

In Zoroastrian tradition, the *padām* was a type of mouth covering used when approaching the sacred fire in order to prevent human breath from polluting it. If the king's head covering on the coin of Ardeshir I is related to this concept, the depiction of the king standing before the structure and the fire acquires an even stronger ritual character. Thus, this coin places particular emphasis on the relationship between the king, the sacred fire, and the ritual of purity.

B) Coin of Vohubarz

The coin of Vohubarz is among the most significant examples in this study, since the image depicted on its reverse is highly meaningful and complex.

Table 2: Analysis of the Coin of Vohubarz (Authors, 2026)

Visual Element	Description	Meaning and Interpretation
Ruler's portrait	Right-facing profile with a distinctive cap and diadem	Indicates the political–religious status of Vohubarz
Sanctuary / temple structure	A building with a double-leaf door, pilasters, and a decorative cornice	Suggests ritual architecture, possibly reflecting Achaemenid architectural traditions
Three fire altars	Placed above the sanctuary with rising flames	Symbol of three sacred fires or a ritual triad; possibly associated with Ahura Mazda, Mithra, and Anahita, or with social classes
Worshipping king	Vohubarz standing on the left with his right hand raised	Represents the act of worship and the king's connection with sacred matters; continuation of the visual tradition and consolidation of religious imagery on Frataraka coins
Standard (banner)	Positioned to the right of the fire altar	Symbol of political authority
Aramaic inscription	"Vohubarz, Frataraka of the gods"	Indicates the ruler as a representative of Ahura Mazda on earth and emphasizes his divine legitimacy

The coin of Vohubarz represents one of the strongest pieces of evidence for interpreting the structure as having a ritual character. Several significant elements appear together on this coin: the worshipping king, the structure or sanctuary, three fires, a winged figure, a

standard, and a divine inscription. These features show that the reverse does not depict an ordinary scene, but rather a highly symbolic one. The king stands before the building and the fires in an attitude of worship. This image may indicate that the Fratarakā regarded himself not only as a political ruler but also as the guardian of the religious and ritual traditions of Pars. The inscription “Fratarakā of the gods” further reinforces this interpretation, as it presents the rule of Vohubarz as having a divine origin.

C) Coin of Autofradat I / Vadfradat I

On the coin of Autofradat I, the depiction of the winged figure and its connection with Achaemenid traditions is of particular importance.

Table 3: Analysis of the Coin of Autofradat I / Vadfradat I (Authors, 2026)

Element	Description	Interpretation
Ruler / worshipper	The ruler raises his right hand toward the structure while holding a bow in his left hand	Indicates the political–religious status of Autofradat I; a combination of worship and martial power
Structure	A ritual building depicted on the reverse of the coin	Serves as the central element of the religious scene
Winged Fig	Positioned above the structure	Symbol of <i>khvarenah</i> (royal glory), Ahura Mazda, or royal legitimacy
Crown of the winged Fig	A crenelated Achaemenid crown	Emphasizes the connection with Achaemenid royal tradition
Visual resemblance	Reminiscent of the façade of the tomb of Darius I at Naqsh-e Rostam	Indicates the continuation of the iconographic pattern of king–fire–winged Fig
Bow	Held in the king’s left hand	Symbol of royal, martial, and military power

In this coin, the image of the winged human figure appears for the first time. This element may represent the *khvarenah* (royal glory), that is, the sacred force that makes the ruler worthy of kingship. By depicting himself standing before the structure and beneath the presence of the winged figure, Autofradat I asserts both political and religious legitimacy. The presence of the winged figure wearing the crenelated Achaemenid crown recalls Achaemenid reliefs and imagery, suggesting that Autofradat I sought to present himself as a continuation of the Achaemenid tradition. In this way, he intended to demonstrate that his rule possessed divine legitimacy and represented a continuation of Achaemenid royal heritage.

D) Coin of Bagadat

The coin examined here belongs to the second type of his coinage.

Table 4: Analysis of the Coin of Bagadat (Authors, 2026)

Coin Section	Features	Interpretation
Obverse	Right-facing portrait of the king with a short beard and mustache and a pointed cap	Depicts the ruler with Iranian and local attributes, expressing his independent or semi-independent political identity
Reverse	The ruler standing before a ritual structure	The presence of the king before the structure indicates that political authority is connected with ritual and sacred tradition

Cap / Bashlyk	A bashlyk decorated with a diadem	The diadem is a symbol of royal status and political legitimacy
Structure	A sacred or ritual building	Possibly representing a fire temple, a place of worship, or a structure similar to the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht

On the coin of Bagadat, the shift in imagery from the “ruler seated on a throne” to the “ruler standing before a structure” is highly significant. This change suggests that, at a certain stage in the minting of these coins, the emphasis shifted from purely political power to ritual and religious authority. In other words, the king is no longer depicted merely seated on a throne; instead, he is shown in interaction with the sacred. This indicates that Bagadat sought to legitimize his rule in opposition to Autofradat I and, in doing so, employed religious and ritual symbols to strengthen the legitimacy of his authority.

Study and Analysis of the Coins of the Second Group of Local Rulers of Pars Coin of Darius I

Obverse: On the obverse of the coin, the ruler is shown in right profile. He wears a distinctive cap whose straps are tied at the back of his head. His face is depicted with open eyes, a beard, and a circular earring. The beard is rendered in a dotted style, which gives the portrait a distinctive appearance. Reverse: At the center of the reverse appears a fire altar composed of two main sections. The lower section represents the body of the altar and is decorated with geometric motifs, probably square forms, as well as circular ornaments. This section lies beneath the place where the fire is set. The upper part of the altar consists of two crenelated elements that indicate the place where the fire burns. Beside the fire altar stands a worshipping figure, most likely Darius I. He is dressed in a long garment and wears a cap resembling a bashlyk. His hand is raised in a gesture of reverence or prayer. On the right side of the image, a square banner mounted on a pole is also depicted (Karmajani, 1993: 87–88; Bahramzadeh et al., 2018: 40). In fact, the image on the reverse of the coin may be interpreted as a representation of the structure associated with the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht, with the difference that the fire altars seen on the coins of the local kings of Pars are rendered here in crenelated form. Moreover, the section beneath the crenellations should not be understood as the container of the altar; rather, it most likely represents the entrance door and the body of the building itself (Bahramzadeh et al., 2018: 41).



Fig. 5: Coin of Darius I, (Sepah Bank Museum).

