

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF ZOROASTRIANISM

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A Thesis submitted to the faculty of  
San Francisco State University  
In partial fulfillment of  
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the Degree

Master of Arts

In

Anthropology

by

Megan Elizabeth Hall

San Francisco, California

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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF ZOROASTRIANISM by Megan Elizabeth Hall, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts in Anthropology at San Francisco State University.



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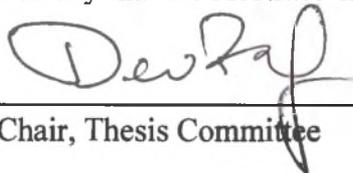
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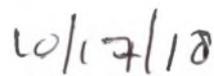
# THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF ZOROASTRIANISM

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San Francisco, California  
2019

My thesis compiles a list of attributes that can be used to archaeologically identify the ancient religion of Zoroastrianism. To do so, I reviewed literature written on the archaeology of religion and what factors indicate that a certain religion was being practiced at a site. I then reviewed literature written on the archaeology of Zoroastrianism and the religion in general. The combination of the two allow for a more cohesive understanding of what practices were important to this religion. I also discuss the limitations provided by the lack of academic writing on this specific religion. Advocating for further research to be done on this religion and its foundation, I then provide my own set of religious attributes that will indicate the practice of Zoroastrianism at a site. This will provide future archaeologists with a fundamental foundation for the analysis of Zoroastrianism.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.

  
Chair, Thesis Committee

  
Date

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Historical Background .....	6
Chapter 2: Archaeology of Religion.....	14
Chapter 3: Archaeology of Zoroastrianism .....	37
Chapter 4: A Case Study of Persepolis.....	57
Chapter 5: Discussion.....	74
Conclusion.....	84
Bibliography .....	87

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figures	Page
1. Tower of Silence layout.....	41
2. Modern day Tower of Silence in Yazd, Iran.....	42
3. Zoroastrian Ossuary.....	44
4. Mortar and Pestle.....	46
5. Figure in Winged Circle.....	48
6. Modern day figure in winged circle.....	49
7. Fire altar seal impression.....	51
8. Fire altar and protective wall.....	52
9. Modern day fire altar.....	53
10. Darius I's palace at Persepolis.....	57
11. Artist recreation of Persepolis.....	59
12. Construction phases of Persepolis.....	62
13. Site map of Persepolis.....	63

## INTRODUCTION

The ancient religion of Zoroastrianism is one of the oldest documented in the world. It was established between 1700 and 1500 BC and still influences certain practices today in Christianity, Islam, and Judaism (Boyce 1979). Once a major religion, Zoroastrianism has become a minor one that is mostly practiced in Iran and India today, resulting in it not being as well-known. This ancient religion is important though when studying Middle Eastern cultures, particularly Iran, due to the influence it had on early society and the spread of the Persian Empire.

### **Purpose**

The aim of this research is to compile a list of attributes that can be used to identify the practice of Zoroastrianism in the archaeological record. This ancient religion has become smaller over time with fewer modern-day practitioners, and even fewer researchers discussing it. As stated, this religion was influential to the beginning of other religions, and it deserves to be more well-known than it is today. Through my research, I aim to bring Zoroastrianism back into modern day academic discussions.

By studying this ancient religion archaeologically, this research will also aid not only archaeologists in the field, but modern-day Zoroastrian practitioners. For archaeologists, compiling a list of attributes that are specific to this religion will ensure that when a Zoroastrian site is located, it will be identified as such. Religious practices can be difficult to discern at times if they are not clearly documented. Documenting the

material remains left by Zoroastrian practices will ensure that researchers will not mistake the remains for another practice. Studying Zoroastrianism through archaeology will also expand the knowledge of this religion within the archaeological record, ensuring that the knowledge of it will be around for centuries to come.

Through the archaeological record, modern-day practitioners will also be able to know more about their own religion. Religions are taught through texts that are important to the practice, but there are always individuals who have a drive to learn more about where their religion came from, geographically and the culture surrounding its formation. By studying this religion archaeologically, identifying key attributes that make up the foundational practices of the religion, and documenting them within the archaeological record, practitioners will be able to have a greater knowledge of exactly where their religion originated. Through the archaeological record, practitioners will be able to see that though their religion may be a minority now, the doctrine they worship from inspired many others and has a long-standing history.

### **Methods**

For this research, the data collection will involve in-depth literature reviews of both the archaeology of religion, and the archaeology of Zoroastrianism. Architectural elements, material objects and symbolism will be a main focus within the identification of Zoroastrianism. The study of religion will also be aided by archaeological work

written on ritual and rites of passage and how it can be identified archaeologically through material remains. This research will be composed of three main objectives.

The first objective of this research is to review the work that has been done on the archaeology of religion. There are certain traits within religion that scholars have focused on, and that make it possible for archaeologists to identify them. Within the traits discussed, there are those that are constantly repeated, meaning that they should be visible markers of any religious practice. I will be analyzing those traits and how they can appear in the archaeological record.

The second objective of this research is to review the literature on the archaeology of Zoroastrianism. From this literature I will be able to identify what traits are observable when searching for Zoroastrian practices. Through archaeological and non-archaeological work written on Zoroastrianism, I will be able to gain a broader understanding of this religion, and what certain archaeological traits mean to the community at large. From this review, I will be analyzing the traits that seem to be more prominent within the religion that make it identifiable in the archaeological record. I will be including a case study of the Iranian site of Persepolis within this objective, as the site has yielded archaeological aspects of the religion (Boyce 1984, Lerner 1973, Potts 2012).

The third objective of this research is the compilation of a list of attributes that can be used to identify Zoroastrian practices in the archaeological record. By analyzing features that are repeated within the archaeology of religion and applying them to the

traits found within Zoroastrian practices, I will be able to create a list for future archaeologists to use on site when identifying Zoroastrianism. Through creating a list of attributes that are specific to Zoroastrianism, the religion itself will be more identifiable, which will aid in the recording of it for the archaeological record.

### **Why Archaeology?**

The study of Zoroastrianism can be looked at in different ways. You can take a religious studies approach, a historical one, or even study it through geography to see if different terrain prevented the spread of Zoroastrianism into other areas. For my research, I will be studying this ancient religion through archaeology. The study of archaeology provides insight into religion by allowing researchers to examine the material remains of specific human behavior and belief systems. Through archaeology, Zoroastrianism has been persevered within the archaeological record. With the continuous loss of practitioners throughout the centuries, it is of the upmost importance to record the archaeological remains of the religion of Zoroastrianism.

Through the use of literature written on both the archaeology of religion and Zoroastrianism, I will be creating a list of attributes that can be used by researchers to identify Zoroastrian practices archaeologically. Since Zoroastrianism held great influence over more modern-day religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, it is important to be able to identify this ancient religion and its roots. Through being able to identify Zoroastrian practices archaeologically, researchers will be able to see where in a

community the practices were centered, where the religion was most prominent, and how far the practice spread. Establishing a list of attributes will aid in the identification of Zoroastrianism and keep this ancient religion prevalent in today's academic community.

The following chapters will aid in the creation of a list of attributes to identify Zoroastrianism archaeologically. In chapter one, I will be discussing the historical background of the religion. This discussion will include the founding of the religion, the texts used, the gods associated with Zoroastrianism, and a brief overview of the religions influence and history up until modern day. Chapter two is a literature review on the archaeology of religion. To discuss how archaeologists can identify religion on site, I also discuss ritual, rites of passage, and symbolism. In chapter three I discuss the archaeology of Zoroastrianism and the trends that have been identified within the archaeological record of the religion. Chapter four is a case study on the site of Persepolis in Iran. In this chapter I provide a brief background of the site, and discuss the religious finds associated with Zoroastrianism. Chapter five is a discussion of the archaeological trends seen in Zoroastrianism from chapter three, with the application of how religion can be viewed from chapter two. Along with the case study in chapter four, I create and discuss the list of attributes that will aid archaeologists in identifying Zoroastrianism on site. I then conclude this thesis and discuss how the list of attributes can further research on the religion of Zoroastrianism.

## **Chapter 1: Historical Background**

### **Zoroaster and His Beginnings**

The religion of Zoroastrianism was founded between 1700 and 1500 BC by the prophet Zarathushtra, or Zoroaster to the ancient Greeks. Zoroaster was a part of one of the many Iranian tribes that lived on the South Russian steppes (Boyce 1979, 1982, 1984). At this time, the ancestors of Iranian and Indian people formed one group, the proto-Indo-Iranians. The religion originally practiced by this group on the Iranian Plateau was known as Indo-Iranian, or Old Iranian (Koch 1977, Malandra 1983, Potts 2012: 812). They were semi-migratory, herding cattle, goats and sheep. Within this society, there were three main professions one could be. Individuals were either priests, warriors/hunters, or herdsmen (Boyce 1979: 2, 1982). During this time, around the fourth and third millennium BC, life for the proto-Indo-Iranians was slow but stable. Out of this way of life emerged a strong religious tradition though that has been preserved till this day through the descendants of this group, the Brahmins of India, and Zoroastrians of Iran (Boyce 1979: 2).

In the third millennium BC, the proto-Indo-Iranians separated and became two distinct groups that could be identified by differing speech patterns. During this time, the Iranian people spread through Persia, which is modern day Iran, and Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan (Zaehner 1961: 19). Both the Indians and Iranians were still pastoralists and had contact through trade. The Iranians then learned

about wooden carts from Mesopotamia, as well as war-chariots (Boyce 1979). Mountains near the Inner Asian steppes contained copper and tin, enabling the Iranians to equip themselves and be presentable as a fighting force. From the adoption of the horse drawn chariot, the older static way of life gave way to a more violent one, with chieftains and their followers willing to seek out glory through the conquering of neighboring tribes and settlements. Fame came to warriors who showed their might in battle, and during this time might seemed to rule over law (Boyce 1979: 3). It was at this time that Zoroaster lived, and sought answers as to why man was living in such a troubled age (Boyce 1979, 1982, Zaehner 1961).

Zoroaster was a priest and spent years looking for truth. According to oral accounts, he witnessed acts of violence between men that made him long for justice and a moral law. Zoroaster wanted to find a way to pursue a good life in peace. The religion that had been practiced at this time was known as Indo-Iranian, or Old Iranian (Koch 1977, Malandra 1983). Zoroaster did not regard himself as being rid of the religion, neither did he denounce it as one. Instead, Zoroaster regarded his revelations and teachings as adding a new dimension to the older religion through the addition of the true god, Ahura Mazda (Zaehner 1961: 35). In this way, Zoroastrianism can be looked at as a more modern version of the Old Iranian religion (Potts 2012). According to one of the Gathas, a Zoroastrian text, Zoroaster was thirty when he had a vision of Ahura Mazda. Ahura Mazda was to become the main god of the Zoroastrian religion (Boyce 1979: 19).

### **Zoroastrian Texts**

Zoroaster's teachings were handed down orally within his community from generation to generation. It was not until the Sasanians reign of Iran, also known as the Neo-Persian Empire from 224-651 AD, that Zoroaster's teachings were committed to writing (Boyce 1979: 17). These writings were made into two separate books that contain the beliefs of Zoroastrian practitioners, the Avesta and the Gathas. The Avesta can be thought of as the Zoroastrian Bible. It was the first to be committed to writing containing the practice of Zoroastrianism (Kronen and Menssen 2010: 187). The Avesta is the main source for the teachings of Zoroaster. The name likely means "The Injunction of Zarathushtra", which can be interpreted as meaning 'the warning of Zoroaster' (Boyce 1984). Based on the time period Zoroaster was living and his quest to find the truth, this interpretation fits. Zoroaster was living in a time of lawlessness and bloodshed, and his teachings were warnings to individuals that they needed to live a better life in order to not perish in hell once they were deceased.

The text of the Avesta is composed in two parts, the first being the 'Gathic' Avestan, which is written in a language close to the Indian Rigveda. The Gathic Avestan contains 17 Gathas composed by Zoroaster himself. The Gathas are then a collection of short verse texts that are mainly in the form of utterances from Zoroaster to Ahura Mazda. The word 'gatha' can mean 'psalm', 'hymn', or 'poem'. The second is called the 'Younger' Avestan and is presented as if the writing is being directly revealed to Zoroaster by the good god, Ahura Mazda himself (Boyce 1984: 1). All together the Avesta holds the ethical standards that Zoroastrians live by even today. The words in the

ancient scripture are *humata*, *hūkhta*, and *hvarshata*, meaning good thoughts, good words, and good deeds respectfully (Williams Jackson 1906: 340).

Writings in the Gathas also present the visions of Ahura Mazda and prophecies of the future. From the poetry inspired structure of short verse texts, the Gathas convey conviction and passionate feelings. This being said, they are the only examples of this ancient, learned tradition of religious poetry to have survived in Iran. They contain words that are either unknown, or scholars are uncertain of their meaning. There are certain terms that cannot be translated directly and go through a variety of different languages to be understood. An example of this is the word *zaothra*. When used in text, it is in association with a measurement of food for a religious ceremony. It has been interpreted to be the Old Persian word for *dauša*, which is an Iranian word meaning, “libation, oblation, offering,” (Boyce 1982: 134, Cameron 1948) This makes the Gathas very difficult to translate. However, the Younger Avesta provides aid to interpreting the poems, providing a way for future generations to continue using these two doctrines within their religion.

