



FASĀ II. TALL-E ŽAḤḤĀK

FASĀ

ii. Tall-e Žaḥḥāk

Tall-e Žaḥḥāk (or Žohāk) is an appellation of no great age given to an expansive archeological site on the Fasā plain in southern Fārs, 130 km south of Shiraz and 3 km southeast of the modern town of Fasā. More specifically, this toponym identifies a tell or artificial mound, lying within a still broader archeological zone, built up by successive layers of human occupation ([Plate I](#)). Beyond the mound of Tall-e Žaḥḥāk, there extends a heavily-eroded area of cultural debris delineated by a now dry moat that measures 660 by 750 m ([Figure 1](#)). Additional archeological material may be found on the surface in some areas well beyond the moat.

The ruins at Tall-e Žaḥḥāk were visited in 1811 by William Ouseley, who provided the earliest detailed description of the site (Ouseley, II, pp. 92-93, 103-4). In 1934 Aurel Stein opened two archeological trenches into the sides of the tell ([Figure 1](#), point B). Stein also published a topographical plan of the entire site together with several photographs (Stein, pp. 137-42). Exploratory excavations were carried out at Tall-e Žaḥḥāk in 1960 by the Fārs Department of Antiquities (Edāra-ye bāstān-šenāsī-e Fārs) and in 1972 by Pierre de Miroschedji, a French archeologist (de Miroschedji, Site F, p. 97).

Ceramic materials recovered by de Miroschedji point to two periods of prehistoric occupation. The first is defined by Kayrābād ware which resembles



the red Kaftarī pottery of the Marvdašt region of central Fārs. The second group, called Žaḥḥāk ware, shows stylistic similarities to the terracotta or cream-colored Kaftarī ware. Pottery of both groups is often decorated with a variety of painted geometrical patterns. The period of the Kaftarī wares is, in part, tentatively reckoned as ca. 2000-1800 B.C.E. (Sumner, p. 156). The Kayrābād and Žaḥḥāk sequences may also date within the Kaftarī time range.

Stein was the first to record that the Tall-e Žaḥḥāk mound consists, in part, of an extensive mud-brick platform overlain by later archeological debris and founded upon older cultural levels. The approximate height from the present exposed base of the tell upward to the base of the platform is 14 m. The distance from the platform base to the highest point of the tell is 8 m, giving the mound an overall height of 22 m (Stein, p. 138).

The wider cultural zone of Tall-e Žaḥḥāk is littered with fragments of Sasanian and early Islamic pottery. Numerous shards from these periods were also recovered from two trenches excavated by the Fārs Department of Antiquities in the 1960s.

During a visit to this site in 1973, John Hansman determined that most of the early Islamic glazed shards on the surface of the archeological zone could be dated to the 12th and 13th century (Hansman, pp. 295, 297). The sparsity of any Islamic ceramics from later periods supports the observation of Ebn al-Balkī (q.v.; tr. p. 32), who states that Pasā (the early Islamic name for this site) was formerly a great city but had fallen into decay in his day (12th century C.E.)

Scattered over the western and southern slopes of the Pasā tell examined by Hansman were not only the anticipated fragments of Sasanian and early Islamic pottery, but also a number of rim shards that look Achaemenid in form. These included shards of carinated bowls of finely-burnished red ware showing characteristic everted rims. Shards of less finely-made bowls with incurving rims possibly document a late Achaemenid presence together with a very probable subsequent Hellenistic occupation (Hansman, pp. 298-99). No shards of pre-Achaemenid ceramics of the first millenium B.C.E. were noted either by de Miroschedji or Hansman.

Stone Achaemenid platforms constructed on elevated ground are known of course from both Pasargadae in northern Fārs (on the west side of the Tall-e Takht) and at Persepolis (Stronach, pp. 11f.). The mud-brick platform on the



Pasā tell, with its seemingly associated scattering of Achaemenid shards, is most likely also to be Achaemenian in date.

Aurel Stein excavated a finely-made Achaemenid column base within the Tall-e Žaḥḥāk/Pasā site, at a point 350 m east of the tell (Figure 1, point A; [Plate II](#)). The base displays a sculptured, fluted design favored by the Achaemenians and also utilized for column bases in the Throne Hall, the Treasury, and in still other buildings on the Persepolis Terrace.

Given the available archeological evidence, it is thus probable that the site of Tall-e Žaḥḥāk/Pasā at one time represented an Achaemenid stronghold in southern Fārs. It is also possible that the above-mentioned column base contributes evidence for the existence of an Achaemenid royal residence or administrative center at Pasā, which lies 230 km south of Pasargadae.

As noted earlier, the toponym Fasā is an Arabicized form overlaying an older Persian Pasā by which the site of Tall-e Žaḥḥāk was known during the early Islamic period. Sir Harold Bailey theorized that Fasā/Pasā derives through a regular process from a postulated Old Persian **pa-sāya*, with the preverb *pa-* followed by *sāya-*, conveying the meaning “camp” (Bailey, p. 310). Hence “campground,” which, given the archeological evidence at Pasā/Tall-e Žaḥḥāk, and the OP root of Pasā, initially identified a nomadic Persian encampment that later evolved to a more permanent settlement. It also may be understood that an expansive land area, on which an encampment associated with the toponym **Pasāya-* is located, assimilated this appellation, thus becoming the Fasā plain that surrounds Pasā/Tall-e Žaḥḥāk.

Through the mechanics of usage transfer within a specific area, the traditional toponym identifying the original chief town Pasā on the Fasā plain was later utilized in Arabicized form to identify the new principal town, Fasā, located 3 km to the north in the same district. The older, abandoned town then gradually became associated with the appellation given its most prominent feature, the mound of Tall-e Žaḥḥāk.

Bailey noted that the form **Pasāya-* can be seen in the Elamite *ba-a-ši-ya-an*, a place in Fārs attested in the Persepolis Treasury Texts, and identified by George Cameron with Fasā (Bailey, p. 310). Hansman has suggested a possible connection of Elamite *pašip* and *pašap*, referenced in the Persepolis Fortification Tablets (Haddock, p. 742), with Pasā/Fasā (Hansman, p. 305). The Elamite forms identify large numbers of workers of different occupations who



are assigned in various parts of Fārs. The usage indicates that *pašap* had an ethnic or regional association or both. Women are usually indicated, but males are included in two texts. Bailey viewed this postulation as plausible. He suggested that Elamite *pašap*, *pašip* could be short forms or possibly written ones for **paši(ya)p* (Bailey, pp. 310-11).

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