

Research Paper

A Study of the Characteristics of Historical Farmsteads in Iran

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Abstract

Political stability and economic security have led to forming small and independent agricultural units in different regions of Iran in a period. They were shaped by combining water with residential, religious, service, and agricultural elements and are referred to in local communities as the 'Farmstead'. The historical documentation recorded their presence from the 4th century AH until the Safavid era from an economic and jurisprudential approach. Then, domestic and foreign elites introduced them in the form of books and travelogues in the Qajar era; however, they did not mention the architecture of the farmsteads and their features. In 2008, for the first time, some farmsteads are introduced by field surveys in Niasar, and the qualities of their formation and structure are considered by publishing papers. The landlords have built them with two types of agricultural castles and agricultural complexes. In addition, they have determined the location of farmstead by water resources, and their formation was subject to economic and security equations. The main research problem is insufficient knowledge of the historical farmstead of Iran in the national and international communities. These monuments are ruined due to various reasons in a period, and eventually, the people have forgotten their names. The current study aims to introduce the historical farmsteads of Iran by investigating their past and present status and the main question in this research is: What are the physical and functional characteristics of Iran's historical farmsteads? According to this, the interpretive-historical method is used to read the written documents and survey their historical properties to reach the research aim and question. Thus, interviews with farmstead dwellers, observation, review maps of historical monuments, and library studies to examine written documents constitute research tools. These farmsteads were studied in the central plateau of Iran, especially in the cities of Kashan, Qom, and Yazd. Some of them were known as castles until now. But in this article, by examining their physical and functional characteristics, it has been determined that they are farmsteads and in addition to agricultural land and water, they have physical elements such as Castle, mills, water reservoirs, baths, and mosques. Thus, the Castle has been a part of the farmstead-related elements. They also have social, cultural, and economic systems. The current research can help to register farmsteads in the list of national monuments of Iran as an independent collection.

Keywords: Historical farmsteads, Agricultural heritage, Castles, Niasar, Qom, Yazd.

1. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture has a comprehensive history in Iran. A complete water supply system indicates the attention and need of the people of the Central Plateau of Iran for water and agriculture, for example, Qanat from the Achaemenid period (Raie, 2017, p. 71). Access to water, political stability, and economic security led to the formation of small, independent agricultural units in various parts of Iran. These units were smaller living complexes than the village responsible for producing agricultural products and

creating economic value. They made from a combination of residential, religious, and service elements and agricultural lands and were formed in the vicinity of water sources and at different distances from each other. In Iranian legal documents and written literature, they are referred to as Farmstead (Etemad-ol-Saltaneh, 1990, p. 20; Najm al-Molk, 2006). Local communities know them as "Farmstead" as well.

From the early Islamic centuries to the Pahlavi period, farmsteads existed independently and subordinated in the countryside of the cities and villages and were given in the form of rent by the government and sometimes sold (Lambton, 1966, p. 121). There were life and vitality in many of the studied farms. Peasants, farmers, and

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landlords participated in economic production. The lords benefited from the social and economic advantages of the farm, and peasants had the advantages of group life in the castle, and support and education at the time (Tavangar Marvasti, 2015, pp. 298-305). The government took the required number of soldiers from the lord, if necessary, and the government received the farm tax from the revenues (Kristensen, 1995, p. 40). Therefore, farms had cultural, social, economic, and physical characteristics that contributed to their existence and arranged their relationship with the government and people.

The main research problem is insufficient knowledge about the characteristics, values, and natural capabilities of farmsteads in the national and international communities. The reason is the growth of the destruction of historical farmsteads, the concealment of farm-forming systems in their remains, and the disconnection of the knowledge system of historical farmsteads from the second Pahlavi period in Iran. Hence, the research group have studied several historical farms with the interpretive- historical approach in the field and document research, and have investigated the basis of their formation.

The current research aims to introduce the historical farmsteads of Iran by investigating their natural features and characteristics. Farms have physical and functional characteristics that have made them stable over the centuries.

