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Author(s): Zahra Esmailzadeh, Mahmood Heydarian

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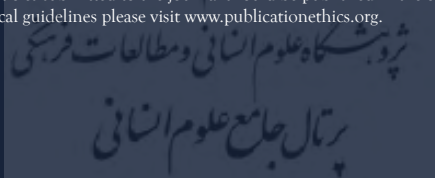
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The Ethnoarchaeological Approach to the Cenotaph or Memorial Grave Tradition: A Case Study of Mafegeh in the Bakhtiari Region of Southwestern Iran


Zahra Esmailzadeh¹, Mahmood Heydarian² 

Abstract

Understanding the descriptions of graves and historical mortuary practices is crucial for interpreting contextual information and broader social significance. This study employs an interdisciplinary approach, drawing from archaeological literature, anthropological evidence, and sociological theory to expand the range of possible interpretations. The research is based on ethnoarchaeological research on the mourning ritual of the Bakhtiari people in southwest Iran. A ritual that exemplifies memorials is embodied in monuments called Mafegeh for individuals or groups whose remains are elsewhere. The conceptual framework encompasses the theoretical and methodological aspects of comparing ethnographic and archaeological data. This framework provides a comprehensive approach to effectively analyzing and drawing connections between these two data types. Fieldwork involves conducting archaeological surveys, interviews, and direct ethnographic observations to document the Mafegeh. The study shows theoretical considerations and emphasises the reluctance to forget the dead. Nonreligious beliefs and mental states underlie many motivations of this practice. It may be that mafageh is driven by other symbolic, emotional, and practical reasons, and that has little to do with a belief in immortal souls. Such historically and culturally recurring funerary practices suggest that humans are predisposed to believe in and prepare for an afterlife. A possible reason would have been that the deceased had died elsewhere; thus, the memorial structure was erected to honour him. The research exclusively involves men, and no instances related to women were found.

Keywords: Ethnoarchaeology; Cenotaph; Memorial Grave; Mafegeh; Bakhtiari; Southwestern Iran.

¹ M.Sc. Graduate, Department of Archaeology, Shahrekord University, Shahrekord, Iran.  zesmailzadeh96@gmail.com

² Associate Professor, Department of Archaeology, Shahrekord University, Shahrekord, Iran (Corresponding Author).  heydarianm@sku.ac.ir

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Introduction

The burial of the deceased represents the most concrete manifestation of human thought. It is important to study the practices, rituals, and items related to death and burial in order to uncover a society's perspectives on religion, death, beliefs about the afterlife, and its economic and social framework. Additionally, knowledge about burial customs and memorials provides valuable archaeological, sociological, and anthropological insights.

The discovery of burial sites dating back 100,000 years to the Middle Paleolithic period highlights the rich archaeological heritage of humanity. These findings, meticulously excavated from Paleolithic sites, underscore the significance of ancient burial practices (Solecki, 1966; Bar-Yosef *et al.*, 2009). From then until today, there has been a considerable culturally determined and ethnographically observed range of variation in human mortuary practice. They include cave interment (Thorne, 1990; Bulbeck, 2001, 2006; Goh, 2014; Lloyd-Smith, 2012; Yanshina, 2022), after-death manipulations with the body, simple pit graves, cremation (Schmidt and Symes, 2008; Micozzi, 1991), burial mounds (kurgans) (Arnold, 2002; Ballmer, 2018; Parker Pearson, 2005), lavish burials, tombs, monumental architecture and royal tombs (Bard, 2005). These practices offer valuable insights into the beliefs and traditions of different societies.

In most of these cases, grave goods were also commonly interred with the deceased from the late Palaeolithic to modern times, perhaps to serve them on their journey to the afterlife (Paulsen,

1967; Kelleher, 2007; Härke, 2014; Ikram, 2015). The evidence includes religion, the deceased's use in the afterlife, the sentiments of relatives (Elliot, 1990), and afterlife beliefs.

A groundbreaking burial tradition, known as Cenotaph, emerged for the first time in the early half of the third millennium BC in Bactria Margiana Archaeological Complex's Culture (BMAC) and some eastern and northeastern parts of Iran. A cenotaph serves as a powerful tribute to individuals or groups whose remains are located elsewhere. It is especially meaningful for honouring soldiers who have fallen in war and are interred in distant locations (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, 2021). The mourning ritual of the Bakhtiari people in southwest Iran provides a powerful example of these memorials, embodied in the monuments known as "Mafegeh". The Mafegeh of the departed individuals is crafted in a setting that truly embodies their deep connection to the land and water, where they dedicated themselves to hunting, labor, and life for an extended period. This type of work is typically carried out either at the request of the deceased, who creates a will before passing away, or by their family members. It involves constructing a platform, in the shape of a cube or a raised circle, somewhere other than the person's grave (Babadi Akashe, 2018: 78; Ghanbari Adivi, 2003: 52).

