The Sassanians (New Persia) [1]

By George Rawlinson

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27. Architecture of the Sassnians

"With the accession of the Sassanians, Persia regained much of that power and stability to which she had been so long a stranger.... The improvement in the fine arts at home indicates returning prosperity, and a degree of security unknown since the fall of the Achaemenidae."--Fergusson, _History of Architecture_, vol. i. pp. 381-3, 3d edition.

When Persia under the Sassanian princes shook off the barbarous yoke to which she had submitted for the space of almost five centuries, she found architecture and the other fine arts at almost the lowest possible ebb throughout the greater part of Western Asia. The ruins of the Achaemenian edifices, which were still to be seen at Pasargadae, Persopolis, and elsewhere, bore witness to the grandeur of idea, and magnificence of construction, which had once formed part of the heritage of the Persian nation; but the intervening period was one during which the arts had well-nigh wholly disappeared from the Western Asiatic world; and when the early sovereigns of the house of Sassan felt the desire, common with powerful monarchs, to exhibit their greatness in their buildings, they found themselves at the first without artists to design, without artisans to construct, and almost without models to copy. The Parthians, who had ruled over Persia for nearly four hundred years,' had preferred country to city life, tents to buildings, and had not themselves erected a single edifice of any pretension during the entire period of their dominion. Nor had the nations subjected to their sway, for the most part, exhibited any constructive genius, or been successful in supplying the artistic deficiencies of their rulers. In one place alone was there an exception to this general paralysis of the artistic powers. At Hatra, in the middle Mesopotamian region, an Arab dynasty, which held under the Parthian kings, had thought its dignity to require that it should be lodged in a palace, and had resuscitated a native architecture in Mesopotamia, after centuries of complete neglect. When the Sassanians looked about for a foundation on which they might work, and out of which they might form a style suitable to their needs and worthy of their power and opulence, they found what they sought in the Hatra edifice, which was within the limits of their kingdom, and at no great distance from one of the cities where they held their Court.

The early palaces of the Sassanians have ceased to exist. Artaxerxes, the son of Babek, Sapor the first, and their immediate successors, undoubtedly erected residences for themselves exceeding in size and richness the buildings which had contented the Parthians, as well as those in which their own ancestors, the tributary kings of Persia under

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Parthia, had passed their lives. But these residences have almost wholly disappeared. The most ancient of the Sassanian buildings which admit of being measured and described are assigned to the century between A.D. 350 and 450; and we are thus unable to trace the exact steps by which the Sassanian style was gradually elaborated. We come upon it when it is beyond the stage of infancy, when it has acquired a marked and decided character, when it no longer hesitates or falters, but knows what it wants, and goes straight to its ends. Its main features are simple, and are uniform from first to last, the later buildings being merely enlargements of the earlier, by an addition to the number or to the size of the apartments. The principal peculiarities of the style are, first, that the plan of the entire building is an oblong square, without adjuncts or projections; secondly, that the main entrance is into a lofty vaulted porch or hall by an archway of the entire width of the apartment; thirdly, that beside these oblong halls, the building contains square apartments, vaulted with domes, which are circular at their base, and elliptical in their section, and which rest on pendentives of an unusual character; fourthly, that the apartments are numerous and en suite, opening one into another, without the intervention of passages; and fifthly, that the palace comprises, as a matter of course, a court, placed towards the rear of the building, with apartments opening into it.

The oblong square is variously proportioned. The depth may be a little more than the breadth, or it may be nearly twice as much. In either case, the front occupies one of the shorter sides, or ends of the edifice. The outer wall is sometimes pierced by one entrance only; but, more commonly, entrances are multiplied beyond the limit commonly observed in modern buildings. The great entrance is in the exact centre of the front. This entrance, as already noticed, is commonly by a lofty arch which (if we set aside the domes) is of almost the full height of the building, and constitutes one of its most striking, and to Europeans most extraordinary, features. From the outer air, we look; as it were, straight into the heart of the edifice, in one instance to the depth of 115 feet, a distance equal to the length of Henry VII.'s Chapel at Westminster. The effect is very strange when first seen by the inexperienced traveller; but similar entrances are common in the mosques of Armenia and Persia, and in the palaces of the latter country. In the mosques "lofty and deeply-recessed portals," "unrivalled for grandeur and appropriateness," are rather the rule than the exception; and, in the palaces, "Throne-rooms" are commonly mere deep recesses of this character, vaulted or supported by pillars, and open at one end to the full width and height of the apartment. The height of the arch varies in Sassanian buildings from about fifty to eighty-five feet; it is generally plain, and without ornament; but in one case we meet with a foiling of small arches round the great one, which has an effect that is not unpleasing.

The domed apartments are squares of from twenty-five to forty feet, or a little more. The domes are circular at their base; but a section of them would exhibit a half ellipse, with its longest and shortest diameters proportioned as three to two. The height to which they rise from the ground is not much above seventy feet. A single building will have two or three domes, either of the same size, or occasionally of different dimensions. It is a peculiarity of their construction that they rest, not on drums, but on pendentives of a curious character. A series of semi-circular arches is thrown across the angles of the apartment, each projecting further into it than the preceding, and in this way the corners are got rid of, and the square converted into the circular shape. A cornice ran round the apartment, either above or below the pendentives, or sometimes both above and below. The domes were pierced by a number of small holes, which admitted some light, and the upper part of the walls between the pendentives was also pierced by windows.

There are no passages or corridors in the Sassanian palaces. The rooms for the most part open one into the other. Where this is not the case, they give upon a common meeting-ground, which is either an open court, or a large vaulted apartment. The openings are in general doorways of moderate size, but sometimes they are arches of the full width of the subordinate room or apartment. As many as seventeen or eighteen rooms have been found in a palace.

There is no appearance in any Sassanian edifice of a real second story. The famous Takht-i-Khosru presents externally the semblance of such an arrangement; but this seems to have been a mere feature of the external ornamentation, and to have had nothing to do with the interior.

The exterior ornamentation of the Sassanian buildings was by pilasters, by arched recesses, by cornices, and sometimes by string-courses. An ornamentation at once simple and elegant is that of the lateral faces of the palace at Firuzabad, where long reed-like pilasters are carried from the ground to the cornice, while between them are a series of tall narrow doubly recessed arches. Far less satisfactory is the much more elaborate design adopted at Ctesiphon, where six series of blind arches of different kinds are superimposed the one on the other, with string-courses between them, and with pilasters, placed singly or in pairs, separating the arches into groups, and not regularly superimposed, as pillars, whether real or seeming, ought to be.

The interior ornamentation was probably, in a great measure, by stucco, painting, and perhaps gilding. All this, however, if it existed, has disappeared; and the interiors now present a bare and naked appearance, which is only slightly relieved by the occasional occurrence of windows, of ornamental doorways, and of niches, which recall well-known features at Persepolis. In some instances, however, the arrangement of the larger rooms was improved by means of short pillars, placed at some distance from the walls, and supporting a sort of transverse rib, which broke the uniformity of the roof. The pillars were connected with the side walls by low arches.

Such are the main peculiarities of Sassanian palace architecture. The general effect of the great halls is grand, though scarcely beautiful; and, in the best specimens, the entire palace has an air of simple severity which is striking and dignified. The internal arrangements do not appear to be very convenient. Too much is sacrificed to regularity; and the opening of each room into its neighbor must, one would think, have been unsatisfactory. Still, the edifices are regarded as "indicating considerable originality and power," though they "point to a state of society when attention to security hardly allowed the architect the free exercise of the more delicate ornaments of his art."

From this general account of the main features of the architecture it is proposed now to proceed to a more particular description of the principal extant Sassanian buildings--the palaces at Serbistan, Firuzabad, Ctesiphon, and Mashita.

The palace at Serbistan is the smallest, and probably the earliest of the four. It has been assigned conjecturally to the middle of the fourth century, or the reign of Sapor II. The ground plan is an oblong but little removed from a square, the length being 42 French metres, and the breadth nearly 37 metres. The building faces west, and is entered by three archways, between which are groups of three semi-circular pilasters, while beyond the two outer arches towards the angles of the building is a single similar pilaster. Within the archways are halls or porches of different depths, the central one of the three being the shallowest. This opens by an arched doorway into a square chamber, the largest in the edifice. It is domed, and has a diameter of about 42 feet or, including recesses, of above 57 feet. The interior height of the dome from the floor is 65 feet. Beyond the domed

chamber is a court, which measures 45 feet by 40, and has rooms of various sizes opening into it. One of these is domed; and others are for the most part vaulted. The great domed chamber opens towards the north, on a deep porch or hall, which was entered from without by the usual arched portal. On the south it communicates with a pillared hall, above 60 feet long by 30 broad. There is another somewhat similar hall on the north side of the building, in width about equal, but in length not quite 50 feet. In both halls the pillars are short, not exceeding six feet. They support piers, which run up perpendicularly for a considerable height, and then become ribs of the vaulting.

