

УДК 94(479.248)''6/19'':728.81/.82

A RESEARCH ABOUT ASTARA'S HISTORICAL CASTLES

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Astara is one of the border ports of north of Iran which is located in the northwestern of Guilan province. This town has been one of the most important historical centers of Taleshan, and one of the thriving towns of Guilan that maybe the presence of important castles in this town is a strong evidence to prove it. The number of Astara's castles are over ten which none have been registered in the national heritage list. The most ancient ones are Shndon and Dba which are related to the Pre-Islamic era. The rest of the castles dates back to the early centuries of Islam that during Safavid era were restored and re-used; and destroyed by tsarist Russians in Qajar era. The castles have been constructed in mountainous highlands and impassible areas to overlook surrounding environments and far lands. The castles structure consists of natural rock, mountain rubble and sometimes colorful river stone with mortar cement and lime. The castles required water was provided by transferring the water of springs and rivers into the castle, using some canals and clay pipes. All the castles are located in residential areas with Taleshi language; that is why these castles names, from ancient time, have been in Taleshi language and most of these castles have been destroyed due to the special climate situation or high humidity in the region or natural disaster, or are being destroyed due to lack of attention. Now, in some areas, the old castles are used as military bases and watchtowers. there is just a little information about Astara castles in archaeological and historical books. This research has been done using field research along library research.

Keywords: Architecture, Astara, Castle, History, Iran, Monuments, Talesh.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.30970/vpl.2023.7375.249257>

Introduction. Living in a castle dates back to a long time ago. The reasons for choosing this life style are: insecurity due to Siberian tribe's invasion from the North, Arab tribes from the South coast, Uzbeks from the East and Rome government and then Ottoman Turks from the West. This lifestyle led the Iranians to build their cities like fortress and build ditches and gates for it. Castles usually have a special architecture and mostly are built on the top of the single mountains and more on individual mountains. These fortifications can be divided into two general categories:

Castles in flat areas and mountainous castles. Infact, castles have been one of the first symbols of power and governance of rural-urban societies. The scope of Talesh civilization is one of the oldest parts of northern Iran that embeds Talesh ancient civilization. In this ethnic area there are many fortresses that most of them have been destroyed and just their remaining is there, but still in some cities, remained parts of the castles can be seen in a better order which Rudkhan castle (QalaRudkhan) in Fuman County is one of them. According to their various applications, castles were used as toll, governmental, military, security castles and etc.

Now, in some areas, the old castles are used as military bases and watchtowers. This study, is a unique one and for the first time presents new information concerning the name, location, structure and history of the castles of Astara county which in the past was the historical center of ethnic region of Talesh- from Kura River in the south of Azarbaijan to the White River (Sefidrud) in northern Iran.

Now, Iran's Astara is 433 km², has 86 thousand inhabitants and nearly 4 thousand nonresident workforce and student, and is located on the border of Iran and Azarbaijan. Most of the castles are being destroyed due to lack of maintenance and still no delegation has done any serious or legal acts for archeological excavations, especially in Astara. Also, there is just a little information about Astara castles in archaeological and historical books. This research has been done using field research along library research.

Shndoni Qala. This castle is one of the oldest, largest and most important ancient castles of the ethnic region of Talesh, which is located in the northern part of a village named Vana Bin, at a distance of 40 Km from the West Astara on top of a mountain of the same name. According to Abdolfattah Fumani “the castle height is over 1850 meters above sea level” [4, p. 142].

Access way to the castle is from the central part of the Astara and through Jeyran village by passing a way from Vana Bin village, attached to the Astara border river. In historical references, this castle has been called by different names like Seydan, Shingan, Shindan and etc. but the natives in their Taleshi language call it ‘Shndoni Qala’. To the castle, there are different meanings, but most researchers consider it as a Taleshi combination (Shn/Shid: light and brightness + don/dan: a place, position) which means ‘place of light’. Shndan always has witnessed the influx and invasion of foreigners to Astara and always stand against the invaders. Perforated walls of the castle by gun and cannon shot prove it.

The castle is as a high wall and wide rock of stone and mortar. Evidence show fireplace, fort and watchtower, supplies warehouse, horse field, iron and clay furnaces and etc. in upper parts of the castle, natural ponds were dug in the rock to gather rain water and lead it to the waterways and canals, after deposition of soil particles. There is an inscription on the north side of Vana valley near the border between Iran and Azarbaijan, nearby Grda Moy on the border, which was written in an ancient and unknown script.

