



# Investigating the Process of the Formation of the Defensive Walls in the City of Mashhad

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**Abstract:** The city of Mashhad gradually took shape and expanded after the martyrdom of Imam Reza, around his mausoleum. Throughout history, defensive walls with towers were built in three different periods to ensure the security of citizens and pilgrims around this city. Historical reports and dedicatory Qurans testify to the existence of the existence of defensive walls around the city of Mashhad from the fourth century, which is considered the first defensive wall constructed for the city of Mashhad. the second defensive wall for this city was constructed by Faramarz ibn Ali in 515 AH. The last defensive wall for the city was built by Shah Tahmaseb Safavi to ensure that the city remained safe from Uzbek attacks forever. This defensive wall remained around the city of Mashhad until the first Pahlavi dynasty. During the first Pahlavi dynasty, the improvement of urban security in Mashhad reduced the effectiveness of the city's towers and defensive walls, leading to the expansion of the city beyond the defensive walls. The lack of maintenance for the defensive wall, along with leveling and destroying it to create new roads and expand the city, destroyed the defensive wall of Mashhad.

**Keywords:** *Defensive Walls, Mashhad, Faramarz ibn Ali, Shah Tahmaseb.*

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## Introduction

Reviewing and studying books and documents to determine the time of construction and the founders of the defensive walls in the city of Mashhad is crucial for obtaining a scholarly text for an accurate understanding of the history of Mashhad. This research also contributes significantly to investigating the process of how the city formed around the shrine of Imam Reza (peace be upon him). The initial evidence of the defensive wall from the fourth century in the city, which will be discussed in detail later, indicates the significance of ensuring security for the city of Mashhad. The attention of the Seljuk and Safavid governments to the prosperity of this city is also evident in the reconstruction of new defensive walls for the city. In the process of determining the time of construction of the defensive walls of the city of Mashhad, in addition to historical books and documents, the deeds of endowment (waqfname) based on the Quran provide valuable information. Mashhad al-Reza has witnessed the construction of defensive walls around the city three times over its 1200-year history. This is indicative of the city's significance and the necessity of ensuring its security throughout history.

The first defensive wall:

The oldest reference to Mashhad's defensive wall is a report by Ibn Hawqal in the 358 AH. During his journey to Mashhad, after seeing the city and its defensive wall, he mentioned it in his book "Surat al-Arz" (written in 367 AH):

"The tomb of Ali ibn Musa al-Reza (peace be upon him) is located outside the city of Noghhan. In its vicinity, there is the tomb of Rashid in a beautiful cemetery in a village called Sanabad. It is surrounded by a strong fortress, and some ascetics anchorite there (Ibn Hawqal, 1988: 146).

In the year 375 AH, Moqadasi also mentioned this matter: "The tomb of Ali al-Ridha is in Tus, and a fortress has been built for it, which includes houses and a market. Amid al-Dawla Fa'eq also built a mosque over it, which is unparalleled in all of Khorasan." (Moqadasi Vol 2, 1983: 488).

In addition to the references by Ibn Hawqal and Maqadasi to the prosperity of the city, evidence of the existence of the defensive wall has also been obtained from the deed of endowment of the Qurans of the shrine. A set of thirty Qurans, originally endowed by Abu Ja'far Musawi (currently only five sections of it remain in the shrine), was dedicated to the shrine of Imam Reza (peace be upon him) in Shawwal of the year 402 AH.

The text of the deed of endowment is as follows:

« وقفه و سبله السيد أبو جعفر محمد بن موسى الموسوي تقبل الله منه على مسجد مشهد الامام أبي الحسن على بن موسى الرضا عليه السلام لا يباع ولا يوهب ولا يخرج من سور المشهد و ذلك في شوال سنة اثنتين و أربع مائة »  
(Kariminia, 2020: 77)

Abu Ja'far has endowed the Quran to the mosque of Mashhad (Mosque of Balasar) and has prohibited its removal from the boundaries of the defensive wall. This is the oldest deed of endowment that refers to the Mosque of Balasar and the defensive wall of Mashhad.

