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Short Article

Development of Understanding of the Primary Nature of the Ancient 'Tepe Mil', a Comparison between 'Presented Space' and 'Represented Space'

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Abstract

Tepe Mil is one of the most enigmatic historical structures in Iran, located within the ancient area of Rey. The collection of efforts to enhance awareness about it has been less fruitful so far for various reasons. Therefore, the present mapping considers "observation" as a tool for assessing the visual tensions in a "constructed space" and seeks to provide an answer to the question of how the landscape of the Tepe Mil complex can be described in relation to its environment, function, and previous representations. In this regard, through the comparison of conducted observations with previous representations, along with abstracting a pyramid-like form from the inherent nature of the Tepe and potential access pathways upon it, indications of calendrical features of the Tepe are also disclosed. This implies that the main axis of the Tepe and the structures upon it are positioned in relation to the sunrise points on the first day of Dey (December 22nd) and its sunset on the 31st of Khordad (June 21st, commencing the fourth month in the Persian calendar). Moments that hold special geographical and cultural significance.

Keywords: *Ancient Hill; Tepe Mil; Rey; Bahram Rey Fire Temple; Calendrical Building.*

Introduction

How can the landscape of the Tepe Mil complex be described in relation to its environment, function, and previous representations?

"Rey" is one of the centers of life from ancient times, which still hosts reflections of its ancient existence. Karimian (1971) traces the history of settlement in this area back to the Aryan migration, based on the findings from the excavations of "Erik Ashmida" in 1934. The claim includes the large Rey Mountain (Bibi Shahrbanoo), the SarSarreh Mountains (with the

flowing Cheshme Ali), and, of course, the Tepe Mil complex. Among these, the Tepe Mil complex stands out with its remaining architectural structures, creating a harmonious blend between celestial perceptions and earthly methods in a landscape consisting of remnants of a brick and stone structure atop a hill in a valley. In this regard, in the autumn of 2023, the Nazar Research Institute organized a collective visit led by Dr. Mansouri¹ to this ancient site. The author intends to present his observational findings in this short article to expand research horizons and activities around this valuable complex.

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Literature Review

Located approximately 12 kilometers southeast of Tehran, there is an archaeological complex on a vast hill known as “Tepe Mil.” This site hosts one of the country’s most historic structures, maintaining an enigmatic and intriguing presence despite its panoramic position in one of the world’s affluent cultural centers. Unfortunately, the outlook for addressing existing questions continues to darken due to negligence regarding cultural perspectives, protective measures, and targeted excavations.

The earliest contemporary documentation of this complex dates back to the visit of Jacques de Morgan, a French researcher in the 1287 Solar Hijri year (1909). He explored the ancient plains of Varamin, influenced by the discoveries of Chal-Tarkhan-Eshqabad, estimating the antiquity of the Tepe Mil complex to at least the Sasanian era. Naumann (1964) identified the remains of Tepe Mil as a Sasanian palace, with a fire temple and a branch located on it, positioned on the western end of an 80-meter-long corridor. He also considered extensive Islamic-era structures in this area as hindrances to any precise interpretations until subsequent excavations. Karimian (1971) referred to this structure as the new fire temple of Rey, which Sasanian Anushiravan relocated from its previous location, known as the “pool,” now referred to as Tepe Mil (*ibid.*). He described the naming of this place as the “pool” by stating, “This place is low-lying, with a large hill in its midst; during heavy rains or irrigation, the hill collects water around it. As Demorgans began excavation there, the locals closed it off with water to prevent interference” (*ibid.*).

However, in geographical terms, the relationship of this structure with complexes such as “Bibi Shahrbanu” and “Cheshme Ali,” rooted in the Mithraic tradition, and certain characteristics of the structure itself, such as its elevation relative to the surroundings, proximity to water, and the open layout of the square-shaped (quadrangular) building, characterize this complex as Mithraic. This school of thought pertains

to the influence of celestial events, Sa’d (auspicious) and Nahs (inauspicious), on earthly matters. Some researchers even consider the observational and calendrical functions as defining features of ancient quadrangular complexes in the country.

Ultimately, based on the author’s field observations and references to previous research (Bahrami, Agha Ebrahimi, Samani, Irani Behbahani, Moniri & Zehtabian, 2014; Javeri & Baghsheikhi, 2021; Hejabri, 2019; Mansouri & Javadi, 2018), and the document referring to the registration of Tepe Mil (1955), the following hypotheses are presented as a trace of the original nature of the Tepe Mil site:

- Hypothesis 1: The pre-erosion form of the hill is estimated to resemble a three-tiered pyramid.
- Hypothesis 2: The structure possessed calendrical functionality.

