

## PERSEPOLIS: A HISTORICAL MARVEL

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### ABSTRACT

#### Persepolis: Tarihsel Bir Hakika

Persepolis is a city known as the ancient capital of the Achaemenid Empire. Built by Darius the Great and Ardashir I, it could be made with various additions. This historical place, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, reflects the cultural richness of Iran.

Among the architectural features, the golden ratio in the door and column sections attracts attention. The construction of Sivand Dam poses a threat to cultural and natural formations.

The inscriptions illuminate the accounting books of the Achaemenid Empire and the lifestyle of the period. However, sharing the information on the inscriptions has become difficult over time. Persepolis has been a rich archaeological site containing various palaces, structures and inscriptions throughout history. These investments from the Achaemenid period could spread the cultural and current heritage of the Persian Empire.

The aim of this study is to demonstrate and promote the value of Persepolis' cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** Persepolis, Achaemenid Empire, UNESCO World Heritage, Sassanid Influence, Naksh-e Rostam

## Introduction

Persepolis is a city known as the ancient capital of the Achaemenid Empire. It was built by Darius the Great and Ardashir I and was expanded with various additions. This historical place, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, reflects the cultural richness of Iran.

Among its architectural features, the golden ratio in the door and column ratios attracts attention. The construction of the Sivand Dam has threatened the cultural and natural heritage around it. The inscriptions illuminate the accounting books of the Achaemenid Empire and the lifestyle of its period. However, sharing the information on the inscriptions has become difficult over time.

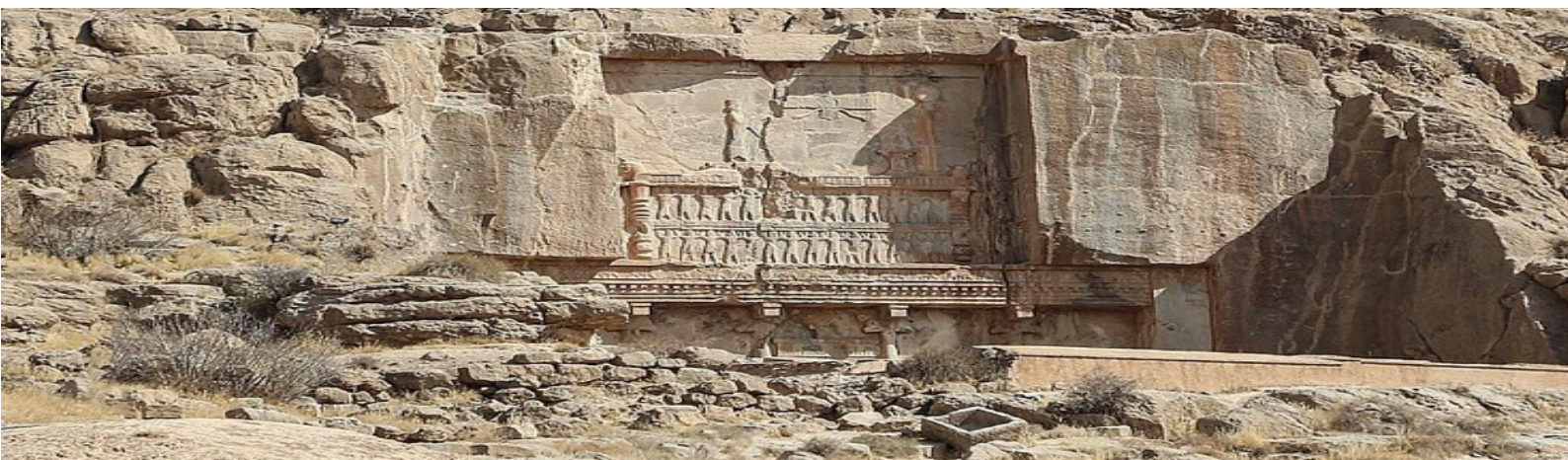
Persepolis is an ancient city known as Takht Jamshid during the Achaemenid period. (Shahbazi, Achaemenid Settlement in the Oersepolis Plain. p. 21. V.) Located in Marvdasht, Iran, it served for many years as the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid Empire. Built by Darius the Great and Ardashir I, Persepolis was expanded with the addition of various buildings. Once a year, representatives from different countries made various offerings and presented their gifts to the king in Persepolis on the first day of the new year. (Figure 1)

