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A Preliminary Study of Kushk-i Sa'idabad-i Tabriz: The Ilkhanid Midway Settlement in Northwest of Iran

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Abstract

Periodic travel and movement between various summer and winter residences were central practices of the Ilkhanid court, as evidenced by numerous accounts in the chronicles from this era and throughout the reign of all Ilkhanids. During these seasonal journeys, the Ilkhanid ordu resided in various seasonal and midway settlements. While historical documents indicate that many of these residences can be located in regions under Lichened influence, only a few have been thoroughly studied to date. This article presents the preliminary results of an ongoing project aimed at tracing the itineraries of the Ilkhanids in Iran, focusing on the Tabriz-Ujan route and the potential location of Kushk-i Sa'idabad, situated along this route. The primary question this research seeks to answer is: Based on historical and archaeological evidence, where was Kushk-i Sa'idabad situated, and what were its characteristics as a midway settlement during the Ilkhanid period? To address this question, this research analysed historical documents and conducted archaeological surveys in areas thought to be the location of this kushk. The findings reveal two potential sites, one to the north and one to the south, of a village in the eastern suburbs of Tabriz, currently known as Sa'idabad. These findings suggest that the remains of this kushk were likely situated at one of these two identified sites.

Keywords: Seasonal Settlements, Midway Settlements, Ilkhanid Dynasty, Tabriz, Sa'idabad.

Article Type: Research Article

Introduction

Annual itineraries were a fundamental aspect of the lifestyle of rulers descended from nomadic pastoralists. These rulers, present in Iran since the 10th century AD, were predominantly desert Turks who, despite assuming control over Iran's urban population, continued to maintain their nomadic practices. Although evidence suggests the construction of grand palaces during the Ghaznavid and Seljuk eras, numerous accounts also document the rulers' periodic journeys between seasonal destinations (Durand-Guédy 2011: 223; 2013: 149-151).

With the Mongol invasion, a new nomadic group entered the Iranian plateau. Historical records suggest that these tribes adhered more strictly to nomadic lifestyles than their Turkic predecessors, often avoiding urban living whenever possible (Hatef Naiemi 2019: 231). The court chronicles from this period detail the Mongols' regular movements throughout Iran, documenting their seasonal journeys from the onset of the invasion through the conclusion of the Ilkhanid era. These annual migrations between winter and summer destinations typically included the Ilkhan and a large retinue of courtiers and soldiers. During these itineraries, the royal ordu travelled along designated routes and established temporary encampments prepared by the "Yurtchis". Occasionally, the caravan would pass through royal hunting grounds located along the route (Nakhjavani 1976: 62-63).

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The royal ordu typically remained at its primary summer and winter destinations for approximately three months or longer. However, the duration of their stay at midway residences varied from three days to forty days, contingent upon the importance and location of the residence (Garakani Dashteh *et al.* 2022: 41-44). Some of these midway residences featured a royal kushk, owing to their significance, the frequency of Ilkhan visits, and the local climate (Garakani Dashteh *et al.* 2022: 41-44).

It can be inferred that a permanent crew maintained these kushks year-round to ensure they were ready for the Ilkhan's arrival (Nakhjavani 1976: 62-63). Referring to these kushks as midway kushks in this study, they constituted a significant category of royal structures during the Ilkhanid period. Due to their isolated, single-building nature, and use of lightweight materials such as wood, these kushks likely had a shorter lifespan than palaces and royal complexes like Suqurluq, Soltaniyyah, and Ujan, which were built at primary summer destinations using heavier building materials. Consequently, very few remains of these buildings have survived to the present day, and only a limited number have been archaeologically examined and studied, compared to other royal complexes from the Ilkhanid period. It is important to note that the scarcity of archaeological and historical evidence has resulted in this type of building receiving less attention in the classification of Ilkhanate edifices.

Based on historical documents, the road connecting Tabriz, the capital of the Ilkhanids, to Ujan (one of their summer residences located east of Tabriz) was a significant route utilised during many of their periodic journeys (Kashani 1969: 31; Mustawfi Qazvini 2019: 79). These documents indicate that there were at least two midway settlements along this route, and chronicles from the late Ilkhanid period record the Ilkhans' residence in these locations (Kashani 1969: 31; Rashid Al-Din 1994: 1270). One such residence, known as Kushk-i Sa'idabad, was situated directly in the middle of the road from Tabriz to Ujan (Mustawfi Qazvini 2019: 79).

This research aims to identify the potential location of Kushk-i Sa'idabad by examining historical documents related to the kushk and conducting a field survey of possible sites along the route between Tabriz and historical Ujan. The primary question this research seeks to answer is: Based on historical and archaeological evidence, where was Kushk-i Sa'idabad situated, and what were its characteristics as a midway settlement during the Ilkhanid period? The article begins with an overview of Mongol and Ilkhanid midway residences to underscore the significance of such structures during this period. It then delves into historical sources to investigate the possible location and layout of Sa'idabad. Finally, preliminary archaeological surveys are undertaken to identify potential sites associated with Sa'idabad.

Research Background

The topic of annual itineraries has been a significant focus in Mongol studies. However, there has been limited research specifically addressing the annual itineraries of the Ilkhans in Iran and their associated settlements. Among the existing literature, Atwood's article (2015) serves as a foundational work for understanding the motivations behind the annual itineraries of Mongol rulers. In his study, Atwood categorised the periodic movements of the Mongol khans across the Mongolian plateau into two types: north-south and east-west journeys. He posited that these journeys, considering the distances involved, differed from traditional nomadic movements and were primarily undertaken to explore various regions within their main territory. Additionally, Melville (1990) has dedicated an article to examining the annual itineraries of Öljeitü, characterising his periodic travels as efforts to explore different areas under Ilkhanid influence, with one objective being the maintenance of trade route security.

Beyond the topic of annual itineraries, the study of midway residences and seasonal settlements is crucial for understanding the customs, culture, and architecture of the Ilkhanid era. The published research on these settlements can be categorised into two groups. The first group focuses on exploring the seasonal and key periodic residences of the Ilkhans. Blair (1993) examined several significant seasonal residences from the Ilkhanate period, including the Soltaniyyah complex. Masuya (2002) explored life in the Ilkhan court and their seasonal residences, focusing on the Suqurluq residence in present-day Takht-i Sulayman, and provided a map outlining the boundaries of Ilkhan seasonal movements, along with the potential locations of their settlements. Huff (2006) examined the Ilkhanid-era structures at the Takht-i Sulayman complex as a seasonal residence and briefly discussed other similar buildings. Garakani Dashteh and Mortezaei (2022 a) compared various structures of Ilkhan seasonal

residences and investigated their locations within Iran, identifying potential seasonal residences not previously mentioned in other studies.

