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## From Apavortene to Abivard: Feasibility and Identification of the Early Parthian City of Dara in Northeastern Iran

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### Abstract

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According to classical texts, Dara stands out as a significant city from the early Parthian era, situated on the eastern fringes of the Parthian Empire. Classical sources have documented this region under various names such as Apavortene, Zapaortenon, Partauticena, and Apauarcticena. Since the latter half of the nineteenth century, Iranologists have engaged in speculation about the location of Dara, drawing insights from descriptions provided by Justin and Pliny, as well as references to its whereabouts in classical texts. This research endeavors to offer relative conjectures concerning the location of Dara and Shahr-Tepe, a potential site representing it, through an evaluation of archaeological data alongside classical and Islamic texts. To achieve the research objectives using a descriptive-analytical approach, the study employs the library research method and incorporates archaeological data. In alignment with classical texts, the research suggests that the province of Apavortene is situated in Eastern Iran, and there exists a likelihood that the Islamic-period Abivard is a transformed manifestation of this Parthian-period province. Additionally, a comparative examination of Dara in classical texts with present-day Shahr-Tepe in Dargaz reveals congruence, aligning with the descriptions provided by Justin and Pliny. Shahr-Tepe, located on the opposite side of Hezar Masjed Mountains between Nisa and Abivard, exhibits a singular historical period. Surrounded by Hezar Masjed Mountains, the region boasts an abundance of rivers and springs, expansive meadows, and remnants of forests within Tandooreh National Park and Tivan region. These characteristics confirm the general depiction of Apavortene and Dara found in classical sources. Collectively, these findings suggest that Shahr-Tepe, covering an area of approximately 70 hectares, could indeed represent the prominent city of the early Parthian period.

### Keywords:

Dara, Shahr-Tepe, Parthian Period, Apavortene, Abivard.

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## 1. Introduction

One of the satrapies of Iran in the Achaemenid period (550-330 BCE) was the Parthava satrapy. During the Parthian period (247 BCE-224 CE), this satrapy was divided along with Hyrcania into the smaller provinces of Parthiyene, Osthane, Apavortene, Hyrcania, Comisene and Choarene (Schippmann, 1980: 11). Apavortene was one of the provinces that was separated from the Achaemenid satrapy of Parthava. Located in Eastern Iran, it is recorded as Zapaortenon, Apavortene and Partauticena in the works of classical writers such as Justin (B.XLI, Ch. V), Pliny (Vol. II, Ch. 18 (16)), and Ptolemy (VI. 5.4). Isidore of Charax also locates Apauarcticena between Parthyena and Margiana in his book "the Parthian Stations" in more detail (Isid, 13). The simultaneous reference to Nisa, the central city of Parthyena, and Abivard in Islamic sources (Tabarī, 1964: 301; Narshakhi, 1984: 375; Maqdīsī, 1967: 321; *Bayhaqī*, 1989: 585; Yāqūt *al-Hamawī*, 1996: 333) may indicate the evolution of the word Apauarcticena to Abivard and the location of Apauarcticena in the vicinity of Abivard in the Islamic period. Justin (B.XLI, Ch. V) and Pliny (Pliny, Vol. II, Ch. 18 (16)) mention that Dara/ Dāreium is the central city of the province, and Isidore of Charax (Isid, 13), without naming Dara, registers the center of the province as the city of Apauarcticena. Dara was probably founded by Arsaces I (247-217 BCE), and its geographical location is widely debated (Weiskopf, 2011: 671-672). Since the second half of the nineteenth century, some Iranologists have speculated about the geographical location of this important city in the early Parthian period, by citing classical texts. One of the areas suggested by Iranologists for the possible location of Apavortene Province and its central city is Dargaz County (Etemad-al-Saltaneh, 1992: 350-351; Keall and Roaf, 2000: 1356; Rajabi, 2002: 65; Wiesehöfer, 2004: 409). Shahr-Tepe is located in the Chapeshlu District of Dargaz County and next to the old road from Dargaz to Quchan. With an area of 70 hectares, Shahr-Tepe is one of the largest Parthian sites in Northeastern Iran. The geographical positioning of Dargaz is consistent with the location of Apavortene as proposed by the writers of the classical period, especially Isidore of Charax. Justin's account of Dara is also compatible with Shahr-Tepe. In the present study, an attempt is made to evaluate the background of archaeological studies regarding Dara in the first place. In the next step, based on archaeological data, classical texts and literary sources of the Islamic period, logical speculations about the geographical location of the province of Apavortene and the city of Dara is provided. In order to evaluate the quality of Dara's identification with Shahr-Tepe, a comparative study of the history and geography of Dara with those of Dargaz and Shahr-Tepe is another goal of the present study.