According to local legends, the castle was built by Daevas, then the sky rained snakes and Shndan castle was destroyed by the snakes attack. Later it has been considered by Sassanid Espahbodan, then improved as Taleshan main capital and got a very special importance. According to Dr.Manuchehr Sotudeh: “in Sassanid era, from the reign of Shapur I, in the northern part of Talesh, gradually Espahbodans, independent from Azarbaijan, got the power and apparently a place in Astara, probably current Qapuchi was their capital and the famous castle of Shndan has remained of them” [10, pp. 14–15].

There are lots of Gabri graves on the hill across from the castle. Also there is a grave with a symbol of shield, sword and bow with two bowstring attributed to ‘Key Quad’ among the graves which is of utmost respect among local people. Elderly people

say that many years ago in the mountains surrounding the castle, coins of gold and silver have been found; they heard from their elders that Nersi, one of the Sassanid kings, has been set Heyran as his summer countryside. Historical evidence suggests that in 450 AH Ravvadian dominated on North Talesh and have been Espahbodan's replacements in Astara for a while.

The wise Qatran Tabrizi (1010–1080 AD), while praising Abunahr Mamlaneben Wahsudan, has mentioned the Shndan castle as a battlefield of Ravvadian and Moghanian, and has spoken of surrender of Espahbod Shndan [11, p. 328]. Afzaladin Khaghani Shervani (1120–1199 AD), also mentioned Shndan fort and Astara Archivan in his poems and stressed that after the death of Espahbod Jamalodin, above mentioned castles, no longer had had their known strength [11, p. 770].

Also, in the sixteenth century, Shndan castle was at the peak of its glory, as Eskandar Beyg Monshi wrote in this respect: "... people in lofty towers, patiently engaged to guard, night and day. Domain of that high mountain is covered by a forest that doesn't have more than one way. Its conditions are so that the passing of just a person by walking through the path will be difficult. Rulers inside the castle have a proper place to live. Taleshi people have come at the service of rulers to show and express their obedience ..." [12, p. 48–49].

It is mentioned in Saeediyeh Reminder (Tazkareh) that "Famous Shndan castle is located on a high mountain and it is unclear how old it is. It is located on a mountain taller than the other mountains around Astara, on the west side of the village of Archivan, and is not connected to any of the mountains, and in the castle, there are some effects of destroyed buildings and one of them is a stone arch made by the rock of the same mountain as well as a reservoir with the width and length of about six and seven cubits that its depth is invisible and in four seasons is full of very cold and savory water. It is impossible to climb to top of the mountain except one side, where the effects of a fence made by bricks in a strongest style. One of the strange signs in there, is a mass of broken Chinese dishes named Faghfuri at the foot of the mountain which is like a large hill, and undoubtedly, is more than a thousand Kharvar (300000k), and the other is artillery shells around the mountain as if thrown in war" [12, p. 181–182]. It's worth to mention that after the shameful Turkamanchay treaty, barbed wire was stretched on its border and traffic to the castle was abandoned.

Dbā Qala. This castle is located at the end of a village named Latun, one of the counties of Lavandavil in Astara, on top of a mountain, overlooking the village of Chelvand. The castle height is estimated of about 1900 meters above sea level. It's at a distance of 8 kilometers from Kutah Kumah village and 2 km to Latun, and is visible as a high mountain and a natural rock. The castle name is formed of a combination of Taleshi words (Dbā: Daeva + Qala: fortress, castle), meaning 'fortress Daeva'.

There are some native legends about the simultaneous construction of the Shndan castles and the castle by the Daevas. Also, both the castles have been built across from each other and have the same design and architecture. "Aryans have called the people before them as Daeva" [9, p. 157], that the theme and the name of the castle, could be another reason for the ancient history of the castle.

The appearance of the castle, from a far distant, is like a royal crown. It is said cuneiform inscriptions were found near the castle that have been looted by non-scientific excavations. Other names of this castle are Boza Qala, Kina Qala. Around the castle, traces of ancient civilizations in the form of place of residence, Stone work, grave stone and etc. are visible, including a rock as an ancient soldier (Maybe Kadusi) with a high similarity to the structure of cover clothes of the soldiers of the Achaemenid era, which is wrongly known by local people in the Taleshi language as 'vayo sq' means 'Bride Stone'. In the lower part of the statue, there is also a deep and unexplored cave.

