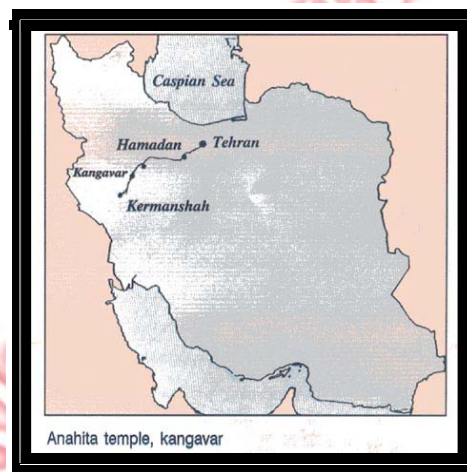
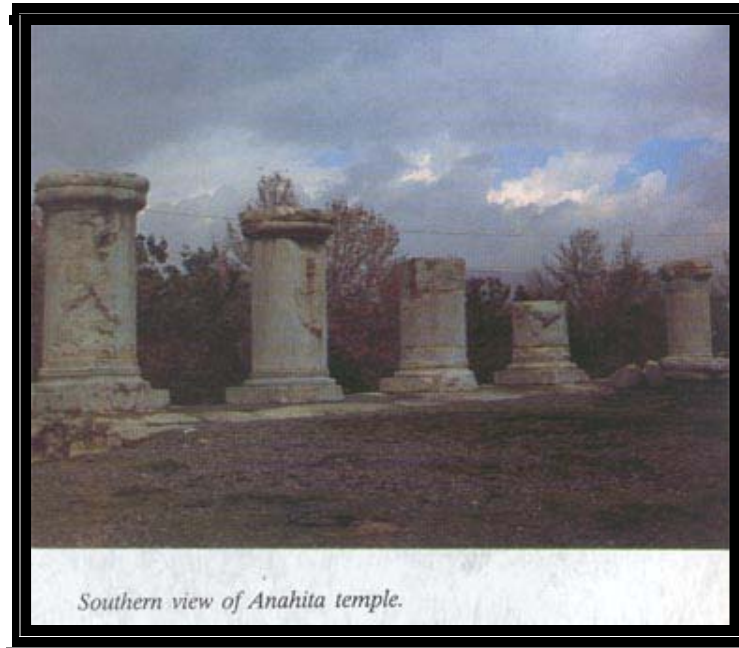


THE ANAHITA TEMPLE AT KANGAVAR



The modern town of Kangavar, the site of the Anahita Temple, is situated midway between Hamadan and Kermanshah, on the main historical Hegmataneh-Ctesphon highway. The Temple has an area of 4.6 hectare and is located on a huge schist outcropping that overlooks the Kangavar plain. Like a number of other monumental buildings, the Anahita Temple is constructed on a platform, a technique common on the IRanian plateau in historical periods.

The town of Kangavar is the principal population center in the vast plain of Kangavar. This fertile plain is surrounded from the north and northwest by the central Zagros ranges. The Chelmaran heights, the main stone quarry of the region, is located on the west, not far from the Temple. High annual precipitation provides the plain with ample irrigation water supplied by natural springs and the Gamasab river, the confluence of the Khurram-rud, the Asadabad, and the Kangavar rivers. As in many regions in Iran, these rivers and the natural springs have played an important role in the cultural development of the Kangavar plain from prehistoric to the present time. The flourishing prehistoric cultures of Seh-Gabi and Godin, whose type sites are located northeast of Kangavar, and the latter's economic and cultural contact with Susa are indicative of the importance of the region from the early Neolithic to the late Chalcolithic period.



Southern view of Anahita Temple

The strategic geographical location of the plain also played an important role as the commercial highway and locus of contact between the cultural centers on the west and east stretching as far as Khorasan and China. The choice of Darius for his monumental trilingual inscription at Behistan (Bistun), on the highway between Hamadan (the Median and Achaemenid capital city of Hagmataneh) and Kermanshah, and the location of the famous monumental Sasanian grottos at Taq-e Bostan, near Kermanshah, testify to the strategic and cultural importance of the region.