The Firuzabad palace has a length of above 390 and a width of above 180 feet. Its supposed date is A.D. 450, or the reign of Isdigerd I. As usual the ground plan is an oblong square. It is remarkable that the entire building had but a single entrance. This was by a noble arch, above 50 feet in height, which faced north, and gave admission into a vaulted hall, nearly 90 feet long by 43 wide, having at either side two lesser halls of a similar character, opening into it by somewhat low semi-circular arches, of nearly the full width of the apartments. Beyond these rooms, and communicating with them by narrow, but elegant doorways, were three domed chambers precisely similar, occupying together the full width of the building, each about 43 feet square, and crowned by elliptical domes rising to the height of nearly 70 feet. The ornamentation of these chambers was by their doorways, and by false windows, on the Persepolitan model. The domed chambers opened into some small apartments, beyond which was a large court, about 90 feet square, surrounded by vaulted rooms of various sizes, which for the most part communicated directly with it. False windows, or recesses, relieved the interior of these apartments, but were of a less elaborate character than those of the domed chambers. Externally the whole building was chastely and tastefully ornamented by the tall narrow arches and reed-like pilasters already mentioned. Its character, however, was upon the whole "simple and severe;" nor can we quarrel with the judgment which pronounces it "more like a gigantic bastile than the palace of a gay, pavilion-loving people like the Persians."

It is difficult to form any very decided opinion upon the architectural merits of the third and grandest of the Sassanian palaces, the well known "Takht-i-Ehosru," or palace of Chosroe's Anushirwan, at Ctesiphon. What remains of this massive erection is a mere fragment, which, to judge from the other extant Sassanian ruins, cannot have formed so much as one fourth part of the original edifice. Nothing has come down to our day but a single vaulted hall on the grandest scale, 72 feet wide, 85 high, and 115 deep, together with the mere outer wall of what no doubt constituted the main facade of the building. The apartments, which, according to all analogy, must have existed at the two sides, and in the rear, of the great hall, some of which should have been vaulted, have wholly perished. Imagination may supply them from the Firuzabad, or the Mashita palace; but not a trace, even of their foundations, is extant; and the details, consequently, are uncertain, though the general plan can scarcely be doubted. At each side of the great hall were probably two lateral ones, communicating with each other, and capable of being entered either from the hall or from the outer air. Beyond the great hall was probably a domed chamber, equalling it in width, and opening upon a court, round which were a number of moderate-sized apartments. The entire building was no doubt an oblong square, of which the shorter sides seem to have measured 370 feet. It had at least three, and may not improbably have had a larger number of entrances, since it belongs to tranquil times and a secure locality.

The ornamentation of the existing facade of the palace is by doorways, doubly-arched recesses, pilasters, and string-courses. These

last divide the building, externally, into an appearance of three or four distinct stories. The first and second stories are broken into portions by pilasters, which in the first or basement stories are in pairs, but in the second stand singly. It is remarkable that the pilasters of the second story are not arranged with any regard to those of the first, and are consequently in many cases not superimposed upon the lower pilasters. In the third and fourth stories there are no pilasters, the arched recesses being here continued without any interruption. Over the great arch of the central hall, a foiling of seventeen small semicircular arches constitutes a pleasing and unusual feature.

The Mashita palace, which was almost certainly built between A.D. 614 and A.D. 627, while on a smaller scale than that of Ctesiphon, was far more richly ornamented. This construction of Chosroes II. (Parwiz) consisted of two distinct, buildings (separated by a court-yard, in which was a fountain), extending each of them about 180 feet along the front, with a depth respectively of 140 and 150 feet. The main building, which lay to the north, was entered from the courtyard by three archways, semicircular and standing side by side, separated only by columns of hard, white stone, of a quality approaching to marble. These columns were surmounted by debased Corinthian capitals, of a type introduced by Justinian, and supported arches which were very richly fluted, and which are said to have been "not unlike our own late Norman work." The archways gave entrance into an oblong court or hall, about 80 feet long, by sixty feet wide, on which opened by a wide doorway the main room of the building. This was a triapsal hall, built of brick, and surmounted by a massive domed roof of the same material, which rested on pendentives like those employed at Serbistan and at Firuzabad. The diameter of the hall was a little short of 60 feet. On either side of the triapsal hall, and in its rear, and again on either side of the court or hall on which it opened, were rooms of a smaller size, generally opening into each other, and arranged symmetrically, each side being the exact counterpart of the other. The number of these smaller apartments was twenty-five.

The other building, which lies towards the south, and is separated from the one just described by the whole length of the court-yard, a distance of nearly 200 feet, appears to have been for the most part of an inferior character. It comprised one large hall, or inner court, but otherwise contained only small apartments, which, it is thought, may have been "intended as guard-rooms for the soldiers." Although, however, in most respects so unpretending, this edifice was adorned externally with a richness and magnificence unparalleled in the other remains of Sassanian times, and scarcely exceeded in the architecture of any age or nation. Forming, as it did, the only entrance by which the palace could be approached, and possessing the only front which was presented to the gaze of the outer world, its ornamentation was clearly an object of Chosroes' special care, who seems to have lavished upon it all the known resources of art. The outer wall was built of finely-dressed hard stone; and on this excellent material the sculptors of the time--whether Persian or Byzantine, it is impossible to determine--proceeded to carve in the most elaborate way, first a bold pattern of zigzags and rosettes, and then, over the entire surface, a most delicate tracery of foliage, animals, and fruits. The effect of the zigzags is to divide the wall into a number of triangular compartments, each of which is treated separately, covered with a decoration peculiar to itself, a fretwork of the richest kind, in which animal and vegetable forms are most happily intermingled. In one a vase of an elegant shape stands midway in the triangle at its base; two doves are seated on it, back to back; from between them rises a vine, which spreads its luxuriant branches over the entire compartment, covering it with its graceful curves and abundant fruitage; on either side of the vase a lion and a wild boar confront the

doves with a friendly air; while everywhere amid the leaves and grapes we see the forms of birds, half revealed, half hidden by the foliage. Among the birds, peacocks, parrots, and partridges have been recognized; among the beasts, besides lions and wild boars, buffaloes, panthers, lynxes, and gazelles. In another panel a winged lion, the "lineal descendant of those found at Nineveh and Persepolis," reflects the mythological symbolism of Assyria, and shows how tenacious was its hold on the West-Asian mind. Nor is the human form wholly wanting. In one place we perceive a man's head, in close juxtaposition with man's inseparable companion, the dog; in another, the entire figure of a man, who carries a basket of fruit.

Besides the compartments within the zigzags, the zigzags themselves and the rosettes are ornamented with a patterning of large leaves, while the moulding below the zigzags and the cornice, or string-course, above them are covered with conventional designs, the interstices between them being filled in with very beautiful adaptations of lesser vegetable forms.

Altogether, the ornamentation of this magnificent facade may be pronounced almost unrivalled for beauty and appropriateness; and the entire palace may well be called "a marvellous example of the sumptuousness and selfishness of ancient princes," who expended on the gratification of their own taste and love of display the riches which would have been better employed in the defence of their kingdoms, or in the relief of their poorer subjects.

The exquisite ornamentation of the Mashita palace exceeds anything which is found elsewhere in the Sassanian buildings, but it is not wholly different in kind from that of other remains of their architecture in Media and Persia Proper. The archivolte which adorns the arch of Takht-i-Bostan possesses almost equal delicacy with the patterned cornice or string-course of the Mashita building; and its flowered panels may compare for beauty with the Mashita triangular compartments. Sassanian capitals are also in many instances of lovely design, sometimes delicately diapered (A, B), sometimes worked with a pattern of conventional leaves and flowers , occasionally exhibiting the human form (D, E), or a flowery patterning, like that of the Takht-i-Bostan (F, Q). In the more elaborate specimens, the four faces--for the capitals are square--present designs completely different; in other instances, two of the four faces are alike, but on the other two the design is varied. The shafts of Sassanian columns, so far as we can judge, appear to have been fluted.

A work not exactly architectural, yet possessing architectural features--the well-known arch of Chosroes II. above alluded to--seems to deserve description before we pass to another branch of our subject. This is an archway or grotto cut in the rock at Takht-i-Bostan, near Kerman-shah, which is extremely curious and interesting. On the brink of a pool of clear water, the sloping face of the rock has been cut into, and a recess formed, presenting at its further end a perpendicular face. This face, which is about 34 feet broad, by 31 feet high, and which is ornamented at the top by some rather rude gradines, has been penetrated by an arch, cut into the solid stone to the depth of above 20 feet, and elaborately ornamented, both within and without. Externally, the arch is in the first place surmounted by the archivolte already spoken of, and then, in the spandrels on either side are introduced flying figures of angels or Victories, holding chaplets in one hand and cups or vases in the other, which are little inferior to the best Roman art. Between the figures is a crescent, perhaps originally enclosing a ball, and thus presenting to the spectator, at the culminating point of the whole sculpture, the familiar emblems of two of the national divinities. Below the spandrels and archivolte, on either side of the arched entrance, are the flowered panels above-mentioned, alike in most respects, but varying

in some of their details. Within the recess, its two sides, and its further end, are decorated with bas-reliefs, those on the sides representing Chosroes engaged in the chase of the wild boar and the stag, while those at the end, which are in two lines, one over the other, show the monarch, above, in his robes of state, receiving wreaths from ideal beings; below, in his war costume, mounted upon his favorite charger, Sheb-Diz, with his spear poised in his hand, awaiting the approach of the enemy. The modern critic regards this figure as "original and interesting." We shall have occasion to recur to it when we treat of the "Manners and Customs" of the Neo-Persian people.