Kinon Qala. This castle is located in a small village named Chemon (current Chamltre) of Heyran County in the Central District of Astara, on top of a high mountain. The castle height is about 1200 meters above sea level. Access to it is possible by passing a rugged path from Galideh village to the castle. The castle name is formed as a compound Taleshi word (Kina: Girl + Arabic plural marker 'On'), which means 'Gilsr castle'. The castle was a natural fortress and was built on a high place, overlooking the surrounding that it seems in its construction, stone and cement mortar have been used. Apart from a few rows stone wall and rubbles scattered around, no traces has remained from the castle.

There is a quote among elderly natives that this castle was a residence of warrior women in ancient time who killed lots of men and boys. Some evidence on the correctness of existence of such women in the region in historical references is available, such as one which says: "Amazon Women have settled in a plain known as Tomis Sir, beside Termodon and their queen (Tales Tris) has reigned over Caucasus regions to Faaz river" [9: 1628]. As well as the "Scythian women used to kill or expel men, and kill boys, and burn girls' right breast to become sharpshooters, so the Greeks called them the Amazon women, means without breast" [9, p. 601].

Which in historical references have also been referred to as the people of Al or Alan. Diakonov believes "Savromatha were an ethnic that was ruled by women and their priests and warriors were women, too. Herodotus considered these female warriors, say Savromatha, as the survivors of the Amazons" [2, p. 410]. And "Alan's first foray into the Caucasus regions and Aras, took place for the first time in about 75 AD at the age of first Balash (Ashk 22) and the second time in 130 AD during the second Balash power [1, p. 319]. There are some speculations regarding the coincidence of these historical events with the castle which are mostly unofficial and unwritten quotes, but still there are some people who are afraid of Alan and Ala Zhen, means 'Al woman'.

The castle name and the existence of a tribe called Sakaj, which in the Taleshi language means 'Scythian', in Lavandevil of Astara and Saka Malla, means 'Scythian neighborhood' in Azerbaijan's Astara, should be relevant to Scythian women (Alan). In Taleshi language, the letter (j) is a place suffix, For example: Astaraj means: a person from Astara. Also an ancient cemetery and stone building, similar to the prison near the place attributed to the pre-Islamic era has remained that natives call it 'Dbā Kaon' means 'house of the Daeva' and the 'Kora zindon' means 'Cyrus prison', which finding its exact dating needs archaeological research and scientific evaluation.

Shā Qola. The castle is located in the center of the county of Astara on the top of Shaqola Mountain and its height is estimated around 1,500 meters above sea level. Access to the castle is possible by passing about 12 km on the main road in Astara to Ardabil and bypass the village of Meshend and rural highlands of the same name of the castle. The castle name is a compound of Taleshi words (Sha: King + Qola: Peak or castle) means 'king of the Peak' or 'king of the castle'.

The castle is overlooking the surroundings and access to it is very difficult. Its walls are made of natural and semi-natural stone. Among the mountains residents it is rumored that 'Sha Qola' castle had a gate to the forest and the sunset and in the far past, there was a king who had ruled over the ethnic regions of Talesh. No credible and reliable scientific reference is available about the date of construction and the history of the castle, but some signs of residence in the castle are well visible. According to current residents, a few years ago, the castle and its surroundings were illegally excavated by unidentified people and precious stone and bronze objects have been discovered and looted. Rocky steps of the castle are still recognizable and around it by a few distance, the Gabri graves can be seen.

Bozuna. The castle is located on the top of a mountain at the end of a village named Tela Khan, in the Central District of Astara County, and the castle height is approximately over 750 meters above sea level. Access to it is possible through Virmuni village, after passing through Hodul village and Tela Khan to the highlands. The appellation of the castle, in the Taleshi language of Astara is (Boz: goshawk, bird of prey + van: plural letter) means 'a fortress which is goshawk's nest'.

In construction of the castle, stone and natural rock of the mountains have been used. "The castle consists of three hills that are respectively: Central hill that the castle building is located on it, and is in the eastern part and ahead of the others, and its width and height is more. It is thought that the middle hill was headquarters and the other hill on the western edge was for soldiers. These three hills as if they just have remained of the castle, from the East to the West, are located along each other, and due to overlooking the environment, have specific positions.

