

Original Research Article

An Investigation of the Historical Evolution of Al-Rashid Bi'llah Mausoleum in Isfahan

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Abstract

It is commonplace for new religions to transform a place of worship while maintaining traditional beliefs in revised forms. Many structures from the Islamic era, such as mosques and Imamzadehs, were built in Iran, however many of them had pre-Islamic origins. The historical mausoleum of Al-Rashid bi'llah or Imamzadeh Prince Hossein, which dates to the sixth century AH and coincided with the Seljuk period, is among the significant, historical, and archaic structures of Isfahan. This building is situated in the Jey neighborhood, one of Isfahan's oldest neighborhoods with a pre-Islamic origin. There are several contradictions and ambiguities about the history and identity of those buried in this mausoleum. To answer the question of whether this building has pre-Islamic roots, this study aims to introduce the historical process based on the available documents and evidence as well as archaeological findings. It also relies on reliable documents and sound rationales to determine the identity of the buried people.

In this fundamental and applied study, the data gathered through the library research and field methods was examined using the inductive approach. employs a descriptive, analytical, and and analytical methodology and historical approach. According to research findings, the site of the current structure was previously occupied by the Mehr and Anahita Temple and a Zoroastrian religious structure. These structures were destroyed in the Arab invasion of Iran, and a sturdy mosque was erected there in the second and third centuries AH. Caliph Al-Rashid bi'llah was killed in Isfahan in the sixth century and buried in the northern part of the mosque. The Caliph's mausoleum was constructed in the same century, together with a mosque, a minaret, and a dome. Just the tomb remains after the mosque and minaret were demolished in the centuries that followed. It seems that the people buried in this place are Prince Hussein, a descendant of Imam Hassan (AS), and Caliph Al-Rashid bi'llah.

Keywords: *Al-Rashid bi'llah, transformation, place of worship, Mithraism.*

Introduction

The neighborhood of Shahrestan, located on the northern bank of Zayanderud and the easternmost part of the current city of Isfahan, is one of the oldest

neighborhoods in the city. According to researchers and archaeologists, it is actually the remains of "ancient Jey" and one of the two main cores of Isfahan (Goudarzi, 2017, 62).

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One of the first cities founded by Aryans in Iran is the city of “Gabe”, which later became “Gey” and “Jey”. Because it was located at the intersection of major roads during the Achaemenid era, Jey was the royal residence during that time and is mentioned in the events related to Alexander’s wars and his successors as “Gaabeh” and “Gaaben” in texts. Jey was one of the most renowned and distinguished villages in the city of Isfahan in subsequent years, concurrent with the Arab invasion of Iran (Honarfar, 1965, 1-2). Jey bin Zaradeh, after whom the city is called, is credited as the architect of Alexander’s construction of Jey, according to some reports (Honarfar, 1973, 25). Jey is one of Isfahan’s oldest neighborhoods and has a long pre-Islamic heritage.

Due to the importance and special position of Jey throughout history, numerous historical monuments from pre-Islamic and Islamic periods can be seen. A brick dome that the locals refer to as the Mausoleum of Prince Hussein and the burial place of Imamzadeh Ibrahim and Imamzadeh Hussein is one of the significant structures that is currently abandoned. Based on historical accounts, some researchers also believe that it is where Al-Rashid bi’llah, the 36th Abbasid caliph, is buried. Historically speaking, Al-Rashid bi’llah became the caliphate after the death of Al-Mustarshid bi’llah in 529 AH. Then, following a dispute between him and the strong Seljuk government in Iran, he left Baghdad and got involved in wars and conflicts in various cities until he ended up in Isfahan, where, after a year of ruling as caliph, he was killed and buried in Jameji Mosque (Haddad-Adel, 2020, 214–216). A group of Khurasani persons who were serving and escorting the caliph is alleged to have murdered him out of the blue when he was recovering from a serious illness (Homayy, 2016, 300). Regarding the two buried Imamzadehs, it is also said that they are Ibrahim ibn Zaid ibn Hassan ibn Ali (AS) and Hussein ibn Zaid ibn Hassan ibn Ali (AS), both of whom are the descendants of Imam Hassan (AS) (Homayy, 2011, 47).

The crucial point is that, given the pre-Islamic history of the Jey village (current Shahrestan neighborhood), the current structure was perhaps constructed on the foundation of an ancient temple. Here, the important point is that, in addition to the assumption of converting the mausoleum of the Abbasid caliph into an Imamzadeh during the Safavid period, which is a precedent, there is also the possibility of burying two Imamzadehs in the previous location of the caliph’s mausoleum. Especially since recent research has proven examples of converting ancient temples into Zoroastrian fire temples and then into Islamic structures such as mosques and imamzadehs, Therefore, the transformation of holy places over time into new religions and traditions is a universally shared practice, as we witnessed with the conversion of Sasanian fire temples into early Islamic mosques in Iran and the conversion of Mithraic temples into churches in Europe. The sacred territory that has been dedicated to God stays holy for those who believe in him, and even after the religion changes, the new structure will still hold religious significance.

