

# Landlord Villages of Iran as Landscapes of Hierarchy and Control

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**Abstract** This paper analyses the walled landlord villages of the Tehran Plain in terms of hierarchy and control, and how these structures are created and expressed through the spatial landscape of the villages. Drawing on original fieldwork, the ways in which landlords used the physicality of the villages to maintain and reinforce control over farmers is explored. We suggest that the “success” or at least longevity of the land tenure system in Iran prior to the later twentieth century can be attributed at least in part to the buildings and spaces of the villages themselves.

**Keywords** Landlord villages · Tehran plain · Hierarchy · Spatial relations · Control

## Introduction

Landlord villages were a major element of rural Iran for many centuries, representing not only the dominant form of land tenure, but also the dominant form of socio-economic organization which ensured that wealth and power was concentrated in the hands of a small percentage of the population (Dandamaev and Lukonin 1989; Lambton 1953). The vast majority of the population however, lived in what many historical accounts describe as great poverty, with all the accompanying social evils (Bausani 1962; Lambton 1953). Wealthy, absentee landlords owned whole villages, which were usually enclosed by high mud brick walls, and the surrounding agricultural and grazing lands. In general, these landlords, or *arbobs*, decided who would live within their villages and which plots of land they could cultivate. In some villages there was a degree of relative security where houses remained in possession of the same families for generations, but landlords usually ensured that their tenants cultivated different plots of land every few years; this meant that everyone had

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periodic access to the better plots of land, but also meant that most farmers lacked personal commitment to improving the land (Hooglund 1982).

The White Revolution of the 1960s was ostensibly Muhammad Reza Pahlavi's attempt to redistribute ownership of agricultural land from large landlords to the farmers (Kazemi 1980; Savory 1978). The long- and short-term outcomes of this revolution have been extensively debated, but it did result in partially breaking the centuries-old stranglehold of the landed elite, and many of these walled, mud-brick villages were abandoned at the time of the White Revolution or shortly afterwards. Landlord villages and the “feudal” form of land tenure and social organization they represent have been studied and reported in a range of historical and ethnographic accounts from many different geographical areas of Iran (e.g., English 1966; Hooglund 1982; Keddie 1980; Lambton 1953), and it is clear that they underpinned the Iranian way of life for many centuries (Bausani 1962; Garthwaite 2005). However, even within texts devoted to exploring and understanding rural history and the roles of those owning and those working the land, farmers (more usually designated “peasants”) remain an amorphous, ahistorical mass, who were subject entirely to the will of the landlord and lived in extreme poverty (e.g., English 1966; Hooglund 1982; Keddie 1980; Lambton 1953). Landlords were also described as a homogeneous group, although their increased wealth raised them above the pity of contemporary western academic observers and travelers.

The primary aim of our wider project is to understand more about the creation and reproduction of structures and systems within these villages, achieved through analysis of material culture and informant interview. Our information comes from three villages in the Tehran Plain (Fig. 1), and is not specifically intended to provide a