## 2. Background

Early in the second half of the nineteenth century, when George Rawlinson speculated about its geographical location, some scholars sought to identify the location of Dara from the early Parthian period, based on archaeological studies and classical texts. Rawlinson, citing Justin, thinks that the city must have been located in the east of Iran and around Mashhad (Rawlinson, 1873: 53). Mohammad Hassan Khan Etemad-al-Saltaneh, one of the political figures of the Qājār court (1789-1925), considers Dargaz to be the evolved form of Dara (Daragarz) and has located this city in the Dargaz County (Etemad-al-Saltaneh, 1992: 350-351). Later, Hassan Pirnia, one of the political figures of the late Qājār period, considered Abivard and Bāvard as the evolved form of Apavortene and Paart (Pāvart) and located it in Gorgan (Pirnia, 2012: 1822). Alfred Gutschmid also suggests that the area is in Abivard, referring to Dara's location in

Apavortene (Gutschmid, 1888: 34). Later, Wilhelm Tomaschek, referring to Kalāt in Islamic literary sources, which is described as an impregnable fortress situated on a steep cliff with many streams, located Dara from Dargaz to Kalāt (Tomaschek, 1900: 250). Shortly afterwards, Victor Chapot, by confusing the Parthian city with the one founded by Anastasius I (491-518CE), identifies the Parthian Dara with Nisibis (Chapot, 1907: 313-314). Edward Meyer, referring to the construction of Dara in a fertile plain and on a rocky texture, locates it in Kalāt (Meyer, 1911: 870). Wilfred Schoff, in his commentary on “the Parthian Stations”, described Dara as an alternative to the Greek city of Hecatompylos, and located it near Mashhad. Schoff believes that Artacana, mentioned by Ptolemy, is Dara indeed (Isid, Stathm; Schoff, 1914: 31). Sir Percy Sykes, arguing that there are not enough forests in Eastern Iran, assumes that Dara should not be located in the east. According to Sykes, due to the abundance of forests and water resources, Gorgan is more in line with the Apavortene mentioned in classical texts. Sykes considers Qaleh Māran, which he visited during his trip to Gorgān, is the ancient city of Dara (Sykes, 1915: 334). Ernst Hertzfeld later located Apavortene and its central city of Dara near Kalāt (Hertzfeld, 1929/30: 109). William Woodthorpe Tarn, referring to the original homeland of the Parthians, situated Dara near Abivard (Tarn, 1932: 575).

Neilson C. Debevoise, while repeating the words of classical writers, suggests that the location of the city is in the mountains of Apaortenon (Debevoise, 1938: 15). Mikhail Evgenievich Masson also assumes that Dara is located in Abivard (Masson, 1950: 43). This area was later proposed as the site of Dara, by Richard Frye (Frye, 1962: 182) and Marie-Louise Chaumont (Chaumont, 1971: 199-201). Igor Khlopin, determining the approximate area of the Apavarktike, located Dara in the down stream plains of the Lainsu and Archinyan rivers east of Kopet Dag (Khlopin, 1977: 148). Klaus Schippmann also positioned Dara near Dargaz, citing Isidore of Charax (Schippmann, 1980: 11-12). Mohammad Yousef Kiani, after surveying the Gorgan plain, pointed to the lack of pre-Islamic archaeological data in Qaleh Māran and identified Qara Shaikh Tepe with Dara due to the presence of Parthian bricks and pottery shards (Kiani, 1982: 47, Kiani, 1986: 108). David Bivar later sited Dara in the Kakhke near the Old Abivard (Bivar, 1983: 26). Josef Wiesehöfer has also suggested a place between Ashkabad and Merv (Wiesehöfer, 1996: 132) and in Dargaz (Wiesehöfer, 2004: 409). Abdolhossein Zarrinkoob, referring to the location of Apavortene in Abivard, has suggested Kalāt as the location of Dara (Zarrinkoob, 1999: 41). Edward Keall and Michael Roaf also assume that this significant city is located in Dargaz (Keall and Roaf, 2000: 1356). Parviz Rajabi evaluated the evolution of the word Darakert to Dargaz and positioned Dara in Dargaz (Rajabi, 2002: 65). Mohammad Rezaei, pointing out that Apavortene is sited between Dāmghān and Gorgān, considers Apavahana and Āhvānā as an evolved form of Apavortene, and by comparing the environmental conditions of Āhvānā to the reports of classical writers, has suggested this area as a possible place (Rajabi, 2002: 442-453). Richard Tada situates Dara between Ashgabat and Merv (Tada, 2008: 77). Mostafa Dehpahlavan also confirms Rezaei's opinion and considers Dara to be located in Āhvānā Valley (Dehpahlavan, 2010: 36-37). Marek J. Olbrycht believes that Dara, which is mentioned in classical texts, should be positioned somewhere between Kakhke and Dargaz (Olbrycht, 2014: 118).

