
THE STUDY AND ANALYSIS OF SEMIRAN CITY-CASTLE BASED ON THE RESULTS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEYS

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ABSTRACT:

Semiran city-castle consists of a series of monuments dated in the 10th century AD¹, located on the banks of the Qezel Owzan River, in north-western Iran. On this river, Sefid-rud Dam has been built (1956-1962), behind which a lake has developed. At the time of its dewatering, it turned the Semiran landscape into a peninsula, causing significant damage to the ancient sites. The following study presents the results of an archaeological survey, made in 2016, which recorded the actual conservation state and structural features of the surviving monuments.

Semiran Castle consists of the remains of a castle and of several mausoleums established on the surrounding hills (four mausoleums on the highest part of the hill), with the same design as a barbican, some scattered enclosures, as well as the domed monument of Imāmzādeh Qasem, which is later. The Sallarids dynasty who had captured the Tarom region and lasted from about 917 to the middle of the 10th century AD, built mausoleums for themselves. In the early 10th century, the Sallarids captured the mountain castle of Semiran, from where they subsequently reached Tarom. This dynasty has been called by different names such as Mosaferian, Kangriyan, Langarian, Solarian, and Sallarids. Tarom was the capital of the dynasty. The rule of its monarchs, however, in different periods went beyond the Tarom region, and included parts of Deylaman as well as Gilan. The head of the Mosaferian dynasty, Muhammad Ibn Musafer, had made this castle his base. The castle had several houses as well as summerhouses and was magnificent. As the discussed region enjoys a special crossroad position, it has always been among the most important and influential routes of cultural exchanges and developments at the regional, national, and international levels.

In July 2016, a survey was conducted in the north and northwest of the city-castle site in order to identify and record possible paths and structures that remained visible. Three defensive baileys, three cemeteries, a barrel-drain ceramic path, and a round stone barbican were identified during this study. The archaeological study of this city-castle revealed its growth and development in the early Islamic centuries.

REZUMAT: ANALIZĂ ASUPRA ORAȘULUI-CASTEL SEMIRAN PE BAZA CERCETĂRILOR ARHEOLOGICE

Orașul-castel Semiran este format dintr-o serie de monumente datate în secolul al X-lea d.Hr.², situate pe malul râului Qezel Owzan, în nord-vestul Iranului. Pe cursul acestui râu a fost construit Barajul Sefid-rud (1956-1962), în spatele căruia s-a dezvoltat un lac. La momentul amenajării sale, a transformat peisajul Semiran într-o peninsulă, provocând daune semnificative sitului antic. Următorul studiu prezintă rezultatele unui sondaj arheologic, realizat în anul 2016, care a înregistrat starea actuală de conservare și caracteristicile structurale ale monumentelor care au supraviețuit.

Castelul Semiran este format din rămășițele unui castel și din mai multe mausolee înființate pe dealurile din jur (patru mausolee pe partea cea mai înaltă a dealului), cu același design cu barbicană, câteva incinte împrăștiate, precum și monumentul cu cupolă Imāmzādeh Qasem, care este mai târziu. Dinastia Sallarizilor care cucerise regiunea Tarom și a durat din aproximativ 917 până la mijlocul secolului al X-lea d.Hr., și-au construit mausolee. La începutul secolului al X-lea, salarizii au capturat castelul de munte Semiran, de unde au ajuns ulterior în Tarom. Această dinastie a fost numită cu diferite nume, cum ar fi Mosaferian, Kangriyan, Langarian, Solarian și Sallarids. Tarom a fost capitala dinastiei. Cu toate acestea, stăpânirea monarhilor săi, în diferite perioade, a depășit regiunea Tarom și a inclus părți din Deylaman, precum și din Gilan. Șeful dinastiei Mosaferienilor, Muhammad Ibn Musafer, făcuse din acest castel baza sa. Castelul avea mai multe case, precum și căsuțe de vară și era magnific. Întrucât

¹ The absolute dates were originally presented by the authors in Islamic centuries. They were equivalated here by the Journal editors with the corresponding dates of the Gregorian calendar, in order to enhance the comprehensiveness of the text for the East European audience.

² Datările absolute au fost inițial prezentate de autori în secolele islamice. Acestea au fost echivalate aici de către editorii revistei cu datele corespunzătoare ale calendarului gregorian, pentru a spori caracterul cuprinzător al textului pentru publicul est-european.

regiunea discutată se bucură de o poziție specială de răscruce, ea a fost întotdeauna printre cele mai importante și influente rute de schimburi și dezvoltări culturale la nivel regional, național și internațional.

În iulie 2016, a fost efectuat un sondaj în nordul și nord-vestul sitului oraș-castel pentru a identifica și înregistra posibile căi și structuri care au rămas vizibile. În timpul acestui studiu au fost identificate trei curți defensive, trei cimitire, o potecă din ceramică cu dren de tip butoi și o barbicană rotundă de piatră. Studiul arheologic al acestui oraș-castel a dezvăluit creșterea și dezvoltarea sa la începutul secolelor islamice.

KEYWORDS: Qezel Owzan River, Semiran City-Castle, Mosaferian, Mausoleum-Barbican, Imāmzādeh Qasem

CUVINTE CHEIE: Râul Qezel Owzan, Orașul-Castelul Semiran, Mosaferian, Mausoleu-Barbican, Imāmzādeh Qasem.