This is a good time to review the meanings of Cenotaphs from archaeological and anthropological perspectives and discuss why they do not contain any skeletons or bodies. Anthropological and archaeological surveys and inter-

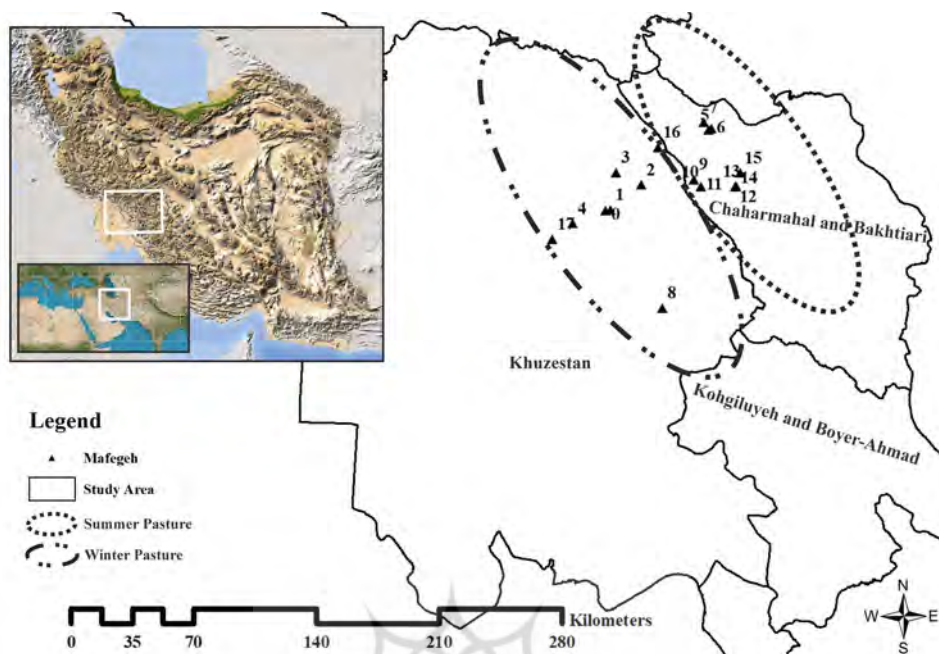


Fig. 1. Map of the Region Showing the Winter (Tropical/Winter Quarters) and the Summer Pasture (Cold/Country) in Southwest Iran.

pretations approach this by studying and evaluating modern pastoral groups and applying the resulting survey to Mafegh in the Bakhtiari region, southwestern Iran. This paper serves as a crucial link between traditional and contemporary archaeological viewpoints in the region. Emphasizing prehistoric periods and the scarce present-day evidence of Cenotaphs, it provides vital additional information that is absent in prehistoric eras. The objectives of this research are to uncover, introduce, and analyze the profound existential philosophy behind the Cenotaph and its tradition. Furthermore, we aim to explore the potential impact of the cenotaph on the current rituals of people today, especially the Mafegh of the Bakhtiari community. Lastly, the study seeks to shed light on and bring awareness to the contemporary Ceno-

taphs present in the study area. Thus, the core of this study explores how Mafegh functions based on archaeological and ethno-archaeological evidence, as well as the similarities and differences between Cenotaphs and Mafeghs.

Study Area and Bakhtiari Tribes

The Zagros highlands and the adjacent countryside define the geographical area being studied. Khuzestan is located to the southwest, while the Iranian Central Plateau is located to the north (refer to Fig. 1). This region of the Zāgros forms a series of parallel valley systems with deep gorges and alluvial flats running in a southeast/northwest direction. The renowned rivers in the area include the Kārūn River, the Zayanderud, the Āb-i Bāzoft, the Āb-i Vanak, and the Khersān. The region is well-suited for



Fig. 2. Some of the Cenotaphs Mentioned in the Text. A. Djarkutan (Ionesov 2020: 98); B. Shahdad (Hiebert and Karlovsky, 1992: pl. II c); C. Shahrak-i Firoozeh (Basafa, 2014: 262-264); D. Tepe Hissar (Schmidt, 1937: 175); E. Ulug Tepe (Lecomte, 2013:182); F. Gonur (Sariiianidi, 2007: 51).

mixed economies, particularly focusing on herding. Its fertile, well-watered valleys offer great potential for a mix of agriculture and pastoral nomadism. The agricultural capacity varies, with several valleys having excellent conditions for farming (Zagarell, 1982: 8).

This region is perfectly suited for herding and is home to nomadic groups. The Bakhtiari, also known as Greater Lur, is one of the two groups of Lurs residing in the Southern Zagros mountainous region. The other group, a smaller one, consists of the current inhabitants of the Lurestan province. The Bakhtiaris flock to this region every spring and summer, drawn by its ideal geography and climate. Abundant water sources, lush pastures, and optimal plant growth timing make it an irresistible destination for them. As the seasons change, the Bakhtiaris migrate to the Khuzestan province. This nomadic tribe is historically divided into the Chahar Lang and Haft Lang, residing in the northwest and southwest of the region, respectively. For further insights

on the Bakhtiaris, their history, and geographical presence, refer to the works of Curzon (1966), Hinz (1971), Garthwaite (1972), Amanollahi Baharvand (1991), Potts (2004), Rafifar and Ghorbani (2008), Sardar Asad (2009), and Heydari Dastenaiei and Mortazavi (2020).

The land utilized by the Bakhtiari is divided into two parts. The first part is the winter pasture (tropical/winter quarters), which includes regions in the southwest or Khuzestan plain. The second part is the summer pasture (cold/country) located on the eastern slopes or the west side of the Iranian Plateau, encompassing the Zagros Mountains and the border between them (Garthwaite, 1978; Alizadeh, 2003: 87; Heydari Dastenaiei and Mortazavi, 2020: 66).

