

## COMPARATIVE STUDY OF BURIAL IN IRAN'S BURNT CITY AND SHAHDAD

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**Abstract.** Studying Iran's history has proved that Iranian ancestors' land had developed culture and civilization so this is why other nations immigrated there and used their superior utilities and took advantage of their advanced civilization. "Burnt City" in Sistan and Baluchestan province and "Shahdad" City in Kerman province are among those Iranian advanced and culturally rich cities and like other parts of Iran had tremendous wealth. Studying the way of burying dead bodies in these two cities and discovering various and precious tools confirms that they had unique cultures. This library research studies and compares the way of burying dead bodies in Iranian "Burnt City" and "Shahdad" City and through finding the differences similarities and differences did a comparative research on them.

The comparison between these two ancient cities showed that the differences are more than the similarities. In fact in "Burnt City" dead bodies were buried in more different ways than in "Shahdad" City, they were buried in more different directions and the fleshes were put in graves in more different ways. The reason is that different races immigrated to "Burnt City" and settled there. Of course it should be mentioned that the most distinguished similarity between these two cities' habitants is that in both cities people believed in the life after death so they provided tools for their life in the other world.

**Key words:** comparative study, bury, Burnt City, Shahdad City.

**Introduction.** The way of burying fleshes in ancient tribes reflects their customaries, beliefs and rituals. The information obtained from burying fleshes in graves provides us with knowledge about ancient communities which are rarely found in written documents.

In advanced Iranian cities "Burnt City" in Sistan and Baluchestan province and "Shahdad" City in Kerman province, the life after death was paid too much attention. Different ways of burying fleshes, different tools and votive objects inside the graves, different shapes of tumuli and other evidences show that the citizens of both cities had a strong belief in the life after death. This article tries to give information about the way of burying fleshes in Iranian ancient cities "Burnt City" and "Shahdad" City through a comparative study. So first it separately studies the way of burying fleshes in these cities then it evaluates their similarities and differences.

**The Burnt City.** The Burnt City is the name of a natural high hill or hills which are 12 to 18 meters higher than the lands around them. This city lays 56 kilometers before the road between Zabol and Zahedan in Sistan and Baluchestan province. It is the most important ancient place in Sistan which is located near Helmand River Delta and in the highest edge of North West of the old Delta and it owes its existence in the third and fourth millennium Before Christ to Helmand River and its delta. 120 acres of 151 acre Sistan city is covered with ancient monuments and the most extended part of this city belongs to 2800 to 2500 B.C i.e. 7<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> layers in which the area of the city was 80 acres (Seyyed Sajjadi, 2010, 17). Colonel Charles Edward Yate was the first visitor of this hill in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. A few years after his visit, in a conference in London, Yate had a speech on his observations in the Burnt City. At that conference he said: "I can remember a place where the residents of Sistan call it The Burnt City but actually there is not any evidence of a city there except a land covered with pieces of pottery. When the guide took me around that area to show me the black burnt soil, I felt that I was walking in a burnt city." The ancient Burnt City has not been hidden from the eyes of researchers due to its extent and special status so in the reports of their visit to Sistan, they explained about this/these hill/s. Among these researches we can name Sir Percy Sykes and Aurel Stein who provided others with worthy geological information about the Burnt City. Stein guessed that the history of this place dates back to the second half of the second or the third millennium B.C.

Since 1960 a group of Italian researches of The Institute of Middle East Studies (ISMEO) began the archeological activities in The Burnt City. In 1967 with cooperation of Archeology and Folk Culture Administration, this institute started digging this/these hill/s. Since 1997 under supervision of Dr. Seyyed Mansour Seyyed Sajjadi, the experts of Cultural Heritage Organization started the second round of researches which is still continuing (Sarhaddi Dadian, 2004, 16-17).