The second category of research investigates the midway residences of the Ilkhans in Iran, which is the primary focus of this study. Scholars such as Luschey (1990), Kleiss (2006), and Khanmoradi (2018) have independently examined the so-called Mongolian kushk in the historical region of Bisotun, primarily relying on archaeological evidence. Luschey and Kleiss not only located the Mongolian kushk, believed to have been constructed during the Öljeitü period but also provided a map of this small structure and analysed the pottery found at the site. Khanmoradi, while discussing these findings, proposed hypotheses regarding the location of the historical city Sultanabad-i Chamchal, which was established during Öljeitü's reign according to historical documents, suggesting that this kushk was situated on the southern outskirts of that city. These studies represent early research on a specific midway building or kushk from the Ilkhanid period. Garakani Dashteh *et al*. (2022) have explored the structure of qarshis (permanent settlements) utilised by Mongol emperors in both Mongolia and China, along with midway kushks built during the Ilkhanid era. They provided a map of potential Ilkhan settlement locations, including midway kushks, and introduced several new kushks. Finally, it is also important to highlight the article by Siri and Amirhajloo (2020), which identified the potential location of one of the Ilkhanid-era midway settlements, known as Khoshi-khaneh, in the Lar Plain region. Their findings were based on documents from the Qajar period, as well as archaeological field surveys.

This study emphasises the significance of the annual itineraries of the Ilkhans in Iran and explores the role of midway kushks within their periodic settlements. For the first time, it focuses on a specific kushk located near the capital of the Ilkhanid dynasty. Utilising historical and archaeological evidence, the present study aims to determine the potential location of this kushk.

Research Method

This research was conducted in two main stages. The first phase involved studying historical documents related to the periodic travels of the Ilkhans, particularly focusing on the historical route connecting Tabriz to Ujan. During this phase, all court chronicles written during and after the Ilkhanid period were examined to identify the locations and names of the midway settlements used by the Ilkhans along this route. Subsequently, to elucidate place names, we investigated possible changes in local names and the present-day locations of the names mentioned in historical documents, geographical texts, and various travelogues. The second phase concentrated on field surveys, wherein survey teams further investigated potential sites that had been identified and marked during the first phase, aiming to uncover material culture.

Seasonal Itineraries of Ilkhans and Their Periodic Settlements

Similar to the Mongol emperors in China and Mongolia, the Ilkhans were nomadic rulers who did not remain in one place for extended periods. Historical documents from the Ilkhanid era enable us to trace the Ilkhans' periodic itineraries, starting from the early reign of Hulegu Khan to the accession of Abu Sa'id Bahadur Khan. These accounts provide insights into not only the routes of these itineraries but also the settlements and residences utilised by the Ilkhans over a century (Garakani Dashteh and Mortezaei 2022 a: 41-43). Their periodic movements were deeply rooted in their nomadic heritage, a tradition they continued even after embracing the culture of urbanised societies. One prominent hypothesis regarding these royal itineraries suggests that, following the establishment of large empires and fixed settlements, the purpose of these journeys shifted from maintaining a nomadic lifestyle to visiting various parts of their vast territories. This hypothesis argues that the significant distances between royal residences, in contrast to traditional Turkish-Mongolian encampments, necessitated these periodic movements to monitor and maintain control over subordinate lands, thereby ensuring the preservation and continuity of the monarchy (Atwood 2015: 312-315).

Furthermore, the adoption of periodic itineraries by nomadic steppe communities during their rise to power has been viewed as an innovative form of spatial utilisation. The seasonal movements of rulers and their entourage, even after establishing control over advanced urban centres, enabled them to maintain annual oversight of their subjects. These itineraries can be seen as a factor contributing to the superiority of nomadic governments over sedentary societies. Through this strategy, nomadic rulers could effectively plan and oversee the

implementation of policies while concurrently attending to the core regions of their empires (Honeychurch and Amartuvshin 2006: 274). However, it is important to note that over time, the frequency and duration of these periodic journeys by nomadic dynasties gradually decreased. In the late Yuan (1294-1368 AD) and Ilkhanid periods, rulers began to spent increasingly longer periods in urban centres, reflecting their growing inclination towards settled lifestyles after a century of nomadic rule (Hatef Naiemi 2019: 231).

Based on extant historical documents from the Ilkhanid period, the settlements used by the Ilkhans can be categorised into two types: seasonal settlements and midway settlements.

Seasonal Settlements: Drawing from surviving accounts of the seasonal itineraries of the early Mongol emperors in Mongolia, their seasonal settlements can be classified into four categories: spring, summer, autumn, and winter settlements (Shiraishi 2004: 110-115). However, historical documents indicate that these divisions were not strictly observed in the seasonal movements of the Yuan emperors in China and the Ilkhans in Iran. In both empires, the rulers' seasonal journeys were primarily revolved around two main destinations: summer and winter settlements. Spring and autumn settlements were typically used for shorter durations, serving as midway residences during transitions between the primary seasonal destinations (Garakani Dashteh and Mortezaei 2022 a: 36-44). Based on the location and type of settlements employed by the Ilkhans in each seasonal journey, these settlements can be further divided into two categories: yurts and sarays (palaces).

The yurt is regarded as the oldest form of dwelling among nomadic Turkic and Mongol peoples. These encampments, sometimes enclosed within a cab wall, functioned as designated areas where nomads would pitch their tents. In many cases, the yurts themselves lacked architectural structures and were primarily understood as the location for the tents of the Khan and his retinue (Rogers *et al*. 2005: 811-812). While the yurts of the Mongol emperors were situated in Mongolia's summer pastures, the primary yurts in Iran were established in winter destinations such as Aran, Mazandaran, and the outskirts of Baghdad (Rashid Al-Din 1994: 1264, 1275; Kashani 1969: 154). These yurts provided shelter and accommodation for the Ilkhans and their entourage during their winter campaigns and migrations. Similar to the Sarays, these yurts, were considered places for the royal ordu, with numerous references to the Ilkhans using these yurts in their main winter settlements, such as Soltan Dovin, Qarabagh, Nghatu, and Muhavvel (Rashid Al-Din 1994:1048, 1124, 1235)[1] .