2. METHODS

The current research is applied. The data are often qualitative and include information on historical properties and written documents with a historical and ancient nature. This research tries to determine their characteristics by addressing some aspects of the living practices in the mentioned farmsteads. Therefore, this research uses a historical-interpretive paradigm. Initially, the location of farmsteads was recognized by field surveys and using aerial photographs in the cities of Qom, Niasar, Isfahan, Yazd, and Meybod. Besides, the research group mapped some of them at an accuracy of 1/2000. In this section, it was revealed that each farmstead has an area of several hectares or includes some service elements (Table 1). Then, the location and quality of the found farms were examined based on written documents. Despite the lack of direct sources, there were more than one hundred written Persian sources and dozens of written English documents to support the research. Then, the research group analyzed all the information with the help of field interactions with the statistical community, and interviews with stakeholders and elders living on the farmstead (Figures 3, 4, and 5). After collecting and classifying the different layers of information and matching them, new results were formed, and physical and functional characteristics were identified in the farmsteads.

3. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Historical documents and scientific productions from the 4th century AH to the Safavid period have commented on farms from an economic and jurisprudential perspective. After that, especially during the Qajar period,

domestic elites often published articles about this in the form of books and travelogues such as (Afzal Al-Molk, 1981; Etemad-ol-Saltaneh, 1990; Farmanfarma, 2004; Hekmat Yaghmaei, 1990; Najm al-Molk, 2006; Qomi, 2006; Zel-e-Sultan, 1990). These documents have scattered information about historic farmsteads and are limited to the names and signs of the farmstead. However, many Europeans traveled to Iran as ambassadors, politicians, and orientalist until the second Pahlavi period, often described what they saw, such as (Lambton, 1966; Rene Dalmany, 1956; Richards, 1964). Due to the insufficient knowledge about the nature of farmsteads, they have not addressed them. They have only mentioned agricultural affairs and social and cultural issues of villages (Raie & Beheshti, 2016). Since then, no sources indicate the presence of domestic and foreign researchers in the field of research on historical farmsteads. Researchers such as (A'azam Waqefi, 2000; Afshar, 1995; Dehghannejad & Sotoudeh, 2010; Kalantar-Zarabi, 1956; Taleb & Anbari, 2008; Tavangar Marvasti, 2015) and many others have only mentioned the name of farmsteads, the social, cultural, and economic status of the agriculture in the cities and villages from the second Pahlavi era until the 2000s. However, they did not address the architecture and organization of the farmsteads. Therefore, there is not a direct source referring to the farmstead architecture and characteristics until 2008. In 2008, several farmsteads were introduced in Niasar using field study, and their structural qualities and forms were considered by publishing papers such as (Raie, 2017, 2018; Raie & Beheshti, 2016; Raie, Mohammad-Moradi, & Salehi-Kakhaki, 2016). Then, in the book of *Niasarnameh*, 2017, they are addressed in a separate chapter in detail. The historical farmsteads are considered as an independent and neglected type in the architecture of Iran in these documents.

Nowadays, although there is no comprehensive understanding of historic farmsteads in Iran, they are considered in the international communities, conventions, recommendations, and charters. They emphasize recognizing, registering, and preserving farmsteads as a historical landscape (UNESCO Regional Office, 2009). Also, the patterns of historical farmsteads of other countries facilitate the understanding and recognition of residential farms. However, they cannot be a complete roadmap for identifying farmsteads in Iran for various reasons (Deadman & Gaskell, 2012; Fazeli & Young, 2012; Freeman, 2010; Gaskell & Owen, 2006; Lake & Edwards, 2006, 2013).

4. HISTORICAL FARMSTEADS IN IRAN

Many farms are used only for agriculture purposes. They are also often established in the adjacent or outside of the city or village (Figure 1). In such farms, there is no permanent residence and establishment of physical elements. Thus, they are called uninhabited or agricultural (Afshar, 1995, p. 369; Clavijo, 1958, p. 193). However, the research group found other types of farms in Iran. In addition to agriculture, other activities were also done in

them, such as housing and settlement. These farms are called farmsteads (Etemad-ol-Saltaneh, 1990; Najm al-Molk, 2006, p. 20). Farmsteads are formed by combining residential, religious, service, and physical elements with agricultural fields and water sources. They are also smaller living complexes than a village (Figures 3 and 4). In some of the legal and historical documents such as endowment letters, there is useful information on the farmsteads, including purchase documents of some farmsteads dated to 1085 AH in the book of *Natanz Cultural Heritage, Historical Monuments, Customs, Traditions and History of Natanz*, 2000.