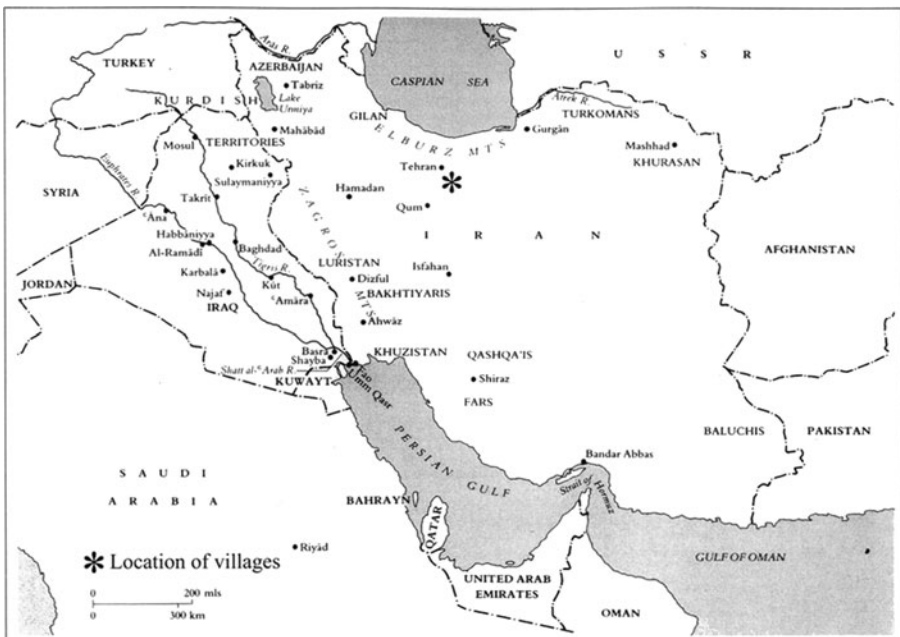


Fig. 1 Map showing location of landlord villages in Tehran Plain, Iran

model for villages from other parts of the country. Chronologically, our focus is the twentieth century up until the White Revolution in the 1960s. Given the social and economic constraints placed on the farmers living within these villages, we wanted to look at the ways in which “acting, feeling, and relating subjects constituted themselves under circumstances beyond their full comprehension or direct control” (Dobres and Robb 2000, p. 3). We also wanted to document a selection of these villages before they were entirely lost through weathering and industrial and agricultural encroachment, and record some of the first hand memories of life in the villages before they too were lost. Over three fieldwork seasons (2007, 2008, 2009) we recorded the village plans and standing remains of three abandoned villages in the Tehran Plain (Kazemabad, Hosseinabad Sanghar, Gach Agach) (Figs. 2, 3 and 4), carried out ethnographic interviews with people who had lived in or been closely associated with the villages, and excavated a series of trenches at Kazemabad (Fazeli and Young 2008; Fazeli et al. 2009).

## Theoretical Context

In this paper we will explore issues of hierarchy and control as key structures within the social organization of the villages, and in particular, the relationship between lived space and power within the three villages of the Tehran Plain. These views are then contrasted with historical and ethnographic sources which have tended to offer a monolithic view of the villages, and we stress that this is by no means true of all studies of landlord villages extant from a wide range of disciplines, but is a view