The glyptic art of the Sassanian is seen chiefly in their bas-reliefs; but one figure "in the round" has come down to us from their times, which seems to deserve particular description. This is a colossal statue of Sapor I., hewn (it would seem) out of the natural rock, which still exists, though overthrown and mutilated, in a natural grotto near the ruined city of Shapur. The original height of the figure, according to M. Texier, was 6 metres 7 centimetres, or between 19 and. 20 feet. It was well proportioned, and carefully wrought, representing the monarch in peaceful attire, but with a long sword at his left side, wearing the mural crown which characterizes him on the bas-reliefs, and dressed in a tunic and trousers of a light and flexible material, apparently either silk or muslin. The hair, beard, and mustachios, were neatly arranged and well rendered. The attitude of the figure was natural and good. One hand, the right, rested upon the hip; the other touched, but without grasping it, the hilt of the long straight sword. If we may trust the representation of M. Texier's artist, the folds of the drapery were represented with much skill and delicacy; but the hands and feet of the figure, especially the latter, were somewhat roughly rendered.

The bas-reliefs of the Sassanians are extremely numerous, and though generally rude, and sometimes even grotesque, are not without a certain amount of merit. Some of the earlier and coarser specimens have been already given in this volume; and one more of the same class is here appended but we have now to notice some other and better examples, which seem to indicate that the Persians of this period attained a considerable proficiency in this branch of the glyptic art. The reliefs belonging to the time of Sapor I. are generally poor in conception and ill-executed; but in one instance, unless the modern artist has greatly flattered his original, a work of this time is not devoid of some artistic excellence. This is a representation of the triumph of Sapor over Valerian, comprising only four figures--Sapor, an attendant, and two Romans--of which the three principal are boldly drawn, in attitudes natural, yet effective, and in good proportion. The horse on which Sapor rides is of the usual clumsy description, reminding us of those which draw our brewers' wains; and the exaggerated hair, floating ribbons and uncouth head-dress of the monarch give an _outre_ and ridiculous air to the chief figure; but, if we deduct these defects, which are common to almost all the Sassanian artists, the representation becomes pleasing and dignified. Sapor sits his horse well, and thinks not of himself, but of what he is doing. Cyriades, who is somewhat too short, receives the diadem from his benefactor with a calm satisfaction. But the best figure is that of the captive emperor, who kneels on one knee, and, with outstretched arms, implores the mercy of the conqueror. The whole representation is colossal, the figures being at least three times the size of life; the execution seems to have been good; but the work has been considerably injured by the effects of time.

Another bas-relief of the age of Sapor I. is on too large a scale, and too complicated, to be represented here; but a description may be given of it, and a specimen subjoined, from which the reader may judge of its character. On a surface of rock at Shapur, carefully

smoothed and prepared for sculpture, the second Sassanian monarch appears in the centre of the tablet, mounted on horseback, and in his usual costume, with a dead Roman under his horse's feet, and holding another (Cyriades?), by the hand. In front of him, a third Roman, the representative of the defeated nation, makes submission; and then follow thirteen tribute-bearers, bringing rings of gold, shawls, bowls, and the like, and conducting also a horse and an elephant. Behind the monarch, on the same line, are thirteen mounted guardsmen. Directly above, and directly below the central group, the tablet is blank; but on either side the subject is continued, above in two lines, and below in one, the guardsmen towards the left amounting in all to fifty-six, and the tribute-bearers on the right to thirty-five. The whole tablet comprises ninety-five human and sixty-three animal figures, besides a Victory floating in the sky. The illustration is a representation of the extreme right-hand portion of the second line.

After the time of Sapor I. there is a manifest decline in Sassanian art. The reliefs of Varahran II. and Varahran III., of Narses and Sapor III., fall considerably below those of Sapor, son of Artaxerxes. It is not till we arrive at the time of Varahran IV. (A.D. 388-399) that we once more have works which possess real artistic merit. Indications have already appeared in an earlier chapter of this monarch's encouragement of artists, and of a kind of art really meriting the name. We saw that his gems were exquisitely cut, and embodied designs of first-rate excellence. It has now to be observed further, that among the bas-reliefs of the greatest merit which belong to Sassanian times, one at least must be ascribed to him; and that, this being so, there is considerable probability that two others of the same class belong also to his reign. The one which must undoubtedly be his, and which tends to fix the date of the other two, exists at Nakhsh-i-Kustam, near Persepolis, and has frequently been copied by travellers. It represents a mounted warrior, with the peculiar head-dress of Varahran IV., charging another at full speed, striking him with his spear, and bearing both horse and rider to the ground. A standard-bearer marches a little behind; and a dead warrior lies underneath Varahran's horse, which is clearing the obstacle in his bound. The spirit of the entire composition is admirable; and though the stone is in a state of advanced decay, travellers never fail to admire the vigor of the design and the life and movement which characterize it.

The other similar reliefs to which reference has been made exist, respectively, at Nakhsh-i-Eustam and at Firuzabad. The Nakhsh-i-Rustam tablet is almost a duplicate of the one above described and represented, differing from it mainly in the omission of the prostrate figure, in the forms of the head-dresses borne by the two cavaliers, and in the shape of the standard. It is also in better preservation than the other, and presents some additional details. The head-dress of the Sassanian warrior is very remarkable, being quite unlike any other known example. It consists of a cap, which spreads as it rises, and breaks into three points, terminating in large striped balls. His adversary wears a helmet crowned with a similar ball. The standard, which is in the form of a capital T, displays also five balls of the same sort, three rising from the cross-bar, and the other two hanging from it. Were it not for the head-dress of the principal figure, this sculpture might be confidently assigned to the monarch who set up the neighboring one. As it is, the point must be regarded as undecided, and the exact date of the relief as doubtful. It is, however, unlikely to be either much earlier, or much later, than the time of Varahran IV.

The third specimen of a Sassanian battle-scene exists at Firuzabad, in Persia Proper, and has been carefully rendered by M. Flandin. It is in exceedingly bad condition, but appears to have comprised the figures of either five or six horsemen, of whom the two principal are a warrior whose helmet

terminates in the head of a bird, and one who wears a crown, above which rises a cap, surmounted by a ball. The former of these, who is undoubtedly a Sassanian prince, pierces with his spear the right side of the latter, who is represented in the act of falling to the ground. His horse tumbles at the same time, though why he does so is not quite clear, since he has not been touched by the other charger. His attitude is extravagantly absurd, his hind feet being on a level with the head of his rider. Still more absurd seems to have been the attitude of a horse at the extreme right, which turns in falling, and exposes to the spectator the inside of the near thigh and the belly. But, notwithstanding these drawbacks, the representation has great merit. The figures live and breathe--that of the dying king expresses horror and helplessness, that of his pursuer determined purpose and manly strength. Even the very horses are alive, and manifestly rejoice in the strife. The entire work is full of movement, of variety, and of artistic spirit.

If we have regard to the highest qualities of glyptic art, Sassanian sculpture must be said here to culminate. There is a miserable falling off, when about a hundred and fifty years later the Great Chosroes (Anushirwan) represents himself at Shapur, seated on his throne, and fronting to the spectator, with guards and attendants on one side, and soldiers bringing in prisoners, human heads, and booty, on the other. The style here recalls that of the tamer reliefs set up by the first Sapor, but is less pleasing. Some of the prisoners appear to be well drawn; but the central figure, that of the monarch, is grotesque; the human heads are ghastly; and the soldiers and attendants have little merit. The animal forms are better--that of the elephant especially, though as compared with the men it is strangely out of proportion.

With Chosroes II. (Eberwiz or Parviz), the grandson of Anushirwan, who ascended the throne only twelve years after the death of his grandfather, and reigned from A.D. 591 to A.D. 628, a reaction set in. We have seen the splendor and good taste of his Mashita palace, the beauty of some of his coins, and the general excellence of his ornamentation. It remains to notice the character of his reliefs, found at present in one locality only, viz., at Takht-i-Bostan, where they constitute the main decorations of the great triumphal arch of this monarch.

These reliefs consist of two classes of works, colossal figures and hunting-pieces. The colossal figures, of which some account has been already give have but little merit. They are curious on account of their careful elaboration, and furnish important information with respect to Sassanian dress and armature, but they are poor in design, being heavy, awkward, and ungainly. Nothing can well be less beautiful than the three overstout personages, who stand with their heads nearly or quite touching the crown of the arch, at its further extremity, carefully drawn in detail, but in outline little short of hideous. The least bad is that to the left, whose drapery is tolerably well arranged, and whose face, judging by what remains of it, was not unpleasing. Of the other two it is impossible to say a word in commendation.

The mounted cavalier below them--Chosroes himself on his black war horse, Sheb-Diz--is somewhat better. The pose of horse and horseman has dignity; the general proportions are fairly correct, though (as usual) the horse is of a breed that recalls the modern dray-horse rather than the charger. The figure, being near the ground, has suffered much mutilation, probably at the hands of Moslem fanatics; the off hind leg of the horse is gone; his nose and mouth have disappeared; and the horseman has lost his right foot and a portion of his lower clothing. But nevertheless, the general effect is not altogether destroyed. Modern travellers admire the repose and dignity of the composition, its combination of simplicity with detail, and the delicacy and finish of some portions. It may be added that the relief

of the figure is high; the off legs of the horse were wholly detached; and the remainder of both horse and rider was nearly, though not quite, disengaged from the rock behind them.

