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The Study of the Factors Considered in Locating Eastern Guilan Castles (Case Study: Amlash Castles)

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Abstract


Amlash is one of the most important parts of Guilan Province in northern Iran. It has endured unending political and military turmoil due to its special geopolitical and geostrategic position, during the early and middle Islamic eras. The establishment of numerous castles in the area is one of the manifestations of this state of affairs during that period. This study, based on library and field study, is aimed at analyzing the factors that might have led to the formation of the castles. The library studies included a review of literature on military castles and fortresses for an analysis of the factors that might have contributed to the castles in the Amlash region. The field studies included direct observation of the locating, photographic imaging, and numerical measurement and topographical features of those castles.

Keywords: Amlash Castles; Political History; Geopolitical and Geostrategic Features.



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Introduction

Political, economic, military, defensive, and other events in every era have played a significant role in building of castles in Iran (Kiani, 2003: 10). The special geographical position of Iran, which is situated on important roads connecting Asia, Africa, and Europe, has been one of the main reasons for the building of the castles (Sotoudeh, 1967: 91-92). In the greater Iran, there are very few cities without castles (Sotoudeh, 1967: 12). Castles have served a variety of purposes, ranging from providing sanctuary for political dissidents, protection against invasion to the sanctuary for ousted statesmen and clerics, in various political situations. They included events as such the rise and fall of dynasties, civil strife, and foreign invasions. Also, the crucial role the castles played in various social and economic changes closely tied to the political ones that occurred in the region (Khalatbary and Delirish, 2004: 7).

Studying the political history of every region, in addition to its natural, cultural, and economic features, plays a significant role in the comprehensive study of that region (Grzymiski, 2004: 21). Military buildings have strong complex structural bonds with their surroundings. The fundamental links between various environmental variables, therefore, could play a crucial role in the formations of these structures. On the one hand, archaeological and historical studies of castles are regarded as one of the best ways to understand the political history and military upheavals of a region; on the other, determining the sequence of the cultural material belonging to the various stages is one of the main purposes

of studying castles (Werz, 2002: 90). In view of the strategic location of Iran and multitudinous political and military ups-and-downs in the various parts, a study of the structural and functional features of the castles, combined with a study of the written political history of the region, can shed light on the factors considered in the formations of the castles.

One of the important regions in northern Iran is the littoral region of the Caspian Sea which consists of three old provinces of Mazandaran, Guilan, and Golestan. It is a narrow strip of land located between the northern slopes of the Alborz Mountains and the southern coast of the Caspian Sea. It stretches from Guilan in the west to Golestan in the east. The westernmost province of this westerly-easterly stretch of land is Guilan. It has had a tumultuous political history. The Amlash region, with seven standing military castles is one of the most important strategic regions of Guilan. The strategic location of Amlash has made it important in the political history of the region. It has been scene to many historical political events, making it one of the most contentious regions of Iran. The residents of Amlash sought to build numerous impregnable castles in order to preserve their integrity and independence for many years. Also, internal and external conflicts led the foundation of the contending powers seeking to find the best location for castles so that they could best defend and protect their territories. For instance, the forested landscape and the unique strategic location of the region being conducive to conflict, thus providing ample grounds for castles.