The Burnt City can be divided to three main sections as below:

- A. The big central part including the eastern and central residential areas and the monuments
- B. North West area or the industrial zone
- C. South area or the cemetery

Four periods were recognized in The Burnt City which divided to eleven cultural classes. The four main periods consist of: The First Period begins from 3200 to 2800 B.C, The Second Period begins from 2800 to 2500 B.C, The Third Period begins from 2500 to 2300 B.C and The Fourth Period begins from 2300 to 2000 B.C or 1800 B.C. The Burnt City was established during The First period and during The Second period it reached to its highest development and since The Third period its deterioration started and at the end of The Fourth Period it was destroyed (Seyyed Sajjadi, 17-19, 2010).

**Research in the cemetery.** The area of the cemetery is estimated 20 to 25 acres and regarding the concentration and the spread of the graves it seems that in every 100 square meters, there are 13 graves. The number

and the concentration of the graves in central part of the cemetery is more than the other parts of it (SeyyedSajjadi, 2010, 24).

The graves in The Burnt City have ten different structures as follows:

1- Simple pits or puddles without any regular geometric shapes; these graves do not have a regular geometric shape so square, circle, oval and irregular shapes are not seen between those graves.

2- Bilateral pits or puddles; the overall shapes of these graves are similar to the first group but their outer surface is somehow circular and a wall containing one to eight bricks separates them in to two parts.

3- Semi-basement graveyards; these groups of graves are similar to the fourth category but the wall that separates the pit from the burial chamber consists of one row of bricks.

4- Cryptic graves; the most considerable graves in The Burnt City belong to this group. The study of the objects found in these graves show that their owners belonged to distinguished residents of this city. In other words they were wealthier than the others. At least 20 to 120 objects were found in these graves.

5. Rectangular brick graves; these graves had a rectangular brick wall.

6-Square brick graves; they were built like the previous graves but in a different geometrical shape of the outer section.

7- Double wall graves; two walls of these graves are made from clay and the other two sides of them are built like normal graves.

8- Round brick graves; they have circular clay wall with an entrance door.

9- Round graves with a clay filled door; they are like simple pits usually in circle or oval shape. Unlike pit shape graves, these structures have a door which is filled with clay.

10- Pottery or bowl graves; these graves were built in limited numbers and dead babies were put in a relatively large clay bowl and buried upside down in a small pit.

It seems that there was not any relationship between the gender and the age of buried people and the shape of their graves except babies which were buried in simple shallow graves usually without any traditional funeral. The religious and ritual beliefs and the social class of those people were different from each other. Funeral ceremonies were held for immigrants to The Burnt City were different from their native land.

Here we compare semi-basement graveyards with Cryptic graves which were found during excavation of The Burnt City.

Cryptic graves consisted of two separated parts; a vertical pit and a chamber next to it. In these graves skeletons and valuable objects and gifts were kept in an enclosed space for thousands of years and without direct contact with air and soil. So the buried objects were decaying slowly and they remain fresh for a long time (SeyyedSajjadi, 2011, 79-81).

The graves in The Burnt City are in irregular shapes. In fact people did not follow a specific pattern to make the graves.

The way of burying flesh, funerals, the structure of the graves, the way of putting objects inside the graves and the direction of the graves do not follow a standard or even a semi-standard pattern and just the way of putting objects in basement graves were nearly the same. The graves were dug in all geographical directions but flesh was put in them in different directions and East, West, North East and South East were preferred directions to put the flesh. The head of flesh and their look were in different directions. Their bodies were put in graves in different positions such as supine (with folded knees), prone with stretched legs, sleeping to the back, curved to the right, curved to the left, sleeping on the abdomen and embryonic i.e. completely folded arms and legs (SeyyedSajjadi, 29, 291-389).

As the nations of The Burnt City believed in life after death, the way of burying them and putting them in the graves, reminds a nap (SeyyedSajjadi, 83, 2011).

They buried the flesh in different times of a day and if this hypothesis is true, ritual ceremonies were conducted as well. From geographical direction of the burial and the direction of buried flesh' look we can determine the time of burial. When the flesh was sleeping on their abdomen or with their face on the soil, the burial took place in the evening when the sun was setting and when the face was towards the sky, the burial was conducted during midday or at noon. In other cases and regarding the geographical directions, the burial could take place in the morning or in the afternoon (SeyyedSajjadi, 2010: 30).