The hunting-pieces, which ornament the interior of the arched recess on either side, are far superior to the colossal figures, and merit an exact description. On the right, the perpendicular space below the spring of the arch contains the representation of a stag hunt, in which the monarch and about a dozen other mounted horsemen take part, assisted by some ten or twelve footmen, and by a detachment mounted on elephants. The elephants, which are nine in number, occupy the extreme right of the tablet, and seem to be employed in driving the deer into certain prepared enclosures. Each of the beasts is guided by three riders, sitting along their backs, of whom the central one alone has the support of a saddle or howdah. The enclosures into which the elephants drive the game are three in number; they are surrounded by nets; and from the central one alone is there an exit. Through this exit, which is guarded by two footmen, the game passes into the central field, or main space of the sculpture, where the king awaits them. He is mounted on his steed, with his bow passed over his head, his sword at his side, and an attendant holding the royal parasol over him. It is not quite clear whether he himself does more than witness the chase. The game is in the main pursued and brought to the ground by horsemen without royal insignia, and is then passed over into a further compartment--the extreme one towards the left, where it is properly arranged and placed upon camels for conveyance to the royal palace. During the whole proceeding a band of twenty-six musicians, some of whom occupy an elevated platform, delights with a "concord of sweet sounds" the assembled sportsmen.

On the opposite, or left-hand, side of the recess, is represented a boar-hunt. Here again, elephants, twelve in number, drive the game into an enclosure without exit. Within this space nearly a hundred boars and pigs may be counted. The ground being marshy, the monarch occupies a boat in the centre, and from this transfixes the game with his arrows. No one else takes part in the sport, unless it be the riders on a troop of five elephants, represented in the lower middle portion of the tablet. When the pigs fall, they are carried into a second enclosure, that on the right, where they are upturned, disembowelled, and placed across the backs of elephants, which convey them to the abode of the monarch. Once more, the scene is enlivened by music. Two bands of harpers occupy boats on either side of that which carries the king, while another harper sits with him in the boat from which he delivers his arrows. In the water about the boats are seen reeds, ducks, and numerous fishes. The oars by which the boats are propelled have a singular resemblance to those which are represented in some of the earliest Assyrian sculptures. Two other features must also be noticed. Near the top of the tablet, towards the left, five figures standing in a boat seem to be clapping their hands in order to drive the pigs towards the monarch; while in the right centre of the picture there is another boat, more highly ornamented than the rest, in which we seem to have a second representation of the king, differing from the first only in the fact that his arrow has flown, and that he is in the act of taking another arrow from an attendant In this second representation the king's head is surrounded by a nimbus or "glory." Altogether there are in this tablet more than seventy-five human and nearly 150 animal forms. In the other, the human forms are about seventy, and the animal ones about a hundred.

The merit of the two reliefs above described, which would require to be engraved on a large scale, in order that justice should be done to them, consists in the spirit and truth of the animal forms, elephants, camels, stags, boars, horses, and in the life and movement of the whole picture. The rush of the pigs, the bounds of the stags and hinds, the heavy

march of the elephants, the ungainly movements of the camels, are well portrayed; and in one instance, the foreshortening of a horse, advancing diagonally, is respectably rendered. In general, Sassanian sculpture, like most delineative art in its infancy, affects merely the profile; but here, and in the overturned horse already described, and again in the Victories which ornament the spandrels of the arch of Chosroes, the mere profile is departed from with good effect, and a power is shown of drawing human and animal figures in front or at an angle. What is wanting in the entire Sassanian series is idealism, or the notion of elevating the representation in any respects above the object represented; the highest aim of the artist is to be true to nature; in this truthfulness is his triumph; but as he often falls short of his models, his whole result, even at the best, is unsatisfactory and disappointing.

Such must almost necessarily be the sentence of art critics, who judge the productions of this age and nation according to the abstract rules, or the accepted standards, of artistic effort. But if circumstances of time and country are taken into account, if comparison is limited to earlier and later attempts in the same region, or even in neighboring ones, a very much more favorable judgment will be passed. The Saseanian reliefs need not on the whole shrink from a comparison with those of the Achaemenian Persians. If they are ruder and more grotesque, they are also more spirited and more varied; and thus, though they fall short in some respects, still they must be pronounced superior to the Achaemenian in some of the most important artistic qualities. Nor do they fall greatly behind the earlier, and in many respects admirable, art of the Assyrians. They are less numerous and cover a lees variety of subjects; they have less delicacy; but they have equal or greater fire. In the judgment of a traveller not given to extravagant praise, they are, in some cases at any rate, "executed in the most masterly style." "I never saw," observes Sir R. Kerr Porter, "the elephant, the stag, or the boar portrayed with greater truth and spirit. The attempts at detailed human form are," he adds, "far inferior."

Before, however, we assign to the Sassanian monarchs, and to the people whom they governed, the merit of having produced results so worthy of admiration, it becomes necessary to inquire whether there is reason to believe that other than native artists wore employed in their production. It has been very confidently stated that Chosroes the Second "brought Roman artists" to Takht-i-Bostan, and by their aid eclipsed the glories of his great predecessors, Artaxerxes, son of Babek, and the two Sapors. Byzantine forms are declared to have been reproduced in the moldings of the Great Arch, and in the Victories. The lovely tracery of the Mashita Palace is regarded as in the main the work of Greeks and Syrians.06 No doubt it is quite possible that there may be some truth in these allegations; but we must not forget, or let it be forgotten, that they rest on conjecture and are without historical foundation. The works of the first Chosroes at Ctesiphon, according to a respectable Greek writer, were produced for him by foreign artists, sent to his court by Justinian. But no such statement is made with respect to his grandson. On the contrary, it is declared by the native writers that a certain Ferhad, a Persian, was the chief designer of them; and modern critics admit that his hand may perhaps be traced, not only at Takht-i-Bostan, but at the Mashita Palace also. If then the merit of the design is conceded to a native artist, we need not too curiously inquire the nationality of the workmen employed by him.

At the worst, should it be thought that Byzantine influence appears so plainly in the later Sassanian works, that Rome rather than Persia must be credited with the buildings and sculptures of both the first and the second Chosroes, still it will have to be allowed that the earlier palaces--those at Ser-bistan and Firuzabad--and the spirited battle-

scenes above described, are wholly native; since they present no trace of any foreign element. But, it is in these battle-scenes, as already noticed, that the delineative art of the Sassanians culminates; and it may further be questioned whether the Firuzabad palace is not the finest specimen of their architecture, severe though it be in the character of its ornamentation; so that, even should we surrender the whole of the later works enough will still remain to show that the Sassanians, and the Persians of their day, had merit as artists and builders, a merit the more creditable to them inasmuch as for five centuries they had had no opportunity of cultivating their powers, having been crushed by the domination of a race singularly devoid of artistic aspirations. Even with regard to the works for which they may have been indebted to foreigners, it is to be remembered that, unless the monarchs had appreciated high art, and admired it, they would not have hired, at great expense, the services of these aliens. For my own part, I see no reason to doubt that the Sassanian remains of every period are predominantly, if not exclusively, native, not excepting those of the first Chosroes, for I mistrust the statement of Theophylact.

28. Religion, Manners, Customs of the Later Persians

The general character of the Persian religion, as revived by the founder of the Sassanian dynasty, has been described in a former chapter; but it is felt that the present work would be incomplete if it failed to furnish the reader with a tolerably full account of so interesting a matter; more especially, since the religious question lay at the root of the original rebellion and revolution which raised the Sassanidae to power, and was to a considerable extent the basis and foundation of their authority. An access of religious fervor gave the Persians of the third century after Christ the strength which enabled them to throw off the yoke of their Parthian lords and recover the sceptre of Western Asia. A strong--almost fanatical--religious spirit animated the greater number of the Sassanian monarchs. When the end of the kingdom came, the old faith was still flourishing; and, though its star paled before that of Mohammedanism, the faith itself survived, and still survives at the present day.

It has been observed that Dualism constituted the most noticeable feature of the religion. It may now be added that the Dualism professed was of the most extreme and pronounced kind. Ormazd and Ahriman, the principles of Good and Evil, were expressly declared to be "twins." They had "in the beginning come together to create Life and Death, and to settle how the world was to be." There was no priority of existence of the one over the other, and no decided superiority. The two, being coeval, had contended from all eternity, and would, it was almost certain, continue to contend to all eternity, neither being able to vanquish the other. Thus an eternal struggle was postulated between good and evil; and the issue was doubtful, neither side possessing any clear and manifest advantage.

The two principles were Persons. Ormazd was "the creator of life, the earthly and the spiritual," he who "made the celestial bodies, earth, water, and trees." He was "good," "holy," "pure," "true," "the Holy God," "the Holiest," "the Essence of Truth," "the father of all truth," "the being best of all," "the master of purity." He was supremely "happy," being possessed of every blessing, "health, wealth, virtue, wisdom, immortality." From him came every good gift enjoyed by man; on the pious and the righteous he bestowed, not only earthly advantages, but precious spiritual gifts, truth, devotion, "the good mind," and everlasting happiness; and, as he rewarded the good, so he also punished the bad, though this was an aspect in which he was but seldom represented.

