

Original Research Article

# Reviewing the Role of 'Ritual Landscape' in Tourism Development

## Case Study: Imāmzādeh Mohsen in City of Hamadan, Iran

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**Abstract** One of the basis of 'cultural tourism' is to address the ritual landscapes in countries, which attract many visitors each year. Generally, the ritual spaces have always been attractive and special to the viewers, either due to the burial of a holy person, or being the symbol of spirituality, the myth and the story referred to in making the building, or even due to the combination of the natural implications. Since, the meaning of the word 'tourism' points to the action of 'travel' and 'moving' for exploring new subjects and frontiers, the study of ritual landscapes is inevitable, as kind of multi-functional landscapes, where points to the object and socio-economic issues in addition to satisfying the people's minds in case of spirituality and making memories of the environment. Therefore, to better understand the issue, the Imāmzādeh Mohsen, which is located in city of Hamadan as a case study, has been adopted here to review the role of ritual landscape in tourism development. In this research, the holy shrine is assumed as a ritual landscape, by having the characteristics such as "repeatability in holy time and place", "symbol and metaphor" and "social actions", that due to its positioning in pure Nature, the holiness of its building (before and after Islam) and the presence of socio-economic activities is considered as a multi-functional item that has the high potential for attracting tourists and developing the tourism industry. The research method in this study is descriptive-analytical one and the data is gathered based on the library information from ancient texts and documents, in addition to site visit of the Imāmzādeh location.

**Keywords** | *Ritual landscape, tourism, cultural tourism, objective-subjective, Imāmzādeh Mohsen in Hamadan city.*

**Introduction** | The tourism industry has grown significantly in recent years in most countries, which indicates the significance of this phenomenon in human life, having a direct impact on the social and economic relations of countries. Tourism comprises one of the broadest area of spatial and location due to its dynamic nature, and is addressing a series of traveling plans that

are being made with the aim of pleasure, recreation and experience, with a temporary and transient nature. In ancient civilization, man has always traveled to other lands for the pilgrimage purpose, in respect to symbols, the honorable people and the holy spaces; where in this journey, has always been encountered with other human beings. In the light of this familiarity and due to the mutual commercial interactions, the human's attitudes, worldviews and even lifestyle have been gradually

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changed; as tourism has always been considered as a new effort in moving and creating the new cultures. Therefore, it can be said that the first type and pattern of tourism industry goes back to the rituals, as a way for transmitting human beliefs over time, and their physical manifestation is the human attempts to preserve them. Therefore, the landscapes that were created as a result of this event are called the 'ritual landscapes'; They are multi-functional landscapes that comprise the socio-economic and, specifically, the cultural areas, that through the tourism industry, all these functions can be addressed. Therefore, in this study, at first step, by reviewing different sources, information in the field of 'tourism', 'cultural tourism' and 'religious tourism' has been collected, and then, by understanding this phenomenon, the ritual landscapes, which are one of the most popular spaces for tourism, have been studied. The aim of this study is to increase the level of audience perception of subjective-objective aspects of ritual landscapes through reviewing the effects and characteristics of them, so that the tourism industry in this field can be improved relying on people knowledge and through experiencing the ritual landscapes. To better understand this issue, the Imāmzādeh Mohsen in Hamedan, which is known as 'Imāmzādeh KooH' (mount.) as well, has been adopted due to its location in the heart of Nature and having a holy tomb, and for many other social and economic events that take place there.

### Research Methodology

The research method in this study is descriptive-analytical one and information has been collected based on the available library resources, relying on site visit data collection. In the field of tourism, the internal and external web sites, together with many books and articles have been reviewed, among which the subjects related to the field of ritual (religious) tourism and cultural tourism have been more considered here. To explain the concept of ritual landscape, the library resources together with the published articles and books in this field have been reviewed during the last 10 years. Finally, the location of Imāmzādeh Mohsen in Hamadan was thoroughly examined, and data collection completed by using images and videos from Library archive of 'Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism' of Hamadan state.

### Literature Review

According to the research subject, the study is divided into three fields of 'tourism landscape', 'religious tourism' and 'ritual landscape'.

