



## Archaeological Investigation of Southeast Part of the Sahand Mountains. Case Study: Khalifeh Kandi Village

**Taymour Akbari**

*Department of Archaeology, Humanist of Science, Islamic Azad University of Varamin-Pishva Branch, Tehran, Iran*

*Article Information*

*Received 16/07/2022*

*Revision Accepted 23/01/2023*

*Available Online 23/06/2023*

**Abstract:** Khalifeh Kandi village is located in the southeast of the Sahand mountain range and northwest of Hashtrud province. Investigation at these sites started in 2013 and continued until 2015. This article is a report on the results of investigations carried out on the Khalifeh Kandi site. Obtained evidence included a variety of pottery, carved stones, and caves from the historical and Islamic eras. In this paper, an attempt has been made to introduce and analyze cultural and historical finds. The result shows that most of the surveyed sites and places around Khalifeh Kandi, belonged to the Islamic period, and rarely, artifacts from the pre-Islamic period were observed. The settlements identified in the area under study are mostly located in w slopes by the river and shallow valleys, and only one of these archaeological sites was observed in flat and elevated lands. probably this site was used in certain seasons of the year. Glazed and simple pottery from the Islamic period and rough pottery that was produced in local workshops are among the artifacts observed in the surveyed sites.

**Keywords:** *Khalifeh Kandi Village, Survey, Carved Stones, Cave, Pottery.*

\* Corresponding Author

Email Address: [Akbaritaymour@yahoo.com](mailto:Akbaritaymour@yahoo.com) (Taymour Akbari)

## Introduction

Bostan Abad, Hashtarud, and Maragheh cities staying in the south, southwest, and east of the Sahand mountain. According to studies by Sadek Kooros., H. conducted in 1975, in the region known as the Azerbaijan Triangle, i.e., the geographical area between Tabriz, Maragheh, and Miyaneh, traces of the Paleolithic and prehistoric periods were found. But until now, no significant studies have been done to clarify the historical and Islamic-era settlements in Khalifeh Kandi and its surroundings. In this research, an attempt is made to identify a part of the ambiguous history of this region by examining the artifacts, especially potteries. The objectives of this study include the following:

1. To shed light on unknown aspects of historical periods of the South and Southeast part of the Sahand Mountains and the Northwest of Hashtrud.
2. To identify the communication of this settlement with other areas based on data from the study of pottery.
3. Determining the various development era over time in this geographic area.
4. Documenting the historical monuments in this region by preparing documents of the movable and immovable monuments, to prevent the destruction of these cultural monuments and collecting and recording archaeological data.

## Geographical Location

Khalifa Kandi is located in the northwest of Hashtrud City and has a distance of about 16,000 square kilometers, is bordered from the north by the villages of Molaghasem, Qarayen, and Mansour Abad (Shahmirzadi, 2000: 187). This village is located about 16 kilometers from the Sahand mountain range, 47 kilometers from Maragheh, 40 kilometers from Bostan Abad, and 82 kilometers from Tabriz, and due to heavy snowfall in winter in this area; The rivers that pass by the lands of this village east by the villages of Seyd Beyg and Beyg Bolaghi, from the south by the village of Kamajari, from the west by Yesavol and Jirandarq, Varah Gol and Agh Dara (Seyfi, 1998: 24-35) (Fig. 1 & 2).



Fig.1: Geographical location of Khalifeh Kandi village



Fig. 2: Landscape of Khalifeh Kandi village

#### *Yasavol Cave*

Yasaul Cave is located in the western part of Pir Ali Dareh only part of its entrance was visible (Fig. 3). It had an area of about 25 square meters and mangers were built into its walls, which was most likely used as a place to keep animals. It should be clarified that the statements of the elderly people of the village indicate that this cave was used until about 70 years ago. The obtained works are broken pottery, hearths, and human skeletons,

About 20 meters above the cave, in the section connecting the steep slope of the valley with the high plains, brick walls were observed. The bricks of these walls are square-shaped with dimensions of 21.5 x 21.5 cm and a thickness of 5.70 cm. At the bottom of the mentioned wall, there is brick slag, which indicates the production of this type of pottery in the place (Fig. 4).