Coin of Autofradat II

Obverse: On the obverse, the ruler is depicted with large, open eyes, a prominent nose, and a long beard. He faces right, and the arrangement of his hair resembles that of Mithradates I on Parthian coins, with the hair extending to the beginning of the ears. A royal diadem is placed on his head, and above it a crescent moon symbol is depicted. Two necklaces are also shown hanging around his neck. Crown: From the reign of Mithradates I onward, the crown was depicted as a simple or lined band tied at the back of the head, with its ends hanging down behind the shoulders (Bayani, 2010, vol. 2: 49). This band or headband may be regarded as a type of semi-crown (Sarfaraz and Avarzamani, 2008: 34). It is highly probable that the semi-crowns of Parthian kings were made of gold, as such crowns correspond well to the status of the rulers of the powerful Parthian Empire (Makvandi and Dadvar, 2012: 37; Bahramzadeh et al., 2018: 41–42). The diadem was regarded as a symbol of divine glory (farrh-e izadi) and had already been in use prior to the Sasanian period. Examination of Parthian coins shows that the diadem appears around the heads of several kings. This sacred symbol was also significant among the local rulers of Pars. The concept of farrh (divine glory) has deep roots in ancient Iranian culture and was associated with Ahura Mazda, the major deities of the Zoroastrian religion, and with kings. At times, this symbol was represented as part of royal attire or adornment (Avarzamani, 2013: 40–41; Bahramzadeh et al., 2018: 41–42). Crescent Moon: The crescent motif follows the same visual tradition as the crescent depicted above the distinctive cap of Darius I (see: Amiri Parian, 2009; Bahramzadeh et al., 2018: 41–42). Reverse: Religious Figure: On this coin, the head of the religious figure appears somewhat detached from the body and is depicted almost as an independent image, thereby emphasizing the distinctive expression of the face. This figure wears a long garment and raises one or both hands in a gesture of prayer toward the fire altar structure. Bird: The bird depicted on the reverse may be interpreted as an eagle or a falcon, an animal associated with Verethragna (Bahram), the god of victory. The bird may also represent the physical manifestation of farrh (divine glory), the sacred force that grants its bearer power and status. From this perspective, the individual standing before the religious structure can be understood as the possessor of farrh. Farrh functions as a symbol of both political and religious authority, and a religious figure is considered worthy of receiving it because of qualities such as truthfulness and trustworthiness. No inscription appears on the reverse of this coin; however, a winged bust is placed above the scene, spreading its wings in a manner that evokes the form of fire (Boyce, 1996: 136; Bahramzadeh et al., 2018: 41–42).



Fig. 6: Coin of Autofradat II (Tamashagah-e Pol).

Structure: The depiction of the structure on this coin cannot be considered a direct continuation of the structure shown on the coin of Darius I, as there are clear differences between them. The building represented on the coins of Autofradat II has a cylindrical form. Its fire altar appears to emerge from the two main columns of the structure and lacks a crenelated form. Moreover, no doorway is visible; instead, two vertical columns are depicted in place of a door. In addition, the farrh or winged symbol in this example has a distinctive form. By contrast, the structure depicted on the coin of Darius I, in addition to the crenelated fire altar, clearly shows an entrance door. Horizontal motifs also appear on its body at regular intervals, which may recall the blind windows of the structure associated with the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht (Bahramzadeh et al., 2018: 41–42; Fig. 7).



Fig. 7: Decorative elements of the Bon khaneh building (Kaaba-ye Zarthosht) (Mousavi, 2011: 119).

Review of the Views of Iranian and Foreign Scholars on the Imagery of the Coins of the Local Rulers of Pars and the Structure Attributed to the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht

One of the important and still unresolved issues in studies of Achaemenid architecture and religious ritual is determining the function of two prominent structures at Pasargadae and Naqsh-e Rostam, namely the “Prison of Solomon” (Zendan-e Soleyman) and the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht (Wiesehöfer, 2009: 43–44). Various interpretations of the function of these buildings have been proposed by both Iranian and foreign scholars, each offering different explanations based on architectural evidence, historical texts, or archaeological data. Some researchers attribute a religious function to this structure. Ghirshman, citing Wikander, considers it a sanctuary associated with Anahita, in which the statue of this goddess may have been placed. In his view, the worship of Anahita could have created a form of religious cohesion among the various peoples of the Achaemenid Empire (Ghirshman, 2011: 228). Ghirshman also emphasizes the religious character of the building and identifies it as a fire temple where the sacred and eternal fire was preserved,

although he simultaneously raises the possibility of its association with the worship of Anahita ([Ibid: 228](#)). In the same context, Arthur Upham Pope likewise regarded the structure as a place for keeping the sacred fire and interpreted it within the framework of the fire-worship tradition of ancient Iran ([Pope, 1987: 23](#)).

In contrast, some scholars have proposed other functions for this structure. Wiesehöfer, citing Sancisi-Weerdenburg, suggests that the building was originally constructed for coronation rituals and ceremonies of royal consecration. In such rituals, symbolic elements of death and rebirth were present, and the “royal fire” played a significant role. At the same time, he also raises the possibility that in later periods—particularly during the Sasanian era—the structure may have been used as a place for keeping documents; however, he considers this function secondary ([Wiesehöfer, 2009: 44](#)). The inscriptions of Shapur I and Kerdir on the walls of the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht have also provided the basis for another interpretation of the function of this structure. In the third section of Kerdir’s inscription, the term *bun xānag* is mentioned: “This foundation house belonged to you; act as you know to be better for the gods and for us” ([Rajabi, 1971: 16](#)). On this basis, some scholars, including Sprengling, Walter Hinz, and Walter Henning, have regarded the building as a place for preserving documents and religious texts. According to this interpretation, *bun xānag*, or “foundation house,” may refer to a structure in which charters, religious decrees, royal proclamations, and even a copy of the Avesta were kept ([Sami, 2010: 42](#)). Henning, in particular, argues that the term “foundation house” in Kerdir’s inscription refers to the very building on whose wall the inscription was carved; that is, the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht itself ([Ibid: 41](#)). However, Walter Hinz emphasizes that applying the name *bun xānag* to the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht is acceptable for the Sasanian period, but that its use for the Achaemenid period still requires further investigation ([Ibid: 42](#)).