Therefore, can we estimate the pre-Islamic history of this structure by examining the available data, and archaeological findings, and comparing and analyzing the geographical conditions, similar examples, and historical trends? Available data for this paper was collected through field and library research methods and analyzed and interpreted inductively.

Literature Review

The previous studies regarding the mausoleum of Al-Rashid bi’llah or Imamzadeh Prince Hussein in Isfahan mostly refer to the description of the structure as one of the historical structures of Isfahan and a brief history of the Islamic period of the structure. No specific research has been conducted on the pre-Islamic history and background of the structure, which is the main difference between the current study and the previous studies. Previous studies have mentioned three possibilities regarding the history of the structure:

According to the first group of references, this structure is attributed to the mausoleum of Al-Rashid Bi'llah, the 36th Abbasid caliph, and the attribution of the structure as an Imamzadeh is due to the change of name and application of the structure during the Safavid period or the destruction of the caliph's tomb at that time. Older sources for the first group of references include "Ganjineh Asar-e Tarikhi-ye Esfahan (The treasure of historical monuments of Isfahan)" (Honarfar, 1965) and the essay "Asar-e Tarikhi-ye Jey (Monuments of Jey)" (Honarfar, 1973), both by Lotfollah Honarfar. The more recent sources include in the article "Aasar-e Nashenakhte-ye Dore-ye Eslami (Unknown Works of the Islamic Period)" published in "Majmooe-ye Yadegarha-ye Tarikhi-ye Esfahan (Isfahan Historical Monuments Collection)" (2002) by Lotfollah Honarfar and the article "Mahalleh-ye Shahrstan, Jayegahe Jey va Haste-ye Asli-ye Shahr-e Esfahan (Shahrestan Neighborhood, the Position of Jey and the Main Core of the City of Isfahan)" (2017) by Parvaneh Goudarzi, which also has used this theory.

In contrast, the second group of references considers this building as the burial place of two descendants of Imam Hasan (AS). Seyyed Mosleh al-Din Mahdavi mentions in his book "Mazaaraat-e Esfahan (Tombs of Isfahan)" (2003) that the tomb of the caliph was located near this structure, which was destroyed in earlier times, probably by the Safavid kings, and the current structure is actually the tomb of two Imamzadehs. In his 1973 book "Asar-e Melli-ye Esfahan (National Monuments of Isfahan)," Abolqasem Rafiei Mehrabadi also asserts that it is the location of the burial of two Imamzadehs. Jalal al-Din Homayi in his book "Tarikh-e Esfahan, Majmooe Salasel va Moshajerat (The History of Isfahan, the Volume of Sadat's Dynasty)" (2011) introduces the lineage of the two Imamzadehs without any judgment on the truth of the buried person or persons in this mausoleum.

According to the third group, Mohammad Qasem Hashemi raises the same possibility in an article entitled "Tarikhcheh-ye Jey va Shahrstan (History of Jey and Shahrestan)" (2005) emphasizing that this place is the

mausoleum of the Abbasid caliph next to Prince Ibrahim or a martyr named Hamameh, who was a martyr in the early Islamic period. The only specific research on this building so far has been a master's thesis entitled "Restoration Plan of Isfahan's Mausoleum of Al-Rashid bi'llah and Organizing Its Surroundings" (2014) by Reza Sadeghi, which focuses on the preservation, restoration, and organization of the existing building.

The Dictionary of Countries by Yaqut al-Hamawi and the Book of Seljuk by Imad al-Katib Isfahani are two significant historical works that discuss Al-Rashid Bi'llah's life and the events surrounding his murder and burial in Isfahan. Recent sources that address this subject include the entry on Al-Rashid Bi'llah in the Encyclopedia of Islam (2020) by Gholamali Haddad Adel and the book History of Isfahan, Volume of Events and Incidents (2016) by Jalaluddin Homayi.

Research Methodology

This is a fundamental and qualitative study employing descriptive, analytical, and historical approaches. Data collection was carried out through field and library research methods, and data analysis was conducted through inductive reasoning. Pure historical methods (historical records and documents), archaeological methods (results of archaeological excavations), and comparison with comparable samples (other buildings that have been previously researched and explored and whose results have been scientifically proven) served as the foundation for argumentation and focus in the conclusion stage. All or part of these techniques were applied to each of the structure's historical eras.