Parckekani (2016) has described the tourism landscape as a new field in the literature of urban studies, which goes beyond the perception of mere urban physical

body and enters into establishing a mutual connection between the city and visitor, the spiritual stabilization of the urban landscape and creating an objective relation between these two components. According to Zandieh and Goodarzian (2014) paying attention to different aspects, 'temporal-spatial', 'civilizational-historical' and 'objective-subjective' dimensions at the same time in a city, would be an appropriate platform for providing many requirements of urban tourism. Mansouri (2020) has addressed the tourism as a displacing in geographical territory that generates an order of meaning and knowledge. He also believes in order to achieve the purpose of tourism, reconsidering the concept of 'location/place' is of great importance (Mansouri, 2015). According to Ebrahimzadeh, Kazemizadeh and Eskandari Sani (2011), in the field of religious-ritual tourism, the available documents on ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt and other related works, all indicate the religious travels of humans. Mousavi, Soltani and Bagheri Kashkoli (2015) have also considered the religious tourists as the cultural tourists who travel to the religious places of the world to visit the places, perform religious ceremonies, visiting religious monuments, receiving religious training and spending their leisure time in these religious places. Ghazanfari and Javadi (2010) consider the religious tourism as an outcome of a mutual relation between travel and culture. Pointing to the religion cognition and ritual landscapes, Mohaddesi (2010) believes that there is a connection between the outer appearance and the conceptual basis of Iranians' reaction to the occasions. Abarghouei Fard, Saboonchi and Farzin (2018) by referring to the ritual landscape state that the ritual spaces are created through the experience of participation and spatial empathy. Additionally, Khorramrouei, et al. (2020) have considered an important role for ritual spaces in shaping the urban landscape, which is known as the strongest experiences of public spaces and one of the main causes of constituting the cities.

### Theoretical Foundations

#### • Ritual and Ritualistic Landscape

The rituals cover a wide range of social, cultural and religious behaviors of different societies and let these manifestations to be appeared in the dimensions of tradition; they comprise a broad range of symbolic items and signs within them; any activity or action is a manifestation of the underlying concepts and ideas that have been mystified. Music, rhythmic movements, manners, principles and rules, clothing and wear, appearance, arrays and ornaments, snacks and sweets, food and various drinks along with prayers, mention

(zīkr), and recitation are the inevitable features of these rituals. Therefore, ritual art is full of belief and spiritual concepts, where in the depth of its basis, considers the eternal soul, as it seems that its permanent appeals are also due to the presence of such blessings (Salehpour, 2007). Ritual is an unwritten “principle” and immortal concept in the minds of people, which has been transferred from generation to generation and, unlike the law, has no changeable framework or commentary. Ritual is a spiritual element that belief in it and its memorable aspect do not diminish over time, rather finds even more expression in life and society. This spirituality turns to objectivity in the form of rituals, customs, symbolism, and other related items, and defines a special place for human beings (Khorramrouei, Mahan & Farzin, 2019). On the other hand, the holy places that have been existed in the belief and religion of the Iranian people from the past until now are all related to the worship of the goddess of sun and moon, which was continuing in the time of Zoroaster. With the beginning of Islam and the formation of a new culture, these beliefs have been appeared in a new way and have been merged with Iranian-Islamic thoughts and customs that have remained stable and constant until now. Some of the religious places that were once the temple of ‘Mehr’ and ‘Anahita’ were later turned into the fire temples and finally into mosques, shrines and tombs of the elders and leaders of Islam. Most of these temples were built up near the mountains, springs and ancient trees. Long before the construction of these ritual and sacred buildings known as ‘CharTaghi’, there were trees, springs, wells and holy caves that were places for praying and appealing (Javadi, 2018). Ritual is a subset of culture, as the landscape that it creates, while being related to culture, is called the ritual landscape due to the significance of the comprising ritual symbols (Mansouri, 2013). The ritual landscape as an objective-subjective phenomenon is arising from the Nature and includes beliefs, faiths, traditions, customs and rituals that are being emerged appropriate to its location. Sometimes this manifestation is emerged either in the form of myth and symbolism, or in the heart of people’s daily life in the form of living principles. The ritual landscape as a ‘landscaped phenomenon’ has entered into the layers of history and people over the course of time and has remained in the people’s mind as a predefined principle. The celebrations like ‘Nowruz’ in Iran, the feast of cherry blossoms in Japan, the Thailand water festival and the annual ‘Cheese Rolling Festival’ in the UK, similar to many others are rituals formed in the heart of Nature originating from the respect for the natural elements. The ritual landscape as a subset of landscape and culture has the characteristics

of both at a same time (Khorramrouei, Mahan & Farzin, 2019). Therefore, according to the mentioned comments, the ritual landscape in the cities is the result of the confluence of two concepts, the citizens’ freedom of action and the reflection of their thoughts and beliefs. This meeting, which has a common physical pattern and a special place in the urban’s spatial organization, and has been formed in a Natural context due to the public and ritual events, has become an inseparable part of the historical memory and social life of the city. Therefore, it seems that the ritual landscape as an important part of the cultural and urban landscape is being considered as the citizens’ reaction to their spiritual needs.