### **Zoroastrian Gods**

Zoroastrianism was a dualistic religion with a good god, Ahura Mazda, and an evil one, Angra Mainyu (Boyce 1979, Kronen and Menssen 2010, Williams Jackson 1906). Zoroaster proclaimed Ahura Mazda to be the creator of all that is good, stating that the god was uncreated and existed eternally (Boyce 1979: 20). Ahura Mazda is “the

Lord Wisdom” that is the light battling darkness within the world (Williams Jackson 1906: 337). Ahura Mazda is also perfectly good, perfectly wise, and all-powerful. He is loving, just, trusting, benevolent, and fair. Zoroaster taught that in the end of days, Ahura Mazda would save all of his creations and no human would suffer in hell for eternity (Kronen and Menssen 2010: 188). This good god is also aided by six angles to help fight the evil in the world. These angles were created by Ahura Mazda and are known as *Amesha Spentas*, “Immortal Holy Ones”. Their individual names come from abstract ideas which they personify. *Ameretāt*, meaning Immortality; *Ārmaiti*, Right-Mindedness or Humility; *Asha*, Truth or Righteousness; *Haurvatāt*, Wholeness; *Khshathra Vairya*, the Desirable Kingdom; and *Vohu Manah*, the Good Mind (Williams Jackson 1906: 337, Zaehner 1961: 63).

In opposition to Ahura Mazda, the “Enemy Spirit” Angra Mainyu rules in the kingdom of darkness. Angra Mainyu is the devil, and a representation of deceit and falsehood (Williams Jackson 1906: 337). Zoroastrian writings describe Angra Mainyu as an uncreated spirit with great, but limited knowledge. Angra Mainyu has maximal destructive powers and is the source of all evil in the world, both physically and morally. He is motivated by his hatred of all things good and his desire to destroy it. In opposition to Ahura Mazda who is manifested in the material world through creation, Angra Mainyu subsists in the world through evil actions and thoughts, but has no corresponding material (Kronen and Menssen 2010: 189-190).

### **The Influence of Zoroastrianism**

The religion of Zoroastrianism is the oldest of recorded world religions (Boyce 1979, Stausberg 2008). As a state religion, Zoroastrianism was the main practice of three great Iranian empires and dominated the Near and Middle East from the sixth century BC to the seventh century AD (Boyce 1979: 1). Iran at the time Zoroastrianism was being practiced mainly throughout the Iranian Empires was wealthy and powerful. A handful of leading doctrines of Zoroastrianism were then spread and adopted by later developing religions, such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism.

Though there is no evidence of what eschatological ideals Zoroastrians had during the last four centuries before Christ, so we cannot compare their end of days to those of Christians, there are similarities in the ways that believers should live. Similar to Judeo-Christian beliefs, Zoroaster's doctrine discusses rewards and punishments, an eternity of bliss for those who have lead good lives, and an eternity of woe and damnation for those who performed evil acts. All three religions discuss an afterlife, that once your mortal body has perished, your soul continues on. Both Jewish practitioners and Zoroastrians believe in the resurrection (Zaehner 1961: 57). When Jewish populations first came into contact with the Medes and Iranians, they adopted the Zoroastrian doctrine of the afterlife. It was Daniel of the Christian Old Testament, and the third section of the Jewish canon, who is known as the minister of 'Darius the Mede' that speaks of the afterlife first. From the religious doctrine of Judaism, we can see that certain ideals were adopted (Zaehner 1961). This also includes Jewish dietary practices that can be seen in Zoroastrian practices (Douglass 1966). Zoroastrians do not eat 'creeping' things, that is

reptiles that move on their stomachs. Judaism explains their distaste for 'creeping' things through the fact that the animal moves by sliding on their stomach, it is unclean and representative of someone who has devoted themselves greedy desires and passions (Douglass 1966: 52-53). From Judaism, the ideals of the afterlife and a heaven and hell were passed on to Christianity (Moore 1912: 181). The eschatological ideals of Zoroastrianism were also later then adopted by the prophet Mohammad for the religion of Islam (Moore 1912).

Zoroastrianism also influenced the doctrines of different Gnostic faiths, and as well as influencing the development of northern Buddhism (Boyce 1979: 1). From the adoption of different doctrines within more western religions, the teachings of Zoroaster are more comprehensible to individuals who practice modern-day Christianity, Islam, and Judaism (Boyce 1984: 12). Zoroastrianism today has been reduced to a minority religious practice, mostly in Iran and India (Boyce 1979). Boyce provides a well laid out chronological background in her 1984 book *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism* that sheds light onto why this once predominate religion became a minority.

Between 750 and 1258 AD, antagonism between the Persians and Arabs became antagonism between Muslims and non-Muslims. In 869, Iranian Muslim dynasties began to gain power, resulting in the persecution of non-Muslims. In 1258 the Mongols conquered Iran, and in 1300 the Mongol ruler adopted Islam, causing Zoroastrian practitioners to move to the desert around the cities of Yazd and Kerman. Then during

Shah' Abbas II reign from 1642 to 1667, an order was signed for the forcible conversion of Zoroastrians, leading to a massacre at Isfahan. Zoroastrian practitioners continued to be persecuted into the 1900s. From 1796 to 1925, the Qajar's ruled Iran, and were the cause of this suffering. When the last Qajar king was deposed of in 1925, Reza Shah Pahlavi became king, and Zoroastrian practitioners moved to Tehran for more religious freedom. In 1979, Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi was overthrown, and the Islamic Republic of Iran was founded. This resulted in religious tolerance being granted to not only Zoroastrians, but also Christians and Jews in the country (Boyce 1984: 24-27).

The religion of Zoroastrianism has gone through long periods of strife and conflict. At its foundation, Zoroaster aimed to provide a truth for his people through similar turmoil that was happening around him. He provided believers with instructions for a lifestyle of good deeds through the Avasta and the Gathas. The resilience of this religion speaks volumes through the fact that it is still practiced today. After being persecuted for centuries, it still continues as a religion today. Though it may not be as large, there are still practitioners who believe in it and practice on a daily basis. The ancient religion lives on through its own community, as well as through the religions that adopted Zoroastrian ideals as their own.

## **Chapter 2: The Archaeology of Religion**

In this chapter I will be reviewing how religion has been defined, as well as how it is observed archaeologically. I will then be doing the same for ritual, rites of passage, and symbolism as they all aid in the understanding of religion. Ritual provides the material remains that archaeologists can observe to understand religion. The ritual remains, in turn, show up from rites of passage. Symbolism also aids in the understanding of religion since most religions can be represented through just a single image. These three elements of ritual, rites of passage, and symbolism are being focused on because together they provide a fuller picture to the archaeological understanding of religion.

### **Religion**

#### **Definition**

Religion is defined in the Shorter Oxford Dictionary as an, “Action or conduct indicating a belief in, or reverence for, and desire to please, a divine ruling power...Recognition on the part of man of some higher unseen power as having control of his destiny and as being entitled to obedience, reverence, and worship” (Onions 1973: 1978, Renfrew 1994: 48). Durkheim defines religion as being a, “unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden...which unite into one single moral community called a Church” (Durkheim 1965: 47, Renfrew 1994). Though we can see that religion can be defined in general, archaeologists tend to differentiate on what the term means in their discipline. Insoll

(2004) states that in many ways, religion is indefinable. Religion is concerned with action, beliefs, thoughts and materials and the way that scholars will observe them in their importance will vary (Insoll 2004: 7). Renfrew (1994) states that there is variation between definitions of religion, and not everyone can agree on just one. He also states how Geertz (1966) provides a definition of religion that avoids reference to the sacred, or the term 'sacred' altogether (Renfrew 1994). Since one definition cannot be reached by scholars, this leads Renfrew to state that there is variation between individual's perspectives and that one's own religious experience must be taken into consideration when attempting to formulate a definition for religion (Renfrew 1994: 48). Geertz (1973) discusses religion as being a system of symbols in which acts establish pervasive, powerful, and long-lasting motivations and moods through formulating conceptions of order to existence (Fogelin 2007). Meslin (1985: 39) discusses how religion is a system that is constructed by long traditions of thought about human problems, such as life, death, good, evil, and love. Religion in this sense does not only function as a logical framework, but also deals with the concerns regarding the human condition (Insoll 2004).

All of these different definitions and conceptualizations of religion provide a spectrum of different views for individuals to understand what religion means. Religion in this sense, provides order for an individual to follow that allows them to please a higher power. These individuals then come together and practice with one another what they believe to be right and pleasing to the higher being or power they believe in. These groups of individuals are what form a church, as Durkheim (1965) discussed. Though

there may be differing opinions on what the meaning of religion is, there is a consensus of shared qualities that make up its practices. This is where archaeology comes into use.

### Archaeology of Religion

The term 'religion' can be interpreted in different ways. Archaeologists have discussed these definitions though, as well as come up with their own. It is important to remember though that religion can be experienced and is not just some abstract concept. Renfrew (1994) discusses how personal experiences are important to religion. These personal experiences can also make individuals feel as if they are a part of something larger. It is within this larger context that archaeologists can observe past religious practices. Renfrew states that religious beliefs within ancient societies provide motivation for many aspects of life, and that religious systems should not be considered secondary factors when explaining cultural change (Renfrew 1994: 50-51). Fogelin also states that through individuals practicing a religion, the religion itself becomes a stable social phenomenon within a society and be used to obtain social information over long periods of time (Fogelin 2007: 57). Religious beliefs can also be transformed from generation to generation, and archaeologists can see this through the creation and practice of ritual (Fogelin 2007).

The archaeological recognition of religion is based upon the identification of ritual (Renfrew 1994: 51). Renfrew provides a list of archeological indicators that can aid researchers in identifying ritual in society (Renfrew 1994: 51-52). He separates the

indicators into four different sets. The first set of indicators for a religious practice is where to focus your attention. Renfrew states that rituals may be conducted in a place that is thought to be special by the society. These places can have natural associations, such as a cave or a mountain top. They can also be special buildings set apart from the society for sacred functions, such as temples. What makes these places 'sacred' is that the land holds a special meaning to a society, or the land was blessed by a religious official before building of a temple or church took place. The equipment used for the ritual may employ attention-focusing devices which will be reflected within the architecture. The attention-focusing devices are objects that can be manipulated to be sure that an individual is paying attention to what, or who, they need to be. These devices include non-moveable objects such as altars and benches, or moveable objects like ritual vessels, musical instruments, and altar cloths. Also, there will be repetitive symbols that can aid in identifying a place of ritual practice. An example of this would be the crosses used at a Christian church. The second set of indicators focuses on the boundary zone between the human world and 'the next'. The 'next' is referring to another world, such as the boundaries between Earth, Heaven, and Hell. Renfrew explains that ritual can be demonstrated through public displays and expenditures that can be reflected in the architecture where a religion is practiced or ritual is being performed. The building when a religion is practiced or a ritual is performed may have certain decorations that make it stand out from buildings around it. Cleanliness may also be reflected in the space through pools of holy water and the maintenance of the sacred area.

The third set of indicators that Renfrew references are the presences of deities. In this set Renfrew discusses iconography, stating that deities important to the society may be reflected through images or representations in an abstract form. Deities will also often be related to myths associated with a society and their beliefs through the visual imagery that iconography provides. The final set of ritual indicators Renfrew presents is that of offerings and participation. He states that worship involves specialized movements, such as prayer, and may be reflected in decorations, iconography or images. Rituals may also employ the use of various devices for inducing religious experiences, such as dancing, drugs, or music. These rituals may also include animal or human sacrifices.

Archaeologists would be able to find skeletal remains in this example that show signs of butchering for ritualistic purposes. The cuts from the butchering would be in specific places on all the bones, and possibly burned in particular areas. Food or drinks may be consumed during a ritual as way being an offering or poured as a libation. Objects may also be brought to places of worship as offerings. These offerings may also entail breaking the objects, Lastly, a great investment in wealth may be reflected in the architecture and offerings brought.

Renfrew (1994) creates a checklist through these features that can aid archaeologists in observing religion. His discussion is straightforward, and easy to understand. Through providing a list of what can be considered as building blocks, Renfrew presents religion in a way that archaeologists can study, and not just as an abstract concept. Insoll (2004) acknowledges that religion is complex, and that through

archaeology religion can include a variety of material culture. Though there is a broad aspect of material culture that can be included within the study of the archaeology of religion, there are still features that can be observed to understand what the religion was. Today we can see that there are religions that influence the way people live and conduct themselves. There is an outward manifest of certain religious practices. If this is true for today, would it not be true for the past. Religion then provides a framework for the past that archaeologists can observe (Insoll 2004: 22). Through the different understandings of how archaeologists view religion itself, certain aspects become key to the identification of it. For archaeologists, ritual becomes a key to identifying religion in a society. This is not to say though that ritual is the only aspect that archaeologists can identify in the field when looking for religious practices. It is ritual though that leaves behind the material remains that archaeologists are able to study (Fogelin 2007). Ritual itself can be a broad topic of interest, so we must see how archaeologists understand ritual themselves.

