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An Achaemenid Column Base from Farouq²

Abstract

This paper examines a column base from the Achaemenid period (ca. 550–330 BC), discovered in the village of Farouq, approximately 20 kilometers northeast of Persepolis, and provides a report and analysis of the issues surrounding this column base. Although its original location remains uncertain, similar examples have been documented at well-known Achaemenid sites in Fars. These parallels offer a basis for chronological analysis and may yield insights into the intended function of the column base.

Keywords

Achaemenid, column base, chronology, Farouq, Persepolis, Pasargadae.

Achéménide, base de colonne, chronologie, Farouq, Persépolis, Pasargades.

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² It is an honor to dedicate this article to such eminent archaeologist as Esmail (Ehsan) Yaghmaee. This work aims to pay tribute to his invaluable contributions and further enrich our knowledge of the Achaemenid period in Iran. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my academic mentor, Dr. A. Zournatzi, for her invaluable comments and insightful remarks on the earlier drafts of this paper. I am also grateful to Dr. M.T. Atayi for reviewing the article and providing his valuable suggestions on its content. Special thanks go to my father, and my brother, Dr. S.O.R. Shobairi, for their discussions on the topography of Farouq. I also extend my sincere thanks to Prof. P. Briant, the ARTA committee for their comments on an earlier draft of this article.



Farouq: Geographical Location and Earlier Exploration

The Marvdash in southwestern Iran is a renowned archaeological region, notable for its rich history and significant cultural heritage. In the plain, there are several long, wide, fertile tracts of land. One such tract is the Khāfrāk-e Olyā district.³ It includes the town of Farouq, also known as Parou, on the eastern bank of the Pulvār River, approximately 20 kilometers northeast of Persepolis and 75 kilometers northeast of Shiraz (fig. 1). To the north, Farouq borders Mount Sivand and the Kāmin plain that stretches beyond it. To the east, it adjoins the sub-district of Arsanjan. To the south, it extends towards Mount (Kuh-e) Rahmat and Persepolis. Finally, to the west, it reaches into the Seydan, Sivand valley and Pulvār/Sivand river. It is about 30 km in length and ranges between 8 and 10 km in width.

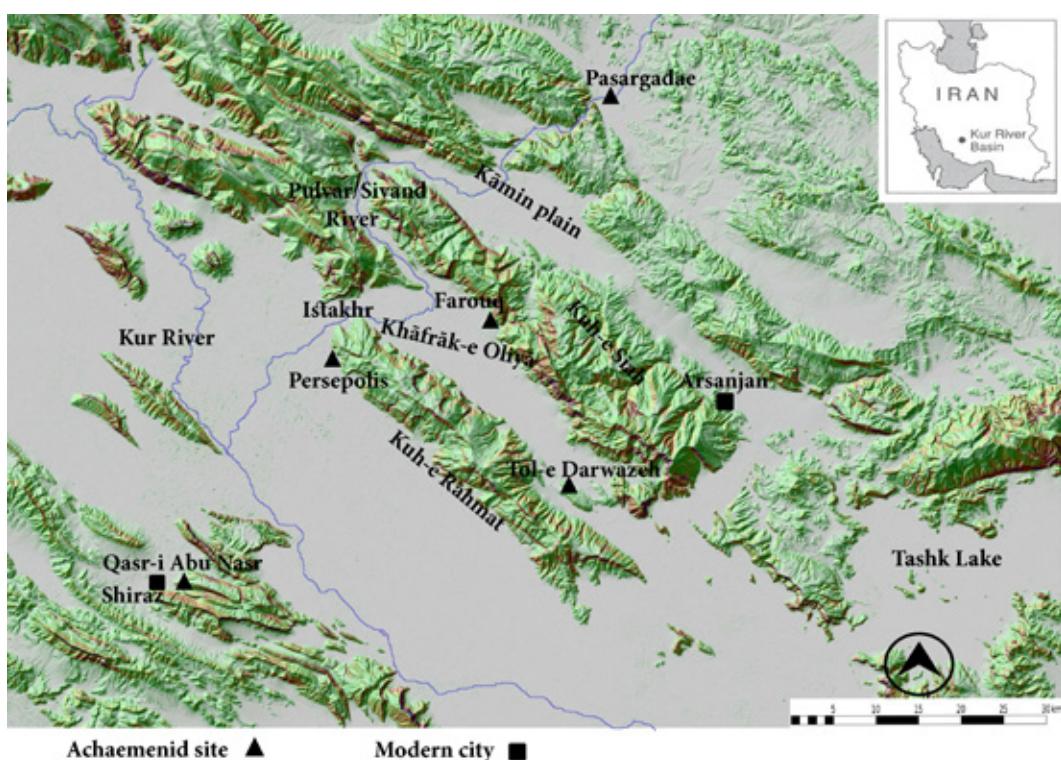


Fig. 2. Map of the geographical area of Persepolis and Pasargadae (drawing by author).

