

The Study of a Distinctive Middle-Bronze-Age Burial in Khanghah Gilavan Cemetery

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Abstract

Throughout history and prehistory, death has been one of the most important issues occupying the minds of humans. They wondered as what causes death, why and when it comes, and whether any portion of an individual survives after such occurrences. Accordingly, they formulated answers to these questions and incorporated them into religious beliefs and practices.

The Khanghah Gilavan cemetery, extending over 2000 hectares, is one of the unique sites located in the northwestern Iranian province of Ardabil. Until now, four archaeological excavations, have been carried out at this cemetery that have resulted in burials from the Middle Bronze Age up to the Parthian period. We have witnessed a variety of burial traditions practiced there over the course of two thousand years.

One of the most distinctive burials in this cemetery is Number 29 burial in which the skeleton has been buried in prone position and its skull has been separated from the spot of its maxilla's joint to the mandible, and then put 39 cm far from the body. This burial belongs to the Middle Bronze Age, and is comparable with the one obtained from the Caucasus. In this paper, we attempt to study this rare burial and compared it with other excavated sites to chronology it.

Keywords: Khanghah Gilvan Cemetery, Middle Bronze Age, Rare Burial.

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Introduction

Ardabil province is located in North-West Iran. Northwestern Iran comprises various geographical landscapes, including pasturages of piedmonts, mountains, and well-watered plains. The present chronology of this region, nevertheless, is based exclusively on the data collected from sites of the plains around the Urmia Lake, other regions being almost totally

ignored (Fig. 1). The Khanghah Gilvan cemetery in Ardebil is one of the important sites that have burials from the Middle Bronze age to the Parthian period. Excavations of this cemetery represents a continuation of the Bronze Age burial and pottery traditions to the Iron Age without any cultural disconnection (Rezaloo 2012: 101).

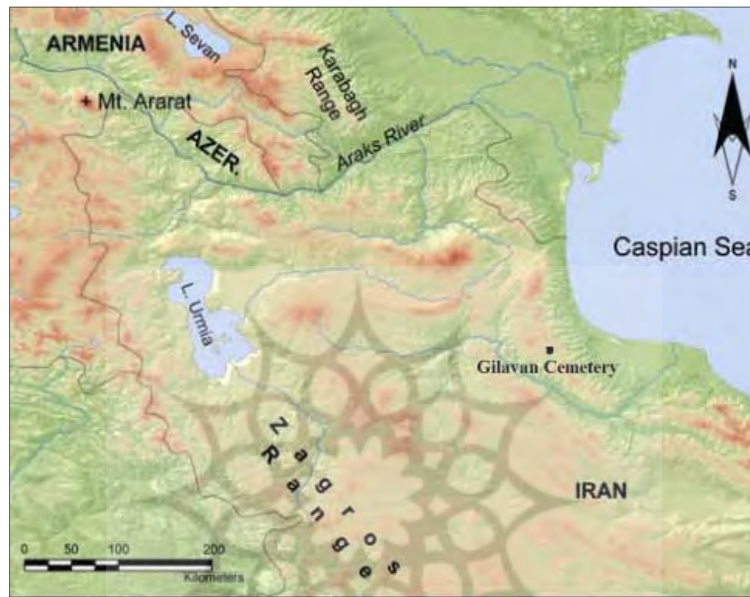


Fig. 1 Location of the Gilvan Cemetery in NW Iran

Background Studies

From the excavated sites related to the Middle Bronze age in North-West Iran, one burial obtained from Dinkhah Tepe named as Tomb B10a B27 (Rubinson 1991) while three burials excavated from the period D in Geoy Tepe named respectively as Tomb A, B and H (Brown, 1951:100).

Khanghah Gilvan Cemetery

The Khanghah Gilvan cemetery is located at 37°, 17', 9" latitude and 48°, 49', 46" longitude on the northwest of the village of

Khanghah. In other words, this site is situated about 60km south-east of the city of Khalkhal in Shah Rud division and about 180km south of Ardebil (Fig. 2). During a highway construction project at Khanghah village in April 2006, there emerged a few ancient graves (Fig. 3). Consequently, an archaeological team launched a four-season excavations of the site and could found burials from the Middle Bronze Age, Iron Age and the Parthian period (Fig. 4) (Rezaloo, Alizadeh Sola and Kazempour, 2015: 132).