In view of the significant role the

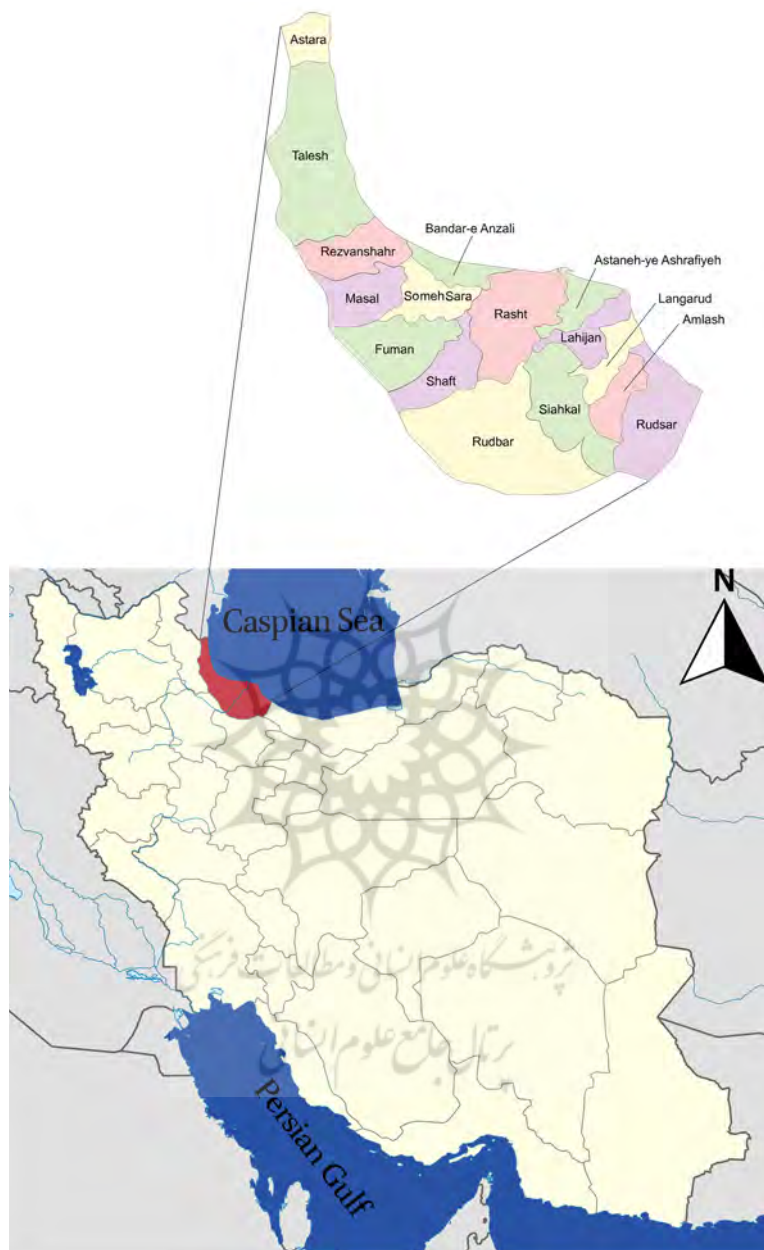


Fig. 1. Gilan, Amlash

Amlash castles played in the political history of the region, a study of their features is of paramount importance. It is crucial that they be studied closely, as they can shed light not only on political

conflicts but also the factors influencing the construction of the various castles. The lack of sources, however, hampers the process of studying the Amlash castles. To compensate for this shortcoming,

a field observation was conducted on the remnants of the Amlash castles. Based on the superficial accounts and limited sources available, the fortifications in this region date back to the Parthian to the later Islamic era (Marashi, 1986; Sotoudeh, 1996). Despite massive destruction, the remnants of the castles can still shed some light on the overall patterns of their construction. This study is aimed at, in addition to giving an account of the Amlash castles based on the written documents and archaeological findings, providing an answer to the all-important question: What have been the principal factors considered in building the Amlash castles?

Security is one of the man's most fundamental and overriding needs and no society can survive without it for a longer time. With the rise of local powers, conflict between the societies arose. It became a requirement that strong turreted protective walls be built around settlements as protection against invading armies (Mollazadeh and Mohammadi, 2007: 13). With the passage of time, the walls required to be further reinforced and fortified, and with the further development of military means, the walls and fortifications, too, required to be made stronger and more worthy of being called castles (Peymani, 2001: 69). They served as military barracks, checkpoint, ammunition depot, and treasury. They were all called *Ghal'eh* or *Dej*, meaning castle in Persian (Sotoudeh, 1967: 14).

Military structures are a reflection of the political tensions that reigned at the time they were built; their remnants today are an indication of the political status of the region (Zaal, 2014). Castles,

watchtowers, and barracks are among the most valuable military relics of the past eras (Pazooki Torudi, 1998). The geopolitical and geostrategic position of Iran has always been very important. Today, the effect of geography and natural elements on the historical variables of powers, seizing and holding of territories, and, on a broader scale, the connection between powers and the governance or sovereignty is a major source of contention and controversy amongst scholars of disciplines such as archaeology, geography, and sociology (Bai, 2010). Undoubtedly, the historical aspect of this field of study dates back to the time when ambitious powers aspiring to expand their territories and rule the world appeared (Mojtahedzadeh, 2003). Militarism and hegemonic rule are the final -and natural- outcome of expansionist ambitions of world powers (Dikshit, 1995: 181). Governments built castles to protect strategic cities and border towns from invasions or infiltration by desert-dwelling tribes and provide internal security (Willey, 2005: 138). The rulers and kings, too, built fortresses to protect the borders of their territories from invading armies. They were built in the form of strong and thick insurmountable walls (Sotoudeh, 1984: 12). The crucial role such castles played in socio-economic changes that occurred in close connection with political changes is undeniable (Khalatbary and Delirish, 2004: 7). Wherever the Elamites, the Medes, the Achaemenids, the Parthians, and the Sasanians ruled, they all established territorial state with independent administrative and political organizations, with the purpose of ensuring political integrity and turning Iran into the



Fig. 2. Scattering of Stone and Mortar on the Motala Kuh Castle

main hub of political and military rule over the world (Hafeznia, 2014).