Discussion

Hypothesis 1: The pre-erosion form of the hill is estimated to resemble a three-tiered pyramid.

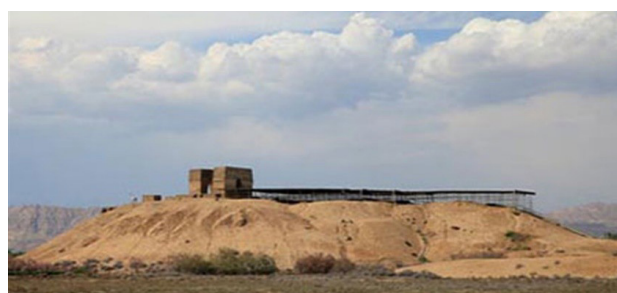
Upon visiting the complex and ascending the hill, at least three discernible tiers, collapsed in a pyramid-like fashion, were evident. Consequently, selected images of the complex were captured, and prominent lines of the hill were delineated as two-dimensional sketches. It should be noted that in the initial stages of reaching an abstraction of the initial form of the hill, its upper building, which had a special view due to the protection measures and the possible access model, was ignored. In Fig. 1, these selected pictures are presented.

In proportion to the four aforementioned selected images, the main lines of the perspectives have been extracted as follows (Fig.3). Also, two aerial maps of the complex exist (Fig.2); the first one has been extracted from “Report on the City and Region of Rey in Iran” (Doroodian, 2015), and the second one is from the article “...Is Tepe Mil the Fire Temple of Rey?” (Hejabri, 2019).

In this regard, although the first image is an imprecise



A



B



C



D

Fig.1. Selected views of Tepe Mil. Source: <https://amordadnews.com> .

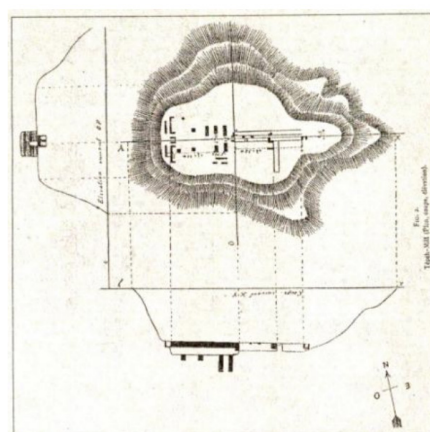
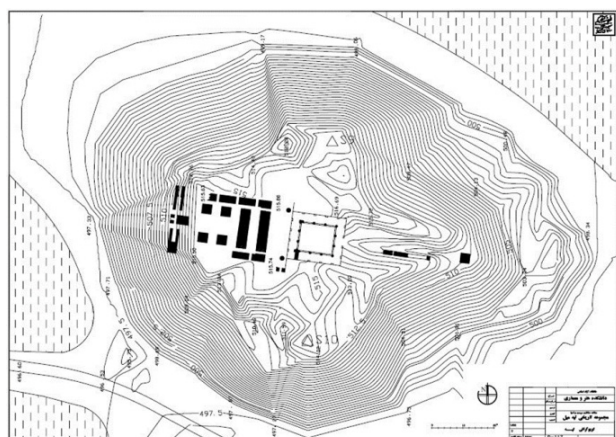


Fig. 2 . Two site plans of Tepe Mil. Source: Doroodian, 2015; Hejabri, 2019.

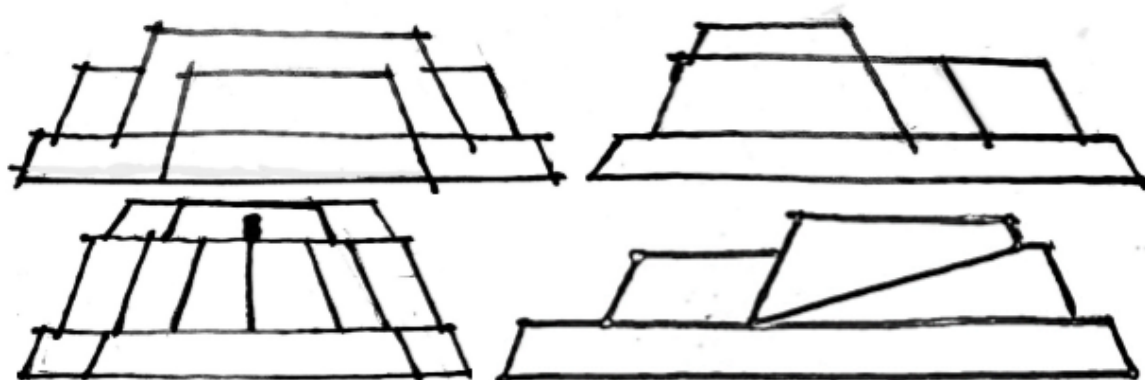


Fig. 3. Sketches of the main lines of the images of the four views of the Tepe Mil complex .Source: Author.