## **Ritual**

### Definition

Ritual, like religion, can be defined a number of ways, with scholars agreeing on different parts of the definition, and arguing against others. Firth (1951: 222) defined ritual as a certain patterned activity that orients towards control of human affairs, specifically symbolic ones with non-empirical referent. These activities are also socially sanctioned. Swenson (2015) discusses how the study of ritual has gained popularity with

archaeological research recently. He argues that ritual leaves behind the physical traces that have the ability to aid in the interpretation of everyday life such as power struggles, community, experiences of place and time, social transformations, and personhood that archaeologists can study (Swenson 2015: 330). All of this effect how individuals view and interact with the world around them. Rappaport refers to ritual as being, “the basic social act” (Rappaport 1999: 137). Geertz approached ritual as being key to the inner workings of culture (Geertz 1973, 2005; Swenson 2015). Verhoeven (2012) provides a definition for ritual, stating that ritual is a performance that takes place within a certain time and space, and is marked by specific immaterial and material symbolism, and has the possibility to be related to the supernatural. Behavior is also guided and restricted by repetition, rules, and traditions. Ritual is a practice where symbolic communication establishes relationships between supernatural beings and humans (Verhoeven 2012: 118).

Bell (2007) argues that because ritual has many meanings and functions, there will never be an agreement over what the definition is. She states that instead of trying to define ritual, we should focus instead on what it does. Bowie (2000: 22) also reminds scholars that with ritual, we are constructing a category where the term may not be applicable to other parts of the world, thus making translating and defining equally as difficult. Though it may be difficult for scholars to come to an agreement on what exactly ritual means, Verhoeven analyzes common ideas that have been discussed with definitions for rituals. Verhoeven credits Bell (1997: 138-69) with a list of basic attributes

that rituals can exhibit within society (Verhoeven 2012). These attributes are formalism, traditionalism, disciplined invariance, rule-governance, sacral symbolism, and performance.

The first basic attribute of ritual is formalism (Verhoeven 2012: 117-118).

Formalism refers to a set of limited and rigidly organized expressions and gestures which restrict behavior and communication. Activities can be formalized to different degrees and are in contrast with informal ones. An example of this is a funeral, and the reception after. At a funeral, there is a more formal setting and a schedule of what is to happen next, from the service to the actual burial taking place. After the funeral, there tends to be a reception, which can be considered an informal setting. Those in attendance can speak and sit at their own free will. The reception tends to offer the family of the deceased a time to recollect about their loved ones' life and celebrate them more, instead of the solemn environment that the funeral before gave off. The second attribute is traditionalism. Traditionalism focuses on attempting to make activities appear identical or consistent with preceding practices. This is used as a tool for legitimizing practices and linking them with the past. An example of traditionalism is the taking of communion at church. The act goes back to the Bible, with Jesus offering his 12 disciples bread and wine, the bread representing his body, and the wine representing his blood. Churches today still participate in this activity through offering their congregation crackers and grape juice. They then take it as a group to remember Jesus' sacrifice for their sins. The third attribute is disciplined invariance. This attribute can be described as an organized

set of actions that are characterized by exact physical control and repetition. An example of this can be a ritualistic dance, where the movements remain the same to convey the same meaning each time it is performed.

The fourth attribute is rule-governance. Rule-governance refers to explicitly formulated norms that are used within a society to restrict human action and interaction. This attribute can be seen through the way prison inmates are allowed to interact with visitors. There is usually a set amount of time they are allowed to see each other, and they talk on opposite sides of a glass with the use of a telephone. They are not allowed to touch each other, and the session can end early if the inmate begins to act out. The fifth attribute Verhoeven discusses is sacral symbolism. This attribute refers to the use of non-profane, sacred symbols. Bell (1997) states that sacredness can relate to special activities that evoke experiences of a greater reality, and not just the supernatural realm. The final attribute is performance. The idea of performance is mentioned in a number of definitions when it comes to ritual. Performance refers to a deliberate self-conscious practice of symbolic actions in public. The performances can be dramatic and tend to create a context which shows a clear difference with the surrounding world. They can be shown through a dance, play, music, or any way that actions can be clearly demonstrated in public to show a difference between the act and the world around them. Together, these six basic attributes provide insight as to how ritual can function within a society. From this list of attributes, ritual is shown as being 'multi-faceted', with not only being concerned with physical action, but also having emotion, movement, and evoking

experiences and communication (Bowie 2000: 154; Insoll 2004: 9). Through understanding this background, archaeologists can begin to grasp how ritual is portrayed in a society.

### Archaeology of Ritual

Understanding the attributes that rituals can exhibit within society, Verhoeven (2012) discusses the different types of rituals that can appear within the archaeological record. A basic distinction that needs to be made is that of rituals that are religious, and those that are non-religious. Religious rituals entail ceremonies that involve belief of supernatural beings, where non-religious rituals do not (Verhoeven 2012: 118). Within these religious and non-religious rituals, Verhoeven has made a list of six types of rituals that can be seen in society. This list is comprised of the most common rituals that can be seen in society. These rituals are rites of passage, calendrical and commemorative rites, rites of exchange and communication, rites of affliction, rites of feasting, fasting, and festivals, and political rituals (Verhoeven 2012: 118-121).

The first type of ritual discussed is rites of passage. These rituals mark an individual's transition from one part of their life to another. Examples include coming of age rituals, marriage, and death. Van Gennep (1960) discusses rites of passage to be a tripartite structure with three defining phases consisting of separation, transition, and incorporation. Turner (1969) focuses on the transitional phase of rites of passage, which he refers to as the liminal phase. These rituals can be seen within society today through

weddings, and funerals, to name a few. The second type of ritual are calendrical and commemorative rites. These rituals are focused around time. Calendrical rites occur at fixed times year around in relation to seasonal changes, or agricultural work, such as changes in seasons or harvesting crops. Commemorative rites are important historical events are celebrated or recalled. An example of commemorative rites can be V-E Day or the Fourth of July. The third type includes rites of exchange and communication. This rite has to do with the interaction between humans and the supernatural. The rites of exchange create a mutual dependency between the supernatural and the natural world to ensure the prosperity of both. Offerings to supernatural beings, such as incense or flowers, are an example of this. Sacrifices are also a special form of exchange. Hubert and Mauss (1964) discuss how in sacrifice, objects are usually sanctified through breaking or destroying them. An example of this would be deposits of broken pottery, or the ashes of burnt objects found in specific places of a society, not just one broken plate that was accidentally dropped at a house.

The forth type of ritual are rites of affliction. These rites have the purpose of abating the negative powers of the supernatural. Examples of this are purification and healing rituals, such as exorcisms. The fifth type of rites are those of feasting, fasting, and festivals. These rites are usually social and can be marked by overt public displays of adherence to religious or social norms and values. An example of feasting would be potlatches held by the Northwest Coast Native Americans of North America. The final type of ritual are political rituals. These rituals promote and display the power of different

political institutions. Examples of this rite are presidential inaugurations and royal coronations. This political power is also established through certain symbols associated with those in higher power that inflict a notion of social cohesion based off of shared norms and values of the public and power in charge.

### Rites of Passage

#### *Definition*

Rites of passage provide a common ritual that can be seen in everyday society. As Insoll (2004) suggested about religion being present in the past since we see it today, why couldn't the same be true for rites of passage. These rites provide meaning to a society and demonstrate deep religious ties to the past. Focusing on rites of passage can aid in the understanding of ritual, and religion as a whole since the rites performed can leave behind traces of material culture for archaeologists to study. Verhoeven (2012) discusses rites of passage as being common in ritualistic practices. Different rites of passage can be present within society at the same time. For example, a couple could get married the same day a funeral is being held for someone different (Verhoeven 2012). Rites of passage can be recognized as practices which create new things through combining learnt skills, requisite materials, and practical *chaînes opératoires* (Pfaffenberger 1988: 244). Today our conceptualization of rites of passage comes from the work of Belgian anthropologist Arnold van Gennep. Van Gennep's 1911 book *Les Rites de Passage* remains influential since it provides a starting point for discussing rite of passage rituals.

He argues that rites of passage serve the purpose of marking a change in conditions and a tradition from one group to another. Van Gennep also states that rites of passage must be understood in a tripartite structure. The tripartite structure consists of a beginning, middle, and end. These three parts can also be looked at as rites of separation, rites of liminality, and rites of reaggregation (van Gennep 1960). Turner (1967, 1969) is also influential in the discussion of rites of passage, furthering our understanding presently of van Gennep's idea of liminality.

#### *Archaeology of Rites of Passage*

Garwood (2012) elaborates on van Gennep's tripartite structure of rites of passage. The first part of the structure are rites of separation. This part dissolves society for an individual and guides them to a domain where ordinary social interactions are excluded. Formality increases, social hierarchy is suspended, and time is cyclical. The second part of this structure are rites of liminality. In this stage, individuals find themselves in a liminal phase where they are between and betwixt heaven and earth. The presence of the supernatural and their power may be noted in this phase, along with the suspension of social norms (Garwood 2012: 262). Turner (1967, 1969) extends van Gennep's model of rites of passage and the liminal phase to include 'social dramas'. These dramas can be religious, political, or legal since they require similar structured processes in order to reestablish and validate a new social order and moral conditions. Turner also focuses on the symbolic properties within the liminal phase. Since symbols can be drawn from culture and nature, archaeologists have a greater chance at identifying

them within the material remains of a society. The final part of the structure are rites of reaggregation. In this phase, individuals reestablish themselves within society and social order is restored. It can also be a time of celebration and reflection of the person themselves (Garwood 2012: 262). This tripartite structure proposed by van Gennep has remained a central means for anthropologists who study ritual. There are even anthropologists who state that all rituals function as rites of passage (Parkin 1992).

There tends to be a lack of discussion in archaeology though concerning rites of passage. Garwood states that this is an issue given that rites of passage have to do with cultural and social identity (Thomas 1996; Dobres and Robb 2000; Meskell and Joyce 2003; Fowler 2004; Garwood 2012: 267). Garwood in turn provides a set of themes based on rites of passage and how archaeologists can spot these practices (Garwood 2012: 268-267). The first theme Garwood presents are states of being and personhood. States of being can be defined as age, gender, and positions held within a society, such as a chief or a shaman. The rites of passage in this theme include birth, marriage, and death. Garwood provides an example for this theme through the use of mortuary practices. These practices can be observed easily by archeologists because burials can be identified and excavated. Archaeologists can study the materials that may have been buried with the deceased or the headstones that mark the graves. Funerary rites can also be considered rites of passage for the dead because it can 'initiate' them into the other realm (Fowler 2004: 81).

The second theme presented are passages to other worlds and back again (Garwood 2012). Rites of passage can be seen as journeys, with an individual moving through them from one realm to the next, ending with the reintegration into society. It is within this theme that movement is fundamental. This theme occurs as an individual is entering and leaving the liminal phase. Symbolic change also occurs within the society, or the individual themselves in this theme. Garwood states that analyzing the phenomenology of sacred journeys through their semiotics, staging, and geography has become a broadening field in archaeology. An example of this can be seen in the circular and linear architectural forms from the British Neolithic. These architectural forms include fully enclosed pathways, defined routes to ceremonial enclosures, and pathways through hedges or timber circles (Garwood 2012: 270-271).

The third theme discussed by Garwood covers boundaries, portals, thresholds, and transformations. This theme focuses on the architectural structuring of rituals. Architecture can play a large part for archaeologists when studying a society. It can define boundaries and manipulate spaces for a specific use. Material deposits can also be found at entrances of sacred spaces by archaeologists, and be in relation to ritual acts that have been performed in the building. Verhoeven (2012) discusses how breaking or damaging objects was common in ritual practices, and this may also be true for rites of passage. Since rites of passage can be ritualized, the broken assemblages at entrances of building can notify archaeologists that not only a ritual has occurred there, but possibly a rite of passage. The Neolithic settlement at Barnhouse, Orkney in Scotland provides

archaeologists with an example of this theme. Within the entrance way of a religious building, there is a hearth. The location of the hearth has been interpreted by archaeologists as a transformative space through crossing the fire to get into the building. From crossing through the threshold, the fire just inside marks the leaving of everyday life, and entering into the sacred (Garwood 2012: 273).

The final theme presented is liminality and sacred domains. The interpretation of sacred landscapes and buildings as liminal spaces has become widespread because they emphasize the experience and representation of order, purity, sacrality, and social performative qualities that can be recognized in the liminal phase. To achieve these sensations of otherness, archaeologists have come across substances that may have been used to induce anxiety, disorient individuals, or induce hallucinations at these sacred sites. For example, a cave can be a liminal space because it may be important to the creation of a society. Liminal domains can be within these landscapes and be where an individual must go for their rite of passage. The individuals may leave behind sacred objects that archaeologists can then identify as being part of their rite of passage within society.

