

THE NASIRA ROCK TOMB; A NEW DISCOVERY OF THE ELYMIAN BURIAL RITUAL

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Abstract. *"Funeral rites" are among the most important and prominent archaeological evidence related to the semi-independent Elymian kingdom; this evidence represents a wide range of history, tradition, culture and civilization, as well as the political, ritual and social conditions of the Elymian kingdom (147 BC-224 AD), which was formed in the context of the Seleucid (312-247 BC) and Parthian (247 BC-224 AD) periods. The newly discovered rock tomb of Nasira was formed on the southwestern slope of a rocky hill at an altitude of about 30 meters above the valley level and the northern edge of the Shor River, in the area of the Mahour hills of Masjed Soleyman city. The entrance of this tomb is rectangular, and a projecting porch with two small side platforms in front of it reveals the unique and different architectural features of the building. The interior of the tomb is almost square and consists of four "arches" with nested niches and side platforms. The distinctive features of the newly discovered tomb of Nasira, including its relatively large dimensions compared to other tombs and crypts in the region, the different style of the interior layout, the presence of a porch, and the preservation of the original structure, have made this newly discovered tomb a unique and researchable work among the works related to the Elymian burial.*

Keywords: *Elymian period, burial ritual, newly discovered tomb, Nasira rock tomb.*

Introduction

In the territory of the Parthian state, there were several semi-independent local kings, which confirms the feudal view of this kingdom (Wolsfki, 1967:135; Vanki, 2006:72). Among these local kings, the Elymian rulers had a special position. The Elymian state, which was formed in the heart of the Seleucid state, continued to play the role of an influential regional power throughout the Parthian era until the beginning of the Sassanid period (224-651 AD). This state, relying on the strategic centrality of Khuzestan, was able to maintain its political identity and influence in the developments in the southwest during the Seleucid-Parthian periods. Sources have mentioned the time period of the Elymian presence between the second century BC and the early third century AD (147 BC-224 AD). (Hansman, 1998:373) The similarity of the Avaric and nominal Elymian and "Elam/Elam" has caused most researchers of the kingdom. The Elymians are considered to be the survivors and successors of the ancient Elamite civilization (Pates, 2006:545). Vandenberg and Shipman consider the name Elymian to be derived from the name Elamite and compatible with the Assyrian-Babylonian word "Elamtu" (mountainous land). (Vandenberg and Shipman, 2007:7) The Elymians were a people living in the northern highlands of Khuzestan (Alizadeh, 1990:36;131, Pliny, 1967, VI, 131_134_6, Strabo, 1967.XV) The oldest

reference to the Elymians is in the report of Nearchus (Alexander's admiral), which Strabo also mentioned, who mentions the Elymians as a marauding group in the neighborhood of Shushan and the Persians. (Le.Rider, 1965:534) Also, Grishman introduced the Elymians as survivors of the Persian tribes. (Ghrishman, 1976:284) The Elymian territory rose to power in southwestern Iran and, at its widest geographical extent, encompassed the regions and provinces of Khuzestan, Lorestan, Kermanshah, Hamadan, Chahar Mahal and Bakhtiari, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer Ahmad, and parts of Isfahan, with its center in the city of Susa. The importance of trade and agriculture and the existence of communication routes that connected the east to the west made Elymian one of the richest and most well-known states and economic-commercial highways of the Seleucid-Parthian era. (Sarfaraz, 2008:85, Chaumont, 1992:149,) Written sources regarding the Elymian territory mention the names of various regions and cities such as: Gabianeh, Massabatneh, Korbianeh, Azara, Seleucia Hediphon (along the Jarahi River), Seleucia Oulaus, and... (Potts, 1385:580-584). Most sources date the first coin minted by the Elymians to 161-162 BC and to a person named "Kamenaskeres", the founder of the Elymian dynasty and a contemporary of the Seleucids (Vandenberg and Shipman, 1386:7). It is possible that the pressure for Elymian independence increased following the death of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 BC). (Sellwood, 1983:307) The Elymian kingdom continued its political life under the two dynasties of Kamenaskiri and Parthian until its fall, coinciding with the rise of the Sassanids (224 AD). As a powerful semi-independent state, the Elymians left behind significant works in the fields of ritual architecture (Ghrishman 1976a-1976b), reliefs (Vandenberg and Shipman, 2007), sculpture, coinage (Sarfaraz and Aversamani, 2005:58), and the like. Among the most important Elymian finds are the works related to burials, which provide valuable evidence regarding the Elymian worldview. In the Elymian period, as in other periods, there were various traditions and methods for burial. This multiplicity of burial methods indicates a kind of religious tolerance and plurality of beliefs in the Elymian land. The Elymian burial is one of the most prominent and important archaeological works from the Elymian kingdom, reflecting a wide range of tradition, history, culture, civilization, and the crystallization of political, ritual, and social conditions, as well as recounting a significant part of the Elymian ritual conditions in the context of the Seleucid-Parthian periods. In general, the Elymian burial methods are divided into six categories: underground crypt tombs, surface crypt burials, coffin burials, jar burials, tomb burials, and stone-lined burials (stone-lined burials). This research deals with a new discovery of the Elymian burial ritual, which was discovered in the form of a rock tomb with a luxurious interior space in the "Nasira" area of the Mosque of Solomon. In this article, the authors introduce its architecture and structure, and the characteristics of this tomb are subjected to archaeological analysis.