### **3. Research problem**

According to the classical texts, Dara is an important city of the early Parthian period in Iran. Although Justin, Pliny, Ptolemy, and Isidore of Charax mentioned this city or its position, Dara's actual location is still widely debated by scholars. The diversity of the

proposed areas, from Dāmghān to Gorgān and Khorāsān, shows the difficulty of research on Dara and emphasizes the importance of research on this prominent city. Archaeological survey of Dargaz County and archeological data discovered from Shahr-Tepe, resulted in re-evaluation of the classical and Islamic texts and the comparison of these literary evidence with the geography of Dargaz and the archeological data. As a result, we can now have reasonable assumptions about the location of Shahr-Tepe.

#### 4. From Apavortene to Abivard

The Achaemenid satrapy of Parthava is the ground for a significant part of the political, social and cultural events of the early Parthian Empire. The exact extent of this satrapy in the Achaemenid, Seleucid (312-63 BCE) and Parthian periods is not clear. Schippmann, citing Achaemenid inscriptions and classical texts, assumes that this satrapy covered most of present-day Khorāsān and Hyrcania (Schippmann, 1980: 10). After a cycle of disintegration and unification of Parthava and Hyrcania in the Achaemenid and Seleucid periods, this satrapy along with Hyrcania was divided into smaller provinces in the Parthian period, including Parthiyene, Ostaene, Apavortene, Hyrcania, Comisene and Choarene (Schippmann, 1980: 11).

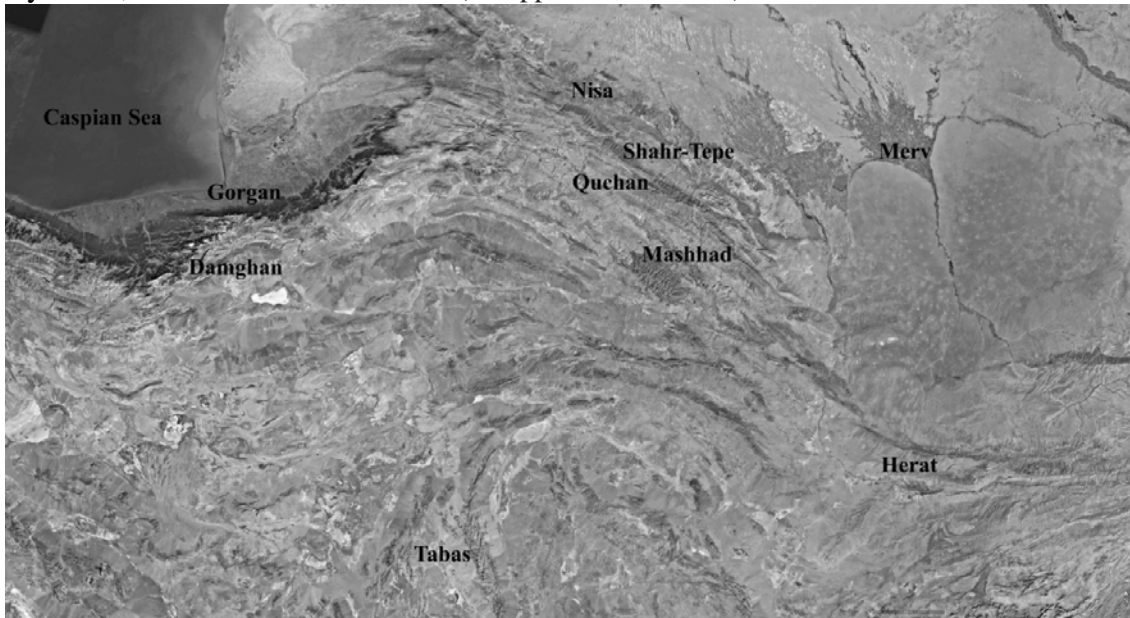


Figure 1. The position of Shahr-Tepe in relation to Nisa and Merv in the Northeastern Iran (Google Earth).