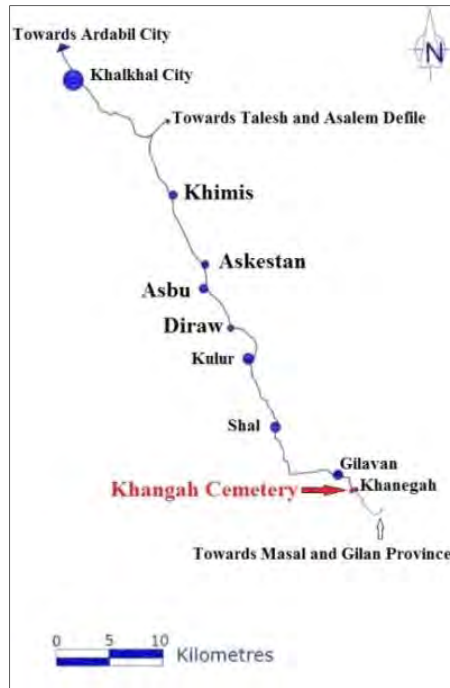


Fig. 2. Location of the Site in Ardabil province.



Fig 3 Topographic Map of the Site



Fig 4 Gilavan Cemetery: An Overview from the North

Burial 29

In the second season of excavations, a unique burial referred to as Burial 29 was detected. This grave located at the northern part of the Trench C. This burial was in the form of a pit grave in way that the body was placed after digging a ditch. Thus, after digging the hole and the burial ritual, it was covered with a combination of dark brown clay and rubble. It seems that after the burial ceremony, stone fragments,

rubble stone and big stones were used to make it distinguished while an almost big piece of stone measuring 96x65x25cm was diagonally positioned in southwestern part as the grave's head stone. The dimension of about 195x170x190cm pit was considered according to the physique of the dead as well as space for gifts. The burial is semi-closed in the south western-north eastern direction and related to a 40 to 45-year-old male (Figs. 5-6).



Fig 5 Burial Number 29

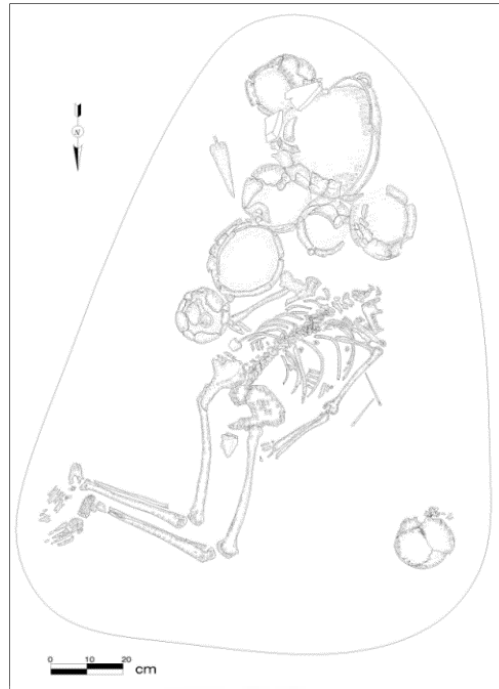


Fig 6 Sketch of the Grave

The interesting point about this burial is the skeleton's prone position that had not been found in other parallel cemetery either in this site or in other cemeteries of northwestern Iran. Also, the skull of the skeleton has been separated from the joint of mandible and maxilla in a way that the mandible has remained on the body and the maxilla on the skull. The skull has been then placed 39cm from the forearm and 66cm from the mandible in a way that the face is towards northwest and the crown is positioned to the top (Fig. 7). There are some knife-cut marks on the joint of mandible and maxilla. The evidence shows that the just-mentioned marks were made intentionally; this surmise gets more intensified when we observe that all the skeleton pieces are in their original place except the skull which is 39cm far from the body; hence, could have been moved after being covered with

deposit due to natural disasters such as earthquake or landslide is very highly unlikely. One of the other features of this burial is the evident red color on the skull's forehead and crown which is probably because of the ochre that once had been employed to cover the skeleton before burying. The direction of the face was south western and the burial orientation is southwest-northeast. The upper part of the body was the resupine. The right humerus is placed in the direction of the body and the palm are placed under the right leg. Legs are closed shape and the right leg is placed on the left.

