

Challenges, discoveries at Gur-e Kaferi Cemetery in Yazd Province



● IRNA

Iranica Desk

Yazd Province is renowned for the extraordinary richness of its historical structures and textures, yet it remains one of the most underexplored regions in the country from an archaeological perspective. There exists a very limited amount of organized, documented, and published information concerning the cultural and historical periods spanning thousands of years within this province. This relative scarcity of data may be attributed to the allure of its vibrant, living historical fabric, which tends to attract more immediate attention. Nevertheless, the limited dissemination of archaeological research findings from Yazd further contributes to the overall lack of familiarity with its ancient artifacts and heritage. The entire country also exhibits a minimal level of archaeological investigation, and Yazd Province is no exception. The scarcity of systematic studies conducted within Yazd is the primary reason behind the very early-stage and superficial understanding of its unique cultural, historical, and archaeological features, IRNA wrote. Bahabad exemplifies this situation.

Situated in the eastern part of Yazd and sharing borders with Kerman and South Khorasan provinces, this region is abundant in mineral resources, agricultural potential, and a long-standing historical legacy, yet it remains relatively. Among the notable sites in Bahabad, the Gur-e Kaferi Cemetery in Kavijan Village stands out prominently. Covering an area of nearly 1,000 hectares and containing over 1,793 graves identified to date, it is regarded as one of the most significant and largest ancient cemeteries in the region. This site has been attributed to the Parthian period, underscoring its immense historical importance. The Gur-e Kaferi site is located five kilometers southwest of Bahabad and to the west and northwest of Kavijan village. The distance from this cemetery to the provincial center is approximately 156 kilometers. This archaeological site offers valuable evidence of the life, culture, and burial practices of ordinary people from that era and has the potential to contribute significantly to a deeper understanding of the cultural and historical sequence of this part of the country. The head of the archaeological team investigating Gur-e Kaferi



told IRNA that during a one-month preliminary and survey-based archaeological exploration, conducted within the site of Gur-e Kaferi, a total of 1,793 historical graves were identified across an area close to one thousand hectares. Mohammad Hossein Azizi Kharanaqi stated, "Considering the similarity of most graves and burial objects found here, it is highly likely that this cemetery belongs to ordinary people

from the Parthian period who inhabited this region. However, this dating remains tentative and preliminary, and further research and excavation efforts could lead to revisions and refinements in this chronological assessment." He also added, "The burial objects discovered are limited in number and include one or two ceramic vessels placed at the head and foot of the graves, along with small bronze arti-

facts such as bracelets, rings, and stone beads. Fragments of glass paste also constitute a significant part of the objects recovered." Furthermore, he stated, "This high density of graves over such a large area has made Gur-e Kaferi a truly unique and significant cemetery site. However, it has been subjected to illegal excavations for over four decades, which has resulted in more than 90% of the graves being damaged or completely destroyed." He continued, "In order to gain a better understanding of the intrinsic nature and historical context of this site, alongside systematic and survey-based investigations conducted within the area, five graves were also carefully selected and excavated for test trenching." Azizi Kharangi emphasized, "Considering the structure of the graves, their shallow depth, and the potential for moisture and water penetration into the interior spaces due to the soil composition surrounding the graves, almost no remains of human skeletons have been preserved. Only in some cases, worn and fractured pieces of long bones have been left behind, providing limited evidence of the buried individuals."

He added, "Despite ongoing efforts by local officials and archaeologists, the lack of comprehensive understanding and accurate expert assessment of the function and significance of this prominent site has prevented Gur-e Kaferi from being registered on Iran's List of National Heritage. This lack of official recognition has unfortunately led to a rise in illegal excavations and disturbances at the site." He further mentioned that studies of Gur-e Kaferi have been conducted during the initial phases of exploration. The next steps in research involve finalizing the documentation necessary for national registration and undertaking more precise, scientific excavations. The goal is to preserve this cemetery, which dates back over 2,000 years, and to recognize it as a valuable cultural heritage within the Iranian plateau. Finally, he clarified, "The graves in this cemetery are constructed directly on the ground in rectangular and oval shapes, often forming mound-like structures. We hope that ongoing and future research into Gur-e Kaferi will lead to the discovery of definitive and solid evidence about this previously unknown period of Parthian history."



Varni standing as unique intermediate between carpets, kilims

Varni Bafi or Varni weaving, is a traditional and popular northwestern part of Iran. Today it is produced in an area called Dasht-e Moghan that is located in Ardebil Province. Varni is a nomadic hand-weave and belongs to an ancient tribe that was known as Shahsavari in the past. The Shahsavari, which was formed by merging of fifty tribes into each other, was named so by Shah Abbas Safavid

who ordered them to settle in Azarbaijan as a defense against the advances of Ottoman Empire. Varni is a delicate kilim also known as Sumak. According to many specialists, Varni, that is double sided, is an intermediate between carpets and kilims. It is considered among the complex weaves and it takes a skillful weaver with years of experience to make a Varni. Varni is weaved using Pudpichi. It is a

method in which in addition to warp and weft yarns, an extra thin weft is added to the body of kilim. After inserting the weft yarns, the thin weft is inserted too and then they are packed together by the comb. The extra weft enhances the interconnection of yarns and adds to the durability of the weave. This is considered as the last upgrade in the craft of kilims. Another weave, very similar to Varni, is Shirikpich that is a product of Kerman Province. They also differ in motifs and patterns. Varni is made more often in the winter season, because that is when the tribe has settled in one place and have the necessary time. The yarn is a mixture of silk and wool. Cotton, wool or silk yarns are used as wraps, and hand spun wool or silk yarn as wefts. Azarbijani nomads use Varni to make saddlebags and horse covers that, in terms of style, motifs (birds and animals) and color palettes, are among the best horse covers of Iran. The big saddlebags that are used to carry the utensils of nomads are ornated by motifs that are inspired by prehistoric potteries of this area.



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