Sarays, on the other hand, were royal complexes comprising permanent structures primarily located in the Ilkhans' summer destinations. These royal compounds were planned and constructed like small towns. Sarays such as Alataq, and Suqurluqand Mozaffariyyah were largely situated away from major cities. In contrast, a few palaces, such as Soltaniyyah and Ujan- used as the Ilkhan's summer residences towards the end of the Ilkhanid era- were located within major urban centres (Garakani Dashteh and Mortezaei 2022 b: 464-465).

Midway Settlements: If we view the summer and winter residences as the primary destinations for the Ilkhans' annual journeys, all settlements along the route connecting these two main locations can be classified as midway settlements. Stays in these settlements, which also included those used in spring and autumn, were typically short-term, often lasting no longer than a month (Garakani Dashteh *et al.* 2022: 116-117). One type of midway settlement mentioned in the chronicles of this period is a small, independent structure called a "Kushk," situated at the midpoint of the Ilkhans' periodic journeys and featured a central building or Kushk within a large area. Due to the lack of archaeological evidence, it is

[1]The use of yurts as temporary structures in wintering areas is supported by numerous historical reports from the Ilkhanid period. In these accounts, settlements in winter regions are predominantly referred to as yurts (Rashid Al-Din 1994: 1151, 1182, 1192, 1301; Kashani 1969: 41, 49, 83, 109). This contrasts with reports of known summer settlements during the Ilkhanid period. Surviving descriptions of summer locations such as Alataq, Ujan, Suqurluq, and Mozaffariyyah explicitly mention architectural structures (Rashid Al-Din 1994: 1048, 1125, 1173), while fewer summer residences, like Kalpush, are noted to have been built with temporary structures (Rashid Al-Din 1994: 1232). It is possible that the Ilkhanids' extended stays in summer residences prompted the construction of permanent structures, whereas their brief and temporary stays in winter settlements, along with their constant movement throughout wintering areas—as indicated by reports of their residence in regions such as Aran and Mesopotamia (Rashid Al-Din 1994: 1272-1274; Kashani 1969: 82-83)—may have justified the use of temporary structures. However, this remains a hypothesis that requires further investigation.

challenging to make definitive judgments about the type of settlement for the Ilkhan's court members in these locations; however, based on historical documents, it can be inferred that the settlements for the Ilkhan's entourage were organised around these midway residences, similar to how Mongol Qarshis erected tents around the main Kushk (Figure. 1) (Rogers *et al*. 2005: 813).

route from his summer residence, was documented in historical sources as "Qarshi-i Turghu Baliq" (Juvayni 2008: 254, 275; Rashid Al-Din 1994: 673). Potential remains of this residence have been identified near the historical area of Karakorum city, atop the "Melkhiin Tolgoi" mound. The site features an enclosed area with a substantial kushk located at its western edge. In addition



Figure.1: *Ilkhanid Seasonal and Midway Residences (After: Garakani Dashteh and Mortezaei 2022b).*

The Settlements or Midway Kushks of the Mongol Emperors and Ilkhans

Historical records reveal the existence of at least two qarshis, or midway kushks, established by the early Mongol emperors in Mongolia. The first, known as "Qarshi-i Suri", is described by Juvayni as a meticulously constructed and decorated kushk built by Muslim architects (Juvayni 2008: 417). This kushk, which served as the emperor's spring residence, was situated north of Karakorum in the centre of the Mongolian Plateau. Recent excavations suggest that the historical site of "Doytan Balgas", situated 42 kilometres north of Karakorum, corresponds to Qarshi-i Suri. At the site's core, remnants of a substantial building remain, surrounded by traces of approximately 50 smaller platforms, interpreted as sheds for the emperor's retinue (Shiraishi 2004: 110-111).

The second midway kushk, situated 12 kilometres from Karakorum and along the emperor's return

to the main building, the remains of a smaller structure were discovered near the compound's entrance gate (Rogers *et al*. 2004: 80-81).

Historical and archaeological records suggest that Mongol emperors of the Yuan dynasty in China built several midway residences between their summer capital, Shangdu, and winter capital, Dadu. Persian chronicles refer to a select few of these structures as Qarshis and kushks (Rashid Al-Din 1994: 903-904), while Chinese chronicles use the term "Liangting," meaning "cool kuṣk," as a general designation for these structures utilised during the summer (Masuya 2013: 244).

Among the most prominent Liangtings, or midway kushks, of the Yuan emperors in China are "Western Liangting," "Eastern Liangting," and "Northern Liangting," all situated at considerable distances from Shangdu. Each residence encompasses a large enclosed area, with the emperor's palace serving as the central structure. Chinese chronicles

refer to this palace as “Ligong,” or the “temporary palace,” signifying its role as a temporary abode for the emperor during his travels (Masuya 2013: 244).

West Liangting was situated midway along the road connecting Dadu and Shangdu and featured the Ligong building, along with administrative and ceremonial structures (Polo 1984: 98-100). Northern Liangting served as the emperor’s spring residence, housing a unique Ligong building at the centre of an enclosed area (Masuya 2013: 247). Finally, Eastern Liangting, known as “Qarshi-i Langten” in Persian chronicles (Rashid Al-Din 1994: 903), was located in the eastern suburbs of Shangdu. It consisted of a rectangular enclosed area with the Ligong building as its sole structure within the complex (Masuya 2013: 247).

The Ilkhanid rulers of Iran established a network of residential complexes, known as kushks, along their seasonal migration routes. These served as strategic stopovers. Notable examples include:

Kushk-i Gulistan

This kushk is positioned near Ardabil (Kashani 1969: 51), and was stationed along the Moghan-Ujan route. While historical sources attest to its existence, archaeological verification of its precise placement is lacking.

Kushk-i Sultani

This is referenced near Hamadan (Kashani 1969: 88).