Many pieces of pottery were found on the way to the Yasacol cave most of them were moved from their original place due to annual floods, and this problem makes the systematic examination of pottery in this area impossible. However, was collected different types of pottery randomly. Pottery included engraved, plain, and glazed pottery of the Islamic period, also have been found samples of under glass glaze-painted pottery. The production of this type of pottery was observed in abundance in the Seljuk period, which is also known as silhouette and black stains (Kambakhshfard, 2013). In this decorative method, the background usually has a plain white glaze, and the patterns on the glaze are mostly black under the glass glaze (Figure 5).

Also found were clay-glazed and carved which had a red paste and their inner surface was devoid of any glaze and their outer coating with of clay glaze and carved motifs (Fig. 6).

#### *Bazar site*

This site is located in the west of the village of Khalife Kandi (Yoli Bazaar), and it is considered



Fig. 3: Exterior view of Yesaul Cave



Fig. 4: Sample of Slage

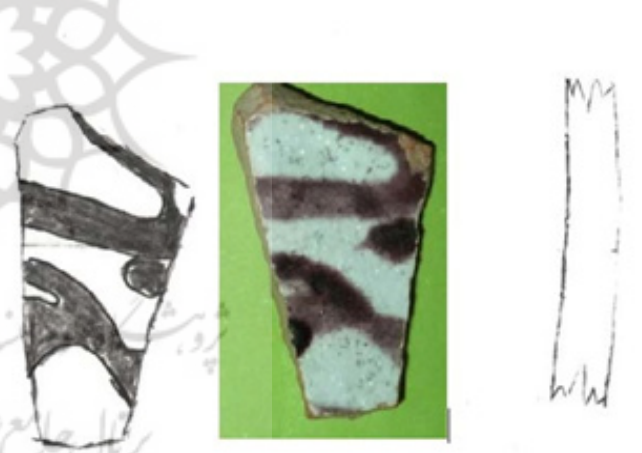


Fig. 5: Silhouette with under-glass glaze pottery

one of the most important communication routes between this village and the neighboring areas. This pathway leads to the flat and high agricultural lands of the village next to a relatively deep valley with a steep slope. On the eastern side of the bazaar pathway, a cave was discovered as a result of civil works (digging the stream) (Fig. 7). Around this cave, many carved stones with symbolic pictures and inscriptions were found (Akbari, 2022: 81-95). Unfortunately, most of them were broken or damaged before the study which makes it difficult to investigate and study their patterns.

In one of the carved stones, a combination of geometric motifs, downward and upward triangles, along with the third line in the center of the pattern, can be seen. The writings are in Arabic and it is not possible to read them easily because they are broken and damaged. Another carved stone was found with an engraving in the shape of a dagger. The picture of war tools on these