Tourism and the recognition of ritual (religious) tourism Traveling has long been a concern of human societies; this distinct social need has been continued until today, due to the improved quality of travel culture among the people, in order to provide conditions for spending their leisure time in a proper way and keep themselves away from work and routine machine life. Traveling at current age, with the aim of visiting historical, natural and religious sites has been considered by almost all Iranian families (Ghazanfari & Javadi, 2010). On the other hand, tourism is a new field of human knowledge that is still caught in the middle of different interpretations. Sometimes it is considered as a mere activity, and not as discipline, that has just dependent on displacing plans, and sometimes it is being defined as an interdisciplinary science that is closely related to economics, culture, society and social services (Mansouri, 2020). Tourism<sup>1</sup> is a set of activities that people commit when traveling outside their usual living environment. It has been said that the length of travel should not be less than 26 hours and not exceeds a continuous 12- months, and it should be done for the purpose of entertaining, doing business and other related goals (Nasirian, 2010). The religious trips might be considered as the initial form of cultural tourism at the beginning of tourism formation. In the middle ages in Europe and later in the modern era, the church was the major and most important culturally active part of society, that was organizing travel similar to the business institutes in order to bring million people to the religious centers; Among them, the Camino de Santiago (Pèlerinage de Saint-Jacques-de-Compostelle), has still remained in the minds of people as a tradition (Abbaszadegan, 2011). Today, the religious tourism, in spite of its diversity in various fields, has been able to be considered as one of the basis of global tourism due to its functional characteristics. According to the World Tourism Organization, as a specialized agency of the United Nations (UNWTO), the religious tourism accounts for 26% of the world’s tourism. In this type

of tourism, the main motivation for a traveler is to visit the holy places and shrines, where the accommodation's quality and the variety of facilities can affect the staying duration (Ebrahimzadeh, Kazemizadeh & Eskandari Sani, 2011). Among the religious tourists, there are two types of visitors in case of confronting the religious places: A visitor whose motivation is limited to performing the religious ceremonies, and his/her staying duration is not dependent simply on their leisure time; And the second are the visitors who travel for religious and non-religious purposes, in addition to performing rituals while participating the ceremonies; they pursue several goals with the priority of religious one. Therefore, considering the visitor's confrontation with religious places, it can be concluded that there is an intrinsic difference between the pilgrimage and the religious tourism. In religious tourism, the purpose of travel is more impartial compared to pilgrimage one and usually comprises a range of voluntary and temporary activities within travel in which the pure religious intentions are combined with the other purposes of tourism. Therefore, the religious tourism seems to be a type of tourism in which the travelers have religious intentions (either particularly for this reason or in combination with the other ones) and visit the holy places. Beside this, the religious tourists initiate their experience from the beginning of their travel while leaving the origin point and perceive different events all the way, they encounter with new experiences until the end of the journey.

## Discussion

### • The History of Imāmzādeh Mohsen (Imāmzādeh Kooch/Mount.) in Hamadan

The state of Hamedan by having great ancient historical background is one of the regions with significant historical attractions. One of the historical areas of Hamedan is Imāmzādeh Mohsen, which is about 15 km away from the city of Hamedan. In order to reach the Imāmzādeh, it is required to pass through the city of 'Maryana' and the villages of 'Solan', Tū'īn/Tuijin, Mū'īn/Muijin/Mū'jīn and Vafrejīn/ Vafre-e Jīn (Fig.1). This tomb and holy shrine is also known as the Imāmzādeh Kooch (mountain) due to its location on a hill, on the northern slope of 'Alvand Mountain'. The valley of Imāmzādeh Kooch has always been prosperous, with lively space, throughout a history of several thousand years and has taken various names during this time. The oldest name for this valley in the ancient texts is known as 'Mashan-rood' valley or 'Mavashan-rood'<sup>2</sup>, which was one of the most prosperous recreational places in the sixth century (Jahanpour, 1997). The holy shrine has a large porch, a royal residence, alcove, (Shahneshin), two brick domes and a shrine. The tomb