THE ANAHITA TEMPLE

Anahita, or Nahid, was a major deity in the pre-Islamic Iran. She was the protector of water and the goddess of beauty, fertility and fecundity. During the Parthian period Anahita's worship became so popular and venerable that Tiridates I was crowned in her temple. The worship of Anahita in the Kangavar region was particularly so popular that in the first half of the first century AD the Greek geographer, Isidore of Charax, was the first to mention the Temple in his book, referring to it as the "Temple of Artemis".

From the 9th to the 14th century, Islamic geographers and historians visited the site and recorded their observations in their reports. Detailed description of the Temple is provided by Yaqut al-Hamawi in his 13th century *Mu'jam al-Boldan*. The Islamic historian Abu Dolaf, who visited Kangavar in the tenth century, described the Temple in his *History of Seven Regions*: **"I went to the palace of al-Losus (Kangavar). The building of the palace is strange. It is built on a brick veranda, 20 feet high. There are also some other verandas, pavilions, and treasuries which are much more magnificent and splendid than what we have heard. The beauty of the building and its decorations is truly awe-inspiring."**

In the 9th century AD, Muhammad of Tus describes the site in his *Ajayeab al-Makhlukat*: **"The Palace (i.e. temple) is a city called "Kangur" because it has strange buildings made of stone of unimaginable weight only God knows how and with what strength they are erected.."**



General view of Anahita Temple by Flandin and Coste.

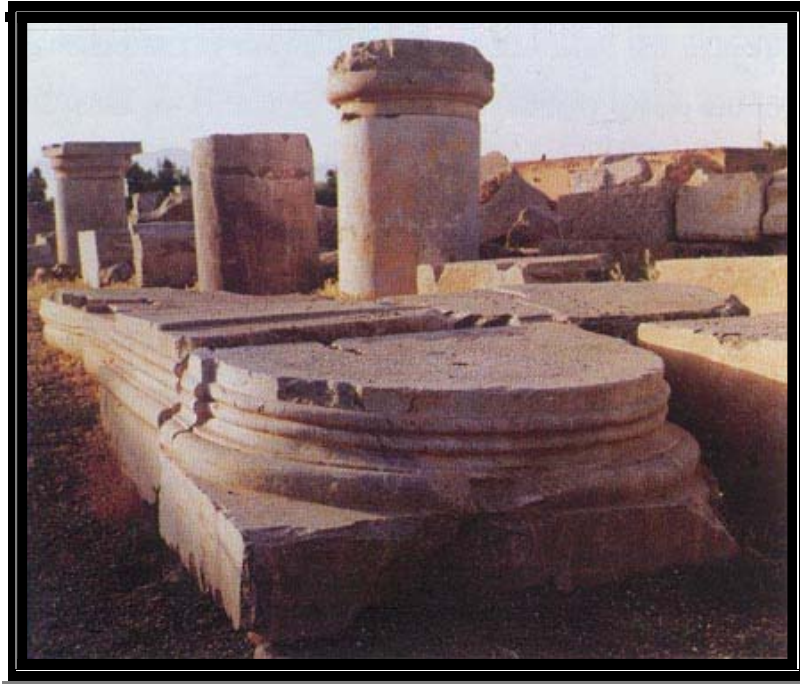
(Click [HERE](#) to view a larger image)

(Other drawings of the Temple [Image 1](#), [Image 2](#))

In 1840 Flandin, the French artist, and Pascal Coste, the French architect, visited the Anahita Temple and made a comprehensive survey of the site. They considered the plan of the site as rectangle, with an area of 200 X 200 m and provided publication, Flandin and Coste compared the Temple with Palmyra in the Syrain desert, which, according to some scholars, belonged to the Greek goddess Artemis.