Collective, family, empty and reused graves show certain social rituals and ceremonies. During explorations some empty graves were found, some of which were pits just dug to be ready for future burial. In some graves there were not any skeleton but there were gifts in them. According to some rituals these graves were left without flesh. It seems that these graves were dug to remind those who had died far from their hometown or they were lost. Some flesh was covered with cloth or shroud (SeyyedSajjadi, 2010: 31).

Usually one or two glass/es, a bowl, a little vase and a stone pot full of food were buried with each flesh, some marbles of semi-precious stones or stone, bronze, bone, wooden tools as well as cloth were among buried object, too. In women's graves a seal and colorful dishes were found as well. Potteries were found in almost all graves (SeyyedSajjadi, 2010: 32, 33).

In modern world of The Burnt City, the life after death was very important. Putting hundreds of different objects, various foods, votive, tools and other evidences show these people's belief (SeyyedSajjadi, 2011: 67).

There are many different ideas about the destroying of this city. A foreign attack, invasion or seizing the city is rejected due to the lack of reliable documents. The emergence of the Aryans cannot be the reason of leaving this city.

The evidences found during the excavation show that during the mid of third millennium B.C this city was involved in political, economic and social crisis which can be the reason of its gradual decline so at the end of fourth millennium less people were settled there and the size of the city became smaller. The most acceptable reason for leaving this city is drought and displacement of Helmand River Delta and its riverbed that made people to seek for water in unknown areas (SeyyedSajjadi, 2010, 40-41).



A basement grave

Picture courtesy: (SeyyedSajjadi, 2010: 142)



A double wall grave (curved to right burial and embryonic)

Picture courtesy: (SeyyedSajjadi, 2007: 463)



A double wall grave (sleeping on the abdomen or upsidown)

Picture courtesy: (SeyyedSajjadi, 2007: 624)



A double wall grave (supine with folded knees or double supine)  
 Picture courtesy: (SeyyedSajjadi, 2007: 601)



Round graves with a clay filled door (curved to the right and embryonic)  
 Picture courtesy: (SeyyedSajjadi, 2007: 424)

**Shahdad City (Khabis).** “Shahdad” is a new name given to the old Khabis City. 50 to 70 years ago geography and history books referred to it as Khabis City. In central part of Loot Desert and on the hill of its west mountains lie Shahdad City and other adjacent villages between the foothills and Takab plain to kaloot edges (hills parallel to central Loot). Shahdad Plain is located 380-500 meter above mean sea level and extends from west mountain hills of Loot Desert to Takab plain and Loot Desert (Hakemi, 2006: 53).

According to Loot Desert archeology group researches, the oldest prehistoric civilization was established in the farthest part of Shahdad City and further from west mountains hills in the central part of Takab plain (Hakemi, 2006: 66). Shahdad or Khabis (Falsehood city) was discovered in 1967 by Board of the Institute of Geography, University of Tehran under the supervision of Dr. Ahmad Mostofi. During his extensive study of Loot Desert geography, he found Clay, metal and stone tools related to prehistory and reported it to Department of Archaeological. In 1968 Loot Desert archeology group was formed under the supervision of Ali Hakemi and in its primary studies estimated the extension of Khabis civilization as far as 7 kilometers from today’s Shahdad City. After Engineer Hakemi, Mr. Vakili became the supervisor of Board of Loot Desert archeology group. In 1997 he studied this zone for one season and improved the precious information about it (Sarhaddadian, 2004: 22-23).

**Archeological excavations in Takab plain (Shahdad).** Loot Desert archeology research group’s years of experience showed that prehistoric, historic and even Islamic cultures in old Khabis was extended in different distances

through a large area of 100 square kilometers in the east of today's Shahdad City. Shahdad's old population had to leave their homes due to Invasions and natural disasters and their destructive effects. So during several years different civilizations emerged in the east of Shahdad but after a while for the mentioned reasons, people left their homes and moved to other places. As a result of these permanent changes, nations could not settle for some periods. Today various graveyards which occupy a large area of west plain of Shahdad are the remaining of previous cultures. This evidence shows that old population was not centralized in that city.