While Ormazd, thus far, would seem to be a presentation of the Supreme Being in a form not greatly different from that wherein it has

pleased him to reveal Himself to mankind through the Jewish and Christian scriptures, there are certain points of deficiency in the representation, which are rightly viewed as placing the Persian very considerably below the Jewish and Christian idea. Besides the limitation on the power and freedom of Ormazd implied in the eternal co-existence with him of another and a hostile principle, he is also limited by the independent existence of space, time, and light, which appear in the Zenda vesta as "self-created," or "without beginning," and must therefore be regarded as "conditioning" the Supreme Being, who has to work, as best he may, under circumstances not caused by himself. Again, Ormazd is not a purely spiritual being. He is conceived of as possessing a sort of physical nature. The "light," which is one of his properties, seems to be a material radiance. He can be spoken of as possessing health. The whole conception of him, though not grossly material, is far from being wholly immaterial. His nature is complex, not simple. He may not have a body, in the ordinary sense of the word; but he is entangled with material accidents, and is far from answering to the pure spirit, "without body, parts, or passions," which forms the Christian conception of the Deity.

Ahriman, the Evil Principle, is of course far more powerful and terrible than the Christian and Jewish Satan. He is uncaused, co-eternal with Ormazd, engaged in a perpetual warfare with him. Whatever good thing Ormazd creates, Ahriman corrupts and ruins it. Moral and physical evils are alike at his disposal. He blasts the earth with barrenness, or makes it produce thorns, thistles, and poisonous plants; his are the earthquake, the storm, the plague of hail, the thunderbolt; he causes disease and death, sweeps off a nation's flocks and herds by murrain, or depopulates a continent by pestilence; ferocious wild beasts, serpents, toads, mice, hornets, mosquitoes, are his creation; he invented and introduced into the world the sins of witchcraft, murder, unbelief, cannibalism, sodomy; he excites wars and tumults, stirs up the bad against the good, and labors by every possible expedient to make vice triumph over virtue. Ormazd can exercise no control over him; the utmost that he can do is to keep a perpetual watch on his rival, and seek to baffle and defeat him. This he is not always able to do. Despite his best endeavors, Ahriman is not unfrequently victorious.

In the purer times of the Zoroastrian religion it would seem that neither Ormazd nor Ahriman was represented by sculptured forms. A symbolism alone was permitted, which none could mistake for a real attempt to portray these august beings. But by the date of the Sassanian revival, the original spirit of the religion had suffered considerable modification; and it was no longer thought impious, or perilous, to exhibit the heads of the Pantheon, in the forms regarded as appropriate to them, upon public monuments. The great Artaxerxes, probably soon after his accession, set up a memorial of his exploits, in which he represented himself as receiving the insignia of royalty from Ormazd himself, while Ahriman, prostrate and seemingly, though of course not really, dead, lay at the feet of the steed on which Ormazd was mounted. In the form of Ormazd there is nothing very remarkable; he is attired like the king, has a long beard and flowing locks, and carries in his left hand a huge staff or baton, which he holds erect in a slanting position. The figure of Ahriman possesses more interest. The face wears an expression of pain and suffering; but the features are calm, and in no way disturbed. They are regular, and at least as handsome as those of Artaxerxes and his divine patron. He wears a band or diadem across the brow, above which we see a low cap or crown. From this escape the heads and necks of a number of vipers or snakes, fit emblems of the poisonous and "death-dealing" Evil One.

Some further representations of Ormazd occur in the Sassanian sculptures; but Ahriman seems not to be portrayed elsewhere. Ormazd appears on foot in a relief

of the Great Arta-xerxes, which contains two figures only, those of himself and his divine patron. He is also to be seen in a sculpture which belongs probably to Sapor I., and represents that monarch in the act of receiving the diadem from Artaxerxes, his father. In the former of these two tablets the type exhibited in the bas-relief just described is followed without any variation; in the latter, the type is considerably modified. Ormazd still carries his huge baton, and is attired in royal fashion; but otherwise his appearance is altogether new and singular. His head bears no crown, but is surrounded by a halo of streaming rays; he has not much beard, but his hair, bushy and abundant, flows down on his two shoulders; he faces the spectator, and holds his baton in both his hands; finally, he stands upon a blossom, which is thought to be that of a sim-flower. Perhaps the conjecture is allowable that here we have Ormazd exhibited to us in a solar character, with the attributes of Mithra, from whom, in the olden time, he was carefully distinguished.

Ormazd seems to have been regarded by the kings as their special guardian and protector. No other deity (unless in one instance) is brought into close proximity with them; no other obtains mention in their inscriptions; from no other do they allow that they receive the blessing of offspring. Whatever the religion of the common people, that of the kings would seem to have been, in the main, the worship of this god, whom they perhaps sometimes confused with Mithra, or associated with Anaitis, but whom they never neglected, or failed openly to acknowledge.

Under the great Ormazd were a number of subordinate deities, the principal of whom were Mithra and Serosh, Mithra, the Sun-God, had been from a very early date an object of adoration in Persia, only second to Ormazd. The Achaemenian kings joined him occasionally with Ormazd in their invocations. In processions his chariot, drawn by milk-white horses, followed closely on that of Ormazd. He was often associated with Ormazd, as if an equal, though a real equality was probably not intended. He was "great," "pure," "imperishable," "the beneficent protector of all creatures," and "the beneficent preserver of all creatures." He had a thousand ears and ten thousand eyes. His worship was probably more widely extended than that of Ormazd himself, and was connected in general with a material representation.

In the early times this was a simple disk, or circle; but from the reign of Artaxerxes Mnemon, a human image seems to have been substituted. Prayer was offered to Mithra three times a day, at dawn, at noon, and at sunset; and it was usual to worship him with sacrifice. The horse appears to have been the victim which he was supposed to prefer.

Sraosha, or Serosh, was an angel of great power and dignity. He was the special messenger of Ormazd, and the head of his celestial army. He was "tall, well-formed, beautiful, swift, victorious, happy, sincere, true, the master of truth." It was his office to deliver revelations, to show men the paths of happiness, and to bring them the blessings which Ormazd had assigned to each. He invented the music for the five most ancient Gathas, discovered the barsom or divining-rod, and first taught its use to mankind. From his palace on the highest summit of the Elburz range, he watched the proceedings of the evil genii, and guarded the world from their attempts. The Iranians were his special care; but he lost no opportunity of injuring the Powers of Darkness, and lessening their dominion by teaching everywhere the true religion. In the other world it was his business to conduct the souls of the faithful through the dangers of the middle passage, and to bring them before the golden throne of Ormazd.

Among minor angelic powers were Vayu, "the wind," who is found also in the Vedic system; Airyanam, a god presiding over marriages; Vitraha, a good genius; Tistrya, the Dog Star,

etc. The number of the minor deities was not, however, great; nor do they seem, as in so many other polytheistic religions, to have advanced in course of time from a subordinate to a leading position. From first to last they are of small account; and it seems, therefore, unnecessary to detain the reader by an elaborate description of them.

From the mass, however, of the lower deities or genii must be distinguished (besides Mithra and Serosh) the six Amesha Spentas, or Amshashpands, who formed the council of Ormazd, and in a certain sense reflected his glory. These were Vohu-mano or Bahman, Ashavahista or Ardibehesht, Khsha-thra-vairya or Shahravar, Spenta-Armaiti or Isfandarmat, Haurvatat or Khordad, and Ameretat or Amerdat. Vohu-mano, "the Good Mind," originally a mere attribute of Ormazd, came to be considered a distinct being, created by him to be his attendant and his councillor. He was, as it were, the Grand Vizier of the Almighty King, the chief of the heavenly conclave. Ormazd entrusted to him especially the care of animal life; and thus, as presiding over cattle, he is the patron deity of the agriculturist. Asha-vahista, "the best truth," or "the best purity," is the Light of the universe, subtle, pervading, omnipresent. He maintains the splendor of the various luminaries, and presides over the element of fire. Khsha-thra-vairya, "wealth," has the goods of this world at his disposal, and specially presides over metals, the conventional signs of wealth; he is sometimes identified with the metal which he dispenses. Spenta-Armaiti, "Holy Armaiti," is at once the genius of the Earth, and the goddess of piety. She has the charge of "the good creation," watches over it, and labors to convert the desolate and unproductive portions of it into fruitful fields and gardens. Together with Vohu-mano, she protects the agriculturist, blessing his land with increase, as Vohu-mano does his cattle. She is called "the daughter of Ormazd," and is regarded as the agent through whom Ormazd created the earth. Moreover, "she tells men the everlasting laws, which no one may abolish," or, in other words, imparts to them the eternal principles of morality. She is sometimes represented as standing next to Ormazd in the mythology, as in the profession of faith required of converts to Zoroastrianism. The two remaining Amshashpands, Haurvatat and Ameretat, "Health" and "Immortality," have the charge of the vegetable creation; Haurvatat causes the flow of water, so necessary to the support of vegetable life in countries where little rain falls; Ameretat protects orchards and gardens, and enables trees to bring their fruits to perfection.