Research Background

The present tomb was identified in 2012 by Alireza Sardari Zarchi and the framework of the program to survey and identify ancient sites in Masjed-e Soliman County. Its preliminary report was published by the researcher a year later in 2013 (Sardari Zarchi ,2013).

Research Method

The present research is a fundamental research based on its purpose and a historical research based on its nature and method. The information was collected through two methods: library and field. In the library section, all sources and references related to the research were identified and the required data along with the theories presented about the burial rituals of the Elymians were extracted and carefully studied. In the field section, a framework called the comparative approach was used, which included a visit to the "Newly Discovered Rock Tomb of

Nasira" and a comparison with comparable cases in other Elymian sites such as the Shushtar Fadlak.

A look at the most important works of the Elymian burials

The Elymian tombs are among the most important evidence of the Elymian architecture and burial tradition in the context of the Seleucid-Parthian period. Studies and excavations of the Elymian tombs have been carried out by archaeologists in recent decades. Based on the excavations carried out in 1947 and 1948 in the city of Susa, Ghrishman came across a cemetery within the city of "Artisans", and based on the coins found in graves number one and three, the discovered cemetery can be introduced as an underground crypt cemetery related to the Elymian kingdom (Ghrishman, 1954:14, Boucharlat & Haerinck, 2011). In 1968, Ali Akbar Sarfaraz, while excavating in an area called "Destva" (fishermen's dam) three kilometers southeast of Shushtar, discovered an underground crypt tomb made of brick materials and burial samples. It was found in a clay coffin belonging to Elimai. (Sarfaraz, 1969) In the continuation of the excavations carried out in 1365 in the Dastva region under the supervision of Mehdi Rahbar, the remains of five Elimai tombs were discovered, again of the type of underground crypt known as "Golalak". (Rahbar 1997). In 1379, Rahbar also revealed the remains of an Elymian tomb in the village of Saleh Davood. (Rahbar 2003) Excavations carried out in the Gotvand Dam catchment area in 1386 led to the discovery of two Elymian cemeteries, Qaleh Shias and Kunar Hoshtlik, of the stone-lined type. (Azizi Kharanaghi et al.: 2012). Joint excavations by Iran and Italy led by Mehrakian and Messina have revealed the remains of an Elymian mountain tomb (Kol Chandar Shami). (Mehrakian and Messina: (2013, 2014, 2016) Also, new underground tombs have been discovered in Masjed-e-Suleiman city. (Sardari Zarchi et al. 1393) Further, following the excavations and studies of Soltani, a rock tomb complex was discovered with a relief of Fadlak. (Soltani, 2024).