In addition to historical geography, countless proposals have been made regarding the role of natural geography and its effect on politics and sovereignty, or geopolitics. The Iranian castles were built with a variety of plans based on the natural location and the available building materials (Sotoudeh, 1967: 14). Considering some of the most noteworthy proposals shows the natural location of the places to have had great impact on the politics of the region. Friedrich Ratzel in his book *Politische Geographie* applied the word *Lebensraum* (living space) as fundamental to man's existence in this world, pointing to the role of the state in establishing and expanding the territory (Muir, 1997). Although the need to maintaining territory led to the advancement of protective structures, the size and type of the structures were also subject to complex social stratification, itself influenced by the locations and broader geopolitical concerns (Meyyer, 1997: 322)

In the study of the environmental

data, consideration of natural changes is essential. O'Conner believes that a part of the universal archaeological laws is based on universal scientific laws (Dark, 2015: 61). In studying military structures, man and the environment are in constant interaction with each other. In some cases, man's actions and methods have translated into the formation of façades (Rezaloo, 2010: 9). A study of literature on military structures reveals close connections between geography and politics, that is, political geography or geopolitics. The main concepts, in this ideology, are sovereignty and *Lebensraum* (living space), the struggle to sustain the former and to seize the latter leading to the rise of ideas of defense and war, respectively. It has had great impact on the formation and dispersion of military and defensive structures in various regions. The factors that influenced the formations and typology of structures include infrastructural elements such as water supply, transport, food supply, and location. In all cases, there has been full consideration of the



Fig. 3. Tomajan Castle

military purpose of the fortification in the plan of structures. It is, therefore, the overall pattern of the distribution of power that can be derived from the type and positioning of castles. It can account for all the factors that have influenced the building of these structures, based on archaeological findings (Zaal, 2014). It can be regarded as the reflection of the distribution of political power in the geopolitical landscape of the region (Ashmore and Blackmore, 2008: 1577). It can be studied more extensively in the light of historical geopolitical accounts (Zaal, 2014). The building of military structures is inseparably tied to the political, economic, and geographical considerations (Khalatbary and Delirish, 2004: 9). The connection between war remains and historical geography, which was first proposed by Fernand Braudel (1902-1985), pointed to the importance of political system throughout history (Ferasaty, 2000).

In Iran, the formation of cities was based on strategic considerations. The

cities were built in places where, in view of surrounding features, could easily be defended. In this respect, land features such as mountains, rivers, and others deemed favorable in catering for the defense of cities. The military structures were built so as to act as deterrent to attacks by invading armies and to enhance resistance. With respect to architecture, Iranian castles are of a variety of types. There are Mott and Bailey castles with towers and ramparts, which were built on high ground, and castles built on flat land, featuring a deep ditch or moat all around it, which was filled with water at times of necessity. Then, there are double castles, one built inside the other (Zoka, 1997: 212). The Iranian castles, therefore, with respect to their location and the availability of building materials, can be divided into two types, namely field castles and mountain castles (Peymani, 2001: 60).

Historical Geography

Amlash is a county located in the east-

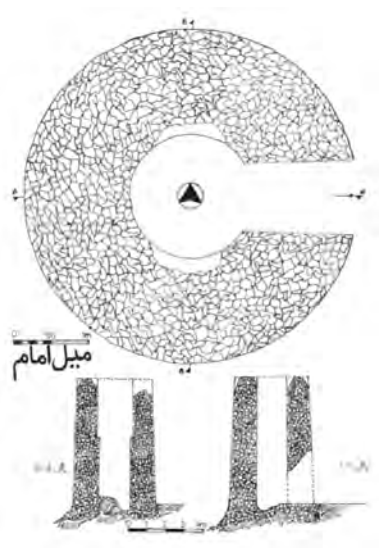


Fig. 4. Mil Omam; Fig. 5. Plan of Mil Omam (Cultural Heritage of Guilan Province)

ern Guilan province of Iran, between the Alborz Mountains and the Caspian Sea. To the north and east lies Rudsar, to the south Siahkal, and to the northwest and west Langarud (Amlash City Development Document, 2005: 13). It has field, foothill, and mountainous regions. In the north towards the south, the elevation of land increases gradually, with the highest elevations lying in the south, in Eshkevar heights (Tajasosi, 2011: 34) (Bastani, 2005: 21)