RECENT INVESTIGATION

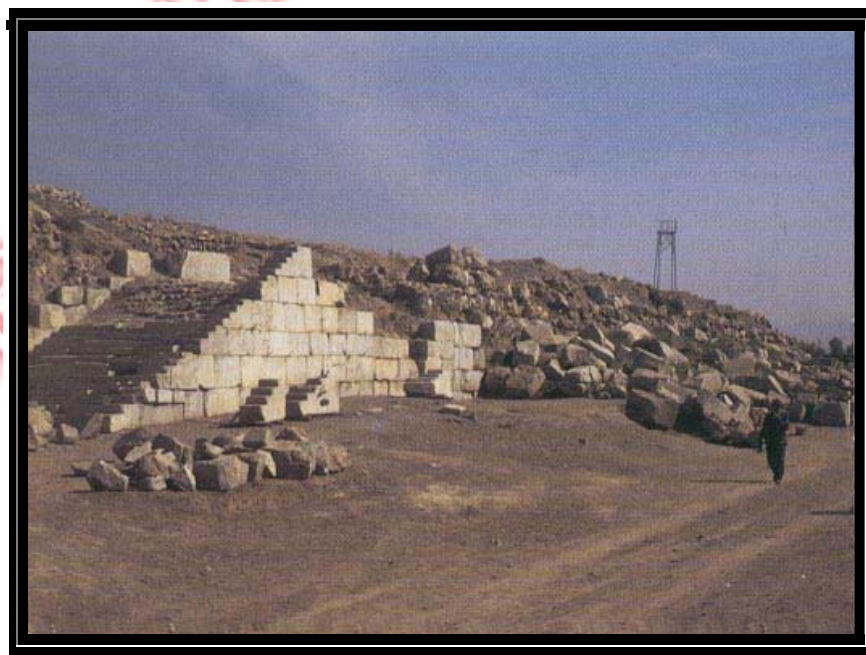
In 1968 an Iranian team conducted some archaeological excavations in the vicinity of the Anahita Temple. Somewhat later the residential areas around the site were purchased and levelled to expand the excavation area to allow a comprehensive plan of the Temple and its precinct. The archaeological investigations indicated that the site is about 230 m long and 210 m wide. The site's highestpoint on the southeastern corner is 32 m high and the width of the surrounding wall is 18.5 m. Further investigations revealed that along the western, eastern, and southern parts of the Temple there had been a series of pillars on the exterior part of the buliding, which originally were 35.4 m high and consisted of three parts: shaft, plinth and capital.



Southern facade pillars and composite pedestals.

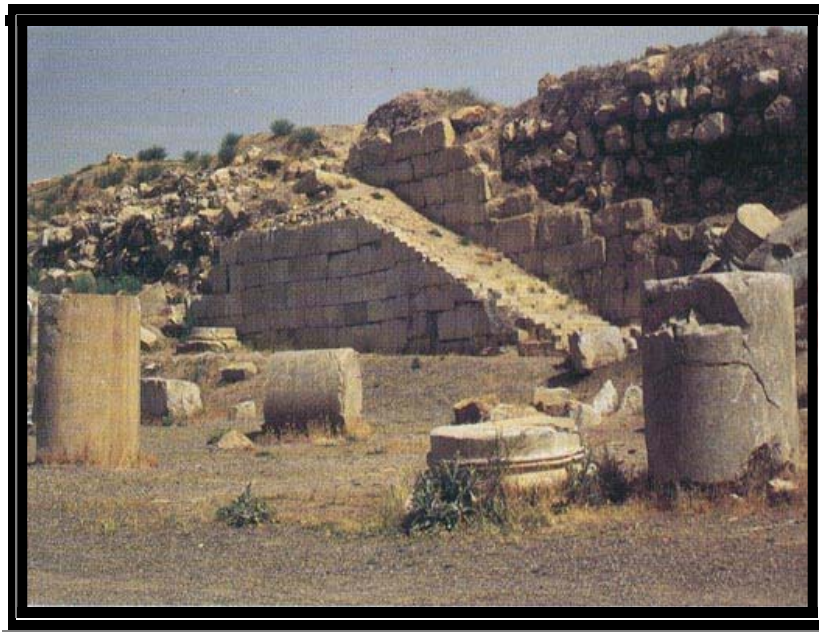
Recent investigation in 1995 located a hitherto unknown part of the northeastern wall, considering of four rocky strata. Fortunately, the presence of some pillars in the northwestern front has provided evidence to reconstruct architectural details by special renovation techniques, which was necessary before excavation process could proceed.

The facing stairways (similar to those at Persepolis), discovered in the southern front of the site, indicate that the main entrance to the building had been located on this part. The distance between the tops of the stairways is 148 m. The steps are 41.5 cm wide, 12 cm high, and 32 cm deep. Today there preserved 26 steps in both the eastern and western fronts. The scattered remains of steps in this area further suggest that actual number of the steps were more than 26. Evidence for additional entrance to the Temple is provided by the continuation of the eastern wall that leads to another stairway on its northeastern section.