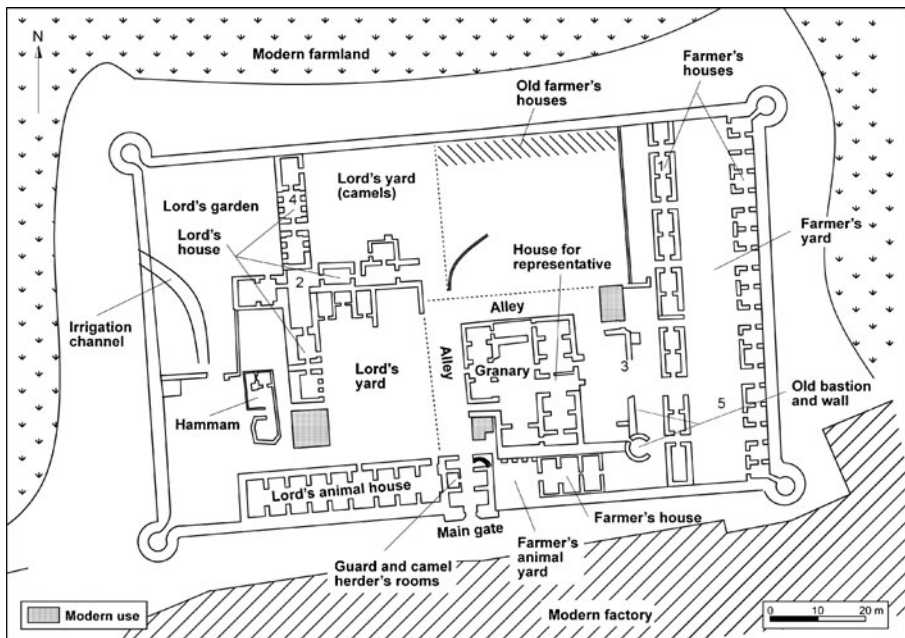


Fig. 2 Kazemabad village plan

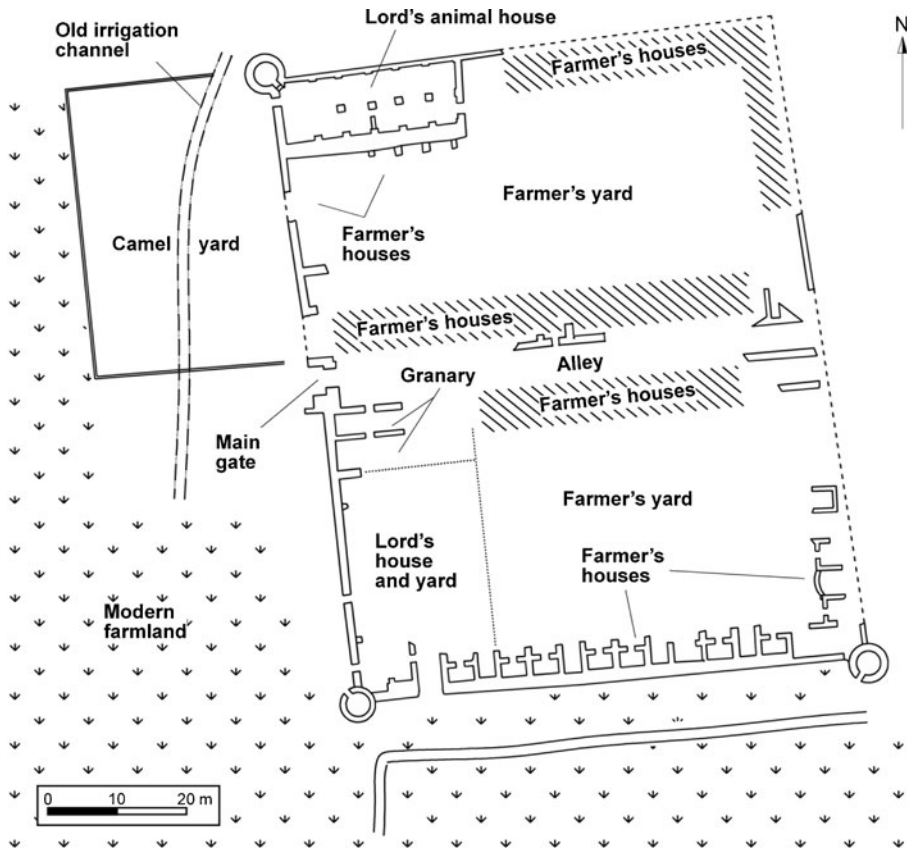


Fig. 3 Hosseinabad Sanghar village plan

which has tended to dominate, particularly western scholarship. In order to consider how these social structures were created, manipulated, and reproduced by landlords and farmers we focus our analysis on the built landscape of the village. As Preucel and Meskell (2004, p. 12) point out, such things as class relations are not merely expressed *within* spatial configurations, but are also expressed *through* spatial configurations since buildings and spaces are inextricably linked to the structures of a society, thus making them also appropriate for looking at the structures we are interested in here, namely hierarchy and control. Within the village these spatial configurations provide the places in which daily tasks and activities are carried out and for the enactment of social interaction and relations, and analyzing these configurations allows us to explore the relationship between people and the structures that order their society (Dobres and Robb 2000, p. 4). Different groups will have different experiences of buildings and spaces; for example, different classes or genders may have access to different spaces and places, perhaps at different times of the day, or they may have different visual or aural experiences, as shown by Casella's (2010) work in female prisons and Gilchrist's (1994) work in female religious buildings. Differentiated places order inhabitants and exert social control by materially expressing hierarchy, and understanding the ways in which people move through the village