## **Symbols**

### Definition

Symbols are objects that can represent or stand in for something else. They have the ability to express meaning. Simply put, a symbol is, “something that stands for or

suggests something else by reason of relationship, association, convention or accidental resemblance; especially, a visible sign of something invisible” (Merriam-Webster 2017). It is what these symbols stand in for that archaeologists can observe. Archaeologists of different schools of thought tend to see how symbols can work in a society differently. According to Robb (1998), processual thinkers view symbols as a representation of social realities. The objects then become a way of communicating with others, with the symbol gaining a material life and becoming a ‘token’ within society. These material tokens are then able to be produced, monopolized upon, exchanged, and destroyed. They provide a physical aspect that can express political power in a group and show the differences among social classes. When symbols are placed into material form, they may become predictable economies of representation (Binford 1962, Wobst 1977).

In comparison, Robb (1998) states that postprocessualists view symbols as having meaning in the interaction between people who are exchanging the object, and not the object itself. Meaning is shown not through a specific object, but through the moment the exchange between members of the society (Thomas 1996: 97). In this way of thinking, the symbol does not have meaning outside of production and exchange of the object or gesture. Postprocessualists also see symbols as not being static in society, but can be used in ways that earns them multiple interpretations over time. Since symbols can be dynamic, archaeologists must acknowledge that they can be reshaped within a society, and also used for self-center actions such as the legitimizing of a family in power (Robb 1998).

Within ritual, symbols can be used to enact deeper religious beliefs (Fogelin 2007). When analyzing ancient symbols, archaeologists need not to focus on the symbol itself, but how meaning can be inferred and then incorporated into the rituals of a society. Archaeologists use the relationship between religion and ritual to understand symbolism, even without ethnohistorical and historical sources. It is possible though for symbols to be manipulated within a society to achieve a specific means (Pauketat & Emerson 1991, Inomata 2001, Lucero 2003, VanPool 2003 and Mills 2004). Archaeologists can still infer meaning of symbols through careful examination of their material context. The material context in which the symbol is found can be used to infer how the symbol was employed and what its dominant ideology was within the society (Fogelin 2007).

### Archaeology of Symbolism

In archaeology, symbols can be used to provide explanations for social relations and social realities in a way to help reconstruct the past. Binford (1962) analyzed symbols from a processualist point of view, stating that symbols were used to reflect economic status within society. In society, different objects can have different symbolic meanings. It is these symbols that have the same meaning that promote identities and group solidarity. He discusses three categories of material culture: technomic, socio-technic, and ideo-technic. Binford's categories are important to understanding his argument on how objects can take on different symbolic meanings in a society.

The first type of material culture that Binford discusses are technomic. The primary functions of these artifacts are to aid people in dealing with their environment. Binford describes them as being a means by which humans can adapt to the world around them (Binford 1962: 219). For example, a sickle can be a symbol of agriculture, but it is also an actual tool which allows individuals to harvest wheat. The second type of material culture are socio-technic ones. This type of artifact allows individuals to interact with one another and connect on a specific level. The third type of material culture are ideo-technic artifacts. Ideo-technic artifacts portray ideological beliefs to a group. The cross as a representation of Christianity is an example of this. These three categories can aid archaeologists in understanding what an object may mean to a society.

An example used by Binford (1962) was the Old Copper Complex. This complex refers to the manufacturing of copper tools during the Archaic period, Early and Middle Woodland times in North America. Since copper was not a strong material that could be used for agriculture and took time to manipulate and work with, this axe could not be considered technomic. When found in a primary archaeological context, the axes were apart of burial goods, showing that they were important to the deceased. Since symbols can be manipulated, Binford suggested that the copper axes symbolized class structure within society. He states this through the physical evidence of the Great Lakes rising around 4500 BP. With the rising lake, aquatic resources became more abundant causing the surrounding population to grow in number. Since the population was larger, a social hierarchy began to form and copper axes were used to show an individual's status in

society. In this case, it would seem that the copper axe acts as both a socio-technic and ideo-technic artifact since it would not only effect how individuals interacted with one another, but also had a unified meaning to the society. The copper axe became a symbol of status and shows how certain objects can be manipulated to mean a specific idea to a community.

### Symbols in Clothing

Hodder (1982, 1987) discusses how clothing and jewelry can be symbols. In the Baringo area of north central Kenya, three tribes exist within close proximity of each other and share similar political and social systems. Hodder observes how their clothing and jewelry distinguish them from one another (Hodder 1982). There are particular ear decorations that signify which tribe an individual is from. Archaeologists can find these ear pieces within material remains and be able to identify what tribe may have occupied a site. Clothing can also be used to distinguish people from different tribes, but an individual can also change their clothing to fit in. Individuals are allowed to marry someone from another tribe. When they marry and move to one tribe, they can change their clothing to show that they are now a part of that particular group. When visiting family though from their old tribe, the individual can change back to the clothing of their old tribe if they so wished to. The clothing in this sense becomes an active symbol that shows tribe solidarity. Hodder discusses the importance of active symbols through this example. He states that through the use of material symbols, individuals and groups can justify their actions and intentions (Hodder 1982: 36). Through understanding that

symbols can be active, archaeologists can view them as working with society, and not just as an abstract image on a wall.

Clothing can also be an active symbol of authority. Champion Pet Foods in Britain began making different color bowties mean different positions in their company (Hodder 1987). They did this so that the factory workers would know if a supervisor was with them on the factory floor. Silver or grey bowties meant they were a divisional supervisor, black a production superintendent, red or maroon a shift manager, and a shift supervisor had a red or maroon band under their collars (Hodder 1987: 15). Since the bowties were introduced to the company after it had already been established, it did not have the desired effect of higher production. If the bowties were more rooted in the history of the company and employees were hired with an understanding of that, it is possible that the color distinctions may have had a more desired effect. Even when the bowties were removed from the uniforms in the 1970s, production output was not affected (Hodder 1987: 19). Unlike the clothing rooted in the tribes in the Baringo, the bowties here served to be an arbitrary symbol.

### Symbols in Mortuary Practices

As discussed by Garwood (2012), funerals can be seen as rites of passage. Whether it's for the deceased as they move into the next realm, or for their loved ones who are left to grieve and attend the funeral, this rite can be recognized in most societies. The symbolism within a mortuary context can be observed archaeologically though.

Binford (1962) discusses how the copper axes were buried with individuals to show their status within society. Parker Pearson (1982) discusses how through mortuary practices, it is the living that seem to be advertising a statement of their wealth. Not only that, but this may also be a false statement of wealth being advertised to make the family appear more affluent. Parker Pearson (1982) argues that through mortuary practices, archaeologists can reconstruct the social past. First, he argues that an individual's social status cannot be identified by material goods placed with them in death and at their burial site. This is because it reflects how the living want to be seen, and not the actual social status of the deceased and their family. Secondly, the material remains can be compared between the individual burials. The deceased in this case however can be manipulated by their family to show more wealth over another individual, even if that was not true during their lifetime. Lastly, there is not a direct reflection of a person's wealth and the material goods they are buried with. The living use the burial as a platform to promote themselves in society, giving the deceased individual a new role in death (Parker Pearson 1982: 112). The material remains at these burials become symbols which can be used by archaeologists to piece together how past societies functioned and viewed different social classes.

## **Conclusion**

The archaeology of religion is understood through different sub categories. Through the observation of rituals, rites of passage, and symbolism, archaeologists can begin piecing together religious practices of the past and how the religion would have

been viewed within society. These sub categories help create a more complete picture of the study of the archaeology of religion. Symbols can be used in rites of passage (Garwood 2012). Rites of passage can be seen as ritual (Verhoeven 2012). Ritual is a means that archaeologists can study religion because it leaves behind material remains (Fogelin 2007). Studying religion archaeologically, these elements can all be combined and aid in a more complete understanding of a society's practices.

### **Chapter 3: The Archaeology of Zoroastrianism**

The archaeology of Zoroastrianism is a topic that few scholars discuss. This being said though, there has been research done on the religion that provides archaeologists with valuable information as to what they may find on a Zoroastrian site. Through my research I have found that a majority of archaeological work written on Zoroastrianism comes from the 1970s and 1980s. Research on this subject has not stopped though, with scholars such as Stausberg (2004), Potts (2012), and Mingren (2016) writing more coteremporally.

Researching the archaeological work done on Zoroastrianism, two main trends stood out. Scholars have focused on the identification of mortuary practices and certain material objects that can be identified as Zoroastrian. In this chapter I will discuss the mortuary practices of this religion through the work of Boyce (1979, 1988), Masani (1968), and Trinkaus (1984). I will also discuss various material objects that scholars have repeatedly mentioned, with a focus on Zoroastrian fire alters and their importance to the religion (Boucharlat 1984, Boyce 1982, Potts 2012, Yamamoto 1979). I will then conclude this chapter with discussing the benefits and shortcomings of the archaeological research done on Zoroastrianism, and what work needs to be done from understanding these shortcomings.

#### **Zoroastrian Archaeological Trends**

Extensive writings on Zoroastrianism have been very few. Stausberg (2008) discusses that most historical background of the religion comes from the 1960s (Zaehner 1961; Duchesne-Guillemin 1962; and Widengren 1965). After that time, Boyce (1975) began writing about the history of the ancient religion. Stausberg states that there is not a scholarly handbook or a specialist journal for Zoroastrianism (Stausberg 2008). What researchers have to rely on for information about the archaeology of this religion are mostly individual scholarly journal articles. It also appears that Zoroastrianism tends to be a secondary outcome of the work done at these sites. What makes a site one that we can identify with Zoroastrianism though is when archaeologists find and document the material culture that was used in the religious practices and acknowledges their god, Ahura Mazda. The work written on the archaeology of Zoroastrianism provides information of what material culture may be present at a site. These sites can be past settlements, or burial grounds. The burial grounds offer information on the mortuary practices of Zoroastrian practitioners (Duchesne-Guillemin 1970; Trumpalman 1984; Litvinsky 1998). The settlements offer information on the everyday life of the practitioners through temples with fire altars, symbolic images, and objects (Schmidt 1953; Yamamoto 1979; Boyce 1982; Potts 2012). Understanding the archaeological finds of both these sites provides a clearer picture as to how Zoroastrianism was practiced.

Potts (2012) discusses ritual and religion within the context of Zoroastrianism. He provides a background into Zoroastrianism, as well as how the practices of the religion can be observed through the material remains. Within Potts' discussion of

Zoroastrianism, he also provides a list of sites that have produced archaeological finds. These sites are Chogha Pahn East (Stolper 1990; Kuhrt 1995), Chogha Pahn West (Carter and Stolper 1984), Chogha Zanbil (Ghirshman 1953, 1966, 1968; Carter 1979; Kurht 1995), Deh-e Now (Litvinsky 1998), Susa (Loftus 1857; Schmandt-Besserat 1978; Dieulafoy 2004), Tappeh Deylam (Ascalone 2010; Basello 2016), Tappeh Gotvand (Ascalone 2010; Basello 2016), Tappeh Horreeye (Ascalone 2010), and Tol-e Bormi (Nasrabadi 2005) in the Khuzestan Province of Iran; and Tal-e Malyan (Zeder 1986; Carter and Deaver 1996; Alden, Abdi, Azadi, Beckman, and Pittman 2004; Sumner 2005), Tol-e Spid (Petrie, Asgari Chaverdi, and Seyedin 2006; Petrie, Zarchi, and Zadeh 2007), and Tol-e Peytul (Carter, Challis, Priestman, and Tofighian 2006) in the Fars province of Iran. The sites of Chogha Pahn East and West, Chogha Zanbil, Tappeh Deylan, Tappeh Gotvand, Tappeh Horreeye, Tol-e Bormi, and Tol-e Peytul were smaller settlements. Chogha Zanbil was also a royal ceremonial site from 1250 to 640 BC. The sites of Susa, Tal-e Malyan, and Tol-e Spid were larger cities. Susa was around from 4200 BC to 1218 AD. Tal-e Maylan was around from 5500 BC through the Sasanian Empire, about 651 AD. Tol-e Spid flourished from 4000 to 50 BC. The site of Deh-e Now was a burial site during the fourth and third centuries BC. These sites were all found with temples in dedication to the deities of Zoroastrianism. Another temple was found at the site of Persepolis in Iran (Potts 2012: 814-815). These sites were also identified through inscribed or stamped bricks that reference the practice of Zoroastrianism. For example, inscriptions written on the rock face near western Iran at the site of Bisotun

identify Ahura Mazda by King Darius I as ‘the god of the Iranians’ (Stonarch 1984: 487). From Ahura Mazda being named, the inscription itself identifies the site of Bisotun as being associated with the religion of Zoroastrianism. Potts (2012) discusses what archaeologists should examine if there are no remaining inscriptions left to aid researchers in identifying a religious practice at a site. Potts (2012) references mortuary practices and material objects in place of the inscriptions.