Materials and Methodology

The study's main purpose was to survey and identify the archaeology and ethnography of the mourning ritual of the Bakhtiari people in southwest Iran, embodied in the monuments known as Mafegeh. After detailed studies, we



Fig. 3. Some Features of the Mafegeh: A. Temporary Mafegeh; B Kotal Ritual Ceremony and Mourning Ceremony with the Sound of a Musical Instrument, the Firing of a Gunshot; C. Permanent, D, E, and F. Decorative Features.

studied 20 architectural compositions in the region. In each case, the architecture was surveyed and the information of each was carefully observed and photographed, and a plan-view drawing of the Mafegeh was mapped and recorded. During these steps, some forms were completed through interviews with survivors of the deceased to identify and document construction methods and the possible reasons for Mafegeh. This process was repeated for each Mafegeh to facilitate summarizing and comparing other Mafegehs. The synthesis of the data related to behaviours performed and their similarities and differences was performed by participating in some ceremonies in temporary Mafegehs. Finally, the distribution of Mafegehs in the region was organized to allow a comparison of behaviours performed and their similarities and differences, social considerations, as well as chronological considerations.

Description of the Cenotaph or Memorial Grave

A Cenotaph, from the Greek “kenos taphos” meaning “empty tomb”, is a monument honoring a person or group whose remains are elsewhere. In simpler terms, this refers to a unique burial practice where there are no human remains in the grave. Instead, various offerings are placed in the empty grave to honor someone who passed away in a distant place and couldn't come back home, like a war martyr or someone who died abroad (Seyed Sajjadi, 2005; Iravani Ghadim and Tahmasebi Zave, 2018: 141). Ancient Greek writings mention many cenotaphs (Mosapour Negari, 2021: 124). The first occurrence of these graves and burial customs dates back to the early half of the 3rd millennium BC at Shahr-i Sokhta. In the latter part of the same millennium, they were also observed in the BMAC archaeological horizon (Seyed Sajjadi, 2009: 469; Iravani Ghadim and Tahmasebi Zave, 2018: 141). This specific type of burial, characterized by the pit

grave structure, has been documented in various locations. These include Tepe Hissar (Schmidt, 1937: 175), Sibri, Quetta (Santoni, 1981: 52-60), Shahdad (Hakemi, 1998: 84-120), Gonur Tepe in Turkmenistan (Sarianidi, 2007: 31), Shahrak-i Firoozeh (Basafa, 2014: 262-264; Basafa and Rahmati, 2012: 617), Chalo (Vahdati and Biscione, 2014: 321; 2015: 520), and Djarkutan in the south of Uzbekistan (Ionesov, 2020: 97). In figure 2, you'll find a glimpse of these striking cenotaphs.

The creation of these graves was driven by a deep desire to honor and memorialize the departed loved ones. The relatives were committed to commemorating their deceased family members by constructing these graves, just as they had done for others. Their unwavering dedication to upholding the time-honored cemetery rituals is exemplified by the act of placing burial gifts in the unoccupied grave. The construction of these graves also serves as a source of solace for the bereaved family members (Iravani Ghadim and Tahmasebi Zave, 2018: 142).

The evidence strongly suggests that the burial custom originated in Shahr-i Sokhta (Periods I and II) and spread to southern Turkmenistan through extensive cultural and trade interactions (Sajjadi, 2007: 122-123; 2009: 20-24; Iravani Ghadim and Tahmasebi Zave, 2018: 142). Cenotaphs dating from 2300-1500 BC have been discovered in the BMAC zone of southern Turkmenistan (Togolok 21, Gonur, Ulug Tepe, see Sarianidi 2007; Mamedov *et al.*, 2012).

The term cenotaph is used to describe national war memorials dedicated to soldiers who were killed in war and are

buried or missing in other locations (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, 2021; Webster, 2021; Mosapour Negari, 2021). These monuments, such as those observed in the mourning ritual of the Bakhtiari people (Mafegeh), serve as powerful and symbolic reminders of sacrifice and loss.

Description of the Case Study of Mafegeh Sites

Mafegeh comprises two components, Mafe and Geh. Mafe is a Persian word or a modified form of Arabic Madfan. Geh is an abbreviation of Gah and the suffix of place; Madfangah, burial ground, or grave (Ghafari, 2008: 23). A cenotaph or memorial, known as Mafegeh, is constructed to commemorate the deceased, indicating the person's connection and ownership of the land where they have lived and worked for an extended period. This construction is carried out either at the request or testament of the deceased or by their family members.

Mafegeh is a symbol and cultural element in the artistic and epic life of Bakhtiari. This element is a memorial that is used for the great and famous men of Bakhtiari (Babadi Akashe, 2018: 78; Ghanbari Adivi, 2003: 52). The origin of this building is not accurately known due to the types of native materials used, but it is believed to have a long-standing significance in rituals. Among the Bakhtiari people, it is known by different names in various regions, including Mafegeh, Tazegeh, Yadman, Yadboud, and Koushk; however, the most commonly used term is Mafegeh. In Bakhtiari culture, Mafegeh is constructed for elders of clans, warriors, soldiers, brave men, and martyrs.