sketch, and the second image has shortcomings such as accuracy in determining the geographical direction or the ability to reflect visible slopes in the eastern foothills, it confirms the three-dimensional interpretation obtained during field observations and reflects symmetry around the main axis. Subsequently, the main lines of the selected facades are illustrated. Ultimately, these four facades are positioned side by side, creating the following three-dimensional representations alongside other elements on the hill (Figs. 4-6). It is important to note that the preparation of these three-dimensional models has been carried out under the assumption that the structure is symmetrical around its main axis.

As illustrated in the three-dimensional images, a continuous series of staircases, extending from the south and north [along the main axis], guide the first level to the second. From there, access points lead into the square-shaped building [located on the second level], allowing access to the third level. It is important to note that the estimated access from the second to the third level, likely situated on the southeast facade due to the position of the iwan on the third level, has not been clearly defined in the three-dimensional models. Therefore, traces of this access route [in the selected facades] are not identifiable to the author. In the following section, Fig. 7 illuminates the position of the remaining structure in relation to the two upper levels of the hill.

Additionally, two ramps along the main axis [likely covered in certain sections, possibly by a terrace on the third level] symmetrically connect the first level in the south to the second level in the north. The slope and width of these two ramps suggest the possibility of the passage of rows and equipment over them; however, the terminal space does not indicate such capacity. Although the definite extension of this path for access to the third level has not been determined, the presence of the entrance of the “tunnel” path on the northeast terrace [on the second level] suggests a specific type of access. This access implies that users entered the

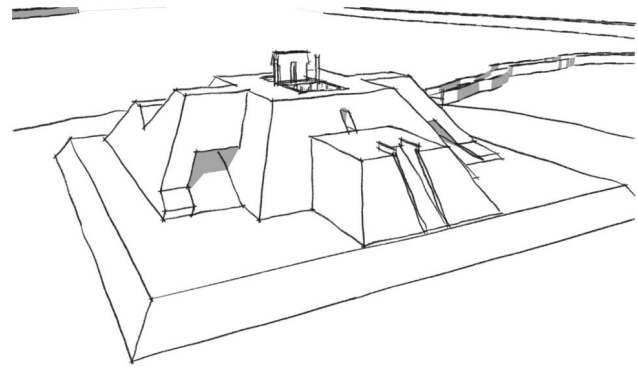


Fig. 4. Bird's Eye View of the Southern Front. Source: Author.

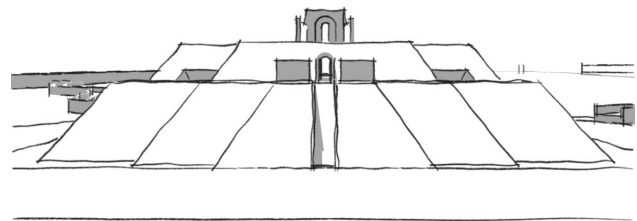


Fig. 5. North Front View. Source: Author.

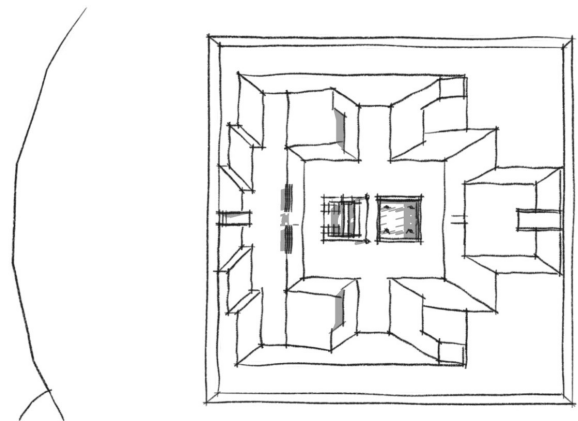


Fig. 6. Sketch of the Roof Plans of the Complex. Source: Author.

building on the third level under specific conditions or facilitated controlled exits.

Hypothesis 2: The structure possessed calendrical functionality.

Placing a solar chart relative to the building's location on its plan reveals that the axis of the building's organization is a line connecting two inspirational points. One in the southeast, where the sun rises on the first day of Dey month (December 22nd), and the other in the northwest, where the sun sets on the 31st of Khordad month (June 21st and the beginning of the

fourth month of the solar year). The inspiration behind these two moments has its roots in the value-free knowledge of geography, describing the maximum and minimum angles of the sun's perpendicular radiation on the Earth from the equator. These moments are referred to as the initiation of the “winter solstice” and the “summer solstice” and likely supported economic activities in an agrarian society.