Another deity, practically perhaps as much worshipped as Ormazd and Mithra, was Anaitis or Anahit. Anaiitis was originally an Assyrian and Babylonian, not a Zoroastrian goddess; but her worship spread to the Persians at a date anterior to Herodotus, and became in a short time exceedingly popular. It was in connection with this worship that idolatry seems first to have crept in, Artaxerxes Mnemon (ab. B.C. 400) having introduced images of Anaitis into Persia, and set them up at Susa, the capital, at Persepolis, Ecbatana, Bactra, Babylon, Damascus, and Sardis. Anaitis was the Babylonian Venus; and her rites at Babylon were undoubtedly of a revolting character. It is to be feared that they were introduced in all their grossness into Persia, and that this was the cause of Anahitis great popularity. Her cult "was provided with priests and hieroduli, and connected with mysteries, feasts, and unchaste ways."

The Persian system was further tainted with idolatry in respect of the worship of Mithra, and possibly of Vohu-mano (Batman), and of Amerdat; but on the whole, and especially as compared with other Oriental cults, the religion, even of the later Zoroastrians, must be regarded as retaining a non-materialistic and anti-idolatrous character, which elevated it above other neighboring religions, above Brahminism on the one hand and Syro-Chaldaean nature-worship on the other.

In the kingdom of Darkness, the principal powers, besides Ahriman, were Ako-mano, Indra, Qaurva, Naonhaitya, Taric, and Zaric. These six together formed the Council of the Evil One, as the six Amshashpands formed the council of Ormazd. Ako-mano, "the bad mind," or (literally) "the naught mind," was set over against Vohu-mano, "the good mind," and was Ahriman's Grand Vizier. His special sphere was the mind of man, where he suggested evil thoughts, and prompted to bad words and wicked deeds. Indra, identical with the Vedic deity, but made a demon by the Zoroastrians, presided over storm and tempest, and governed the issues of war and battle. Qaurva and Naonhaitya were also Vedic deities turned into devils. It is difficult to assign them any distinct sphere. Taric and Zaric, "Darkness" and "Poison," had no doubt occupations corresponding with their names. Besides these chief demons, a countless host of evil genii (_divs_) and fairies (_pairicas_) awaited the orders and executed the behests of Ahriman.

Placed between the two contending worlds of good and evil, man's position was one of extreme danger and difficulty. Originally set upon the earth by Ormazd in order to maintain the good creation, he was liable to the continual temptations and seductions of the divs or devas, who were "wicked, bad, false, untrue, the originators of mischief, most baneful, destructive, the basest of all things." A single act of sin gave them a hold upon him, and each subsequent act increased their power, until ultimately he became their mere tool and slave. It was however possible to resist temptation, to cling to the side of right, to defy and overcome the deltas. Man might maintain his uprightness, walk in the path of duty, and by the help of the asuras, or "good spirits," attain to a blissful paradise.

To arrive at this result, man had carefully to observe three principal duties. These were worship, agriculture, and purity. Worship consisted in the acknowledgment of the One True God, Ormazd, and of his Holy Angels, the Amesha Spentas or Amshashpands, in the frequent offering of prayers, praises, and thanksgivings, in the recitation of set hymns, the performance of a certain ceremony called the Homa, and in the occasional sacrifice of animals. The set hymns form a large portion of the Zendavesta, where they occur in the shape of Gathas, or Yashts, sometimes possessing considerable beauty. They are sometimes general, addressed to Ormazd and the Amesha Spentas in common, sometimes special, containing the praises of a particular deity. The Homa ceremony consisted in the extraction of the juice of the Homa plant by the priests during the recitation of prayers, the formal presentation of the liquor extracted to the sacrificial fire, the consumption of a small portion of it by one of the officiating priests, and the division of the remainder among the worshippers. As the juice was drunk immediately after extraction and before fermentation had set in, it was not intoxicating. The ceremony seems to have been regarded, in part, as having a mystic force, securing the favor of heaven; in part, as exerting a beneficial effect upon the body of the worshipper through the curative power inherent in the Homa plant. The animals which might be sacrificed were the horse, the ox, the sheep, and the goat, the horse being the favorite victim. A priest always performed the sacrifice, slaying the animal, and showing the flesh to the sacred fire by way of consecration, after which it was eaten at a solemn feast by the priest and people.

It is one of the chief peculiarities of Zoroastrianism that it regarded agriculture as a religious duty. Man had been placed upon the earth especially "to maintain the good creation," and resist the endeavors of Ahriman to injure, and if possible, ruin it. This could only be done by careful tilling of the soil, eradication of thorns and weeds, and reclamation of the tracts over which Ahriman had spread the curse of barrenness. To cultivate the soil was thus incumbent upon all men; the whole community was required to be agricultural; and either as proprietor, as

farmer, or as laboring man, each Zoroastrian was bound to "further the works of life" by advancing tillage.

The purity which was required of the Zoroastrian was of two kinds, moral and legal, Moral purity comprised all that Christianity includes under it--truth, justice, chastity, and general sinlessness. It was coextensive with the whole sphere of human activity, embracing not only words and acts, but even the secret thoughts of the heart. Legal purity was to be obtained only by the observance of a multitude of trifling ceremonies and the abstinence from ten thousand acts in their nature wholly indifferent. Especially, everything was to be avoided which could be thought to pollute the four elements--all of them sacred to the Zoroastrian of Sassanian times--fire, water, earth, and air.

Man's struggle after holiness and purity was sustained in the Zoroastrian system by the confident hope of a futurity of happiness. It was taught that the soul of man was immortal, and would continue to possess for ever a separate conscious existence. Immediately after death the spirits of both good and bad had to proceed along an appointed path to "the bridge of the gatherer" (_chinvat peretu_). This was a narrow road conducting to heaven or paradise, over which the souls of the pious alone could pass, while the wicked fell from it into the gulf below, where they found themselves in the place of punishment. The steps of the good were guided and supported by the angel Serosh--the "happy, well-formed, swift, tall Serosh"--who conducted them across the difficult passage into the heavenly region. There Bahman, rising from his throne, greeted them on their entrance with the salutation, "Happy thou who art come here to us from the mortality to the immortality!" Then they proceeded joyfully onward to the presence of Ormazd, to the immortal saints, to the golden throne, to paradise. As for the wicked, when they fell into the gulf, they found themselves in outer darkness, in the kingdom of Ahriman, where they were forced to remain and to feed on poisoned banquets.

The priests of the Zoroastrians, from a time not long subsequent to Darius Hystaspis, were the Magi. This tribe, or caste, originally perhaps external to Zoroastrianism, had come to be recognized as a true priestly order; and was intrusted by the Sassanian princes with the whole control and direction of the religion of the state. Its chief was a personage holding a rank but very little inferior to the king. He bore the title of Tenpet, "Head of the Religion," or _Movpetan Movpet_, "Head of the Chief Magi." In times of difficulty and danger he was sometimes called upon to conduct a revolution; and in the ordinary course of things he was always reckoned among the monarch's chief counsellors. Next in rank to him were a number of _Movpets_, or "Chief Magi," called also _destoors_ or "rulers," who scarcely perhaps constituted an order, but still held an exalted position. Under these were, finally, a large body of ordinary Magi, dispersed throughout the empire, but especially congregated in the chief towns.

The Magi officiated in a peculiar dress. This consisted of a tall peaked cap of felt or some similar material, having deep lappets at the side, which concealed the jaw and even the lips, and a long white robe, or cloak, descending to the ankles. They assembled often in large numbers, and marched in stately processions, impressing the multitude by a grand and striking ceremonial. Besides the offerings which were lavished upon them by the faithful, they possessed considerable endowments in land, which furnished them with an assured subsistence. They were allowed by Chosroes the First a certain administrative power in civil matters; the collection of the revenue was to take place under their supervision; they were empowered to interfere in cases of oppression, and protect the subject against the tax-gatherer.

The Zoroastrian worship was intimately connected with fire-temples and fire-altars. A

fire-temple was maintained in every important city throughout the empire; and in these a sacred flame, believed to have been lighted from heaven, was kept up perpetually, by the care of the priests, and was spoken of as "unextinguishable." Fire-altars probably also existed, independently of temples; and an erection of this kind maintained from first to last an honorable position on the Sassanian coins, being the main impress upon the reverse. It was represented with the flame rising from it, and sometimes with a head in the flame; its stem was ornamented with garlands or fillets; and on either side, as protectors or as worshippers, were represented two figures, sometimes watching the flame, sometimes turned from it, guarding it apparently from external enemies.

Besides the sacerdotal, the Magi claimed to exercise the prophetical office. From a very early date they had made themselves conspicuous as omen-readers and dream-expounders; but, not content with such occasional exhibitions of prophetic power, they ultimately reduced divination to a system, and, by the help of the barsom or bundle of divining rods, undertook to return a true answer on all points connected with the future, upon which they might be consulted. Credulity is never wanting among Orientals; and the power of the priesthood was no doubt greatly increased by a pretension which was easily made, readily believed, and not generally discredited by failures, however numerous.

