

## **Parthian Burials at Khanghah Gilvan Cemetery in Ardabil Province**

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**Received:** 2011/6/26

**Accepted:** 2011/10/22

### **Abstract**

Khanghah Gilvan cemetery is located in Khalkhal, in the Iranian province of Ardebil. This cemetery came into light during a highway construction project in Khanghah village. Until now, three archeological excavations, under the author's supervision, have been carried out in this cemetery that has resulted in burials from the Middle Bronze Age up to Parthian period.

Among the excavated burials, four of them belong to the Parthian period. These burials are pit graves containing gifts such as potteries, bronze and iron materials, metal ornaments and beads with different forms. Grave usually containing single body had different conditions such as open or closed burials in different directions.

Samples of pit graves of Parthian period, apart from Khanghah Gilvan cemetery, have also been discovered at Sad Eskandar in Gorgan, Sang Shir at Hamadan, Cheshmeh Sar at Takht-e-Jamshid and Vaskeh cemetery. The burial samples with open-pit were prevalent during Parthian period that apart from Khanghah Gilvan cemetery have also found at Sang Shir tepe at Hamadan, Kangavar, and Cemetery at Susa, Cheshmeh Sar at Takht-e-Jamshid, Sad Eskander at Gorgan, Veskeh and Mianrud in Talesh.

Likewise, samples showing closed-pit burials of Parthian period, apart from Khanghah Gilvan cemetery, have also found at Sang Shir at Hamadan, Kangavar, Tagh Bostan, Garmi, Vaskeh and Mianrud cemetery.

**Keywords:** Khanghah Cemetery; Parthian Period; Pit Burials.

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## Introduction

Parthian period is one of the important historical periods in Iran. However, despite its importance, we have lack of knowledge of Parthian era with respect to their cultural and archeological remains. As such, burials from that period are important sources that could help identify their beliefs, cultures and traditions. The burial practices attach much importance for nations and people and, in reality; these are key indicators of thoughts, beliefs and cultures of that society. In other words, burials and their remains can be considered as direct manifestations of their beliefs. Khanghah Gilvan cemetery is one of the important archeological sites of Iran that contains burials from the Middle Bronze Age up to Parthian period (with an extent of about 2000 hectares).

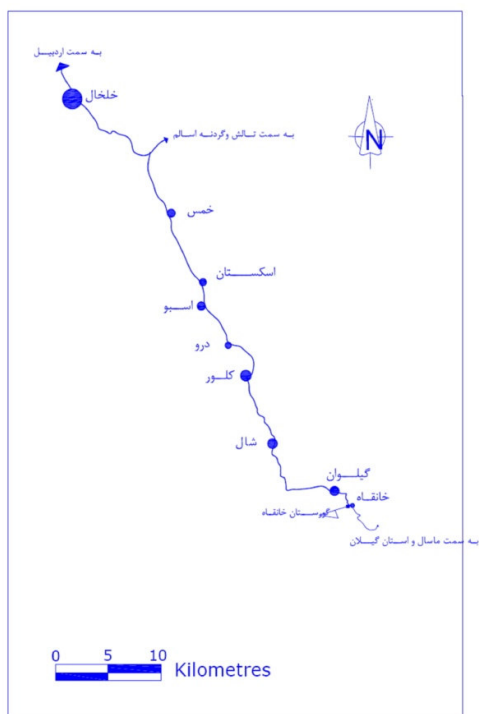
## Previous Researches

In the province of Ardabil, samples of Parthian cemeteries have been excavated at Germi region as well as archeological enclosures such as Jojiran tepe, Darageh tepe, Aiyri tepe, Jeyran tepe, Shiekh Lor tepe, Saleh tepe (Kambakhsh Fard, 1997). Studies conducted by a group led by Charles Burney also reported cemeteries related to the Parthian period around Meshkin Shahr (Ingraham & Summers, 1979). Similarly, from areas around Ardabil, there reported pottery samples known as Ardabil-style painted ware that were unfortunately acquired illegally from those burials and entered to illegal market (Haerinck, 1978). Kleiss excavated few burials related to later Parthian period at Bastam Fort (Kroll, 1979). Also, the burial samples of Parthians were excavated at northern Iranian sites such as Shiman, Shah Pir, Juban, Hasani Mahalle, Ghala-e-Kuti, Khuram Rud and Ghala-e-Kuti Ashkavar (Fukai & Matsutani, 1980; Egami et al., 1966).