Introduction

The city of Semiran, given the existence of its monuments set, has been always noticed by scholars. The writings of Abu Dulaf, an Arab poet and globetrotter, are the oldest information in this regard and date back to 943. After describing Tarom, Abu Dulaf referred to the greatness and glory of the Semiran. He wrote: "I reached the castle of the King of Deylaman, which is called Semiran. I saw things in the constructions there that I had not seen in the palaces of kings. There are 2,850 large and small housing units there"³. Historical literature also indicates the importance of this historical city as great globetrotters and historians such as Abu Dulaf, Nasir Khusraw, Shams al-Dīn al-Maqdisī, Yaqut al-Hamawī, and Hamdallah Mustawfi have mentioned it. Until the end of the 15th century, the Semiran's name appears in the literature of historians; from this date onwards, however, its name stops being mentioned (Fig. 17).

Research Background

The history of the Tarom region is tied to the history of the Gilan and Mazandaran regions since, in the past, this region was considered as one of the Mazandaran and Gilan cities. The forested province of Gilan was inhabited during the Sassanid period by two folks, one called Gil and the other Deylam. The Gils lived on the shores of the Caspian Sea, the Deylamites near Qazvin. These two descents were apparently of the same origin and race, and according to Ptolemy, they were from the Medes or had an affinity with them⁴. Surveying the region in question, which also includes Tarom, we come to the southern tribes of the Caspian Sea, which ruled from the southern shores of the Caspian Sea to the northern regions of Zanjan and Qazvin as well as parts of Azerbaijan. Among these tribes, we can mention Cadusii (Kaššu, Kassites, and Kassi). Some believe that these people lived on the southern shores of the Caspian Sea, their land was bounded on the east and southeast by the Caspian Sea and the land of the Amard, on the south and west by the Ātrpākāna, and to the north by lands later called Aran and Albania⁵. Cadusiieh thus corresponds to the distance between the Caspian Sea, the northern Alborz highlands, and the Sefid-rud River. This region is known today as the Talish ethnic region. Some scholars consider the Cadusii to be natives of Iran before the arrival of the Aryans in this land. They lived in Gilan and the northeastern part of Azerbaijan⁶. Sattagush is the oldest known form of the name Cadus, it was first recorded in Achaemenid inscriptions and since then it has not been inserted anywhere. The word Cadus is the Greek pronunciation of Sattagush-Tagush⁷.

In ancient Armenian sources, the name of Catishian is mentioned, which is the same as Cadusii. According to these sources, they formed a large nation⁸. According to Rawlinson, in ancient times, the mountains to the north and south of the Sefid-rud valley were the residence of the powerful Cadus people, and it seems their centre was variable in Khalkhal, Tarom Olya, and Tarom Sofla⁹. In historical periods, especially from the Sassanid onwards, the name of Cadusii or Cassian has been diminished, being replaced by Deylam and Gol; after that, the name of Deylamestan has been applied to the areas under the control of the Cassians. Originally located in the mountainous

³ Abu Dulaf 1963, 45.

⁴ Kasravi 1974, 18.

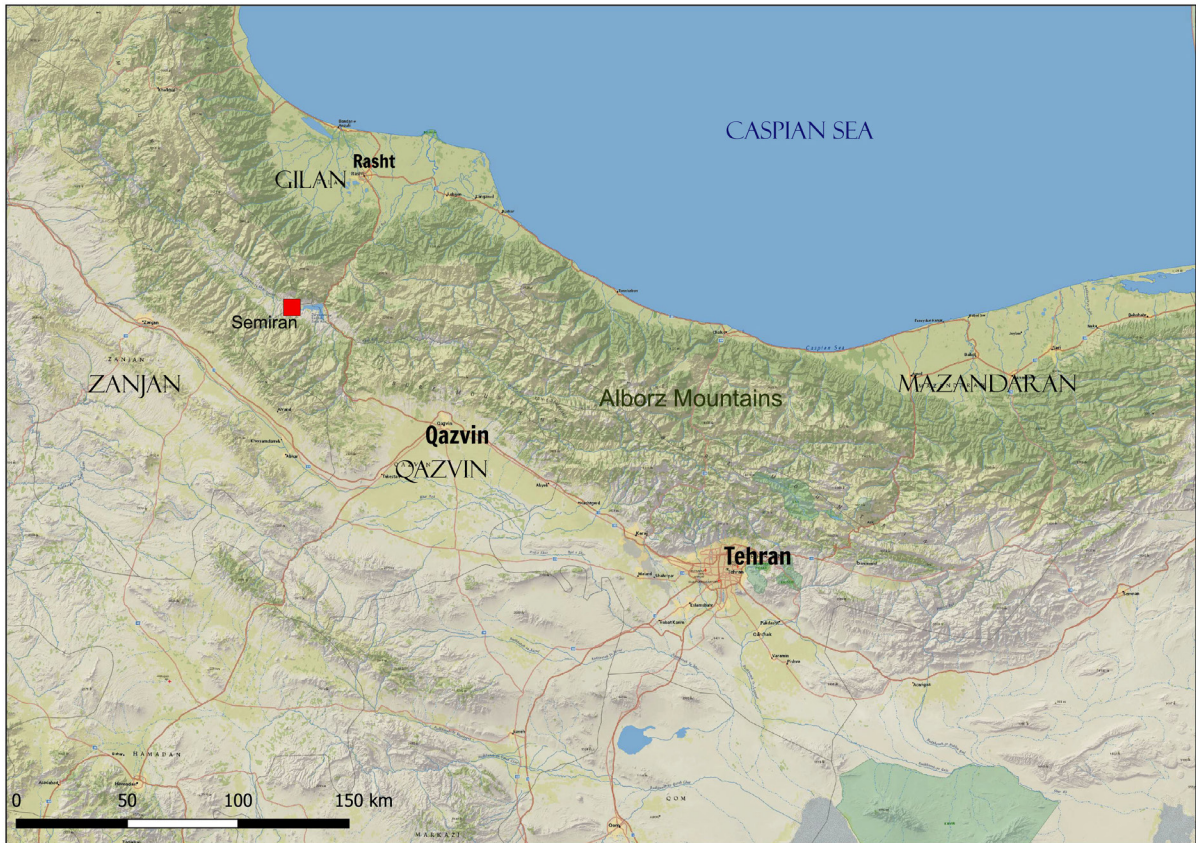
⁵ Naderi 1980.