Natural location of the monument

"Nasira Rock Tomb¹" is located in terms of political divisions in Khuzestan Province, Masjed-e-Soleman County, Markazi District, Tambi Golgir Rural District and 2.5 meters northeast of the village of Ney Nardban. The tomb is located precisely on the northern edge of the Shurr River, between the village of Ney Nardban and the village of Khajeh-abad, and among the lands of the Mahuri Hill. This area is actually the center of a rugged plain that ends in the Doblotan Mountain from the north and in the Gach-Labari Mountain from the south. In this area, the heights gradually decrease and are limited to the Shurr River in the form of rugged lands and the Mahuri Hill. The entire landscape around the area is in the form of the Mahuri Hill and rocky terrain (conglomerates) on both sides of the Shurr River. The Shurr River extends in a southeast to northwest direction; The Nasira rock tomb is located on the southwestern slope of the rocky Mahuri hill and along a shallow and relatively open valley. Although no crypt or tomb of this style has been introduced anywhere so far and is different in structure from other known tombs, it can be attributed to the Elymian period based on other features (such as a platform, a basin, a niche, and dimensions). The name of this tomb is derived from the name of the region.

Nasira is the name of a tribe that is scattered in the region.

Characteristics of the work

¹ This tomb is 4.7 meters long, 4.8 meters wide, and 2 meters high. It is located in the central part of Tambigolgir 2.5 rural district, Ney Nardban village, Masjed Soliman county, Khuzestan province, at an altitude of 241 meters above sea level. This tomb is located in terms of geographical coordinates: .utm: 3527888288,11 X:339945,42

The "Nasira Rock Tomb" was created on a vertical wall of conglomerate rock, at a height of approximately 30 meters above the valley surface. To create the tomb, the rock surface was first slightly carved and then the tomb was dug. The entrance to the tomb² - which has been broken - is rectangular in shape, 15 centimeters higher than the floor of the crypt, 65 centimeters wide, 155 centimeters high, and 50 centimeters thick, and faces southwest. On the sides of the opening, two small platforms measuring 10×10×50 centimeters have been created. In front of the crypt, a porch has been created at a height of 25 centimeters below the entrance opening with dimensions of 180 centimeters in length, 90 centimeters in width, and 25 centimeters in thickness. The space inside the tomb is an almost square-shaped room with the following characteristics and dimensions: On the four sides of the tomb, arches have been created, each of which, except for the entrance, has a platform and a niche with a crescent-shaped roof; on the wall opposite the entrance to the tomb (northern wall), there are two nested niches. The niches have been created at a height of 35 centimeters higher than the platform. The height of the niches is 80 centimeters and their width is 1 meter. The width of the platforms is 80 cm and their height from the floor of the crypt is 50 cm. On one side of them, another small platform, which has a pillow-like shape compared to the main platform, has been carved with dimensions of 10 x 30 x 80 cm. The dimensions of the ceiling of the tomb are: 175 x 180 cm (180 cm in the east/west direction; 175 cm in the north/south direction). The dimensions of the floor of the crypt are also: 200 x 210 cm (210 cm in the east/west direction; 200 cm in the north/south direction). There is a shallow hole in the floor of the crypt (approximately 5 to 7 cm deep) with shallow grooves built into the floor towards it. The height of the crypt from the floor to its ceiling is 190 cm. Weathering and erosion of the surface of the monument as a result of atmospheric factors and human traffic and the breaking of its entrance opening, the perforation of the crypt wall on the west side of the entrance, the peeling of the surface of the tomb walls, the sooting of the inner surface of the walls as a result of lighting a fire inside the tomb, the writing of so-called commemorative sentences and words on the surface of the tomb walls, and illegal excavation outside the tomb on its southeast side are among the most important damages inflicted on it.

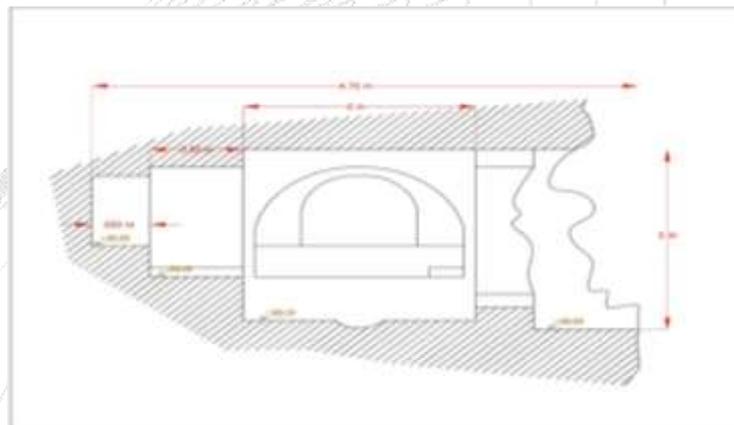


Figure of a linear plan of the Nasira rock tomb (Cultural Heritage Archive: 2015).