A Parthian cemetery was also excavated by Azarnoosh near Sang Shir tepe in the province of Hamadan (Azarnoosh, 1975). Likewise, a cemetery related to the same period was unearthed at Anahita temple of Kangavar (Kambakhsh Fard, 1972). And in southwestern Iran in Susa, Ghirshman excavated a Parthian cemetery in the city of Pishevvaran (Ghirshamn, 1953).



Map1 Ardebil Province

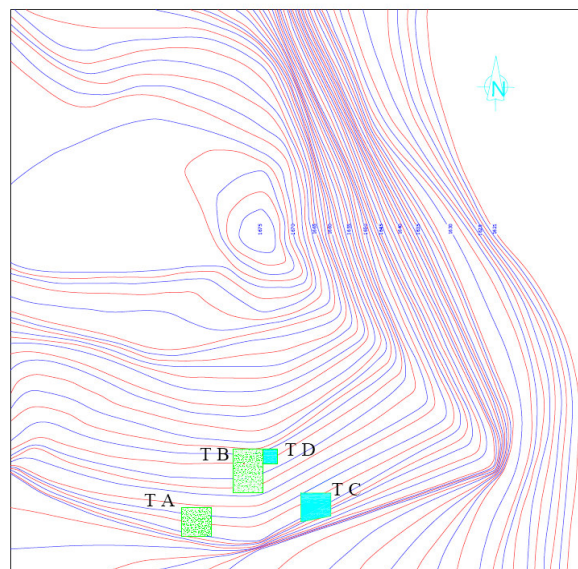


**Map2** Location of Khanghah Cemetery

### **Khanghah Gilvan Cemetery**

Khanghah Gilvan cemetery is located at  $37^{\circ} 17' 9''$  latitude and  $48^{\circ} 49' 46''$  longitude on the northwest of the village of Khanghah. In other words, this enclosure is situated some 60km south-east of the city of Khalkhal in Shah Rud division and about 180 km south of the city of Ardabil. During a highway construction project at Khanghah village in April 2006, there emerged a few ancient graves. Consequently, the author began an archeological survey of the proposed area and could found 16 burials over there. Burial 18, 19, 20 and 22 were related to Parthian which the current paper intends to highlight in detail. In this season two trenches

(A and B) were excavated and consequently the Parthian burials could obtain from the trench B.



**Map3** Topography of Khanghah Cemetery and Excavated Places



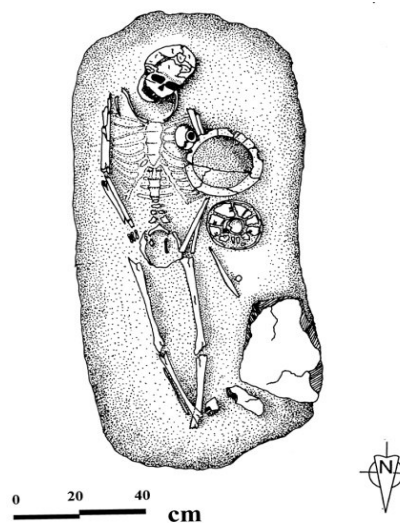
**Fig1** Representing entire Khanghah Cemetery From Northern Side

### Burial 18

This is located at the southeastern part of Trench B. This burial is in the form of a pit in a way that the body was placed after digging a ditch. The dimension of the pit was considered according to the physique of dead as well as space for gifts. The dimension of Burial 18 is 195x110x37cm. This was a single pit-burial related to a 35-45 year-old male who was placed at south-north direction (i.e. the head facing the south). The skull was placed on the back. The dead is facing towards the north, a little inclined toward north-east. The skull is placed in a way that it seems back portion of it was intentionally elevated a little so that face and body could be in vertical position (Plan 1, Fig. 2).

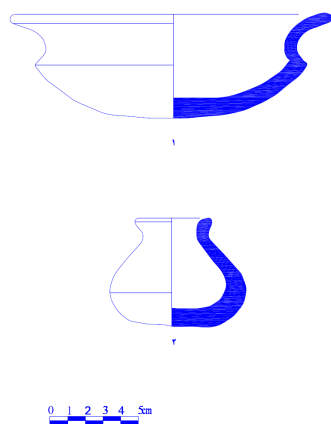


**Fig3** Burial 18



**Plan1** Burial 18

The gifts put inside the grave are as follows: a short neck pottery (B18:N1) that was placed at western side of the grave, above the right shoulder of the skeleton. This brick-red color vessel was hand-made. Open-ended earthen ware with projected rim (B18:N2) at western side was placed on the left shoulder of the skeleton. This vessel is deep brown and wheel-made(Plan 2). Short-neck earthen ware (B18:N3) at western side of the grave has been placed along the left elbow. This vessel with brick-red color is also hand-made. This pottery is broken and deformed hence; cannot be repaired.