The history of Amlash and its surrounding are intertwined with the history of eastern Guilan. During the Achaemenid rule, a war occurred between Artaxerxes III and Cadusii, in which Artaxerxes repelled the Cadusii tribe, which rendered submissive for the remainder of their empire (Sykes, 2003: 305). These people occupied a mountainous district on the southwest of the Caspian Sea, corresponding to today's Iranian provinces of Guilan and Ardabil. Arsaces V (Phraates I) conquered Tapuria,

also called Tabaristan, and subdued the Amardians and resettled them near the Caspian Gate (Pirnia and Iqbal Ashtiani, 2001: 145; Schippmann, 1980: 31). Shapur I, who succeeded his father, Ardashir I, early in his reign, was forced to wage war and subdued the occupant tribes of the Caspian region (350-357 AD) (Amir Entekhabi, 2008: 26). In the introduction of the *Letter of Tansar* (*Nāma-ye Tansar*) it has been mentioned regarding the rulers of this region that Gushnasp governed Parishwar/Tabaristan; also, that Khosrow I Anoushiravan ruled over those regions (Sartippour, 1991: 43). Gil Gavbara, called Jil-i Jilanshah in Arabic, who was the King and founder of Dabuyid dynasty in 642, was contemporary to three of the Rashidun and two of the Umayyad Caliphs, namely Mu'awiya and Yazid, died in 660 AH in Guilan (Mir Abolqasemi, 2005: 40; Olia Allah Amoli, 1969: 35).

Sheikh Al Obeidli, 4th and 5th century AH scholar, in his treatise *Tahzib-ul Ansab wa Nahayat-ul A'ghab* mentions



Fig. 6. Garmavar Tower and Pond (Ab Anbar); Fig. 7. Garmavar Plan (Cultural Heritage of Guilan Province)

Alawids, who were of Abd Al-Rahman Shajari's lineage, that had migrated to Husam (today's Rudsar) (Mirfendersky Ayati, 2014: 22-23). The main activity of Isma'ili Shiites there dates back to the time of Hasan-i Sabbah, who was the leader of the sect in the region. Hasan-i Sabbah in his early campaign considered finding other suitable sites for building castles in addition to the Alamut Castle as the headquarters of his activities (Mirfendersky Ayati, 2014: 34). Hasan-i Sabbah in Rajab of 483 AH, he wended his way to Deylamān, via Bireh and Anbeh, and from there to Marbu, Chakrood, Seepol, Roodbarak, Sangsar Rood, and Parandan, and returned to Alamut via Alaskooyeh and Andaj Rood (Mir Abolghasemi, 2005: 87). In 590 AH, Isma'ili Shiites brought the entire Rankuh under their rule, which led Zaidi Shiites to become more marginalized than ever before in the eastern Guilan region (Keshvardost, 2007: 159). The Kar-Kiya dynasty, which was a Zaidi Shiite dynasty, ruled over Biah Pish (eastern Guilan), including the Amlash region, before being over-

thrown by Abbas the Great, the Safavid king. It brought the entire Biah Pish region under the rule of the Safavid (Keshvardost, 2007: 42-43).

Introducing Castles

The Amlash region is one of the most strategic ones in greater Guilan. It has had a tumultuous political history, resulting in a multitude of castles to be built in. In this study, the factors influencing the construction of 7 castles have been examined, as briefly described below.

Motala Kuh Castle

This castle is located in Kujid village heights. On top of the hill, past the jungle, there is a roughly circular plain strewn with large and small stone and clay shreds and pieces (Fig. 2). The plain is slightly raised around its edge or circumference. The steep sides of the hill have created a valley-like formation, making access to the castle difficult. The castle overlooks the road and villages around it.

Tomajan Castle

The Tomajan Castle is located at a distance of 500 meters east of Tomajan village in Rankuh District of Amlash. The castle's layout is in the northern-southern direction. It is 500 meters in length and 90 meters in width. The remnants of the castle have foundation made of stone and mud. According to historical accounts, in 820 AD, Sayyed Razi Kia ordered building of a castle in the Samam region (Marashi, 1986: 144). Archaeological studies have shown the Shahneshin (Alcove) of the Tomajan Castle on the top of five hillocks (Fig. 3). It overlooks the Omam and Guraj castles, catering for a full view of the villages and the surrounding landscape.

Mil Omam Castle

Based on field studies, this castle was made of stone pieces and Sarooj, a traditional water-resistant mortar used in Iranian architecture (Fig. 4). At the entrance of the castle, there are some holes, which were probably made to hold the wooden girders of the roof. At a height of 350 centimeters in the north-south direction, the wall of the castle is a bit narrower creating a kind of bench-like projection, possibly for watchmen to stand on. Inside the Mil at a height of 190 centimeters, there are wooden girders that run parallel to the base. The outside walls of the castle are coated with plaster. In view of the position of this tower, overlooking the surrounding heights and nearby villages, it may have been used as a watchtower or landmark for travelers to find their way around. It may well have been for this reason that the structure came to be called a "Mil" (Fig. 5).