² The breaking of the tomb is the most obvious interference with the monument, and except for a part of the entrance that is broken, almost the entire crypt is intact and intact. It should be added that no action has been taken to repair or restore the architectural remains of this monument.

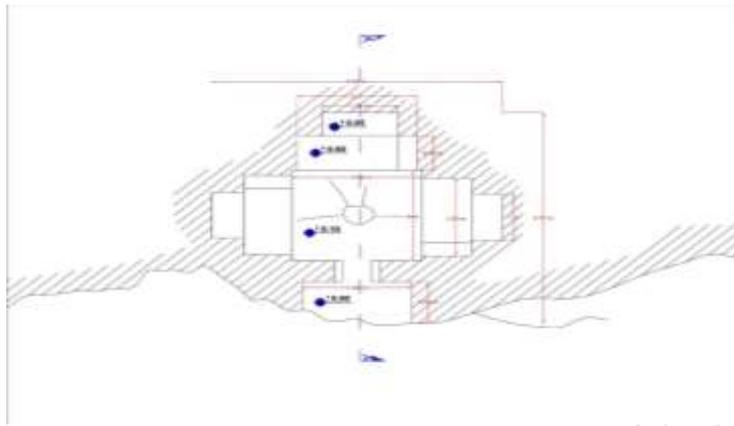
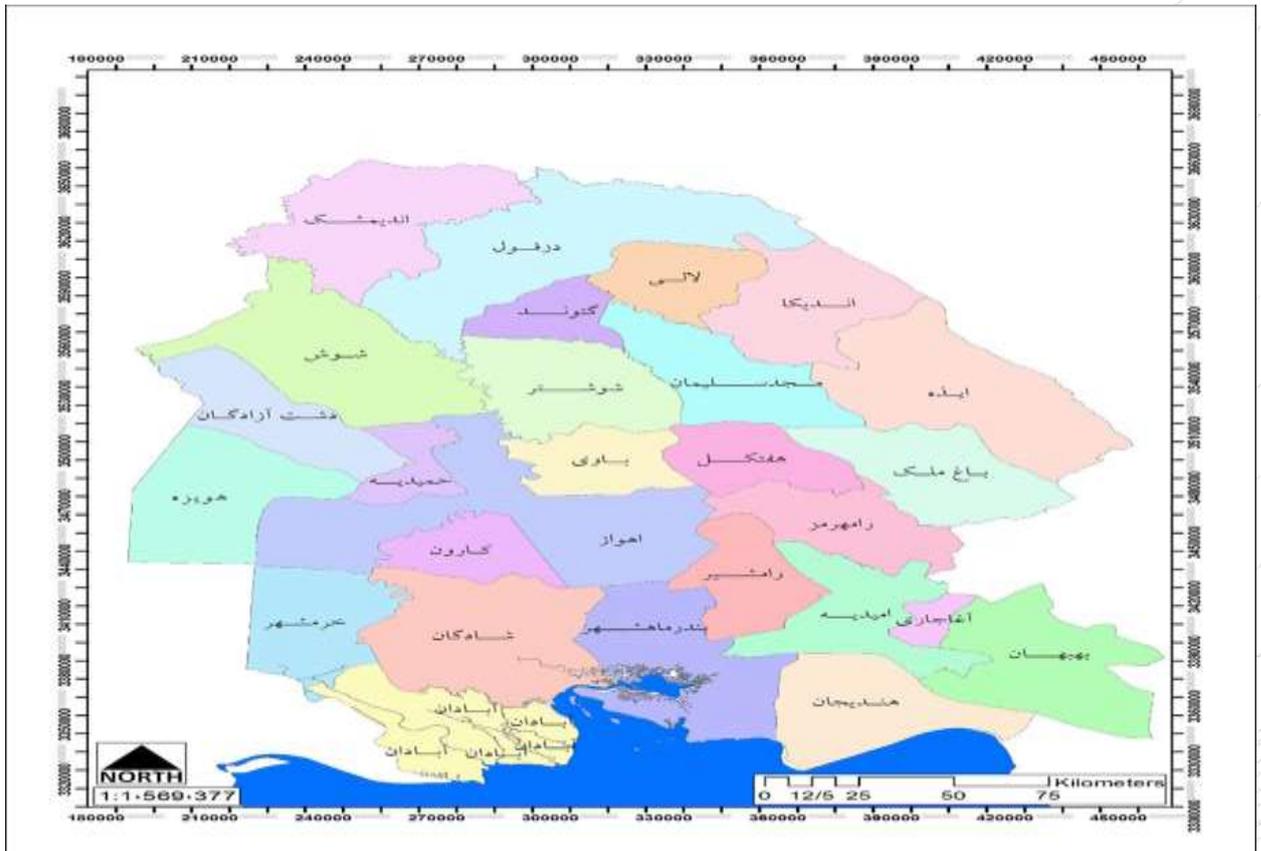