5. CHARACTERISTIC OF HISTORICAL FARMSTEADS

5.1. Location and formation

Field survey and scrutiny of aerial photographs have shown that water and springs were the main factors in

locating the farmstead by the locals and lords, and its related service elements were formed along with water and land for economic and security reasons (Raie, 2017, p. 234). Therefore, the simplest living complex was formed to meet the basic needs of rulers, lords, and farmers. These points are located in different extents and at different distances from each other in the suburbs of larger cities and villages as a system and were in economic, social, and cultural connection with each other (Figure 2). This order in the situation is called systemic or *Golleie* in Iran.

5.2. Types of Farmsteads

Farmsteads were found in two independent types based on field studies in the geographical area of the Central Plateau of Iran and investigating historical documents Iran: agricultural castles and agricultural complexes.

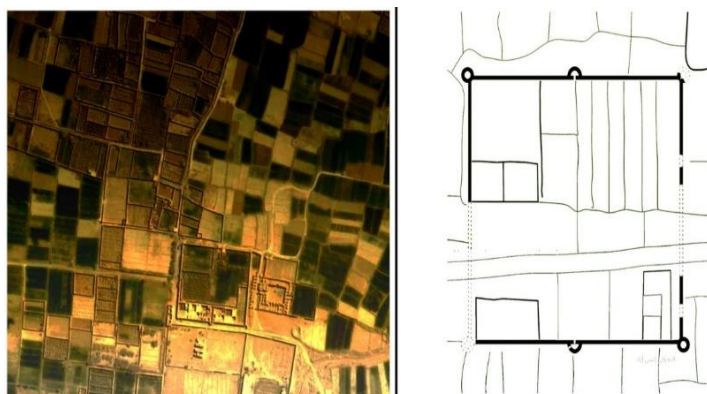


Fig 1. Map and Aerial Photograph of Shamsabad Farmsteads (Historic Database Documentation Center of Meybod, 2016).

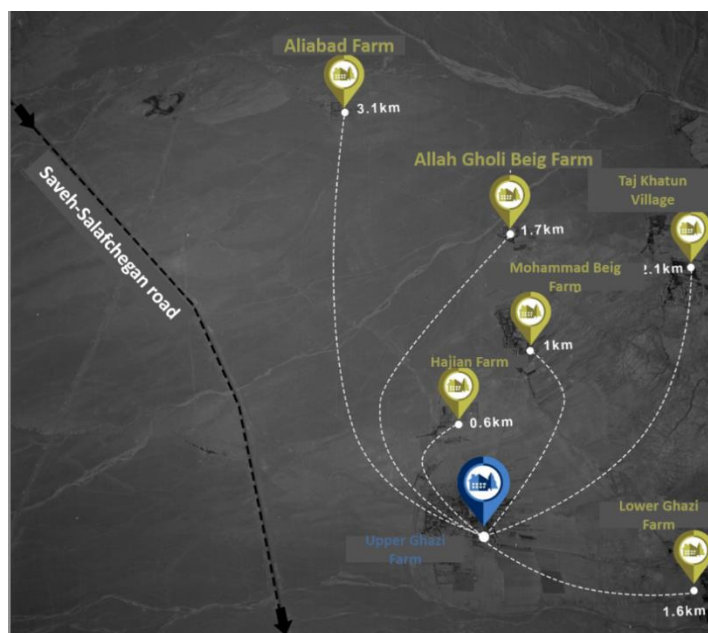


Fig 2. Distribution Pattern of Farmsteads Identified in Qom Plain (Google Earth, 2019).

5.2.1. Agricultural Castles

In this type of farmsteads, castles are the center of life and events, and all the physical and service elements have been formed within them. By combining with the agricultural lands adjacent to and often outside of castles, these castles represent farmsteads. The agriculture castle often belongs to different historical periods and the residence was permanently and seasonally in them. The formation of various physical elements in the farmstead had provided the possibility of housing for the group of peasants and owners, such as Dolatabad Farmstead in Qom (Figure 3).