There is a deep hole in the central part of the castle and some signs of living is observable" [10: 14]. In another reference, about the history of the castle, we have: "... it has been considered in the early centuries of the Islamic and in Abbasid and Taherian era [3: 290]. Assuming the accuracy of quotations, the castle is at least 1,200 years old.

Dzda Qala. The castle is located on a mountain above Hodul village in the Central District of Astara County. The castle height is about 280 meters above sea level. Access to it is possible through Virmuni village, after passing through Hodul village towards Tela Khan, in a quarter named Karam Malla and Hakash, it's on the right side of the road and just a little has remained of it, but its main and old road, as well as the ruins of rock and river stones are observable.

In a close distance, down the castle grounds, the old and carvan's road from Astara to Ardabil has been there, so on the same basis Dzda Qala was arguably a castle to guard this critical and commercial road. But in the history books "any notice or reliable reference about its construction and prosperity date has not received, and it seems that the castle has been residence of robbers and bandits of the Khorrami

religion” [8, p. 118], so it is known in the Taleshi language as ‘Dzda Qala’, means ‘Robber castle’.

Taka Do. The castle is located on a mountain named Moridon, of the foothills of Abas Abad village of Astara. Its height is about 250 meters above sea level. Access to it, which is located in the Central District of Astara and Virmuny village, is possible from Abas Abad, Eastern Qolam Mahalle and the village of Darband. The castle name is a combination of two Taleshi words (Tak: one, single + Do: tree) means ‘Single tree’, and it’s because of existence of a tree at the entrance of the castle, that is visible from a distance, too. Handmade castle stairs are visible from western part of Latif Mahale Mountain of Abas Abad Village.

The castle had a long cave in the mountains, which was derived in some ways, but now the cave is blocked. The cave, during the tsarist Soviet war against Iran, had been a hiding place for Mir Hasan Khan Talesh as well as a secret path for his forces to carry weapons and ammunition. In the cave aperture, there is a deep well. The main body of the fortress was natural and rock and mortar have been used in its construction. As the castle is located in an iron mine, has severely damaged during recent years. Local narratives have dated it back to the Saljuq Sultan Sanjar.

Jrna Bānd. This castle is located on the top of a mountain named Jrna Band. The castle height is 400 meters above sea level. It is located in the central District of Astara and Virmuni village, and its access is possible after passing through Qala village, in a place named Jrna Band of BibiYanlu village. The castle name is a Taleshi combination (Jrna: torn + Band: Elevation) and means ‘fortress that is located on top of a torn mountain’. The body of castle has been the mountainous stone and mortar, and has been turned into ruins and carved stones have been stockpiled in the area.

Fieldwork in the region proves that this fort was to imprisonment and custody of prisoners and it had been used as camp place for Tamerlane army. Also there is a By-way near this location which in the Taleshi language is known as (Shilha Teymuri Ro) means ‘Tamerlane’s way’. In a short distance from the castle, there is a historical cemeterys. Some parts of the cellars with hewn stone and pottery in the region are visible. According to manuscript document obtained – as written in 1005 AH equals to the 16th century, in the Safavid era – the castle dates back to before the Safavids and even before Islam, later was out-dated and destroyed.

Lmr. The castle is located in the south part of Lamar Mahalle village of Central District of Astara and Virmuni village. The castle height is about 350 meters above sea level. After passing through Lamar Village Mahalle village to the north and to the mountains, with passing a distance of 2km through forest trees can reach to the castle. The castle name is a Taleshi word (Lma: a high place or ‘Lmr: Taleshi tongue’ [7, p. 253]) which means a ‘high castle’ or ‘Taleshan castle’. Apparently, Castle building was made of the stone from rivers near the hills around the castle and rock and mud. “Around the main area, there are 3 circular ditch that about 2 meters has remains from each and its depth gradually was filled, and somehow has been destroyed by growing wild plants and trees” [10, p. 20].

The old castle pathway is clearly marked. In the hills nearby the castle, broken pottery and ceramics in different colors and thin or thick pieces, and sometimes glazed

pottery can be seen. The castle dates back to pre-Islamic era, and in the Safavid and Afsharieh eras was renovated and used as a watchtower. Several bronze swords and bayonets belonging to the first millennium BC have been found in residential and agricultural lands around the castle. This natural fortress was a refuge for people in times of war and “has been destroyed in the war between Russia and Iran” [8, p. 77].