1 B.C. Construction began in 518 at Parsa, the new capital of the Achaemenids.



**Figure 1:** Engraved in Takht Jamshide (Amin Abedour, Personel Archieve, 2022)

**Figure 3:** Tomb of Ardashir II knk (Amin Abedpour, Personel Archieve, 2022)



Macedonian General Alexander the Great, B.C. In 330 she attacked Persia and set fire to Persepolis, but its ruins still stand. (Figure 2)



**Figure 2:** Alexander raises the torch to set fire to Persepolis, George Roche Gross, 1890 (Amin Abedpour, Personel Archieve, 2022)

This historical site has been on Iran's UNESCO World Heritage list since 1979. (UNESCO, 1979, Nu. 114) Sassanid kings also left inscriptions in the Thatcher Palace in Persepolis, and after the spread of Islam, they called the region "Hazarstun" or "Chel Setun" (Erbay, 2009, p. 74-76).

Persepolis has undergone name changes at various periods throughout its history and is still protected as an important archaeological site today (Shahbazi, Achaemenid Settlement in the Oersepolis Plain. p. 21).

There are hundreds of semi-completed tombs in Persepolis (Figure 3), some of which are located at the foot of Mount Rahmat and date back to II. Ardashir and III. It belongs to Ardeşir. According to archaeologists, the half-abandoned tomb in the south belongs to Darius III.

Darius, Xerxes, Ardeshir I and III. Emperors such as Ardeşir completed or repaired the structures built in Persepolis.

In Firdevsi's Shahnameh, Jamshid is mentioned as a ruler who ruled a just and beautiful kingdom and celebrated Nevruz. (Figure 4) During the Islamic period, the carved images of the royal throne next to the Parse ruins (Figure 5) were named Takht Jamshid, as they were thought to be similar to the throne of Jamshid described by Ferdowsi.



Figure 4: Shahname chapter 4 Ganjur Story (Amin Abedpour, Personel Archieve, 2022)



Figure 5: Shahname Chapter 4 (Amin Abedpour, Personel Archieve, 2022)

This name was later translated as Parse. During the Islamic period, this area was revered and referred to as “a thousand columns and forty minarets” and was associated with figures such as the Prophet Solomon and Jamshid. (p.48)

In Greek, Persepolis was used as the nickname of Athena, the goddess of wisdom. At the same time, B.C. The 5th century Greek poet Achilles used this term as a metaphor and pun for the city of the Persians.

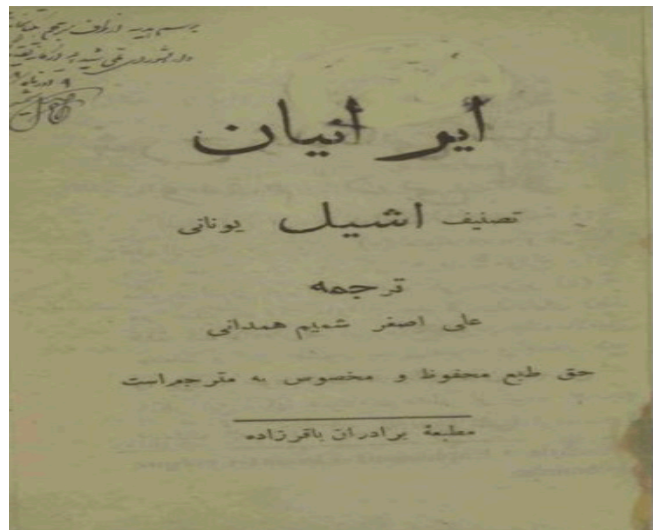


Figure 6: Iranian named book (classification Achilles in Greek) Ali Asghar Hamedan

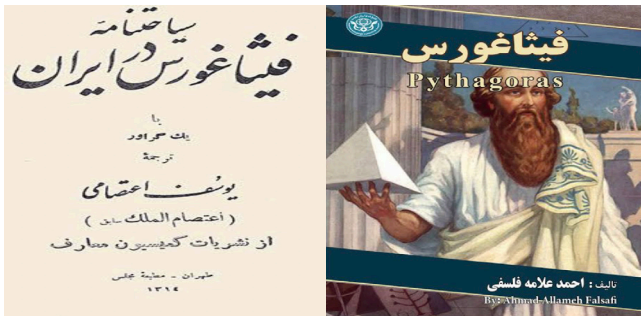
Takht Jamshid is located in the capital of Fars province, 10 km north of the city of Maroodasht and 57 km from Shiraz. The height of Persepolis above sea level is 1770 meters. This palace complex is located to the east of Mount Rahmat, while its other three sides overlook the Mervdasht Plain. Persepolis is located on a stone platform with a height of 8 to 18 meters above the level of Morvdasht Jalga. Its dimensions are measured as 455 meters (west facade), 300 meters (north facade), 430 meters (east facade) and 390 meters (south facade). The construction of Persepolis dates back to B.C. It dates back to 518 and spreads over an area of 125 thousand square meters. (prof remy boucharella (archaeologist and member of the french scientific research center) (Figure 7)