1. Bath
2. Shah Kucheh (main passage)
3. Watermill
4. Water reservoir
5. Carvancerai
6. Location of Dashtban
7. Mosque.

5.2.2. Agricultural Complexes

The castle is not the central axis in the type of agricultural complexes. However, all physical elements have been formed outside or without the castle due to the relative security at some point. It also was formed with two characteristics of residence and production and with the social system of feudalism. There are many of these complexes near the villages, such as the GhaziBala Farmstead in Qom (Figure 2). They are in the form of a village, such as the Dulatabad Farmstead in Qom. Others are considered a complete farmstead, such as the Tarazabad Farmstead of Yazd (Figure 3). The Tarazabad farmstead is an agricultural complex and related elements such as the lord's house, mosque, bath, etc. located outside the castle. In this type of residential farmstead, the castle is

an element along with other elements. Together, they form an agricultural complex. Here, due to public security, the elements are not inside the castles. But the Dolatabad Farmstead is an agricultural castle, which means that all the related elements are built inside a large castle. And other elements have been formed in recent times to create public security.

5.3. Water and Farmland

Water and farmland are the two main elements of farmsteads. Life on farmsteads depends on these two elements. Water resources include aqueducts, qanats, springs, and rivers, and farmsteads gradually formed along with them. Farmers used drinking water from aqueducts and springs and used manual and domestic wells for washing dishes and clothes (Tavangar Marvasti, 2015, p. 269). Some elements were also part of the water-related features in the architecture of the farmsteads, such as aqueducts, pools, waterways, ponds, mills, and water reservoirs. The farmsteads' financial value has been determined by the number and extent of water and agricultural land in the area. Therefore, the owner has paid the tax by considering these characteristics. Water has been the reason for the vitality of the farmsteads so far.

Based on field studies conducted in 28 farmsteads of Niasar, 2018, 90% of the farmsteads had water. In addition, 82% of them have old agricultural lands, gardens, and trees due to the existence of appropriate and numerous water resources, and less than 10% of farmsteads are at risk of destruction (Table 1). Every farmstead that provided the water needed for agriculture has also benefited from natural gardens and agricultural elements. The farmers and peasants have dedicated a vast part of the land to the rose garden and harvesting Damask Rose, lived in the castles located on the farms, and worked part-time in the rose gardens.

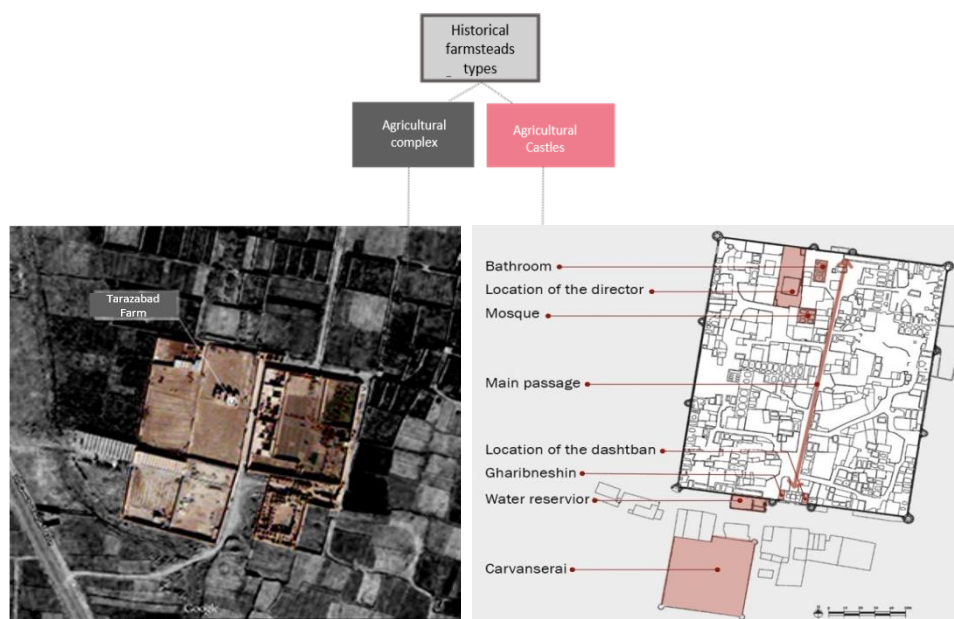


Fig 3. On the Left: Tarazabad Farmstead of Yazd, an Agricultural Complex Type (Google Earth, 2017)
On the Right: Dolatabad Farmstead of Qom, Agricultural Castle Type