⁶ Pirnia 1983, 1129.

⁷ Abdoli 1999, 28.

⁸ Arabani 1995, 25.

⁹ Rabino 1985, 450.



Map 1. The geographical location of Semiran (Source: Semiran Cultural Heritage Site).

region north of Qazvin, the Deylamites had a long-standing tradition of military efficiency and were allies in the Sassanid expeditions to Georgia. They, like the Turks, had played an important role as mercenaries in the period before the rise of Buyids and were active in Iran, Mesopotamia, and even the western regions¹⁰. Dynasties ruled in different parts of Deylam, the most famous of which was the Buyids dynasty, which ruled over large parts of the Gilan highlands in the south of the Caspian Sea and Deylaman from 932 to 1056. They were Shiites with political traditions and cultural heritage of Iran and served the development of philosophy, science, poetry, and literature¹¹.

According to Iranian and Islamic historians, in the early 9th century, the Justanids ruled over Deylaman and Gilan, whose capital was Rudbar; when this dynasty weakened against the Mosaferian (Kangriyan), they moved their capital to Lahijan. Not much is known about the start of Justanids activities. The first famous king of this dynasty is Marzuban, the son of Justan, who is contemporary with Harun al-Rashid Abbasi¹². The study of historical literature indicates that the government headquarters of this dynasty was part of the Deylam and Gilan, which included Tarom, Zanzan, as well as Abhar. In the early tenth century, due to severe dynastic disputes and the emergence of fierce rivals such as the Kangriyan, the Justanids declined; the status of the Justanids was overshadowed by the advent and victory of the Mosaferian, as the heights of Deylam, including Rudbar, were captured by this dynasty. Thus, from the beginning of the tenth century, another dynasty came to power in a part of the territory of Gilan and Deylaman, which was the rival of the Justanids. This dynasty has been called by different names, including Mosaferian, Kangriyan, Langarian, Sallarids, and Solarian. The capital of this dynasty was located in Tarom¹³. However, the domain of its monarchs in different periods has gone beyond the Tarom region and included parts of Deylaman and Gilan. The founder of this dynasty was called “Solar” who chose the Islamic name of Muhammad. His father’s name was Asvar, which was distorted by the Arabic name of “Musafer”; hence, this dynasty is called Mosaferian and Sallarids. At the beginning of the 9th century, these travellers captured the mountainous castle of Semiran and from there gained control of Tarom¹⁴. The head of the dynasty of travellers, Muhammad Ibn Mosafer,

¹⁰ Frye 2001, 218.

¹¹ Kraemer 1996, p. 68.

¹² Arabani 1995, 49-50.

¹³ Turkmaniazar 2005, 13.

¹⁴ Barthold 1979, 290

had made this fort his base. The castle had several houses as well as summerhouses and was quite magnificent¹⁵. Sir Henry Rawlinson, the famous English explorer, seems to have been the first explorer to investigate this place. He went to Semiran in 1838, briefly reporting on the ruins in the *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*¹⁶.

Architectural Components of City-Castle

“Dezh” or “Dez” is a word from Pahlavi Persian and means retaining enclosure or a castle - a site surrounded by strong barbicans and baileys, protecting the people and soldiers who live in it from enemy attacks. According to historical evidence, Semiran city-castle was a large city with numerous mud-brick houses and was a centre for artists. Although today most of the monuments of this city have been destroyed, due to the construction of the Sefid-rud dam and water flood, the plan of the remaining parts of this historical city can be revealed, by careful scientific excavations. Three factors, including the passing of time, erosion, and man, have left only a few traces of this historical city. The remaining monuments include Semiran castle, barbicans Nos. 1 to 4, the monument called Lean-to, the three rotunda monuments and Imāmzādeh Qasem.

Semiran Castle

The remains of the main kernel of the castle include the entire first bailey, the remains of the second enclosure, and the remaining parts of this monument. The age of the monument and its use as a defensive fortress have caused a lot of damage during different periods. The main construction materials used in this monument were natural stone, wood, gypsum mortar, Sarooj¹⁷ veneer, and pieces of brick (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Semiran Castle, view from the south and north-west.