Theoretical Foundations

The transformation and conversion of sacred places in the body of the sacred place related to the new religion is a common practice in most regions. In Iran, most of the buildings that have been built in the heart of mountains, beside springs, and sacred trees have been ancient places of worship, which according to evidence, were dedicated to the worship of Mehr and Anahita, and over time,

they have changed to suit the performance of the new ritual (Javadi, 2007, 13). Iranians have long practiced the worship of plants and water, as well as the locations connected to these revered resources. The naturalistic beliefs of the ancient Iranians served as the foundation for cases such as sacred trees, holy springs, Chahartaq, sacred mountains, and locations attributed to mosques and Imamzadehs that were built in nature alongside rivers, springs, or canals and were revered in the past (ibid., 14). Therefore, in relation to these elements in Islamic sacred places, it is likely that these structures had a pre-Islamic history.

It can also be said that Islamic and sometimes Zoroastrian sacred places throughout Iran are ancient relics of the era of Mehr worship that have continued to exist in accordance with new beliefs. What is now known as the Atashgah or has been transformed into a mosque and Islamic holy place was previously a temple dedicated to the worship of Mehr and Anahita, which later became an Atashgah and then underwent a change of use (Javadi, 2018, 14).

• Historical structures of Jey

As mentioned earlier, Jey was one of the important cities of the ancient period in the current area of Isfahan, and despite the damages and the passage of centuries, in addition to the mausoleum Al-Rashid bi'llah which will be explained below, there are still important historical structures in the area. A brief introduction and description of the relationship between the historical buildings of Jey can be of great help in understanding the position and background of the discussed structure.

- Shahrestan Bridge is located in the eastern part of Isfahan on the Zayandehrud River. According to archaeologists, the foundation of the bridge belongs to the Sassanid period, and it was repaired during the Daylamites and Seljuk periods (Honarfar, 1965, 8).

- The minaret of the city belongs to the sixth century AH and was located near the mausoleum of Al-Rashid bi'llah and today no sign of it can be seen (Honarfar, 1973, 36).

- According to historical sources The great battlement of Jey dates back to pre-Islamic times. As Mafrooqi

reports, half of the battlement was built during the reign of Tahmuras, the third king of the Pishdadian dynasty, and the other half was built during the reign of Firooz Ibn Yazdgerd Sassanid (Jafarian, 2005, 40).

- The Jameh Mosque of Jey which belongs to the Islamic period and is located on the southern side of the mausoleum of Al-Rashid bi'llah, was found in the 1970s, during the excavations of the remains of the mosque of the Seljuk period, structures of the Abbasid period, and stone walls [probably before Islam] (Mirfattah, 1976, 195-236). Today, this structure has remained as a mound known as the Jey mound on which two schools have been built.

- Ashraf Mound is located about 300 meters southwest of the mausoleum Al-Rashid bi'llah and on the northern bank of Zayandehrud. The mound is 12 hectares in size and is located on a rocky foundation (Jafari Zand, 2002, 204). Some have suggested that Ashraf Mound may be the remains of the ancient Sarouyeh fortress or a large pre-Islamic castle whose name appears in historical sources (Honarfar, 1965, 20).

The ongoing usage of the mound from pre-Islamic to Islamic eras has been established via quick excavations in recent years. In these excavations, a burial from the Parthian period was discovered, which could be evidence of the ceremonial use of the site (Discovery of a Parthian lady's skeleton in the historical Ashraf Mound in Isfahan, 2020). This mound and the Jey mound were connected, but the construction of new streets has separated them (Jafari Zand, 2002, 210). The author has identified rock-cutting artifacts in the bedrock of Zayandehrud and near the Ashraf Mound, indicating the performance of water-related ceremonial rituals in the area (Fig. 1).

• The current status of the Prince Hussein structure or the mausoleum of Al-Rashid bi'llah

This structure is now located in the Shahrestan neighborhood of Isfahan and on the northern bank of Zayandehrud (about 200 meters inside Bazarcheh street on a hill that is a few meters higher than the surrounding area and behind two girls' schools (high school and elementary school)). Its current entrance is on the northern

side and there are turquoise gemstone tiles above the main gateway, which probably date back to the Qajar period (Fig. 2). After the gateway, there is a very small courtyard and after entering the courtyard and turning to the left, the entrance to the dome can be seen, which is facing south. Inside the dome, there is a small wooden Zarih, and two graves can be seen inside it (Fig. 3).

The building's interior is plastered in white and is undecorated. Only in the middle of the dome is an ornamental Kufic inscription adorned with verses 36 to 38 of Surah An-Nur in the style of Seljuk plasterwork, which unfortunately lacks a date. Inside the Imamzadeh, there are two Ziyarat-Namahs written in Naskh script on wood, dated 1309 AH (Qajar period), donated to the shrine of Imamzadeh Hossein ibn Zaid ibn Hasan ibn Ali. It is interesting to note that the current text does not mention Imamzadeh Ibrahim's name.

