

“The Art and Ritual of Imperial Temporality in Persia and the Ancient Iranian World”

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This paper explores the intersection between imperial and religious temporalities and the natural and built environments of Iranian kingship. Iranian kings ruled with the knowledge that time was progressing linearly towards a spectacular apocalyptic end. This is a remarkably consistent and characteristic feature of Iranian political temporality. It subtly inflects the political discourse not only of such overtly Mazda-worshipping dynasties as the Achaemenids and Sasanians, but even those who engaged the contemporary Iranian Religion as practiced in Persia or the eastern Iranian world lightly, if at all. Moreover, time in ancient Iran was a weapon. The Wise Lord created finite time, which we humans experience as our existential present, as a strategic weapon. In addition to considering temporality as an imperial tool, this paper will examine the role of the built in natural environment in inculcating these experiences, and building new visions of the past and present. It considers those institutions that played a role in shaping Iranian memory, but also those spaces and rituals that laid bare the inner workings of the cosmos to present an imperially sanctioned view of the present and future.