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The Position of Asadabad Pass in the Historical Geography and Political-Economic Transformations of Iran from Antiquity to Contemporary Times

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ABSTRACT

The Asadabad Pass, situated on the western slopes of Mount Alvand and along the Hamadan–Kermanshah route, is considered one of the oldest and most significant natural passages across the Iranian Plateau. Throughout history, this pass has played a prominent role in the country's political, military, economic, and cultural transformations. This study, employing a descriptive-analytical approach based on historical and geographical sources, examines the position of the Asadabad Pass from the ancient era up to contemporary times, seeking to elucidate the reasons for its sustained importance within the structure of Iran's historical geography. The findings indicate that from the Median and Achaemenid periods through the end of the Sasanian era, the Asadabad Pass served as the western gateway to Central Iran, playing a decisive role in controlling communication and defense routes. During the Islamic periods, particularly from the Middle Ages up to the Safavid era, the Hamadan–Asadabad–Kermanshah route transformed into one of the main military, commercial, and pilgrimage axes, leading to a simultaneous increase in the region's economic importance. In the Safavid, Afsharid, and Qajar periods, this passage was vital for the movement of armies, trade, and religious caravans. In contemporary times, due to its strategic location, it has attracted the attention of both domestic and foreign forces. The natural location of the pass has been the primary factor in its continuous historical importance- a feature that has kept this passage not merely a route of transit, but a geographical, cultural, and historical link between the East and West of Iran.

Keywords: Asadabad Pass, Adrapana, Historical Geography, Ancient Routes of Iran.

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Introduction

Asadabad Pass, located on the western slopes of Mount Alvand along the historical Hamadan–Kermanshah route, is one of the oldest natural corridors in western Iran. Throughout history, this pass has played a significant role not only in political and military developments but also in the formation, continuity, and sustainability of rural settlements along its route. The interaction between natural geography, communication networks, and rural life has made Asadabad Pass a key element in the historical geography of western Iran. The main objective of the research is to explain why and how this pass maintained its strategic and settlement-related importance over long historical periods.

Materials & Method

This study adopts a descriptive–analytical approach and is based on historical sources, geographical treatises, travel accounts, and administrative and military reports. It examines the role of Asadabad Pass from antiquity to the modern period, with particular emphasis on its impact on rural settlement patterns, local economies, and socio-cultural structures.

Discussion

The findings indicate that from the Median and Achaemenid periods, Asadabad Pass functioned as a crucial link between Ecbatana (Hamadan) and Mesopotamia. This position facilitated the emergence of way stations, villages, and service-oriented settlements that supported travelers, caravans, and military movements. During the Parthian and Sasanian eras, the military significance of the pass increased due to conflicts along Iran's western frontiers. At the same time, logistical requirements encouraged the development of agriculture, animal husbandry, and supply services in surrounding rural areas, creating a strong interdependence between the road network and rural livelihoods. In the Islamic period, particularly from the early centuries to the Safavid era, the Hamadan–Asadabad–Kermanshah corridor became one of Iran's major commercial and pilgrimage routes. Muslim geographers and travelers describe Asadabad as a prosperous area with cultivated lands, markets, gardens, and numerous villages. The continuous movement of trade caravans and pilgrims traveling to the Shi'i holy cities in Iraq strengthened the economic and demographic stability of rural settlements and enhanced their cultural and religious significance. During the Safavid, Afsharid, Zand, and Qajar periods, despite political instability and occasional insecurity, Asadabad Pass remained a vital factor in sustaining rural life. The establishment of postal stations, road maintenance, and repeated military and pilgrimage movements transformed villages along the route into

multifunctional settlements providing accommodation, supplies, and services. In the modern period, especially during World War I, the strategic importance of the pass once again affected the social and economic conditions of nearby rural communities.

Results and Conclusion

This study concludes that Asadabad Pass represents a clear example of the reciprocal relationship between communication routes and rural settlements in Iran's historical geography. Its natural characteristics, combined with economic, religious, and strategic functions, contributed to the long-term sustainability of rural settlements in the region. The research highlights the importance of historical passes as key factors in understanding rural settlement patterns, rural livelihoods, and the continuity of human habitation in Iran and the Islamic world.

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