Persepolis

Persepolis (/pərˈsɛpəlɪs/; Old Persian: 𐎱𐎢𐎹𐎢, romanized: Pārsa; New Persian: جمشید تخت, romanized: Takht-e Jamshīd, lit. 'Throne of Jamshid') was the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid Empire (c. 550–330 BC). It is situatedin the plains of Marvdasht, encircled by southern Zagros mountains in Iran. It is one of the key Iranian Cultural Heritages. The city of Shiraz is situated 60 km (37 mi) southwest of Persepolis. UNESCO declared the ruins of Persepolis a World Heritage Site in 1979.[2]

The earliest remains of Persepolis date back to 515 BC.[3] The city, acting as a major center for the empire, housed a palace complex and citadel designed to serve as the focal point for governance and ceremonial activities.[4] It exemplifies the Achaemenid style of architecture. The complex was taken by the army of Alexander the Great in 330 BC, and soon after, its wooden parts were completely destroyed by fire, likely deliberately.[3]

HISTORY, CONSTRUCTION

History

Archaeological evidence shows that the earliest remains of Persepolis date back to 515 BC. André Godard, the French archaeologist who excavated Persepolis in the early 1930s, believed that it was Cyrus the Great who chose the site of Persepolis, but that it was Darius I who built the terrace and the palaces. Inscriptions on these buildings support the belief that they were constructed by Darius.

With Darius I, the sceptre passed to a new branch of the royal house. The country's true capitals were Susa, Babylon and Ecbatana. This may be why the Greeks were not acquainted with the city until Alexander the Great took and plundered it.

Darius the Great, by Eugène Flandin (1840)

Persepolis in 1920s, photo by Harold Weston Darius I's construction of Persepolis was carried out parallel to that of the Palace of Susa.[12] According to Gene R. Garthwaite, the Susa Palace served as Darius' model for Persepolis.[13] Darius I ordered the construction of the Apadana and the Council Hall (Tripylon or the "Triple Gate"), as well as the main imperial Treasury and its surroundings. These were completed during the reign of his son, Xerxes I. Further construction of the buildings on the terrace continued until the downfall of the Achaemenid Empire.[14]

Destruction

After invading Achaemenid Persia in 330 BC, Alexander the Great sent the main force of his army to Persepolis by the Royal Road. Diodorus Siculus writes that on his way to the city, Alexander and his army were met by 800 Greek artisans who had been captured by the Persians. Most were elderly and suffered some form of mutilation, such as a missing hand or foot. They explained to Alexander the Persians wanted to take advantage of their skills in the city but handicapped them so they could not easily escape. Alexander and his staff were disturbed by the story and provided the artisans with clothing and provisions before continuing on to Persepolis. Diodorus does not cite this as a reason for the destruction of Persepolis, but it is possible Alexander started to see the city in a negative light after this encounter.[16]

Upon reaching the city, Alexander stormed the Persian Gates, a pass through modern-day Zagros Mountains. There Ariobarzanes of Persis successfully ambushed Alexander the Great's army, inflicting heavy casualties. After being held off for 30 days, Alexander the Great outflanked and destroyed the defenders. Ariobarzanes himself was killed either during the battle or during the retreat to Persepolis. Some sources indicate that the Persians were betrayed by a captured tribal chief who showed the Macedonians an alternate path that allowed them to outflank Ariobarzanes in a reversal of Thermopylae. After several months, Alexander allowed his troops to loot Persepolis.

It is believed that the fire which destroyed Persepolis started from Hadish Palace, which was the living quarters of Xerxes I, and spread to the rest of the city.[17] It is not clear if the fire was an accident or a deliberate act of revenge for the burning of the Acropolis of Athens during the celebrated with a symposium, they decided to take revenge against the Persians.[18] If that is so, then the destruction of Persepolis could be both an accident and a case of revenge. The fire may also have had the political purpose of destroying an iconic symbol of the Persian monarchy that might have become a focus for Persian resistance.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Research

Odoric of Pordenone may have passed through Persepolis on his way to China in 1320, although he mentioned only a great, ruined city called "Comerum".[25] In 1474, Giosafat Barbaro visited the ruins of Persepolis, which he incorrectly thought were of Jewish origin.[26] Hakluyt's Voyages included a general account of the ruins of Persepolis attributed to an English merchant who visited Iran in 1568.[27][28] António de Gouveia from Portugal wrote about cuneiform inscriptions following his visit in 1602. His report on the ruins of Persepolis was published as part of his Relaçam in 1611.[29]

In 1618, García de Silva Figueroa, King Philip III of Spain's ambassador to the court of Abbas I, the Safavid monarch, was the first Western traveler to link the site known in Iran as "Chehel Minar" as the site known from Classical authors as Persepolis.[30][10]s in 1621, and noticed that only 25 of the 72 original columns were still standing, due to either vandalism or natural processes.[31] The Dutch traveler Cornelis de Bruijn visited Persepolis in 1704.[32]

AFTER THE FALL OF THE ACHAEMENID EMPIRE

Achaemenid Empire

In 316 BC, Persepolis was still the capital of Persia as a province of the great Macedonian Empire (see Diodorus Siculus xix, 21 seq., 46; probably after Hieronymus of Cardia, who was living about 326). The city must have gradually declined in the course of time. The lower city at the foot of the imperial city might have survived for a longer time;[23] but the ruins of the Achaemenids remained as a witness to its ancient glory.

The nearby Estakhr gained prominence as a separate city very shortly after the decline of Persepolis. It appears that much of Persepolis' rubble was used for the building of Istakhr.[24] At the time of the Muslim invasion of Persia, Estakhr offered a desperate resistance. It was still a place of considerable importance in the first century of Islam, although its greatness was speedily eclipsed by the new metropolis of Shiraz. In the 10th century, Estakhr dwindled to insignificance. During the following centuries, Estakhr gradually declined, until it ceased to exist as a city.