Some historical sources also point to a possible connection between this structure and the preservation of sacred texts. Ibn al-Balkhi, in the *Fārsnāma*, relates that the book of the Zand was written on twelve thousand cowhides and kept in Istakhr of Fars, in a place called “Kuh-e Nefesht” ([Ibn al-Balkhi, 1984: 49–50](#)). On the basis of such accounts, it has been suggested that the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht, or a similar building, may have served as a repository for religious texts. Alongside these interpretations, some scholars have proposed a funerary function for the structure. Herzfeld regarded these tower-like buildings as a type of tomb that, in structural terms, bore some resemblance to residential houses ([Herzfeld, 2002: 219](#)). By contrast, Richard Frye, examining the architectural characteristics of the building, considered this hypothesis less convincing. In his view, the presence of stone doors and the absence of windows are not compatible with either a funerary or a fire-temple function. He therefore suggested that these buildings may have been used as places for keeping royal objects or as fortified storehouses associated with the court ([Frye, 2003: 203](#)). Part of this discussion is also connected with the images of architectural structures depicted on the coins of the Fratarakā rulers of Pars. In their

study of these coins, Ernie Haerinck and Bruno Overlaet refer to the architectural features of the structure represented on them. According to them, the building has a broad double-leaved door that occupies almost the entire front façade. On both sides of this doorway, three block parapets with horn-shaped elements can be observed—features that appear only on the coins of the first group (Haerinck & Overlaet, 2008: 209–210). They compare these characteristics with the entrances of the Achaemenid royal tombs at Naqsh-e Rostam and Persepolis, where tall doors are carved into the upper part of the rock façade and the lower part is enclosed by stone (Ibid: 210; Fig. 7). In this context, some scholars have also pointed to the connection between this image and known Achaemenid buildings. David Stronach regards the structure depicted on the Fratarakā coins as a post-Achaemenid example of Achaemenid fire sanctuaries (Stronach, 1986: 220–221). By contrast, Shapur Shahbazi associates it with the fire sanctuary on the terrace of Persepolis and emphasizes the presence of a double-leaved door, projecting roof beams, and cornice decoration consisting of a row of circles. In his view, the three fire altars shown above the building symbolize the three sacred fires of the social classes of ancient Iran—warriors, artisans, and priests (Shahbazi, 1999: 22; Fig. 8). Amiri Parian likewise considers this structure to be a reflection of Achaemenid architectural traditions and religious beliefs. He points to its similarity to the gateways of Achaemenid palaces, as well as to the stone doorway discovered during Stronach's excavations in the Dasht-e Morghab. In his opinion, the building was probably similar to the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht at Naqsh-e Rostam or the Zendan-e Soleyman at Pasargadae; fires may have been kindled on its summit, and the Fratarakā rulers of Pars may have performed devotional rituals before it (Amiri Parian, 2009: 12). Overall, a review of these various interpretations shows that no definitive scholarly consensus has yet been reached regarding the actual function of the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht and similar structures. Some scholars have identified it as a fire temple or sanctuary; others have interpreted it as a repository for documents and religious texts; and still others have proposed functions such as a tomb, ceremonial building, or royal storehouse. This diversity of views demonstrates that the structure remains one of the major enigmas of the architecture and religious practices of ancient Iran.

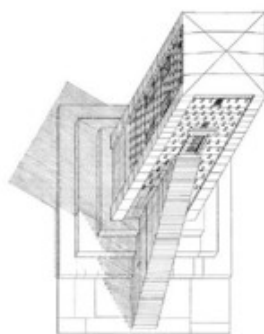


Fig. 8: Three-dimensional reconstruction of the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht, viewed from the north (Haerinck & Overlaet, 2008: 225).

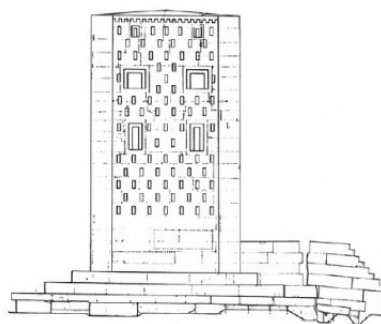


Fig. 9. Reconstruction of the southeastern façade of the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht (Haerincx & Overlaet, 2008: 226).

In conclusion, considering the range of views proposed regarding the function of structures such as the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht (Figs. 8 & 9) and Zendan-e Soleyman, it may be said that none of the existing theories alone is capable of fully explaining all the architectural, historical, and archaeological evidence. Nevertheless, a comparison of the architectural features of these structures with the images depicted on the coins of the Fratarakā rulers of Pars suggests that these buildings likely had a ritual and religious function. The presence of fire altars, the depiction of a ruler or religious figure praying before the structure, and the continuation of certain Achaemenid architectural elements in these images all indicate a connection between these structures and religious practices, as well as symbols of political legitimacy.

Therefore, it may be assumed that, in addition to their symbolic aspect, these buildings served as places for the performance of certain religious rites or ceremonies associated with political authority. Consequently, these structures should be examined within the framework of the religious and political traditions of ancient Iran and in relation to the concept of *farrh-e izadi* (divine glory) and the legitimization of rulership—an idea that is also reflected in the images and symbols appearing on the coins of the Fratarakā.

Analysis of the Coins of the Second Group of the Local Rulers of Pars

In the second group, the depiction of the structure undergoes certain changes. On some coins, the structure appears simpler, more abstract, or somewhat different from the examples seen in the first group.

A) Coins of Darius I

Table 5. Analysis of the Coin of Darius I (Authors, 2026).

Element	Description	Analysis
Obverse of the coin	Profile portrait of the ruler with a distinctive cap, dotted beard, and an earring	Representation of royal status and local identity
Reverse of the coin	A fire altar or structure placed at the center	The ritual focal point of the scene
Worshipper	A Fig wearing a long garment and a bashlyk-like cap	Probably Darius I himself shown in the act of worship
Standard (flag)	Located on the right side of the image	A symbol of political authority and ceremonial power
Structure	Featuring an entrance doorway and horizontal decorative elements	Resembling the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht and its blind windows
Farrh (Divine Glory)	Above the altar/structure, depicted as spread wings and suggesting flames	Symbol of <i>farrh</i> , Ahura Mazda, or royal legitimacy; also evoking the sacred fire

Based on the available evidence, it is emphasized that the image on the reverse of the coin of Darius I represents the structure attributed to the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht. What some scholars interpret as a “crenellated fire altar” is, in fact, part of the building itself; the lower section is not a fire-altar base or container, but rather the entrance doorway of the structure.

B) Coin of Autofradat II

Table 6: Analysis of the Coin of Autofradat II (Authors, 2026).