³ This constitutes one of the large districts within Marvdash city, subdivided into Khāfrāk-e Olyā (upper) and Khāfrāk-e Soflā (lower). Today, a large part of this area is part of the Seydan section of the administrative-political division of Marvdash City. The Khāfrāk district encompasses over 26 villages the most important including Sivand, Farouq, Hassan Abad, Meij, Mahmoud Abad, Sādāt Abad-e Shushtri, Rahnavieh, and Anjireh. The primary occupations of the residents are agriculture, horticulture, and herding.



The region, with its rich water resources,⁴ abundant stone and other natural materials, and fertile soils supported diverse subsistence strategies throughout all periods of human presence and hosts prehistoric, Achaemenid, Sassanian and Islamic sites. L. Vanden Berghe identified some of these during his surveys in 1952 and 1954;⁵ M.T. Mostafavi subsequently identified further sites and commented on the region's archaeological significance.⁶

Location and Dimension of the Square Column Base

For many years, two stone artifacts—a large circular stone (likely a millstone)⁷ and a square stone (figs. 2-3)—were preserved at the old Hosseinieh in the *Dēh Balā*⁸ locality of Farouq. The square stone, the primary focus of this contribution, was found at UTM coordinates 698,141.26 m E and 3,316,702.57 m N. (first observed by the author in November 2003 in the course of research for a BA project). Shortly afterwards, a new building was constructed at the site, the square stone was moved a number of times and eventually deposited at Persepolis in 2006 to ensure its preservation.

The square stone is a two-stepped square column base, made from a high-quality block of grey limestone (sourced from an as yet unidentified quarry). The top slab measures 14 cm x 56 cm x 56 cm, while the lower slab is larger at 16 cm x 66 cm x 66 cm. Combined, the two sections create a column base with a total height of 30 cm (fig. 4). Portions of the side edges on both the upper and lower sections of the column base appear to be broken, likely as a result of recent displacements. Remnants of cement mortar are visible on the top column's surface. A circular shape approximately 50 cm in diameter on the upper surface has been roughened with a toothed chisel, probably

⁴ On the eastern and northeastern sides of Farouq, numerous Qanats systems, such as Parou, Āb Hajāri, Boshizār, Palangi, Khasegi and others, can be observed and are still in operation. The water resources were already known to Islamic geographers, commented on a wide district extending to Estakhr, see Le Strange 1905: 279. Paleoenvironmental studies show that the Persepolis Basin's unique spring wetlands supported both human settlement and biodiversity, Djamali et al. 2018.

⁵ Vanden Berghe 1954, pp. 395-396.

⁶ Mostafavi 1964, pp. 18-20; Shobairi 2017, p. 68.

⁷ This stone was partly considered sacred by local people. During the ten days of Muharram, cloth flags were hoisted on it. The round stone is known as the Sang-e Hosseinieh ("Hosseinieh Stone").

⁸ *Dēh balā* means "upper village (on *dēh* see Bailey 1959, p. 110). In the 1990s, the residents of Farouq demolished the old building to construct a new one in its place. Before the construction of the new Hosseinieh, the site functioned as an open gathering space for the local community's Muharram ceremonies.



Fig. 2. Column base of grey limestone from Farouq (photos by author 2003).



Fig. 3. Column base from Farouq: some damages to the block's surface (photo by author 2003).