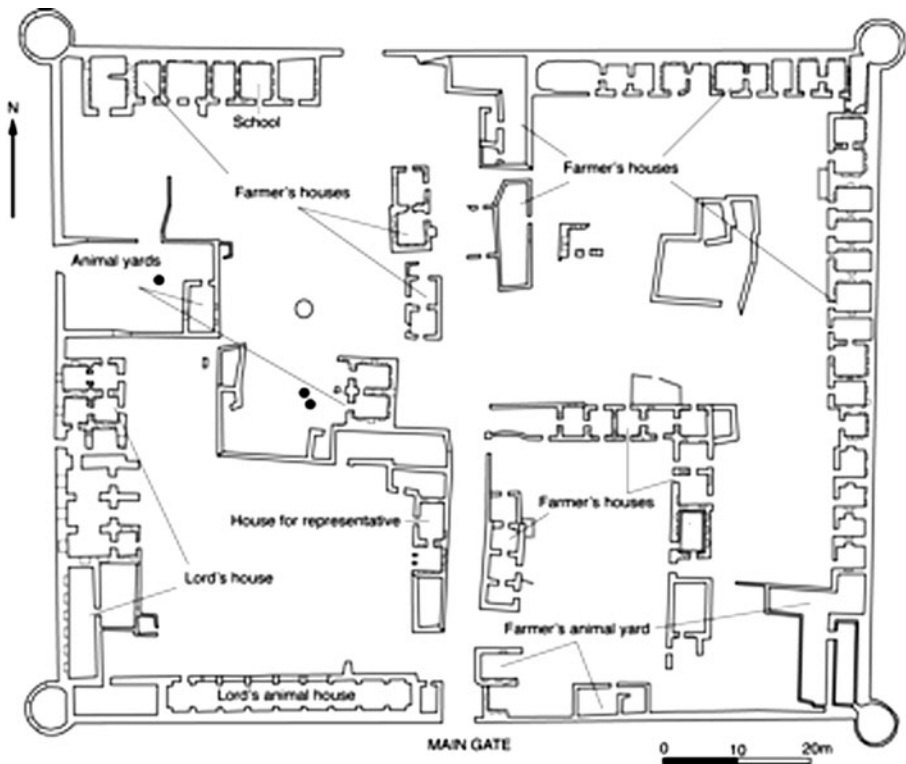


Fig. 4 Gach Agach village plan

can provide a way of mapping segregation and hierarchy (Casella 2010, p. 93; Gilchrist 1994, p. 152; Johnson 1996, p. 123). It has also been argued that buildings and spaces are active within social relations and that they are also given meaning by the people who use them and how they are used (Gilchrist 1994, p. 15). We can therefore analyze the spatial landscape of the village both in terms of how the buildings and spaces are made meaningful by the activities and relations that take place within them, and also how they themselves help shape and manipulate activities and relations. Central to this whole approach is the understanding that it is these activities and relations which reproduce and maintain social structures, and the village landscape (which can be actively manipulated). In turn the village landscape itself plays an active role in the ways in which activities and relations are carried out.

We argue that the buildings and their spatial arrangements act ideologically to legitimate the power of the landlord and obscure inequalities in terms of hierarchy; the physical structures are a way of both controlling and ordering the farmers and their families, and of presenting an established order within the villages (Hodder and Hutson 2003, p. 82–83). We look at the ways in which ideology is both expressed and reinforced through buildings and space in these villages, and in particular at the ideology behind power and control.

The concepts of structure and agency are often used to explain everyday life and action: people operate within a world shaped by social structures, but they also have some degree of choice and some power to effect change (King 2005, p. 216).

Giddens' (1979, p. 56ff, 1984, p. xxi) theory of structuration, whereby people are knowledgeable agents with impact on the social structures within which they operate, has allowed archaeologists to think about the ways in which people negotiated their daily lives and relationships. It is important, though, to acknowledge Giddens' ideas of duality, whereby people or agents function within the constraints of social structures, as well as shape and reshape them (Giddens 1984; Wallace and Wolf 2006, p. 187). Individuals carry out certain actions that reinforce or recreate the social structures which in turn constrain the actions and so the individuals, meaning that there is a sense of cyclical, self-perpetuation to structuration theory. However, Giddens is at pains to emphasize that human activity can and does change and is not simply static through time, and that "this is not a mechanistic repetitive process in which we simply reproduce exactly what came before" (Wallace and Wolf 2006, p. 187). Structuration theory "is designed to explain the reproduction of institutional orders through the knowledgeable agency of individuals" (King 2005, p. 218). This is a particularly powerful interpretative approach, as it is a means of using our data to get beyond the static, amorphous categories of "peasant" and "landlord" locked into an eternal polarized relationship of dominance and submission which has played such a large role in many of the (Western) academic and traveler accounts of landlord villages in the past, and begin to think about each as having knowledge and understanding of their respective situations. Giddens understands society in terms of the reproduction of social structure by individual agency through the intercession of culture (King 2005, p. 227). We are also interested in agency as a means of social reproduction, as there may have been both intended and unintended outcomes, with some of these unintentional outcomes contributing to the subjugation of the agent (e.g., Pauketat 2000). This is something we return to briefly later in our discussion, and will explore more fully in future work.

## Historical Context and Hierarchies

Studies of land tenure in Iran suggest it has followed a broadly similar model since the Arab conquest and subsequent spread of Islam in the seventh century CE, with landed elite playing an important role (Bausani 1962, p. 73; Dandamaev and Lukonin 1989; Garthwaite 2005, pp. 119-20; Lambton 1953, p. 16). In this paper we present the findings of various academics (and occasionally others such as political observers and travelers) who have observed landlord villages and analyzed them. These views have come to dominate much western literature about landlord villages, and we want to offer an alternative view based on our research in the Tehran Plain. Iranian rulers over many centuries used land to reward and support military and other elites, thus creating a powerful land-owning class (Bausani 1962; Lambton 1953). Although landowning statistics were not recorded (Lambton 1953, p. 266), it was asserted that "the outstanding characteristic of village society in the 1950s and early 1960s was its domination by large landowners" (Hooglund 1982, p. 10). Ownership of land conferred status and prestige, which was considered to be at least as important as the possible wealth from working the land. Horne (1994) points out that villages in Iran are living entities, and not static sites representing a single stage in human activity, and this is important in terms of placing these villages within a historical context.