Barbicans Nos. 1 and 2

In the Semiran zone from west to east, there are four barbicans, which are all made of stone and brick. Barbican No. 1, which is referred to as the Great Mausoleum and Sasan Castle, is located on a hill, rising 31 m high above the adjacent lands. The creation of such barbicans in the Islamic period is a continuance of a type of burial architecture that was common in the Sassanid period. The monument has an entrance in the south and a window in the east, each measuring 5.60 m high. The height of this monument is currently 10 m. In the outer base of this monument, first, a two-meter-high bailey has been created around it. Inside the monument, on the west side, there is a spiral staircase 80 cm wide that reaches the roof of the monument. Apart from a few stairs inside the monument, which somewhat have remained intact, today, the stairs leading to the roof of the monument have been severely damaged and destroyed (Fig. 2).

Barbican No. 2 has been completely damaged and only limited numbers of end courses of the barbican remain, which form a bailey, 2 m high in the south and 80 cm in the north. This mausoleum-barbican is built on a natural hill (Fig. 3).

¹⁵ Al-e Buyeh 1964, 43.

¹⁶ Willey 1995, 100.

¹⁷ Sarooj is a traditional water-resistant mortar used in Iranian architecture, used in the construction of bridges, and ice pits or earth refrigerators. It is made of clay and limestone mixed in a six-to-four ratio to make a stiff mix and kneaded for two days.



Fig. 2. View of the Castle and Mausoleum-Barbican, known as Sasan Castle (Source, Author).

The variety of construction materials, dimensions, and appearance of these graves may indicate class conflict among individuals. According to the funerary inventories, this conflict and the class differences can be linked with the military ranking of the individuals.

Barbicans Nos. 3 and 4

Barbican No. 3 is located on a hill, 13 m above the plain. Like other barbicans in this zone, this barbican has not been safeguarded from natural damage, and in addition to the vegetation that has covered it, in recent years, one of its sides has collapsed; neither the other sides are in good condition. Throughout its base, the exterior view of the barbican has a bailey that on its octagonal corners, at a height of 1.40 m, has tetrahedron columns. The aforementioned columns, at a height of 60 cm, have become circular and continued until the roof. The monument has an entrance in the south and has no windows. In the interior, there are arches on each side whose zigzag arch is made of bricks. According to some researchers, there were acrographies in the remains inside the dome of the monument that had shrubbery motifs, but today such decorations are not visible anymore (Fig. 4).

Barbican No. 4 is located at a distance of 270 m, on the northeast side of the castle, i.e. in the easternmost part of the Semiran zone, on a 42 m high hill. Given the damage done to this barbican, it has been given the title of the Half-Ruined Mausoleum. It seems that this barbican had an inscription in Kufic, which was of great artistic importance (Fig. 4).



Fig. 3. Barbican No. 2 (Source: Author).



Fig. 4. View of Barbicans No. 3 and 4.



Fig. 5. Location of the Semiran site structures.

The barbicans of Semiran are completely based on an octagonal layout, implementing though different dimensions. The entrance to these barbicans is usually from the south, north, and southwest. Given the total destruction, it is not possible to comment definitively on the covering of the dome of the barbicans. However, it seems that the barbicans dome's cover of Semiran have been double-covered, according to which these barbicans should be considered as some of the first and oldest barbicans of this type (Fig. 5).

Lean-to Monument

This monument, which is referred to as a lean-to (Fig. 6), is located south of Imāmzādeh Qasem. The southern entrance of the mentioned monument, along with its dome, have collapsed. This monument, according to the plan, is made in the shape of a square. The lean-to consists of four entrances on four sides, each 1.25 m wide and 1.35 m high. There are annex remains of a structure to the west of this monument and can be seen in the form of a plastered anta that is attached to its body.



Fig. 6. Lean-To.



Fig. 7. View of the three rotunda monuments.

Three Rotunda Monuments

These three rotundas (Fig. 7) are located east of Imāmzādeh Qasem. They are called quadrangle mausoleums and Islamic bathrooms. None of them has an inscription or evidence of a building date. In recent years, the roof of the mentioned monuments has collapsed. With a similar plan, monuments No. 1 and 2 include a porch (side room) and a square rotunda. Each of them has a door with a width of 2.5 m and porches with dimensions of 1.90×2 m; but each of the rotundas has different dimensions. Monument No. 3 has no porch or side room and enters the rotunda directly through a door with a width of 1.12 m.

Imāmzādeh Qasem Monument

This monument is located on a hill, 25 m above the adjacent lands (Fig. 8). Around this monument, in both northern and eastern directions, there is an old cemetery, which also shows signs of recent activity. No information about the past of the monument is available. In a year that is unknown, this monument became known as Imāmzādeh Qasem. This monument includes a mausoleum, a central room, a porch, and a southeast room. In recent years, unfortunately, some parts of the porch and architectural spaces in the eastern part have been completely damaged.



Fig. 8. The view of the Monument of Imāmzādeh Qasem and the effect of the Thuluth in Azure glaze on the southern enclosure of the Mausoleum.

The monument has an irregular rectangular plan whose dimensions are not the same in all parts. The interior spaces, porch, and eastern room of the mausoleum have the same plan (rectangular); the central room of the mausoleum and the room southeast of the mausoleum are based on a square plan.