In the works of classical writers, Apavortene and its geographical location are mentioned. Justin (3<sup>rd</sup> century CE), in his “*Epitome of Pompeius Trogus’s Philippic Histories*” (1<sup>st</sup> century BCE), while referring to Dara, mentions that this city is located in the mountain of Zapaortenon (Justin, B.XLI, Ch. V). Pliny also spelled this region as Apavortene and considers it to be east of the Caspian Sea (Pliny, Vol. II, Ch. 18 (16)). Ptolemy also describes the geographical area of Parthia, from the north to Hyrcania and the Cronus Mountains, from the south to Kermān and Tabas, from the east to Aria (Herāt) and the Masdoranus Mountains, and from the west to the Medes. He goes on to call this region Partauticena and adds: “The part of Parthia which joins Hyrcinia is called Comisena, below which is Parthyena; next is Chorana and Partauticena, after this is Tabicenanear Carmania, then Sobide.” (Ptolemy, VI. 5.4). Isidore of Charax, who

traveled to Iran, registered this region as Apauarcticena, and located it between Parthyena and Margiana (Isid, 13) (Figure 1).

Johann Gustav Cuno, equated Zapaortenon mentioned by Justin, Apavortene as described by Pliny, and Apauarcticena in Isidor of Charax's. He translated Za as "beyond" and paortenon as "mountain", and as result, Zapaortenon as "beyond the mountain" (Cuno, 1871: 198-199). Most scholars who have conducted research on Apavortene have located this Parthian province in Eastern Iran (Rawlinson, 1873: 53), near Mashhad (Isid, Stathm; Schoff, 1914: 31), Abivard (Gutschmid, 1888: 34; Tomaschek, 1900: 250; Tarn, 1932: 575; Chaumont, 1971: 199-201; Khlopin, 1977: 148; Bivar, 1983: 26; Wiesehöfer, 1996: 132; Keall and Roaf, 2000: 1356), from Kakhke to Dargaz and Kalāt (Herzfeld, 1929/30: 109; Olbrycht, 2014: 118), and Southern Turkmenistan (Schippmann, 1980: 12). Some also assume that Apavortene must be sited in Gorgān (Sykes, 1915: 334; Kiani, 1982: 47) and between Gorgān and Dāmghān (Rezaei, 2004: 442-453; Dehpahlavan, 2010: 36-37).

Isidore of Charax, located the Apauarcticena in the vicinity of Parthyena and names Nisa as its center (Isid, 13). As the excavations of Russian archaeologists has revealed the exact location of Nisa, the simultaneous reference of Islamic texts to Abivard and Nisa can be considered as reminiscent of Isidore of Charax referring to Apauarcticena and Nesaya. In the texts of the Islamic period, Abivard and Nisa have been repeatedly recorded together and in the form of two adjacent regions, which shows their similar socio-political history. For instance, in his narrative of the Muslim conquest of these areas, *Tabarī* writes: "According to 'Alī—Abu Hafṣ al-Azdī—Idrīs b. Hanzalah al-'Ammī: Ibn 'Amīr captured the innercity of Abrashahr by assault and conquered the placesaround it—Tus, Abiward, Nisa..." (Tabarī, 1964: 301). In the history of Bukhārā's description of the political situation at the time of the Samanids and the Abbasids, that story is related as: "... Gave Nisa and Abivard to him" (Narshakhi, 1984: 375). Maqdīsī also points out that: "Abivard is more amazing than Nisa with a thriving market..." (Maqdīsī, 1967: 321). In describing the contemporary events of Mas'ud I of Ghazni's reign, *Bayhaqī* also mentioned Nisa and Abivard: "And Sultan Mas'ud ordered that letters should be sent to Herāt, Pushang, Tus, Sarakhs, Nisa, Bāvard and Bādghīs..." (Bayhaqī, 1989: 40). Yāqūt *al-Hamawī* also writes about the geographical location of Abivard: "Bāvard... is a city in Khorāsān between Sarakhs and Nisa" (Yāqūt *al-Hamawī*, 1996: 333).

### **5. Dara in the classical sources**

Pompeius Trogus's *Philippic Histories* (1st century BCE), is the most important source regarding Dara. Unfortunately, this book was lost in the ancient era and only a summary of it is recorded by Justin. According to Justin: "He founded a city also, called Dara, on Mount Zapaortenon, of which the situation is such, that no place can be more secure or more pleasant; for it is so encircled with steep rocks, that the strength of its position needs no defenders; and such is the fertility of the adjacent soil, that it is stored with its own produce. Such too is the plenty of springs and wood, that it is amply supplied with streams of water, and abounds with all the pleasures of the chace" (Justin, B.XLI, Ch. V). Pliny also briefly refers to this description: "Lying to the east of the Caspians is the Region called Apavortene, in which is Dareium, a place noted for its fertility" (Pliny, Vol. II, Ch. 18 (16)). No other classical writers mention this principal city of the early Parthian period, using the spelling of Dara and Dareium. It should be noted that the village of Thara, which Justin mentions while describing the apprehension of Darius III (Justin,

B.XI, Ch. XV), and some scholars rely on it to locate Dara from Dāmghān to Gorgān (Rezaei, 2005: 442-453; Dehpahlavan, 2010: 36-37), is different from the Parthian Dara. Furthermore, Justin has mentioned them in a different historical context with two distinct spellings.

