



## Tepe Nezam-Abad and its Position in the Late Classical Antiquity and the Early Islamic Era

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### ABSTRACT

With the transition from the Sasanian period to the Islamic era, the culture and art of Iran continued in the same previous pattern and underwent little change. One of the key archaeological sites alongside the Tepe Hissar monument in Damghan and Chāl Tarkhān, which well displays the transition period from the Sasanian period to the early Islamic era, is Tepe Nezām-Ābad (=Nizamabad). Despite this importance, the location of this mound has been shrouded in ambiguity, and most researchers have noted it near Varāmin or Ray. However, based on a photograph taken by Ernst Herzfeld in 1925 of Tepe Nezam-Abad, its morphology can be recognized. Tepe Nezam-Abad is located on the southwestern outskirts of the current city of Tehran. The purpose of this article, in addition to introducing this mound, is to show its importance so that appropriate research plans can be made for future investigations. Through field and documentary studies, we have conducted research in this regard, which has shown that fortunately, today, the least interference has occurred in this mound in the southeastern part of Eslamshahr County. Although the site has been registered in the list of national monuments of Iran, its core zone and buffer zone have not yet been determined. Considering the importance of the unique plasterworks from this mound in reputable museums around the world, the first step should be to take measures to protect the mound so that more detailed investigations can be carried out in the future.

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## Introduction

The history of Ray owes to the writings of Professor Hossein Kariman, among which the book "Ancient Ray" (Kariman, 1975) stands out. However, in addition to the pre-historical excavations, Deborah Thompson's excavation in 1976 published a book on the plasterworks of Chāl Tarkhan in Eshqābād (Thompson, 1976), which became the basis for research works such as "Sasanian Plasterwork Decorations" by Jens Kröger (Kröger, 2017). At the same time, Edward Keall gave a lecture on medieval Ray at the Congress of Iranian Art and Archaeology in Munich (Keall, 1979). Yahya Kowsari is a pioneer of Iranian archaeologists in Ray, and his works remain (Kowsari, 1995, 1996, 2001, 2002). Shahriar Adl also has writings on Ray (Adl, 1979). Rocco Rante has conducted the most research on Ray among contemporary Western scholars (Rante, 2008, 2010, 2014, 2018). Qadir Afround, who is now the director of the National Cultural Heritage Base of Ray, has made extensive efforts for archaeological activities in Ray, and his reports are available at the Research Institute of Archaeology's document center. Khosrow Pourbakhshandeh has also done activities in this area, and some probes have been carried out in several Ray sites, such as Cheshmeh-Ali, Āneysābād, Khānlaq, Shams-Ābād, Tāleb-Ābād, and one of the latest studies in Ray has been published by Shaikh Baikloo Islam (2015). However, the most important published work regarding Nezam-Ābād is in the book *Sasanidischer Stuckdekor* (Sasanian Plasterwork Decorations) by Jens Kröger, which dedicates a few pages to "Plasterwork Decorations from Nezam-Ābād in the North Ray-Varamin Region of Iran" (Kröger, 2017). However, since the Nezam-Ābād mound is known in archaeological sources, but its location was in doubt, in this research, we have addressed the question of where the Nezam-Ābād mound is located.

## Methodology

In this research, we have utilized data collection methods in field study as well as library research by referring to scientific sources, historical resources, and written documents. Accordingly, we were present at the site in the summer of 2023 and matched it with the previous data in order to process the data using the descriptive-analytical method.

## Discussion

Many of the most important historical sites from the early Islamic era demonstrate the significance of plaster decoration in buildings and the continuation of Sasanian era art. These include works from Syria (Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī, 727-744 CE), Palestine (Khirbat al-Mafjar, 724-743 CE), Jordan (Qaṣr al-Kharāna, 710 CE and the Umayyad Palace, 724-744 CE), Iraq (Samarra, the Palace of al-Muḥtashim, Bāb al-'Āmma, 9th century CE), Afghanistan (the Hāji Piyādah or Nine Domes Mosque, 9th century CE), and Iran (Tepe Mīl, Chāḥ Tarkhān, Niẓām-Ābād (Ray-Varamīn), late Sasanian and early Islamic periods; Tepe Madrasah, Tepe Sabzpuṣhān, Tepe Tākistān (Nīshāpūr), 10th century CE; Jūrjīr (Isfahan), 10th century; Jāmi' Mosque of Na'in, 960 CE, and several other examples.