It is worth mentioning that this is the only burial comparable to our subject in the style of burying i.e. prone position has been reported from southern Russia in a cemetery named Nalchik (Burney and Lang, 1971:78-80).



Fig 7 Skull's Knife-cut Mark

Burial Objects

B29:N1: The bronze head pin, which has a spherical ring in the end, is placed at the north-western of the grave (Fig. 8). The tip of the pin is toward the east. These samples of head pins with twisted end, can be compared with the sample obtained from Ugarit 2 (1750-1900BC). The head pins with hammer work in the head may give the impression that their main home was the Western Caucasus, this is due to the fact that in this region has appeared a lot (Burney & Lang, 2007:117). This

samples can be compared with the sample pins that were obtained from Geoy Tepe D (Burton Brown, 1951:Fig. 29 N1277), Dinkha Tepe IV in the Middle Bronze Age (Rubinson, 1991: Fig 21, Na) and in Velikent Tepe III at No 11 grave that is related to the Early Bronze Age (Kohl, 2001: Fig6, N353).

B29:N2: The bronze head pin is similar to the No.1 object. The orientation of this head pin has been the north-south direction and its tip is placed along the shoulder of the skeleton (Fig. 8).

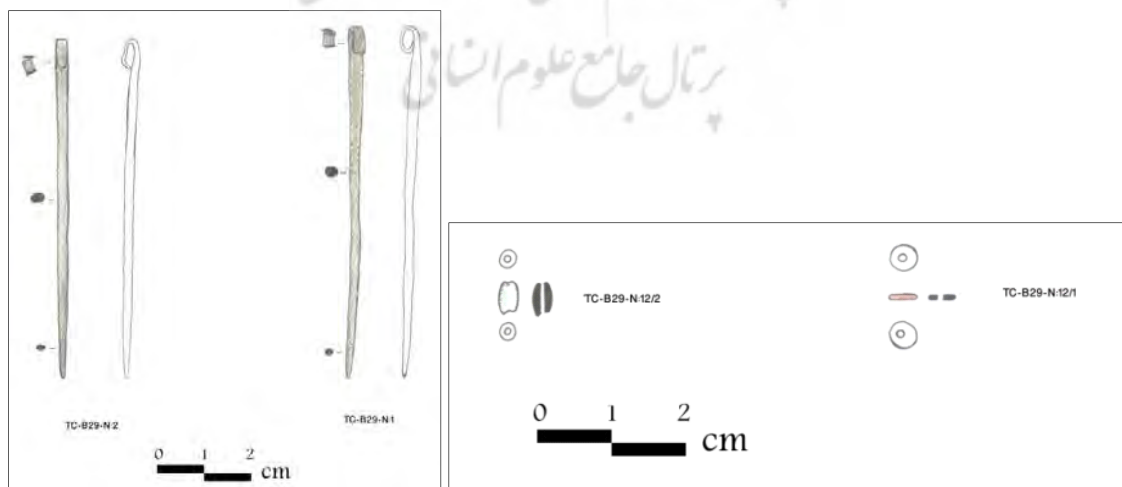


Fig 8 Bronze Head Pins and Beads

B29:N3: The bronze dagger that is placed on the south-eastern part of the grave is about 15cm long and made with hammering technique. It must probably had either a wooden or a bone-made hilt

(Fig. 9). The sample can be seen among the gifts placed within early Kurgans (Kushnareva, 1997: Fig.34 N13) and Velikent that were related to the Early Bronze Age (Kohl, 2001: Fig.9, N186).