Figure 7: Prof Remy Boucharella, archaeologist and member of the French scientific research center. (Amin Abedpour, Personel Archieve, 2022)

Pyth agoras described Persepolis as the largest building in the world and stated that this work was completed by hundreds of people in a process

that took 120 years. (Pythagoras Iran Sihetnamesi Book. Translated by Yusuf Etesami, 1935, p.136) (Figure 8)



**Figure 8:** The book named Pythagoras Iran Sihetname, tr., Yusuf Etesami, 1935 (Amin Abedpour, Personel Archieve, 2022)

The striking feature among the architectural arts of Persepolis is the golden ratio of the height of the doors to their width and the height of the columns to the distance between two columns (Frye, 1974, p.385) (Figure 9)

This complex dates back to B.C. It was burned by Alexander the Great in 330, but some structures, such as the Apadana Palace, have partially survived until today.



**Figure 9:** Prof. Dr. Richard Fry, Iran Research Professor at Harvard University, (Amin Abedpour, Personel Archieve, 2022)

The fact that Persepolis has been known by various names throughout its history and is associated with the legends in Firdevsi's Shahnameh reflects the cultural importance of this ancient city.

According to Herzfeld, whose findings were studied by the Institute of Oriental Studies at the University of Chicago and whose findings are still preserved in this institution, the reason for the construction of Persepolis was the need for a royal and magnificent atmosphere. (Figure 10)

This ancient city was designed to be the site of the founding of the Persian Empire and as a ceremonial place to celebrate special events, especially Nowruz, but it was not the center of the Persian Empire. (Frye, 1974, p.383)



**Figure 10:** Ernest Emil Herzfeld in Perspolis Iran (Pinterest, <https://tr.pinterest.com/pin/675469644082625841/>)

The architecture of Persepolis was noted for its use of wooden columns. The lower and upper parts of the columns were made of stone, but wooden columns were used. (Frye, 1974, p.383) (Figure 12)



**Figure 12:** Prof. Richard N. Frye

Explored by an Italian-Iranian expedition team, Persepolis has gained great prestige among Iranians due to a sense of patriotism and respect for its history.

The Pahlavi dynasty gave great importance to Persepolis, and Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi held the 2,500-year celebrations of the Iranian Empire in this ancient structure. (Figure 13)



Figure 13: Book celebrating the 2500th anniversary of the founding of the Persian Empire. (International Iran Committee)

However, with the Islamic revolution, respect for Persepolis decreased and some extremist groups launched attacks to destroy this historical structure. (Figure 14)



Figure 14: BBC 1979 .6.16

However, these attempts failed, thanks to the resistance of local people and authorities. (Figure 15)



Figure 15: Etelaat newspaper (Mahmud Taleghani) 1979.07.10

The construction of the Sivand Dam is approximately 50 km from the ancient city of Persepolis, which has raised concerns that it may have negative impacts on the cultural and natural heritage of the Pasargad Plain and the Balaghi Pass. Those who oppose the withdrawal of water from the Sivand Dam believe that this situation may negatively affect historical and natural riches. It is important to note that due to misuse of water and drought around Persepolis, a critical land subsidence has occurred, which could be dangerous in the future. The construction of the Sivand Dam has raised concerns that it may damage and affect national monuments in the region. (alireza majidi prof. dr article about the sivand dam and its historical ruins (1pezeshk.com) (Figure 16)



Figure 16: The historical area (Article about alireza majidi prof. dr sivand dam and its historical ruins)

Architects, artists and experts from different nations under the influence of the Achaemenid kings worked on the construction of Persepolis. (Stelper .linguist. institute of oriental studies. university of Chicago) documentary (figure 17)



**Figure 17:** Prof. Mathieu Stelper (Amin Abedpour, Personal Archive, 2023)

To ensure the earthquake resistance of the columns in the Palace of Hundred Columns, the architects ensured this durability by connecting the two supporting parts with molten lead. This method took advantage of the advantages of lead, which is resistant to earthquakes. The principle of measuring length and number at Persepolis was determined with the contributions of researchers and experts. Using “fingers” as the unit of measurement, these measurements were used to determine different sections on the structure. These measurements provided information about the details and symmetry of the structure at Persepolis.