Kushk-i Mothanna

It is depicted in eastern Baghdad (Rashid Al-Din 1994: 1271). Both Kushk-i Sultani and Mothanna were established along the Baghdad-Soltaniyyah route; however, aside from textual records, no archaeological evidence has been identified to verify their exact sites.

Kushk-i Murad

This is documented in North Khorasan (Rashid Al-Din 1994: 1234; Mirkhwand 2006: 4318). This kushk was constructed during Ghazan’s governorship in Khorasan, and was placed on the route between Soltan Dovin and the city of Khabushan. Apart from historical sources, there is no archaeological evidence to confirm its exact placement.

Kushk-i Sa’idabad

It is recorded in eastern Tabriz. This kushk was set along the road from Ujan to Tabriz (Kashani 1969: 31).

Kushk-i Ghazan

It lies near Qori Gol Lake. This kushk was also set along the route from Ujan to Tabriz (Rashid Al-Din 1994: 1270).

Additionally, archaeological studies on certain settlements from the Ilkhanid period reveal instances of midway settlements that are not explicitly mentioned in the chronicles of that time. For instance, the Mongolian kushk at Bisotun (Kleiss 2006: 280-289), located along the route between Solṭaniyyah and Baghdad, is believed to have been built during the reign of Öljeitü. Furthermore, it is important to emphasise the recently discovered remains of Kushk-i Khoshi-khaneh in the Lar Plain, which likely functioned as one of the midway settlements established during the Arghun period, situated south of the Alborz foothills (Siri and Amirhajloo 2020). Further archaeological investigation is crucial to fully comprehend the extent and significance of the Ilkhanid midway kushk network in Iran.

Sa'idabad in Historical Documents

Despite its potential significance, very few reports from the Ilkhanid era have explicitly mentioned Kushk-i Sa'idabad, a midway kushk. Kashani mentioned it in the *Tarikh-i Öljeitü*, noting the Ilkhan’s stay in this kushk after returning from Ujan: "The Ilkhanid ordu moved towards Tabriz and stopped at kushk-i Sa'idabad, reaching the beautiful city of Tabriz on Monday" (Kashani 1969: 31). This account suggests that after performing the coronation ceremony in Ujan city, Öljeitü (1304-1316 AD) travelled to Tabriz to visit Ghazan’s tomb, briefly residing at kushk-i Sa'idabad en route. From this report, two conclusions emerge. Firstly, Sa'idabad was located in the middle of the road from Ujan to Tabriz. Secondly, given Öljeitü's stay there in the early months of his rule, it is reasonable to infer that kushk-i Sa'idabad was built prior to his reign.

The earliest reference to an area called Sa'idabad near Tabriz appears in the *Tarikh-i Öljeitü*. Prior to this account, the name does not appear in any known historical records or documents. Subsequently, Mustawfi (1281-1349 AD), in his *Nuzhat al-Qulub,* also referenced Sa'idabad, describing it as a village located within the Mehranrud district, east of Tabriz (Mustawfi Qazvini 2019: 79). Mustawfi further noted its position midway between Ujan and Tabriz, with a distance of four parasangs (approximately 25

kilometres) from both Ujan and Tabriz (Mustawfi Qazvini 2019: 183). This geographical placement is corroborated by Romelu, who also stated that Sa'idabad is four parasangs from Tabriz (Romelu 2004: 326).

Another report from the same period as Mustawfi's, which references to Sa'idabad district, belongs to the Nakhjavani (1245-1328 AD). He stated:

"It was reported that during these times, as Sa'idabad village lies along the path of travellers, its elders were obligated to prepare food (Shurba) for their welcome. Consequently, and according to the Ilkhan's decree, no soldiers or officers were permitted to collect taxes from the villagers or harass them after this date (Nakhjavani 1976: 634-635)."

This report significantly enhances our understanding of the location of Sa'idabad and the Ilkhanid-era Kushk constructed there. Based on this report, it can be inferred that Sa'idabad was situated in the Mehranrud district, east of Tabriz, adjacent to a busy suburban road, as mentioned in the *Nuzhat al-Qulub*. Notably, the report also indicates that the inhabitants of Sa'idabad were responsible for welcoming guests and travellers passing through or departing from Tabriz, providing them with "Shurba" (food).

This account of Sa'idabad bears similarities to Persian chronicles that describe the Kushk or qarshi-i Turghu Baliq located near Karakorum. The name Turghu Baliq translates to the city or district where Turghu is provided to travellers. This Turghu was a meal prepared at the emperor's expense for those passing through (Boyle 1972: 127). Both Juvayni and Rashid Al-Din mentioned the Mongol emperor's frequent stays at the royal qarshi of Turghu Baliq, where he would pause before entering Karakorum and eat the Turghu prepared for travellers (Juvayni 2008: 254; Rashid Al-Din 1994: 673). By comparing these reports, we can draw parallels between the location of the Kushk-i Sa'idabad on the outskirts of Tabriz and the qarshi-i Turghu Baliq on the outskirts of Karakorum.

From the reports above, it can be inferred that Sa'idabad served multiple purposes during the late Ilkhanid era. Firstly, it functioned as a royal resort for the Ilkhans during their journeys between Ujan and Tabriz. Secondly, it provided a resting place for other travellers passing through the region. The village likely housed the staff and caretakers of the royal Kushk, as well as those responsible for welcoming travellers and guests on behalf of the Ilkhan. The current location of Sa'idabad, situated east of Tabriz, corresponds with the description provided in the *Nuzhat al-Qulub*. The distance between present-day Sa'idabad and the historical boundaries of Tabriz further supports the assumption that these two locations are the same.

Another issue arising from the provided documents is identifying which Ilkhan oversaw the construction of this kushk. Before establishing the city of Ujan and its subsequent prosperity during Ghazan's reign, the route connecting this region to Tabriz had not received significant attention. This interpretation is reinforced by the scant reports regarding its use by the Ilkhans. For example, Arghun travelled this route only once in 1248 AD, and Gaykhatu also used it in 1248 AD to settle in the area (Rashid Al-Din 1994: 1158, 1196). Consequently, the construction of the Kushk-i Sa'idabad can be attributed to the period when prosperity returned to the road between Tabriz and Ujan, particularly when Ghazan rebuilt Ujan as his summer capital. Furthermore, the Tarikh-i Öljeitü records the Ilkhan's stay at Kushk-i Sa'idabad during the early days of his reign (Kashani 1969: 31), suggesting that the kushk existed before Öljeitü acceded to the throne.