Keta So. The castle is located at the end of Qala village of Virmuni village of Central District of Astara, in Astara to Ardabil road, after Qala Border Patrol Station (Pasgah). The castle height is 65 meters above sea level. Access to the castle is possible after passing through Qala village to the West, by passing a distance of about 300 meters through thorny bushes and trees planted by Natural Resources Organization. The castle name is of two Taleshi words (Ket: Stone + So: Place, position) means ‘a place of stones’ or ‘stony place’. The castle was made of rock and stone, and it’s been a few years that has been called by the Turkish-Taleshi name of Dash Borun (Dash: Stone + Borun: transportation place, throw position, out) means ‘a place of carrying rocks’.

Today, little has left of the castle and has become the stony hill. At the center of this castle, square-shaped remains of water reservoirs in sizes 4 x4 meters of natural rock carved stones that were sealed by mortar seal is visible. “When planting pine seedlings on the west side of the hill, the remains of clay pipes obtained and it seems needed water to the castle was led with clay pipes, from about 200 meters from the west side, to the castle” [5, p. 2].

In the hill and areas around it, some pieces of bricks, a lot of hewn stone and pottery can be seen. The castle has been refurbished in Fath Ali Shah Qajar era and by Amir Khan Qajar. Also there was an artillery here which had been used, and local khans (rulers) have taken the advantages of the castle as a center of their reign. “Finally, the castle was destroyed in the late Qajar by Hedayat Khan Rashti and only a pile of rock has remained” [8, p. 109].

Conclusion. Unfortunately, given the geographical location of Astara and the region’s high humidity, scattered monuments, specially ancient castles, are not in a good situation, and except these castles, there is no other significant ancient structure which can completely show a certain ancient style and classicism in the region and also due to lack of archaeological surveys and scientific excavations, there is no documentation indicating scientific research in this region. What is available, is some raw theories and sometimes non-expertised observations. Hope the day comes that ancient expert’s researches with scientific attitudes in the region lead to identify the missing puzzles of Talesh ancient civilization, because this process in turn removes unscientific excavations and abusive smuggling mafia and plunder of the region antiques which undoubtedly are the national capital of ancient civilizations. In addition, it is possible using scientific studies, take important steps towards emerging ecotourism industry, creation of jobs for local youth, and the revival of ancient culture and identity of the region, and awareness and welfare of local people.

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ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ ІСТОРИЧНИХ ЗАМКІВ АСТАРИ

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Присвячено замкам Астари – міста-порту на північному заході Ірану в провінції Гілян, одного з найважливіших історичних центрів іранського народу талиші. Кількість замків Астари перевищує десять, проте жоден із них не був занесений до списку національної спадщини.

Докладно висвітлено історію замків, їхню структуру та фактори руйнування. Найдавніші – Шндон і Дба належать до доісламської епохи. Решта замків датовано першими століттями ісламу, за часів Сефевідів вони були відновлені та використані повторно; а згодом в епоху Каджарів зруйновані російськими царськими військами. Замки збудовано в гірських високогір'ях і непрохідних районах. Структура замків складається з натуральної скелі, гірського щебеню та іноді різнобарвного річкового каменю з розчином цементу та вапна. Необхідне водопостачання забезпечувалося шляхом перекачування води джерел та річок у замок за допомогою деяких каналів та глиняних труб. Більшість із цих замків було зруйновано через географічне розташування Астари (особливі кліматичні умови – висока вологість регіону, часті стихійні лиха). Оскільки всі замки розташовані в житлових районах з талиською мовою, відповідно, назви цих замків з давніх часів були талиською мовою. У статті докладно висвітлено етимологію назв замків.

Також констатовано незадовільний стан старовинних замків, які є єдиними значними старовинними спорудами, що повністю демонструють певний античний стиль та класицизм у регіоні на сучасному етапі, а також повну відсутність археологічних досліджень та наукових розкопок у цьому регіоні. Поміж тим дослідження цього регіону експертами із науковим підходом можуть привести до виявлення зниклих головоломок давньої цивілізації талишів, оскільки цей процес, своєю чергою, усуне ненаукові розкопки та розкрадання антикваріату регіону, який, безперечно, є національною столицею стародавньої цивілізації. Крім того, наукові дослідження можуть бути використані як важливий крок на шляху розвитку індустрії екотуризму, створення робочих місць для місцевої молоді, відродження давньої культури та самобутності регіону.

Ключові слова: архітектура, Астара, замок, історія, Іран, пам'ятки, талиші.