The historical sources do not mention the construction time and the builder of the defensive wall. Abu Dolaf states in the year 341 AH: "The residence of Hamid ibn Qahtabe is located in Tus and covers an area of about one square mile. In one of its gardens, the mausoleum of Ali ibn Musa al-Reza and the tomb of Harun al-Rashid are situated." (Abu Dolaf, 1974: 84). It is believed that this defensive wall, mentioned in the middle of the fourth century, is the same area as the garden or residence of Hamid ibn Qahtabe in the vicinity of Nowqan. Due to its military func-



Figure 1: An example of the deed of endowment for the Quran by Abu Ja'far Musavi (Kariminia, 2020: 99)

tion, there was a defensive wall around it.

The second defensive wall: With the increase in the city's population and the deterioration of the original defensive wall over time, along with the reduction in its defensive function, which was well evident in the records up to the year 510 AH, the need arose for the construction of a new defensive Wall around the city of Mashhad. Ibn Athir, in recounting the events in the year 510 AH in Mashhad, mentions:

«ذكر الفتنه بطوس فى هذه السنه فى عاشوراء كانت فتنه عظيمه بطوس فى مشهد على بن موسى الرضا عليه السلام. و سببها أن علويا خاصم فى المشهد يوم عاشوراء بعض فقهاء طوس فادى ذلك الى مضاربه و انقطعت الفتنه ثم استعان منهما بحزبه، فثارت فتنه عظيمه حضرها جميع اهل طوس و احاطوا بالمشهد و خربوه و قتلوا من وجدوا فقتل بينهم جماعه و نهبت اموال جمه و افرقوا. و ترك اهل المشهد الخطبه ايام الجمعيات فيه فبنى عليه عضدالدين فرامرز بن على سورا منيعا يحتمى به من المشهد على من يريد بسوء و كان بناوه سنه خمس عشره و خمسمائه» (Ibn Athir Vol 10, 2005: 522).

After this incident, the need to create a new and fortified wall around the city became more pressing than ever. Therefore, the city walls were constructed in the year 515 AH by Azad al-Dawla Faramarz ibn Ali (Ibn Athir Vol 10, 2005: 522; Hafez Abrou, 2020: 162). The founder of the second wall of the city of Mashhad, Azad al-Dawla Faramarz ibn Ali, was a ruler from the Yazd branch of the Al-i Kakuyeh dynasty who ruled in the years 513-536 AH. In 536 AH (1141 AD), Amir Faramarz ibn Amir Ali rushed to the aid of Sultan Sanjar to battle against the Qara Khotai.

In this battle, Sultan Sanjar suffered a hard defeat, and Faramarz also fell in captivity and was subsequently killed. Ibn Fanduq mentions him in his book "Tatimmat Sawaan al-Hikmah" with

the following title:

الملك العالم العادل عضد الدنيا و الدين علاء الدولة فرامرز بن علي بن فرامرز ملك يزد كان ملكاً عالماً عادلاً رأيته بخراسان سنة ست عشرة و خمسمائة (Ibn Fandūq, 1935: 110).

Ibn Fandūq saw him in Khurasan in the year 516AH, it would be one year after the construction of the defensive wall in Mashhad.

In addition, reference has been made to the second defensive wall in the deeds of endowment of the holy shrine. In a Quranic endowment by Abu al-Fath Baravastani in the year 515 AH, where he endowed the sacred shrine, it is mentioned that this Quran should not be taken out of the city walls:

«هذا المصحف و هو ثلثون جزءاً في صندوق محلى وقفه العبد المذنب الفقير الى رحمة الله تعالى ابو الفتح صاعد بن الاجل السيد جمال الدين عمده الدوله آيه الملك رئيس العراقيين ابي المجد سعيد بن محمد بن موسى البراوستاني رجاء ثوابه و حذراً من سوء عقابه و أليم عذابه على مشهد سيدنا و مولانا ابي الحسن على بن موسى الرضا عليه السلام بطوس وقفاً صحيحاً موبداً لا يباع و لا يوهب و لا يورث و لا يملك و لا يخرج من السور بل يقرأ فى الروضة الرضويه و المسجد المتصل بالقبه و البيت التى بناها الأجل جمال الدين والده فى مقابله القبه المقدسه و دفن الواقف فيها فمن بدله بعد ما سمعه فانما اثمه على الذين يبذلونه ان الله سميع عليم تقبل الله تعالى ذلك منه ون غفرله و لوالديه و كتب فى شوال سنة خمس عشر و خمس مائه»

The third defensive wall:

A new defensive wall was constructed by Shah Tahmaseb Safavi around the city for the last time between the years 935-942 AH. The construction of this wall was completed in the year 942 AH. It is presumed that Tahmasbi defensive wall is the same one that was visible around the central core of the city of Mashhad until the early years of the reign of Reza Shah.