5.4. Religious and Service Buildings

The presence of a stationary and floating population on farmsteads is an important feature. Those living on farmsteads needed to use the physical elements of service to meet the basic needs of life. Therefore, the owners have built castles to provide shelter and security for the peasants. In addition to the elements such as baths for cleaning, watermills for flour production, water reservoirs for having water, mosques, and sanctuaries were built to meet religious needs over time (Raie, 2017, p. 72). The number of these elements is not equal in all the farmsteads, but it is subjected to factors such as extent, type of ownership, type of land use, and positions. Extensive lord farms had many physical elements due to the proper economic production, but the peasant and simple farmsteads had a part of these elements (Table 2, Figure 4).

5.5. Ownership Characteristics

Historical farmsteads had endowed, royal, governmental, and private ownerships (Edward Pollack, 1982, p. 351).

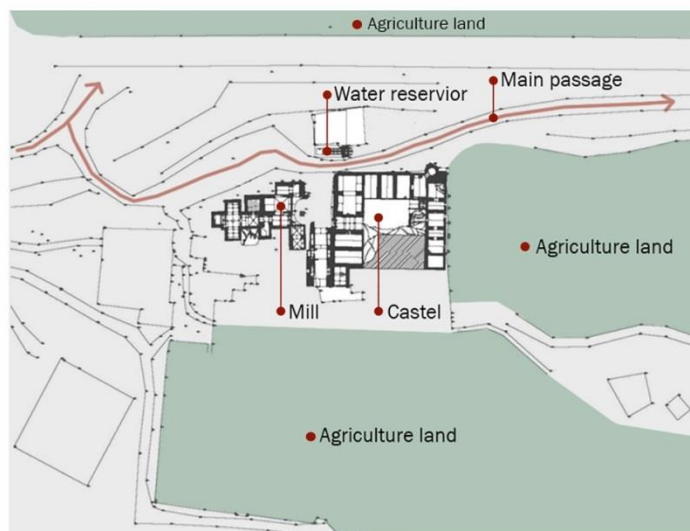
Lords and stewards run the private farmsteads, and farm income belonged to the landlord after taxes. Farmers also took their share of agriculture based on specific rules (Hekmat Yaghmaei, 1990, p. 222). Governmental farmsteads belonged to the government and they have rented to the rulers and militaries. Also, the government gave the farmstead to them for a specific time for their service to the government (Farmanfarma, 2004, p. 223). There was no endowed ownership in the farmsteads, but the exploitation system was based on the endowment of the ruler. Accordingly, a part of the farm income was dedicated to religious and public affairs, and the rest belonged to the endower (Foran, 1999, p. 57). Royal farms also belonged to the king. He has dedicated the incomes to others, and sometimes, presented or sold them to princes or great owners (Lambton, 1966, p. 149). Historical documents show that the farmsteads had various ownerships, and the type of ownership could play a role in the promotion or the destruction of the farmsteads.

Table 1. Presence of Elements in Niasar Historical Farmstead

no.	Name of farmstead in niasar	Physical elements		
		Water/well/fountain	Cultivator	Garden .Old trees
1	Deh-e Zirin	*		*
2	Bala Abbas Abbad	*		
3	Baronagh	*		*
4	Sanjadeh			
5	Khoncheh	*		*
6	Salakh-e No	*		*
7	Nezamabad	*		*
8	Salimabad	*		*
9	Hirmand	*		*
10	Adamabad-e Bala			
11	Adamabad-e Paieen	*		
12	Pachenar	*		*
13	Atabaki	*		*
14	Dook	*		*
15	Hassanabad	*		*
16	Hosseinabad	*		
17	Hashe	*		*
18	Khatoon	*		*
19	Surabad	*		*
20	Langan	*		*
21	Saranj	*		*
22	Kusanj	*		*
23	Khanke	*		*
24	Nusratabad			
25	Sariche	*		*
26	Hosseinabad Agha Rahmat	*		*
27	Hesamieh	*		*
28	Tajargan	*		*