This significant city seems to have been rarely recorded in classical texts with the two spellings, Dara and Dareium. Sykes assumes that the Parthian kings returned to Hecatompylos due to the lack of water in Dara, and until the first century CE this city was the capital of the Parthians (Sykes, 1915: 334). Regardless of the exact date of Dara's abandonment, the registration of the Parthian capital by Chinese sources as Ho-tu or Fan-tou, possibly Hecatompylos, indicates that the Parthian kings have used this city, at least at some points (Leslie and Gardiner, 1996: 34). Chaumont also believes that the lack of reference to Dara in "the Parthian Stations" of Isidore of Charaxis due to the declining significance of the city at this time (Chaumont, 1971: 200). Without ignoring the hypothesis of Dara's abandonment, Olbrycht thinks that the lack of reference to Dara could be due to the fact that the city was far from the route used by Isidore of Charax (Olbrycht, 2014: 118). Although, in his commentary on "the Parthian Stations", Schoff assumes that the Apauarcticena as referred to by Isidore of Charax (Isid, 13) and the Artacana mentioned by Ptolemy (Ptolemy, VI. 5.4) were indeed the early Parthian Dara (Isid, Stathm; Schoff, 1914: 31).

#### **6. Shahr-Tepe, the Parthian Dara?**

Since the second half of the nineteenth century, some Iranologists have tried to speculate about the location of Dara, by citing archaeological studies and classical and Islamic texts. Most of these researchers have located Dara in Eastern Iran and Khorāsān Province. Some of the most important of the proposed places are: Near Mashhad (Rawlinson, 1873: 53; Isid, Stathm; Schoff, 1914: 31), Abivard (Chaumont, 1971: 199-201; Frye 1962: 182; Masson, 1950: 43; Tarn, 1932: 575; Gutschmid, 1888: 34), Dargaz to Kalāt (Tomaschek, 1900: 250), Kalāt (Meyer, 1911: 870; Herzfeld 1929/30: 109; Zarrinkoob, 1999: 41), the down stream plains of the Lainsu and Archinyan rivers east of Kopet Dag (Khlopin, 1977: 148), Kakhke (Bivar, 1983: 26), between Ashgabat and Merv (Tada, 2008: 77; Wiesehöfer, 1996: 132), from Kakhke to Dargaz (Olbrycht, 2014: 118), Dargaz (Schippmann, 1980: 11-12; Etemad-al-Saltaneh, 1992: 350-351; Keall and Roaf, 2000: 1356; Wiesehöfer, 2004: 409; Rajabi, 2002: 65), Gorgān (Pirnia, 2012: 1822), Qale Māran in Gorgān (Sykes, 1915: 334), Qara Shaikh Tepe in Gorgān (Kiani, 1982: 47) and Āhvānā Valley between Dāmghān and Gorgān (Rezaei, 2004: 442-453; Dehpahlavan, 2010: 36-37).

Of the areas and sites that can potentially represent what is mentioned in classical texts, we can nominate Dargaz City and Shahr-Tepe area. Shahr-Tepe is located in the northwest of Chāpeshlu City in the Dargaz County. With an area of 70 hectares, this is one of the largest Parthian sites in Northeastern Iran. Archaeological excavation of this area was started in 2009 by Ali Hassanābādi. In order to determine the core area and propose the buffer zone, he dug 29 test-pits in the core area and the buffer zone of Shahr-Tepe. As a result, architectural remains, painted bricks and clay vessels of the early period were discovered (personal correspondence). Later, in 2016, Hassan Nami, while re-surveying Dargaz County, reviewed the core area and the buffer zone of the site. While conducting systematic survey of Shahr-Tepe, he dug 38 test-pits in the site. Thence, the remains of a ditch, fortifications, gate, citadel, Sharestān and industrial areas (with numerous pieces of waster, slag and deformed glass) were discovered. In addition, the remains of a clay barrel-drain was discovered at the lower section and the

eastern end of the site, indicating that the site had an urban sewer system. As a result of systematic survey of the site, the remains of painted bricks, stucco pieces, stone pillar base and pottery shards from the Parthian period were discovered (Nami, 2016: 28-53). Since the archaeological studies of the site have already been published in the form of several monographs, no more details will be covered here (Nami et al., 2018; Nami and Mousavinia, 2019; Mousavinia and Nami, 2019).