Figure 2: A sample of the deed of endowment of the Quran by Abolfath Al-Baravastani (Kariminia, 2020: 99)



Figure 3: The tower and defensive wall of the city of Mashhad (Mahvan, 2012)

Contrary to oral statements, there is no evidence of the construction of the defensive wall during the Timurid period. It seems that the defensive wall built in the year 515 AH during the Timurid period did not have any defensive functionality. Evidence of this is reported during the Uzbek attack on Mashhad in the year 913 AH. Mohammad Qasem, the son of Sultan Hossein Mirza Bayqara created a barricade around the city by using the walls of the last houses and blocking the streets on the outskirts of the city. However, even with this, he could not resist the Uzbek attacks (Ruzbahane Khonji, 1978: 188).

A view of Shah Tahmaseb's defensive wall, which was created around the city, can be well observed in the map drawn by Jules Dalmaj (Map number 1), dating back to the year 1286 AH. According to this map, Mashhad has six gates (see Images number two and three) and 144 towers around the city. From the lower street gate to the Nowqan gate, there are 13 complete towers and 21 half towers. From the Nowqan gate to the upper street gate, there are 14 complete towers and 17 half towers. From the upper street gate to the Sarab gate, there are 7 complete towers and 7 half towers. From the Sarab gate to the Arg gate, there are 12 complete towers and 7 half towers. From the Arg gate to the Eidgah gate, there are 22 complete towers and 9 half towers. Finally, from the Eidgah gate to the lower street gate, there are 8 complete towers and 7 half towers. Furthermore, the wall around the citadel, which is inside the city, has 4 complete towers and 8 half towers.

In describing this defensive wall, E'temad al-Saltaneh writes in the book "Matla al-Shams": "This enclosure is constructed in such a way that from each tower, another tower can be targeted with arrows. The purpose of this design is to ensure that if an enemy occupies one tower, the



Figure4: The gate of Nowghan in Mashhad (Mahvan, 2012)