So far these graves have been protected from the losses of natural effects and interesting tools and objects from thousands years ago were found in them (Hakemi, 2006: 75).

Loot Desert archeology research group had studied three parts of this city including the graveyards and speculated on them. These graves are shown by letters (A), (B) and (C).

Studying the (A), (B) and (C) regions, they found these 8 grave structures:

- 1- To protect the graves from collapse, they build a layer of wall from mud or raw clay or a mixture of them and protected the dead body with this wall.
- 2- Graves which were enclosed by a row of raw bricks or four walls of the graves were built from large half bricks in 10×21×42 centimeters.
- 3- Almost large square graves above which there were rectangular platform higher than the grave floor. One side of the platform was leaning to the wall of the grave and the flesh was put on it with folded arms and knees.
- 4- Diamond shape graves which were cut in to two unequal parts. In one part there was the flesh and in the other part there were clay, metal and stone dishes.
- 5- Graves which were surrounded by an oval layer. The social rank of the dead person determined the area of these graves and the number of clay, stone and metal objects in them. In this regard some graves were full of potteries (Hakemi, 2006: 98).
- 6- Shallow graves in depth of 15 to 60. In these graves the skeletons of dead bodies were loose and hollow as a result of corrosives existing in the soil (Hakemi, 2006, 85).
- 7- Sand graves in which through a special ceremony the flesh was put on clothes then it was covered with soil or after burying the body and putting the objects beside him, it was covered with a mat of palm leaves. Sometimes the flesh was put on a platform and the precious objects were put around him (Hakemi, 2006, 98).

Bodies were put in the soil from one side and with folded arms and legs in east to west direction. The head of flesh was to the west and its legs were to the east (Hakemi, 2006, 85).

During prehistory the dead bodies were buried towards the sun because the sunshine was regarded as a source of mercy for urban and rural communities (Hakemi, 2006, 98).

Beside the dead bodies there were clay, stone and metal dishes as well as different marbles. Around women's necks and wrists there were agate, azure and gypsum marbles (Hakemi, 2006, 89).

Beside the flesh there were also various clay sculptures in different sizes. For sure the sculptures were an imitation of the dead person's configuration. When burying the bodies, cubic mud models of buildings with arched roofs were put inside the graves. Probably these structures were imitated from temples that people were worshipping there (Hakemi, 2006, 89) or maybe the designers were inspired by their religious beliefs and made the models from the imagination of third millennium people settled in Loot Desert border who believed their hereafter house is a small building (Hakemi, (2006: 89).

These civilizations were gradually destroyed by natural disasters such as Loot Desert monsoon winds, west mountains flood, annihilation of plant and animal lives and atmosphere and environment changes (Hakemi, (2006: 75).



The head of dead body is towards the west and its face is towards the south (embryonic burial)  
Picture courtesy: (Hakemi, 2006: 650)





The head of the dead body is towards the west and its legs are towards the east  
 Picture courtesy: (Hakemi, 2006: 620)



The direction of the grave is east to west (with clay)  
 Picture courtesy: (Hakemi, 2006: 646)



The direction of the grave is east to west with two rows of clay walls  
 Picture courtesy: (Hakemi, 2006: 341)

**The comparative study of burial in The Burnt City and in Shahdad (Khabis).** In previous sections we discussed the way of burying fleshes in The Burnt City of Sistan and Baluchestan province and Khabis City (Shahdad) in Kerman province. In this part through a comparative study, we compare the way of burial in these two cities and present the similarities and differences which were found through researches. These points are listed as below:

- 1- In The Burnt City the area of the graveyard is estimated to be 20 to 25 acres but the remains of civilization in Shahdad plain shows that the area of its graveyard was about 100 square kilometer in the east and the graves are extended at different distances from each other.