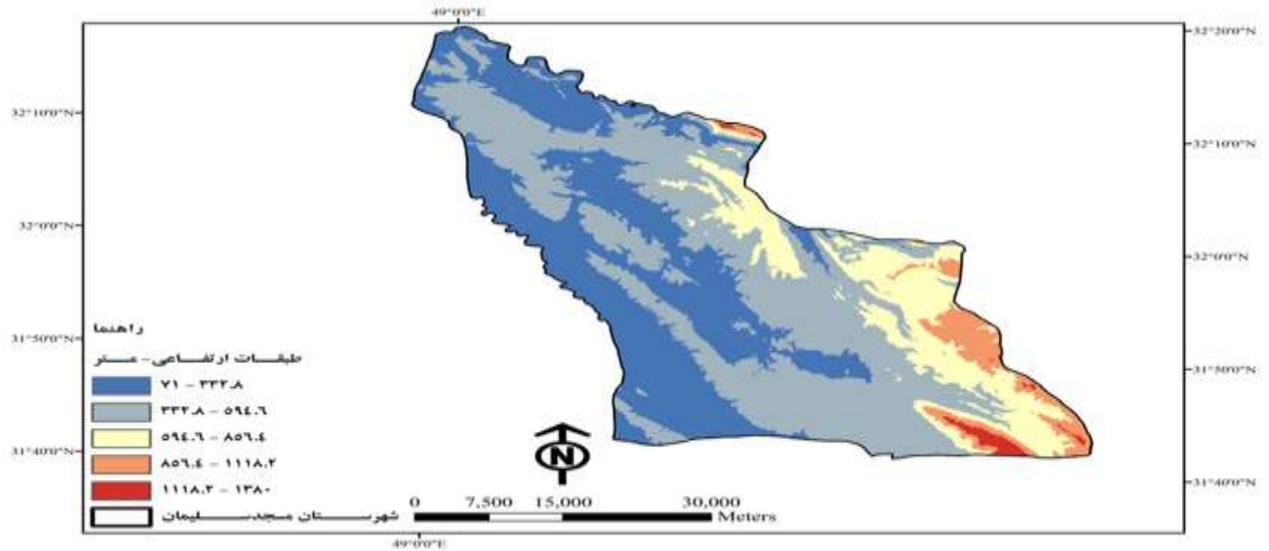
Figure 2. Longitudinal cross-section of the Nasira rock tomb (Cultural Heritage Archive:2015).