In the four corners inside the mausoleum, at a height of 4 m above the floor, the tetrahedron section was turned into octagonal by placing four planks, creating thus four triangles in four corners. An enclosure with a height of 1.20 m has been erected on an octagonal plan, and then the dome of the monument has been built on it. The most important type of decoration belongs to the dome. These decorations were made as bas-relief acrography, being composed of plant forms, including small foliage, among which, usually, the leaves are seen in the form of a pentagram and hexagram. In the collapsed part of the beds in the south, there are Thuluth scripts written in Azure glaze, of which only a few illegible letters can be noticed (Fig. 8). In the interior view of the central room, on the quadruple enclosures, from the floor to near the circular base of the dome, a large lean-to view has been created. A shallow acrography altar is visible only inside the southern arch. In the transitional part, many small arches have created an octagonal plan, so that they

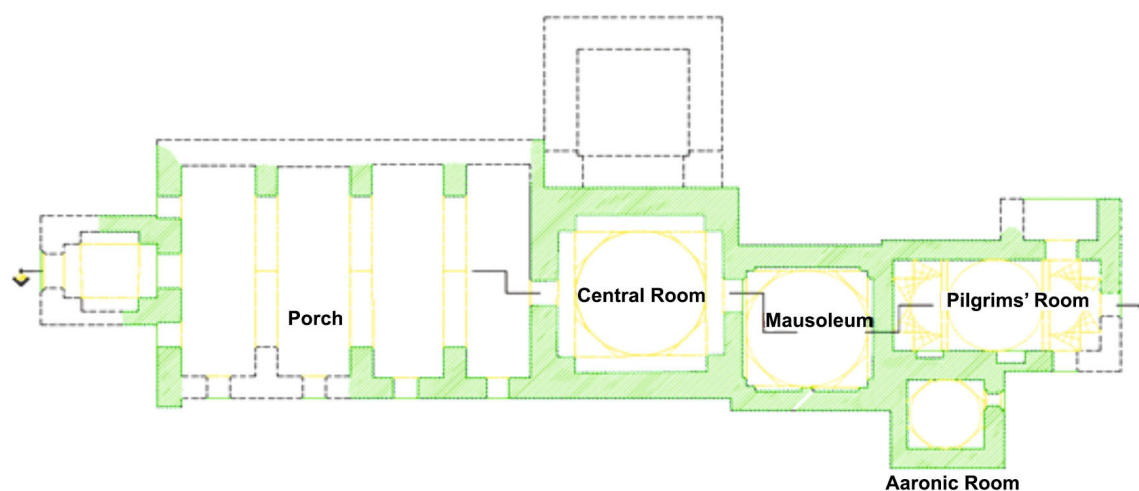


Fig. 9. View of the porch of the monument and horizontal section of Imāmzādeh Qasem.

play the role of a polygonal base for dome. Some locals believe that there is a gravestone ascribed to Sheikh Haji in this room, which is why the room is known as Sheikh Haji Mosque. For unknown reasons, the room southeast of the tomb is also known as the Aaronic Room. The interior of this room has also four long and elongated antas on which a small dome has been created. The porch is to the west of the central room, most of which has been destroyed, but the surviving documents show that the place had several skylights or windows in the past (Fig. 9). There are remains of a room to the east of the tomb that had a dome-shaped cover, the northern and southern antas of which are still intact. According to local information, this room was known as the Pilgrims' room (Fig. 9).

The Traversing Survey of the North and Northwestern regions of Semiran Site

The north of Semiran site is about 3.5 km away from the current asphalt of Gilvan road, which in terms of topography and land folds, was not used to accommodate the human population and build residential units. In the studies carried out in this section, except for the water pipe route and the enclosing baileys, which will be described below, no other traces were found.

A Stone Enclosure

On the way from Joodaki to Semiran, a stone enclosure (Fig. 10) can be seen. It extends from east to west. The enclosure was cut off by the construction of the road. It is made of very hard mountain rock and mud mortar. Its width is 135 cm. The enclosure on the east side of the road, which extends 1 km to the entire edge of the heights overlooking the Semiran ancient site, is made of mountain rubble with mud mortar; the rubble material is loose and foliated. The width of this enclosure is 95 cm. The reason for the difference in the use of two types of stones is related to the ease of access to each of them in relation to the enclosure. At the edge overlooking Semiran, at a distance of 30 m from the starting point of the enclosure in the east, the traces of a circular barbican unit with rubble material are quite visible, which if traversed, its regular plan and enclosure may be seen. Scattered traces of pottery can be seen on the surface (Fig. 10).



Fig. 10. Stone enclosure overlooking the Semiran site.

The Western Enclosure of Semiran site

The western enclosure followed the intersection of the Joodaki earthen pathway to Semiran. After a short section of this route, it was observed that the old earthen road to Gilvan, which is now abandoned, had covered this enclosure, while the traces of the enclosure have completely disappeared along several hundred meters long. In search of the sightly enclosure, the earthen pathway to Gilvan went in a direction inclined to west, and again in the northern part of the pathway to Gilvan, a continuation of the earthen pathway was seen.

A Stone Hedge

In the layout of the stone hedge (Fig. 11), at a distance of 100 m from the riverbed, a unit of a circular stone tower was observed. The search for a stone enclosure continued on the opposite side of the river, in an area covered by Bahram-Abad olive groves. The continuation of the earthen route to Gilvan divides the groves in two parts, north, and south. Given that agricultural operations have been carried out in orchards for many years (irrigation, shovelling, etc.), it seemed almost impossible to find a stone enclosure. However, attention to the scattered accumulation of large river rocks brought us closer to a hypothesis. The basis of the hypothesis was that the northern edge of the Gilvan earthen road, which is also the border of the olive groves, matched with the stone enclosure in many parts since immediately the rubble of scattered and ruined constructions of Bahram-Abad can be seen in the olive groves. This enclosure extends in the northwest direction to the asphalt road to Gilvan. In the northwest-southeast direction, a string of aqueducts extends into the olive groves. This aqueduct is located at the junction of the Gilvan unsurfaced earthen pad and today irrigates olive groves.