Fig. 1. The positioning of Imāmzādeh Mohsen to the city, Source: www. Googleearth.com.

consists of two relatively short brick buildings with high ellipse-shaped domes that are seem to belong to 'Ilkhanate' era (Garrusin, 2004). In the war between the Iranians and the Arabs, some of the Arab leaders were killed, such as 'Abu Dujana Ansari' (one of the companion of the Holy Prophet, or aṣ-ṣaḥābah), 'Abu Saleh Tamati', 'Abu Samil' and 'Abu Kamel', whose burial place is thought to be in the tomb of Imāmzādeh Kooch (ibid., 26). According to evidences the 'Mavashan Valley' has been considered by kings and rulers since ancient times, and the tomb was built on a much older building, probably belonging to the Sassanid era, which could have been a fire temple as it was built where the beam of sunlight shine, which has been one of the most important conditions in constructing the religious buildings in ancient Iran. Secondly, the building has two domes, and two uneven courtyards, one higher than the other, with three 'Soffeh' (or "Soffa", means "stone bench), that can be a symbol of 'Good Thought, Good Speech and Good Deed'; additionally, the place of "Hashtadar"<sup>3</sup> which points to both the mountains located at the west side of 'Barfin village' (or Imāmzādeh Kooch village) and the holy shrine of Imāmzādeh, can confirm this theory (Khorramrouei, 2017).

### • The effect of Imāmzādeh Mohsen's ritual landscape on tourism in the region

One of the most important reasons that tourists consider



the 'Imāmzādeh Kooch' valley as a tourist place, is its ritual aspect attached with pilgrimage. For long time, the most pilgrimage spaces have included the nature tourism, ritual-religious (pilgrimage), social, economic, and recreational. So this conclusion can definitely be drawn here that the religious places as shrines and other holy places are among those urban spaces that have integrated several functions. The geographical area of Imāmzādeh Mohsen, due to its pleasant climate and valleys, represents religious attractiveness, in addition to showing recreational aspects; so the place of Imāmzādeh has been centrally focused and visited by the visitors (Figs. 2-4). Due to its high degree of holiness and the deepest beliefs of pilgrims, the Imāmzādeh is considered as a resort for travelers. Under the shadow of this ritual center and due to the burial of the holy person there, huge number of people travel a long distance to purify their soul and body. According to the concepts stated by Kanekar & Arati (1992), Douglas (1968), 'Rothenbuhler' (2008) and 'Givian' (2016), ritual has the repeatability characteristic of an event in a specific time and place; while according to the concepts of Bocock (1974), Turner (1966) and Eliadeh (1966) ritual has a pattern of behavior, action and social manifestation, with a symbolic and metaphorical nature. On the other hand, in the works of Alalhesabi and PaiKan (2013), all the mentioned cases have been addressed, while in a study by Khorramrouei, et al., (2019) the ritual landscapes generally have three major characteristics of 1. Repeatability in a specific time and place, 2. Symbol and metaphor, and 3. Action and social activity, that their objective manifestation is being appeared in the physical structure of holy monuments, while their spiritual manifestations are evident in the form of symbols, myths, traditions and customs. Therefore, about the ritual landscape of Imāmzādeh Mohsen, there are couple of examples in case of repeatability in time and place that can be referred to as the historical events, celebrations, ritual ceremonies and recalling the memories, in addition to the holiness of place and the burial of the blessed person. Pointing the symbolism and metaphor, the building's establishment on the height of the hill and the presence of three ancient mulberry trees in front of its entrance, along with number of the springs that flow by and under the Imāmzādeh building, all represent a symbolic manifestation of Imāmzādeh Mohsen for the visitors. In case of customs, there are numbers of traditions which are being held every year in this ritual space at a specific time and place as: holding rituals and respecting the mulberry trees 4, holding the religious ceremonies such as offering vows (sacrificing sheep or cows), donating foods (spreading on a table-cloth usually on the floor, traditionally