Conclusion

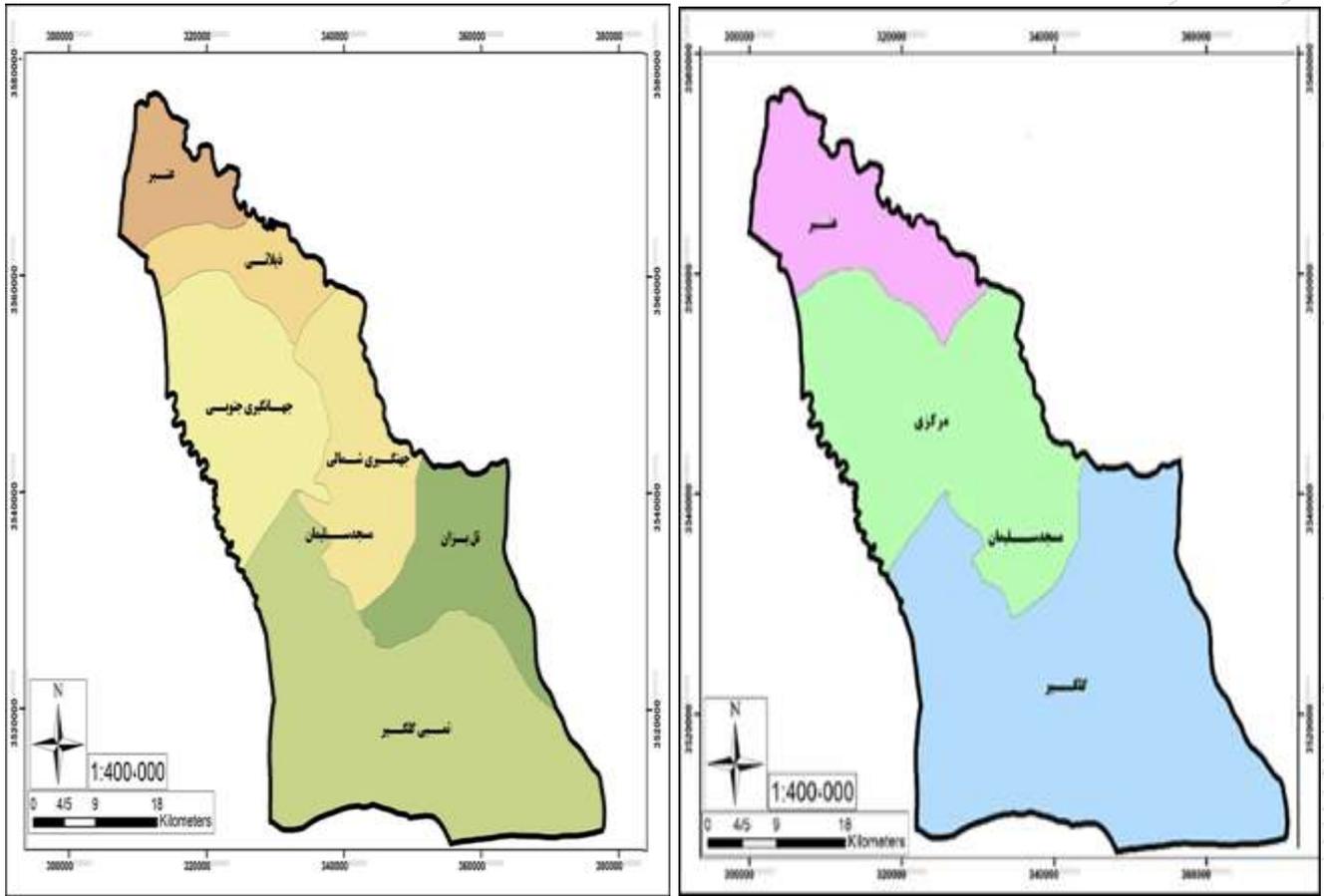
The discovery of the Nasira rock tomb in the Masjid-e Suleiman region, as one of the most important archaeological discoveries in the field of Elymian studies, plays a decisive role in understanding the burial practices, architectural features, and ritual beliefs of the semi-independent and sometimes independent Elymian state in the context of the Seleucid-Parthian period. This tomb, with its unique features, including relatively large dimensions, complex interior design including arches, nested niches, side platforms, and the presence of a porch in front of the entrance, is considered a rare example compared to other known Elymian tombs. The location of the tomb on the southwestern slope of a rocky hill with a direct view of the Shor River not only indicates the importance of the burial site in the natural landscape, but also reflects the Elymian beliefs regarding the afterlife and the sanctity of the place. The internal structure of the tomb with four arches and embedded platforms reinforces the possibility of multiple ritual functions or holding collective-family burial ceremonies. Comparison of this work with other Elymian burial sites, including the Fadlek tomb of Shushtar, indicates the simultaneous continuation of diversity in burial practices across the Elymian territory. Despite this architectural style and unique details of the tomb The Nasira rock tomb has made it a distinctive and remarkable example for comparative studies. In addition, the authors' hypothesis of a possible connection between the Nasira rock tomb and the Mehri ritual has increased its importance in ritual-civilizational fields and highlighted the need for interdisciplinary research. Unfortunately, this valuable monument faces threats such as natural erosion, human destruction, fracture of the entrance opening, and unauthorized excavations; factors that have endangered the authenticity and continued survival of the monument. Therefore, physical preservation, careful documentation, and systematic excavations at this site and similar sites are essential to complete the archaeological map and cultural influence of the Elymian kingdom and to better understand the ritual system of the Elymian kingdom. Overall, the Nasira rock tomb provides a new perspective for understanding the social structure and ritual system of the Elymians, while emphasizing the prominent position of the cultural heritage of southwestern Iran. And it highlights the importance of continuing field and interdisciplinary research.