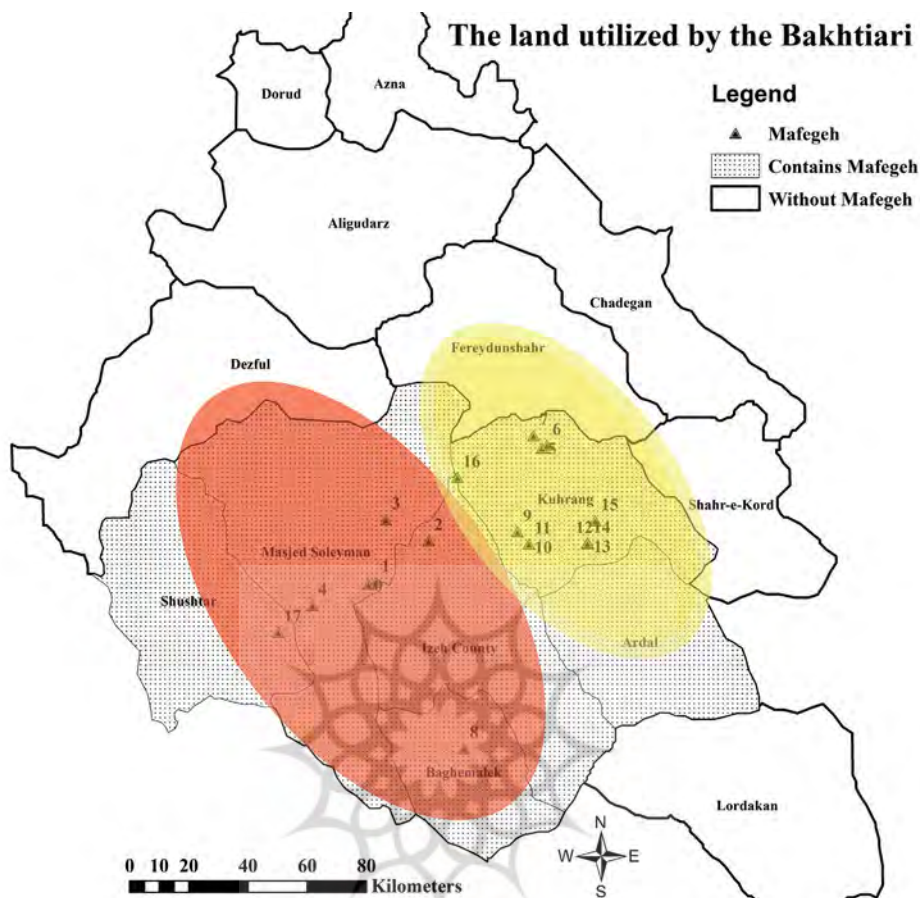


Fig. 4. Map of the Region Showing the distribution of Mafegeh in the Winter (Tropical/Winter Quarters, Red Color), and the Summer Pasture (Cold/Country, Yellow Color). See Table 1 for Sites Information.

In the event of someone passing away during the winter in the pasture (referred to as Qeshlaq in Persian), a Mafegeh (memorial structure) may be constructed in their memory in the summer pasture (known as Yilaq in Persian) based on the wishes of the deceased or their surviving family members. Similarly, if someone passes away in the summer pasture, a memorial can be built in the winter pasture. Mafegeh is a memorial that symbolizes the connection of the deceased to the land where they

lived, farmed, hunted, moved, or were born, even if they were far away from it. Mafegeh serves as a memorial and is not a burial site, but it holds great respect in the eyes of the Bakhtiari people. Insulting it goes against traditions and ethnic customs, and is as serious as insulting a person's grave. Sometimes, people even swear by it. Occasionally, a well-known individual from the Bakhtiari tribe passes away in one of the villages. Due to their significance within the tribe, they are buried in the local cemetery. The

Table 1. Summary of the Mafegehs Data under Study.

Site	Name	Location	Coordinate	Dimension (Meters)	Some Attributes
1	Has-sanagha Hatami	Khuzestan province - Andika - Haj Hassan Agha village	32067398 49461622	1×1/20	Its base is without a platform or Mastaba. Made from modern materials such as cement and artificial stone, like granite, on which the profile of the deceased is engraved.
2	Faizullah Cher-aghian	Khuzestan province - Andika city - Abzhadan - Sargach village	32074568 49478790	1/20×1/21	Made with a platform and from modern materials such as cement and artificial stone, like granite, on which the profile of the deceased is engraved.
3	Ghol-amshah Ahmadi	Khuzestan province - Andika - Abzhadan - Sargach village	32074568 49478790	-	Made with a platform and from modern materials such as cement and stone.
4	Akhonyar	Khuzestan province - Izeh - Iveh village	32074568 49670495	50×1/30	Dry stone picking involves using stone pieces without mortar. Without the profile of the deceased.
5	Aneghadar Zarasvand	Khuzestan province - Andika - Talpa village	32267025 49514326	1/10×1/20	Who was buried in Chaharbisheh cemetery and his Mafegeh is in his hometown of Endika. Made with a platform and from modern materials such as cement and artificial stone, like granite, on which the profile of the deceased is engraved. Its decorative feature is stone lion statues on the top of structure. In the Bakhtiari dialect, 'bard shir' (lion stone).
6	Emam Hossein	Khuzestan province - Masjid Suleiman city	31995649 49265287	1/30×1/20	Hossein ibn Ali (11 January 626 – 10 October 680) a social, political and religious leader is regarded as the third Imam (leader) in Shia Islam. Made with a platform and from modern materials such as cement and artificial stone, like granite, without the profile.