Based on these factors, it is reasonable to infer that Kushk-i Sa'idabad was likely constructed during the mid to late reign of Ghazan Khan, coinciding with the establishment of Ujan as a major city and the increased importance of the communication route between Tabriz and Ujan.

After the fall of Ilkhanid rule, Sa'idabad continued to serve as the temporary residence of other rulers who considered Tabriz the centre of their rule or who travelled through the city. Mustawfi, in *Zayl-i Tarikh-i Gozideh*, recounted the 1357 AD battle between Malik Ashraf and Jani Beg, noting that Malik Ashraf camped in Sa'idabad (Mustawfi Qazvini 2017: 60-61). Sa'idabad also held significance for Turkmen princes of Aq Qoyunlu, as Ruzbehan-i Khonji reported Yaqub Aq Qoyunlu's stay in Sa'idabad during his journey from Tabriz to Ujan in 1488 AD, and described it as a pleasant and beautiful residence (Ruzbehan-i Khonji 2003: 314). Similarly, Torkaman noted Shah Safi's stay in Sa'idabad during his 1634 AD journey from Tabriz

to the Sahand, referring to the area as “Chaman-i Sa’idabad” (Sa’idabad’s meadow) (Torkaman 2003: 161).

In his detailed report on the war travel of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent (1520-1566 AD) during the reign of Shah Tahmasp I (1524-1576 AD) in the western and northwestern regions of Iran, Matrakci discussed the Ottoman army’s three-day sojourn in a village known as Sa’idabad near Tabriz. Like other reports, Matrakci referred to Sa’idabad as “Chaman-i Sa’idabad”, and his painting of the Sultan’s camp in this location offers valuable insights (Matrakci 2000). Based on this painting, the hypothesis regarding the presence of a kushk in this area is strengthened, helping to clarify other ambiguous cases about the appearance and structure of this kushk.

In this painting, the camp is depicted in a flat plain with a narrow stream flowing nearby. A prominent building with a square plan is situated next to the camp. This large structure rests on a platform and features three main porches, with the central porch being taller than the two flanking porches (Figure. 2).

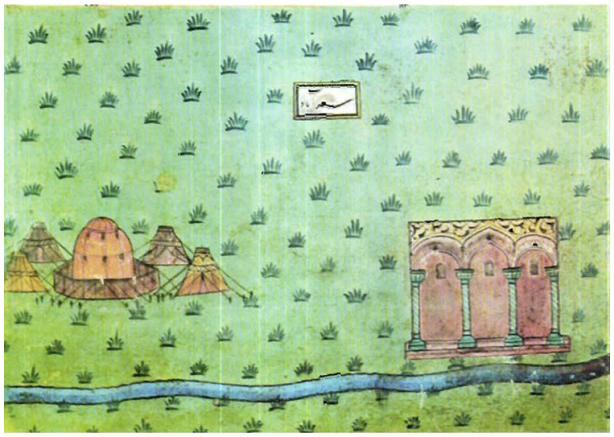


Figure. 2: *Sa'idabad Painting (After: Matrakci 2000).*

By comparing the painting of Kushk-i Sa'idabad with another painting by Matrakci depicting the Kushk-i Ujan[1] , as well as archaeological evidence from other royal buildings of the Ilkhanid period, we can gain a clearer understanding of the possible structure and appearance of Kushk-i Sa'idabad. The kushk-like structure shown in the Ujan painting is likely the remains of the Kushk-i Ghazani, built by Ghazan Khan as part of the royal complex in that city, as mentioned in historical chronicles (Khwandamir 2001: 501). This building is depicted as a kushk likely featuring an octagonal plan with a row of portico-like porches on its exterior, similar to the Kushk-i Sa'idabad.

Two major differences can be observed between the two buildings. First, the Kushk-i Sa’idabad features a square plan, likely with only one of its facades having an entrance porch. In contrast, the Kushk-i Ujan cannot be classified as square. The second difference pertains to the roof covering of the two structures. In Matrakci’s drawing of the Kushk-i Sa’idabad, the type of roof covering is unclear. Conversely, in the depiction of the Kushk-i Ujan, the building features a sloping roof adorned with blue glazed tiles in a style reminiscent of Chinese architecture. This roof remained intact until the Safavid era, likely because the Kushk-i Ujan continued to be used until the end of the Aq Qoyunlu period, as indicated by Ruzbehan-i Khonji’s account of its restoration by Yaqub Aq Qoyunlu (Ruzbehan-i Khonji 2003: 315) (Figure. 3).



Figure. 3: *Kushk-i Ujan in Right and Kushk-i Sa'idabad in Left (After: Matrakci 2000).*

Sa'idabad in Primary Archaeological Surveys: Present-day Sa'idabad is situated in the suburbs of Tabriz, approximately 20 kilometres east of the city. It is bordered by the Tabriz-Bostanabad road to the south and the Tabriz-Zanjan freeway to the north. The residential area of the village is located in the southern part, while agricultural lands and gardens occupy the northern part. In recent decades, the "Ali Nasab" industrial town, constructed south of the

[1]Ujan served as one of the summer residences of the Ilkhans, established during Ghazan's reign, located eight parasangs east of Tabriz (Mustawfi Qazvini 2019: 183). Currently, the remains of a historical site west of Bostan Abad (which is situated 60 kilometers east of Tabriz) are considered a possible location for the historical Ujan (Velayati *et al.* 2019: 110).

Tabriz-Bostanabad road, has emerged as the new industrial zone of Sa'idabad.

Given that historical accounts place Sa'idabad within the Mehranrud district and along the road connecting Tabriz to Ujan (in the suburbs of present-day Bostanabad), it is plausible that the potential remains of Kushk-i Sa'idabad may be located in the vicinity of the modern village. To investigate this, field surveys were conducted in the district using simple random sampling to pinpoint the possible location of the Kushk. During these surveys, the target area was divided into several equal sections, where a group of four members surveyed parallel transects within each section multiple times, making 45-degree changes from the previous route and maintaining a 3-metre distance between each member.