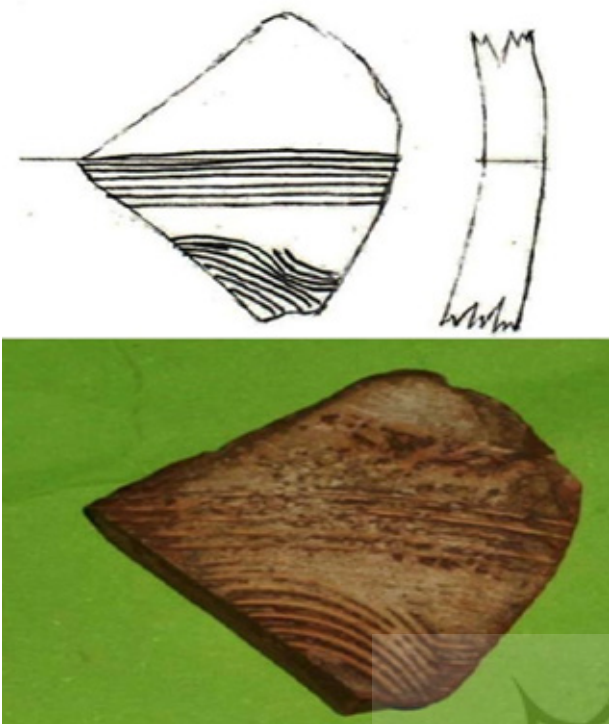


Fig. 6: Pottery with clay glaze and carvings



Fig. 7: Cave found in Bazar and the geographical location ratio of Khalifeh Kandi village



Fig. 8: Plan of the biggest cave in the pathway

carved stones can indicate that these stones were used to cover the graves of soldiers killed on the way to the homeland. The chain and brick designs are among the other carved tetrahedral stones that were found next to the cave. The mentioned motifs only include pictures of one side of these carved stones and the other sides of these stones have been lost due to the passage of time and human factors. Illegal excavations in the cave made it possible to enter the cave and calculate its approximate length, width, and height, as well as examine some beautiful and carved stones. The structure of the mentioned cave is artificial and the soil of its bottom is sand and gravel and its body is made of red soil, gray soil, and lime. The length of the big cave number 1 is about 30 meters and its width varies from 3 meters to 5 meters, and it is not possible to measure its height because a part of it, is filled with soil, but its height also varies from 1 meter to 3 meters. On the left side, after entering the cave, a small sub-space can also be seen (Fig. 8).

At the entrance of the cave, a carved stone with the picture of an altar was observed and about 4 meters below the entrance of the cave, a quadrilateral stone was found. The width of this stone is 20 to 30 cm and its length is 120 cm. On one of the faces of this stone, the picture of the altar in the middle of two suns (probably eight petals flower) has been carved. The presence of the altar represents the religious role of this artifact, On the other side of this quadrilateral stone, a part of a Quranic verse can be seen in the form of "الملك الله الواحد القهار" (Figs. 9, 10, 11).

### ***History and Application of Cave and Painting Carved Stones***

The creation of cave space in the areas around Sahand mountain has a long history and can be seen in samples at Qadamgah in Azarshahr (fig. 12), and Varjavi in Maragheh (Varjavand, 1976: 4-17) which are similar to the Mithraic temples (fig. 12). Based on their structure, these sites date back to the Parthian and Sasanian eras, when Mithraism reached its peak, and temples of this religion were built in the form of caves in different parts of the world (Rayesniya, 1989). Of course, before the full excavation and emptying of this cave of accumulations, it is not possible to attribute the caves of Khalifeh Kandi to Mithraism. However, the existence of the Islamic cemetery and carved stones with national and religious symbols makes us think that this place had religious significance before Islam. About the history of carved stones, it can be said that use of these stones containing different symbols such as the sun, star, altar, flower with several petals, Quran statements, and war equipment, apart from the place and form of the cave, which is unconventional in the Islamic era, started from Ilkhanate and reached its peak during Safavid period and continued to next period, especially Qajar period. In a cemetery around the Ghadamgah cave, in Varjuy temple in Maragheh and Dash Kasan temple in Vir village samples of carved stones can be found (Mirftah.1997: 242-245). The existence of at least 12 caves in the sloping land between the bazaar pathway and the road leading to the village called Yasavol indicates the use of this type of architectural space in the past. These caves were used as places of human habitation and religious places for worship in the past. It should be mentioned that to fully understand the use of these places, it is necessary to excavate and empty these spaces from the accumulated soil. Many cave sites have been found in the areas around the Sahand mountain range, researchers, considering the characteristics of the interior spaces and their similarity to the overall shape of Mithraism temples known in Europe, believe that these religious spaces have preserved their sanctity in the Islamic period and are being considered with new ways of thinking, and this process is developed in the Ilkhanid period due to the freedom of action in the choice of religious thought so that in the Ilkhanid, Timurian, and Safavid periods, some Islamic cemeteries were formed next to these cave buildings and the tombstones of prominent national figures. And religious ones are decorated with symbols such as motifs of war tools, Quranic verses, altars, geometry, etc (Akbari, 2000: 118-150).