The Magian priest was commonly seen with the barsom in his hand; but occasionally he exchanged that instrument for another, known as the _khrafgihraghna_. It was among the duties of the pious Zoroastrian, and more especially of those who were entrusted with the priestly office, to wage perpetual war with Ahriman, and to destroy his works whenever opportunity offered. Now among these, constituting a portion of "the bad creation," were all such animals as frogs, toads, snakes, newts, mice, lizards, flies, and the like. The Magi took every opportunity of killing such creatures; and the _Jchrafgthraghna_ was an implement which they invented for the sake of carrying out this pious purpose.

The court of the Sassanian kings, especially in the later period of the empire, was arranged upon a scale of almost unexampled grandeur and magnificence. The robes worn by the Great King were beautifully embroidered, and covered with gems and pearls, which in some representations may be counted by hundreds. The royal crown, which could not be worn, but was hung from the ceiling by a gold chain exactly over the head of the king when he took his seat in his throne-room, is said to have been adorned with a thousand pearls, each as large as an egg. The throne itself was of gold, and was supported on four feet, each formed of a single enormous ruby. The great throne-room was ornamented with enormous columns of silver, between which were hangings of rich silk or brocade. The vaulted roof presented to the eye representations of the heavenly bodies, the sun, the moon, and the stars;no while globes, probably of crystal, or of burnished metal, hung suspended from it at various heights, lighting up the dark space as with a thousand lustres.

The state observed at the court resembled that of the most formal and stately of the Oriental monarchies. The courtiers were organized in seven ranks. Foremost came the Ministers of the crown; next the Mobeds, or chief Magi; after them, the hirbeds, or judges; then the sipehbeds, or commanders-in chief, of whom there were commonly four; last of all the singers, musicians, and men of science, arranged in three orders. The king sat apart even from the highest nobles, who, unless summoned, might not approach nearer than thirty feet from him.

A low curtain separated him from them, which was under the charge of an officer, who drew it for those only with whom the king had expressed a desire to converse.

An important part of the palace was the seraglio. The polygamy practised by the

Sassanian princes was on the largest scale that has ever been heard of, Chosroes II. having maintained, we are told, three thousand concubines. The modest requirements of so many secondary wives necessitated the lodging and sustenance of twelve thousand additional females, chiefly slaves, whose office was to attend on these royal favorites, attire them, and obey their behests. Eunuchs are not mentioned as employed to any large extent; but in the sculptures of the early princes they seem to be represented as holding offices of importance, and the analogy of Oriental courts does not allow us to doubt that the seraglio was, to some extent at any rate, under their superintendence. Each Sassanian monarch had one sultana or principal wife, who was generally a princess by birth, but might legally be of any origin. In one or two instances the monarch sets the effigy of his principal wife upon his coins; but this is unusual, and when, towards the close of the empire, females were allowed to ascend the throne, it is thought that they refrained from parading themselves in this way, and stamped their coins with the head of a male.

In attendance upon the monarch were usually his parasol-bearer, his fan-bearer, who appears to have been a eunuch, the _Senelcapan,_ or "Lord Chamberlain," the _Maypet_, or "Chief Butler," the Andertzapet, or "Master of the Wardrobe," the _Alchorapet_, or "Master of the Horse," the _Taharhapet_ or "Chief Cupbearer," the _Shahpan_, or "Chief Falconer," and the __Krhogpet, or "Master of the Workmen." Except the parasol-bearer and fan-bearer, these officials all presided over departments, and had under them a numerous body of subordinates. If the royal stables contained even 8000 horses, which one monarch is said to have kept for his own riding, the grooms and stable-boys must have been counted by hundreds; and an equal or greater number of attendants must have been required for the camels and elephants, which are estimated m respectively at 1200 and 12,000. The "workmen" were also probably a corps of considerable size, continually engaged in repairs or in temporary or permanent erections.

Other great officials, corresponding more nearly to the "Ministers" of a modern sovereign, were the _Vzourkhramanatar_, or "Grand Keeper of the Royal Orders," who held the post now known as that of _Grand Vizier_; the _Dprapet Ariats_, or "Chief of the Scribes of Iran," a sort of Chancellor; the _Hazarapet dran Ariats_, or "Chiliarch of the Gate of Iran," a principal Minister; the _Hamarakar_, a "Chief Cashier" or "Paymaster;" and the _Khohrdean dpir_, or "Secretary of Council," a sort of Privy Council clerk or registrar. The native names of these officers are known to us chiefly through the Armenian writers of the fifth and seventh centuries.

The Sassanian court, though generally held at Ctesiphon, migrated to other cities, if the king so pleased, and is found established, at one time in the old Persian capital, Persepolis, at another in the comparatively modern city of Dastaghord. The monarchs maintained from first to last numerous palaces, which they visited at their pleasure and made their residence for a longer or a shorter period. Four such palaces have been already described; and there is reason to believe that many others existed in various parts of the empire. There was certainly one of great magnificence at Canzaca; and several are mentioned as occupied by Heraclius in the country between the Lower Zab and Ctesiphon. Chosroes II. undoubtedly built one near Takht-i-Bostan; and Sapor the First must have had one at Shapur, where he set up the greater portion of his monuments. The discovery of the Mashita palace, in a position so little inviting as the land of Moab, seems to imply a very general establishment of royal residences in the remote provinces of the empire.

The costume of the later Persians is known to us chiefly from the representations of the kings, on whose figures alone have the native

artists bestowed much attention. In peace, the monarch seems to have worn a sort of pelisse or long coat, partially open in front, and with close-fitting sleeves reaching to the wrist, under which he had a pair of loose trousers descending to the feet and sometimes even covering them. A belt or girdle encircled his waist. His feet were encased in patterned shoes, tied with long flowing ribbons. Over his pelisse he wore occasionally a long cape or short cloak, which was fastened with a brooch or strings across the breast and flowed over the back and shoulders. The material composing the cloak was in general exceedingly light and flimsy. The head-dress commonly worn seems to have been a round cap, which was perhaps ornamented with jewels. The vest and trousers were also in some cases richly jewelled. Every king wore ear-rings, with one, two, or three pendants. A collar or necklace was also commonly worn round the neck; and this had sometimes two or more pendants in front. Occasionally the beard was brought to a point and had a jewel hanging from it. The hair seems always to have been worn long; it was elaborately curled, and hung down on either shoulder in numerous ringlets. When the monarch rode out in state, an attendant held the royal parasol over him.

In war the monarch encased the upper part of his person in a coat of mail, composed of scales or links. Over this he wore three belts; the first, which crossed the breast diagonally, was probably attached to his shield, which might be hung from it; the second supported his sword; and the third his quiver, and perhaps his bow-case. A stiff, embroidered trouser of great fulness protected the leg, while the head was guarded by a helmet, and a vizor of chain mail hid all the face but the eyes. The head and fore-quarters of the royal charger were also covered with armor, which descended below the animal's knees in front, but was not carried back behind the rider. The monarch's shield was round, and carried on the left arm; his main offensive weapon was a heavy spear, which he brandished in his right hand.

One of the favorite pastimes of the kings was hunting. The Sassanian remains show us the royal sportsmen engaged in the pursuit of the stag, the wild boar, the ibex, the antelope, and the buffalo. To this catalogue of their beasts of chase the classical writers add the lion, the tiger, the wild ass, and the bear. Lions, tigers, bears, and wild asses were, it appears, collected for the purpose of sport, and kept in royal parks or paradises until a hunt was determined on. The monarchs then engaged in the sport in person, either singly or in conjunction with a royal ambassador, or perhaps of a favorite minister, or a few friends. The lion was engaged hand to hand with sword or spear; the more dangerous tiger was attacked from a distance with arrows. Stags and wild boars were sufficiently abundant to make the keeping of them in paradises unnecessary. When the king desired to hunt them, it was only requisite to beat a certain extent of country in order to make sure of finding the game. This appears to have been done generally by elephants, which entered the marshes or the woodlands, and, spreading themselves wide, drove the animals before them towards an enclosed space, surrounded by a net or a fence, where the king was stationed with his friends and attendants. If the tract was a marsh, the monarch occupied a boat, from which he quietly took aim at the beasts that came within shot. Otherwise he pursued the game on horseback, and transfixed it while riding at full speed. In either case he seems to have joined to the pleasures of the chase the delights of music. Bands of harpers and other musicians were placed near him within the enclosure, and he could listen to their strains while he took his pastime.

The musical instruments which appear distinctly on the Sassanian sculptures are the harp, the horn, the drum, and the flute or pipe. The harp is triangular, and has seven strings; it is held in the lap, and played

apparently by both hands. The drum is of small size. The horns and pipes are too rudely represented for their exact character to be apparent. Concerted pieces seem to have been sometimes played by harpers only, of whom as many as ten or twelve joined in the execution. Mixed bands were more numerous. In one instance the number of performers amounts to twenty-six, of whom seven play the harp, an equal number the flute or pipe, three the horn, one the drum, while eight are too slightly rendered for their instruments to be recognized. A portion of the musicians occupy an elevated orchestra, to which there is access by a flight of steps.