The surveys were carried out in two phases. The first phase focused on the southern areas of Sa'idabad, particularly the region south of the Tabriz-Bostanabad road. The second phase encompassed the main village of Sa'idabad, the agricultural lands to its north, and the historical Askiteppe mound, which is situated amidst the agricultural lands and gardens of Sa'idabad (Figure. 4).

During the first phase of the survey, several potential locations were identified through satellite imagery and field observations. Among these, an area of approximately 3 hectares, situated one-kilometre southeast of the new industrial town, was selected for further survey. According to interviews with local residents, this area was once part of a settlement within the Sa'idabad village a century ago, which was subsequently abandoned due to natural disasters.

The area is located at a considerable distance from the Sa'idabad River, and its terrain, unlike the land north of the road, is surrounded by various topographical changes. Currently, it is barren and arid. A railway construction project is underway nearby, and a construction road built for this purpose has passed by the side of the area, cutting off a portion of it.

During the sampling of this location, several groups of glazed ceramics were discovered, categorised as follows:

A. Black Painting Under Turquoise Glaze Ceramics: This type of ceramics constitutes most of the ceramics found in the area, having been produced since the twelfth century AD (Rice 1953: 76; Pope 2008: 1845) and becoming particularly prevalent during the Ilkhanid period. It emerged as one of the most common ceramic types of that era. The motifs on the ceramics discovered in this area primarily consist of plant designs executed in black, green, or dark blue, painted on the body of a vessel and covered with a transparent turquoise or dark blue glaze. These ceramic pieces closely resemble those found in sites such as Soltaniyyah (Mehryar *et al.* 1986: 27), Zino Abad, Bozanjerd (Mohammadi and Shabani 2016: 145), Andajin (Rezaei and Mohammadi 2020: 156) Arzanfoud (Zarei *et al.*

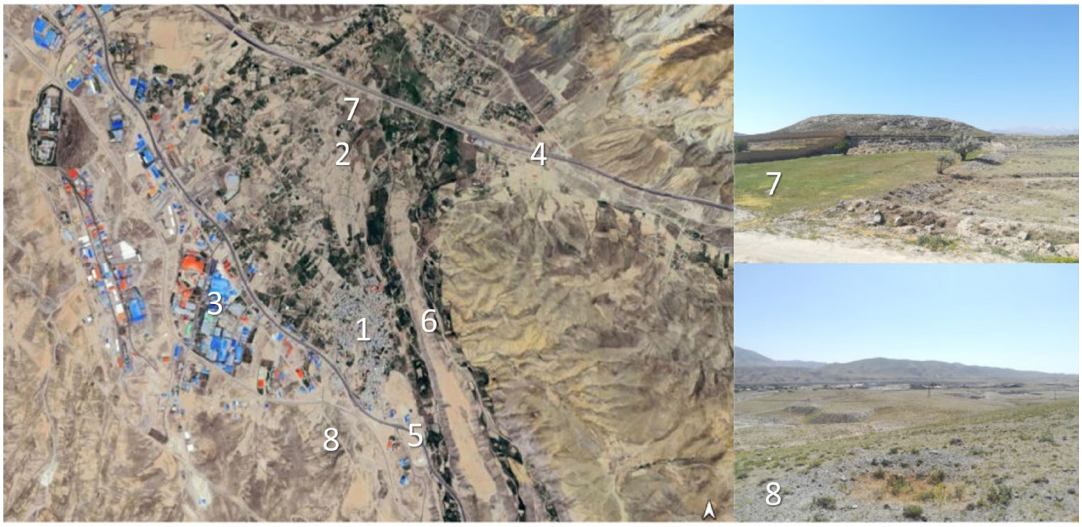


Figure.4: *Today's Location of Sa'idabad in Aerial Photo: 1. Residential Area 2. Sa'idabad Gardens and Farms 3. Industrial Complex 4. Tabriz-Zanjan freeway 5. Tabriz-Bostanabad Road 6. Sa'idabad River (After: Google Earth, Depicted on 11/12/2022). 7. Askiteppe 8. Historical Site in the south.*

2015: 79), Samen (Hemati Azandaryani *et al.* 2017: 198), Dargazin (Zarei 2020: 200), Neyriz Plain (Moradi and Karimian 2020: 290) and others. They can be dated to the 13th and 14th centuries AD (Figure. 5).

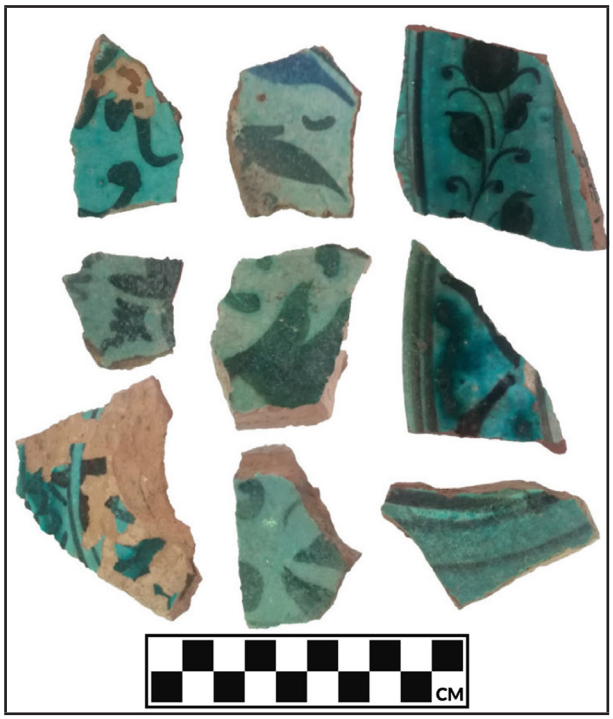


Figure. 5: *Ceramics from the Historical Site in the South: Black Painting Under Turquoise Glaze Ceramics.*

B. Ceramic Pieces With Polychrome Motifs Over Bright Glaze: Following the first category, these artefacts comprise the second largest quantity. The designs on these ceramic pieces predominantly feature plant motifs. These findings exhibit similarities to ceramics unearthed at Ilkhanid-era archaeological sites in Hamadan, such as Andajin (Rezaei and Mohammadi 2020: 156), Samen (Hemati Azandaryani *et al*. 2017: 198), Bozanjerd (Rezaei *et al*. 2023: 309), and Qaleh Juq (Rahmani 2015: 115), which are dated to the 12th-14th centuries AD (Grube 2005: 297) (Figure. 6).