Element	Description	Analysis
Obverse of the coin	Portrait of the ruler with large eyes, a prominent nose, long beard, and diadem	Influence of Parthian art and continuation of royal symbols
Crescent moon	Above the ruler's head	Religious or royal symbol; continuation of the crescent motif on earlier coins
Religious Fig	On the reverse, with hands in a gesture of prayer	Continuation of the theme of worship
Bird	Eagle or falcon	Symbol of Verethragna (Bahram), <i>farrh</i> , and victory
Farrh or winged bust	Above the scene	Indication of sacred authority and divine legitimacy
Structure	Cylindrical, without a doorway, with two vertical columns	A change in form compared with the structure on the coin of Darius I

The coin of Autofradat II reflects a transformation in the depiction of the structure. Unlike the coin of Darius I, on which the building more closely resembles the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht, the structure on the coin of Autofradat II appears cylindrical and more simplified. The entrance doorway is omitted, and two vertical columns are depicted instead. This change may have several possible explanations: a decline in artistic precision and detail in the minting of the coin; a stylistic shift from realism toward symbolism; a movement away from the direct representation of the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht; or the influence of Parthian artistic traditions on later coinage. The presence of a bird, possibly an eagle or falcon, is also significant. The falcon may symbolize Verethragna/Bahram, the deity associated with royal glory (*farrh*) and victory. Therefore, even if the representation of the structure changes, the central theme—namely, religious and political legitimacy—remains preserved.

Identification of the Structure Depicted on the Coins of the Local Rulers of Pars and the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht Based on Archaeological Evidence

The hypothesis that these structures functioned as fire temples or fire sanctuaries is noteworthy to some extent. This is because the fire shrines depicted on the reverse of some coins of the Fratarakā—the local rulers of Pars after the Achaemenids—closely resemble the two monuments known as the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht and Zendan-e Soleyman. Moreover, the ground plans of these two structures do not differ significantly from those of the Achaemenid fire temples at Susa, which were constructed as small spaces built above four columns and surrounded by an enclosed corridor (Mousavi, 2011: 117).

Ancient Iranians believed that heat existed in three forms and in three realms: on earth in the form of fire, in the space between the earth and the sky as warmth, and in the heavens in the form of the world-illuminating sun (Sami, 2010: 288). Reverence for fire was of such importance that the local rulers of Pars, the Fratarakā, during the Seleucid and Parthian periods, held not only political authority but also leadership over fire temples and considered themselves guardians of the sacred fire. For this reason, images of fire or fire altars were depicted on their coins. Some of these coins also bear inscriptions indicating that the reigning kings were regarded as protectors and custodians of the sacred fire (Ibid: 289). In the early Achaemenid period, another type of tower-like structure also appears to have been in use. It has been suggested that such buildings may have had roots in earlier architectural traditions. For instance, in one of the Assyrian reliefs from the reign of Ashurbanipal (668–627 BCE), an example of tower-like sacrificial altars can be observed. Since no fully identified examples of this type of structure from pre-Achaemenid periods in Iran have been discovered, the possibility that they were influenced by earlier architectural models appears plausible (Prada, 2007: 210). Considering the evidence of door-pivot sockets at the entrances of both structures—which indicates that the doors were repeatedly opened and closed—the hypothesis that they functioned as places of worship or fire temples seems more plausible than the idea that they served as tombs. Nevertheless, it is also possible that these buildings, especially the so-called “foundation house” (bon khāneh), were used for storing highly important objects. In contrast, some scholars have suggested that the tower-like form of these structures may have been derived from the model of ancient houses. For example, a small stone model from Samos depicting a house corresponds, to some extent, with this hypothesis (Mousavi, 2011: 117; Fig. 10).



Fig. 10: Stone tower model, or house model, from Samos, height 24 cm (Mousavi, 2011: 117).

However, it may be more appropriate to compare these structures with much earlier remains as well. Evidence can also be found among indigenous Iranian materials; for instance, representations or forms of prehistoric temples and houses appear on stone artifacts from eastern and southeastern Iran. One example is a vessel made of chlorite, or soapstone, whose lower part, with its rectangular cubic structure—even in its underside

view or plan—closely resembles the so-called bon khāneh and the Zendan-e Soleyman (Fig. 11).

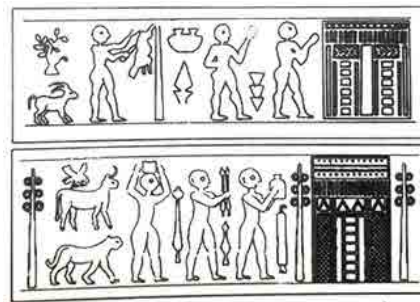


Fig. 11: Two depictions, or seals, showing the presentation of offerings to a tower-like temple in the city of Uruk (Mousavi, 2011: 117).

In Mesopotamia as well, there are comparable examples. In some depictions on prehistoric or early historic seals from this region, men are shown bringing offerings to a temple. Some of these sanctuaries are represented as tall rectangular structures whose overall form—and, to some extent, even their decorative elements—recall the two Achaemenid buildings under discussion (Ibid: 118; Fig. 12).

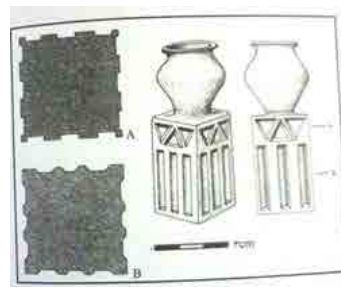


Fig. 12: Model of a house or temple made of chlorite, or soapstone, from Shahdad, third millennium BCE (Mousavi, 2011: 118).

The building materials used in these structures include white limestone for the walls and black stone for the frames, doors, and windows, which imitate the mudbrick walls and wooden doors and windows of actual houses (Herzfeld, 2002: 219). Moreover, the square projections on the four sides of these buildings, made of carefully cut stones, bear similarities to the gate towers of the Urartian fortress of Teishebaini in the Karmir Blur region of Armenia (Fig. 13).

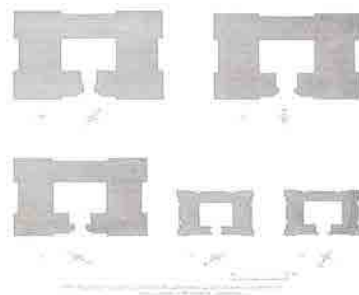


Fig. 13: Plans of Urartian and Achaemenid tower-like structures: a) plan of the Altintepe tower; b) Toprakkale; c) Kayalidere; d) Pasargad; e) Naqsh-e Rostam (Stronach, 2000: 187).