Fig. 9: Carved stone with a picture of an altar, stars, and a part of the Quran statement. Left: carved stone with a picture of the altar.



Fig. 10: Decoration of a gravestone



Fig. 11: Carved stone with a sword motif

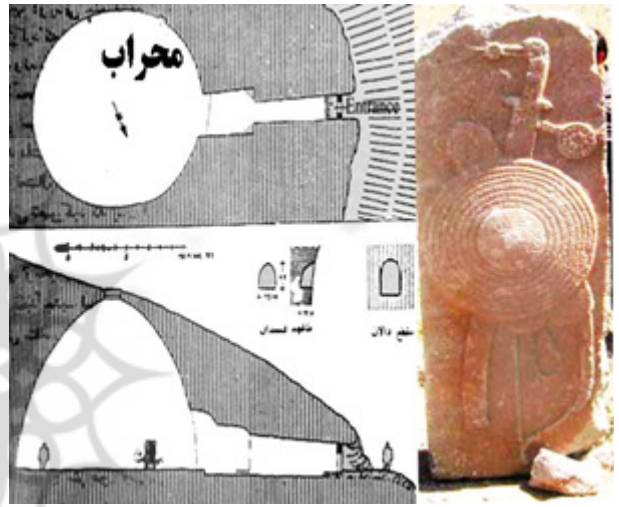


Fig. 12: Plan of Ancient Mithraism temple (new mosque) and tombstone with the decoration of war equipment.



Fig. 13: Geographical location of the cemetery



Fig. 14: Sol's line on the tombstone



Fig. 15: Broken stone column at the old cemetery

### ***Cemeteries***

In the east of Khalifeh Kandi village, there are two cemeteries under the titles of old and new cemeteries (fig. 13). The new cemetery is about 200 years old and is located in the north of the old cemetery which is more than 500 years old. In the new cemetery, a carved tombstone with the date 1203 AH can be seen. One of these tombstones belongs to a spiritual person named Mullah Ali Panahi, whose date is 1209 AH, and above it is a Quranic verse written in third script, and at the bottom of this tombstone, which is located vertically on top of the grave, name and the nickname of the person is observed (Fig. 14). In the south of the new cemetery, there is an old cemetery, where the residents believe that the grave of the Khalifeh, which is the origin of the name of the village, is located there, and some people believe that a treasure is hidden there and the reason they started smuggling and dug many holes in the surface of this area. In these unauthorized actions, a stone column has been found, which shows an architectural find in this place. Unfortunately, the stone column was broken by thinking that it contained a treasure, and only a part of the column's base and its body remained (fig. 15).

### ***Conclusion***

Most of the surveyed sites and places around Khalifeh Kandi, in terms of pottery types, belonged to the Islamic period. Rarely, artifacts from the pre-Islamic period were observed. Of course, many caves were discovered in sloping lands across the village, which are probably belonging to the pre-Islamic period. However, excavations on some mounds under study will reveal monuments belonging to pre-Islamic periods, in deeper layers. The settlements identi-



fied in the area under study are mostly located on low slopes by the river and in shallow valleys, and only one of these archaeological sites was observed and surveyed in flat and elevated lands, and probably this site was used in certain seasons of the year. Glazed and simple pottery from the Islamic period and rough pottery that was produced in local workshops are among the artifacts observed in the surveyed sites. In addition to the above-mentioned pottery, several caves belonging to different times, slags, red bricks, carved stones, and small containers in the form of teapots and cups were among the significant artifacts studied in this research.

#### *Acknowledgments*

This archaeological survey was supported by the financial support of Azad Islamic University, Varamin, Pishva, and this university has provided the ground for following extended surveys and even archeological excavations in the mentioned location.

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