**Plan 2** Potteries N 1 and 2 in burial 18

The most remarkable and attractive point at this burial is an iron material hidden at the western side and is along the pelvis. Along with this material, at 2cm distance on western side, a purple color spherical stone with plain surface has been placed. This small stone has enough weight compare to its volume. Considering remains of this iron material, it seems to be a weighing lever. The presence of a stone along this material makes it evident that this probably would have been used as a weighing load.

### Burial 20

This grave is located at the south western part of the Trench B. This burial is in the form of a pit and it seems that after the burial ceremony, stone fragments, rubble stone and big stones were used to make it distinguished.

It seems this was a secondary burial. The body was buried somewhere else and after some time that was transferred to this place.

The dimension of the grave is 105x70x30.

This grave was related to a 30-35-year-old male. Since, it was his second burial, only parts of skull and leg bones are remained from the whole skeleton. With reference to those remains it seems the body was placed on south-north direction. The head at the south is little tilted toward southeast direction and feet in the north is tilted little toward northwest. No gifts were placed inside this grave. Its chronology was set with reference to the placement of dead similar to other burials of Parthian period (Fig 3).



**Fig4** Burial 20

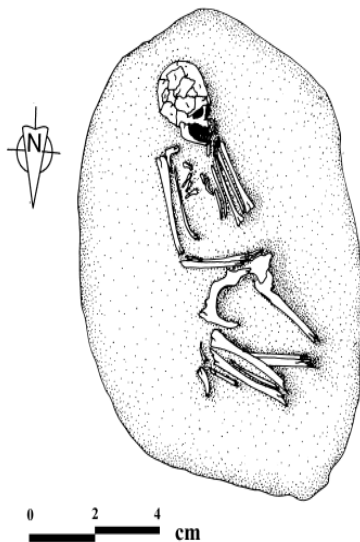
### Burial 21

This burial is located at southern part of the Trench B. This too is a pit burial with 110x60x75cm dimension. It is a single burial related to a 30-35-year-old woman. The burial is semi-closed in north-south direction. The

head is facing the south. The skull is placed toward the left side (Plan 3, Fig 4). No gifts were placed inside this grave. Its chronology was set with reference to the placement of dead similar to other burials of Parthian period



Fig 5 Burial 21



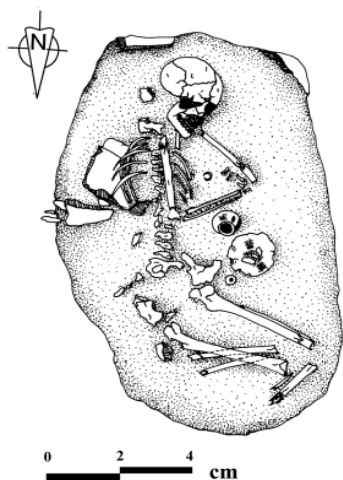
Plan 3 Burial 21

### Burial 22

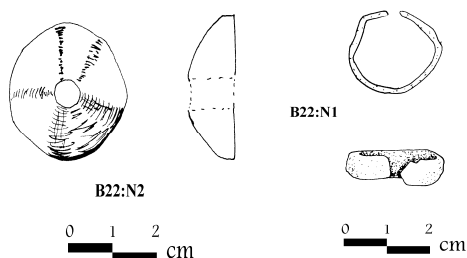
This burial is located at southern part of the Trench B. This, too, is a pit burial with 80x60x50cm dimension. It is a single burial related to a 25-30-year-old woman. The burial is semi-closed in north-south direction. The head is facing the south. The skull is placed toward the left side (Plan 4, Fig 5). Gifts put inside this grave includes: a bronze ring (B22:N1) in a right hand finger. This bronze ring was completely spherical with two open ends. A complete conical earthen spindle whorl (B22:N2) was placed at western side of the grave along the pelvis. This buff color spindle whorl is hand-made (Plan 5). Earthen ware with open and projected mouth (B22:N3) is also placed on the western side along the pelvis. This brick-color vessel is also hand-made. Low-neck earthen ware (B22:N4) that is placed on the western side of the grave is also brick-colored and hand-made (Plan 6).