Agricultural production in Iran was often viewed as the result of five elements: land, labor, water, oxen, and seed (Hooglund 1982, p. 25). The person who owned and contributed each of the elements was then entitled to claim a proportionate share of the resulting produce; thus if the landlord contributed land, water and seed he claimed three-fifths of the produce at harvest time. In practice, the system of taxes and levies forced onto those who actually farmed the land meant that they remained within a cycle of labor and debt which tied them to the land and the landlord, and provided them with a bare subsistence living (English 1966; Hooglund 1982; Keddie 1980). While the landlord needed farmers and their families to be healthy enough to carry out work in the fields, this was balanced against ensuring that these people did not summon enough individual and communal will to attempt to change the system from the bottom up (Curzon 1892, p. 490; Keddie 1980, pp. 172–173, 201). Indeed, historical accounts report that any peasants who tried to flee the land during particularly grim periods were often forcibly returned to their villages (Bausani 1962, p. 119; Lambton 1953, pp. 90, 99).

Landlord villages were recorded as miserable places to live, with little hope beyond bare subsistence for the farmers, and little desire by landlords to improve the lot of those in their care. Curzon (1892, p. 490), while travelling through Iran in the 1880s and 90s remarked that:

He [the peasant] is poor, illiterate, and stolid; but in appearance he is robust, in strength he is like an ox, he usually has clothes to his back, and he is seldom a beggar. With the grossest ignorance he combines a rude skill in turning to account the scanty resources of nature, and though he neither expects nor aspires to prosper, he is patient and persevering. His times of misery occur when there is a break-down of the water supply, or when, after a long drought, there is a famine in the land. Unfed and uncared for, the Persian peasantry then die off like flies.

Lambton (1953, p. 263) summarized her understanding of the villager-landlord relationship thus: “The landowner regards the peasant virtually as a drudge, whose sole function is to provide him with his profits and who will, if treated with anything but severity, cheat him of his due.” Keddie (1980, p. 75) reported the findings of an unpublished government commissioned survey of rural conditions in 1954 which found “appalling conditions; locusts and clover as the main food supply in a few areas; a majority seriously diseased.” Other sources reiterate the general, widespread undifferentiated understanding of these villages (and villagers) as poor and deeply unpleasant: “The peasants, who cultivate cereal crops, live in villages built of mud and crude brick. Two-roomed, poorly ventilated houses are huddled together, often forming the celebrated *qal'eh* [any walled site or village] which embraces within its walls both man and beast” (Behnam 1968, p. 479). It is the lack of any attempt to address any idea of agency for either the farmer or landlord which seems clumsy and alien within modern scholarship (Moore 2000, p. 261). Both groups appear to be trapped in an endless hostility based on exploitation and deprivation, without any evidence for change having occurred for centuries.

Keddie's (1980, pp. 175–181) analysis of the 1954 report of rural conditions (commissioned by Muhammad Reza Pahlavi's government but never published), showed that the villages of Iran were far from egalitarian in nature, with 14 possible strata based on ownership, administration, cultivation, and other work. Thus access to wealth and economic standing was very important in creating and determining

different strata, and so contributing to hierarchy in the villages. In practice, Keddie (1980, p. 178) said that villages would generally be composed of between four and seven of these strata, with peasants perhaps falling into more than one stratum. The main focus of Hooglund's (1982) ethnographic work of the 1960s was the impact of hierarchies on access to agricultural land and the wider implications this had for socio-economic change within villages, and there was a general assumption that those higher up the hierarchy would be wealthier in material terms (see Fazeli et al. 2009, for a preliminary consideration of artifacts and status). In our interviews, we were told about a limited number of classes or strata within the villages: the landlord, the landlord's agent (if there was one), the village headman, the farmers, and *khwush-nishin* (those with non-agricultural roles). Interestingly, everyone we spoke to maintained that there were no differences between the farmers at all, and many people stressed a great sense of community and sharing that was present among the villagers.