There is reason to believe that the Sassanian monarchs took a pleasure also in the pastime of hawking. It has been already noticed that among the officers of the court was a "Head Falconer," who must have presided over this species of sport. Hawking was of great antiquity in the East, and appears to have been handed down uninterruptedly from remote times to the present day. We may reasonably conjecture that the ostriches and pheasants, if not the peacocks also, kept in the royal preserves, were intended to be used in this pastime, the hawks being flown at them if other game proved to be scarce.

The monarchs also occasionally amused themselves in their leisure hours by games. The introduction of chess from India by the great Chosroes (Anushirwan) has already been noticed; and some authorities state that the same monarch brought into use also a species of tric-trac or draughts. Unfortunately we have no materials for determining the exact form of the game in either case, the Sassanian remains containing no representation of such trivial matters.

In the character of their warfare, the Persians of the Sassanian period did not greatly differ from the same people under the Achaemenian kings. The principal changes which time had brought about were an almost entire disuse of the war chariot, and the advance of the elephant corps into a very prominent and important position. Four main arms of the service were recognized, each standing on a different level: viz. the elephants, the horse, the archers, and the ordinary footmen. The elephant corps held the first position. It was recruited from India, but was at no time very numerous. Great store was set by it; and in some of the earlier battles against the Arabs the victory was regarded as gained mainly by this arm of the service. It acted with best effect in an open and level district; but the value put upon it was such that, however rough, mountainous, and woody the country into which the Persian arms penetrated, the elephant always accompanied the march of the Persian troops, and care was taken to make roads by which it could travel. The elephant corps was under a special chief, known as the _Zend-hapet_, or "Commander of the Indians," either because the beasts came from that country, or because they were managed by natives of Hindustan.

The Persian cavalry in the Sassanian period seems to have been almost entirely of the heavy kind. We hear nothing during these centuries of those clouds of light horse which, under the earlier Persian and under the Parthian monarchy, hung about invading or retreating armies, countless in their numbers, agile in their movements, a terrible annoyance at the best of times, and a fearful peril under certain circumstances. The Persian troops which pursued Julian were composed of heavily armed cavalry, foot archers, and elephants; and the only light horse of which we have any mention during the disastrous retreat of his army are the Saracenic allies of Sapor. In these auxiliaries, and in the Cadusians from the Caspian region, the Persians had always, when they wished it, a cavalry excellently suited for light service; but their own horse during the Sassanian period seems to have been entirely of the heavy kind, armed and equipped, that is, very much as Chosroes II. is seen to bo at Takht-i-Bostan. The horses themselves wore heavily armored about their head, neck, and chest; the rider wore a coat of mail which

completely covered his body as far as the hips, and a strong helmet, with a vizor, which left no part of the face exposed but the eyes. He carried a small round shield on his left arm, and had for weapons a heavy spear, a sword, and a bow and arrows. He did not fear a collision with the best Roman troops. The Sassanian horse often charged the infantry of the legions with success, and drove it headlong from the field of battle. In time of peace, the royal guards were more simply accoutred.

The archers formed the elite of the Persian infantry. They were trained to deliver their arrows with extreme rapidity, and with an aim that was almost unerring. The huge wattled shields, adopted by the Achaemenian Persians from the Assyrians, still remained in use; and from behind a row of these, rested upon the ground and forming a sort of loop-holed wall, the Sassanian bowmen shot their weapons with great effect; nor was it until their store of arrows was exhausted that the Romans, ordinarily, felt themselves upon even terms with their enemy. Sometimes the archers, instead of thus fighting in line, were intermixed with the heavy horse, with which it was not difficult for them to keep pace. They galled the foe with their constant discharges from between the ranks of the horsemen, remaining themselves in comparative security, as the legions rarely ventured to charge the Persian mailed cavalry. If they were forced to retreat, they still shot backwards as they fled; and it was a proverbial saying with the Romans that they were then especially formidable.

The ordinary footmen seem to have been armed with swords and spears, perhaps also with darts. They were generally stationed behind the archers, who, however, retired through their ranks when close fighting began. They had little defensive armor; but still seem to have fought with spirit and tenacity, being a fair match for the legionaries under ordinary circumstances, and superior to most other adversaries.

It is uncertain how the various arms of the service were organized internally. We do not hear of any divisions corresponding to the Roman legions or to modern regiments; yet it is difficult to suppose that there were not some such bodies. Perhaps each satrap of a province commanded the troops raised within his government, taking the actual lead of the cavalry or the infantry at his discretion. The Crown doubtless appointed the commanders-in-chief--the _Sparapets, Spaha-pets, or Sipehbeds_, as well as the other generals (_arzbeds_), the head of the commissariat (_hambarapet_ or _hambarahapet_), and the commander of the elephants (_zendkapet_). The satraps may have acted as colonels of regiments under the arzbeds, and may probably have had the nomination of the subordinate (regimental) officers.

The great national standard was the famous "leathern apron of the blacksmith," originally unadorned, but ultimately covered with jewels, which has been described in a former chapter. This precious palladium was, however, but rarely used, its place being supplied for the most part by standards of a more ordinary character. These appear by the monuments to have been of two kinds. Both consisted primarily of a pole and a cross-bar; but in the one kind the crossbar sustained a single ring with a bar athwart it, while below depended two woolly tassels; in the other, three striated balls rose from the cross-bar, while below the place of the tassels was taken by two similar balls. It is difficult to say what these emblems symbolized, or why they were varied. In both the representations where they appear the standards accompany cavalry, so that they cannot reasonably be assigned to different arms of the service. That the number of standards carried into battle was considerable may be gathered from the fact that on one occasion, when the defeat sustained was not very complete, a Persian army left in the enemy's hands as many as twenty-eight of them.

During the Sassanian period there was nothing very remarkable in the Persian tactics. The size of armies generally varied from 30,000 to 60,000 men, though sometimes 100,000, and on one occasion as many as 140,000, are said to have been assembled. The bulk of the troops were footmen, the proportion of the horse probably never equalling one third of a mixed army. Plundering expeditions were sometimes undertaken by bodies of horse alone; but serious invasions were seldom or never attempted unless by a force complete in all arms; comprising, that is, horse, foot, elephants, and artillery. To attack the Romans to any purpose, it was always necessary to engage in the siege of towns; and although, in the earlier period of the Sassanian monarchy, a certain weakness and inefficiency in respect of sieges manifested itself, yet ultimately the difficulty was overcome, and the Persian expeditionary armies, well provided with siege trains, compelled the Roman fortresses to surrender within a reasonable time. It is remarkable that in the later period so many fortresses were taken with apparently so little difficulty--Daras, Mardin, Amida, Carrhse, Edessa, Hierapolis, Berhasa, Theodosiopolis, Antioch, Damascus, Jerusalem, Alexandria, Caesaraea Mazaca, Chalcedon; the siege of none lasting more than a few months, or costing the assailants very dear. The method used in sieges was to open trenches at a certain distance from the walls, and to advance along them under cover of hurdles to the ditch, and fill it up with earth and fascines. Escalade might then be attempted; or movable towers, armed with rams or balistae, might be brought up close to the walls, and the defences battered till a breach was effected. Sometimes mounds were raised against the walls to a certain height, so that their upper portion, which was their weakest part, might be attacked, and either demolished or escaladed. If towns resisted prolonged attacks of this kind, the siege was turned into a blockade, lines of circumvallation being drawn round the place, water cut off, and provisions prevented from entering. Unless a strong relieving army appeared in the field, and drove off the assailants, this plan was tolerably sure to be successful.

Not much is known of the private life of the later Persians. Besides the great nobles and court officials, the strength of the nation consisted in its _dilchans_ or landed proprietors, who for the most part lived on their estates, seeing after the cultivation of the soil, and employing thereon the free labor of the peasants. It was from these classes chiefly that the standing army was recruited, and that great levies might always be made in time of need. Simple habits appear to have prevailed among them; polygamy, though lawful, was not greatly in use; the maxims of Zoroaster, which commanded industry, purity, and piety, were fairly observed. Women seem not to have been kept in seclusion, or at any rate not in such seclusion as had been the custom under the Parthians, and as again became usual under the Arabs. The general condition of the population was satisfactory. Most of the Sassanian monarchs seem to have been desirous of governing well; and the system inaugurated by Anushirwan, and maintained by his successors, secured the subjects of the Great King from oppression, so far as was possible without representative government. Provincial rulers were well watched and well checked; tax-gatherers were prevented from exacting more than their due by a wholesale dread that their conduct would be reported and punished; great pains were taken that justice should be honestly administered; and in all cases where an individual felt aggrieved at a sentence an appeal lay to the king. On such occasions the cause was re-tried in open court, at the gate, or in the great square; the king, the Magi, and the great lords hearing it, while the people were also present. The entire result seems to have been that, so far as was possible under a despotism, oppression was prevented, and the ordinary

citizen had rarely any ground for serious complaint.

But it was otherwise with the highest class of all. The near relations of the monarch, the great officers of the court, the generals who commanded armies, were exposed without defence to the monarch's caprice, and held their lives and liberties at his pleasure. At a mere word or sign from him they were arrested, committed to prison, tortured, blinded, or put to death, no trial being thought necessary where the king chose to pronounce sentence. The intrinsic evils of despotism thus showed themselves even under the comparatively mild government of the Sassanians; but the class exposed to them was a small one, and enjoyed permanent advantages, which may have been felt as some compensation to it for its occasional sufferings.