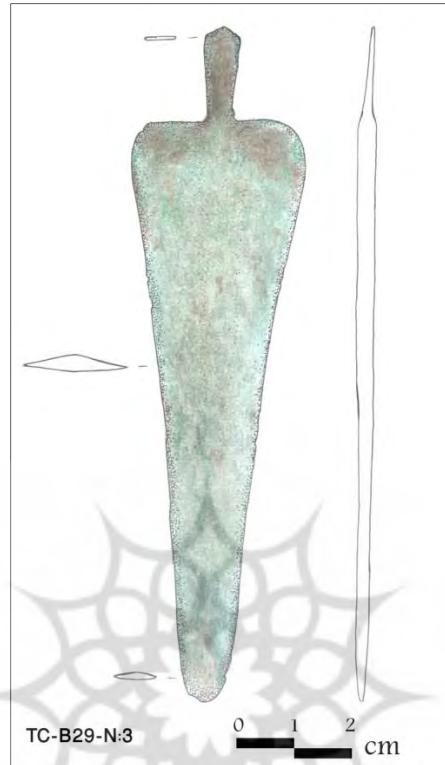


Fig 9 Bronze Knife

B29:N4: This is a middle-necked ware with one handle and dark gray color as well as hand-made (Fig. 10.1). The temperature is sufficient and its temper is medium sand. In the paste of this ware can be seen the white limestone particles. The exterior wall has been wash and burnished and its quality is mediocre.

(Burton Brown, 1951: Fig.20 N809), Haftvan VIB (Edwards, 1981:Fig.16 N24), Dinkha Tepe V (Rubinson, 1991: Fig 27, Ng) and in Sos Hüyük VI (Sagona, 2000: Fig.18 N7) that has been dated to the Middle Bronze Age. It seems that this was prevalent form the early Bronze Age and the comparable forms can be seen from Yanik tepe of the Early Bronze Age (Summers, 1982:Fig.65 N1).

B29:N5: The open-mouth vessel with one handle and dark gray color is hand-made (Fig. 10.2). The temperature is insufficient and its temper is coarse sand. In the paste of this ware can be seen the white limestone particles. The exterior wall has been wash and burnished and its quality is mediocre. The comparable sample ware obtained from gifts in Geoy Tepe D

B29:N6: The closed-mouth ware with one handle that has been the dark gray color and is hand-made (Fig. 10.3). The temperature is insufficient and its temper is coarse sand. The exterior wall has been wash and burnished. It can be compared with the sample ware obtained from the

placed gifts in Haftvan VIB (Edwards, 1981:Fig.13 N14) and Sos Hüyük VIB (Sagona, 2000: Fig.23 N5) that has been dated to the Middle Bronze Age.

B29:N7: The open-mouth vessel with two handles and black is hand-made. The temperature is insufficient and its temper is medium sand (Fig. 10.4). In the paste of this ware can be seen the white limestone particles. The exterior wall of the ware has been wash and burnished and its quality is mediocre. The comparable sample ware obtained from the placed gifts in Geoy Tepe D (Burton Brown, 1951:Fig.19 N846), Haftvan VI B (Edwards, 1981:Fig.16 N19) and Dinkha Tepe IV (Rubinson, 1991:Fig.27 Ng) that has been dated to the Middle Bronze Age. It seems that this was prevalent form the Early Bronze Age and the comparable sample forms can be seen from Yanik Tepe of the Early Bronze Age (Summers, 1982:Fig.10 N6).

B29:N8: The open-mouth vessel with one handle and brownish color is hand-made (Fig. 10.5). The temperature is insufficient and its temper is fine sand. In the paste of this ware can be seen the white limestone particles. The exterior wall has wash and burnished with fine quality. The comparable sample ware has been obtained from Haftvan VIB (Edwards, 1981: Fig.15 N13) and Sos Hüyük IVb (Sagona, 2000:Fig.21 N7).