Garmavar Castle

The Garmavar castle and tower is located at a distance of 100 meters to the west of Garmavar village in Pir Kuh, Siahkal county in Guilan (Jahani, 2007: 111). The adobe tower of the castle, called Khan Tower, was built by Salim Khan, who had rebelled during the reign of Fath-Ali Shah Qajar (Figs. 6 & 7) (Mir Abolqasemi, 1990: 86). Of all the main structures of the castle, only the watchtower is still standing, with a perfect view of the surrounding roads and villages. Negahban has referred to this tower in his notes (Negahban, 2007: 159). In the field studies, some remnants of the foundation of a structure can be seen. The Garmavar Castle has four *Ab Anbars* (water reservoirs) for the use of its occupants.

Kharkal Tower

On the right side of the Amlash-Qazvin Mountain Road, between Lengeh and Khasib Dasht, on top of a single mountain, there stand the remnants of an ancient castle. All around the castle is covered with forest. Some parts of the short walls made of stone and lime are still standing (Sotoudeh, 1996: 341-34). The remnants of the castle are in the form of a knoll. On the west of it, there is a room measuring 3×3 meters in dimension. There is also a square stone pool in 3×3 meters, with a current depth, not considering the depth that has been taken up with residue, of 120 centimeters (Fig. 8).

Guraj Tower

This tower is included in the National Heritage list of Iran. It is located at a height of 1600m above sea level (Jahani,



Fig. 8. Pond of the Kharkal Castle

2007: 31). Only one wall, 26 meters long and 2.6 meters thick is still standing today (Fig. 9) (Negahban, 2007: 160). To the east, northeast, and north of this castle, there is a steep slope seriously hindering access to the castle from its sides. Of the significant facts about this castle are its broad unimpeded view of the surroundings and its dominance over Mil Oman and Tomajan castles and the routes that join these three buildings and the surrounding areas.

Shabkhus Lat Castle

This castle is located in the Rankuh district of Amlash county in Guilan Province, Iran. The remnants of this castle are in the form of a hillock in the north-south layout or expansion (Jahani, 2010: 72). It is strewn with rubble stone and red clay pieces. On the eastern side, there are many remnants made of stone pieces. Among the noteworthy features of this castle is its dominance over the sea, the Rudsar plain, and the roads leading to the valley and the foothill on the eastern side (Fig. 10).

In Table 1, the geographical location and the cultural data regarding the castles have been given, and in Table 2, the distance from the sea, the age, and the possible function or purpose of the castles have been mentioned.

Discussion and Analysis

Castles are structures that are made of vertical walls and are built inside defense zones. Most castles are built on elevated areas and on rocks overlooking surrounding landscape and roads, as well as other nearby castles (Kleiss, 1990: 65). They constituted the bulk of Iran's defense system and fortification. In view of the diversity of these structures, they can be classified according to their geographic location or structure. Based on geography, castles are divided into two types, namely field and mountain castles. With respect to structure, castles can be divided into military border castles, road-guard castles, palace castles (ruler's residence), and rebels' castles, where rebels and dissidents had their stronghold (Mollazadeh and Mohammadi, 2007: 16).



Fig. 9. Guraj Castle Wall

For castles, a variety of factors have had to be borne in mind. Literature in this regard has mostly focused on the structural and architectural features of castles and their defensive and strategic properties (Creighton, 2013: 19). All in all, the studying of the structure and location of castles is of paramount importance in studying the political situation and military events of any region. In this regard, studying the castles in their respective locations is crucial, as the location and the surroundings of a castle –or, for that matter, any structure– greatly influences its building. Claudio Vita-Finzi believes that an understanding of the setting and surroundings of a structure is required for any conclusion regarding the main factors influencing a building and the possible purposes of it can be made (Vita-Finzi, 1987).

In this study, seven of the Amlash castles have been identified and studied. Bertold Spuler believes that the mountainous regions in Iran are suitable for constructing any type of fortification, which fully accounts for the numerous castles found here (Spuler, 2014: 387). Studies show that in building Amlash castles, key considerations such as terrain, suitable living conditions, water supply, and the like have been taken into account. Water supply of castles is of paramount importance, both at peace time and during war. It has led to many castles to have been built nearby rivers or natural springs (Khalatbary and Delirish 2004: 12). Another important feature to take into account with regard to castles has been their strategic location so that they could defend one another in case of enemy attack (Willey, 2005: 138). Struggle



Fig. 10. View of the Shabkhus Lat Castle on the Beach of Caspian Sea

for expanding territories to ensure political survival, the strategic position of the region, the unimpeded view, the defensibility of the heights, and dominance over roads and the surrounding plains have had great impact on the establishment of Amlash castles. Generally, the contenders of power and dissidents pursued the bulk of their activities and campaign to seize power from inside the castles (Khalatbary and Delirish, 2004: 45). Some of the castles had the purpose of guarding roads. They served as military bases for patrols assigned to ensuring the safety of highways and roads (Mahjur & Khaledian, 2012: 47).