View of two-sided eastern stairway.

In the central part of the Temple there exists a well-preserved wall (94 m long and 9 m wide) that leads from the eastern to the western side of the Temple. Its facade had been plastered. The southwestern and southeastern corners continue northward, where, near the wall, a small canal was found. The purpose of this canal is not certain; it was either dug to collect rain water or was constructed for ritual purposes.



View of two-sided western stairway.

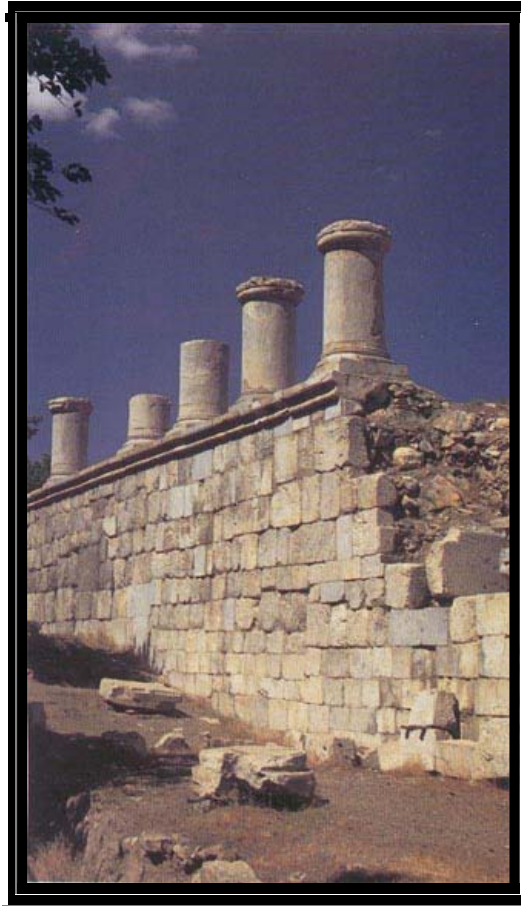
PARTHIAN BURIALS

The site has been dated to the Parthian period based on a number of archaeological pieces of evidence such as pottery, carved stones, and burials typical of the period. Most of the graves found on the eastern side of the wall can be divided into three groups: The first group belongs to the Parthian period (from the first century BC to the beginning of the 1st century AD). In this group, the body is placed in a rock-cut pit (200 x 6 cm) on its back with the face turned to the Temple's wall; the orientation of the burial pit is usually west-east or north-south. Occasionally, the left hand of the deceased is placed on its chest, probably as a gesture of respect. Some of the burials contained coins from Phraates I (171 BC) and Orodes III (37 to 56 BC), placed under the skull. The graves in the second group are later and date to the beginning of the 1st century AD. In this group the body was placed in a plain ceramic coffin, measuring 210 x 35 x 30 cm. The coffin had been placed in rock cavities covered with slabs made of pottery or limestone. The orientation of these burials is north-south with the face and body towards the Temple's wall.

The third group consists of jar burials. These burial jars were covered with stone slabs and deposited in rock cavities as the other groups. The orientation of these burials are the same as in others and the dead is similarly facing the temple's wall.

SASANIAN PERIOD

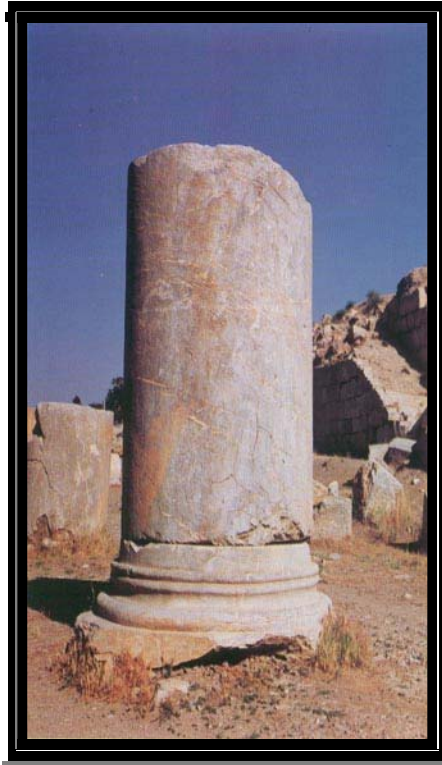
The Temple was also in use and popular during the Sasanian period. Archaeological evidence indicates periodic repair and restoration of a number of buildings in the Temple during this period. The original restoration performed by Sasanian masons is provided in the illustration below.