http://www.achemenet.com/pdf/arta/ARTA_2025.003_Shobairi.pdf

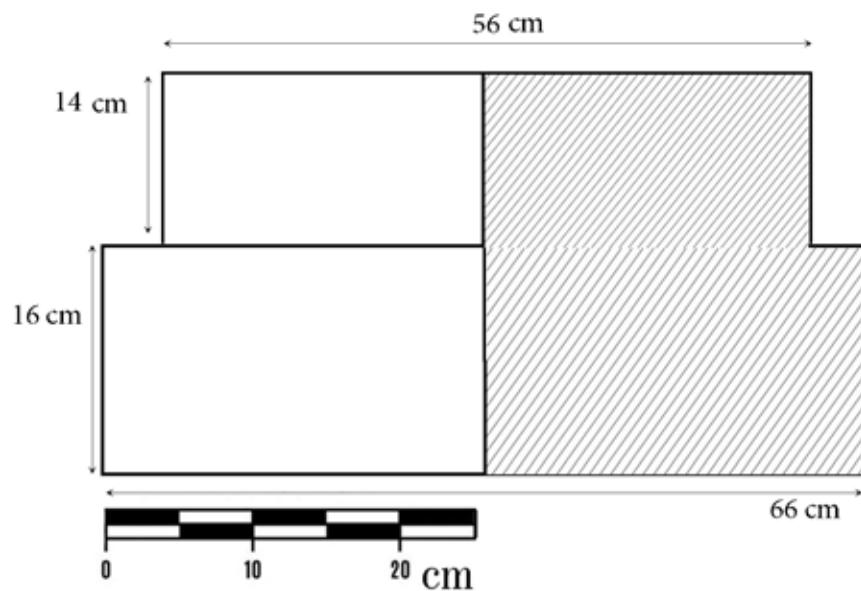


Fig. 4. Column base from Farouq (drawing by author).



Fig. 5. Traces of tooling, chisel marks, and mortar on the Farouq column base (photo by author).



to receive a circular stone torus or to set a wooden shaft. Toothed chisel marks are also found on the lateral surfaces of the two steps. The polishing of the bottom part of the column base appears to be complete (fig. 5).

Date

Two-stepped, square column bases are known from the Central Plateau, northwestern and northeastern Iran, and may date to the Achaemenid (e.g., Tappeh Hegmataneh,⁹ Tappeh Rivi¹⁰) and post-Achaemenid periods.¹¹ In the case of the column base Farouq, the stone-working technique points to an Achaemenid context (fig. 6), which also provides close stylistic or typological parallels. Whereas the toothed chisel marks do not provide a more precise date within the Achaemenid period,¹² Tajvidi's discovery of a columned hall south of Persepolis includes closely similar column bases and supplies, therefore, a chronological reference point from a nearby site (fig. 7).

Although specific dimensions of the square column bases in Shahrak Zerāei were not provided, Tajvidi noted that their width exceeded their height. Comparing the shape of the column bases to examples from Pasargadae, Tajvidi suggested a date of construction for the building that aligns with the initial construction phase at Persepolis,¹³ estimated by M. Roaf to around 515-490 BC.¹⁴

Comparanda

Expansive covered spaces, comprising grand halls and porticoes and featuring a dense array of columns are characteristic of Achaemenid architecture. The surviving remnants of such buildings may include stone column shafts, bases, and capitals, but in many cases only column bases or their foundations are retrieved, also because columns were often made of wood.¹⁵ Achaemenid column bases have been found throughout Fārs and elsewhere, for example in the Borāzjān Plain. While the majority of these finds lack archaeological context, they are often situated in proximity to

⁹ Mehryar 1982, pp. 88, 91-94; Knapton et al. 2001, p. 111.

¹⁰ Jafari and Thomalsky 2023, p. 214, fig. 25.

¹¹ Hakemi 1990, figs. 13, 16; Kleiss 2015, fig. 298; for more recent overviews see, Alibaigi et al. 2022.

¹² For earlier attestations in Pasargadae see Stronach 1978, pp. 99-100; Roaf 1983, p. 3, n.7; Nylander 1991, pp. 1044-1045. For occurrences in Persepolis see Nylander 1965, figs. 7-10; Tilia 1968, figs. 48-50, 56, 60.

¹³ Tajvidi 1976, pp. 12-14, n. 4.

¹⁴ Roaf 1983, p. 150.

¹⁵ Cf. Schmidt 1953, pp. 160-161, fig. 72. J; Tajvidi 1976, pp. 178-183, figs. 131-133; Mousavi 2012, p. 33, pls. 7, 8.



Fig. 6. Example of stone finished of Achaemenid toothed chisel marks on the column base (photo by author).