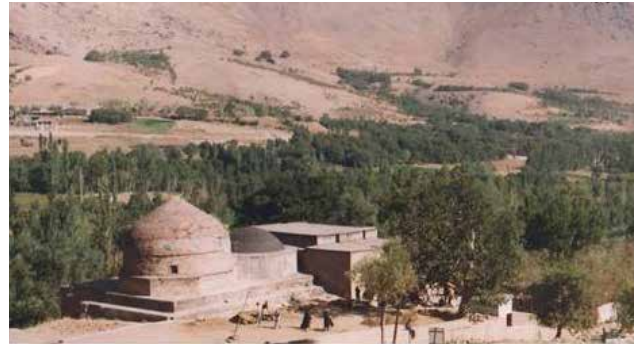


Fig.2. The picture is related to August 1991. Source: Archive of Hamedan Cultural Heritage.

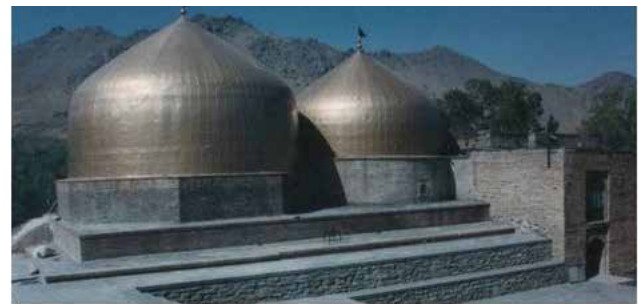


Fig.3. The picture is related to 1996, following the renovation of the domes, Source: The Archive of Cultural Heritage of Hamadan.



Fig. 4 the picture is related to 1996, the repair and renovation of the building, Photo: Reihaneh Khorramrouei, 2017.

known as 'Sofreh-ye Nazri') and inviting the pilgrims to the shrine when their prayers are answered, lighting candles in the holy shrine to heal patients, pouring cash into the holy shrine of Imāmzādeh when the vows are accepted and prayers are responded, sharing tea and fruit next to the holy shrine are among those traditions that are performed in this holy place (Fig.5). These socio-ritual-cultural events make this space attractive to the domestic and foreign tourists. As mentioned earlier, in addition to the holy place of Imāmzādeh, the existence of wild nature, mountains, valleys, springs, rivers and gardens around it, provide the touristic, recreational and economic dimension of the region. The tourists who travel to this area usually stay here about one or two days. In addition to performing the ritual of pilgrimage, they



Fig. 5. The holy shrine of Imāmzādeh Mohsen in Hamedan and the related beliefs of citizens, by addressing the ritual landscape (the symbolic and metaphorical part of the ritual landscape) along with the social activities and actions (social-interaction of ritual landscape), Source: www.hamshahriphoto.ir.



Fig. 6. The religious tourists in Imāmzādeh Mohsen in Hamadan, Source: the personal archive of Reihaneh Khorramrouei, 2017.

usually do other activities like spending recreational time in Nature, camping there, buying the garden products, and considering their presence in Imāmzādeh both as “fun and visiting” (Fig.6). Therefore, based on the above-mentioned comments, the effect of ritual landscapes of Imāmzādeh Mohsen on tourist’s attraction has been given in Fig. 7.

### Conclusion

Culture as a dynamic and constant concept, represents civil society and the spirit of social life. The more the human interact with it, the greater opportunity to create and deepen the culture and provide conditions to inter into the people’s lives. The interaction and cooperation of people with each other leads to stability and steadiness of one culture in confronting with other cultures; in this way, tourism will develop human culture in both physical and spiritual dimensions, and make them flourish. Since the ritual tourism is one of the inseparable parts of cultural tourism, in order to achieve knowledge through it, first the conditions for practically encountering with it be must be provided for tourists. The tourists, as representatives of different cultures, by

encountering in and contacting with that spatial space, can deal with transferring the experience, socializing and mutual interaction; since ritual landscapes are both a combination of holy places, with symbols and metaphors and a context for socio-economic activities, it can be a good opportunity for tourists to interact and participate with others. Therefore, traveling to and visiting the ritual landscapes is not solely confined to the activity of “observation”, rather, the significant point here is to get experiences out of the space, beside the holy symbols in these ritual places and integrated with the available Nature. Therefore, in ritual landscapes, the emerged parts can be appeared in the form of ritual “Place”, holy “Person”, ritual “Object” and blessed “text”, as visiting these objectivities along with the acquiring experiences will lead to the subjective construction, perception and cognition of environment and the ritual landscape. Actually, there is a mutual relation and interaction between the ritual landscape as a ‘host’ and the tourist as a ‘guest’, which results in evolution of the cultural patterns, the value and cognitive orders, the living quality and standards, and the ritual traditions in community with different attitudes.