Fig. 11. Northern enclosure of Semiran site to the west.

Water Transfer Barrel-drains

Along the earthen road, towards Joodaki (at a distance of 500 m), on its eastern side, at the foothill of parallel heights, broken water transfer barrel-drains (Fig. 12) to Semiran site can be seen in large numbers. This path has gone deep wherever it has encountered the flood-prone while the pipes have passed through a place that was not exposed to the destructive water flow. The diameter of the barrel-drains was about 38 cm. They can be traced about 450 m on the surface of the ground. It seems that the drinking water of Semiran originates from the upper valley of Joodaki, which is in the route of Vkhman villages, Callas and Kota.

A Cemetery with Rubbles

The area of the cemetery is separated from the residential areas with a relatively deep and main flood-prone. The width of the area varies in different places and follows the topographic features of the land. At a great distance from this ancient site, an earthen pathway has been constructed. Concrete signs are installed in a part of the western margin of this area (overlooking the river). The rubbles quarry can be seen in the eastern heights of this area at a short distance from the cemetery, from which the material for the graves and residential units was probably supplied (Fig. 13).

Stone Barbican

There are pebbles along the eastern and southern edges of this area. This situation reinforces the hypothesis that there was once a fence around the area. Remains of a circular barbican unit with related structures can be seen at the end of the southern part of the area. The position of this barbican is at the end of a row. With a 90 degrees deviation, the Bahram-Abad River returns to east and southeast. In this part, a stone enclosure (?), which runs through the southern side of the area at the southern edge of the flood-prone, is connected to the barbican. The construction material of this barbican includes river rocks and lime mortar (Fig. 14).

The lowlands and steep slopes to the north and west of Semiran Castle contain many cemeteries that have been built using stone, brick, chalk and thatch. Small and large pits can be seen throughout the cemetery, results of unauthorized excavations. The funerary inventories of these graves are scattered throughout the area. The general shape of the graves was rectangular or square and they were all created in the east-west direction (in the direction of the Kaaba) (Fig. 17). These graves, which have structural diversity, have large (3 × 5 m) as well as small dimensions (1.5 × 1.5 m). In their simplest form were composed of an initial burial pit and enclosing walls. The most complex form of these graves includes those in which, in addition to their size, there was a greater variety of objects. In the construction of these graves, first a pit was dug in the ground, and then it was surrounded by beached bank enclosures with mud mortar and half-beat chalk coating, while the interior surface of the enclosure, like the interior enclosures of houses, was covered with thatch or half-beat chalk. Large flat rocks were placed on these graves, then a four-wall consisting of large and small irregular river rocks or regular rocks was built above on these slabs, so as they created a structure above the grave. This is the common shape of graves in this cemetery; of course, there are other different graves, which have used bricks in addition to stone to build their outer enclosures.

Like the old traditional architecture, in general, some of the graves had brick material in the upper parts of the enclosure suggesting that the roof of these graves may have been domed, or at least that brick was used extensively to build part of it.



Fig. 12. Pottery barrel-drain.



Fig. 13. Rubbles quarry near the cemetery.



Fig. 14. Stone barbican next to the river.

The large dimensions of some bricks (10 cm × 50 cm × 30 cm) show that this material was used in the lower parts and foundations of the graves, too. In addition to destruction by human factors, natural and annual erosion due to seasonal floods have also been effective in causing damage to the graves of this cemetery. Furthermore, soft soil, and lack of proper vegetation have contributed to the accelerating of this process. The extent of this destruction in some graves is so great that it is very difficult and sometimes impossible to identify the type of plan, especially when the cultural materials of several graves are mixed together, and a pile of debris is left. Recognition of the



Fig. 15. View of the northern cemetery and of a destroyed grave.

external structure of graves is based on restrictive stone enclosures, which at best do not exceed 60 cm in height. In fact, no standing structures can be seen in this cemetery, but given the passage of time and the destruction, it seems that all of them were on the same level. These graves were built individually or next to each other as a collection of several graves. Disordered river and truncated stones, bricks, chalk, and mud have been used to make them. Some of the funerary enclosures in this cemetery have dimensions of about 5 x 20 m, containing several small graves. By building a rectangular enclosure around these graves, they have formed a small set of family or collective burials. Considering the width of the enclosures built around the graves, it can be concluded that the height of some of these enclosures reached at least 2 m.