It was determined that 3, 7 and 9 were considered sacred numbers among the numbers used in the architectural design of Persepolis. These numbers are found in the number of pillars and other details in Apadana. It turned out that these numbers were considered sacred in ancient Iranian beliefs and played this important role in the design of Persepolis.

The 111 steps of the great staircase in Persepolis are the multiplication of the numbers 37 and 3, also the number of houses from Shush to Sardis is exactly 111. These numbers carry symbolic meanings in the details of Persepolis.

Using dovetail instead of mortar in gluing the stones of Persepolis ensures that the stones are brought together smoothly. Without using mortar, the stone surfaces are shaved so that they fit together well, and they are joined using a dovetail. Various methods were used to join stone, for example, by carving marks on pieces of stone to ensure fit before assembly. Additionally, holes were drilled

and molten lead was used to connect the stones together. In the Persepolis petroglyphs, stone carvings used to symbolize the Zoroastrians’ Nowruz represent balance between the lion and the cow, symbols of power and strength. (Figure 18)



**Figure 18 :** Persepolis (Amin Abedpour, Personal Archive, 2023)

In the petroglyphs, representatives of the nations are depicted as members of the equally large world community, and it is shown that each nation can freely use its own culture. (Figure 19)



**Figure 19:** Petroglyphs (Amin Abedpour, Personal Archive, 2023)

The Gate of Nations, the entrance building of Persepolis, is a 10 meter high structure. At the western and eastern gates are two stone bulls with a winged man and a human head. In the inscriptions, it is stated that every good thing was done by the will of Ahuramazda. These gates face south and east and are directed towards the Apadana Palace. (Figure 20)



**Figure 20:** A view of the Apadana Palace. (Amin Abedpour, Personal Archieve, 2023)

It is one of the oldest palaces of Persepolis. It was built by Darius the Great for the celebration of Nowruz and the reception of representatives of the countries. Its roof, supported by 6 rows of 6 columns, contains 72 columns in total. The portico columns of the palace are round and the interior columns are square. (Shahbazi, Achaemenid Settlement in the Oersepolis Plain. p. 21) (Figure 21).



**Figure 21:** Source in a documentary program (Prof. Alireza Shapour Shahbazi. Achaemenid Period Expert and History, Eastern Oregon University)

Eric Schmidt, who excavated Persepolis, described the Apadana Palace as “the most magnificent and comprehensive buildings of Persepolis.”



**Figure 22:** Thatcher Palace (Google Lens, Photography)

It is a private palace built by the order of Darius the Great. The palace, with an area of 29 x 40 meters, is also known as the Khat Museum, where various Persian inscriptions are found. During the construction process, the stone porch and staircase in the south were built by Xerxes, and the stone staircase in the west was built by II. Added by Ardeşir.



**Figure 23:** The ruins of the entrance gate of the Hadish Palace (Amin Abedpour, Personal Archieve, 2023)

It is the private palace of Xerxes and is located on the highest part of Persepolis.

The palace, which had 66 columns, probably suffered a fire due to the Athenians’ hatred of Xerxes. The area of this palace is approximately 46,000 square meters, and its roof is supported by a hundred columns. The People’s Assembly complex of the King of Xerxes, located in the Imperial Treasury building, consists of a hall with 99 columns. Columns, each 14 meters high, support this impressive complex.

Persepolis contains many palaces and building complexes. The Hundred Column Palace consists of a hall, a room and two backyards. According to ancient Greek historians, Alexander took the

gold, silver and valuables of the Persepolis treasury. During the scientific excavations carried out in the treasury building, many clay tablets written in cuneiform and Elamite language were discovered. (Figure 24)



**Figure 24:** Tablets (University of Chicago, [https://isac.uchicago.edu/gallery/contents-treasury-and-other-discoveries#5C5\\_72dpi.png](https://isac.uchicago.edu/gallery/contents-treasury-and-other-discoveries#5C5_72dpi.png))

Among the palaces of Persepolis, Palace H is located to the west of the Palace of Hadish. The carved stairs leading to this palace from both sides are in a semi-ruined state today.

It is located in the parliament hall and attracts attention with its three doors opening to other palaces. It was built by Xerxes and is located inside the Persepolis Museum and Gallery.