On the other hand, the dark stone used in the tower of Karmir Blur resembles the black limestone employed in the frames of the blind windows in the towers at Naqsh-e Rostam and Pasargad (Sarfaraz and Firouzmandi, 2007: 143). In fact, before the Achaemenid period, tower-like buildings were mainly known in the land of Urartu and were generally associated with religious architecture (Ibid: 135). Urartian temples with square plans and projecting corners have been identified at sites such as Altintepe, Patnos, Toprakkale, Çavuştepe, and Kayalidere. The dimensions of these temples usually ranged from approximately 10×10 meters to 13.80×13.80 meters; in particular, the temples of Khaldi at Toprakkale and Altintepe reached sizes close to 14×14 meters (Hajizadeh, 1995: 110–111). These temples were generally single-chambered, lacked side rooms, and were built in open spaces. Their structure consisted of a stone foundation made of finely cut blocks and a mudbrick superstructure, which was sometimes decorated with wall paintings depicting religious themes (Behboudi, 2001: 146). Regarding the height of these buildings, Firouzmandi notes that, given the strength of their stone foundations and the considerable thickness of their walls, their height was probably comparable to that of the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht at Naqsh-e Rostam or the similar structure at Pasargad. It is therefore possible that the Achaemenids drew inspiration from Urartian temples—particularly the temple of Altintepe—when constructing these buildings (Firouzmandi, 1997: 135).

Apart from the general form of the structure, the decoration of its façades is also of particular importance. The most prominent external feature of these two buildings is the presence of small and large decorative recesses in their façades, known as “blind windows”. The use of black stone in constructing these elements gives the buildings a multi-tiered appearance and was probably intended to emphasize the symbolic aspect of the architecture (Mousavi, 2011: 119–120). Examples of such decorative elements can also be observed in Elamite architecture, especially in the ziggurat of Chogha Zanbil, as well as in Achaemenid architecture, such as the crenellations of Persepolis. Similar blind windows are also known in Median architecture, particularly in the temples of Nush-i Jan Tepe and Baba Jan Tepe, where, in addition to their decorative role, they may also have served as niches for placing objects (Mousavi, 2011: 121).

Evidence of similar elements also appears in Urartian architecture. For example, blind windows have been included in the reconstruction plans of the temple at Toprakkale. Furthermore, on a bronze plaque from Toprakkale—now kept in the British Museum—the image of a fortress with rows of blind windows is depicted, showing a notable resemblance to the decorative features of the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht (Klais, 1988: 89).

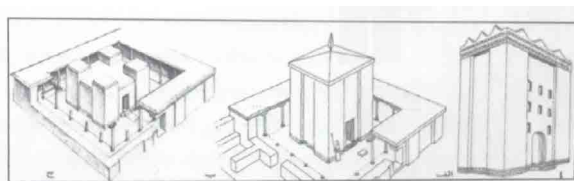


Fig. 14: Reconstruction plan of three Urartian temple structures: a) Toprakkale; b–c) Altintepe (Mousavi, 2011: 118).

Based on this evidence, it may be concluded that the structure depicted on the coins of the local rulers of Pars most likely represents the monument known as the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht. The reasons supporting this hypothesis are as follows:

Iconographic similarity: In terms of visual resemblance, the structure shown on the coins corresponds more closely to the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht than to any other known building. It appears that the die engravers attempted to reproduce its image as faithfully as possible within the limits of coin design. **Spatial limitations of the coin surface:** The restricted space available on the coin likely prevented the full depiction of certain architectural elements, particularly the tall staircase of the monument; therefore, these features were represented only in a symbolic or abbreviated manner. **Portable fire altars:** The fire altars depicted on the coins were probably portable. In unfavorable weather conditions, they could have been moved into the inner chamber of the structure. Therefore, the absence of a fixed altar on top of the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht does not necessarily invalidate the hypothesis that it functioned as a fire temple. **Architectural differences across periods:** It should not be assumed that Achaemenid fire temples were architecturally identical to those of the Sasanian period. Architectural differences between these periods are natural and cannot, by themselves, refute the interpretation of this structure as a fire temple. Moreover, Achaemenid architecture possessed a cosmopolitan character and was influenced by the architectural traditions of neighboring civilizations. Consequently, comparing this monument with religious structures from adjacent cultures may further support the fire-temple hypothesis regarding the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht.

Analysis of Scholarly Views on the Structure

The perspectives of both Iranian and foreign scholars can be classified into several main groups.

Table 7: Analysis of Scholars' Views on the Structure (Authors, 2026).

Viewpoint	Scholars / Sources	Analysis
Fire sanctuary or fire temple	Ghirshman, Pope, Christensen, some Iranian scholars	The structure is interpreted as a place for keeping the sacred fire.
Temple of Anahita	Wikander, to some extent Ghirshman	The building is associated with the worship of Anahita.
Tomb	Some scholars such as Herzfeld	The structure is considered a tower-like mausoleum.
Treasury / repository of documents	Henning, Hinz, Sami	The building served as a place for storing religious texts, the Avesta, or religious and royal documents.
Coronation and royal ritual structure	Sancisi-Weerdenburg	The structure is connected with coronation ceremonies, concepts of death and rebirth, and the royal fire.
Example of post-Achaemenid ritual architecture	Stronach, Potts, Hatkamp (Hatkamp/Houtkamp)	The structure depicted on the coins represents a type of ritual building related to the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht and Zendan-e Soleyman.
Difference from Achaemenid towers	Herrmannk / Hrynck and Oertel (often cited as Herringk and Orel)	There are differences between the structure shown on the coins and the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht; therefore, they should not be considered completely identical.

Based on the views of Iranian and foreign scholars, there is no definitive consensus regarding the function of the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht and the structure depicted on the coins. However, most interpretations emphasize the ritual, religious, or ceremonial aspect of the building. Even if the structure was not a fire temple, it was most likely connected with sacred matters, kingship, religion, or the preservation of ritual texts and documents.

Comparative Analysis of the Coin Depictions and the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht

Based on the available evidence and the views of both Iranian and foreign scholars, the structure depicted on the coins of the local rulers of Pars may be identified as the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht itself or as a representation of it.

Table 8: Comparative Analysis of the Coin Structures and the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht (Authors, 2026).