B29:N9: The open-mouth black color vessel with outside rim and one handle is hand-made (Fig. 10.6). The temperature is insufficient and its temper is fine sand. In the paste of this ware can be seen the white limestone particles. Its quality is mediocre with wash and burnished exterior wall. The comparable sample

ware has been obtained from Geoy Tepe D (Burton Brown, 1951:Fig.20 N809), in the cist grave at Dinkha Tepe IV (Rubinson, 1991:Fig 27, Ng), Haftvan VI B (Edwards, 1981:Fig.16 N24) and in Sos Hüyük IVb (Sagona, 2000:Fig.18 N7) that has been dated to the Middle Bronze Age. It seems that this form of the wares was prevalent from the Early Bronze Age. Its evidence has been obtained from Yanik Tepe of the Early Bronze Age (Sagona, 2000:Fig.65 N1).

B29:N10: The open-mouth dark gray color vessel with outside rim and one handle is hand-made (Fig. 8.7). The temperature is sufficient and its temper is fine sand. In the paste of this ware can be seen the white limestone particles. Its quality is mediocre with wash and burnished exterior wall. The comparable sample ware has been obtained from Geoy Tepe D (Burton Brown, 1951:Fig.19 N79), Dinkha Tepe IV (Hamlin, 1974:Fig.1 N2) and among the gifts placed in excavated graves in early Kurgans (Kushnareva, 1997:Fig 36 N48). It seems that this form of the wares was prevalent from the Early Bronze Age. The evidence of it, has been obtained from Yanik Tepe of the Early Bronze Age (Sagona, 2000:Fig.4 N33).

B29:N11: The closed-mouthed vessel with two handles and dark gray color is hand-made (Fig. 8.9). The temperature is sufficient and its temper is coarse sand. In the paste of this ware can be seen the white limestone particles. The exterior wall has wash and has been burnished and its quality is mediocre. The comparable sample ware has been obtained from Geoy Tepe D (Burton Brown, 1951:Fig.30 N51) that has been dated to the Middle Bronze Age. It seems that this form of the wares

was prevalent from the Early Bronze Age. The evidence of it, has been obtained from Sos Hüyük Vc of the Early Bronze Age (Sagona, 2000:Fig.11 N1).

B29: N12: One dark red color discus agates bead and a white cylindrical frit bead are placed on the bosom at 9cm distance of the cheek along the chin of the skeleton (Fig. 8). It seems that these beads belonged to the neckless that was dangled from the neck of the deceased.

The Middle Bronze Age in North-Western Iran

The end of the Early Bronze Age and the beginning of the middle Bronze Age in southern Caucasia has been distinguished with the disappearance of the Kura-Araxes culture and its numerous settlements in villages. In the Middle Bronze Age changed settlement patterns, that has been known as a result of the advent of new ethnic elements and groups whose economic subsistence was based on animal husbandry activities and nomadic lifestyle (Badalyan, Smith and Avetsiyan, 2003:10). Of the most notable changes in this period, it can be pointed to the development of metallurgy industry and making delicate and beautiful vessels of gold and silver, the advent of new burial customs (kurgans), using of four-wheel chariot and changes in settlement patterns that were inhibited highland and summer areas instead of plains and lowlands and this region has been empty of the habitation (Puturidze, 2003:114). Also, only in a few archaeological sites including Ozarlik Tepe, Shah Takhti, Kül Tepe, Haftvan Tepe and Geoy Tepe, one can see the architectural evidence of this

period (Ozfirat, 2001:117). A major part of the archaeological remains related to the Middle Bronze Age is obtained from the graves. The different structures of the graves and diversity of the amount of the gifts that were placed in them, indicate the advent of deep changes in the structural patterns of south Caucasian societies and the introduction to socio-political complex society (Kohl, 1993:128).

During the Middle Bronze Age in the Caucasus region can be seen the evidence of five local cultures: 1- Western Trans-Caucasia culture 2- Trialeti culture 3- Karmir berd culture 4- Ozerlik culture 5- Ghizil Vank culture (Kushnaeva, 1997:84).