Among these, one of the most important sites that displays the transitional period from the Sasanian period to the Islamic era is "Tepe Niẓām-Ābād". A number of unique plaster decorations from this mound were unearthed in 1925, and Ernst Herzfeld immediately went to the site, photographed them (Fig. 1), and purchased as many as possible, transferring them to the Kaiser Friedrich Museum. After World War II, many of these artifacts ended up in the Museum Island in Berlin.



Figure 1: View of Nizam-Abad (Herzfeld, 1925).

The publication of Herzfeld's photographs of the unparalleled plaster decorations from Tepe Niẓām-Ābād in 1925 made this mound famous, but its exact location has been a matter of debate from that time until the present, with researchers generally placing it about 80 km southeast of Tehran (Heidmann et al., 2014: 40; Rante, 2010). However, investigations have shown that this site is actually located in a different spot, in the

southwest of Tehran and the southeastern part of the current Eslamshahr.

Eslamshahr holds a special place in ancient Ray, and several known mounds in this area indicate settlements from prehistoric to Islamic times. For example, one can refer to (1) Tepe Māfin-Ābād from the 4th-5th millennia BC on the outskirts of the Māfin-Ābād village in Eslamshahr, south of the Qā'emi-yeh neighborhood, registered as National Heritage No. 2235 on March 3, 1998; (2) Tepe Vāvān in the Vāvān neighborhood, registered as National Heritage No. 1955 on December 7, 1997; (3) Sefid Tepe Goldasteh from the 5th-7th centuries AH; (4) Tepe Chīchaklū (Parthian and Sasanian periods) in the west of Eslamshahr, 2 km south of the Chīchaklū village; (5) Tepe Deh-'Abbās from the Parthian and Sasanian periods, located in the southwest of the Deh-'Abbās village, and several other ancient mounds.

After the discovery of the unique plaster decorations from Tepe Nezām-Ābād in reputable museums, it gained a special place, but no sustained scientific excavation was ever carried out there. Therefore, researchers who studied the plaster decoration subjects there guessed that Tepe Nezām-Ābād should be located somewhere about 80 km southeast of Tehran, near Chāl Tarkhān, Tepe Mil and Eshqābād (Heidmann *et al.*, 2014: 40). However, this location identification is not correct: Tepe Nezām-Ābād is located in the village of Nezām-Ābād in southern Tehran.

Nezām-Ābād is the name of a village near Eslamshahr. The Eslamshahr County with an area of 195 square kilometers and an altitude of 1165 meters above sea level is located on alluvial or alluvial fan deposits of the floods flowing from the southern slopes of the Alborz Mountains, and there is no significant topography. The Eslamshahr section, centered on the city of Eslamshahr, includes two rural districts: Deh-e Abbās and Fīrūzbahrām. The Deh-e Abbās rural district, with the center of the Deh-e Abbās village, consists of 27 villages and farmlands, the second of which is the village of Nezām-Ābād (The Research Center of Islamic Legislative Assembly, Establishment of 4

districts in Ray County, Tehran Province, with the center of Shahr-e Ray).

In summary, Tepe Nezām-Ābād (Fig. 2), which contained the unique plaster decorations that gained fame in reputable museums, is actually located in the village of Nezām-Ābād in southern Tehran, and not in the southeastern area about 80 km from Tehran as previously thought by researchers. The precise location of this important archaeological site has now been clarified (Fig. 3).



Figure 2: The view of Nizam-Abad (A. Hozhabri, July 2023).

The emergence of Eslamshahr as an urban center revolved around the village of Qāsem-Ābād-e Shāhī, which has a history of settlement dating back to the 10th century. Eslamshahr was named "Shādshāhr" in 1973 due to the growth in population and development of urban areas. After the Revolution in 1979, the city was renamed "Eslamshahr". In 1988, a county administration was established there and it came under the jurisdiction of the Ray governorate. Finally, in 1994, it was promoted from a county to a city by the decision of the Cabinet of Ministers.

### Conclusion

Contrary to what has become established among researchers that Tepe Nezām-Ābād is located 80 km southeast of Tehran, it has now been determined that Tepe Nezām-Ābād is located near the present-day Eslamshahr. This mound, along with several other important sites in the Ray, Fashāpūyeh, and Varāmīn regions, contains traces of Iranian art from the transitional period between the historical era and the early Islamic era.