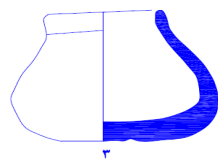
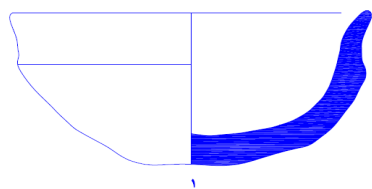
Fig 6 Burial 22



Plan4 Burial 22



Plan 5 Bronze Ring, Spindle Whorl at Burial 22



Plan 6 Potteries N1 and 2 at burial 22

### Comparison of Khanghah Gilvan Burials with Contemporary Enclosures

All four burials of Parthian period at Khanghah Gilvan are pit types. As a whole, the pit-burial was one of the prevalent methods during Parthian period. Similar burials, apart from Khanghah Gilvan have been acquired from Sad Eskander tepe at Gorgan (Saeedi, 1996), 48 samples at Sang Shir cemetery at Hamadan (Azarnoosh, 1975, 1976), 7 samples at Cheshme Saar of Takht-e-Jamshid (Schmidt, 1975) and three samples at Veskeh cemetery at Talesh (Khalatbari, 2004).

Sample of open-bit burial that is witnessed at burial 18 of Khanghah was a usual practice during Parthian period hence; apart from Khanghah Gilvan, have also been found at Sang Shir of Hamadan (Azarnoosh, 1975, 1976), Kangavar (Kambakhsh Fard, 1972, 1995, 1968), Susa (Ghirshman, 1950), Cheshme Sar at Takht-e-Jamshid (Schmidt, 1975), Sad Eskander at Gorgan (Saeedi, 1996), Veskeh and Mianrud cemetery at Talesh (Khalatbari, 2004).

The closed-burial conditions that are visible at Burial 21 and 22 of Khanghah cemetery were also employed during Parthian and have found at Sang Shir (Azarnoosh, 1975, 1976), Kangavar (Kambakhsh Fard, 1972, 1995, 1968), Tagh Bostan (Kambakhsh Fard, 1995) and Veskeh and Mianrud cemetery at Talesh (Khalatbari, 2004).

South-north direction that followed in all Parthian burials at Khanghah Gilvan cemetery was a unique method that could not be observed at other cemeteries of this period. The second burial (Burial 20) is also a unique feature at Khanghah which could not be found at the other contemporary cemeteries.

Carinated bowl with projected rim (B18:N1, Plan2) were prevalent during Parthian. These samples have acquired from Shahr-e-Ghomes that were related to Parthian (Stronach, 1974: Fig4).

It is evident that this form of pottery was during Iron Age III up to Parthian period. Consequently, these samples have also acquired from the entrance of Gilaman as well as during Achaemenid (Scerrato, 1970).

Sample (B22:N3) at Khanghah Gilvan included vessels with geometrical and boat-shaped body along with concave mouth and spherical base were prevalent in areas between Iran and Mesopotamia (Iron Age III). Surely, these vessels would have continued at some Iranian regions until the end of the first century BC i.e. middle of the Parthian period. Apart, similar potteries have also found at Bard that employed yellow color paste and these were identical in forms and shape of potteries found at Khanghah Gilvan (B22:N3). The chronology presented at Bard shows an early period i.e. 250-150 BC (Haerinck, 1997:33). Likewise, samples of these vessels have also

found from Nushijan tepe (III layer) that is also related to Parthian period.

These pottery samples related to Parthian period have also unearthed in Sistan that were introduced by Italian archeologists as painted ware of historical period. These painted ware samples containing features of eastern Iran and southwestern Afghanistan have been distinguished from III layer to IV layer of Kuh-e Khwajeh, Ghale Sam, Ghale tepe, Nadali tepe. This is a native-type pottery that began from 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC and probably continues during the whole Parthian period. As such, their features are Parthian. Sample (B22:N3) has also found at Ghale Sam with carinated body (Haerinck, 1997: Fig37,1).

### **Conclusion**

As a whole, it can be said that Parthian burial practices manifesting from their thought, custom, tradition and religious belief could employ differently. Khanghah Gilvan cemetery is one of the archeological enclosure that followed Parthian burial practices in northwestern Iran. The Parthian graves in this enclosure are a kind of pit burials where the dead body was placed after digging a ditch. The dimension of the pit was usually in accordance to the needed space for the dead body as well as gifts. Burials usually contained single body in south-north direction. The head and feet were on southern and northern sides, respectively.



There were usually open and clods-pit burial practices. The pit-burial samples of Parthian period, apart from Khanghah Gilvan, have also been found at Sad Eskander tepe in Gorgan (one sample), Sang Shir of Hamadan (48 samples), Cheshme Sar at Takht-e-Jamshid (7 samples) and Vaskeh cemetery (3 samples).