### Mortuary Practices

Zoroastrianism has its own specific burial practice. Practitioners of this ancient religion believe that it is taboo to bury their deceased in the ground due to the fact that the decomposing body could pollute the earth (Potts 2012: 815; Mingren 2016). Practitioners instead expose their deceased in the open to have the flesh removed by birds of prey. This practice was first documented being used in Iran during fifth century BC (Mingren 2016). The religious practitioners would place their dead on a circular platform inside a tower, known as the tower of silence, or *dakhma*. Three concentric circles would be made on the top platform, with men being placed on the outside, women next, then children in the center. Within the tower, birds of prey remove the flesh of the deceased within two hours (Masani 1968: 99-103; Mingren 2016).



Figure 1. Tower of Silence three tier depiction. Wu Mingren. 2016. *Zoroastrian Towers of Silence: Where the Dead Are Left to the Vultures*. [cited 2 August 2018]. Available

from World Wide Web: (<https://www.ancient-origins.net/history-ancient-traditions/zoroastrian-towers-silence-where-dead-are-left-vultures-007182>)

Towers of Silence were used in Iran until this style of mortuary practice was banned by the government in the 1970s. An example of a Tower of Silence can still be seen in Yazd, Iran. Yazd is the capitol of the Yazd Province in Iran, and was founded during the Achaemenian Empire, from 550 to 330 BC (Duchesne-Guillemin 1970; Trumpalman 1984). Since the banning of the towers, there are still some existing structures that can be observed for the research of Zoroastrianism throughout Iran and India (Mingren 2016). After the flesh was cleaned from the bones and the bones dried in the sun, they would then be interred in an ossuary which is often in the form of a rock cut niche (Boyce 1988: 21, Potts 2012).



Figure 2. Tower of Silence in Yazd, Iran. Ella Morton. 2014. Towers of Silence: The Zoroastrian Sky Burial Tradition. [cited 2 August 2018]. Available from World Wide

Web:

([http://www.slate.com/blogs/atlas\\_obscura/2014/10/15/towers\\_of\\_silence\\_in\\_yazd\\_a\\_zoroastrian\\_sky\\_burial\\_site.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/atlas_obscura/2014/10/15/towers_of_silence_in_yazd_a_zoroastrian_sky_burial_site.html))

The interpretation of Zoroastrian ossuaries relies on written sources (Herodotus 440 BC; Strabo 7BC). After the flesh is removed from the body of the deceased, the bones are placed in a container. The ossuary, or *uzdāna*, was to then be made out of reach of foxes, wolves, and dogs, and covered from the rain. They were to be made out of clay, carved stone, or chalk, or if the family of the deceased could not afford that, the bones could be placed in the family's home (Trinkaus 1984: 676). The shape of the ossuary can be distinctive with local features. For example, they can be distinguished by the décor of actual buildings from a particular area (Pugachenkova 1994: 227). Clay ossuaries found in Central Asia provide archaeological evidence of Zoroastrian mortuary practices. They were found primarily in modern day Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (Kozenkova 1961; Belenitsky 1969; Kosholenko and Lelekov 1973). The ossuaries are simple boxes or ovals, with either little or no decoration (Trinkaus 1984: 676). This also provides evidence of there being economical differences within Zoroastrian society due to the ornamentation of the ossuary varying by class (Boyce 1979: 90-91).



Figure 3. Zoroastrian Ossuary from Yumalaktepa. The Brunei Gallery. 2013. SOAS [online]: University of London. [cited 2 August 2018]. Available from World Wide Web: (<https://www.soas.ac.uk/gallery/everlastingflame/>)

### Material Culture

There are also objects that can be identified with Zoroastrian practices, such as engraved mortars and pestles. At the site of Persepolis in Iran, green chert, marble mortars, pestles, trays, and plates were found, along with epigraphic accounts that have attributed these items to the production of *haoma* (Potts 2012: 818). *Haoma* is an intoxicating drink made from the ephedra plant and is consumed in Zoroastrian practices

(Edujje 2005). When crushed the plant produces an extract that can be used for healing purposes. *Haoma* benefits both the spiritual and physical ailments of an individual. Not only is the drink nourishing, but also aids in thinking clearly, making the individual wiser (Edujje 2005).

The objects found at the site of Persepolis have been written on with ink as well, stating that the objects were to be handed over to officials. Scholars believe that after being handed over, they were then used in the ‘crushing ceremony’ that made *haoma* for Zoroastrian ritual (Potts 2012: 818). An example of the pestles being written on was found in the Treasury at Persepolis. The pestle states that, “In the *haoma* crushing ceremony of the fortress...1, *Haoma-data*, has used this pestle...” (Wilber 1989: 26). Another example of the mortar and pestle being used is on an altar in the Treasury at Persepolis (Boyce 1982: 145-146). On the altar is an image of two worshippers who are wearing wide-sleeved Persian robes. The individuals face the fire altar in the center of the image, and between the figure on the right and the altar there is a table. Sitting on the table is a large mortar and pestle. From the recognition of the mortar and pestle on the altar, it appears to be a scene of the *haoma* ceremony (Schmidt 1953: 9; Boyce 1982: 146).



Figure 4. Mortar and pestle found in the Treasury at Persepolis. 2018. The Oriental Institute [online]: University of Chicago. [cited 3 August 2018]. Available from World Wide Web: ( [https://oi.uchicago.edu/gallery/miscellaneous-finds#6A9\\_72dpi.png](https://oi.uchicago.edu/gallery/miscellaneous-finds#6A9_72dpi.png))

### *Symbols*

Symbols are also an indication of what religion may be practiced at a site. These symbols can be stamped, drawn, or even worn as clothing pieces at the site. Within the religion of Zoroastrianism, the decoration of ossuaries with a sun and moon appears to be common. Also, the symbol of a figure in a winged circle. The figure within the winged circle is a symbol that can still be seen today at modern Zoroastrian worship sites. The longevity of the symbol itself demonstrates how important it is to the religion.

The symbols of the sun and the moon appear on Zoroastrian ossuaries in Central Asia within the modern-day countries of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. (Kozenkova 1961; Belenitsky 1969; Kosholenko and Lelekov 1973). The sun and moon also appear on small objects and wall paintings in temples and houses from the site of Tok-kala in

Uzbekistan (Trinkaus 1984: 677). These symbols are thought to be important to Zoroastrian practice since the Avasta specifies that the corpse, "...should be seen by the sun," (Trinkaus 1984). The light given off from the sun and moon was thought to be purifying for destroying the dead matter and releasing the soul into the afterlife (Trinkaus 1984: 677).

For Zoroastrianism, there is also the symbol a figure within a winged circle. Researchers believe this may be a symbol of the Zoroastrian god, Ahura Mazda (Boyce 1982: 101-103). The figure is shown over the heads of rulers or individuals in general. Placing it above gives the figure in the winged circle a superhuman aspect, having the viewer believe it is 'above all'. One particular figure in the winged circle had fragments of color still on the lower portion. The color red was on the figure's robes, the area within the disk, the small winged feathers, and the second row of large feathers. Green was found on parts of the lotus that the figure can be holding at times instead of the disk, the remnant of the tail feathers, and the first and third rows of the large feathers. Blue showed inside the disk, within the winged area on the left of the disk, and the robe. The color purple was also discovered on the lotus (Lerner 1973). This image can be seen at the site of Persepolis in Iran and will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter (Van Buren 1945; Boyce 1982).



Figure 5. Figure in winged circle. Marco Prins. 2017. Persepolis, Palace of Xerxes. [cited 3 August 2018]. Available from World Wide Web: [\(http://www.livius.org/pictures/iran/persepolis/persepolis-palace-of-xerxes/persepolis-palace-of-xerxes-interconnecting-terrace-faravahar/\)](http://www.livius.org/pictures/iran/persepolis/persepolis-palace-of-xerxes/persepolis-palace-of-xerxes-interconnecting-terrace-faravahar/)



Figure 6. Modern day figure in winged circle. 2017. Megan E. Hall. California Zoroastrian Center. Westminster, CA.

### *Fire Altars*

Early practices of this religion involved blood sacrifice, normally from the sacrifice of animals (Herodotus 440 BC; Benveniste 1964: 46; Boyce 1966: 105). Potts (2012) discusses the *dron* ritual, where sacrificed meat is consumed alongside a cake. This sacrifice of an unidentified animal would also be offered in a purified place, with a portion of the cauld placed on a fire in offering to their deity (Potts 2012: 813-814). From this practice, archaeologists would be able to find the remains of the animal that was sacrificed around the fire pit at a Zoroastrian site.

It is these fire altars that can be architectural markers of Zoroastrian sites. Referred to also as a fire bowl, this architectural design can provide archaeologists with

the information that Zoroastrianism was more than likely practiced at a specific site. For Zoroastrians, the 'sacred fire,' or 'most holy fire,' can be seen as a representation of Ahura Mazda's son. The smoke from the fire was also considered to have purifying qualities. Through identifying the fire alter, archaeologists can identify the fire precinct which is held within the fire temple. This is where the fire would burn upon the altar (Potts 2012: 817). At the site of Nush-I Jan in central western Iran, the central temple had a fire altar inside. This fire altar was 85cm tall with a square surface, 1.4m by 1.4m. This site is dated to seventh and sixth century BC (Potts 2012: 815). The sixth and fifth century BC site of Dahan-e Ghulaiman in Seistan, Iran also had a temple with a fire altar dedicated to Ahura Mazda (Scerrato 1966). Also, in Seistan at the site of Kuh-e Khwaja from the second and first century BC, a temple was located with a fire altar inside (Kaim 2004: 323).

These fire altars can be divided into three groups (Yamamoto 1979: 30). The first group of altars that can be observed are made by brick or stone. They resemble a plinth, being rectangular in shape and panels cut on the sides. On the top there are ornate battlements in a step shape, and the fire was to burn between these battlements. The altar is approximately 0.8m. The battlement on top of the altar would be the distinctive feature for this first group of altars. From the height and large battlements adorning the top of the altar, this group of altars would have been fixed in place. Since it was a permanent structure, the altar would have been reserved for ritualistic practices. However, this altar has only been found on seals from the later Achaemenian period, and not as an actual

architectural remain. On these seals, this type of fire altar is shown being flanked by two men. Both of the men wear Persian styled clothing that consists of a long skirt and wide sleeves, with what appears to be a crown worn by nobles and kings (Thompson 1965: 125; Boardman 1970: 305; Yamamoto 1979: 30-32). Since these seals are associated with royalty, the fire altar on the seal would be associated with the ruling class. If so, the size of the altar may correlate with the power of the ruler, allowing them to claim dignity and respect from it (Yamamoto 1979: 31). Note that in figure seven, the winged figure is also present.



Figure 7. Fire altar seal impression from Persepolis, Iran. Dr. Ali Akbar Jafarey. 1998. *The Achaemenians, Zoroastrians in Transition*. [cite 3 August 2018]. Available from World Wide Web: ([http://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Religions/iranian/Zarathushtrian/achaemenian\\_zarathushtrian.htm](http://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Religions/iranian/Zarathushtrian/achaemenian_zarathushtrian.htm))

The second group of fire altars are pillar shaped, with two or three steps at the base and top. These altars are mainly made out of brick or stone, and possibly metal for

the slenderness of the center pillar. These pillar altars are also seen at Naqsh-I Rostam and Persepolis on tomb reliefs (Yamamoto 1979). Like the first group, this altar type is shown on a seal. The seal was found at Persepolis dated to the Assyrian era, from 4750-609 BC, showing the altar in front of a seated god. This altar can also be found in its physical form as well. The oldest surviving second style altar is from eighth century BC Iran at Nūsh-I Jān Tepe (Stronach 1973: 129-138). This specific altar was made out of mud brick and covered in white plaster, with a four-stepped top and a shallow depression where the fire would have burned. This style of the fire altar can be seen in modern temples today as the usual type of Zoroastrian altar, causing this style to be considered as the standard type of Zoroastrian fire altar (Yamamoto 1979: 32-35).



Figure 8. Fire altar with protective wall from Tepe Nūš-e Jān, Iran. Mark Garrison. 2012. Fire Altars. [cited 3 August 2018]. Available from World Wide Web: (<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/fire-altars>)



Figure 9. Modern day fire altar. 2017. Megan E. Hall. California Zoroastrian Center. Westminster, CA.

The third group of fire altars are depicted by a slender shaft. This design in particular has not been found at an archaeological site as of yet but is referenced on Assyrian and Babylonian seals. This altar may have been influenced by the standard style of the second group through the use of metal. These altars may have also been portable and used during the Achaemenian period. The army of Darius III carried a fire upon a 'silver altar' during their campaign against Alexander the Great from 335-300 BC (Curtius Rufus 3.3.9; Yamamoto 1979: 35-36). Since this altar group has only been referenced and not found, it is difficult to say exactly what it looks like. The references seem to provide the idea that the altars were portable, so having a slender shaft would be beneficial. It would also be beneficial for these altars to be light weight. With the altar

being portable though, the remains of one could be completely out of context, therefore difficult to interpret.