Persepolis Museum building, (Figure 25)



**Figure 25:** Entrance of the palace with three gates (Amin Abedpour, Personal Archive, 2023)

It is one of the palaces of Persepolis. It is located on the north side and was excavated and rebuilt in 1931 by orientalist Ernst Emil Hertzfeld. This museum is used as the central administration of Persepolis and serves history and culture enthusiasts as a restored building.

Non-Achaemenid inscriptions in Persepolis, it is especially notable in the complex of flat palaces at Jamshid. These inscriptions contain information about historical figures from later centuries and date back to the late Qajar period.

These are clay inscriptions that were baked and stored in warehouses as a result of the burning of Persepolis. Some of these inscriptions were sent to America, but were lost for various reasons, and due to the World War II, the remaining amount remained in the warehouses of American universities.

When these inscriptions were translated, the accounting books of the Achaemenid Empire and details about the lifestyle of Iranians during the period were revealed.

For example, information about the workers and engineers who worked on the construction of Persepolis shed light on issues such as the way they received their salaries and even the participation of women in the workforce.

However, due to the problems experienced during the period when the inscriptions were found, the government of the Islamic Republic requested that the inscriptions be returned to Iran with compensation demands for the Jews.

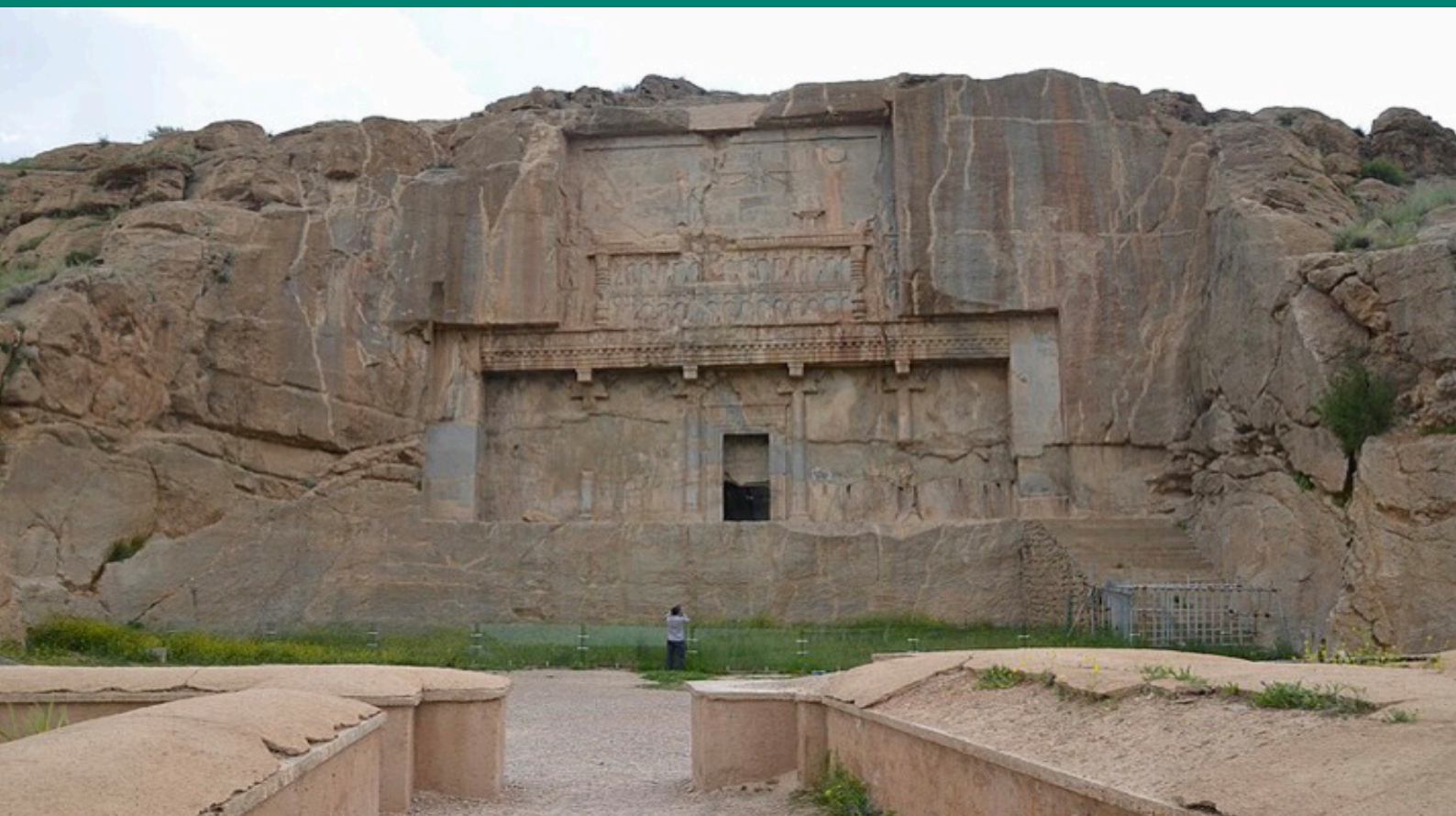
This event made it difficult to share the information on the inscriptions.