Table 2. The Presence of Elements in Historical Farmsteads in Iran

1	Feudal& rural Castles	4	Water/well/fountain/aqueduct	7	stumps
2	Feudal & rural houses	5	Mosque/sanctuary	8	Bath
3	reservoir	6	Watch tower	9	Cultivator / Garden

**Fig 4.** The Farmstead of Soranj, the Presence of Manor alongside Elements such as; Historic Baths, Manors, Wells, and Agricultural Lands

5.6. Demographic and Social Characteristics

Residence and floating and stationary populations are the distinguishing features of the farmsteads compared to the uninhabited farms. According to the conducted studies, the population was variable in the farms based on the extent and type of ownership. Its amount was estimated between 5-500 in the historical documents (Etemad-ol-Saltaneh, 1990, p. 1949). Every household was 6-7 on average, and 1-2 rooms of the castle were dedicated to them (Tavangar Marvasti, 2015, p. 304). Farm residents were often Muslims and families living in castles often belonged to one or two tribes, such as the castle belonging to Dolatabad Farm, which belonged to Lor Bakhtiari and 4 families named Alimardani, Kadkhodazadeh, Bagheri, and Shirazi lived in this castle. The lord was on the top of the social pyramid, and then, his stewards were in charge of the farm affairs. People who worked on the farmstead were farmers, guards, field keepers, bath keepers, millers, water bailiffs, and well-diggers (Hekmat Yaghmaei, 1990, p. 296). The landlord lived on the farmstead and residents or in a town near the farmsteads (Taleb & Anbari, 2008, p. 159). The lord was the absolute owner of the farmstead and its residents. The lord could sell the whole farmstead with all workers to another person (Rene Dalmany, 1956, p. 74)

5.7. Livelihood and Economic Characteristics

Every farmstead acted as an economic enterprise and social base. It was also relatively self-sufficient to meet the basic needs of residents. The owners have supplied farmstead incomes in various ways. Activities that were the key sources of income of a farm were agriculture, husbandry, weaving, and the production of handicrafts.

Also, some farmsteads were involved in other industries, such as the straw oil industry in Nahchir farmstead of Isfahan (Shafiee, 2001, pp. 53-59). Farmers spent their days on farmsteads and nights inside castles for economic purposes. Some were paid for their work, while others lived permanently in castles and received no salary from the landlord in exchange for shelter, food, and clothing. They had economic, social, and cultural relations with other farmsteads (Tavangar Marvasti, 2015, p. 271). The landlord was obliged to pay part of the farm income as a tax to government officials. Some farmsteads were new or were suffering from water shortages as well as droughts paid lower taxes (Taleb & Anbari, 2008, p. 151). The economic aspect of the farmsteads caused the lords and rulers to gain a vast amount of wealth and suitable social and cultural affairs. The income of some endowed farmsteads also led to the development of mosques, schools, and public buildings in the long term.

6. CONCLUSION

Historic farmsteads of Iran have emerged by combining physical elements, farmland, and water to meet the economic and security needs of rulers, lords, and people. These living complexes were evolved and were seen with two types of agricultural castles and agricultural complexes in the central plateau of Iran. In addition to political, economic, and social variables, the reasons for their formation are the characteristics in which they have gradually developed. These characteristics are identified based on field studies, and document research in both functional and physical sections, and other systems are identified and introduced as the research geography expands.

Farmsteads in Iran emerged as a strong social base and economic enterprise. They had specific social and financial systems and were given to the rulers in the form of feudality. Therefore, studying them as endogenous cultural and economic packages in Iran can be considered and led to the identification of the country's capacity in agricultural production and the growth of the farm tourism industry. Also, preserving the mentioned features on the farmsteads should be a priority for public and private stakeholders. The first step is to register all the physical elements of the farmstead in the list of national monuments of Iran as an independent collection entitled Historical Farmsteads. Accurate data-driven registering can also be effective in introducing and protecting farmsteads. By registering them as a lordly farmstead, all its related elements will be in physical and functional connection with each other and none can be inappropriately physically interfered with alone. In The next step, by identifying these farmsteads, they can be placed in the category of "important agricultural heritage" and registered in the Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS). It will be on the path of dynamic conservation.

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