

# A Glance at Burial Rites in Pithos of Arsacids era Located in Western Region of Central Zagros (Marivan)

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## Abstract

Pithos burial is a common burial method in Arsacids era. Various cemeteries of this era have been unearthed until now but there wasn't any reference about historical and archaeological condition of Marivan's region and the existence of pithos because of the lack of enquiry and archaeological studies. Fortunately, by with research effort, some pithos cemeteries with diverse burial from Arsacids era were discovered and excavated. The study attempts to describe some invaluable information regarding migrant Arsacids religious out look and their burial practices near Zaribar lake.

**Keywords:** Burial, Arsacids, Pithos, Marivan, Iran.

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## Introduction

In autumn, 2002 a research committee under the supervision of Yaghob Mohammadi Far [1] (the author of this article) undertook to explore central Marivan in cooperation with cultural heritage organization. It was the first research in Marivan's region and possess great value for those interested in Arsacids culture, art, religion etc. As we know, until the mid twentieth century, greater part of Arsacids history, art and civilization were unknown to the world [2]. By exploring and investigating the archaeological remains of this era, initial steps were taken.

Arsacids cultural and historical heritage stretches from the sand valley in the east and contemporary Syria in the west and included a wide area that needs great facilities during the course of study. By digging and discovering some Arsacids cities like Nisa, Margiana, Hatra, Assur, Dura-urpos, Nipur, Hycatompilos, Qale-yazdigerd [3], and by putting efforts of historians in studying and investigating historical text, the history and art of this region were made clear. Yet with so much invaluable efforts, there are some dark spots in history, religion, and the art of this era that needs greater focus and investigations. Here, the case studies regarding different aspects of this era is of special importance. In this study, considering the archeological data and some other documents, the writer tries to introduce and analyze the pithes that discovered in Marivan.

## Marivan's geography and its natural features

Marivan is located in 130 kms west of Sanandaj, the center of Kordestan province. It is located in

46° 10" east of longitude and 35° 32" minutes northern latitude and 1270 to 1340 meters height from the sea level [4]. It was first named as Ghala (fortress in English) since a military fortress was founded there from Nasereddin Shah Qajar's period, in 1903 Haj, Farhad Mirza Motamedoldoleh increased the space of this fortress and built a caravanserai for the local and foreign traders [5].

Marivan city is a part of the Zagros mountain range. The existence of Shamo and Oromanat mountains trapped great humidity in western part of the region and causing thick forests. Considering the climate, Zaribar Lake and Marivan basin is part of Mediterranean region. It has humid weather from November to March and a desert-like weather from May to September and from the April to October the condition is mild-dry. In north western part of the Marivan's small plain that is trapped between the heights, and is located at the height of 1285 meters from the sea level, there exists a sweet water lake called Zaribar with the average capacity of 34 million cubic meters. This lake is 6 kms long and about 1700 to 3000 meters wide and about 5.85 meters deep [6].

## Archaeological Investigation

For archaeological investigation and exploration process of Marivan, the topography survey [7] is used. The most problematic part of investigatory committee was the lack of any kind of practical studies. The only way to find the traces was to cover the limitation (distances) of the investigation. The existence of dense forest delayed the investigation, but effort continued



gradually. From the morphological point of view, there existed a small valley and the accumulation of mountain sediment had brought a lake into existence. This place has an ideal condition for cultivation and animal husbandry. In addition to natural gifts, this plain is suitable for archaeological studies. As the result of the studies showed, some trace from the Paleolithic, Epi Paleolithic and Neolithic age, chalcolithic age, bronze age, first millennium B.C and historical ages and Islamic ages are found in this region [8]. What attract the attention of archaeologists at the end of the investigation was the discovering of the great cemeteries in the manner of pithos burial that involves more than 45 percent of the discovered materials. (The traces and remains of about 15 pithos cemeteries were discovered). These cemeteries are dispersed like a belt around the Zaribar Lake and the vallies around it. Unfortunately, unauthorized excavators have spoiled great deal of buried material in these cemeteries.

Zarde Vian and Pile cemeteries have recently seen unauthorized diggings. In addition to various earthenware, the investigatory committee managed to discover fragment of glass, neckles and bronze buried needles.