7	Ahafiz Gheybi- poor	Chaharma- hal Bakhtiari province - Kohrang - Sheikh Alikhan village	32504545 50064688	1/30×1/20	Made with a platform and from modern materials such as cement and stone, on which the profile of the deceased is engraved. The distance between the grave and Mafegeh is approximately 600-700 meters.
8	Khosh- namha	Cha- harmahal Bakhtiari province - Kohrang - Sheikh Alikhan village	32542120 50032961	1/50×1/30	The only occurrence of several Mafegeh existing together. The four Mafegeh numbers are associated with prominent individuals. Made with a platform and from modern materials such as cement and artificial stone, like granite, on which the profile of the deceased is engraved.
9	Alabedi Rezaei	Chaharma- hal Bakhtiari province - Kohrang - Sheikh Alikhan village	32514314 50081435	1/10×1/10	Made with two platforms and from modern materials such as cement and artificial stone, like granite, on which the profile of the deceased is engraved.
10	Nur Ali Shahabi	Khuzestan province - Baghmalek - Kaltander village	31579321 49827435	50×1/80	His primary grave is situated in Uganda. The memorial is built like a regular grave, different from the usual Mafegeh in Bakhtiari. However, like them, it does not contain a human body and has a memorial aspect.
11	Kohne Lireh	Chaharma- hal and Bakh- tiari province - Bazfat district - Bagh Chenar village	32246401 49985540	1/30×1	It has no specific specifications of deceased and there is a hole in the roof. Made with a platform and from modern materials such as cement and artificial stone, without the profile.
12	Gholam Abbas Ali- janvand	Chaharma- hal and Bakhtiari province - Bazoft district - Chamangoli village	32210669 50031246	1/40×1/60 & 1/40×1/60	His main grave is in Chaharbisheh cemetery in Masjed Suleiman. He has two mafages in two different places in Chamn Goli. Both of them are made with a platform and from modern materials such as cement and artificial stone, like granite, on which the profile of the deceased is engraved.

13	Khodamorad Bahramian	Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari province - Bazfat - Bagh Chenar village	32467940 49989935	50×1/30	Who was buried in the Baghchenar cemetery, a Mafegeh was constructed in front of his house in his memory. Made with a platform and from modern materials such as cement and artificial stone, like granite, on which the profile of the deceased is engraved.
14	Bahman Hashempur	Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari province - Kohrang - Shah Mansouri	32218452 50239180	1×1/30	Made with a platform and from modern materials such as cement, on which the profile of the deceased is engraved. Its decorative feature is stone book statues on the top of structure and two guns and one hunting camera on the wall.
15	Bahram Tahmasabi	Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari province - Kohrang - Shah Mansouri	32220240 50241996	1/15×1/15	Cow-shaped capitals on the top of the Mafegeh were exactly similar to the double bull-shaped capitals in Persepolis, in the plains of Marvdasht, encircled by the southern Zagros mountains, Fars province of Iran. Made with a platform and from modern materials such as cement, on which the profile of the deceased is engraved.
16	Nasser Hajatpour	Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari province - Kohrang - Shah Mansouri	32219415 50240982	1/10×1/30	Made with a platform and from modern materials such as cement and stone.
17	Mohammad Farhadi	Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province - Kohrang - Biregan Village	32289180 50265952	50×1/60	Made with a platform and from modern materials such as cement and stone.
18	Monjazi	Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province - Kohrang County - Biregan Village	32289180 50265952	1/10×1/20	Made with a platform and from modern materials such as .cement and stone

19	Bahman Alaeddin 1	Khuzestan province - Shushtar - Rahdar village	31909409 49147018	1×1/20	His primary burial site lies in Karaj City, to the south of Alborz Mountain. Made with five platforms and from modern materials such as cement and artificial stone, like granite, on which the profile of the deceased is engraved. Its decorative feature is two stone Partridge statues.
20	Bahman Alaeddin 2	Khuzestan province - Andika - Taraz	32405498 49764734	50×2	His primary burial site lies in Karaj City, to the south of Alborz Mountain. The building's design incorporates elements representing the Haft Lang and Chahar Lang tribes, with a height of 7 meters and four columns. The central design of this structure is inspired by the Choghazanbil ziggurat, and its dome resembles a Khosravani Bakhtiari hat. The materials used in its construction include black granite stone, cement mortar, metal sheets (composite), and cut malon stone.

survivors also constructed a Mafegeh for him within the same village, either on his personal property or in front of his house, to honor the revered men in the clan. Like the living Mafegeh of “Khodamarad Bahramian,” who was a resident of the “Baghchenar” village and was buried in the Baghchenar cemetery, a Mafegeh was constructed in front of his house in his memory.

The distance between Hafiz Ghai-bipour's grave and Mafegeh is approximately 600-700 meters, as documented by Esmailzadeh in 2024. Hafiz Ghaibi-pour was the elder of Sheikh Ali Khan village and one of the respected elders of the Babadi tribe.

In terms of structure, Mafegehs are often divided into two types: temporary and permanent. A temporary Mafegeh is erected during a mourning ceremony. The organizers build a temporary structure, generally with wood or iron rods, in the shape of a square or rectangle, either during the ceremony or shortly before. The remaining horns from the deceased person's hunts, along with other hunting and fighting tools, are placed on it (Babadi Akashe, 2018: 78). A statue or replica of the deceased person or a symbol representing the deceased is then made from two or more pieces of wood, forming the main body of the statue.



Fig. 5. Some of the Mafegehs and Their Owner Mentioned in the Text. A. Hassanagha Hatami; B. Gholamshah Ahmadi in Chamn Goli; C. Gholamshah Ahmadi in His Personal Property; D. Akhonyar with Dry Stone Picking; E and F. Aneghadar Zarasvand, Main Grave and Mafegeh; G. Emam Hossein; H and I. Ahafiz Gheybipoor, Mafegeh and, Main Grave; J. Khoshnamha; K. Alabedi Rezaei.

They adorn this statue with the deceased's hat, Bakhtiari local pants known as Debit, a waist bag, a gun, a camera, and other personal belongings to create a life-like representation. On the day of burial, items placed on the temporary grave are believed to hold the essence of the departed. These include invaluable possessions that are so closely linked to the individual that they cannot be inherited or sold, such as official attire, accessories, a cigarette holder, a pipe, a belt, and spectacles. The involvement of numerous individuals during a funeral displays the

enduring nature of their motives. Furthermore, the consistent significance of certain items, such as clothing and weapons, persists across different geographical regions like Khozestan, Chahr Mahal and Baktyari.