The overall shape of the building is an octagonal dome with an oval dome, and there are windows on all sides at the top and one window on one side at the bottom. Researchers believe that the building belongs to the Seljuk period (see Honarfar, 1965, 206, and Jafarian, 2005, 32). On the northern side of the structure, next to the gateway, there is a small stone inscription that shows a Waqfnama related to 1081 AH (Safavid period), and interestingly, only the name of Prince Hossein is mentioned in this inscription. The outer surface of the dome is simple and made of brick, and at the bottom, there are still some remains of turquoise glazed tiles that are clearly in contrast to the main structure of the building and seem to have been added in later periods. Some sources have suggested that in the past two centuries, due to the popularity of the building as an Imamzadeh among local people, tilework has been added to the dome (Jafarian, 2005, 33). The dome's tiles and the addition of the gateway may be related to this period.

• The historical evolution of the structure:

Since the existence of various and confusing historical narratives and limited archaeological findings makes it difficult to understand and identify the historical process of structures, it is necessary to identify the evolution of



Fig. 1. Parallel cutting artifacts similar to a canal in the rocky bed of Zayandehrud and near the Ashraf Mound. Photo: Taha Sanizadeh, 2022 .



Fig. 2. The northern facade and the gateway of the building. Photo: Taha Sanizadeh, 2022 .



Fig. 3. The interior of the building and its wooden shrine. Photo: Taha Sanizadeh, 2022 .

buildings in stages and from facts to assumptions. The historical periods of buildings that are known with the greatest degree of certainty are those that precede the caliph's burial, the Seljuk era, and then the pre-Islamic period. Therefore, initially, the history of structures

from the Seljuk period to the early Islamic period will be identified and introduced. In the second step, the evolution of structures from the Seljuk period to the contemporary period will be examined, and in the third and most important step, the probable pre-Islamic background of buildings will be identified based on analysis and comparison.

- The evolution of the structure from the Seljuk period to early Islam (from later to earlier)

The oldest source that refers to the killing and burial of Al-Rashid bi'llah in Isfahan is Emad Katib Isfahani, a historian of the 6th century AH. He reports that the incident of Al-Rashid's killing occurred during his childhood. He writes: "Al-Rashid bi'llah was buried in the city of Jey; a tomb was built for him in the Jame Mosque, and now it is considered to be one of its most honorable places" (*ibid.*, 32). From this statement, several points can be inferred: Firstly, Al-Rashid was buried in Jey. Secondly, there was a mosque in Jey before his burial, and he was buried in this place. Thirdly, the tomb was built at the same time, which may have been due to the destruction or alteration of part of the mosque. Fourthly, the location of his grave was considered important at the time of the writer, and probably local people made a pilgrimage. After Emad Katib, Yaqut Hamawi writes in "Mu'jam al-Baladan" in the 7th century AH: And in the city of Jey, the tomb of Al-Rashid bi'llah, the son of al-Mustarashad bi'llah, is known and visited, and it is located on the bank of the Zayandeh River. From this statement, two points can be deduced: First, in the 7th century, the location of Al-Rashid's grave was well-known and visited by people, and secondly, the location of this grave was next to the bank of Zayandeh Rud, which probably corresponds to the emphasis of Emad Katib on the burial of the caliph in the Jameh Mosque of Jey, which is now known as the Imamzadeh. According to the book "Mojmal al-Tawarikh wa al-Qasas (The Collection of Histories and Tales)", whose author is unknown and written in the 6th century, it is also mentioned: "Al-Rashid Balleh was buried in Isfahan; may God protect that city from calamities" (Honarfar, 1965, 209). Again, this sentence

emphasizes the existence of the Abbasid caliph's grave in Isfahan.

Based on the above, it can be speculated that the Jameh Mosque of Jey was located next to the place now known as the mausoleum of Al-Rashid bi'llah and had a history before the Seljuk period. After the burial of the caliph in it, part of the mosque was turned into a tomb. In excavations carried out in the 1970s on a hill located in the south of the structure (the current location of the two girls' schools), it was found that a relatively magnificent mosque dating back to the Seljuk period existed in the southern part of the mausoleum of Al-Rashid bi'llah, which was parallel to the Jameh Mosque of Isfahan. Under the foundation of this structure, traces of Abbasid architecture and stone walls, which are probably related to the pre-Islamic period were found (Mirfatah, 1976, 195-236). So far, it has been confirmed that in the south of the mausoleum of Al-Rashid bi'llah, there was a magnificent mosque dating back to the Seljuk period, in which the caliph was buried in its northernmost part, and then a separate mausoleum was built for him in that part. Considering that the current entrance is also towards the south and there is no other entrance to the building, it can be understood that in the past, the only way to enter the building was from inside the Jameh Mosque of Jey, and therefore, the tomb of the caliph was part of the mosque's structure.