According to the given chronology, there are two ceramic traditions in the Middle Bronze Age in northwestern Iran. One of them, Urmia wares are obtained from Haftvan VIB and is known to this name by Edwards (Edwards, 1981: 65, 1983: 72, 1986: 65). This type of ware that has monochrome and polychrome motifs have been obtained in Geoy Tepe C and D (Dyson, 1968:18) and from a disturbed layer in the Late Bronze Age of Dinkha Tepe (Rubinson, 1994:199). Also, from this type of ware has been obtained outside Iran from Azerbaijan (Abibullaev, 1982: 4-6, Aliev, 1967:117) and some surveys conducted in the eastern Turkey (Cilingiroglu, 1986: 312, 1987:121). There are some wares preserved in Turkish museums whose discovery places is not yet known (Cilingiroglu, 1984:131, 1986:312, 1987:121). According to the pottery data, Haftvan VI is divided into three smaller periods from early to late includes VIC, VIB and VIA. The classification criteria of VIA period that is

placed on the top of VIB (the layer from where the Urmia type ware was obtained) is achieving a series of rough painted wares that are obtained only in the end of the eastern Tepe (jx) and these wares are rough and without burnish, unlike the later period wares (VIB). For this reason, these wares were considered as a new period characteristic but but studies reveal that these wares are of local kind identified in Haftvan VIB (Burney, 1994:54). There is only one sample of the absolute radiocarbon chronology from Haftvan VIB that showed 1772 BC (Burney, 1975:161). According to recent excavations in Armenia, this culture dated between 2400 and 1600 BC. Bakhshalief and Seidov presented the date between 2300 and 1600 BC for this period (Ozfirat, 2001:122-123). According to the data obtained from Haftvan Tepe, Edwards dated this period between 1950 and 1350 BC, it means in the end of the early Trans-Caucasia to the beginning of the Iron Age (Edwards 1981:102). According to the given chronologies, it can be stated that this is one of the important Middle Bronze Age cultures in northwestern Iran whose dispersal include western and northern regions of the Urmia Lake. It seems that the influence of this culture in Dinkha Tepe from where 24 pieces of kind of this ware were obtained which come to this place by merchants as Dinkha Tepe was on the trade route (Rubinson, 2004:666). The evidence of this culture can be seen limited in these regions until the beginning of the Iron Age.

Other ceramic traditions that can be seen in the Middle Bronze Age of northwestern Iran include khabur ware. This was obtained from Hasanlu VI and Dinkha Tepe IV. Generally, the advent of this

culture is an indicative influence of a new culture in northwestern Iran since its ware is not related to previous period. This kind of ware had been prevalent in northern Mesopotamia between 1600 and 1900 BC and its advent in this region is the indicative influence of the Mesopotamian culture largely due to trade transactions. Almost 6 pieces of khabur ware in Dinkha Tepe were dated through Thermoluminescence and the data obtained put them between 2106 + 68 and 1684 + 58 BC. The khabur kind of ware in Mesopotamia has been obtained from different places such as Kül tepe, Chgharbazar, Tel Alrimeh and Nuzi (Hamlin, 1974:129-130).

Conclusion

Burial No. 29 in the Khanghah cemetery is attributed to the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age and has had no similar example in Iran up to now. Moreover, the only samples which are comparable to it are the early tumulus burials of the second half of the Early Bronze Age and the first half of the Middle Bronze Age in southern Russia. Five prone-positioned ochre-covered individual burials have been discovered from the Nalchik cemetery in Russia, but they are different from our subject burial where no indicators showing the skull's separation from other parts of the body have been observed. According to comparative studies done on the artifacts of this Middle Bronze Age grave as well as its pottery assemblage, we can conclude that these forms had been common since the Early Bronze Age (Yanik Tepe) until the Middle Bronze Age.

Some of the wares and bronze objects placed in this grave are comparable with the samples obtained from the Early Bronze Age sites such as Yanik Tepe and Sos Hüyük Vb and Vc as well as early kurgans including the Maykop kurgans.

Also, these data can be comparable with the samples belonging to the Middle Bronze Age obtained from the sites such as Haftvan IVB, DinkhaTepe IV, Sos Hüyük IVb and IVb, Geoy Tepe C and D.

