



Chronology and Functional Analysis of the Site Known as Qale-e Sam in the Historical Province of Masbazan (Ilam Province)

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(307-330)

Abstract

Qaleh Sam is located in Holeylan district in Sirvan/Shirvan County in the northeast of Ilam province. This monument is one of the worthy Iranian architecture in the central Zagros cultural zone. Despite its importance, this monument is unknown until now. Qaleh Sam is located in Si'pelah canyon on the border of Lorestan and Ilam provinces. In Si'pelah, in addition to Qaleh Sam, remains some of the other buildings such as: a bridge, some military installations, a *Char Taq*, a water mill, and two ruined sites. The distribution pattern of these monuments in Si'pelah Canyon shows that they are related to Qaleh Sam, and they could be interpreted together. As the focal point of formation for the architectural complex in Si'pelah canyon the Qale Sam has archaeological and architectural values. The main structure of this monument consists of a residential building with a focal *char taq* in down and a fortress on top. Nevertheless, it has been neglected by researchers and its historical and functional nature remains unclear. The purpose of this paper is the introduction the Qale Sam by relying on archaeological findings and existing architectural evidence and evaluating and analyzing functional identity and its chronology. The research approach is historical and findings have been collected through field methods and the study of library texts. The study of archaeological and architectural findings of Qale Sam along with the study of its geographic location and the analysis of the spatial organization of all works in Si'pelah canyon show that Qaleh Sam has been a security residency of a high-grade person. The analysis of these monument in the regional context indicated that it has been built based on political and security objectives in a mountainous situation, with the creation of several military structures around it. Architectural elements, scattered pottery on surface, and stucco decorations used in the building show that Qale Sam was constructed in the late Sassanid period and the early Islamic centuries.

Keywords: Masbazan, Si'pelah, Qaleh-Sam, military architecture, Province of the Masbazan.

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Intruducion

During the Islamic period, Masbazan has been one of the important districts of the Jebal province. In the historical texts, the geographical area of Masbazan is introduced to the north of the present-day province of Ilam. Historians and geographers of the early Islamic centuries have noted its economic prosperity (Estakhri, 1993:164; Yaghobi, 1964:44; Ibn-e- Khordadbeh, 1991: 33; Ibn-e- Hoghal, 1966: 105). Due to its environmental features and strategic location on the roads of Khuzestan and Mesopotamia to the west and center area of Iran, Masbazan has special importance in the Sassanid period and the early centuries of Islam. During this period, have been built many buildings with different functions in this area. One of the valuable architectural sites of Masbazan is "Qala-e-Sam" inside the Seipele strait. This site is located in the geographical coordinates of N: 47°00'33.8" & E: 33°39'16.2". The site is located 4 km northwest of Chambour Farkhivand village in the Holilan section of Sirvan county town. This site has been less opened and studied by archaeologists and little information is available about it. The purpose of this article is to review the archaeological and architectural evidence to determine its function and date of construction.

Qala-e-Sam consists of two parts: a) the fort, which is located on the highest level of a natural rock, and b) The residential part of the area, which is located at the bottom of the fort and consists of an interconnected set of various spaces centered on a domed Chartaq (Fig 2).

The fort is built on high cliffs with a good view of the surrounding area and overlooking the structures below it (Fig 3). The building includes entrances, stairs, fortifications, guardrooms, storage rooms and, several rooms, all of which are made of stone and gypsum mortar. The entrance of the building is located on the east side and through stairs, it is possible to access the interior of the fort. Inside the fort, there is evidence of several architectural spaces with different dimensions and sizes. The fort is fortified on the west and south sides by a high wall and semicircular towers along with it. Similar to these towers, have been identified in the Sassanid castle called "Divar Gach" in Qale-e Yazdgerd (Keall, 1967:103 & pl.IIIb). The lack of habitable architectural spaces inside the fort, its sloping and uneven surface, and it's overlooking of the surrounding environment and the downstream view of the gorge show the role of this structure as a surveillance and security part for the residential part of the Qala-e-Sam area.