### **Shortcomings**

The information above is gathered from both archaeological and non-archaeological sources. While attempting to focus mainly on the archaeological sources, it proves difficult when there is not a large amount of information available. For what is available, Zoroastrian fire altars seem to be of the most interest. After the 1980s, academic interest in this ancient religion appears to have fallen. When researching this topic, there may be references towards Zoroastrianism appearing, but articles or books themselves are few. Why is this the case?

I have found that today Zoroastrianism is not as popular in Iran as it once was. Not only are followers of this religion becoming fewer, but those who know about the religion are few as well (Goodstein 2006; Hays 2008). This was a surprise in my opinion. Whether you practice a religion or not, people generally have an idea of different religious viewpoints. When it comes to Zoroastrianism though, from my own experience not many people have heard of it. Since the religion provides building blocks for Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, could it be that those religions have begun to take the popularity of Zoroastrianism and cause it to become less popular? For research purposes, this causes an issue in the amount of information available.

The public's understanding of Zoroastrianism could be directly affected due to the lack of academic work on the subject. Research into the subject would greatly expand the public's sphere of knowledge. If discussed in academics, then more people would learn about Zoroastrianism. This religion is still important to its own practitioners and has such a rich history that it should not be forgotten. My research aims to bring this religion back into discussion. The archaeology behind the religion shows that Zoroastrianism was practiced at certain locations, and these practices can be distinguished. Stausberg (2008) states that moving forward with the study of this religion, the material and visual culture should be examined more so that scholars can move away from observing only the textual sources. The material culture study of Zoroastrianism would then focus on clothing, consumption, eating and dietary restrictions, landscape, architecture, domestic interiors, and home furnishings (Stausberg 2008: 586). This would be able to aid archaeologist in understanding how Zoroastrianism was practiced in a household, rather than only in public in religious spaces. Through being able to study more of the cultural material that Zoroastrianism provides, archaeologists will be able to gain a fuller understanding of the religion and its roots in Iranian culture. Though this religion has been pushed aside by many scholars, it is my belief that through archaeologists that are interested in Zoroastrianism and given the opportunity to be on an archaeological site, the study of this antient religion can progress and continue to be relevant within academic studies.

## **Conclusion**

The archaeology of Zoroastrianism has a long way to go. My research has shown that Zoroastrianism sites have been found within existing archaeological sites as a secondary aspect. While not the primary research goal, the artifacts found relating to the religion provide a better understanding of the site as a whole. Through the work of scholars such as Yamamoto (1979), Trinkaus (1984), and Potts (2012) though, archaeologists can begin to understand what features a Zoroastrian site will have. Like other religions and cultures, this ancient religion has a set of markers specific to it. Even with the limited amount of research that has been done on this topic, these markers have presented themselves. Through specific mortuary practices, architectural features such as fire pits, and material remains, archaeologists can identify Zoroastrian sites and further the research of this religion. Zoroastrianism deserves to be studied and through the research of those prior, future archaeologists can continue understanding how this ancient religion functioned within society.

#### Chapter 4: A Case Study of Persepolis



Figure 10. Darius I's Palace at Persepolis, Iran. Mark Banning-Taylor. 2017. Persepolis Iran. [cited 4 August 2018]. Available from World Wide Web: [\(https://www.odysseytraveller.com/articles/persepolis-iran/\)](https://www.odysseytraveller.com/articles/persepolis-iran/)

The site of Persepolis in Iran is a place that many individuals have traveled to see, with descriptions of it being recorded by scholars, such as archaeologists and art historians, to amateur traveler and tourist alike (Schneider 1976, Mousavi 2012). Not only do the remains of the palace offer archaeologists insight as to how ancient Iranian architecture was presented, but Persepolis also provides evidence of how Zoroastrian practices may have looked like. Through archaeological excavations, this sight has yielded evidence of the religion, from the material culture found to written inscriptions. From an inscription found on the excavated foundation of the site, King Darius I states

that, “And Ahuramazda was of such mind, together with all the other gods, that this fortress (should) be built. And (so) I built it. And I built it secure and beautiful and adequate, just as I was intended to,” (Schmidt 1953: 63).

In this chapter I will discuss how the site of Persepolis provides information regarding the religion of Zoroastrianism. First, I will provide the background information of the site, placing Persepolis historically. Next, I will discuss a brief history of the excavations and archaeological finds at Persepolis. I will then discuss the finds and their connections with Zoroastrianism. In regards to the ancient religion of Zoroastrianism, Persepolis provides a useful collection of material culture to aid archaeologist in understanding how the religion was present in everyday life.

## **Background**

Persepolis was founded during the Persian Achaemenian Empire. The Achaemenian Empire was established in 550 BC under the rule of Cyrus the Great, who ruled from 550 to 530 BC. Under his reign, Zoroastrianism was established as the official Iranian religion. The empire ruled over Iran, the Ionian Greeks, and individuals of Jewish, Hindu and Arab descent (Boyce 1984: 22). Lasting until 330 BC, the empire came to an end with the death of Darius III who ruled from 336-330 BC.

During the Persian Achaemenian Empire, Darius the Great ruled from 522 to 486 BC. He rose to power after Cyrus the Great and kept the traditions of his predecessor, including the pious institutions (Boyce 1982: 90). Between 518 and 516 BC, Darius

began construction on a new palace-complex about 644km south from the present-day capital city of Iran, Teheran. The place Darius chose for the complex was in the plains of Marv Dasht, at the foot of Kuh-i-Rahmat, "Mountain of Mercy," (Schneider 1976: 1). The mountain-spur created a rock base that was used for a large stone terrace for the palace, which was built up to be about 17 meters high (Boyce 1982). The rock-base was levelled, and a platform was built 13.35 hectares long (Wilber 1989: 3). The palace-complex that was built upon the platform was named Parsa, better known as Persepolis (Wilber 1989; Mousavi 2012: 9).



Figure 11. Recreation of Persepolis, Iran. Jean-Claude Golvin. 2018. Middle East.

[cited 4 August 2018]. Available from World Wide Web:

(<http://jeanclaudegolvin.com/en/project/middle-east/>)

In order to build the platform that Persepolis sits upon, side walls had to be erected. Forming a rough quadrilateral structure, the walls run 300m on the north side, 290m on the south, 300m for the east side, and 455m on the west end of the platform (Kleiss 1992; Mousavi 2012: 10-12). The site consists of two main parts, with the north side of the complex being mainly the Audience Hall of the Apadana, the Gate of Xerxes, and the Throne Room. The south side of the complex consisted of the Palace of Darius, the Palace of Xerxes, the Council Hall, and the Treasury. The north side of the complex represented the business section of Persepolis, with accessing being restricted to the public (Schneider 1976: 2).

Phases of construction completed at Persepolis have been examined by Schmidt (1953), Tilia (1978), Roaf (1983), and Calmeyer (1990). Four periods of construction have been identified throughout the sites history, from about 515 BC to 330 BC. The first phase, *period I*, was from 515 to 490 BC. During this phase, Darius laid the foundation for the site. The Apadana, a large audience hall, was under construction during this phase, as well as the Treasury. *Period II* was from 490 to 480 BC. Darius continued construction until his death in 486 BC and was then succeeded by his son Xerxes. Xerxes completed most of the construction of the palace-complex and The Gate of All Lands was built. Eastern and Northern fortifications were also built during this phase and surrounding

residential and administrative buildings date to this phase in the southern plains of the site. *Period III* lasted from 479 to 458 BC, and Xerxes commissioned the construction of the Hall of a Hundred Columns. The north-west main staircase also dates to this phase. Xerxes' son, Artaxerxes I finished the construction of the Hall of a Hundred Columns, as well as had the Tripylon built. During the seventh year of Artaxerxes' reign, 458 BC, construction halted. There is an absence of documentation as to why this happened. Construction began again though in 423 BC, during the last phase, *Period IV*. This phase lasted from 423 to 330 BC. Darius II was ruling at this time, from 423 to 404 BC, and this period was marked by diplomatic efforts and pressure for the military to recapture Asia Minor coastal cities. During this time, buildings were remodeled or altered, including the eastern rooms of the Hall of a Hundred Columns (Mousavi 2012: 49-51). In 330 BC, Alexander the Great conquered and looted Persepolis, causing the site to burn and the Achaemenian Empire to end (Schneider 1976).



Figure 12. Construction Phases of Persepolis. The Map Archive. 2018. [cited 4 August 2018]. Available from World Wide Web:

(<https://www.themaparchive.com/construction-phases-of-persepolis.html>)

Persepolis may have been established to be a secure yet magnificent palace in order to receive representatives of subjugated people. During the reign of Xerxes from 486 to 465 BC, scenes of present-bringing and processions had been carved into the great staircases at Persepolis (Boyce 1982). It is also thought though that Persepolis was the

spiritual sanctuary of the Achaemenian Empire. This is based on the depiction of the rulers sitting on their thrones with the symbol of Ahura Mazda hovering over them (Wilber 1989: 14). Through the archaeology of the site, both theories can be proven as viable. Archaeological evidence from the site of Persepolis indicates that the religion of Zoroastrianism was practiced there. This evidence can be seen throughout the history of the site, through inscriptions, images of Ahura Mazda, and the material culture.

### Archaeology of Persepolis

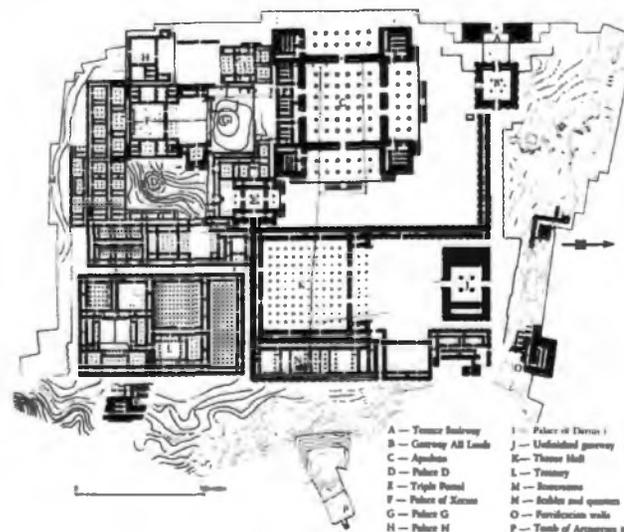


Figure 13. Site Map of Persepolis. Gabriel Feld. 2013. Reading the City. [cited 4 August 2018]. Available from World Wide Web:

(<http://citiesandstories.blogspot.com/2013/03/city-of-buildings-persepolis.html>)

Travelers have gone to see the ruins of Persepolis for centuries. In the eighteenth century, visitors were carving their names into conspicuous places. Most of the names

appear to have been written on the Gate of All Lands. In 1815, a British diplomat, author, and traveler did some digging at the site. The first official excavator of Persepolis was Mo'tamed ad-Dawla Farhad Mirza in 1876. His excavation focused mainly on the clearing of the Throne Room. According to a report to trustees though, he found nothing (Hauser 1933; Whitcomb 1985). Then in 1891, W. H. Blundell 'dug' in several places, but documented that he found nothing of value (Blundell 1893; Wilber 1989: 114-115).

In 1931, Ernst Herzfeld began excavating Persepolis as the lead archaeologist on site. He was sponsored by the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. This excavation was not authorized by the Iranian government though. Recent research has revealed that the Institute and Herzfeld were only granted "clearance permission," which was to be used to promote the preservation and restoration of the site (Stolper 2013). Excavation of Persepolis was not the end goal of the Iranian government (Mousavi 2012: 163). Nevertheless, Herzfeld did excavate at Persepolis. He had three goals for the site. The first was to examine the site by excavating the main palace-complexes on the platform, or Terrace. The second goal was to reconstruct one of the palaces to house the expedition. Herzfeld's third goal was to preserve the sculptures and buildings on the Terrace. He aimed to reopen the ancient drainage system by doing so, and to protect the sculptures and buildings from frost, rain, and man (Herzfeld 1933: 406-407; Mousavi 2012). During his time spent excavating Persepolis, Herzfeld uncovered the Harem of Xerxes, the north section of the Apadana, Palace 'G', and the eastern side of the Gate of All Lands. Herzfeld never produced a survey grid to mark the locations of find at the site

however. He thought that it was time-consuming and unnecessary as he wanted to proceed quickly with the excavation. This was a task that Erich Schmidt later took on (Schmidt 1957; Krefter 1979).

Schmidt took over the excavations at Persepolis in 1935. In 1931, Schmidt first began to excavate in Iran at Tepe Hissar, then at Rey. When Herzfeld resigned, the Oriental Institute hired Schmidt as the director of the excavations being done in the Marv Dasht plain, including the site of Persepolis. Schmidt avoided excavating in areas that Herzfeld had, opting to wait for Herzfeld's report of the excavation. The report was never released by Herzfeld, and Schmidt had to continue without it (Mousavi 2012). He began by excavating the south-east section of the platform of Persepolis and found the architectural remains of the garrison (Schmidt 1939: 7-15; 1957: 206-212). There seven inscribed slabs were discovered from the rule of Xerxes. These slabs provided information on the religious policy of the Achaemenian ruler (Mousavi 2012: 188).