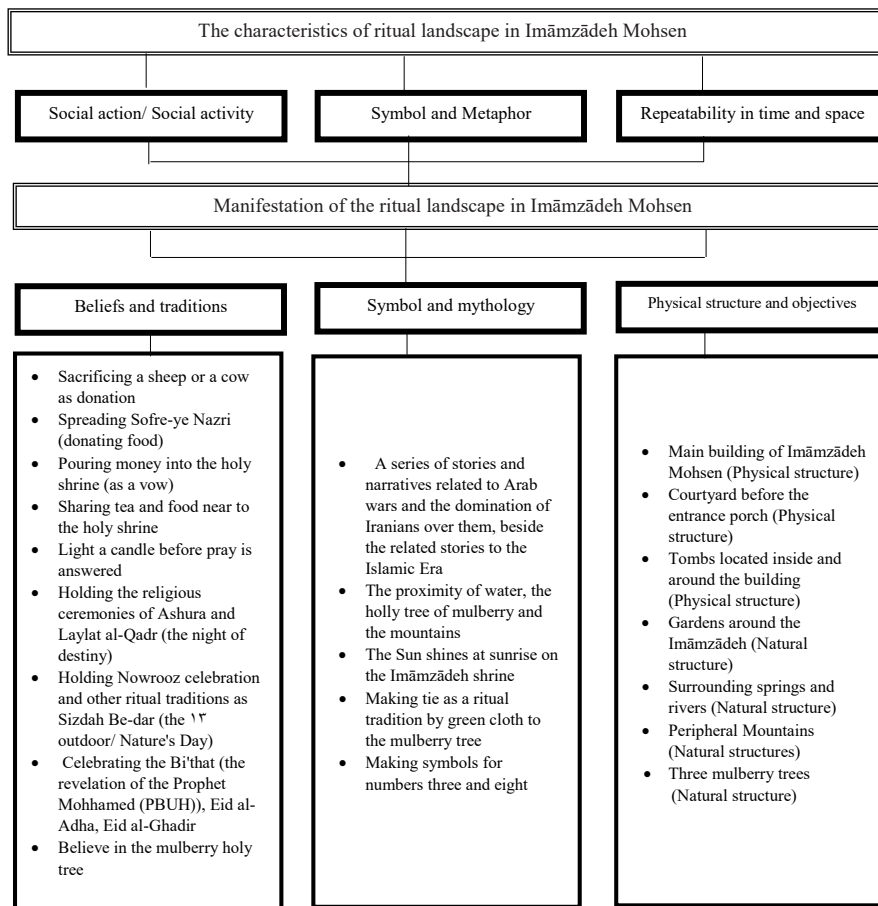


Fig. 7. The characteristics and manifestation of the ritual landscape in Imāmzādeh Mohsen of Hamedan and its effect on tourist attraction. Source: authors.

### Endnote

1. According to 'Academy of Persian Language and Literature', two Persian words are considered for 'tourism'. 2. Tourism, as set of activities that are performed by the tourists outside the borders of a country and 2. Tourism as set of activities that is performed inside a country (Nasirian, 2010).
3. "Mashan" means a place as beautiful as the Moon and also a green, lively, eternal place; "Mavsha" means a graceful place, the place of the king (= Yurdshah), as "Mav" means place, and 'Sha' refers to greater, Shah (king) and 'more graceful' (Rezaei Hamedani, 2000).

4. Garrusin, in the book entitled the "Historical Geography and .... Valley Habitats of Alvand Mount", points out that "Hashtadar" is probably refers to "Hasht Azar" that means 'eight fire temples'. "When Ghobad, from the Sassanid reign arrived in Persian land, he came to Yazd city, and built a 'fire house' ten miles away from the Meybod province, and said to bring seven fires from the large fire places of that time, and turned it into a prosperous place called 'Hafd Azar' (Garrusin, 2004).
5. The people of Hamedan believe that cutting down a mulberry tree is a bad omen (Khorramrouei, 2017).

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