View of west wall and columns after restorations.

THE ISLAMIC PERIOD

Preliminary archaeological excavation indicated that the site had also been occupied during the Safavid and the Qajar periods, with an interval of nomadic occupation. From the 11th to the 13th centuries, there are some signs of Seljuk settlement. The existence of bathhouses and workshops and the hydraulic system using pottery pipes suggest that the occupation of the site had been continuous from the Safavid to the Qajar periods. Green and yellow glazed ceramics of Nayshaboor's type, vessels with carved designs, Quranic verses and Abbasid coins are all indicative of this period.

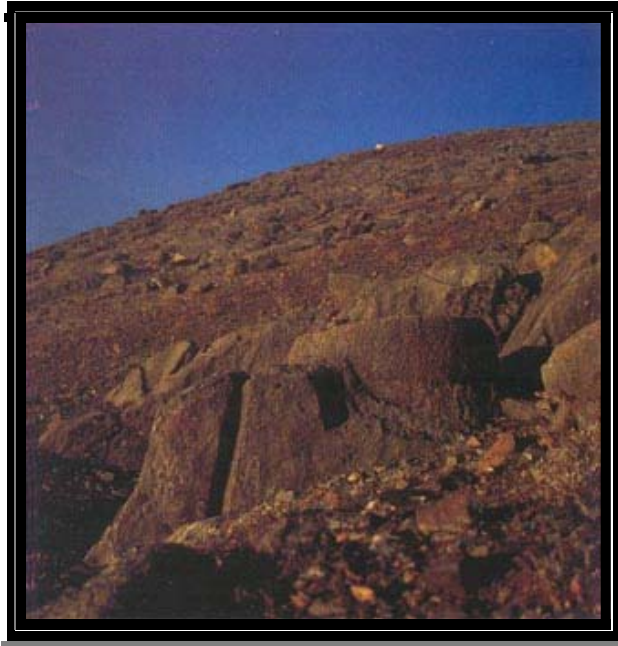


View of the columns at south eastern.

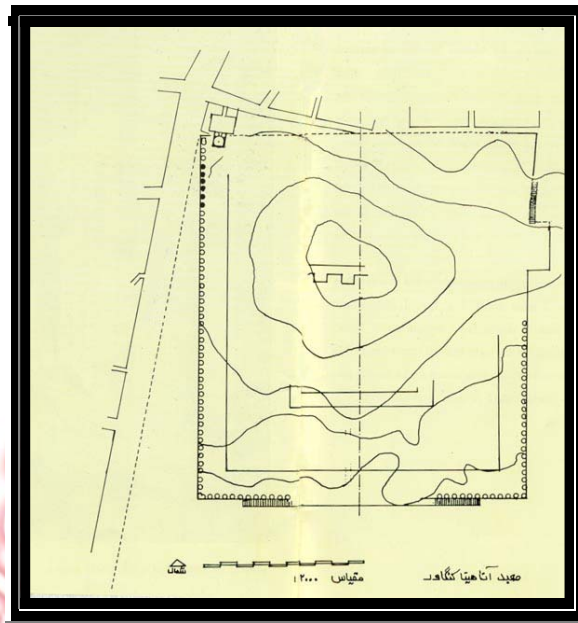
THE ROCK QUARRY

The stone used in the Anahita Temple was quarried from the nearby Chelmaran mountain. There, when suitable blocks were chosen, the masons would cut wedge-shaped cracks alongside the stones and then, using a wedge, the desired blocks would be separated. These blocks would then be roughly shaped into architectural components in situ and subsequently rolled down the mountains onto the loading zones at the foot of the mountain. The final shaping and polishing would be done in the Temple.

Recent archaeological excavation in the southwestern front of the Temple revealed special architectural components such as double-faced arched blocks, blocks carved specifically for the right and left direction, carved stones in the arch or false arch stones in the middle part of the pillars (the half-shaft of them) and half plinth.



Chelmaran quarry; View of partially cut stone vestiges before transportations.





Overlooking view of Temple.



View of western wall.

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