In 1936, excavation at the Treasury began. The Treasury of Persepolis holds the largest number of finds from the royal storehouse within the building (Schneider 1976: 4). The excavation of the Treasury resulted in the discovery of the 'audience reliefs' that are attributed to Darius. Two of the reliefs were set into the back walls of the southern and eastern porticoes in the eastern part of the Treasury. The reliefs vary in length from about 6.2m to 6.3m and are 2.6m in height (Mousavi 2012: 188). Hundreds of clay tablets and sealed labels were also found in the Treasury. These tablets and labels are known as the Persepolis Treasury tablets and discuss the economic and social proceedings of the

Achaemenian Empire (Schmidt 1957: 54; Mousavi 2012: 189). For example, twenty-four of these tablets are records of the workmen at Persepolis and what they were being paid. The tablets also recorded commodities within the empire and how much they were worth. A shekel, the Iranian currency, was the equivalent to one jar of wine. Three shekels was worth a sheep. Other commodities included on the tablets were grain and beer (Wilber 1989: 95). During this excavation season, Schmidt also decided to excavate the interior of the Hall of a Hundred Columns.

Excavation of the Treasury was completed in 1938, and the last excavation season for Schmidt was in 1939 (Mousavi 2012: 191). During his last season, attention was turned to the southern section of the platform. The excavation uncovered the west wing of the Harem and the southern part of the Apadana. Schmidt left Persepolis in a hurry in December of 1936. Tension was increasing between European powers in Iran, and ten cases of objects from Persepolis were seized by Iranian authorities before they could make it to the United States for further study. Though they were given back in 1941, the American freighter that was transporting the objects, the *S.S. City of Alma*, was struck by a German torpedo and sank in the Caribbean about 600 km north-east of San Juan, Puerto Rico (Mousavi 2012).

After Schmidt left Persepolis in 1939, the Archaeological Service of Iran undertook work at the site. Directed by André Godard, work was continued for clearing the platform (Godard 1954). The Istituto Italiano per il Medio de Estremo Oriente took over the site in 1964 and focused on research and restoration only. From 1964 to 1979,

they worked to repair damaged capitals, columns, parapets, and reliefs by patching them with cement or stones that matched the color of the original. The preservation of the reliefs on the east stairway of the Apadana and the stairways of the Triple Portal were the priority so they would not be damaged by the elements. Today the site remains open to visitors (Wilber 1989: 116).

### **Religious Finds at Persepolis**

The site of Persepolis lasted through one period of Iran's history, the Achaemenian Empire. When the palace-complex was being built, Darius the Great acknowledges that Ahura Mazda wanted it to be "secure and beautiful," (Schmidt 1953: 63). With Zoroastrianism being made the official religion of Iran during the reign of the first ruler of the Achaemenian Empire, Cyrus the Great, Persepolis has been identified as the 'spiritual heart' of the time period (Wilber 1989: 21). There are inscriptions at the site that name Ahura Mazda as their god. There is also imagery throughout the site that pictures the Zoroastrian god above the ruler, as well as artifacts that relate to the religion. Though Persepolis was burnt down by Alexander the Great, the material culture of the site shows that Zoroastrianism was practiced there.

### **Inscriptions**

Darius the Great proclaimed how he built Persepolis how Ahura Mazda wanted it. This inscription, written in the beginning of this chapter, was placed on the foundation of the platform (Schmidt 1953). Ahura Mazda's representation through Persepolis shows

how critical Zoroastrianism was to its occupants. Xerxes also names Ahura Mazda, stating that he worships him 'reverently' (Wilber 1989; Mousavi 2012). Both Artaxerxes I and Darius II ask for blessings to be bestowed upon them from Ahura Mazda. It is shown that through inscriptions Artaxerxes II and Artaxerxes III call upon the god as well. In the Treasury, there were tablets found that list instructions about the amount of *haoma* that should be used for religious purposes (Schneider 1976: 5).

Around 30,000 clay tablets inscribed in cuneiform and the Elamite language were found in the Treasury at Persepolis during the 1933 and 1934 excavations. Around two years later in 1936, a collection of over 750 tablets were found in there as well (Cameron 1948). The tablets found in the north-eastern part of the complex were dated to about 509-494 BC, Darius' reign, and record larger operations and detailed apportionments to consumers, such as the transfer of food and commodities. The ones found in the Treasury were dated to 492-458 BC, from Darius' to Artaxerxes I reign. These tablets recorded payment in silver to workmen. Overall the texts also contain theophoric names that can be connected with pre-Zoroastrian beliefs, as well as matters of the ancient religion (Hallock 1969, Boyce 1982).

On a few tablets found in the Treasury, the issue of food, wine and beer in reverence to a religious observation is recorded. The tablets stated that the items were issued for the '*lan*' ceremony (Boyce 1982: 133). *Lan* in Elamite is suggested to mean 'sending forth' and could be a technical term for acts of worship. These tablets mention *dausa*, which is a part of the *lan* ceremony in which four cups of flour are to be given,

along with 12 measures of figs. The measurements would be given to four men who perform the *lan* ceremony, described as '*lan* performers' (Hallock 1969; Boyce 1982: 134). The word *dauša* itself is an Iranian word and the Old Persian equivalent of *zaothra*, which for Zoroastrians mean 'libation, offering, and oblation' according to the Avesta (Cameron 1948, Boyce 1982). Another word in the *lan* ceremony that can be traced to the Avesta is *tamšiyam*, which can be translated to Old Persian as *daušiyam* which means 'propitiatory offering, what serves for satisfaction'. This can also be connected to the Zoroastrian word *zaoša*, meaning pleasure (Gershevitch 1969, Hallock 1969, Boyce 1982). On the tablets for the *lan* ceremony, the word *hatutmakša* could mean a priest, which could then be interpreted into a Persian word found in the Avestan that names the priest that resides over the ritual fire, *ātrə-vaxš* (Boyce 1982: 136).

### Images

In the main doorway of the Palace of Darius at Persepolis, also known as the Tačara, an image of Darius leaving the hall was carved. Darius was followed by two attendants while he wears his crown and his robe that was brilliantly painted at one time. There is also evidence that a figure once appeared in a winged circle on the wall at Tačara. This symbol may have been added by Darius' grandson, Artaxerxes I. On either side of the northern doorway of the Central Palace built by Artaxerxes I, his sculpture is shown in the same form as Darius', flanked by two attendants as well. One of the attendants holds a parasol over Artaxerxes' head, and above it the winged symbol occurs. The figure within the circle faces the same way the king does and wears a crown identical

to the kings as well. The figure also holds the ring of divinity, with the other hand raised in greeting. The wings are tapered at the end and painted in bright colors (Boyce 1982: 100).

Within the eastern doorway of the Tripylon, there is a sculpture identical to that in the Tačara. The winged circle also reappears. This symbol once again appears over the scenes carved into the four doorways in the Hundred-Columned Hall, or the Throne Hall. Construction on this hall began during the reign of Xerxes and was finished by Artaxerxes I (Tilia 1972, 1978; Boyce 1982: 101). With the continuation of this winged symbol being used throughout different reigns of the Achaemenian Empire, we can identify the importance of it to the ruling class, and the society as a whole.

Since the figure in the winged circle sits above the human plane in the sculptures, it would appear to be superhuman. On the walls at Persepolis it is associated with powerful symbols, such as the rosette, snarling lions, and date-palms, which are the symbols of a long life and immortality, might, and fecundity and wealth respectfully (Boyce 1982: 103). Early suggestions of the figure in the winged circle discuss it as representing the *fravaši* of the king, since the *fravaši* is thought to be a winged spirit, or Ahura Mazda himself. Scholars have come to this conclusion on the bases that Ahura Mazda was the only deity identified by Darius (Van Buren 1945). However, the *fravaši* was thought to be a female in ancient times, and since the figure in the symbol is always portrayed as a male, scholars can disregard the suggestion that it is the *fravaši*, and instead accept the later suggestion that the symbol is the supreme god (Boyce 1982: 103).

Lerner states that the figure within the winged circle is Ahura Mazda, as he is wearing a long, pleated Persian robe, or *candys*, with a high squared crown. He also wears a long rectangular beard that is reserved for monarchs and deities in Persian iconography (Lerner 1973: 116). This relief originally stood in the Hall of a Hundred Columns and was carved there during the reign of Artaxerxes I, since the Hall is attributed to him and his father Xerxes (Lerner 1973: 119).

There are also images of a fire altar being present on the tombs of four of the rulers of the Achaemenian Empire. These tombs were found in the cliff at Naqsh-e Rostam, about 9.7 km from Persepolis. On Darius' tomb, there is an image of himself and a fire altar, with Ahura Mazda in the winged circle hovering above (Wilber 1989: 106). Since Zoroastrian belief includes the use of fire altars, and there are scenes from the site depicting them, it is not hard to believe that the altars were present at Persepolis. Perhaps their remains have been made difficult to find because the site was burnt by Alexander the Great in 330 BC. It is possible that the altars perished in this fire, and that the only indication we have of them is from the imagery presented.

### Material Culture

Objects recovered at the Treasury and fortification of Persepolis also show religious scenes on seal impressions (Schmidt 1957). Themes of these scenes match what appears on the walls, such as the figure in the winged circle, and the winged disk. There are a number of seals that also show a fire-holder, or fire altar, with two worshippers or

attending priests and the winged symbol above it (Boyce 1982: 145). Once again, a fire ritual is alluded to at the site. Seal number 20 from Persepolis provides a clear depiction of what the fire altar may have looked like, with a three-stepped top and base, joined together by a rectangular shaft. From other depictions of fire altars, they may be three-stepped or two-stepped, with square tops that have a place in the center for the fire to burn (Boyce 1982).

At the site of Persepolis, marble mortars, pestles, green chert, and plates were also found. These were instruments that scholars believe were used to make *haoma*, which is an intoxicating drink made from a plant and consumed in Zoroastrian ritual (Bowman 1970, Taillieu 1997, Potts 2012: 818). Around 269 mortars and pestles were found all together in the Treasury, with about 200 of them being inscribed in Aramaic writing (Wilber 1989: 25-26). The objects were manufactured and given to the officials of the Treasury to be used in the ‘crushing ceremony’ (Levine 1972). The *haoma* ceremony is depicted on a seal from Xerxes that was also found in the Treasury. This seal was discussed in the previous chapter, with two men standing on either side of a fire altar, the figure of Ahura Mazda in the winged circle above, and the mortar and pestle on a table (Boyce 1982; Wilber 1989: 25).

## **Conclusion**

The site of Persepolis in Iran has captivated travelers and scholars for centuries. This site is not only important in understanding the ruling class of the Achaemenian

Empire, but also depicting how Zoroastrianism incorporated itself into the ruling class. With Cyrus the Great proclaiming Zoroastrianism as the official religion of Iran, at Persepolis we can see how Ahura Mazda was praised through the inscriptions, images and material culture. The archaeological finds of this site are large examples of what has been found scattered elsewhere. From the inscriptions and imagery, ideals of this Empire are shown and elements of the religion are discussed. The material culture of the site supports the images found and provides an example of what can be found when Zoroastrianism is practiced.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

The religion of Zoroastrianism can be studied archaeologically. But since there is so little written on this topic, the question of whether or not it has been identified correctly can be posed. From the case study at Persepolis in Iran, without certain key features being excavated and identified, this site may have just been a palace that Darius the Great built. Through specific indicators though, the ancient religion is able to be seen at this site. After reviewing the archaeology of religion, the archaeology of Zoroastrianism, and the archaeological finds at the site of Persepolis, there are certain religious indicators that begin to make themselves present.

### **How Zoroastrianism Fits the Framework**

Archaeological research on the ancient religion of Zoroastrianism has produced useful information on certain elements from different sites. Though there is a lack of resources when analyzing the literature, the work that has been published discusses repeated themes. The repetition of these elements aid archaeologists in understanding the religion, as well as what some of the remains may look like. With the combination of both the literature review of the archaeology of Zoroastrianism and the case study of Persepolis, these archaeological elements become apparent.

From the literature review of religion, architecture greatly contributes to the identification of religion at a site. Incorporating the work that has been done on Zoroastrianism, there are architectural elements that can be attributed to the ancient

religious practice. Fire altars would be considered architecture, and two out of the three types of altars Yamamoto (1979) discusses are stationary. Also, the Tower of Silence, where the dead go to be prepared for being interred in an ossuary, would be an architectural feature that archaeologists can spot (Masani 1968).

Material artifacts are also discussed as being indicators of a religion. The material artifacts are usually left from rituals, which is one way archaeologists can view religion (Fogelin 2007). Within Zoroastrianism, an ossuary, or *uzdāna*, can be a material object. Since they can be decorated or plain, archaeologists can examine levels of wealth within the community of practitioners (Trinkaus 1984). Also, the materials used to make *haoma* would be a part of this category. The marble mortars and pestles used for the ‘crushing ceremony’ are indicators that a Zoroastrian ritual took place at the site. These objects would have been written on, stating that they were to be handed over to the officials who were to preside over the ceremony (Potts 2012).