The Mafegeh building is completed after the seventh or 40th ceremony, but a temporary Mafegeh is prepared for the Kotal ritual ceremony and mourning ceremony. They may often hold the ceremony in the place where the main Mafegeh is made. They put the belongings of the deceased on it and hold the



Fig. 6. Some of the Mafegehs and their Owner Mentioned in the Text. A. Nur Ali Shahabi, Memorial Grave; B. Kohneh Lireh, without the Profile of the Deceased; C. Khodamorad Bahramian, in Front of His House; D. Bahman Hashempur, Modern Design; E. Bahram Tahmasabi; F, G, and H. Bahman Alaeddin, Main Grave, Mafegeh in Rahdar and Taraz.

“Kotal” ritual ceremony. The people present at the ceremony circle around this Mafegeh and mourn with the sound of a musical instrument, the firing of a gunshot, and chanting (Fig. 3) (Esmailzadeh, 2024).

Permanent Mafegeh: After performing the mourning rituals of the week and then the 40th, the relatives of the deceased, including children, friends, and relatives, set up the main Mafegeh for their lost loved one. In the past, the construction components of most Mafegehs were stone carcasses (or cut into cubes), and mud-straw mortar. Until recently, however, the materials used were more than normal construction materials, especially rubble and mud. For this reason, they did not last long. Due to the lack of attention from future generations and the absence of reconstruction over time, no trace of them has remained. However, nowadays, they are made from modern materials such as cement and artificial stone, like granite, on which the profile of the deceased is engraved.

In some instances, mafegehs are constructed entirely from industrial and granite stones. The choice of stone relies on the preferences of the deceased person's loved ones, with Malon stone being the most popular due to its resilience against natural and man-made destructive elements. Their base is a platform resembling a Mastaba. The number of stairs varies in different booths. Beyond the platforms, there is a cubic chamber with a height of 1.5 to 2 meters and a width of 1.5 meters. It should be noted that many Mafegehs have a unique architecture. They resemble a vertical grave on a single mastaba, similar to the mafegeh of the master Bahman Aladdin. However, there are exceptions to this pattern; some mafegehs do not have a platform and vary in height and width. In general, Mafegeh cubes are typically no taller than 2.5 meters with flat roofs, featuring a hole for hoisting a black flag during anniversaries or the horns of the last hunt of the deceased. In the past, most memorials were not engraved with the name of

Table 2. Summary of the Differences and Similarities between Mafegeh and Cenotaph.

Component	Mafegeh	Cenotaph
Construction Purpose	Today, as migration among Bakhtiari tribes has decreased, the love and attachment people have to their ancestral land leads relatives of deceased individuals to erect memorial monuments at their birthplace or ancestral location.	For individuals who travelled away from their home for war or business trips and did not return, as well as for those who lost their lives due to natural disasters such as floods or earthquakes, it's important to acknowledge their sacrifices and struggles.
Usage	Commemorative aspect	Commemorative aspect
Type of Architecture	Mafegah architecture consists of solid cubes made from stone and cement.	Similar to other burials containing skeletons, this was performed in a simple pit.
How To Use the Buried Grave	Unlike a cenotaph, this location has no connection to the deceased and lacks any offerings.	Cenotaphs have grave goods
Additional Elements	Mafegahs feature additional elements, including stone lions and mythical beasts.	Cenotaphs are simple graves that resemble other graves from the Bronze Age.
Gender	It is exclusively designed for men and not intended for women.	The burials indicate that these were made for both women and men.

the deceased. For instance, the Mafegeh is situated in Mazargeh, opposite Ashkeft Selmas, or Kohne Lire Mafegeh in the Chamangoli section of Bazoft.

The clan members could easily determine the owner of the memorial based on the Mafegeh's location on the property. The Mafegeh is adorned with the engraved name, family name, year of birth and death, and sometimes a photo of the person, along with epic poems describing the owner (Esmaeilzadeh, 2024). Mafegehs are adorned with decorative features, often resembling stone lion statues. However, modern designs now encompass a variety of decorative elements that do not adhere to a standardized pattern. Notable examples of Mafegeh identified in the Bakhtiari regions include:

Bahman Alaeddin: He was the most renowned musician and singer among the Bakhtiari people, celebrated and beloved by all. The Bakhtiaris honored him with the construction of two Mafegehs, one in Rahdar village and the other at the foothill of Taraz Mountain. His primary burial site lies in Karaj City, to the south of Alborz Mountain.

Noor Ali Shahabi: One of the most distinguished graduates from the Bakhtiari region in the field of agriculture served as a representative in the National Assembly before the 1957 revolution. A memorial has been erected in Bagh Malik to honor him, resembling a typical gravestone. His primary grave is situated in Uganda.