A comparative study of Dara in classical texts with Dargaz and Shahr-Tepe shows the compatibility of this site with the prominent city of the Parthian period. Archaeological data acquired from the survey and excavations of Shahr-Tepe show that this area was inhabited only during the Parthian period. Therefore, the foundation, flourishing and decline of this site occurred entirely in the Parthian period. On the other hand, the proximity of this site to Nisa and the discovery of data comparable to this site (such as painted bricks), shows that Shahr-Tepe reached its zenith in the early Parthian period. Although there is no evidence on the exact date of the abandonment of Shahr-Tepe in the Parthian period, the mere evacuation of the site in this period is reminiscent of Isidore of Charax's lack of reference to Dara in the first century CE. Sykes (1915: 334), Chaumont (1971: 200) and Olbrycht (2014: 118) have also hypothesized that Dara was abandoned during the Parthian period. Furthermore, the location of the site at the foot of the Hizār Masjid Mountains is reminiscent of Dara's position on Zapaortenon Mountain. If, as Cuno points out, Zapaorton means "across the mountain" (Cuno, 1871: 198-199), then it can be assumed that Dara is located on the other side of Hizār Masjid Mountain. On the other hand, the existence of this mountain range, which has limited Shahr-Tepe and Dargaz on all sides, is a reminder of its strong position and its enclosure with steep cliffs. In addition, there are rivers in the county of Dargaz that originate from the surrounding foothills and water the Dargaz Plain. This is also in line with Justin's statements about Dara. Interestingly, there are two waterways around Shahr-Tepe that run along the northern and southern sides of the site. These waterways start from Hizār Masjid Mountains at a distance of 10 km west of Shahr-Tepe and as they approach the site, they are divided into two branches, northern and southern. One branch passes through the northern margin and the other goes through the southern edge of Shahr-Tepe, and after crossing the site, the two branches join in the east of Shahr-Tepe and extend further to the east in the form of a single branch. The craftsmen of Shahr-Tepe have used these waterways to fill the moat that exists beyond the walls. Considering the results of the surface survey of the site, the moat that surrounds Shahr-Tepe is very large and is on average 11 to 15 meters wide and 6 to 8 meters deep. The meadows of Dargaz Plain and the forests of *Tandūreh* National Park and Tivān region also have the last remnants of hunting grounds and extensive forests in this county and are reminiscent of Justin's reference to the abundance of forests and the existence of hunting grounds around the city (Figure 2).