Iconography is important to any belief system, and that does not exclude Zoroastrianism. By far the symbol that seems to be the most meaningful is the figure within the winged circle, identified at the Iranian site of Persepolis (Boyce 1982). The figure, who is considered to be Ahura Mazda himself, appears with depictions of the king (Lerner 1973). This symbol is still prominent within the practice today as well. The longevity of use of the symbol shows that it is important to the Zoroastrian community. With the continual use of this symbol, modern day practitioners can study the duration of it and where it came from. It also brings practitioners together, knowing that people who

associate themselves with the symbol may have common beliefs with them. Symbols also transcend language barriers. Any practitioner, regardless of language, will know that there is a place for them to worship and feel at home. The symbol of the figure within the winged circle shows that Zoroastrianism was practiced at a site and can lead archaeologists to observe the religion and document the remains of it.

### **List of Attributes**

After analyzing the literature on the archaeology of religion, there are certain themes that are repeated when identifying a religion at a site. The archaeology of Zoroastrianism identifies certain finds that are able to be placed within the context of these themes as demonstrated above. As discussed, there is a limited amount of scholarly work that has been written on this topic. To be able to identify Zoroastrian sites in the future, I have compiled a list of attributes that will aid archaeologists in their research. The attributes that I have identified throughout the literature are architectural features, certain material objects, and specific symbols relating to the ancient religious practice. Renfrew's (1994) list of indicators of ritual provides a framework for identifying religion in a society. The list he provides not only focuses in on key elements that archaeologists should be looking for to identify a religious practice, but it also incorporates main elements that make up religion (Renfrew 1994: 51-52). Through the methods of Renfrew (1994) and previous research within this paper, these are the attributes that multiple sources discuss as part of the practice of Zoroastrianism.

### Architectural Features

Renfrew (1994) discusses how rituals take place in specific spots, and these places can be seen through structural features (Renfrew 1994: 51). Observing the architecture of a site can aid archaeologists in identifying different practices. An outline of a house can be left in stone, or the top of a steeple can indicate a Christian religious practice was held there. These features can be large, like the remains of a medieval castle, or small within the context of being a fire hearth in a house. The features also provide focal points that command the attention of those practicing a religion (Renfrew 1994). Architectural features identified by archaeologists come in various forms and provide important information on how a certain area of a site may have been used. These features can provide a deeper insight as to how ancient civilizations, and religions within them, functioned.

#### *Fire Altars*

One major architectural feature of Zoroastrianism are fire altars (Boucharlat 1984; Potts 2012; Yamamoto 1979). These altars were important for Zoroastrian worship since it can be seen as a representation of Ahura Mazda's son (Potts 2012). The altars provide a structural focal point as well for Zoroastrian practitioners. As discussed previously, there are three groups that these altars can be divided into (Yamamoto 1979). Locating the fire altars can lead archaeologists to discovering the fire precinct, or room that the fire is held in. By locating a fire altar that can be identified as one of the altar groups that Yamamoto

(1979) discusses, archaeologists can then identify the practice of Zoroastrianism at the specific site.

In the case study, we see that images of fire altars were present on the tombs at Naqsh-e Rostam near Persepolis (Wilber 1989: 106). Fire altars dedicated to Ahura Mazda were also found at Kuh-e Khwaja and Dahan-e Ghulaiman in Seistan, Iran (Scerrato 1966; Kaim 2004). The fire altars not only provide a fixed point for Zoroastrian worship, but can also lead archaeologists to the architecture surrounding it. Fire altars were usually within the fire precinct (Potts 2012). This precinct would provide a special place for rituals to be conducted. The precinct and the altar together draw attention to the worship of Ahura Mazda, indicating that Zoroastrianism was practiced there.

### *Towers of Silence*

Another architectural feature identified as an element of Zoroastrian worship is the Tower of Silence. The towers are fixed structures that draw attention, indicating that they are part of a ritual practice (Renfrew 1994). An example previously discussed is the tower of silence in Yazd, Iran (Duchesne- Guillemin 1970; Trumpalman 1984; Mingren 2016). The tower still stands today, though it is not used for its original purpose as the practiced was banned by the Iranian government in the 1970s. The tower was also built during the Achaemenian Empire (Mingren 2016), the same rulers who built the site of Persepolis. Since the religion of Zoroastrianism was established as the main religion by the first ruler of this empire, it is possible that Persepolis had a tower of silence. One has

not been positively identified though and may have to do with the destruction and burning of the city by Alexander the Great in 330 BC.

Even if the structure is no longer standing, the base may be found and provide an indication that the religion was practiced there. Since it is taboo to bury their dead, archaeologists are more likely to find these towers, instead of signs of a burial ground. Together, fire altars and towers of silence are key architectural features when studying Zoroastrianism. Both provide architectural features that can be identified by archaeologists and aid in the identification of a Zoroastrian site. Also, through these features, archaeologists can provide a continuous understanding of the different practices this ancient religion participated in. This information is not only useful to modern practitioners, but those in surrounding communities of these sites to understand why these architectural features are important to preserve.

### Material Culture

Material culture found at a site can provide archaeologists with the information to know what was happening at a certain point in time at a location. When excavating a site, material objects can show preferences in pottery styles through decades, whether or not the site was abandoned at one point, and also religious preferences. Since there is limited information written about Zoroastrianism archaeologically, understanding what the material objects of the religion look like can aid in the identification of the practice at a site if the larger architectural features are not present.

### *Ossuaries*

Material objects have been found in connection with Zoroastrian mortuary practices. After the bodies have been exposed to birds of prey at the tower of silence, the bones are placed in an ossuary. The ossuaries took the form of simple boxes, and decoration depended on the wealth of the family. More ornate ossuaries were affordable to the wealthy, with simpler ones belonging to the lower classes (Boyce 1979). Renfrew (1994) discusses how an investment in wealth and resources will be reflected within a religious practice. Even a simply decorated ossuary shows investment within the religion of Zoroastrianism because the practitioners are still treating the deceased the same way. The ossuary itself reflects the mortuary practices of Zoroastrianism and can be identified with the religion.

### *Haoma Ritual Objects*

There have been other objects identified with Zoroastrian practices as well. As stated previously, green chert, marble mortars, pestles, trays, and plates were found at the site of Persepolis in Iran. There was also an epigraphic account found that attributes these items with the production of *haoma*. *Haoma* holds many properties according to Zoroastrian practitioners, such as nourishment, stamina, improving health, and the bearing of strong children (Eduljee 2005). Locating the material objects used in the production of this drink would be a useful indication in locating Zoroastrian practices, as it appears to be important to their everyday health. The consumption of *haoma* employs

various devices for the ritual. The employment of these devices along with the actual drink is an indicator of a religious practice (Renfrew 1994: 52). Mortars and pestles were found in the Treasury at Persepolis, many with inscriptions indicating their use in the 'crushing ceremony,' (Levine 1972). There was also a seal depicting two men with a fire altar between them and a table with the mortar and pestle on it (Boyce 1982; Wilber 1989:25). Through the identification of these objects, archaeologists can positively identify the production of *haoma* with Zoroastrianism.

The material objects found in association with Zoroastrian practices can aid archaeologists in the identification of the religion. Being that the mortuary practices of the ancient religion are specific, the identification of the ossuaries are easily connected to the religious practice. Through the identification of other objects found at the site of Persepolis, there are certain ones that are more important to the religion such as the mortar and pestle. These material objects are just as important in the identification of Zoroastrianism as the architectural features are, and the symbols that accompany them.

### Symbol

Similar to architectural features and material objects, symbols can aid archaeologists in identifying important ideals at a site. Renfrew (1994) states that a sacred area will likely have repeated symbols. He also states that the deity of the religion may be reflected in an abstract form (Renfrew 1994: 51). From the site of Persepolis, there is a

specific symbol that appears to be important to the religion and has a long-lasting meaning through the use of it through present day.

### *Figure in the Winged Circle*

The symbol that appears throughout the history of Zoroastrianism is of the figure in a winged circle. As discussed previously, this figure appears on the walls at the site of Persepolis in Iran. Scholars have concluded that the figure within the circle is a representation of Ahura Mazda himself (Van Buren 1945, Boyce 1982). Since during the reign of Artaxerxes I, Persepolis can be identified as a religious site, and the figure being interpreted as Ahura Mazda is very believable. Not only was this symbol found at Persepolis, but also on a cylinder in Egypt belonging to King Darius, showing the importance of this religion to the ruling family (Boyce 1982). This figure appears on the architecture of the site, on seals and scrolls, and in the iconography of the religion in general. Today the symbol is still used at Zoroastrian sites. The modern worship site of the California Zoroastrian Center in Westminster has the symbol displayed on the top of the building, as well as on their iron fence. This symbol is one that has spread along with Zoroastrianism, showing its importance to the religion.

### **Conclusion**

The presence of architectural features, material culture, and symbols all together would be ideal in the identification of a particular practice. Unfortunately, all three may not appear together depending on the preservation of the site. Being able to recognize the

different attributes individually though can provide archaeologists with the information they need to identify a site. Renfrew (1994) provides a useful list to understand how these attributes can be markers of a religious practice. For Zoroastrian architectural features, archaeologists should focus on the structures and the focal points within them. The material culture of Zoroastrianism shows an investment in the religious practice and certain objects being used for ritualistic purposes. The figure in the winged circle is a repeated symbol that is a depiction of the Zoroastrian god, Ahura Mazda. Through the method that Renfrew (1994) discusses, these particular attributes make themselves evident as being indicators of Zoroastrianism. It is important to understand what the attributes of Zoroastrianism look like for further identification of religious sites, as well as further preservation and documentation of this ancient religion.

## CONCLUSION

The ancient religion of Zoroastrianism was established between 1700 and 1500 BC by the prophet Zoroaster in Iran (Boyce 1979, 1982, 1984). During Cyrus the Great's reign of the Achaemenian Empire from 550 to 530 BC, Zoroastrianism was established as the religion of Iran, then referred to as Persia. Traces of the religion can still be seen archaeologically today throughout Iran. Though Zoroastrianism is a minority religion today, the practice is still around with certain aspects surviving through the centuries.

The purpose of my thesis was to compile a list of attributes that could aid archaeologists with identifying Zoroastrianism. To develop this list, I reviewed literature on the archaeology of religion to gain a better understanding of how religion is seen in the archaeological record. I then reviewed the archaeological work done on Zoroastrianism. This part proved difficult within my research. It appears that the archaeological remains of Zoroastrianism are found on sites as a secondary focus. The artifacts pertaining to Zoroastrianism may be acknowledged, but not completely discussed in the context of the religion. The literature did provide artifacts and themes though that many scholars discussed in the context of being associated with Zoroastrianism. Understanding the artifacts and themes, I then analyzed the site of Persepolis in Iran.

Persepolis was established between 518 and 516 BC during Darius' reign of the Achaemenian Empire. In 330 BC, it was looted and burned down by Alexander the Great

(Schneider 1976). Analyzing the archaeological research of the site, specifically by Herzfeld from 1931 to 1934 and Schmidt from 1935 to 1939, I was able to observe certain traits that could be contributed to Zoroastrianism. Through understanding how Zoroastrianism is presented at a site, I was able to take that knowledge and apply it to my case study. Through the inscriptions referring to Ahura Mazda, the images portraying Ahura Mazda in the winged circle, and the material culture providing evidence of instruments that were used during Zoroastrian ceremonies, the presence of the religion was apparent.

Combining the research on the archaeology of religion, Zoroastrianism, and the case study, I then implemented the ideals of Renfrew (1994) and how he discussed religion can be presented on an archaeological site. Through this research, I was able to create a list of attributes to aid archaeologists in the identification of Zoroastrianism. Through the identification of specific architectural features, material culture, and the symbol of Ahura Mazda in the winged circle, Zoroastrian practices can be identified and analyzed at a site. Not only are these attributes important to identify the religion at a site that is already being excavated, but this could also aid archaeologists in identifying a site to specifically study Zoroastrianism and its effects on the community.

Through my research, I aimed to aid future archaeologists in the identification of this religion. I also aimed to bring Zoroastrianism back into academic discussion. I first heard of this ancient religion in an upper division history class at the University of California, Riverside, and even then it was briefly mentioned in two sentences before

moving forward. Through the list of attributes, Zoroastrianism can become the primary research goal of an archaeological excavation. Instead of being a secondary research find, with the religion being a primary goal, researchers can learn more about the religion itself and how the surrounding community was influenced by it. Not only can we learn about the religion more clearly, but the development of Persia, then Iran, and the religion's influence on the formation of the state. Through making Zoroastrianism a primary goal of an excavation, the archaeological record will benefit from the artifacts found and we can have a better understanding of the religion as a whole.

Archaeological research on this ancient religion would provide an insight for researchers to understand how the belief shaped the society around it. It will provide the archaeological record with material remains that can be analyzed for decades to come. With the number of practitioners of the religion becoming smaller in size, I believe that it is important to preserve the religion so it does not become extinct in the future. The ancient Iranian religion of Zoroastrianism is a complex one with specific practices that can be identified archaeologically and can contribute to the further understanding of human behavior of the past.

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