### Religion in Arsacids ear

What religion did Arsacids follow? There is no exact information about the religion of this civilization. Information about their civilization, culture and especially their religion are lacking, yet some people believe that their achievement was halted by Sasanians. In Iranian history ranging

from Khodayname to Shahname, the lengthy era of this civilization is not taken into consideration, as Ferdosi says:

I have not heard of them except their name.

and I have not seen in king's book [9].

In Islamic sources 480 years of their reign has been decreased to 200 years. But there are various statements indicating Arsacids religion, some of the researchers believe that when Arsacids were the neighbors of Saka, they worshiped the sun, the moon and stars and their ancestors when they got mixed up with Parsi, they worshiped Ahuramazda and when they got in touch with Sleucide and the Greece, they worshiped Gods. Some other historians that their religius belief was the result of the political thought and was suitable with their reigning duties, that was limited to war and loved Anahita, Mithra and Iranian ancient gods [10]. The study on Aryan gods and other useful powers shows similarities and harmonies between Iranians, Indians, Babylonia, Greece and the cultures and civilizations of other nation. These harmonies that sometimes exists in Arsacids reign can be observed. In fact, many historians believe that Parthians had no specific religion and most of their kings didn't practice any specific religion [11]. There is no sign to show that Ahoramazda was the best God in Arsacids era. As it was in Achaemenids and Sasanians era, in Arsacids era, Ahoramaza didn't play an important role [12]. Some others consider that Parthians like Sleucide and the Greek considered themselves as the sons of God and used names that had a Zarathoshtrian tone like Hormozdik, Dinmazdak and probably shows a Zarathoshtrian atmosphere in those days



but there is no evidence of the existence of this religion [13].

### **Burial Practice in Arsacids period**

In the lengthy Arsacids empire, different practices of burial can be observed particularly in eastern part in Nesa shows a kind of burial that is also found in Soghed. In addition to this, Russian explorers found burial temple in Nisa [14]. In the western part of this territory, the simple burial was burying the corpse in the walls or in the floor of the houses. Children's corpses put in small pithos or in large cruse. They also used wooden or clayed coffins. In Sulocie, some graves have been excavated that seems to be of the same family. These graves are called cellar that were buried with clayed coffins called vathtub or slipper like ones [15]. This kind of coffin was common in the 1st century B.C, most of them are covered with blue or green glass and have much decoration. In this kind of burial, materials were put with the corps. In Hatra, four- wing buildings have been made for the burial inside and out side it [16]. In Palmir and Dura-orpos some towers like Zarathoshtrian towers have been found. In Palmir, there are some underground family tomb and some worshipping tomb that housed the coffins [17].

In Suse city, the burial with coffin and corps burial in Grave shaft are reported in a report by French archeologist[18]. In Shoshtar city, the burial in cellar and in clayed coffins are explored [19]. Three ways of burial are identified in Kangavar such as burial in coffin, burial in pithes and burial in stone columbarium [20]. In mound of Moghan plain: kan-yary, ayry-zamin, Tape-darogh,

Tape-Hatam, Hemat-salaleh and Kishag Ostmagh, the burial in pithes is reported [21].

In Taghe Bostan park in KermanShah, a wide cemetery form this period with pithes style [22]. In addition to this, in many different places of Hamadan city, such as Sang-shir, Ghazaiat Square mahala Ghazian, and so on, many cemeteries with pithes style and coffin have been identified and dug out [23].

As we know, treatment to the dead, is one of the basic principles of different religions. As it is said before, as well as considering the available sources, a special variety in Arsacids geographical area can be found and different kinds of burial can be observed that show a kind of religious freedom.

### **Burial ways in Marivan**

Marivan is a mountainous region and is trapped between the heights. Geographical the burial practice of pithos in Arsacids era was discovered from geographical point of view. Marivan's pithos is like a continuous belt that is located around Zaribar lake and has trapped the lake. In addition to this, the valleys and height near Marivan can be called a closed area and culturally stay typology.

### **Pithos classifications**

In general, the identified burials in Marivan can be classified in two groups. It is necessary to be noted that our information is based on superficial findings owing to archaeological investigations and the possibility of discovering other practices of burial.

#### **1- Pithos burial with the use of one Pithos:**



Considering the archaeological sources, the most common practice of burial is by the use of one pithos. In this way, the dead is put in a pithos and the pithos mouth direction is toward the east. This way of burial is a known way of burial in the south western, west and north western part of Iran. In Zardoyan cemetery, the passage of the road has made various kinds of these pithos clear. The committee managed to identify and study seven pithos with this burial. Although, the great pressure of soil that is more than one meter and half high over the pithos has caused breaking in their central parts, since they are resistant and well-baked, the pithos has not vanished.