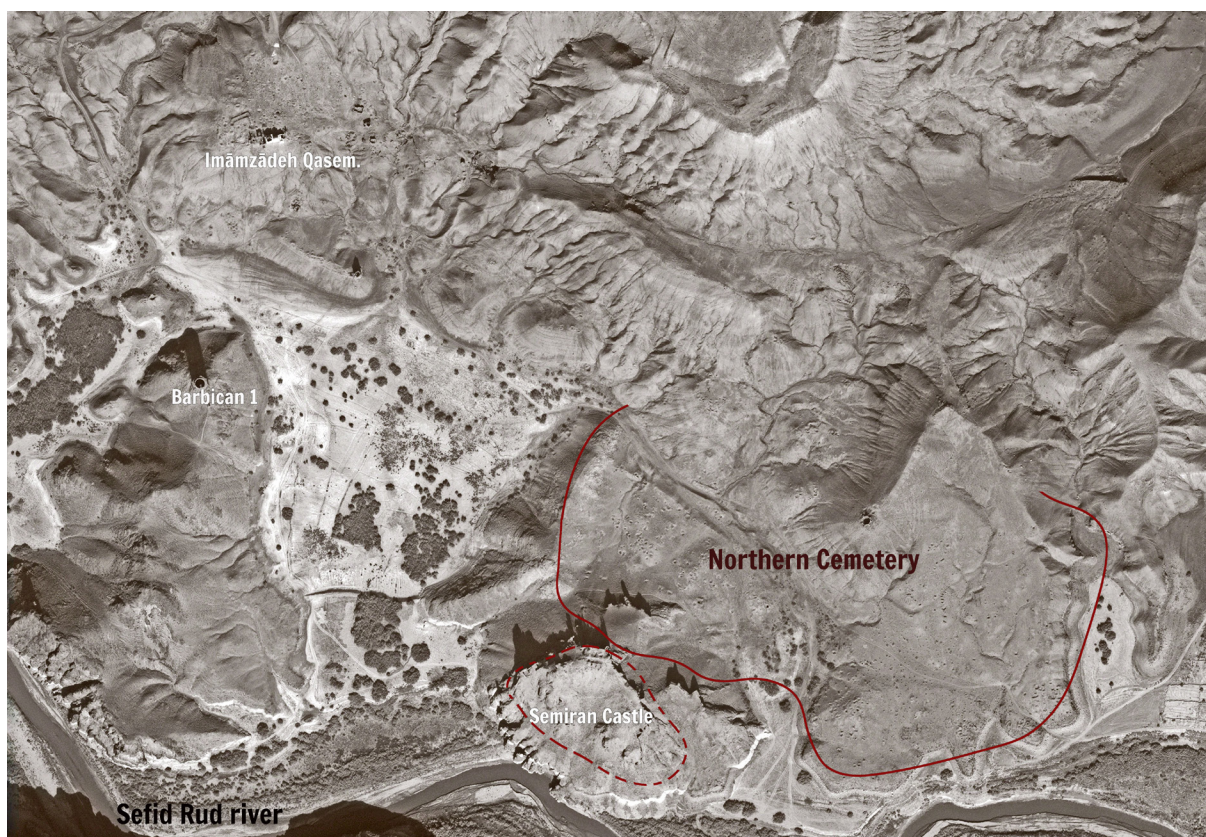
The variety of construction materials, dimensions, and appearance of the graves indicate class difference among individuals, but according to the cultural materials in the graves, this conflict and class differences may be linked with the military ranking of the individuals. Illegal excavations carried out in this cemetery have scattered many cultural materials in the cemetery. As can be seen from the study of historical literature, this city and the surrounding lands have been the centre of numerous military conflicts throughout history, which is evidenced by the existence of such cemeteries in the Semiran site. It is not clear to us if the burials were performed according to certain customs and if the tools of war were buried next to the bodies, or if these burials were related to the victims of the wars; because it is not possible to make a definite statement about this before sounding and archaeological scientific excavations (Fig. 15).



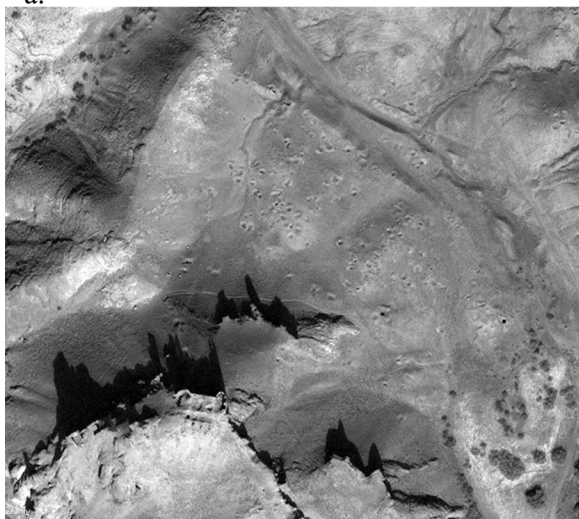
Fig. 16. View of Gabri cemetery and the thick rubble enclosure of the graves.

Gabri Cemetery

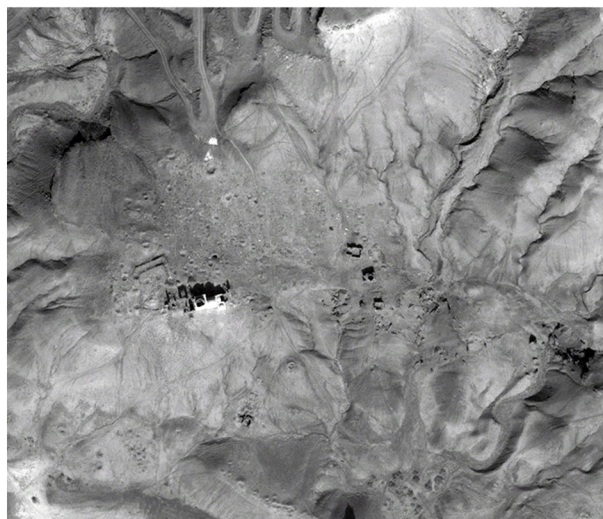
In the relatively high eastern areas of Semiran, 50 meters east of Semiran Castle, there is a cemetery that is known to the local people as Gabri Cemetery. The appearance and materials used in the construction of the graves were in perfect harmony with the northern cemetery. These two cemeteries should be attributed to the same period. Given the advance of Qezel Owzan River water during the flooding of the Sefid-rud dam, the southern parts of this cemetery have been gradually eroded and many of its graves, like in the northern cemetery, have been severely damaged by illegal excavations. A large number of materials, scattered on the ground indicates that the graves of this area were also characterized by structural diversity, revealing a variety of social conflicts and rankings among the burials. Although the illegal excavations have caused a lot of damage to the graves, they have also revealed some details about the structure of the graves and their inventories.