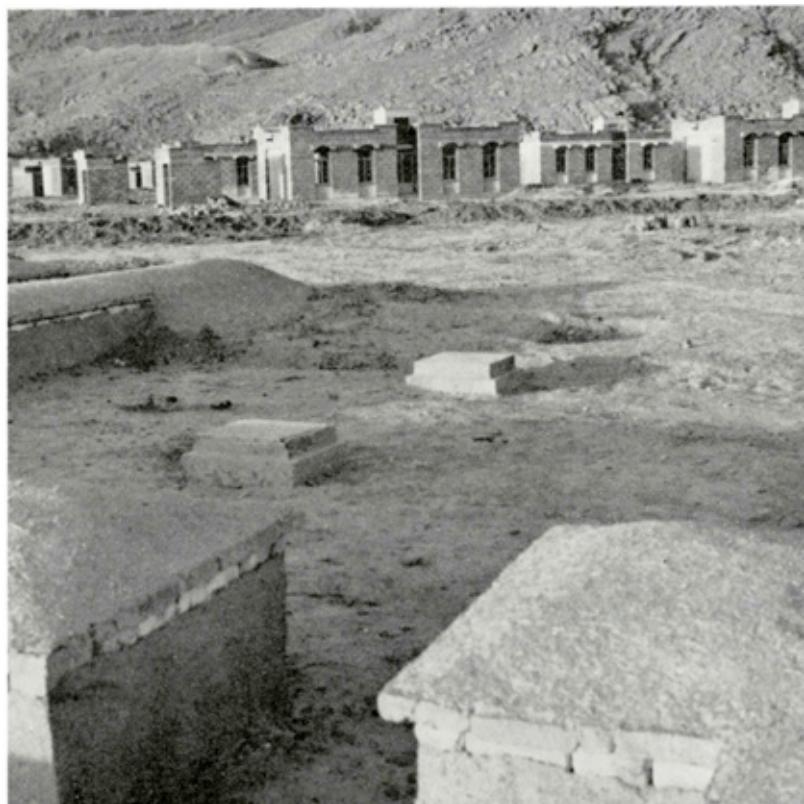


Fig. 7. Two-stepped square column bases discovered in Shahrak Zerāei, south of Persepolis (after Tajvidi 1976: fig. 8).



Fig. 8. An Achaemenid square column base with a torus on top from Qasr-i Abu-Nasr, the Stone (Haft-Tanan) Museum, Shiraz (photo by author).

villages, and agricultural lands, or have been repurposed in modern religious sites.¹⁶ The Farouq column base falls into the latter category.

As for rectangular column bases, these are known from Palaces S and P at Pasargadae,¹⁷ the Persepolis Treasury (featuring a single slab), the Palace of Darius (with larger dimensions),¹⁸ the three Borazjan sites (Bardāk-e Siah, Sang-e Siah, and Charkhāb),¹⁹ the pavilion in the Tang-e Bolaghi, Qasr-i Abu-Nasr (fig. 8), Nurabad,²⁰ and Barzān-e Jonoubi and Shahrak Zerāei, two sites situated south of the Persepolis terrace. Of these, the Barzān-e Jonoubi type shares the style and shape with the Farouq

¹⁶ Cf. Yaghmaee 2006; 2013; Atayi et al. 2013; Yaghmaee and Emeni 2023.

¹⁷ Nylander 1970, pp. 103-107, figs. 35-36; Stronach 1978, p. 80, figs. 28, 42 and pls. 72b, d; 73a, 75a-b.

¹⁸ Schmidt 1953, figs. 72 e, g, j; 94 e; 50c, 39 a-c.

¹⁹ Sarfaraz 1971, pp. 27-33; Yaghmaee 2010, p. 317; 2014, pp. 4-6; 2018, pp. 36, 190-192; 2019, pp. 83-98; Zehbari 2020.

²⁰ Yaghmaee 2006, p. 37, figs. 11-12.



Fig. 9. The eastern portico of the Achaemenid pavilion TB-34, featuring two-stepped column bases (photo courtesy of Atayi).