Map One: Location of Masjed Soliman County in the divisions of Khuzestan Province (Authors: 2025).



Map Two: Location of the work on the map of the unevenness of Masjed-e-Suleiman city (Authors: 2025).



Map Three: Location of the work on the map of political divisions of Masjed Soliman County, divided into districts and villages.



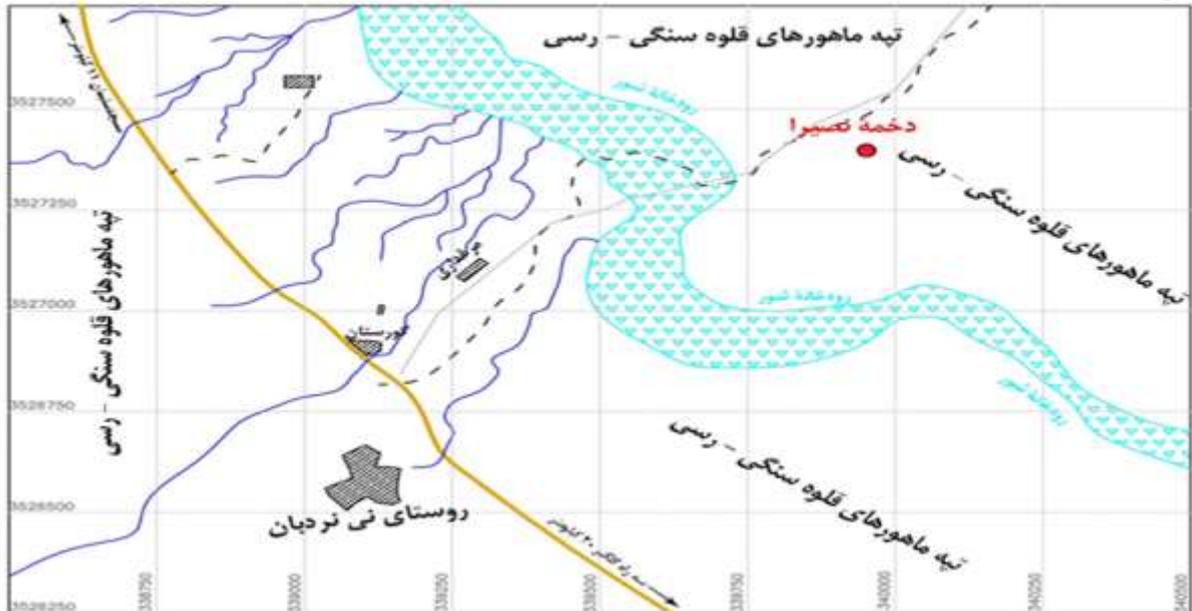
(Google Earth 2014) Figure 3 Aerial photo of the location of the Nasira rock tomb

تomb Nasira



direction

direction of the village



Four-dimensional map of the Nasira rock tomb (Khuzestan Cultural Heritage Archive: 2015).