This section consists of a series of interconnected rooms centered on focal Chartaq, built on two levels on natural ridges downstream of the fort (Fig 2&4). The entrance of the building is located on the north side of the complex, of which a wall, a room and, a staircase remain. The main center of this building is a domed space that is located in the center of the complex and, around it is a set of spaces with different dimensions, sizes and functions (Fig 5&8). In front of the domed space/ Domed Chartaq, there is an open area without a roof, which, as a courtyard, has made possible the spatial connection of different parts of the complex. The main entrance of the domed space is located on the east side, the walls on both sides of which are decorated with stucco. The presence of these decorations on both sides of the entrance of the domed space/Chartaq indicates the possible existence of covered space in the form of a porch or a second dome in front of the main domed space/ chartaq. Therefore, here we are faced with the well-known combination of porch and domed hall, which together with the surrounding rooms, forms a spatial unit whose axis surrounds the entire building and is considered the most important aspect and architectural appearance of the Qala-e Sam. All the spaces of this complex are made of stone and gypsum mortar. The rooms and spaces of this section are roofed by using domes, semi-domes and, crescent arches.

All the architectural features of Qala-e Sam are similar to the examples of the Sassanid period. The type of squinches of the dome, the shape of the dome, and its construction method is similar to the Sassanid examples in the buildings of Qaleh Dokhtar and Firoozabad in Fars Province (Huff, 1971: 223; Bier, 2006: 68; Besenval, 2000:202). Crescent arches (Fig6&7), are similar to Sassanid examples in Ctesiphon Palace and Ardeshir Palace in Firoozabad (Reuther, 1938: 643). The spatial composition used in the building- the combination of a porch with domed chartaq is a well-known composition in the ceremonial architecture of the Sassanid period (Huff, 1971: 85). The stucco decorations (Fig 9 and Table 1) in terms of the type and the way of composition, show traces of stucco decorations of the Sassanid period (Vassegh Abbasi, 2018: 126; Kroger, 2017: 344). The Stuccos of Qala-e-Sam have similarities with the Stuccos of the early Islamic centuries, especially the examples of the Abbasid period, in terms of execution method, shallow

depth of patterns, and use of form and elegance of patterns (Scerrato, 1977: 234; Luigi Corsi, 2017: 87-88 & 93-95. Fig 5-9). The pottery obtained is similar to the pottery of the late Sassanid period and the early Islamic centuries (Fig 13 & Table 2).

Therefore, by putting together all these evidence and documents, for the time of construction of the Qala-e-Sam and its related structures, a period of time from late Sassanid to early Islamic periods is suggested.

Qala-e-Sam is built in a mountainous landscape and is suitable for biological enjoyment and natural defense facilities. Around the site is a collection of buildings and architectural structures with security-defense, service and, residential functions. The spatial composition of the muniments and the pattern of their distribution in the Sepelah strait show their functional relationship in a unit complex. The architectural features and pottery findings of these works confirm their relative timeliness. The location of Qala-e Sam in a difficult mountainous area, surrounded by natural obstacles and military structures, and its distance from big cities show the dominance of the security aspect of building it. According to the all features of Qala-e-Sam and its associated structures we can say that this muniment has been a security residence that due to the political and security reasons built by a rebellious prince or a local ruler in a strategic and secure position.

Conclusion

Based on the architectural features of Qala-e-Sam such as dimensions and its size, several spaces, Stucco decorations, the location selected for its construction (ie above difficult heights) and the existence of defensive and security structures around it could be said the security aspects have prevailed to other possible functions. It was probably built by a high-ranking person (rebellious prince or local ruler) who, for political and security reasons, built his residence in a difficult and impassable mountainous area. According to the architectural elements used in the building (such as the semi-dome, the crescent arch, the shape and method of the dome, the circular towers attached to the walls) along with the ceramics and stucco could be said Qala-e-Sam and its related structures have been built in a period of time from the late Sasanian to the early Islamic centuries.