One of the considerations to account for in forming castles is their surroundings. Based on field observations, terrain and living conditions of the place have been two of the most important considerations of the castles. From a topographical point of view, Amlash castles consist of three sections, namely plain, foothill, and mountains. Favorable cli-

mate made for a diversity of fauna and flora to appear. Ample precipitation and sedimentation of rivers catered for the growth of a variety of plants and pastures. The plant growth is denser in the foothills than in the plain and the mountains, the latter having the most pastures. In an ecological study of the Amlash region, two elements are to be given attention, namely 1. fertile land and copious water, and 2. dense and diverse plant growth. These elements have provided the opportunity to farm and cultivate the land, and therefore live in this region. In addition, there is an inextricable connection between agriculture, economy, and conflict on the one hand and expansionism and resistance against aggression on the other. In fact, geopolitical analysis of a particular state involves and requires all the facts related to it, natural, political, etc., and their interactions to be taken into account (Giblin and Lacoste, 1998: 19). The manner of managing the land, also,

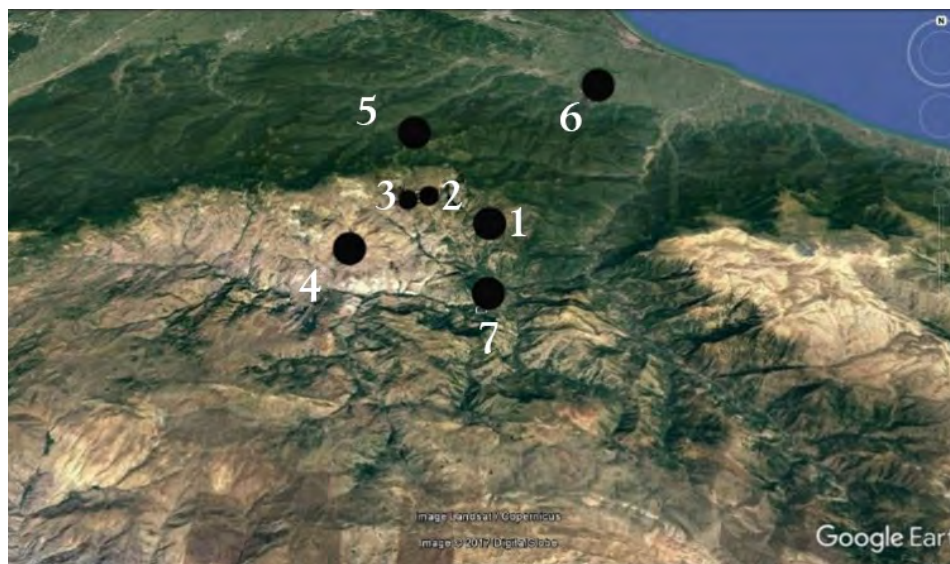


Fig. 11. Castles Landscape in the Geographical Substrate.

1. Motala Koh; 2. Tomajan; 3. Omam; 4. Garmavar; 5. Kharkal; 6. Shabkhus Lat; 7. Guraj.

involves the decision and interaction of policymakers and the society at large, (Wolf, 1966) and the government ownership and protection of land requires military power.

The visual impact of the castles with regard to unimpeded view of the surrounding roads and landscape and the other castles in the vicinity has been aptly called one of the factors influencing the formation of the castles. Topographical studies of the region as well as geographic maps of the region show the mountain castles of Guraj, Garmavar, and Tomajan to have direct view of one another. It is in perfect harmony with political and military events in the region at the time of their construction. It was an absolute necessity in view of the political and security conditions that reigned during the time they had their prime and use. That is to say that, in view of the vast stretch of land that lay all around, it was an absolute requirement of the castles

to have an unimpeded view of the surrounding land. It required the collective surveillance of all the castles. The Shabkhus Lat (Kol Shab Khosb Lat) castle, which is located in the Rankuh District of Amlash County, has dominance over the entire land of the plain section, the coastal strip, and the linking road of the foothill to the plain.

Another factor influencing the formation of the castles has been the geopolitical position. Generally, the most inaccessible and hard to reach sites were chosen for building castles (Sotoudeh, 1967). Often the paths leading to castles were treacherous and contained such features as cliffs so as to make the castles all but impregnable and as hard to reach as possible for any invading army. A glance at the topography of the Amlash region shows all of the castles to have been positioned on the paths to precipitous cliffs, so as to add to their inaccessibility. It catered for greater safety and defensibility