C. Blue and White Ceramics: This category exhibits the lowest number of pottery fragments among those discovered. These pieces consist of ceramics featuring a blue underglaze pattern on a white glaze background, often using kaolin or pea paste. These fragments bear resemblance to those found at sites such as Tahyaq (Sharahi and Sedighian, 2019: 150), Bozanjerd (Rezaei *et al*. 2023: 309), Zino Abad (Mohammadi and Shabani 2016: 145), Samen (Hemati Azandaryani et al. 2017: 202), Jurjan (Mortezaei 2004: 64), Qal´eh Sang (Amirhajloo and Sedighian 2020: 170), and Zolfaabad (Nemati 2019: 39). Given the widespread production of this type of ceramics from the Ilkhanid period to the end of the Safavid period, it can be dated to the 13th-16th centuries AD (Nemati 2019: 40) (Figures. 7and 8).

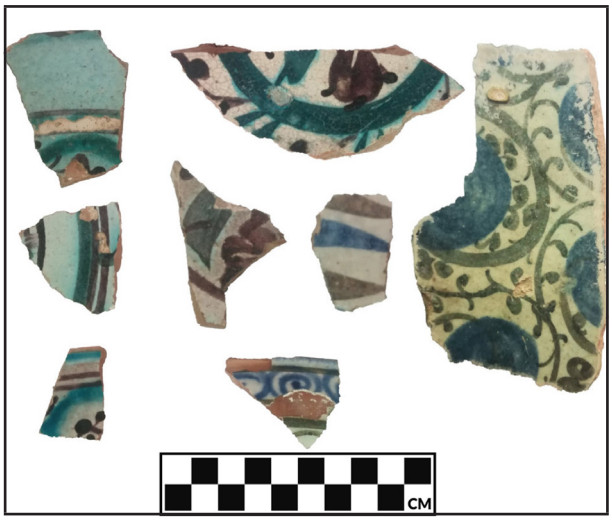


Figure. 6: *Ceramics from the Historical Site in the South: Ceramics with Poly-chrome Motifs Over Bright Glaze*

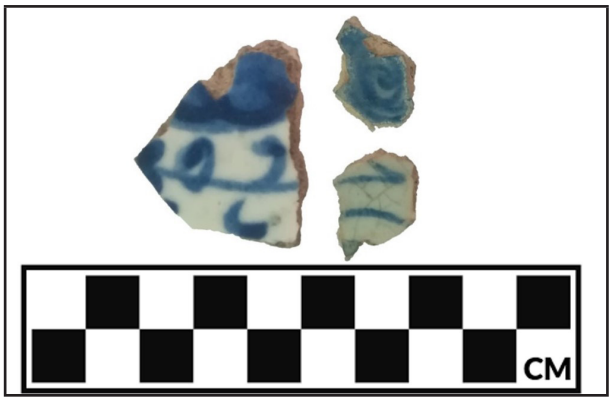


Figure. 7: *Ceramics from the Historical Site in the South: Blue and White Ceramics*

During the second phase of the survey conducted in Sa'idabad village, located in the northern part of the road, all the possible points on the river bank, as well as the surface of agricultural lands and orchards, were investigated through both satellite images and field surveys. In the totality of these investigations, the only important point is the historical Askiteppe mound, located on the southern side of the Tabriz-Zanjan highway and the bank near one of the branches of the Sa'idabad River.

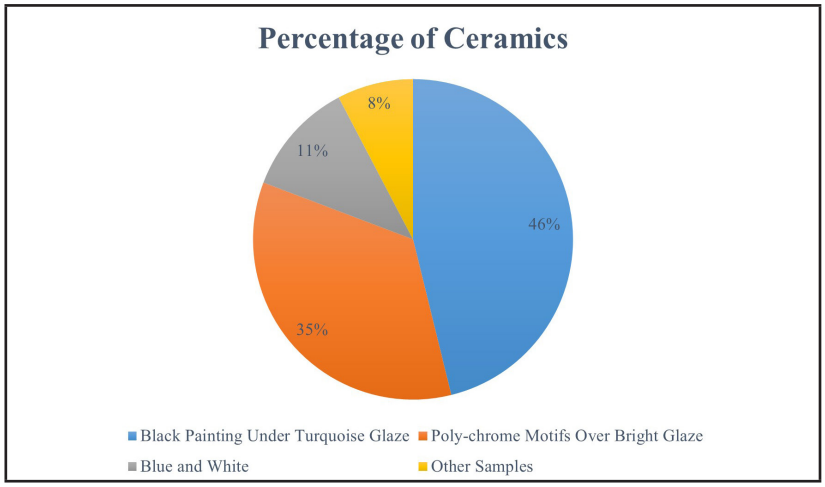


Figure. 8: *Percentage of Ceramics UnRecovered from the Southern Sa'idabad Site*

Askiteppe, with an area of about 4 hectares, is located amidst lowlands utilised for agriculture, and is currently the place of Sa'idabad gardens and agricultural lands. A recent survey uncovered a significant number of ceramic shards dating to the first millennium BCE, alongside some glazed ceramics from the Islamic period. Notably, the collection of Islamic pottery was predominantly found on the northwest-facing slope of the mound.

D. Black Painting Under Turquoise Glaze Ceramics: These artefacts bear resemblance to the pottery found in the southern Sa'idabad region and are likely from the 13th and 14th centuries AD (Figure. 9).

E. Sgraffiato: The ceramics recovered included two types of Slip Ware or Sgraffiato. The first type, which was the most abundant, consisted of Slip Ware or Sgraffiato ceramics featuring a green glaze, nearly identical to the Sgraffiato pottery found at the Ujan historical site (Velayati *et al*. 2019: 110), Ilkhanid-era archaeological sites in Iran like Bozanjerd (Rezaei *et al.* 2023, 309), Zino Abad (Mohammadi and Shabani 2016: 139-142), Samen (Hemati Azandaryani *et al.* 2017: 197), and Dargazin (Zarei 2020: 200), and can be dated to the historical period between the 10th and 13th centuries AD. The second type, which was much less common, was Sgraffiato with a milky glaze, also dating to the 10th to 13th centuries (Shateri *et al*. 2019: 184) (Figure. 10).