Although these cemeteries were robbed, but proper investigation led to some glass bead remains, inside these cemeteries with the dispersed bones that can be compared with the remaining of glass neckles from Ardabil's pithos. In Marrvan's other discovered cemeteries the same way of burial can be observed [24].

In Kisel Abi cemetery, the remaining of one thermos with glass turquoise that is a kind of special glass alkali of this era was discovered with some dispersed pieces of pithos. The cemeteries of this region is also directed to the east, pointing to sun rise. In Beheshte Mostafa cemetery, a piece of clayed material was found that had a vague function. This piece is like an empty square with about 8 centimeters high. By comparing this discovered thing with things from Garimi cemeteries, the essence of this thing was identified. This thing that was completely in good shape was introduced as a clayed mortar [25].

After the close observation of pithos in Pille cemetery, two buried bronze needles were found, the length of which was about 22cm. This finding arises some questions. The most important was practical secularist question, and the other was the relation of these things with the last life. The only way to get the answer was to study a live sample in nomadic society of the western part of the country. With close study of the materialistic Zagros nomads and close attention on the tools they used, on thing attracted the attention of the authors. Was the use of as a necessary instrument for tying the tent's entrance. This needle functions as broach by putting the two sides of the tent on each others and it ties the two surfaces with each other. Nowadays nomads use a wooden sample of these tools. It seemed that the discovered needles had the same function in those days. Now, one should know the use of this materials in the grave. Fortunately, by scientific study of Garimi region dead are with clothes. If we accept this hypothesis, that they believed in the existence of the other world after death, just a continuation of this world life, then we can conclude that most of these tools were necessary for the other world and that these needles in Marivan graves were used as cerment Immortelle .

## 2- Use of Two pithos

Another way of burial in Marivan is by the use of two joined pithos. Zardoyan cemeteries used one pithos but recent studies showed in two places of Kangaver and Garimi. Since, these two ways of one pithos and two pithos burial is at the same place, one can conclude that these practices belong to



same age. One feature regarding the Marivan's pithos is the existence of a new element on the surface of clayed pithos, which is similar to a sword that is designed in the middle of the pithos with decorated surface, that not only shows a symbolic meaning but also like a belt it has a positive influence on the resistance of the pithos body. This decorating element is only identified in Marivan's region.

### Conclusion

The burial is part of a culture. Before the Parthians Iran witnessed, various kinds of burial such as coffin burial way. Another common way of burial is, building a stone tomb found in Pasargad that is related to Cyrus, the founder of Achaemenids dynasty. Other ways of burial in Achaemenids era is rocky tomb with stone coffin of king in Naghshe Rostam and Persopolis by wide scientific studies, it is found that the Parthians also used coffin burial that might be observed in regions like Kangavar, Sange Shir Hamadan, Khark Island , Dura-ropos, Uruk, Sulocia , Nisa, Palmir and ect.

When this tribe dispersed all over Iran, first they started to bury the dead with their traditional way with clothes. In rocks and in stone graves the sample of which can be found in regions like Kangavar and Garmy [26]. Because of national and cultural influence in Arsacids era, the presence of a Greece tradition such as putting coins or keys under the head or the mouth of the dead is found in large cities and temples, the dead were placed over the plat forms in deep pithos like Ilami era with clay suet light [27]. According to Roman Ghirshman, such underground Dakhmes in Suse

[28] In addition to such underground Dakhmes with luxurious clayed coffins have been used in Shoshtar [29].

In addition to the coffins, large and small pithoes for the burial in Iran dates back to 3000 years B.C when the burial of the children is found in small clayed pithos.

Too many reasons are placed for the use of pithos for people's burial. Some people think of financial problems as the reason for replacing pithos with coffin. Others believe that protection of the past heritage and prevention of the corpse against decay is the reason for this [30].