a.



b.



c.

Fig. 17. a - location of the northern cemetery; b, c – details of the satellite image of 2010 with traces of illegal excavations.

According to the documentation obtained for the cemetery, some of the graves were made of bricks, stones, clay, and some were made only of rubble. In this cemetery, disordered large and small river stones, bricks, half-beat chalk, mud, mud coating, and mud-brick have been used to build the graves; these have an east-west orientation, in the direction of the Kaaba. The rectangular and square graves of this cemetery are very similar to the graves of the northern cemetery. In both cemeteries, large flat stones, sometimes measuring 1 x 1 m, have been used to cover the graves; these were actually the gravestones. Gabri Cemetery is bordered on the east by the low and agricultural lands of Aliabad village, on the north by the northern cemetery, on the west by Semiran Castle, and on the south by the Qezel Owzan River (Fig. 16).

Conclusion

As mentioned above, from the early Islamic centuries, specifically from the late 10th century AD, with the coming to power of local governments in Iran, a new tendency to express commitment and belonging to the ancestors or to religious and political dignitaries started inside Iran. This issue appeared especially in the northern region of Iran, in the form of material manifestations in the social arena, including tombs, monuments, and mausoleum barbicans. This kind of faith, sense of commitment, and respect for the opinion of some scholars were rooted in the traditions and religions related to the Shiite, which ruled in the early Islamic centuries the northern part of the country, under the leadership of Sadat and Alevis, as the dominant culture and religious model. Tarom Sofla, in terms of archaeological studies, is one of the richest areas with potential cultural backgrounds, which unfortunately has not been properly introduced and recognized. Archaeological studies and surveys that have been carried out sporadically in this area since the 1970s, revealed a large number of ancient works and monuments, including prehistoric, historical, and of the Islamic periods. These works include sites, hills, cemeteries, castles, etc., among which the Semiran Castle has a special place. Based on these studies, it has been determined that since pre-Islamic times, the Qezel Owzan River basin has been considered significant by various communities, and this importance has continued until the Islamic era and the founding of the city of Semiran. Existence of several historical sites with burial use in the northern and southern basins of Qezel Owzan River and the city of Semiran on the one hand, as well as numerous Islamic cemeteries in the city of Semiran on the other hand, indicate the special importance of this part of Tarom for cultural studies.

Based on written documents and archaeological studies on cultural materials in the city of Semiran, from the early Islamic period (10th and 11th centuries) onwards, we see the development of the city and the increasing growth of cultural-political developments in the Tarom Sofla region. The existing works and constructions are the reason for this claim. Studying the cultural-historical monuments of the city of Semiran and comparing them with the social developments of the early Islamic centuries, especially in the northern region of Iran, similar cultural perspectives and horizons can be drawn in the Tarom Sofla area. Undoubtedly, this helps our understanding to explore the dark cultural-historical angles of this region. With a brief look at the city of Semiran and its shaping elements (especially burial sets), countless cultural links with neighbouring areas will be presented to us, of which the mausoleum-barbicans of this city are the excellent examples in this field.

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Lista ilustrațiilor

Fig. 1. Castelul Semiran, vedere dinspre sud și nord-vest.

Fig. 2. Vedere a Castelului și Mausoleului-barbacană, cunoscut sub numele de Castelul Sasan (Sursă, Autor).

Fig. 3. Barbacana nr. 2 (Sursă: Autor).

Fig. 4. Vedere a Barbacanelor nr. 3 și 4.

Fig. 5. Amplasarea structurilor sitului Semiran.

Fig. 6. Monumentul Lean-To.

Fig. 7. Vedere a celor trei rotonde.

Fig. 8. Vedere a Monumentului Imāmzādeh Qasem și efectul Thuluth în glazura azurie, pe incinta de sud a Mausoleului.

Fig. 9. Vedere a pridvorului monumentului și secțiunea orizontală a Imāmzādeh Qasem.

Fig. 10. Incintă de piatră care se înalță deasupra sitului Semiran.

Fig. 11. Incinta de nord a sitului Semiran, spre vest.

Fig. 12. Șanț de scurgere din ceramică.

Fig. 13. Ruinele exploatării din apropierea necropolei

Fig. 14. Turn de pază din piatră lângă râu.

Fig. 15. Vedere asupra necropolei de nord și a unui mormânt distrus.

Fig. 16. Vedere asupra necropolei Gabri și a dărâmăturii incintei mormintelor.

Fig. 17. a - localizarea necropolei nordice; b, c - detalii ale imaginii satelitare din 2010 cu urmele săpăturilor ilegale.

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