This seeming paradox may be due to a number of reasons. Our interviewees may be telling us what they think we wish to hear or they may be viewing the villages and the hierarchical structures through a nostalgic lens, especially since the experience of living in the villages took place up to 60 years ago. It may be that these former village occupants had simply forgotten the reality of the hierarchy amongst farmers, or it may be that this denial of difference was part of an active coping strategy. Non-agricultural workers were few, being gatekeeper, camel keeper, and *hamam* (bath-house) attendant (the latter only at Kazemabad). During the late 1990s limited ethnographic work was carried out in a landlord village to the east of the Tehran Plain, where farmers explained that status differences among them had been reflected in the position of housing (Fazeli, The socio-economic structure of the village societies of Tehran Plain before land reform, unpublished). Fazeli found that those lowest in the village hierarchy lived in houses built against the inside of the village walls, while those higher up the social and economic scale lived in houses closer to the center.

### The Village Landscape: Tehran Plain Examples

Landlord villages were divided into the landlord's and the farmers' areas. Unsurprisingly, the landlord's area was large, but the proportion of a village given over to his house, garden, and animal stabling varied from around one quarter in Hosseinabad Sanghar and Gach Agach, to over one half in Kazemabad. There was a series of "dedicated" rooms and buildings within the landlord's section of the village (including a sizeable animal stabling block, a kitchen, a wing of reception rooms, and a wing of women's rooms), and the buildings and garden were visible demonstrations of greater wealth and investment than the farmers' houses. The landlord's area was completely separated from that of the farmers by high internal walls (about 2–3 m), thus clearly demonstrating the physical gulf between them, which we understood from discussion could be breached only by specific invitation from the landlord to farmer. Even if a farmer was invited into the landlord's area, there were restrictions in place about where the farmer could go, and clear rules that guided such interactions in different circumstances. Bourdieu (1977, p. 79) presented similar examples arising from his work with the Kabyle in Algeria. The landlord could also extend his area of the village at will: at Kazemabad we were told in the course of our interviews about a



former row of farmers houses along the northern wall that had been demolished so the landlord could extend his gardens, and new walls were erected to separate these gardens from the farmers' houses.

The spatial boundaries and separations that are evident in these villages are critical in the construction and maintenance of difference, hierarchy, and control (Casella 2010; Gilchrist 1994). The high walls that bound the landlord's area form a very sharp demarcation between the ruler and the ruled. Also, simply by building a house in the village the landlord was using spatial arrangements to make a strong statement about his position and power. Given that the majority of large landowners were absentee, the construction of a large, elaborate house and garden taking up a significant portion of the total village area sends direct messages about control and entitlement. It is also worth thinking about why the landlords would choose to live right next to the farmers. The high walls may have screened them from the sight of the farmers themselves, their families, herds, and houses, but it would not have screened them from the noise, smells, and general disturbance of living alongside an active village. Landlords were "living" very closely to the farmers in order to suggest their involvement in and commitment to the villages, but at the same time were symbolically separated from them in order to show that they were different and superior in terms of status, wealth, control, and power. This shows the strategic use of material culture to reinforce understandings of difference between groups, and also how material culture is actively used in social processes linked to power negotiations (Casella 2010; Hodder 2004, p. 29).

One of the most distinctive features of landlord villages was the very high mud brick walls which surrounded and enclosed them (Fig. 5), distinguishing them from *khalisah* (crown land) and villages where farmers owned or rented the land they worked (Behnam 1968; Ferrier 1856; Nezam-Mafi 1993). These walls were built to a height of some 4 m with four mud brick towers at each corner, and represented a significant investment in terms of both materials (purchasing mud bricks from nearby brick makers) and the labor to build and repair them, and were likely to have served a number of purposes, both practical and symbolic/ideological. They would have provided protection from bandits who terrorized rural settlements; thieves preying on herds; wild animals threatening people, animals and stored grain; and from some extremes of weather (e.g., Ferrier 1856, p. 33; Lambton 1953, p. 8). They would have also made an immediate statement about the landlord's wealth, status and power to delimit land and people. The towers were described by various farmers as lookout points and storage areas. At Gach Agach the rooms leading into the towers had been altered recently (i.e., since the 1970s) into stables, indicated by the addition of mangers. At Hosseinabad Sanghar we found that the towers could not be entered from inside the village at ground level, although damage to two of the towers meant that we could not be sure if they had been blocked at some point after construction. In the case of the northwest tower, the structural arches of the landlord's stable were positioned so that it was clear that access to the tower in this part of the village had not been intended (Fig. 6). Both towers and wall can be interpreted as symbolic capital for the landlord, signaling his elevated position and role and indicating his control of access to such things (McGuire and Walker 2008, p. 105).