Figure 4: Perspective of the Nasira Rock Tomb – View from the South (Authors: 2025)



Figure 5: View of the Nasira Rock Tomb - View from the South (Authors: 202)



Figure 6: View of the Nasira Rock Tomb - View from the West (Authors: 2025)



Seven: View of the interior of the Nasira Rock Tomb – Northern Wall (Authors: 2025)



Figure 8: View of the interior of the Nasira rock tomb - eastern wall (authors: 2025)

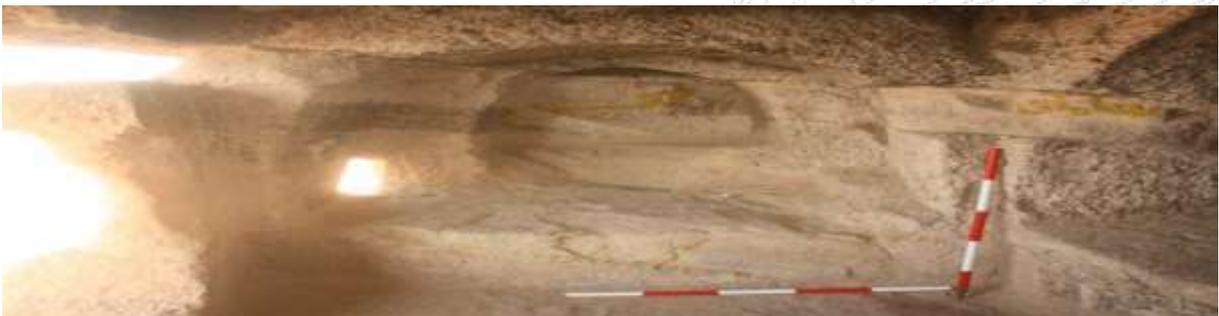


Figure 9: View of the interior of the Nasira rock tomb – Western Wall (Authors: 2025)



Figure 10: View of the interior of the entrance to the Nasira rock tomb (authors: 2025)



Figure Eleven: View of the interior of the Nasira rock tomb – floor of the crypt (Authors: 2025)



Figure 12: View of unauthorized excavation near the Nasira rock tomb - view from the west (Authors: 2025)



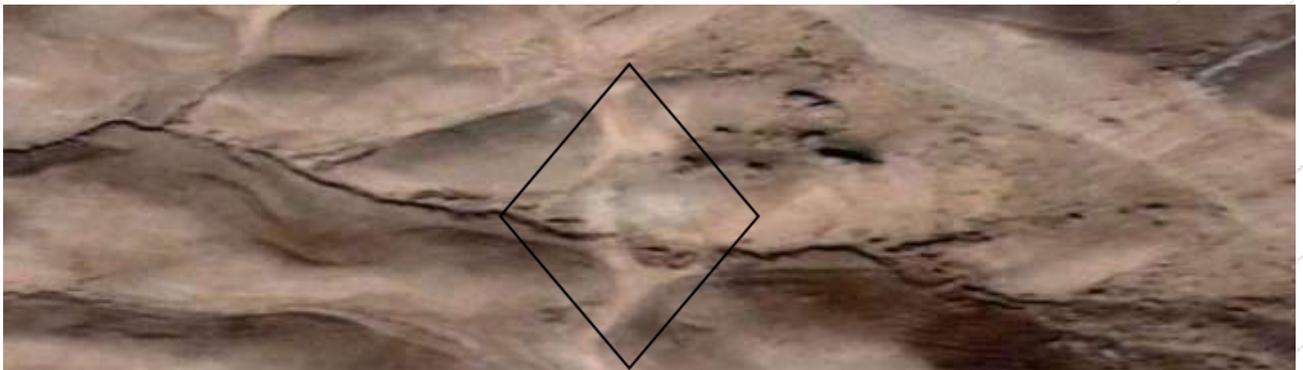
Figure Thirteen: View of the entrance to the Nasira rock tomb – view from the west (Authors: 2025)



Figure Fourteen: View of the opening of the Nasira rock tomb - view from the south (Ngarnagan: 2025)



Figure 15: View from the top of the Nasira rock tomb – view from the north (Authors: 2025)



(Google Earth: 2014) Figure 16: Determining the area of the Nasira rock tomb

Geographic coordinates of the arena points

<u>X</u>	<u>Y</u>
1. 339946	3527829
2. 339933	3527816
3. 339922	3527829
4. 339936	3527838

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