- 2- The graves in The Burnt City have ten different structures while in Shahdad they were made in eight different structures.
- 3- - The Cryptic graves in The Burnt City are among the most remarkable structures and the ancient material used in them decay slowly, in Shahdad City the sand graves have this characteristic.
- 4- In The Burnt City the children were buried in shallow graves while in Shahdad City all dead people were buried in them.
- 5- In The Burnt City the walls of some graves were made of rows of bricks while in Shahdad City the walls were made of bricks, half-bricks, mud or a mixture of them.
- 6- Circular or oval graves in The Burnt City had clay door or walls while the oval graves in Shahdad City were made of mud.
- 7- In The Burnt City the clay rectangular wall of the grave is made of a row of brick and the flesh was protected by it but the square graves in Shahdad City had square columns above them which were higher than the grave floor and the dead body was placed on it.
- 8- Bilateral graves in The Burnt City included bilateral pits or puddles whose outer surface was almost circular but in Shahdad City the bilateral graves were diamond shape which were divided into unequal parts.
- 9- The different ways of burial in The Burnt City was due to the variety of people who were immigrated to this city while population of Shahdad City mostly consisted of natives.
- 10- The ways of burial or funeral, the structures of the graves, the way of putting objects in the graves and the direction of the graves in The Burnt City do not follow a standard or even a semi-standard method while in Shahdad City dead bodies were buried through certain ceremonies.
- 11- In The Burnt City the graves were dug in geographical directions and the dead bodies were put in them in different directions, although east to west and north east to south west directions were preferred while in Khabis (Shahdad City) the dead bodies were buried in east to west direction and the head of the flesh was towards west and its legs were towards east.
- 12- In The Burnt City the body was put in the grave in different positions such as supine with folded knees (double supine), prone with stretch legs, sleeping to the back, curved to the right, curved to the left or even upside down (sleeping on the abdomen), with completely folded arms and legs or embryonic while in Shahdad City the dead bodies were put in the graves to the side with folded arms and knees.
- 13- In The Burnt City the bodies were buried in different directions while in Khabis or Shahdad City they were buried towards the sun.
- 14- There are many collective, family, empty and reused graves in The Burnt City while in Shahdad City one body was buried in each grave and there is no evidence that shows the graves were reused.
- 15- In the women's grave of The Burnt City there were a marble with a colorful dish as well as clay and stone tools but in women's grave of Shahdad City there were agate, azure and gypsum marbles as well as clay and stone tools and objects.

#### **The Similarities**

- 1- In both cities (The Burnt and Shahdad) some graves are bilateral. One part of these graves is the pit in which the dead's private tools and objects are put and the other part is the burial chamber in which the flesh is put.
- 2- Both cities had rectangular and oval graves.
- 3- The Burnt City and Shahdad City both had graves in which skeletons, objects and gifts were kept for a long time and decayed more slowly. These graves belonged to rich people and those with higher social status.
- 4- In both cities (The Burnt and Shahdad) sometimes dead bodies were buried in their clothes or they were wrapped in shrouds.
- 5- Both in The Burnt City and Shahdad City clay, stone and metal tools and objects and different kinds of marbles were buried with the dead bodies while in Shahdad City a clay sculpture was buried with the flesh as well.
- 6- In The Burnt City and Shahdad City the clay objects are the most important things were found in the graves.
- 7- The life after death was important for the population of both cities so they provided tools and objects for their hereafter houses.

**Conclusion.** The way of burying is one of the most important findings of archeology which reflects the ceremonies and rituals of different tribes especially ancient people. The way of burying dead people in The Burnt City and Shahdad City expresses the social, economic, political, religious issues of their population. Although the way of burying dead people in these two cities have differences and similarities but they have their unique characteristics. The direction of dead bodies in their graves and the direction of the graves are the main differences in burying methods of both cities. In The Burnt City these directions had more varieties while in Shahdad city the graves and the flesh were in one direction. All these varieties in The Burnt City result from the diversity in the population of that community some of which were the immigrants of other countries.

In conclusion one of the most important similarities in burying dead bodies in two above mentioned cities is putting clay, stone and metal tools and objects as well as different types of marbles in their graves which shows the importance they gave to the world after death.

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### Picture courtesy

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