No.	Reason(s)	Analysis
1	General resemblance of the image	The structure depicted on the coins shows the closest overall similarity in form to the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht.
2	Limited space on the coin	Because of the small surface of the coin, it was not possible to represent all architectural details of the building.
3	Omission of the large staircase	The massive staircase of the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht is omitted or greatly simplified in the coin depictions.
4	Enlargement of the entrance	The doorway is depicted larger so that it can be clearly recognized on the small coin surface.
5	Portable fire altars	Fire altars are shown on the roof of the structure, though in reality they may have been movable.
6	Architectural differences between Achaemenid and Sasanian periods	One should not expect an Achaemenid fire sanctuary to be architecturally identical to a Sasanian fire temple.
7	Influence of earlier architectural traditions	Achaemenid structures may have been influenced by Urartian, Elamite, and Mesopotamian architectural traditions.

Considering the available coins and the analysis of their motifs, there is an iconographic resemblance between the structures depicted on the coins and the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht, although certain differences are also observable. In particular, scholars such as Haerinck and Overlaet have emphasized that the structures shown on the coins differ from the Achaemenid towers in several respects, including the type of doorway, parapets, the location of the stairways, and the form of the roof. Therefore, the structure depicted on the Fratarakā coins is not necessarily an exact or realistic representation of the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht; rather, it may be a symbolic representation of a type of tower-like ritual building, of which the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht and Zendan-e Soleyman are the best-known examples. In the following section, in order to better identify the structure shown on the coins, it is compared with various examples.

Table 9: Analysis of the Structure in Comparison with Similar Architectural Examples (Authors, 2026).

No.	Relation to the Discussion	Architectural Example
1	The main comparative example	Kaaba-ye Zarthosht
2	A similar Achaemenid example at Pasargad	Zendan-e Soleyman
3	Possible ritual examples	Achaemenid fire sanctuaries at Susa

4	Pre-Achaemenid tower-like examples	Uartian temples
5	An example of architectural recesses and decorative elements	The ziggurat of Chogha Zanbil
6	A precedent for tower-like ritual buildings	Mesopotamian temples
7	Median examples with blind windows and ritual spaces	Nush-i Jan Tepe and Baba Jan Tepe
8	Earlier examples of house/temple forms	Chlorite/soapstone artifacts from Shahdad

This comparative scope indicates that the structure present on the coins belongs to a long tradition of ritual architecture in the ancient Near East and Iran. From the perspective of both Iranian and foreign scholars, the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht is not an entirely unique or unprecedented structure, but rather a continuation of an ancient tradition of tower-like sacred buildings. The structure depicted on the coins of the local kings of Pars reflects a real and sacred building, which could be the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht itself or at least a related example. This structure is shown on the coins alongside fire, a worshipper, a winged man, a banner, and a bow, and therefore must be understood in a ritual-political context.

In the coin imagery of the local kings of Pars, we are not merely confronted with an administrative or military ruler, but with a guardian of sacred traditions, a preserver of fire, a legitimate heir to the Achaemenid tradition, and one who possesses divine glory (*farrh*). In this regard, the coins served as a medium for displaying the religious and political identity of the Fratarakā. Therefore, the depiction and role of the structure on these coins can be seen as a sign of the continuation of ritual architecture, the persistence of Achaemenid memory, and the link between religion and politics, with the Fratarakā using these motifs to legitimize their local rule.

Analysis

Based on the analysis in the table below, the depiction of the structure on the Fratarakā coins of Pars cannot be considered merely a decorative image. This structure held ritual, religious, and political significance. Its similarity to buildings such as the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht suggests that the Fratarakā used recognizable patterns of sacred and Achaemenid architecture to express their identity and legitimacy.

In essence, coinage during this period was not just a medium of economic exchange but also a formal means of conveying political and religious messages to society. Therefore, the image of the structure on the reverse of the coins can symbolize sanctity, the continuation of Achaemenid traditions, the legitimacy of rule, and the local identity of Pars.

Table 10: Analysis of the Structure's Depiction on the Fratarakā Coins of Pars (Authors, 2026).

No.	Analysis Axis	Analysis and Review	Archaeological Interpretation
1	Type of Study Object	Coins of the Frataraka of Pars, which bear an architectural structure on their reverse.	Coins, as material and visual documents, provide important information about the politics, religion, and art of the post-Achaemenid period.

2	Historical Period	The period of rule of the local kings of Pars during the Seleucid era.	This period signifies the continuation of the local identity of Pars after the collapse of the Achaemenids.
3	Location of Sample Storage	Some samples are kept in the Bank-e Sepah Museum and the Museum of Coinage.	The presence of these artifacts in museum collections allows for comparative and documented studies on actual specimens.
4	Position of the Structure's Depiction on the Coin	The structure is usually depicted on the reverse of the coins and holds a significant place in the pictorial composition.	The reverse of the coin served as a space for displaying symbols of identity, religion, and politics.
5	Visual Characteristics of the Structure	The building is depicted as a tower-like, cubic, or architecturally rendered structure.	The form of the building likely refers to a ritual or sacred edifice, not an ordinary building.
6	Similarity to Ritual Architecture	In its general form, this structure is comparable to buildings such as the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht at Naqsh-e Rostam.	Formal similarity can indicate the continuation of Achaemenid ritual architectural traditions under the rule of the Frataraka.
7	Probable Function of the Structure	It was likely a religious, ritual building, a fire temple, a sacred place, or a symbol of sanctity.	The depiction of the structure reflects the connection of the local rule of Pars with the religious and ritual beliefs of the society.
8	Symbolic Meaning	The structure can symbolize legitimacy, sanctity, the continuation of the Achaemenid tradition, and the local identity of Pars.	By using ritual symbols, the Frataraka presented their political power as legitimate and rooted.
9	Connection to the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht	The similarity of the structure's depiction to the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht has led some researchers to consider it a reflection or symbol of that type of architecture.	This connection highlights the importance of Naqsh-e Rostam and sacred architecture in the cultural memory of Pars.
10	Religious Aspect	The depiction of the structure, alongside other symbols on the coins, may signify beliefs related to Iranian and Zoroastrian rituals.	Coins can be a reflection of the official religion or dominant beliefs in the local society of Pars.
11	Political Aspect	The display of such a building on a coin, in addition to its religious aspect, could also carry a political message.	The Frataraka likely utilized religious symbols to bolster their political power and legitimacy.
12	Continuation of Achaemenid Tradition	The use of depictions of ritual buildings is reminiscent of the architecture and symbolism of the Achaemenid period.	This indicates that the Frataraka presented themselves as cultural and political heirs of the Achaemenids.
13	Evolution of the Depiction Over Time	In some examples, the structure's depiction is rendered with greater detail, while in others, it is simpler with fewer details.	These variations could indicate the evolution of artistic style, a decline in minting quality, the absence of a skilled die-cutter, or a change in the significance of the symbol.
14	Artistic Value	In terms of composition, detail, and rendering style, the depiction of the structure showcases a part of the local art of Pars coinage.	The coinage art of this period is a blend of Iranian traditions and the political-cultural influences of the era.
15	Research Significance	The study of this depiction aids in understanding the religion, politics, architecture, and cultural identity of the Frataraka.	These coins are key resources for reconstructing the cultural and ritual history of post-Achaemenid Pars.