Table 1. Characteristics of Amlash Castles

| No | Cultural Materials | Architectural Materials | Architectural Data | Location | Above Mean Sea Level (AMSL/Meter) | Latitude and Longitude geographic | City/Village | Castles Name |
|----|--------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 | Clay | - | - | Mountain | 1671 | N 36 53.057 E 50 08.067 | Amlash/ Kujid | Motala Koh |
| 2 | Clay | Rock Sarooj | Remains of several rooms | Mountain | 2052 | N 36 54.225 E 50 05.278 | Amlash/ Tomajan | Tomajan |
| 3 | Clay | Rock Sarooj | Tower | Mountain | 2000 | N 36 54.062 E 50 04.579 | Amlash/ Omam | Mil Omam |
| 4 | Clay | Rock Sarooj | Tower | Mountain | 1286 | N 36 51.713 E 50 01.704 | Amlash/ Marbou | Garmavar |
| 5 | Clay | Rock Sarooj Bricks | Remains of several rooms | Mountain | 1821 | N 36 58.231 E 50 04.143 | Amlash | Kharkal |
| 6 | Clay | Rock Sarooj Bricks | Remains of several rooms and tower | Mountain | 1600 | N 36 49 26 E: 50 08 10 | Amlash/ Guraj | Guraj |
| 7 | Clay | - | - | Plain and foothills | 152.5 | N 37 03.153 E 50 14.291 | Amlash/ Rankuh | Kol Shab Khosb Lat |

of the castles and their occupants. It also greatly hindered laying siege to the castles by invading armies. A case in point is the Garmavar castle and tower.

The surveillance of the roads and the nearby villages has been another factor greatly influencing the location of the castles (Yeganehfarzand, 2013: 76). The security of roads and plains has had bearings in location of the Amlash castles. It has had bearings on the functioning and purpose of these structures, too. For instance, there is significant correlation between the location of the Amlash castles and the two linking roads of the region. One of these routes is emerging

from the plain to the mountains, which the two Shabkhus Lat and Kharkal castles have dominance over. Another case is the strategic Qazvin-Deylaman route, which is dominated over by the Guraj and Garmavar castles. By the same token, these castles can be regarded as having served road guarding and surveillance purposes. It is to be noted that the castles overlooking these routes are linked to three greater regions based on their distribution, catering for dominance and surveillance of the entire region. Another castle having the purpose of guarding linking routes is the Motala Kuh, built on the heights of Kujid village.

Table 2. Specification of Age and Functionality of Amlash Castles

| No | Function | Old | Distance from the sea / km | City/Village | Castles Name |
|----|---------------------------------------|--|----------------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| 1 | Guard Provisional and temporary use | Parthian Sasanian - Seljuk | 32 | Amlash/ Kujid | Motala Koh |
| 2 | Shahneshin (Alcove) | Parthian Sasanian - Seljuk | 33 | Amlash/ Tomajan | Tomajan |
| 3 | Watchtower | - | 34 | Amlash/ Omam | Mil Omam |
| 4 | Watchtower – governmental | Parthian to Qajar | 40 | Amlash/ Marbou | Garmavar |
| 5 | | Parthian - 10 th century AH | 27 | Amlash | Kharkal |
| 6 | governmental – residential - Military | Parthian Seljuk | 38 | Amlash/ Guraj | Guraj |
| 7 | linking–Watchtower | Parthian Sasanian - Islamic | 12 | Amlash/ Rankuh | Shabkhus Lat |

To reach the castle, one needs to pass through a dense forest before reaching a large swath of land overlooking the road to Kujid rural district.

Dense plant growth is another factor influencing the location of castles. In view of regional and trans-regional conflicts that occurred from time to time, dense forestation played a crucial strategic role as a deterrence or otherwise protection against invasion. Dense forestation provided for safe havens for occupants of the castles and plants. The Kharkal castle in Amlash, for instance, on the right-hand side of the Amlash-Qazvin Mountain Road, midway between Mian Lengeh and Khasib Dasht, stands on the top of a single mountain, and, together with Motala Koh castle, is situated in a densely forested region.

Mutual visibility of castles, as is the case with Omam and Tomajan castles in

Amlash, has been another factor influencing their formation. Standing on the top of either castle gives full view of the other, so that they have dominance over each other.

Table 2 has been arranged in accordance with the aforementioned findings influencing the Amlash towers. The geographical factors have been arranged separately. The most prevalent factor considered has been the dominance over roads. It catered for the castles to have control over access roads. Also, clear visibility of the castles as well as to be in direct view of one another and the nearest military bases have been major considerations. Inaccessibility due to treacherousness of pathways has been another major consideration. Therefore, based on field research and archaeological records, five significant factors can be regarded for the formation of the Amlash

Table 3. Effective Factors in Locating Castles

| | Motala Koh | Tomajan | Omam | Garmavar | Kharkal | Guraj | Shabkhus Lat |
|-------------------------|------------|---------|------|----------|---------|-------|--------------|
| Pathway | + | + | + | + | + | + | + |
| Namely Accessibility | | + | + | | | + | |
| Scope of View | + | + | + | + | | + | + |
| Valley | + | | + | + | | | |
| Jungle | + | | | | + | | |

castles. Figure 2 shows the pathways. It shows the importance of easy access to roads and surveillance of the roads leading to the nearby villages. Based on the field studies of the castles and the aerial and topographic maps of the region, the Amlash castles were built on areas having excellent and broad views of the surrounding. Thick woodland catering for hiding the castles was found to have been a consideration for only two of the castles, namely Kharkal and Motala Koh. In view of the arduousness of passage in the entire region, the existence of valleys around the castles was found not to have been given top priority in the construction of the castles. According to the findings, Omam, Motala Koh, Garmavar, Tomajan, and Guraj were found to have been of greater strategic and geopolitical significance in that order.