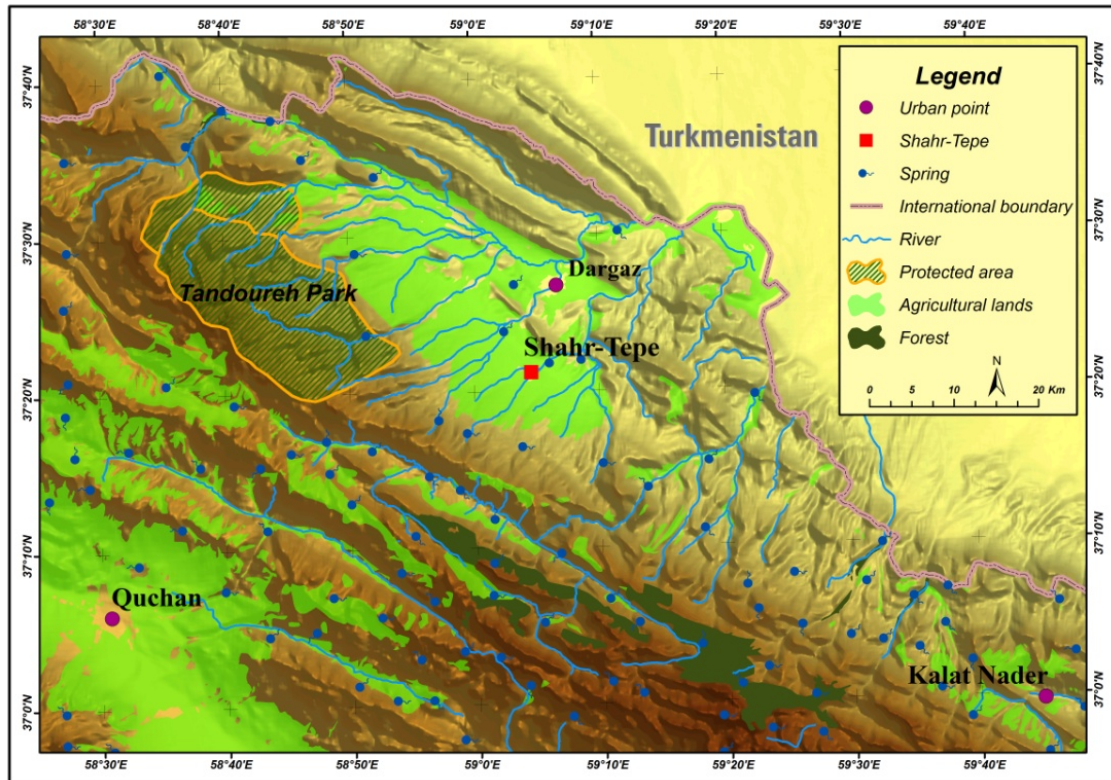


Figure 2. The position of Shahr-Tepe in relation to Geographical variables (Authors).

## 7. Evaluation

According to Justin and Pliny, Dara is located in the Zapaortenon Mountain (Justin, B.XLI, Ch. V) and the region of Apavortene (Pliny, Vol. II, Ch. 18 (16)). Although Ptolemy, while describing the region of Parthia, has generally located the position of Apavortene in Eastern Iran (Ptolemy, VI. 5.4), Isidore of Charax locates it more specifically between Nisa and Merv (Isid, 13). Some researchers, however, locate Apavortene in Gorgan without providing convincing evidence (Sykes, 1915: 334; Kiani, 1982: 47). Others, citing Justin, who mentions the village of Thara while narrating the imprisonment of Darius III of the Achaemenid dynasty (Justin, B.XI, Ch. XV), have equated “Dara” with “Thara”, thus locating Apavortene in the vicinity of Gorgān and Dāmghān. They consider the Āhvānā region, which is now located between Dāmghān and Gorgān, to be an evolving form of the Parthian Apavortene. By comparing the natural conditions of Dara with Justin and Pliny's statements about Āhvānā, they consider this region to be the Parthian Apavortene (Rezaei, 2005: 442-453; Dehpahlavan, 2010: 36-37).

The existence of the Greek city of Hecatompylos and its use by the Parthians when necessity arose, political instability of the western borders until the time of Farhād I (171-176 BCE), Arsaces I's attitude towards consolidation of power instead of invading Seleucid territories and enlarging the imperial domain are among other reasons for not situating Dara from Dāmghān to Gorgān. Justin's description of the city of Dara and the village of Thara in two different historical and geographical contexts and with two distinct spellings along with the proposed location of Apavortene in classical and Islamic texts also shows that this region and its central city of Dara, are not sited in the vicinity of Dāmghān and Gorgān, but they must be located in Northeastern Iran and the



borders of Iran and Turkmenistan. Due to the vastness of Shahr-Tepe and its distinct archaeological findings, this area was a significant city of the early Parthian period. The location of Shahr-Tepe on the other side of Hizār Masjid Mountains is reminiscent of Cuno's translation of the word Zapaortenon (Cuno, 1871: 198-199). Furthermore, the old road from Central Asia to Dargaz and Quchān passed along Shahr-Tepe until recent times, and this site is truly situated on the other side of the mountain from Quchān. The proximity of Nisa and Abivard in the Islamic texts is also a reminder of the vicinage of Parthyena with the center of Nisa and Apauarcticena with the centrality of Apauarcticena. In addition, the abandonment of the city during the Parthian period is remindful of Isidore of Charax's lack of reference to Dara during his possible voyage to Apauarcticena. The enclosure of Shahr-Tepe with Hizār Masjid Mountains, which made Dargaz look like an impregnable fortress, is also reminiscent of Dara's strong position and the rocks that surrounded it. Moreover, the abundance of springs and rivers that originate from Hizār Masjid Mountains, one of which has filled the huge moat of Shahr-Tepe, evokes the abundance of water in Dara. It is worthy of note that there are now paddy fields in parts of Dargaz that shows the richness of water resources in the distant past of this county. At the same time, the abundance of meadows and the environment of the Hizār Masjid Mountains, such as *Tandūreh* National Park and Tīvān region, can indicate the abundance of hunting grounds and forests during the Parthian period of Dargaz.