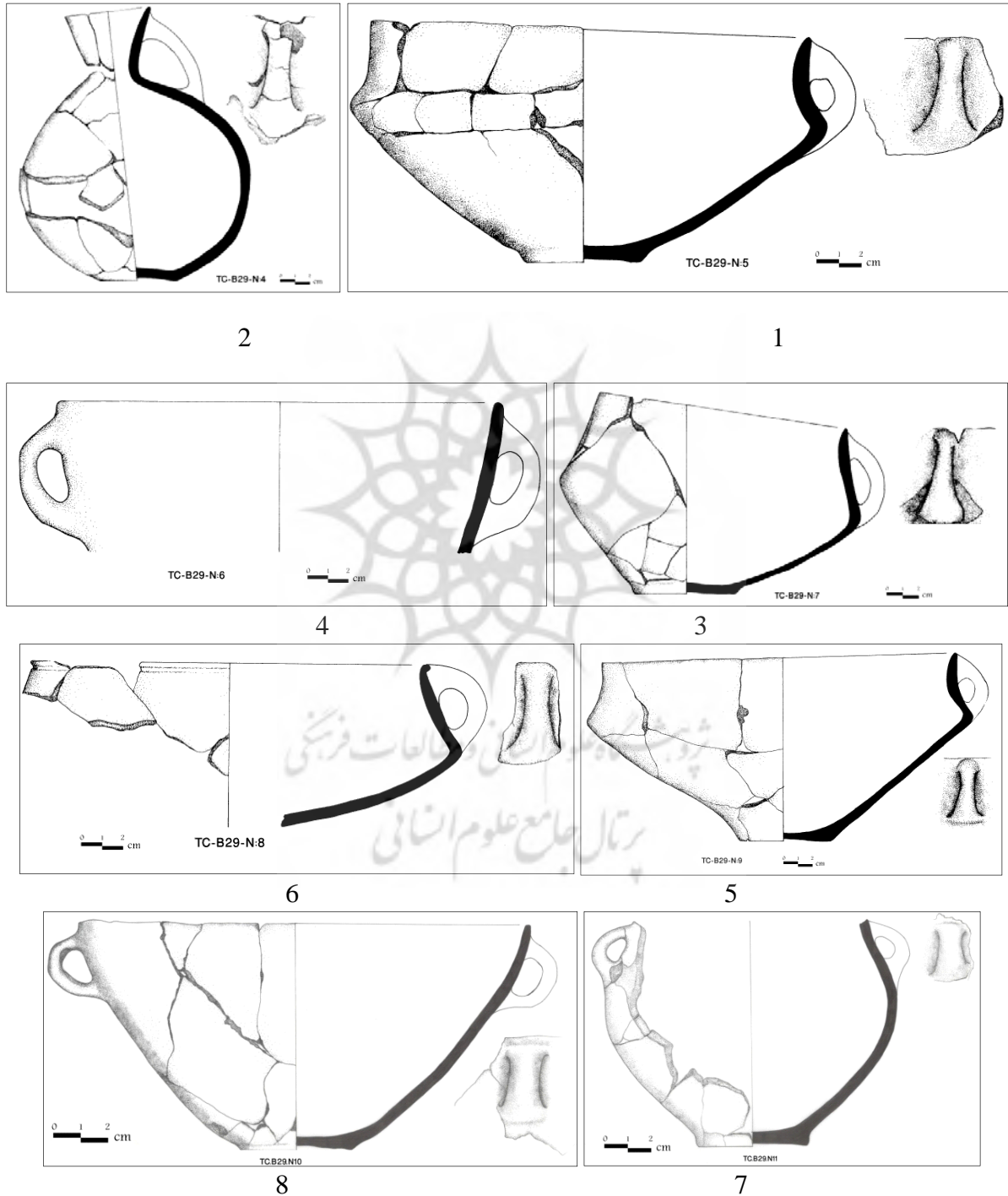


Fig. 10 Potteries

Table 1 Features of Potteries at Burial 14

number	Burial	Color			Making	Backing	Temper	Coating		Finishing		Quality		Thickn ess		Height	Rim diameter	Form
		inner	pulp	outer				inner	outer	inner	outer	inner	outer	maximum	minimum			
1	TB.B29.N4	Dark gray	Dark gray	Dark gray	Hand-	complete	Medium sand+white particles	wash	wash	-----	burnish	medium	fine	cm1/1	mm5	5/18	cm3/5	Medium Necked ware
2	TB.B29.N5	brown	Dark gray	Dark gray	Hand-	incomplete	coarse sand+white particles	wash	wash	burnish	burnish	medium	medium	cm1/2	mm7	4/10	cm 2/19	Open-mouthed outright) (rim
3	TB.B29.N6	Dark gray	Dark gray	Dark gray	Hand-	incomplete	coarse sand+white particles	wash	wash	-----	burnish	medium	medium	mm13	mm5	----	----	closed-mouthed
4	TB.B29.N7	red	Dark gray	black	Hand-	incomplete	Medium sand+white particles	slip	wash	Partial burnish	Partial	Medium	medium	mm12	mm7	cm 4/12	cm 4/15	Open-mouthed outright) (rim
5	TB.B29.N8	brown	Dark gray	brown	Hand-	incomplete	fine sand	wash	wash	burnish	burnish	fine	fine	mm13	mm7	cm8/7	cm6/18	Open-mouthed inside) (rim
6	TB.B29.N9	red	Dark gray	black	Hand-	incomplete	Fine sand+white particles	slip	wash	burnish	burnish	Medium	Medium	mm14	mm8	7/12	cm 4/24	Open-mouthed outright) (rim
7	TB.B29.N10	Dark gray	Dark gray	Dark gray	Hand-	complete	Fine sand+white particles	wash	wash	-----	burnish	Medium	Medium	mm18	mm11	7/19	32/5 cm	Open-mouthed outright) (rim