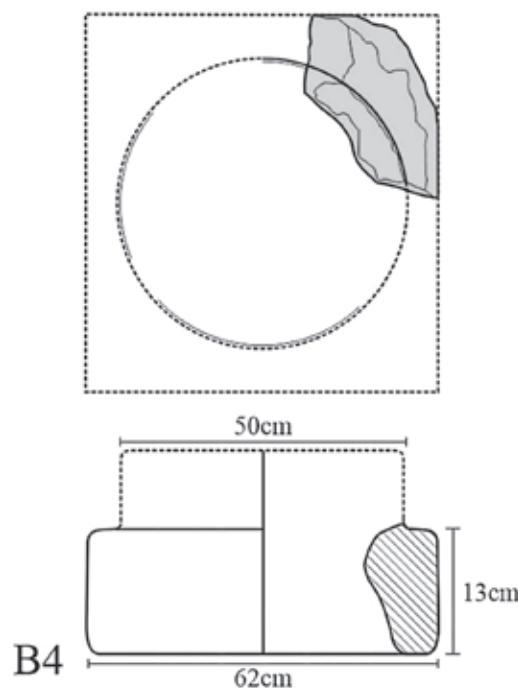


Fig. 10. Fragment of a square column base TB-85, carved from light limestone using a toothed tool (after Atayi 2018: fig. 5. B4).



base; the recorded dimensions are 64 x 64 [x 13] and 80 x 80 [x 16] cm,²¹ which seems also comparable to the Farouq base.²²

Also pertinent are the two column bases from the Tang-e Bolaghi, each consisting of “two square plinths of gray limestone measuring 65 x 65 x 22 cm with a torus on top they formed bases of 30.5 cm high” (fig. 9).²³ Another fragment of a square column base from Tang-e Bolaghi, carved from light limestone using a toothed chisel, has a shape and dimensions similar to those of the Farouq column base (fig. 10).²⁴

The Farouq column base provides evidence of a probable columned structure, the nature and location of which are difficult to establish. The dimensions of the base suggest that it may have been comparable to those of buildings at the Barzān-e Jonoubi (Building A; fig. 11) and Shahrak Zerāei (fig. 7).

The column base at Farouq may have been transported from a known Achaemenid sites such as Qasr-i Qalat or Seydan,²⁵ but it may also be the sole remnant of a local structure (for which there is as yet no archaeological evidence). Note, in this context, that a further stone square column base with a round torus has been reported from the Tol-e Darwazeh (Jelodār/Tavab-e Arsanjan) site in the Khāfrāk-e Soflā region (fig. 12),²⁶ highlighting the area’s importance during the Achaemenid period (fig. 1). It should be noted that on the Farouq column base, the torus is not integral with the plinth. Important examples of monolithic stone square column bases with a round torus have been reported at Tol-e Darwazeh and Qasr-i Abu Nasr, representing a more elaborate phase of Achaemenid construction (see figs. 8 and 12).

As to the function of the building to which the Farouq column base originally belonged—if the base indeed belong to a local structure—, one may point to the abundant wildlife and water resources of the district. Islamic geographical texts describe Farouq as renowned for its abundant water sources, verdant plains, agricultural bounty, and hunting grounds.²⁷ Might it be that the possible columned building was part of a plantation or paradise, a locality often used for hunting?²⁸ A comparable

²¹ Tajvidi 1976, pp. 94-95, fig. 43.

²² Tajvidi 1976, pp. 12-14, fig. 8.

²³ Atayi and Boucharlat 2009, p. 13, fig. 10.

²⁴ Atayi 2018, p. 16, fig. 5 B4.

²⁵ Whitcomb 1969; Shobairi 2017, p. 68.

²⁶ Roustaei-Farsi and Sarbishe 2020, pp. 260-263, fig. 8.

²⁷ Ibn Balkhī 1921, p. 125; Mustawfi 1958, pp. 148-149; Hāfez Abrū 1996, p. 114. Among the wildlife leopards, various bird species and caprids known as *pāzan* or *kal* (Firouz 2004; Taj Bakhsh and Jamali 1995, pp. 105-109) should be mentioned.

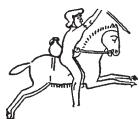
²⁸ Hdt. 3.129; Xen. *Anab.* 1.9.6; Xen. *Cyrop.* 1.2.9; 1.4.7, 14; 8.1.38; Strab. 15.3.18; for further interpretations see Briant 2002, pp. 83-85, 201-202, 23; and for hunting, pp. 230-232; 297-299 and Tuplin 2018, pp. 478-484.



Fig. 11. Square-shaped column bases of the so-called Barzān-e Jonobi, Building A, south of Persepolis (photo by author).



Fig. 12. An Achaemenid column base from Tol-e Darwazeh, Jelodār (photo courtesy of E. Roustaei-Farsi).



interpretation has been suggested for the columned structure ('pavilion') excavated in the Tang-e Bolaghi (TB-34).²⁹

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²⁹

Cf. Atayi 2018, p. 23; Boucharlat 2014, p. 32 ff.



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