Gholam Abbas Alijani: He was one of the elders and sheriffs of the Moor-

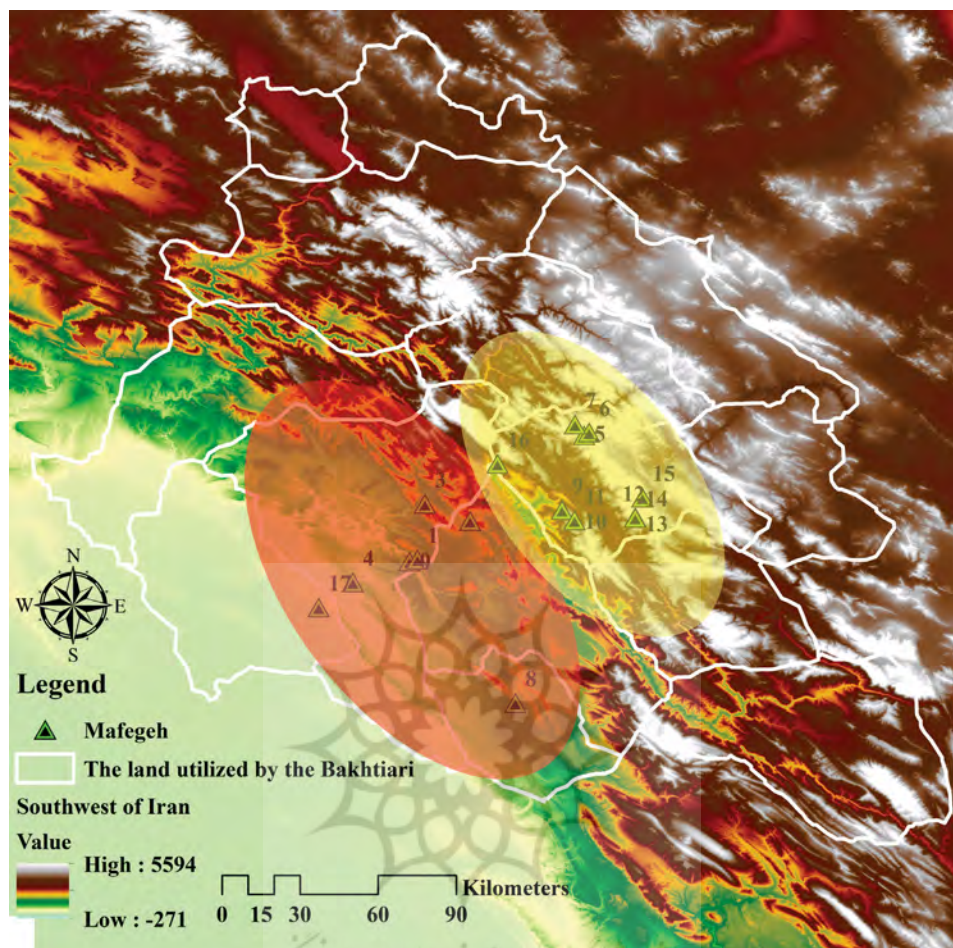


Fig. 7. The Distribution of Mafegehs in the Winter (Tropical/Winter Quarters, Red Color), and the Summer Pasture (Cold/Country, Yellow Color).

ish tribe in Bazoft, Bakhtiari, and Masjid Suleiman. His main grave is in Chahar-bisheh cemetery in Masjed Suleiman, and his family built two *Mafegehs* for him in Chamn Goli, Bazoft.

Neghadar Zarasvand: who came from a large, noble, and hospitable family, was buried in Chaharbisheh cemetery. The deceased's family constructed a Mafegeh in his hometown of Endika.

Khoshnamha: In the valley of Abdul Reza Sheriff in Sheikh Ali Khan village of

Kohrang County, you will find the unique occurrence of several Mafegeh existing together. The four Mafegeh numbers which are associated with prominent individuals from the Mirkad clan leaders. The first monument belongs to Mash-hadi Jali Rezaei Khoshnam (Mirkad), who died in 2002. His main grave is located in Shahmal Babadi in Lali, Khuz-estan. The second memorial pays tribute to Ahmad Qoli Rezaei Khoshnam (Mirkad), who departed in 2013. His primary

resting place is situated in Kharaj village of Lali, Khuzestan. The third monument is that of Sultan Murad Rezaei Mirqaed, the son of Hasan, who died in 2015. The main grave is located in Kharaj village of Lali, Khuzestan. The fourth monument is dedicated to Qoli Rezaei Mirqaed, who passed away in 2018. His main grave is located in the city of Yazdanshahr in Isfahan province. The brave men are buried in different places, but their relatives have built memorials on their winter property to commemorate them.

The data of Mafegehs under study is effectively summarized in Table 1. See figures 4, 5, and 6 for site locations and details.

Discussion

After data collection in the field, a detailed description of the Mafegeh tradition was followed to analyze the motivations of this practice. Given that there are still newly temporary Mafegeh in the study area, a careful study of the new structures of Mafegehs can be very useful in interpreting the findings of ancient memorial graves.

In general, it should be noted that the funerary architecture and memorials of Mafegeh within the main areas of the Bakhtiari Tribe have not exhibited a wide array of structural and aesthetic variations. Memorials in Iran are often filled with impressively sized funerary structures. Memorials are frequently constructed within urban spaces of towns and cities to commemorate prominent military leaders and elites. In other words, the architectural style attempts to connect those killed by war and those

who memorialize them with eternal peace and glory. However, Mafegehs also have such functional features; on the contrary, they lack such huge and sized funerary structures.

The potential features of the Mafegehs under study are as follows: They are made from dry stone picking, involving the use of stone pieces without mortar or modern materials such as cement, metal sheets, cut malon stone, and artificial stone, like granite, on which the profile of the deceased is engraved. However, some of them do not feature the profile of the deceased. Their bases are without or with one to five platforms or Mastabas. Many buildings have plain roofs, but newer ones are adorned with decorative elements. Their decorative feature are stone lion statues, stone partridge, cow-shaped capitals, and stone book statues on the top of the structure, or guns and hunting cameras on the walls.