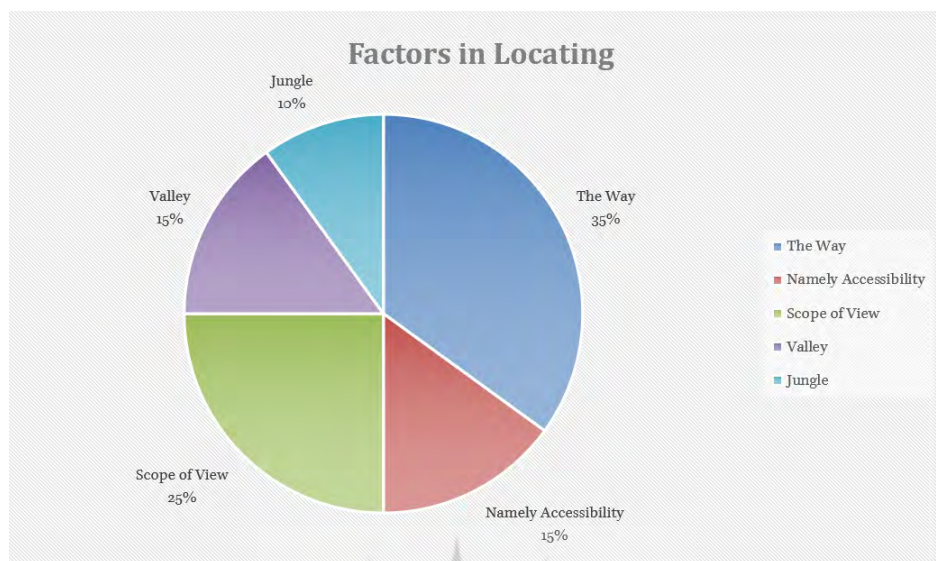
Conclusion

Generally, the location of castles was based on the one hand on topographic considerations such as geographic location and terrain, accessibility of resources and living conditions, and, on other, on geopolitical status of the region,

based on the premise of Lebensraum, or living space, that is, obtaining and keeping territory.

Historically, the Amlash region in eastern Guilan province has been one of the most important strategic ones on Iran's southern coast of the Caspian Sea. A multitude of castles have been built in this region, due to the tumultuous history that it has had and the multiple conflicts that arose from time to time both before and after the Islamic era. Topographical studies have shown that the location of the castles followed a distinct pattern. This region is divided into three sections of plain, foothill, and mountain. The availability of ample water and fertile land made the region to have resources to sustain life despite the inaccessibility of the area and the treacherousness of the terrain. Therefore, the Amlash region with ample resources was the the most suited to sustain life. It has had the most tumultuous history, with many political and military conflicts. The ideological conflicts that arose in the early Islamic era added to and greatly intensified the political and military conflicts. On the other hand, militarism and power struggle, whether

Fig. 12. Most Important Factors in Locating Castles



with the purpose of seizing power or for ideological purposes, are directly connected with geopolitical and strategic status of any region, in that it involves taking and holding territory. In view of Amlash's mountainous topography and its dominance over resources, roads, fields, and connecting routes, it held great appeal for building castles and taking up residence there. Based on the tables above, the most significant factor in the construction of the Amlash castles had been the topography. Accordingly, the castles that were built were of two types. One type was those that were less expensive to build and relied more on the topography such as roads and valleys and providing for greater security of the residents. One such type of castle was Motala Koh. The second type is those that were built on the basis of the political power relations of the time that required constant vigilance and surveillance of roads and passages. They

were built with the purpose of unanticipated attacks by invading armies or the people aiming to overthrow the ruler. This type of castles includes Omam, Guraj, and Tomajan, having perfect views of one another as well as of the connecting routes. They are among the most important castles of the region in terms of topographic and strategic considerations. On the other hand, mutual dominance and visibility as well as unimpeded view of surroundings have had a great impact in the formation of Garमार, Guraj, and Tomajan castles. Finally, in the case of the Shabkhus Lat Lat and Kharkal castles, only two topographical criteria were considered, namely accessibility and scope of view for the former and accessibility and dense forestation for the latter.

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