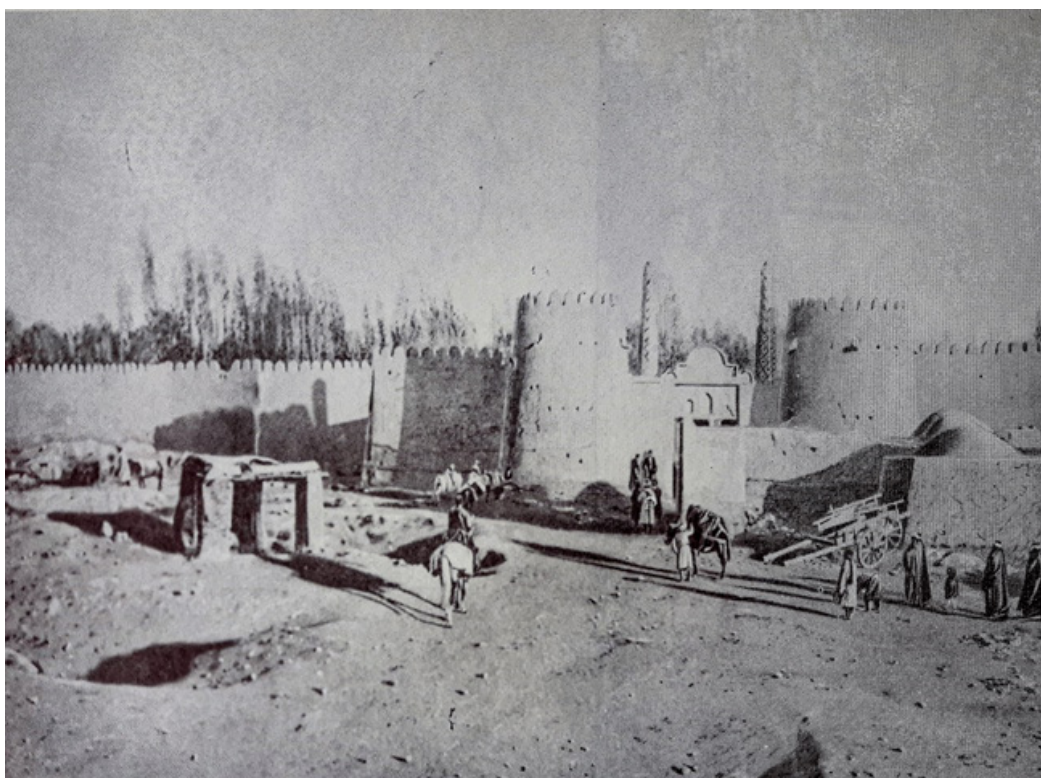


Figure 5: The Gate of the Eidgah in Mashhad (Mahvan, 2012)



Map 1: The map of holy Mashhad for the year 1286 AH (the archive of the specialized library of Mashhad studies)

defenders of Kian Castle can repel them from another tower. The city fortress, surrounded by an expanse of one Farsakh, has a hundred and forty-one towers. The city citadel, which is connected to the suburbs and is part of it, situated in the western part of the city, has eight towers, connecting to the desert on both sides. At these times, the city of Mashhad has six gates with the following names: Nowqan Gate, Lower Street Gate, Upper Street Gate, Sarab Gate, Arg Gate, and Eidgah Gate. It is evident that the city also had two other gates (Sani' al-Dawlah Vol 2, 1923: 238).

On the defensive wall of Shah Tahmaseb in Mashhad, there were four main gates with the following names and locations: Sarab Gate in the west of the city (Location: Saadi Square), Eidgah Gate in the east (Location: Eidgah 20), Nowqan Gate in the north (Location: Beginning of Nowqan Street from Ayatollah Kashani Street, Iravani Alley, Nowqan 11), and Mirali Amu Gate in the northeast (Location: Vahdat Street, Mir Park). Sarab Gate served as the connecting point between Mashhad and Tabaran, Tarqabeh, and the villages to the west of Mashhad. Nowqan Gate facilitated communication with the city of Nowqan. Eidgah Gate provided a route of communication with Nishabur, Herat, Marv, and southern Khorasan. In the year 1016 AH,

Shah Abbas ordered the construction of a street (Upper Street and Lower Street) and the creation of a water channel for the street (increasing the water flow from Amir Ali Shir's reservoir and altering its course) (Mulla Jalal, 1988:328). This project concluded in the month of Sha'ban in the year 1021 AH. In the same year, Shah Abbas traveled to Mashhad for the inauguration of the street, the water channel of the street, and the courtyard of Atiq Mosque. "On Wednesday, the fourth of Sha'ban, they entered Mashhad and inaugurated the street, the water channel of the street, and the courtyard of the Atiq Mosque" (Mulla Kamal, 2019: 65). The creation of the street led to the establishment of two new gates: Upper Street Gate (Location: Noor Alley, Tohid 21, on Tohid Street) and Lower Street Gate (Location: Bahre Alley, on Navvab Safavi Street) in the city. After the construction of the street, Upper Street Gate functionally replaced Sarab Gate. Also, the creation of Lower Street Gate reduces the communication role of the Eidgah Gate, particularly in connection with cities situated in the west of the Silk Road.

***Conclusion:***

In the Abbasid, Seljuk, and Safavid periods, defensive walls were constructed around the city of Mashhad to ensure the safety of its residents and pilgrims. Although the exact time of the construction and the builder of the first wall are not clear, the second wall was built by Faramarz ibn Ali in 515 AH, and the third wall was constructed in 942 AH by Shah Tahmasp Safavid. So far, no archaeological excavation has taken place within the vicinity of any of the three gates of the city of Mashhad. This has prevented us from obtaining detailed information about the construction materials and methods used in these gates. Accordingly, considering the time of construction of the first and second gates, there is currently no available image or map of these defensive structures. However, for the third gate, at least its boundaries and even the number of its towers have been depicted on the Jules Dalmaj map. The gate of Shah Tahmaseb is capable of being depicted within the city limits. Therefore, the precise location of the gates and even the defensive towers can be discerned. Hence, it is hopeful that through archaeological excavations in these areas, remains of the city's defensive gates and towers can be identified.

***Conflict of Interest:*** The authors declare that they agreed to participate in the present paper and there is no competing interests.



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