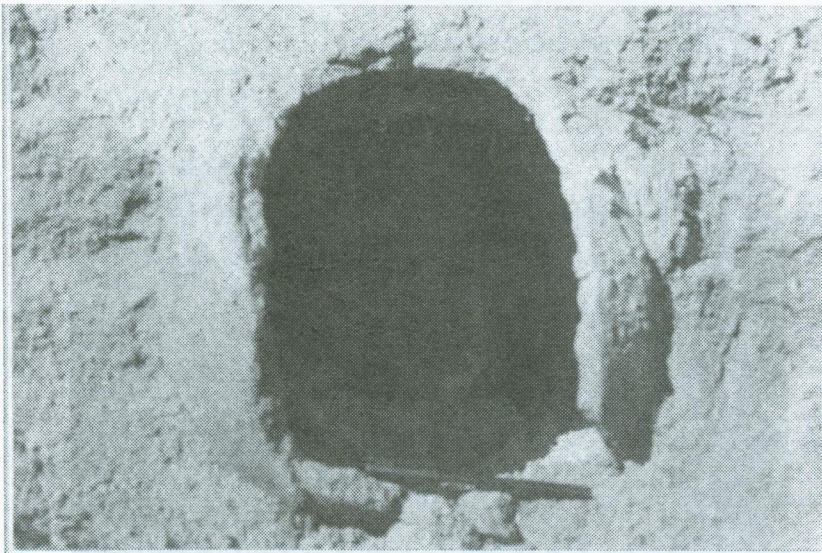
What seems clear is that the existence of religious thought of existence of an external life after death by the followers of these religions cause them to protect the corpse from decay. The existence of different materials in pithos shows the prevalence thought among migrant Arsacids. Here, the word migrant Arsacids bring a question that for what reasons we think that these pithoes belongs to a migrant tribe? As it is mentioned, the central part of Marivan involves this statistic community of this investigation. By investigating a region about 500 square kms by a research committee, traces of some permanent residences are found in this period and the justification various cemeteries from Arsacids era, without the existence of permanent residence shows the existence of a tribe with seasonal residence in the region.

Though, it is difficult to explain Marivans's pithos due to lack of scientific exploration, but one can describe this from some dimensions. Physically, there are great similarities between this pithos and those of the Arsacids's in some other places.

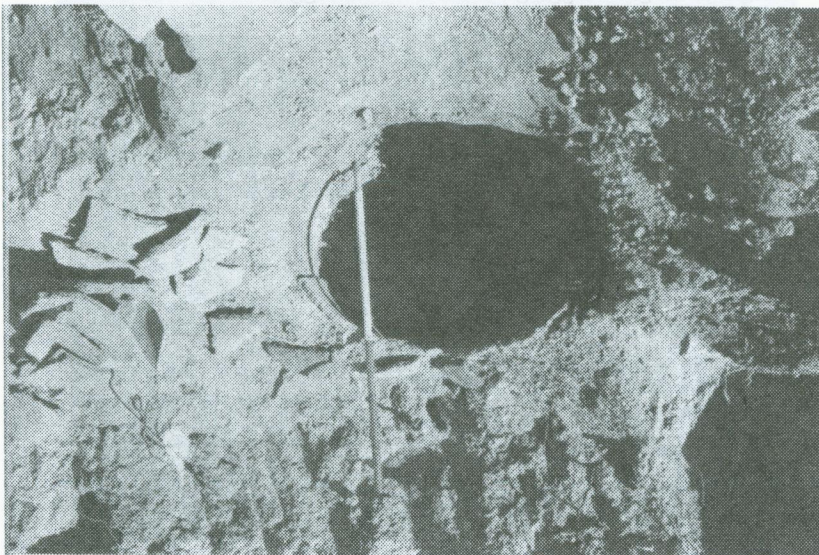


While the pithos of the others regions especially those of the central and northern part of Zagros make the pithos strong in the middle part, Marivan's pithos have decorated belts like sword that belongs to that area. In addition to the form and function, Marivan's pithos belongs to Arsacids period. For tow reason, first, by considering the pithos burial ritual that is like other regions burial of this time and by considering the belongings of

the dead like the remains of glass neckles, needles, mortar and thermos found in some destroyed cemeteries. Secondly, combining of tow pithos belong to Arsacids period in a way that the second the floor of pithos is broken and put on the first pithos and make a long pithos. Similar cases can be found in Sange Shir Hamadan and Anahita temple in Kangavar.