Conclusion

The study of the coins of Ardashir I, Vohubarz, Autophradates I, Bagadat, Darius I, and Autophradates II indicates that many of these coins feature a ritual scene on their reverse. This scene typically consists of several core elements: the figure of the ruler or worshipper, an architectural structure, fire or an altar, a banner, a bow, and occasionally

a winged figure representing *farrh* (divine glory). The combination of these elements implies that the imagery on the reverse carries a multi-layered message.

On the obverse of the coin, the ruler is depicted in specific attire, signifying his political status, while his particular clothing indicates his religious standing. In essence, the image on the obverse represents the highest authority in Pars. The reverse of the coin elaborates on how this position is attained. The ruler's presence before the structure, fire, and sometimes the *farrh* symbol, portrays him as a devout worshipper and guardian of religious rites. Conversely, the inclusion of symbols such as a diadem, bow, banner, and winged man reinforces his political, military, and sacred status. Therefore, the coins reflect the intrinsic connection between religion and politics in the ideological framework of the Fratarakā of Pars.

One of the most significant findings of this research is that the structure depicted on the Fratarakā coins likely represents a ritual or sacred building. In several examples, particularly in the coins of the first group, this building is rendered with significant detail, featuring elements such as a double-leaved door, architectural reliefs, a cornice, altars, and occasionally battlements or tower-like sections. In examples such as Vohubarz's coin, the presence of three fires atop the structure, the ruler's adoration, an Aramaic inscription, and a winged man strongly emphasize the ritualistic and religious nature of the scene. This imagery clearly indicates that the building is not merely an ordinary structure but a sacred site, a place of worship, or a representation of ritual architecture.

Comparing this structure with monuments such as the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht at Naqsh-e Rostam and Zendan-e Soleyman at Pasargad is crucial to understanding its nature. Although there are discrepancies in detail between the coin depictions and these Achaemenid buildings, the general similarities in their tower-like form, symbolic significance, association with fire, and presence within a ritual context have led many researchers to evaluate these structures in relation to one another. From a comparative perspective, the structure on the coins may be a direct representation of the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht or, at the very least, a symbolic representation of a related type of ritual building. It should be noted that the limited space on a coin did not allow for the precise depiction of all architectural details; therefore, the die engraver was necessitated to represent the essential and recognizable features of the building in a concise and symbolic manner.

Within this context, the depiction of fire holds particular importance. In ancient Iranian religious traditions, fire occupied a sacred position, associated with concepts such as purity, truth, light, divine power, and political legitimacy. The display of altars atop the structure or at the center of the scene indicates that this building was likely connected to fire-related rituals. The three fires observed on some coins could refer to the three fires of social classes—associated with religious leaders, warriors, and artisans—or to a ritual and religious trinity. In any case, the recurrence of this symbol

on the Fratarakā coins suggests that fire was a primary element in their structure of legitimacy and religious identity.

Another element of significant importance in the analysis of these coins is the winged man, or the symbol of farrh. This motif, reminiscent of Achaemenid art and reliefs, appears on the coins of several local rulers of Pars, positioned above the structure or the fires. The interpretation of this symbol has been linked to Ahura Mazda, the Fravahar, or royal farrh. Regardless of differing scholarly opinions, the presence of this symbol alongside the king and the ritual structure signifies the ruler's connection to celestial and sacred power. Through this imagery, the Fratarakā sought to present their rule as divinely sanctioned and a continuation of the Achaemenid royal tradition.

Examining the evolution of the structure's depiction on the coins of the first and second groups of local kings of Pars reveals a significant trend. In the coins of the first group, such as the issues of Ardeshir and Vohubarz, the structure is depicted with relatively greater precision, coherence, and fidelity to the patterns of ritual architecture. In these examples, ritual elements—the altar, banner, worshipping king, and winged man—are harmoniously arranged. However, in some coins of the second group, such as those associated with Darius I and Autophradates II, the depiction undergoes simplification. At times, the entrance or architectural components are less distinct, and the building assumes a more abstract or symbolic form. These changes could be attributed to a decline in artistic precision, a shift in aesthetic taste, a lack of specialized personnel in die-cutting, influence from Parthian art, or a gradual departure from the initial model.

Despite these changes, the central message of the depictions remains constant: the ruler is connected to the sacred, and his authority is inextricably linked to ritual, fire, and farrh. Even when the form of the building becomes simplified or stylized, the presence of the worshipper, fire, banner, or symbols of farrh indicates that the core theme remains politico-religious. Thus, the coins are semantically consistent, despite their stylistic and artistic transformations.

From an architectural perspective, comparing the structure on the coins with examples such as the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht, Zendan-e Soleyman, Achaemenid fire temples, Urartian temples, Elamite ziggurats, and Mesopotamian ritual buildings demonstrates that this type of architecture did not emerge in a vacuum. Tower-like structures, elevated sacred spaces, blind windows, distinctive doorways, high platforms, and the building's connection to religious rituals are all elements rooted in pre-Achaemenid and Achaemenid architectural traditions. Therefore, the structure in question is a reflection of a long-standing architectural tradition in Iran and the ancient Near East—a tradition that continued symbolically in the art of coinage during the rule of the Fratarakā.

In evaluating existing scholarly viewpoints, it can be concluded that no single theory fully explains all aspects of this structure. The theory that the building functioned as

a fire temple is highly significant, given the presence of fire and the scene of worship. The theory identifying it as a treasury or a repository for religious documents is also compelling, considering Sasanian-era inscriptions and interpretations such as the “foundational house”. The view of it as a sanctuary, particularly in connection with Anahita or royal rituals, cannot be overlooked. Furthermore, the theory of it being a tomb, although inconsistent with some evidence, has been raised in the history of research on the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht. Based on this, the most plausible interpretation is to consider this building as a multi-functional structure or at least one of profound ritual-royal significance; a monument that may have served different functions in different periods or been associated with various sacred and royal concepts in the collective consciousness.