Open-pit burial conditions was also usual during Parthian period that apart from Khanghah Gilvan, have observed at cemeteries of Sang Shir of Hamadan, Kangavar, Susa,

Eskander at Gorgan, Veskeh and Mianrud cemetery at Talesh. Likewise, closed-pit burials related to Parthian period have found at Sang Shir of Hamadan, Kangavar, Tagh Bostan, Germe, Veskeh and Mianrud. With regard to burial direction usually in south and north, it was a unique method that was not observed other than Khaghah Gilven cemetery. The second burial too has been a unique feature observed at Khanghah Gilvan but was absent in other contemporary cemeteries.

**Table 1** Features of potteries at Burial 18

Number	Burial	Colour			Making Method	Firing Grade	Temper	Engobe		Finish		Making Quality		Height	Rim Diameter	Form
		Inner	Pulp	Inner				Inner	Outer	Inner	Outer	Inner	Outer			
1	TB.B18.N1	Brick Red	Brick Red	Brick Red	Hand-made	Complete	Gritty with Mica inclusions	Wash	Wash	—	—	Medium	Medium	6/1cm	3cm	Low-necked war
2	TB.B18.N2	Dark Brown	Brick Red	Dark Brown	Wheel-made	Complete	Gritty	Slip	Slip	Burnish	Partial burnish	Fine	Medium	5/9cm	16cm	Open Rim

**Table 2** Features of potteries at Burial 22

Number	Burial	Colour			Making Method	Firing Grade	Temper	Engobe		Finish		Making Quality		Height	Rim Diameter	Form
		Inner	Pulp	Inner				Inner	Outer	Inner	Outer	Inner	Outer			
1	TB.B22.N3	Brick Red	Brick Red	Brick Red	Hand-made	Complete	Gritty with Mica inclusions	Wet	Wet	—	—	Medium	Medium	12cm	6/4cm	Open Rim
2	TB.B22.N4	Brick Red	Brick Red	Brick Red	Hand-made	Complete	Gritty with Mica inclusions	—	Wash	—	—	Medium	Medium	5/4cm	3/6cm	Low-necked war

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## تدفین‌های دوره اشکانی گورستان خانقاه گیلوان - استان اردبیل

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تاریخ دریافت: ۹۰/۴/۵

تاریخ پذیرش: ۹۰/۷/۳۰

گورستان خانقاه گیلوان در استان اردبیل و در شهرستان خلخال قرار گرفته است. این گورستان در نتیجه یک پروژه جاده سازی در روستای خانقاه آشکار گردید. در این گورستان تا به امروز، سه فصل کاوش باستان‌شناسی، به سرپرستی نگارنده انجام گردیده که در نتیجه این کاوش‌ها، گورهایی از دوره مفرغ میانی تا دوره اشکانی به دست آمده است.

از گورهای کاوش شده، چهار گور مربوط به دوره اشکانی است. این گورها به شکل چاله ای بوده و در کنار آن‌ها هدایایی از قبیل ظروف سفالی، اشیای مفرغی و آهنی و زینت آلات و مهره‌هایی با اشکال مختلف قرار داده شده است. تدفین‌ها عموماً به شکل انفرادی بوده و در وضعیت‌های مختلف از قبیل طاق باز و جمع شده و در جهات مختلف صورت گرفته است.

نمونه تدفین‌های چاله‌ای دوره اشکانی، علاوه بر گورستان خانقاه گیلوان از گورستان سد اسکندر گرگان، سنگ شیر همدان، چشمه سار تخت جمشید و سکه به دست آمده است. نمونه تدفین‌های با وضعیت طاق باز نیز در دوره اشکانی از جمله وضعیت‌های معمول تدفین بوده که علاوه بر گورستان خانقاه گیلوان از گورستان‌های سنگ شیر همدان، گنگاور، قبرستان حومه شوش، چشمه سازتخت جمشید، سد اسکندرگرگان، و سکه و میانرود در تالش به دست آمده است.

همچنین از نمونه وضعیت تدفین جمع شده این دوره، علاوه بر گورستان خانقاه گیلوان در گورستان‌های سنگ شیر همدان، گنگاور، طاق بستان، گرمی و سکه و میانرود به دست آمده است.

**واژگان کلیدی:** گورستان خانقاه، دوره اشکانی، تدفین چاله‌ای

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۱. عضو هیات علمی و استادیار گروه باستان‌شناسی دانشگاه محقق اردبیلی