Now it is necessary to examine the history of the mosque or other buildings existing in this location before the Seljuk period and the burial of the caliph. Since Isfahan was first conquered by the Arabs without resistance in 19–21 AH and then reoccupied by the Arabs in 23 AH due to the uprising of the people of Isfahan, and Abu Musa Ash'ari destroyed the city in revenge for the killing of his son in this incident, likely, ancient Jey was also destroyed in this attack, and according to historical evidence, these ruins continued until 150 AH (Jafari Zand, 2002, 67). It seems that a mosque was built in this location in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AH, whose foundation was made of Abbasid brick walls and was found in a layer above the stone walls. After that,

Maghdesi mentions the Jameh Mosque of Shahrestan (or, in his interpretation, Medina, which means city) in the 4th century and refers to its strength and antiquity (*ibid.*, 63).

According to the mentioned historical documents and archaeological data, it can be said that after the destruction of an unknown building from the pre-Islamic period at this location during the conquest of Isfahan in 23 AH, the ruins existed as an abandoned hill at least until 150 AH. In the 2nd and 3rd centuries AH, a grand and sturdy mosque was built on the foundation of the previous structures, until in the 6th century, the Abbasid caliph was buried in its northern part, and probably after that, a new mosque was renovated based on the previous mosque, and in the course of these actions, the structure of the tomb of the caliph was built as a dome connected to the mosque. Also, a tall and unique minaret was built next to the tomb of the Abbasid caliph in the Seljuk period and the 6th century AH, which was known as the Minaret of Shahrestan or Shah Rostam Minaret, which existed until 1333 AH and the Qajar period (*Honarfar*, 1965, 210).

- The evolution of the structure from the Seljuk period to the contemporary period (from earlier to later)

After the Seljuk period, there were not many historical documents until the Safavid period, when the famous French tourist Chardin visited the structure and called it the tomb of the Abbasid caliph (*Jafarian*, 2005, 86). Considering that Chardin did not mention the name of the Jameh Mosque, it seems that the Jameh Mosque of Jey was destroyed before the Safavid period. The discovery of a tombstone from the Safavid period and the identification of a cemetery layer around the mausoleum during archaeological activities in the 1370s indicate that, at least from the Safavid period onwards, the area around the building and the hill had been transformed into a local cemetery (*Mirfattah*, 1976, 216). Here, the author suggests that due to the attribution of the structure to Imamzadeh Prince Hussein in the Safavid period and the history of burying the caliph in this place, which both

made the building respected among local Shiite and Sunni people, after the destruction of the Mosque of Jey, people turned to bury their dead around this structure and transformed the hill into a cemetery, which was a common practice around holy places. Another important point is that in the Safavid-era stone inscription and the Qajar-era *ziyarat-namah* that was mentioned earlier, only the name of Prince Hussein is mentioned, and Imamzadeh Ibrahim's name is not mentioned, and the local fame of the building is also under the name "Prince Hussein." Given the existence of two tomb structures until the contemporary period, it can be guessed that after the death or martyrdom of Imamzadeh Hussein, one of Imam Hasan Mojtaba's (AS) sons, he was buried next to the Abbasid caliph, and one of the two current tombs belongs to Imamzadeh and the other belongs to the caliph. Although there is a weak possibility of burying someone named Imamzadeh Ibrahim (according to the genealogy, the brother of Prince Hussein) instead of the Abbasid caliph, Finally, during the Safavid period, with the policies of the Safavid kings aimed at expanding Shiism, both name and memory of the Abbasid caliph were removed from the building, and the name of Imamzadeh was given priority.

After the Safavids, the most important historical documents about the structure are related to the Qajar period. Etemad al-Saltanah mentions the structure in his book "*Mer'at al-boldān* (Mirror of Countries)" and considers it a mosque related to Rashid bi'llah and a place visited by people, and elsewhere he counts it as the mausoleum of the Abbasid caliph (*Etemad al-Saltanah*, 1988, 2373, 117). In 1860 AD/1255 AH, Eugene Flandin saw this building during his travels and wrote: "Among the remaining monuments, there is still a small mosque with a dome and minaret, and perhaps at a time when Isfahan had great importance, Shahrestan was also a desired place for dignitaries" (*Flandin*, 1977, 237). The mosque referred to here is the same mausoleum of the caliph that had a minaret next to it until that time. Fortunately, he recorded some valuable images of the city and the mausoleum that are very effective in

identifying the building's past status (Figs. 4&5).