On the other hand, it serves as a suitable representation of ceremonial events in local culture, now recognized as the Yalda night and [possibly] the Tirgan festival. Yalda, beyond its connections with other myths (such as Christmas, Saturnalia, Lohri, etc.), is introduced as the birthdate of Mehr, where the sun, in safeguarding the covenant of creation, is celebrated for shaping the cycle of life. Therefore, the rays of light are revered as symbols of overseeing covenants and preventing war and destruction.

“Tirgan” is the day of mourning for Iranians commemorating the defeat of Manuchehr (Iran) against the army of Afrasiab (Turān). This marks the point where the dominance of darkness over daylight begins. The importance of this angle is evident in an event that entrusted the determination of the territory to the pen of Arash Shivatir (bowman). Being a devout individual and a negotiator for the Iranian army, he dedicated his mortal life to this explanation. Hence, Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī commemorates “writers” on this day². Here, similarly to the explanation provided for Yalda, one can explore similar myths in other ancient wisdom to describe symbols associated with this orientation, such as Hermes, the Greek god whose name is incorporated into the scientific method of “hermeneutics” [for interpreting the meaning of works in the absence of the author]. The Greeks considered Hermes born on the fourth day of the month, and they identified Mercury as their planet. In ancient Rome, the same deity is known as “Mercury,” renowned for his role in message transmission and mediation among gods. In Islam, Hermes is equated with “Hazrat Idris,” the first to use the pen for writing, and is similar to

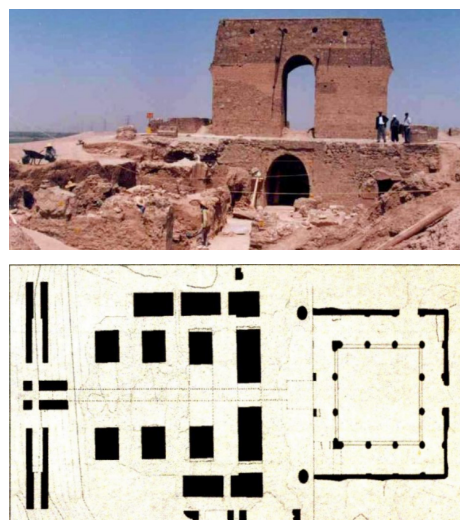


Fig. 7 .The condition of the upper building. Source: Doroodian, 2015.

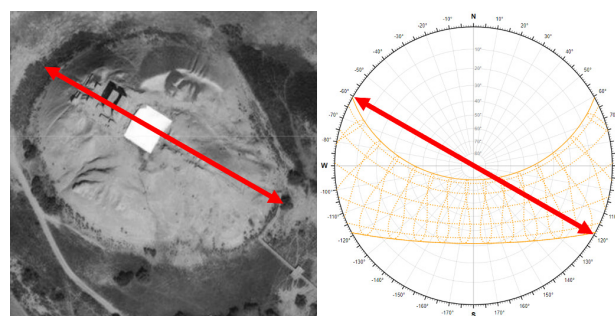


Fig. 8. The calendrical orientation of the Tepe-Mil complex. Source: A author.

Arash Kaman-Gir, who after delivering the message, faced a fate other than inevitable death. It is said that his soul resides in the fourth sky after his departure³.

Conclusion

In pursuit of expanding horizons and fostering research activities around the valuable Tape Mil complex, efforts have been directed towards providing an answer to the question: “How can the landscape of the Tepe Mill complex be described in relation to its environment, function, and previous representations?” Along this path, the researcher’s field observations from the presented space were juxtaposed with the representation of spaces. While abstracting a pyramid-like form from the primary nature of the hill, such data presented the pattern of accesses available on it. It also

provided evidence for the calendar characteristics of this building. This implies that the principal axis of the Tepe Mil and the structures upon it extend in a manner aligning with the sunrise points on the first day of Dey (December 22nd) and its sunset on the 31st of Khordad (June 21st), moments that hold both geographical and cultural significance.

Ultimately, the author, while appreciating the critical confrontation of researchers with the presented assumptions in this discourse, recommends a study on the mutual relationship between “water” and “Tepe-Mil” from various geographical dimensions (such as the current flow pattern, vegetation coverage, etc.), spatial dimensions (such as the role of water in determining Tepe’s relationship with other structures in the region or the trace of water in defining the boundaries of existing agricultural plots), infrastructural aspects (including water supply, controlling its effects on the structure, water purification), and meaningful dimensions (from a ritualistic perspective, from a power perspective, etc.).

Endnote

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