Apart from the issues of visibility in the wider plain landscape, protection and storage outlined above, these walls and towers would have played a vital role in the

**Fig. 5** Aerial view of Kazema-bad village



construction and maintenance of power. They enclosed the whole village and all those in them, providing the boundaries of the physical landscape within which control was centered. At the same time, they performed the function of being a tangible expression of control for farmers (which might be viewed as either positive or negative; that is something to be welcomed as perhaps providing security, or perhaps resented as a physical restraint) and they would also have played an important role in constructing and iterating a sense of “belonging” to a landlord village, and thus been a powerful component of group and individual identity (Moreland 2001). The village walls and towers would have been visible from any part of the village, meaning that there was no escape from this potent symbol of the landlord and all he

**Fig. 6** Northwest tower and arches of the landlord’s stable at Hosseinabad Sanghar village



represented. At Kazemabad, the remains of an earlier wall and bastion still standing in the south-eastern quadrant indicate a smaller, older village on the same site (see Fig. 3). The longevity of this village design supports the suggestion that it played a vital role in ongoing negotiations of power relations between landlord and villager.

The landlord's agents at Kazemabad and Gach Agach lived in houses that were larger than those of the farmers, and smaller than the landlords. The agent at Kazemabad had close control of both the granary where the agricultural output for the village and the landlord was stored, and also the comings and goings of the farmers by virtue of closeness to the only village gate. At Gach Agach the location of the agent's house indicated the privileged position of this individual in relation to the landlord, and was also close enough to the main gate to be able to monitor those entering and exiting. Village headmen were appointed by the landlord or agent from among the villagers, and Hooglund (1982) argues convincingly that both the headman and the leaders of village workteams (*buneh*) could gain an advantage in terms of status and wealth through their positions. However, this was something that our interviewees denied, all saying that there were no differences among the villagers, and the headmen and work team leaders lived in the same type of house as all other farmers.

The houses and yards occupied by the farmers, families, and animals were built in rows around the edges and interior of the villages (Fig. 7). Prior to the 1960s these houses were similar in plan in all three villages; they had two rooms and a small corridor or store room, plus a yard in front of each house. We were told that the landlord at Kazemabad decided how many rooms each family should occupy: if a family contracted, he would order doors to be blocked; while if it expanded, he might order doors to be unblocked to extend a particular dwelling area. This, along with the account of the landlord knocking down houses to extend his garden, demonstrates the landlord's ability to control the most intimate living spaces of the farmers, thus directly impacting a fundamental element of daily life. The plans of Kazemabad and Gach Agach show that there is a difference in the morphology of houses in the row abutting the eastern wall compared to the row opposite them in the centre of the farmers' area. This difference supports the findings of earlier ethnographic work (Fazeli, The socio-economic structure of the village societies of Tehran Plain before land reform, unpublished), and the presence of a tangible hierarchy in the farmers of

**Fig. 7** Farmers' houses at Kazemabad village



the villages. Despite the avowals that there were no status differences among the farmers by those we talked to, there is a systematic difference in farmers housing according to spatial location within the village. This disjunction between the peoples' memories of the past and the material remains is important because it suggests that people were actively constructing their understandings of the relationships between different groups within the village in order to minimise difference where possible. Given the role of housing in the creation and expressions of hierarchy for landlord and agent, it can be argued that where farmers could ignore or gloss over the far smaller (but arguably no less important) status differences within the general "farmer" class, that this was something that they actively did (Giddens 1979, p. 72; Preucel and Meskell 2004). Whether this can be viewed as a positive or negative strategy with regard to maintaining structures of class and hierarchy is another matter (Pauketat 2000).