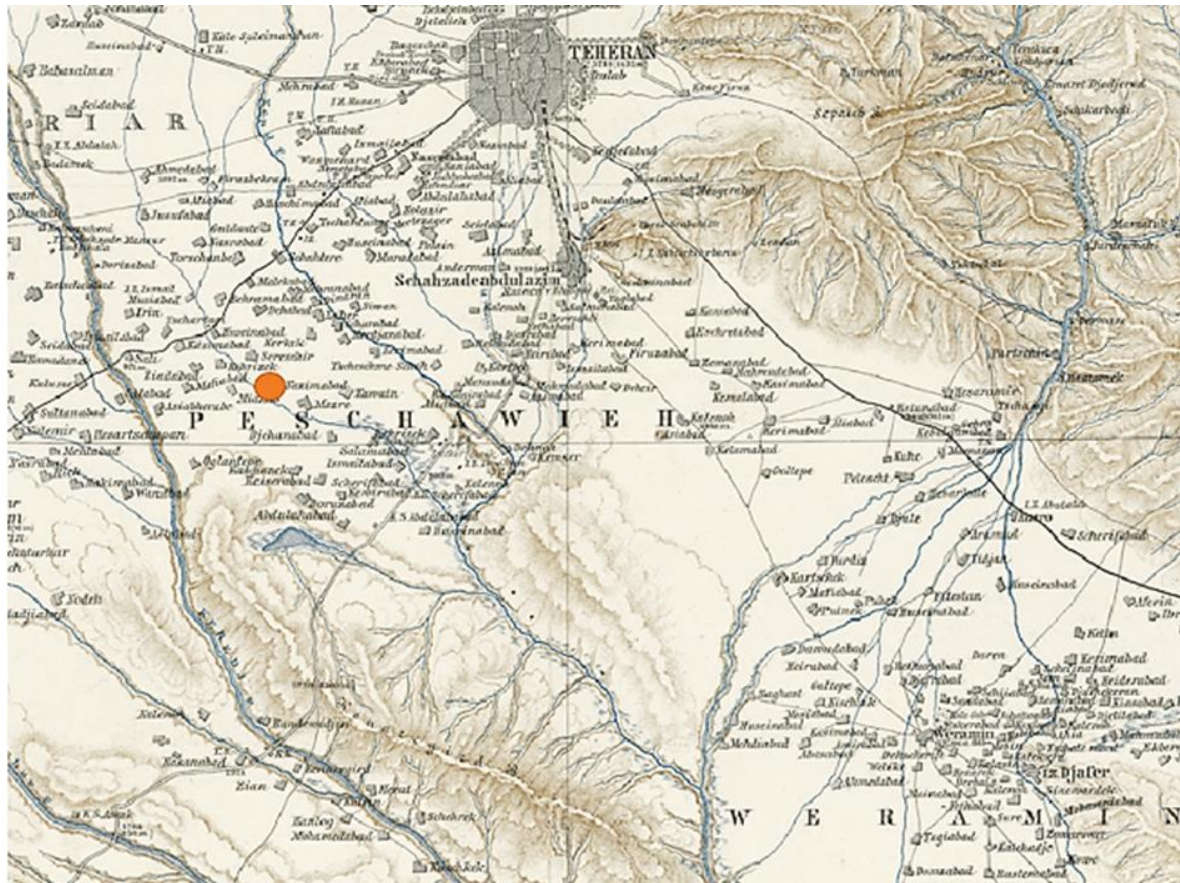


Figure 3: The location of Nezam-Abad (Alexander Friedrich Stahl in 1900) shows the original location of the site.

Valuable plaster decorations were accidentally discovered on this site, which now adorn museums. These plaster decorations are divided into human, animal, floral, geometric, and architectural motifs. Some key features of these motifs include symmetry and repetition of designs. The depictions of horses and riders, hunting ibex, and possibly lions, as well as Sasanian kings and men in elaborate shoes and clothes, indicate the high status of the patron.

While some Sasanian era motifs can be attributed to this site, it seems that a large portion of these works were created in the early Islamic era, but in the same artistic style as the Sasanian era. Given that the location of this important historical mound has now been determined, urgent measures are needed to protect the site and facilitate future excavations.

In summary, contrary to previous beliefs, Tepe Nezām-Ābād is located near modern-day Eslamshahr, not 80 km southeast of Tehran. This site contains valuable plaster decorations from the transitional period between the historical and

early Islamic eras, and now that its location is known, preservation and future research efforts are needed.

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