**Figure 1** Burial by the use of two pithes , Zardeviyan cemetery



**Figure 2** Burial by the use of one pithes, Zardeviyan Cemetery





Figure 3 The use of Ston around the moth of the pithos



Figure 4 A great digging by unauthorized diggers in Balk cemetery

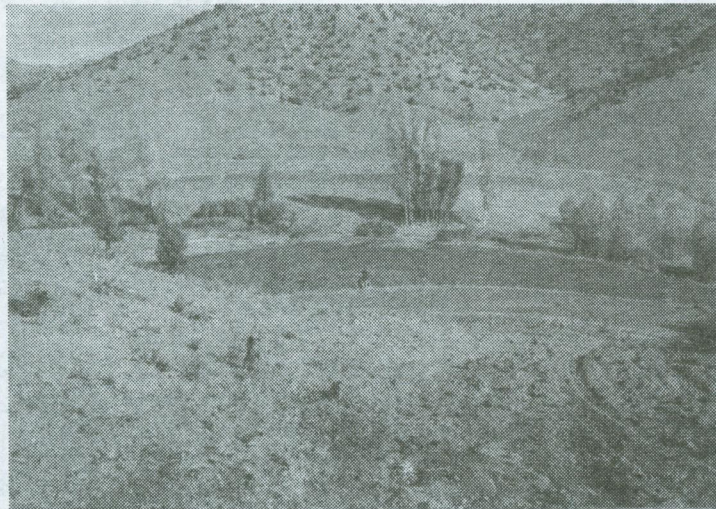
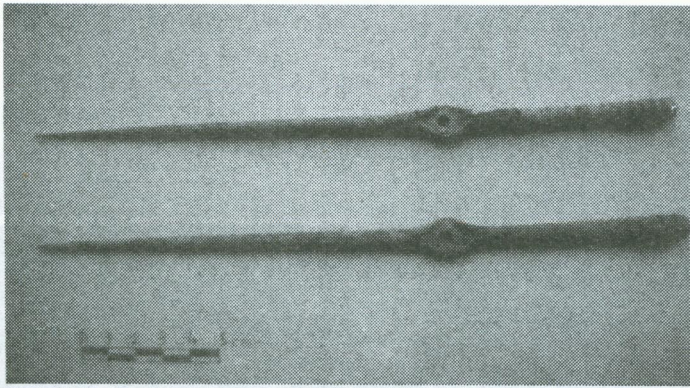


Figure 5 A genera vies of Qisal Abi cemetery





**Figure 6** The burial needles from Pile cemetery



**Figure 7** Glass bead inside pitted, from Zarderoyan cemetery



**Figure 8** A landscape of Zarivan Lake



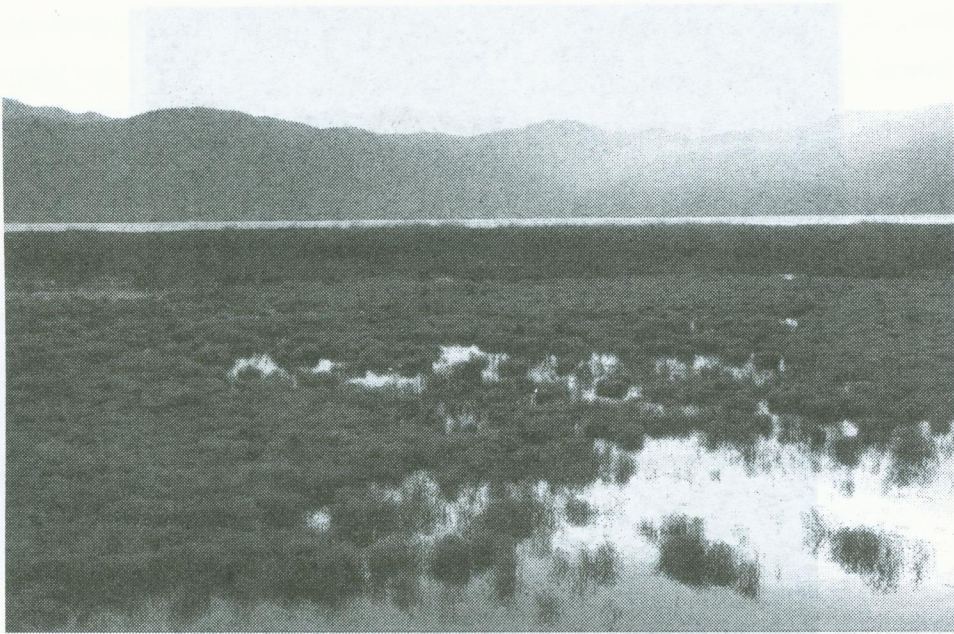


Figure 9 A landscape of Zarivan Lake, from Zarivan ceremery

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