In the first image, a view of the south bank of the Zayandehrud River towards the north is depicted, wherein the background of the image, the brick dome of Al-Rashid bi'llah, and the minaret of Shahrestan can be seen. From this image, it can be inferred that the external appearance of the building has not undergone significant changes from the Qajar era until now. In front of the image, there is a hill on the Zayandehrud River bank, which, considering the angle of depiction, is the current Ashraf Hill, and on it, the ruins of two small Chahartaq are visible. However, the most important information hidden in this image contains two crucial points for recognizing the pre-Islamic history of the structure. Firstly, in the waterline of the Zayandehrud River, the remains of stone walls are visible, indicating the existence of pre-Islamic structures in the current Ashraf Hill location that do not match the Islamic architecture prevalent during that period. Therefore, these structures probably belonged to the pre-Islamic era and had a ritualistic function related to water due to their proximity to the Zayandehrud River. Secondly, there are abundant old trees around the caliph's mausoleum, none of which exist today. The presence of trees may be related to pre-Islamic rituals (Fig. 4). In the second image drawn specifically from the building, several crucial points can be inferred: Firstly, the decorations and inscriptions of the Shahrestan minaret and its exact location on the southeast side of the dome. Secondly, the placement of the structure on a hill and the absence of the Jameh mosque adjacent to it. Thirdly, the location of the entrance door of the dome from the south, which still exists today. Fourthly, the presence of a cemetery around the structure confirms the theory of burial next to the structure, at least from the Safavid period onwards. Fifthly, the courtyard and the gateway of the current building did not exist until the time these images were drawn and were likely added to the building on the Qajar period (Fig. 5).

Approximately 40 years after Flandin, Madame Dieulafoy mentioned the building in her travels in 1881 AD/1298 AH and wrote: "The first thing that appears

from afar is the minaret of a shrine... The old walls of the shrine were more or less intact. The most interesting thing about this structure is its vaulted dome" (Dieulafoy, 2014, 277). From these statements, it can also be inferred that the building was known as a shrine at that time.

Aerial images from the Pahlavi era show that Shahrestan village was located to the east of the mausoleum and agricultural lands surrounded the village and the Jameh Mosque hill is well visible on the southern side (Fig. 6). Another image that exists from the Pahlavi era shows the remains of brick and adobe buildings on the northern side of the dome, which no longer exist and have been destroyed along the street (Fig. 7).

- The pre-Islamic evolution of the structure

In identifying the pre-Islamic historical evolution, which is the most important and unknown part of the present research, three categories of documents and data will be separately considered and argued for the identification of the use of the pre-Islamic building located in the historic hill of Jameh Mosque and the mausoleum of Al-Rashid bi'llah, which has been proven to exist in archaeological excavations and was previously mentioned:

A) Archaeological data: As mentioned, in short-term excavations in the 1970s, which were carried out around the structure, multiple historical layers were found, the oldest of which was a stone-built structure that seems to belong to the pre-Islamic period. As recent archaeological findings in Ashraf Hill (which is the southern side of Jameh Mosque Hill that has been separated from it by a street) indicate, there have been Achaemenid, Parthian, Sasanian, and Islamic buildings in this area until the 12th century AH (Discovery of a Parthian lady's skeleton in the historical Ashraf Mound in Isfahan, 2020). Therefore, there is no doubt about the continued use of this area at least from the Achaemenid period onward.

Another important finding is the discovery of a human burial from the Parthian period in the Mithraic ritual style (East-oriented), which is very significant (ibid.). It should be noted that burial was always performed next to temples and holy places, and the Mithraic burial style indicates the presence of a Mithraic temple on this historic hill. On

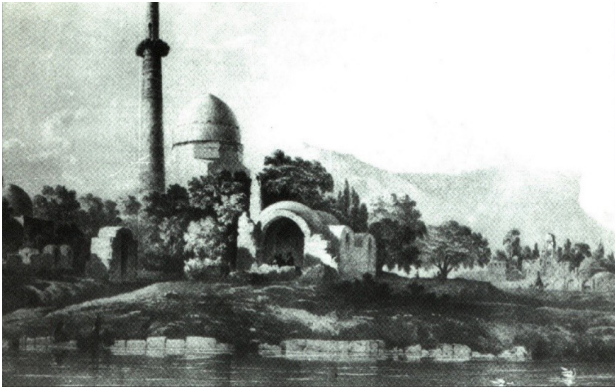


Fig. 4. The view of Al-Rashid bi'llah and Zayandehrud tombs during the Qajar era. Flandin's travelogue Source: Janzadeh, 2009, 136.

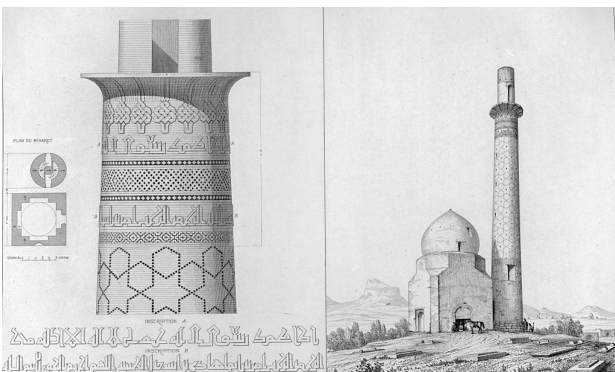


Fig. 5. The Mausoleum of Al-Rashid bi'llah, next to the minaret of Shahrestan and the cemetery around it. Qajar period. By Pascal Coste. Flandin's travelogue. Source: The Mausoleum of Al-Rashid bi'llah, n.d..