In the northwestern section of the mound, particularly on its slope, evidence of stone foundations suggests the presence of building remnants. Clay bricks of two sizes, measuring 25x25x7 and 21x21x7 cm, were also uncovered from this part (Figures. 11 and 12).



Figure. 9: *Ceramics from Askiteppe: Black Painting Under Turquoise Glaze Ceramics*



Figure. 10: *Ceramics from Askiteppe: Sgraffiato Ceramics.*

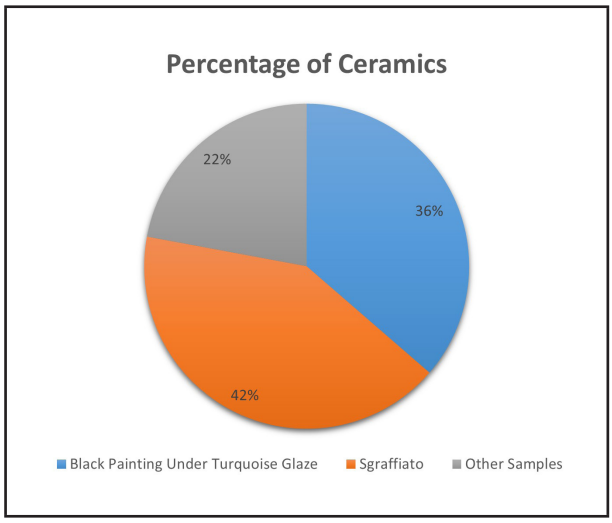


Figure. 11: *Percentage of Ceramics UnRecovered from the Askiteppe*



Figure.12: *Example of Bricks in Askiteppe*

Discussion

Drawing upon the historical documents and material culture found from the sites investigated, an analysis of the structure, shape, and possible location of Kushk-i Sa'idabad was carried out based on the following components:

Although Matrakci's painting of Sultan Suleiman's camp at the site of Sa'idabad cannot be regarded as a definitive document for evaluating the architectural form of the kushk building or its environment, it does allow for a preliminary glimpse into the structure likely associated with Kushk-i Sa'idabad and its location. The depiction suggests that the building appears to have been a single structure built on a platform, dominating the surrounding landscape. Given that only one side of the building is visible in the painting, it can be inferred that it had a square plan, probably featuring a large porch at the entrance. No definitive conclusions can be drawn about the roof structure, except that it was likely flat.

Furthermore, the painting of Kushk-i Sa'idabad provides two insights into the environment surrounding the kushk. First, it suggests that the kushk was situated next to a stream or small river, likely the Sa'idabad River. However, no conclusions

can be made regarding the topography (its elevation or depression) from this painting alone. One can only speculate—drawing on surviving reports from the 13th century that frequently mention ordus being established in "Chaman-i Sa'idabad" (Sa'idabad's meadow)—that both the ordu and consequently Kushk-i Sa'idabad were likely located in low-lying areas. Secondly, the absence of other buildings or signs of settlement near this structure in Matrakci's painting may indicate that the kushk was situated some distance from the village of Sa'idabad.

In addition to the interpretations derived from Matrakci's painting, the material culture uncovered at the surfaces of the two sites can also contribute to assessing the potential location of Kushk-i Sa'idabad. The ceramics retrieved from these sites exhibit a significant difference: those found at Askiteppe date from the 11th to 14th centuries, while the ceramics from the southern area range from the 13th to 16th centuries AD. This discrepancy suggests that the settlement at Askiteppe has a longer history and was likely abandoned much earlier than the southern area.

Given the above considerations, pinpointing the exact location of the Kushk-i Sa'idabad remains challenging. Interpretations of the painting associated with the Kushk-i Sa'idabad, along with historical accounts, suggest that its remains may be found within the boundaries of Askiteppe. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that Askiteppe is situated in lowlands that still host the Sa'idabad gardens today. Furthermore, although Askiteppe is distanced from the village of Sa'idabad, it is located near one of the branches of the Sa'idabad River. In contrast, the site identified to the south of Sa'idabad lies in a hilly, valley-filled terrain and is relatively far from the Sa'idabad River. However, surface material culture from both sites presents conflicting hypotheses. The onset of settlement in the southern area and its ongoing development into the Safavid period aligns more closely with the construction period of the kushk and its sustained occupation, as indicated by historical reports. Conversely, material culture suggests that settlement in the northern area predates the construction of the kushk and was abandoned much earlier than in the southern area.

Finally, two specific factors can be considered regarding the construction timeline of the building. First, considering the timeline for establishing the city of Ujan and the significance of the road connecting Tabriz to Ujan, it can be inferred that Kushk-i Sa'idabad was built shortly thereafter, during the mid-reign of Ghazan. Secondly, Öljeitü's stay at the Kushk-i Sa'idabad immediately following his coronation ceremony in Ujan suggests that it was not constructed during his reign, thereby reinforcing the hypothesis that it was built during Ghazan's time.

Conclusion

Based on the preliminary results of this research aimed at identifying Kushk-i Sa'idabad, it can be concluded that the site, which served as one of the Ilkhanid's midway residences, was likely constructed during the mid or late Ghazan period. Historical chronicles written after the Ilkhanid era highlight the significant importance of the Sa'idabad district near Tabriz for local rulers and kings of various dynasties, at least until the mid-Safavid era. Furthermore, historical documents and archaeological field surveys suggest that the present-day village of Sa'idabad in eastern Tabriz is likely the location of Kushk-i Sa'idabad. Archaeological investigations at this site have identified two potential areas to the south and north of the village, where a wealth of material culture from both Ilkhanid and post-Ilkhanid periods has been uncovered, indicating that Kushk-i Sa'idabad may be situated in one of these locations. However, due to incomplete studies, the specific location of the kushk remains uncertain. Evidence from historical documents, along with the painting of Kushk-i Sa'idabad, suggests that the northern site is more likely; however, material culture, such as ceramics found at both sites, diminishes the likelihood of this hypothesis in favour of the site located south of Sa'idabad. Additionally, our understanding of the physical structure of this kushk is limited to a drawing by Matrakci, which suggests it was probably a square building with a single porch situated on a high platform. Finally, it is important to emphasise that this article presents only preliminary findings from an ongoing project, and future studies are expected to provide clearer and more definitive answers to the questions raised at its outset.

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