## **8. Conclusion**

Dara is an important city of the early Parthian period. According to classical texts, the city is located in the province of Apavortene. Although Justin, Pliny, and Ptolemy have defined the approximate boundaries of this province, Isidore of Charax locates it more specifically between Parthyena and Margiana. The co-occurrence of Nisa and Abivard in the Islamic literary sources, while confirming the location of Apavortene, indicates that Dara (the central city of this province), must have been located in Abivard of the Islamic period. Shahr-Tepe is one of the most prominent Parthian sites in Northeastern Iran, which is situated on the other side of Hizār Masjid Mountains in Dargaz County. The discovery of clay vessels, painted bricks, stucco pieces, stone pillar bases and clay barrel-drain, along with the remains of a ditch, fortifications, gate, citadel, Sharestān and industrial areas shows that Shahr-Tepe is a prominent and pre-designed city from the first centuries of the Parthian Empire. Although there is no clear evidence on the date of the desolation of Shahr-Tepe, according to archaeological evidence this area was built in the Parthian period, reached its peak of prosperity and was eventually abandoned. This case is reminiscent of Isidore of Charax's lack of reference to Dara in his "Parthian Stations". Justin, quoting Trogus, gives a detailed description of Dara's position, which is consistent with the Shahr-Tepe's location. Shahr-Tepe is located in a strong position and is limited by the Hizār Masjid Mountains. There are rivers in Dargaz County that originate from the surrounding foothills. One of these rivers ran along Shahr-Tepe and filled the moat that surrounds the site. The meadows of the Dargaz Plain and the remnants of trees in the *Tandūreh* National Park and the Tīvān region are probably the last remnants of the hunting grounds and the immense forests around Shahr-Tepe that existed in the Parthian period. To put it concisely, the simultaneous evaluation of archaeological evidence and classical and Islamic texts shows that Shahr-Tepe is one of the most important Parthian cities in Dargaz County, which is historically and geographically consistent with Dara in the province of Apavortene. Extensive

archaeological excavations in Shahr-Tepe can evaluate this hypothesis and provide vital information on the first decades and centuries of the Parthian Empire.

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## از آپاورتنه تا ابیورد؛ امکان سنجی و شناسایی شهر اوایل دوره اشکانی دارا در شمال شرق ایران

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## چکیده

با استناد به متون کلاسیک، دارا یکی از شهرهای مهم اوایل دوره اشکانی است که در مرزهای شرقی شاهنشاهی اشکانی واقع شده است. متون کلاسیک این منطقه را با املاء آپاورتنه، زاپاورتنون، پارتاوتیکنه و آپاوارکتیکنا ثبت کرده است. توصیف ژوستین و پلینی از شهر و اشاره متون کلاسیک به موقعیت قرارگیری آن باعث گردید تا از نیمه دوم سده نوزدهم میلادی برخی ایران‌شناسان راجع به مکان قرارگیری دارا گمانه زنی کنند. در این تحقیق تلاش می‌شود با ارزیابی داده‌های باستان‌شناسی، متون کلاسیک و متون نوشتاری دوره اسلامی راجع به مکان قرارگیری دارا و محوطه احتمالی معرف آن شهر تپه، گمانه‌هایی نسبی ارائه گردد. رویکرد این تحقیق توصیفی تحلیلی است و از داده‌های باستان‌شناسی و منابع کتابخانه‌ای برای دستیابی به اهداف تعیین‌شده استفاده گردیده است. تحقیق حاضر نشان می‌دهد بر اساس متون کلاسیک، ایالت آپاورتنه در شرق ایران قرار گرفته است و احتمالاً ابیورد دوره اسلامی شکل تحول یافته این ایالت دوره اشکانی است. از سوی دیگر، بررسی مقایسه‌ای دارای متون کلاسیک با شهر تپه درگز نشان می‌دهد این محوطه با توصیف ژوستین و پلینی از شهر دارا همخوانی دارد. قرارگیری شهر تپه در آن سوی رشته‌کوه هزار مسجد بین نسا و ابیورد، تک دوره‌ای بودن محوطه، محصور شدن شهر تپه با رشته‌کوه هزار مسجد، فراوانی رودخانه‌ها و چشمه‌ها، گستردگی چمنزارها و بقایای جنگل در پارک ملی تندوره و منطق تیوان، ضمن تأیید شرح متون کلاسیک راجع به آپاورتنه و دارا، نشان می‌دهد شهر تپه با قریب به ۷۰ هکتار وسعت، می‌تواند معرف شهر مهم اوایل دوره اشکانی دارا باشد.

واژه‌های کلیدی: دارا، شهر تپه، دوره اشکانی، آپاورتنه، ابیورد.