Another important conclusion is that the Fratarakā of Pars, through these motifs, sought to reconstruct and represent an Achaemenid identity. They governed in a period when the primary political power was held by the Seleucids and later the Parthians, yet a form of Achaemenid cultural and political memory remained vibrant in the region of Pars. The use of symbols such as the winged man, specific crowns and diadems, banners, bows, ritual structures, and fire indicates that the Fratarakā considered themselves heirs to ancient Persian traditions. These symbols served as tools to assert their local identity and political legitimacy against external powers.

Therefore, the coins of the Fratarakā should be considered multi-dimensional documents—evidence that provides historical data regarding the local rulers of Pars, testifies to the continuity of religious and artistic traditions, and reflects the identity politics of these rulers. The depiction of the structure on the reverse lies at the center of this semantic system. This building is not merely an architectural image but a symbol of sanctity, legitimacy, historical memory, and the king’s connection to the divine realm.

Ultimately, the archaeological investigation of the structure’s depiction on the coins of the local kings of Pars shows that this motif is among the most important pieces of evidence for the continuation of ritual architecture and religious symbolism in post-Achaemenid Pars. Although it cannot be stated with absolute certainty that the structure on the coins is precisely the Kaaba-ye Zarthosht, the visual, comparative, and symbolic evidence suggests that this depiction belongs to the same architectural and ritual tradition. Therefore, the structure depicted on the coins should be considered a symbolic representation of a sacred building deeply connected with fire, worship, farrh, kingship, and the continuation of Achaemenid identity. Such an interpretation not only aids in a better understanding of the Fratarakā coins but also enhances our comprehension of the relationship between religion, politics, architecture, and art in ancient Iran.

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Conflict of Interest

In adherence to ethical publication standards, the authors affirm that there are no conflicts of interest, either personal or financial, that could have influenced the content or conclusions presented in this research.

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محمد بهرام‌زاده^{ID^I}، ابوطالب مقسم^{ID^{II}}، مسلم رضایی^{ID^{III}}

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چکیده

سکه‌های حاکمان محلی پارس (فرتکه‌ها) از مهم‌ترین اسناد باستان‌شناختی برای بازسازی اوضاع سیاسی، مذهبی و فرهنگی ایالت پارس در دوره سلوکی به‌شمار می‌آیند. این مسکوکات افزون بر ارزش اقتصادی، حاوی عناصر تصویری و نمادینی هستند که بازتاب‌دهنده تداوم سنت‌های هخامنشی و شکل‌گیری هویت سیاسی حاکمان محلی در این دوره‌اند. یکی از شاخص‌ترین عناصر تصویری بر این سکه‌ها، نقش بنایی است که در پشت برخی از آن‌ها مشاهده می‌شود و از دیرباز توجه پژوهشگران را به خود جلب کرده است. باوجود مطالعات انجام‌شده، ماهیت معماری و کارکرد این سازه هم‌چنان از مسائل بحث‌برانگیز در مطالعات سکه‌شناسی و باستان‌شناسی ایران به‌شمار می‌رود. پژوهش حاضر با هدف بررسی و تبیین هویت معماری و کارکرد بنای نقش‌شده بر سکه‌های گروه نخست و دوم شاهان محلی پارس انجام شده است. در این راستا تلاش شده است تا با معرفی این گروه از سکه‌ها و تحلیل ویژگی‌های تصویری آن‌ها، ابهامات موجود درباره ماهیت این سازه تا حد امکان روشن شود. پرسش اصلی پژوهش آن است که، سازه نقش‌شده بر سکه‌های فرتکه‌ها چه نوع بنایی را بازنمایی می‌کند و تا چه اندازه می‌توان آن را با نمونه‌های شناخته‌شده معماری آئینی ایران باستان مقایسه و تفسیر کرد؟ روش پژوهش توصیفی-تحلیلی و مبتنی بر رویکرد تطبیقی است. داده‌های مورد استفاده از طریق مطالعات موزه‌ای بر مجموعه سکه‌های موجود در موزه بانک سپه و موزه تماشاگاه پول، همراه با بررسی منابع کتابخانه‌ای و پژوهش‌های پیشین گردآوری شده است؛ سپس این داده‌ها با نمونه‌های معماری شناخته‌شده از دوره هخامنشی و پساخامنشی مورد مقایسه و تحلیل قرار گرفته‌اند. نتایج پژوهش نشان می‌دهد که بنای تصویرشده بر سکه‌های فرتکه‌ها دارای ماهیتی آئینی و مذهبی است و از نظر برخی ویژگی‌های ساختاری و نمادین با بنای کعبه زرتشت در نقش‌رستم قابل مقایسه است؛ هم‌چنین بررسی سکه‌ها نشان می‌دهد که در گذر زمان و در پی تغییرات فنی در شیوه ضرب، کیفیت هنری و دقت در نمایش جزئیات معماری این نقش کاهش یافته است. این یافته‌ها نشان می‌دهد که نقش این بنا نه تنها بازتاب‌دهنده سنت‌های معماری و مذهبی ایران باستان است، بلکه می‌تواند نشانه‌ای از تداوم مشروعیت دینی و سیاسی حاکمان محلی پارس در دوره پساخامنشی نیز تلقی شود.

کلیدواژگان: فرتکه‌های پارس، سکه‌شناسی، معماری آئینی، موزه بانک سپه، موزه تماشاگاه پول، کعبه زرتشت.

I. بنیاد ایران‌شناسی، تهران، ایران (نویسنده مسئول). Email: MohammadBahramzade@gmail.com

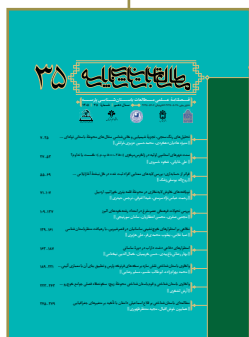
II. گروه تاریخ، دانشکده علوم انسانی، واحد نجف آباد، دانشگاه آزاد اسلامی، نجف آباد، ایران.

III. گروه باستان‌شناسی، دانشکده علوم اجتماعی، واحد علوم و تحقیقات، دانشگاه آزاد اسلامی، تهران، ایران.

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نشریه پژوهشکده باستان‌شناسی، پژوهشگاه
میراث فرهنگی و گردشگری، تهران، ایران

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