8	TB.B29.N11	Dark gray	Dark gray	Dark gray	Hand-	complete	Fine sand coarse sand+white particles	wash	wash	-----	burnish	Medium	Medium	mm13	mm7	----	----	closed-mouthed

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چکیده

یکی از مهم‌ترین مسائلی که از دوره پیش از تاریخ ذهن انسان‌ها را درگیر خود کرده، مرگ بوده است. این مساله همیشه برای انسان سوالی بدون جواب بوده است، چرا اتفاق می افتد؟ کی اتفاق می افتد؟ بعد از مردن آیا انسان به حیات خود ادامه می دهد؟ به همین دلیل ما شاهد به وجود آمدن سنن و آداب و باورهای مختلفی در تدفین هستیم که در جهت جهانیابی این مردمان ایجاد شده است. گورستان خانقاه گیلوان یکی از محوطه‌های باستانی منحصر به فرد در ایران است. وسعت این محوطه در حدود دو هزار هکتار بوده که از این نظر از جمله بزرگ‌ترین محوطه‌های باستانی کشور به شمار می آید. تا به امروز چهار فصل کاوش در این محوطه انجام شده که در نتیجه کاوش‌ها گورهایی از دوره مفرغ میانی تا دوره اشکانی به دست آمده است. در طول این دوره دو هزار ساله، ما شاهد انواع آداب و سنن و تدفین در این محوطه هستیم. یکی از نمونه گورهای منحصر به فرد، در طی کاوش‌های فصل دوم به دست آمده که با نام گور شماره ۲۹ نامگذاری شده است. این تدفین به صورت دمرو انجام گرفته و مجموعه از قسمت دهان از تنه اسکلت جدا شده است و قسمت فک زیرین روی بدن قرار دارد. مجموعه و فک بالایی به فاصله ۳۹ سانتی متر داشته از بدن قرار داده شده است. این تدفین متعلق به دوره مفرغ میانی بوده و تنها نمونه تدفین قابل مقایسه با آن از قفقاز به دست آمده است. در این مقاله به مطالعه این نوع تدفین و مقایسه داده‌های آن به منظور به دست آوردن گاهنگاری پرداخته شده است.

واژه‌های کلیدی: گورستان خانقاه گیلوان، دوره مفرغ میانی، تدفین نادری.

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