Fig. 6. Aerial images from the Pahlavi era The location of the building is indicated by an arrow. Source: JafariZand, 2002, 452.

the other hand, archaeological findings in Ashraf Hill indicate the existence of an east-facing building in this area, indicating its ritual use (Jafari Zand, 2002, 209). It should be noted that pre-Islamic Mehrabs also faced the East (Javadi, 2018, 13).

On the other hand, the geographical location of the historic hill (next to the river) and its relation to the meanings and uses of water make it even more important. Also, the existence of architectural remains related to water in the bed of the Zayandehrud River and in the vicinity of Ashraf Hill, which has been previously presented in an image, the construction of two hills of Jameh Mosque and Ashraf on a natural rocky elevation (which is now completely visible due to the cuts caused by the construction of a street in Ashraf Hill and the surrounding areas of Jameh Mosque Hill), and the presence of ancient and massive old trees around the building that existed until two centuries ago, are all signs of ancient Iranian temples related to Mithraic and Anahita rituals. Most of these sanctuaries were related to mountains, springs, and old trees (*ibid.*, 10). According to Mithraic worshippers, the birth of Mithra was from a maiden who was fertilized in water, and it was one of the most prominent symbols that connected Mithraic rituals with water (Moghddam, 2006, 32). The word “Mehrab” is also made up of “Mehr” and “Ab”, and the other pronunciation, “Mehravah”, means a specific place for Mehr (Razi, 2002, 269).

Certainly, in case of the destruction of the two existing schools on Jameh Mosque Hill and conducting extensive archaeological excavations there, completing excavations in Ashraf Hill and paying attention to excavations in the space between these two hills (under the street bed), more findings will be obtained that will illustrate other dimensions of pre-Islamic buildings in this area.

B) Historical documents: The second group of evidence that can be effective in finding the history of the structure related to the pre-Islamic period is historical documents. The remains of the barrow existed along the northern coast of the Zayandehrud River from east to west in contemporary times (Jafari Zand, 2002, 455). It seems that the four-gated nature of the barrow had roots in Mithraic



Fig. 7. The status of the building in the Pahlavi era. Source: Honarfar, 1965, 208.

beliefs (*ibid.*, 51-52). Based on the available historical books, the Jameh Mosque and the mausoleum of Al-Rashid bi'llah were located inside the huge battlement of Jey. This battlement had four gates named after the sun, moon, arrow, and Jews (Jafarian, 2005, 40). It seems that the four gates of the battlement in four directions are rooted in Mehrprasti's thoughts (Jafari Zand, 2002, 51-52).

Another important point is the fame of a nearby mausoleum called "Mehrabad" (located about 200 meters away from the structure, between Bazaarcheh Street and Sayyad Shirazi Highway). According to local people, this name has been referred to this neighborhood since ancient times. Generally, such ancient names are not unrelated to the history of the area. Regarding this place, the existence of a region named Mehrabad near the building related to Mithraic rituals is another reason for the area's ritualistic history.

C) Comparisons with similar cases: Based on the common patterns of most ancient temples and sacred places, by comparing and matching the structures that have been scientifically proven in terms of their history and status due to archaeological excavations and further research, a better understanding of the state of the building in previous millennia can be obtained. One of the most famous temples in Iran, which has been proven to belong to Mithraic and Anahitaic rituals due to numerous studies and excavations, is the Anahita Temple in Kangavar. Mentioning the most prominent features and findings related to this building and comparing and analyzing

it with the cases mentioned regarding the mausoleum of Al-Rashid bi'llah can be a source for explaining the history of the building.

The Anahita Temple in Kangavar is a religious structure from the Achaemenid period that was formed on a rocky cliff. After that, during the Parthian period, it was used as a temple for the goddess Anahita after renovation and restoration. Then during the Sassanid period, a fire temple was built there to continue using this sacred place. At the end of this period and during Arab invasions, this temple was destroyed, and from the second century AH onwards, it became a place for Islamic structures such as mosques and Imamzadehs (Kambakhshfard, 1995, 12). This structure was attacked and burned twice. In the first stage at the end of the Parthian period due to a lack of religious tolerance by Sassanids, this temple was destroyed, and a large fire temple called "Atur Anahita" was built instead (*ibid.*, 14). In the second stage probably in 22 AH during the Arab occupation of Nahavand due to religious reasons, this fire temple was destroyed (*ibid.*, 96).