The discovered clay tablets contain important information on subjects such as the salary payment system, the types of materials used, the events that took place in Persepolis and the revenge actions of the police.

Additionally, the discovery of tablets containing words written in Elamite cuneiform script during excavations in 1312 AD revealed that the workers involved in the construction of Persepolis came from different nationalities and were all subjects of the Achaemenid Empire.

The stone inscriptions of Darius the Great and the foundation inscriptions of the Apadana Palace of





**Figure 26:** Artabanus's tomb (Amin Abedpour, Personal Archive, 2023)

Persepolis represent an important archaeological and historical source. The content of these inscriptions provides important information about the reign of Darius. In addition, the presence of explanations about Darius' leadership and empire in various parts of these inscriptions written in different languages offers historians a rich perspective. These stone inscriptions are important texts engraved on the foundation stones of buildings constructed in Persepolis during the reigns of Darius the Great and Xerxes. In these texts, the rulers' expressions of themselves, their governments, and their devotion to Ahura Mazda illuminate the religious and political context of the Persian Empire. In addition, requests for preservation of the inscriptions from enemies, wishes for protection from drought and lies, rulers' encouragement of their people and requests for blessings, it reflects the core values of Persian culture and government. The inscription of Artabanus I presents remarkable information such as spelling and spelling errors that emerged during the examination of buildings and inscriptions built in the later periods of Persepolis. These inscriptions provide an important archaeological source on the history and culture of the Persian Empire.

### Conclusion

In retracing the historical imprints of Persepolis through the annals of stone inscriptions, modern architectural renaissances, and cultural celebrations, a profound narrative unfolds, underscoring the perennial significance of this ancient Persian marvel. Darius the Great, through his meticulous inscriptions in multiple languages at Apadana Palace, the southern wall, and the Thatcher Palace, transcended temporal boundaries, etching the triumphs and blessings of Achaemenid rule into the very stones of Persepolis. These inscriptions, eloquent in Old Persian, Elamite, and Akkadian, serve as an indelible testament to the imperial aspirations and cultural amalgamation orchestrated by the Achaemenid kings.

The infusion of Persepolis's architectural magnificence into the fabric of modernity, particularly during the era of Rıza Şahin, represents a deliberate homage to the regal aesthetics of ancient Persian edifices. The Sehrbani Palace, Meli Bank of Iran fund building, and Ancushirvan Dadgar High School emerge as architectural relics where the echoes of Persepolis reverberate through capitals adorned with mythical creatures and stone carvings reminiscent of Achaemenid soldiers. This

harmonious fusion of past and present underscores Persepolis's enduring influence on contemporary architectural expressions.

Furthermore, the cultural celebrations emanating from the shadows of Persepolis, epitomized by the Shiraz Arts Festival, assume a pivotal role in perpetuating the legacy of the Achaemenid Empire. Leaders from diverse nations converge to pay homage to Cyrus the Great, rekindling the spirit of aristocratic tributes amidst the rich tapestry of Persian heritage. The Shiraz Arts Festival, spanning a decade, not only becomes a cultural extravaganza celebrating Iranian artistry but also serves as a bridge between ancient marvels and the dynamic expressions of global artistic diversity.

In conclusion, Persepolis stands as an immutable monument, weaving together the intricate threads of historical narratives, architectural reawakenings, and cultural celebrations. Its stone inscriptions narrate the saga of a bygone era, echoing through contemporary architectural endeavors that pay homage to its grandeur. The cultural celebrations, particularly the Shiraz Arts Festival, serve as a living testament to the enduring spirit of Persian heritage, fostering a cross-temporal dialogue between antiquity and the present. Persepolis's legacy is not confined to the annals of history but thrives in the modern-day, ensuring its indomitable presence in the cultural mosaic of the world.

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