As mentioned earlier, Bakhtiari tribes between two pastures (Zagros and Khuzestan plain) choose specific places to reside and set up camps for a short or long period during their movement in both regions (Hole, 1979; see also Minorsky, 1945; Layard, 1846; Garthwaite, 1978; Alizadeh, 1988; 2003; Moshiri, 2006; Amanollahi Baharvand, 2005; Heydari Dastenaee and Mortazavi, 2020). For this reason, Mafegeh's works have been identified in both regions: Zagros and Khuzestan Plain (Fig. 7). In the region, Mafages are increasingly used for ethnic and social inferences in the same way that in archaeology, styles of artefacts were used to identify tribes and

peoples (Childe, 1929; Kossinna, 1911). In addition, the Mafegeh for famous people is like differential wealth in graves within the cemeteries or regions, leading to suggestions of social hierarchies in archaeology (Reinecke, 1925; Veeck, 1926).

One of the reasons for this memorial grave is that the dead person has died elsewhere, or no trace of him has been found. This is also a sign of the beliefs of the people in society about the afterlife, who wanted to not only honour the memory of the deceased, but also to perform the usual rituals in the community about him/her elsewhere to perform religious duties, and have performed their rituals in full. One of the items was created for a person who passed away in a different country (Nur Ali Shahabi, whose primary grave is situated in Uganda). It's important to note that in both regions, explicit and implicit religious beliefs, particularly those related to the continuity of personal information after death, do not have a significant influence. However, other matters of emotional, sentimental, and relational value motivate contemporary actions. Here, actually, social messaging and other motivations were more commonly observed.

Although both the Cenotaph and Mafegeh traditions are designed to honour the deceased, it is important to note that they have fundamental differences. It is important to note that cenotaphs and Mafegeh s are graves that do not contain human bones. Cenotaphs were used for both men and possibly women, based on the funerary gifts found. In the current study, Mafegehs are as-

sociated only with men, and there are no mafegehs attributed to any of the famous Bakhtiari women. The Mafegeh is reserved for warriors, nobles, influential men of the clan, wealthy individuals, and officials such as sheriffs, chiefs, and khans. Among the Bakhtiari, these titles are primarily associated with men. In the Bakhtiari family, women hold a sacred position and are highly valued. Although managing family affairs is a priority, this focus on caregiving often limits their opportunities for personal development. In the Bakhtiari culture, Mafegeh pertains to property inheritance. Women are traditionally entitled to movable property when they marry; however, immovable property, such as land, is typically not awarded to them. Male Mafegeh, like the Bardshir (Stone Lion), is predominantly reserved for Bakhtiari men. It should be noted that one reason Mafegeh was not designed for women is due to post-Islamic beliefs and rituals. Before the advent of Islam, women's roles were depicted in reliefs and coins. However, after the introduction of Islam, particularly in contemporary times, images of women are rarely, if ever, engraved even on graves. In contrast, prehistoric cenotaphs were constructed for both women and men, as evidenced by the excavations at sites such as Tepe Shahdad (which yielded agate and lapis lazuli pins), Chalo (where stone ornaments were found), and Tepe Hissar (noted for necklaces and headstones). This information suggests that gender did not play a role in constructing cenotaphs. It seems that placing objects of the deceased in the

tradition of Mafegeh is different from the grave goods. The burying of objects with the dead in prehistory is often claimed as some of the evidence for religion, or the deceased's use in the afterlife. Grave goods have always implied a religious aspect, suggesting a 'pagan' concept of an afterlife where material possessions held significance (Paulsen, 1967; Reinecke, 1925), while Mafegeh has a social and respectful aspect. Ethnographic studies in the region show that biographical representations (metaphors) during the funeral and emphasising the desire not to forget the dead underpin theoretical considerations of the particular mafege goods (such as clothes or weapons).

The practice of burying objects in cenotaphs is often considered some of the earliest evidence for religion. It is assumed that these grave goods were intended for the deceased to use in the afterlife. The items in temporary Mafegeh are not placed in a specific location within the burial deposit, but they appear to be linked to collections that represent the deceased and contain elements with emotional, symbolic, and cultural meanings. In the Permanent Mafegeh, neither a body nor an object is buried. In the Middle East, grave goods were deposited with the dead from the Middle Palaeolithic to the Islamic Age. Still, contrary to this behavior and even cenotaphs, in Mafegeh, no objects are placed in the grave, which is influenced by Islamic beliefs that consider burying objects as an abomination.

Although the Mafegeh has no connection with some of the archaeological

and anthropological reconstructions of life in the past, such as the construction of post-mortem identities (Ekengren, 2004), it is related to memory (Hallam & Hockey, 2001; Williams, 2001a, 2001b, 2003, 2004, 2006) and emotion (Tarlow, 1999, 2000). Table 2 provides a summary of the differences and similarities between Mafegeh and Cenotaph.

Conclusion

The ethnographic study shows theoretical considerations about the role of biographical representations (metaphors) during funerals and the erection of the Mafegeh, and emphasises the reluctance to forget the dead. Specifically, we hypothesized that nonreligious beliefs and mental states underlie many motivations of this practice. This may, therefore, characterize the status of the deceased in the social hierarchy, and the importance attached to that person by their family or even the entire community. It may be that mafegeh is driven by other symbolic, emotional, and practical reasons, and that has little to do with a belief in immortal souls. Such historically and culturally recurring funerary practices suggest that humans are predisposed to believe in and prepare for an afterlife. A possible reason would have been that the deceased had died elsewhere; thus, the memorial structure was erected to honour him/her". The analysis of Mafegeh's attributes suggests that the main focus is on the differences between genders. The research exclusively involves men, and no instances related to women were found.

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