The existence of water springs in this temple made the connection with the goddess Anahita even stronger (*ibid.*, 39), and in three periods of Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sassanid, various burial methods were used around it, some of which have been proven to be East-oriented burials. In the Islamic period, this place was also used as a cemetery where tombstones from the Seljuk and Safavid periods were found (*ibid.*, 39, 74, 246, 310).

Building a temple on a rocky outcrop near water sources, used as a sacred site for the religions of Mithraism (East-oriented), Zoroastrianism, and Islam, continuing the tradition of religious burial from the Mithraic period to the Islamic period, and ultimately transforming into a mosque and shrine during the Islamic period are all common features of the construction of the mausoleum of Al-Rashid bi'llah and the temple of Anahita. These are examples of the transformation of structures and sacred sites over time in various rituals, indicating a unified pattern. Even during the joint destruction of both structures in the first half of the Islamic century for

religious reasons and the beginning of the establishment of Islamic structures from around the second century AH brings to mind that the possible temple in Jey Hill, similar to the Anahita temple, was destroyed by the Arabs for political and religious reasons and then used again as a holy structure of the new religion. It should be noted that Anahita Temple in Kangavar was not unique and similar temples were built in other regions of Iran such as Pasargadae, Hamedan, and Shush from the time of Ardeshir II to later periods (*ibid.*), so it is likely that the mausoleum of Al-Rashid bi'llah was built on the foundation of one of these temples.

In conclusion, based on three groups of historical evidence, archaeological findings, and comparison with similar examples, it can be argued that a temple related to Mithraism or Anahita religion was built on a rocky outcrop near the Zayandehrud River during the Achaemenid or Parthian periods. During the Sassanid period, it was probably transformed into a Zoroastrian temple which existed until its destruction by Arabs during their occupation of Isfahan. It should be noted that sacred sites in Iranian beliefs that were initially associated with worshipping the moon and sun continued to exist in new forms after Islam. This means that temples dedicated to Mithraism or Anahita were first transformed into fire temples and then into mosques and shrines (Javadi, 2018, 10).

Conclusion

In this article, for the first time, the history and evolution of the attributed mausoleum of Al-Rashid bi'llah in Isfahan were studied and introduced. In this regard, the examination of historical sources and documents, travelogues, historical images, and archaeological findings, along with the analysis and comparison of the author, led to the identification of the structure's history from pre-Islamic times to the present day. Additionally, efforts were made to resolve ambiguities regarding the individuals buried in the structure based on historical evidence.

According to this study, a temple related to the cults

of Mithra and Anahita was built on a hill located on the northern bank of the Zayandehrud River, inside the ancient city of Jey, alongside other buildings of that time, during the pre-Islamic period (Achaemenid or Parthian). It was probably converted into a fire temple during the Sassanid period, coinciding with the prevalence of Zoroastrianism. This structure existed until the Arab invasion when it was destroyed along with the other structures of Jey during the ravages of 23 AH. It remained abandoned and in ruins until around 150 AH, when it appeared as a hill. In the second or third century AH, a strong mosque was built on the ruins of the previous temple, following the usual tradition, which was important and noteworthy. In the sixth century AH, Al-Rashid bi'llah, the 33rd Abbasid caliph, fled from Baghdad after a conflict with the Seljuks of Iran and was eventually murdered in Isfahan. The Abbasid caliph was buried in the northernmost part of the Jameh Mosque of Jey, and after some time, a new mosque was built on the site of the previous one. This time, a separate dome-shaped mausoleum for the caliph as well as a tall minaret known as the Minaret of Shahrestan or Shah Rostam was built next to it. At this time, the caliph's tomb was part of the mosque and could also be accessed through it. However, during the following centuries and before the Safavid period, the mosque was destroyed. Additionally, during the Islamic period, one of Imam Hassan's descendants, Prince Hussein (AS), was buried alongside the caliph. With the Safavid policy of expanding Shiism, the caliph's name was removed from the structure, and two graves in the building were named after Imamzadeh Hussein and Imamzadeh Ibrahim (although there is a weak possibility that Imamzadeh Ibrahim was buried instead of the caliph). From the Safavid period onwards, the mound remaining from the mosque was transformed into a cemetery, which has existed until contemporary times. In the years following the victory of the Islamic Revolution, two girls' schools were built on the southern side of the caliph's mausoleum on the cemetery, which still exists today. Therefore, it can be said that the mausoleum Al-Rashid bi'llah, or Imamzadeh Prince

Hussein, located in the Shahrestan neighborhood of Isfahan, like some other religious sites of the Islamic period, has a pre-Islamic history and includes periods of worship of Mithra and Anahita, Zoroastrianism, and Islam, which is the result of the continuity of using a sacred place and reinterpreting ancient Iranian beliefs in new forms.

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