At Kazemabad a bath-house or *hamam* was located in the landlords area, but available to the farmers on certain days of the week (men and women had access during different times of the day) (Fig. 8, also see Fig. 3). This was run by a dedicated attendant, who was paid ostensibly by the landlord in cash, but the landlord then took a standard proportion of each farmers agricultural produce to cover the costs of the bath-house (and various other services). The farmers were able to reach it via an alley running between the landlord's public reception rooms and the stables. The landlord controlled this building in terms of deciding where it was to be built, paying for its construction, paying the wages of the attendant, and allowing the farmers and families regular access to it. It was apparently also used by the landlord and his family (although another smaller structure was also described as the landlord's bathroom). For the landlord to actively sponsor such a structure sited in his area of the village suggests that he was perhaps publicly demonstrating his beneficence and concern for the villagers' physical and spiritual health, hygiene being a cornerstone of

**Fig. 8** Trench in hamam at Kazemabad village



Islam (Loeffler 1988, p. 115; Schimmel 1992, p. 40). However, he was also controlling this highly personal and social activity among his villagers, allowing them to undertake it only by penetrating his area, and at the same time keeping their movements within a well regulated and understood framework.

Alleys and fences were important ways of shaping the landscape of the village by controlling movement and access to different spaces and places (Casella 2010). Farmers were channeled from the main gate (in itself an expression of power) alongside the high wall demarcating the lords area, which would have expressed and reinforced the power of the landlord and the separation between the groups. There may have been certain well understood access points such as the alley to the bath-house in Kazemabad, but these were negotiated on the landlord's terms. Entering or exiting the villages the farmers would have had to pass the gatekeeper. At Hosseinabad Sanghar, the landlord had a strategically placed window in order to watch the movements of the farmers in and out of the village, and at Gach Agach and Kazemabad the location of the agent's house meant another layer of observation. The village hierarchy is clearly reflected in such differential access and controlled movement, with the landlord able to move freely; the agent able to move freely in most of the village, but needing an invitation or regular agreement to enter the public areas of the landlords' house; and the farmers restricted to their section of the village, unless using the *hamam* within a defined timetable and with clearly channeled physical access. Village inhabitants would have a strong, implicit understanding of these constraints to access, and this would have shaped both practice and structures (Bourdieu 1977, p. 79).

Also notable is the absence of a central public place for farmers in the village. Farmers and families could gather at the main gate, in alleys or yards, but there was no designated area such as a square or garden; nor was there a mosque or even a shop where people would have a reason for meeting in groups. This absence may have been deliberate on the part of the landlord, as it would have ensured that there was no single place large enough for the whole village to gather at any one time, and it may also have reinforced the main emphasis of the village as a working agricultural place. Blake (2004, p. 246) offers a similar interpretation of the early construction phases of the Phoenician city of Motya, where the lack of public spaces and emphasis on warehouses is argued to be in keeping with the trading function of the city.

## Conclusion

Landlord villages can thus be understood as landscapes of control and power, where the buildings and spaces of this landscape reflect, create, and reproduce the social structures that frame village life, i.e. Giddens (1979, pp. 77–78) “duality of structure.” The village class and hierarchy structures are expressed in and through the buildings and their spatial arrangements (Preucel and Meskell 2004, p. 12). This paper has explored ways in which such things as differential access and the positioning of walls played a role in a system of economic, political and social domination by one person over many. This system must have been rooted in an extremely powerful ideology, and we will

discuss this further in future work; here we note that understandings of different roles people play in achieving and submitting to domination stress such things as symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1977, p. 190) and even complicity and collusion on the part of the oppressed (Rowlands 1989, p. 30; Weber 1968, pp. 28–29). One of the farmers that we spoke to said that “When government spread land between the farmers [during the White Revolution] I didn’t get land because I thought the land was for the landlord and I didn’t like to have land. I thought the land was the landlord’s property, and I am very poor now because I don’t have land.” This is an example of negative practice, and the unforeseen and unintended consequences of action (Pauketat 2000, pp. 124–125), and of just how powerful the ideological system actually was. Farmers were persuaded to take part in a system which was of economic and apparent social benefit to a small minority of landlords and to go so far in some cases, such as the example quoted above, to directly work against their own short and long-term economic and social interests in order to ensure that they did not transgress the systems and structures in place. Historical research (Bausani 1962, p. 88; Garthwaite 2005, p. 201; Lambton 1953, pp. 13, 28) asserts the great antiquity of landlord villages and the supporting land tenure system, although exactly how old these structures are is not known. That they have survived and underpinned rural economy and social organization since at least the introduction of Islam in this region is a strong indication that the intentional manipulation of space discussed above has been “successful” in supporting a landed elite (Dandamaev and Lukonin 1989, p. 134; Lambton 1953, pp. 175–176, 259). We have begun to understand how the people of these villages lived within a system of control and domination which was widespread in Iran, both temporally and geographically.

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