

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Burial Customs of the Dead in Dakme or Temporary Graves (A Case Study of the Sadat Husseini Family in Dehdasht)

Abstract



After the establishment and spread of the Shiite religion, the sanctity of the tombs of Imams and *Imamzadehs* in the holy shrines of *Aliaat*, Mashhad, Qom, Rey, etc. increased in the Shiite community of Iran. This issue was very popular among the affluent and the *sadat*. The desire to be buried next to these tombs turned into a spiritual and social value for these people. However, the transfer of the deceased bodies to the desired location was tough, mainly due to the distance and transportation problems. This article, following the descriptive-analytical method and through conducting interview (oral history), seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1) what difficulties did *Sadat Husseini* face in Dehdasht to transfer the body of the deceased to the tomb?
- 2) what measures were taken to overcome the problem?

According to the findings of research, this family did their best to transfer the body to the holy shrines to show their deep and sincere beliefs. They put the corpse in *dakme* (Temporary grave) and while observing religious customs, care was taken to protect the corpse against decomposition. *Dakme* was not architecturally beautiful and was only used to keep the corpse for a certain period of time.

Key words: *Dakme*, Temporary grave, *Sadat Husseini*, The dead, Dehdasht, Religion, Humans, Iran

Received: 23 Aug 2020; Accepted: 5 Dec 2020; Online published: 28 Feb 2021
Research on History of Medicine/ 2021 Feb; 10(1): 35-48.

Mostafa Nadim^{1,2} 
Parvindokht Jahan Kohan³ 
Ali Kamrani Moghadam⁴

- 1- Ph.D., Associate Professor, Center for Interdisciplinary Research in Islamic Education and Health Sciences, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Shiraz, Iran
- 2- Research Office for the History of Persian Medicine, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Shiraz, Iran
- 3- Ph.D. Candidate, Department of History, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran
- 4- Ph.D. Candidate in History of Islamic Revolution, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran

Correspondence:

Parvindokht Jahan Kohan
Ph.D. Candidate, Department of History,
Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran

parvind.jahankohan@yahoo.com

Citation:

Nadim M, Jahan Kohan P, Kamrani Moghadam A. Burial Customs of the Dead in Dakme or Temporary Graves (A Case Study of the Sadat Husseini Family in Dehdasht). *Res Hist Med.* 2021; 10(1): 35-48.



Introduction

With the establishment of the Safavid government at the beginning of the tenth century AH in Iran and following their political and cultural goals, Shiite beliefs spread in the society. One of these beliefs, which was also supported and approved by the clergy of the Safavid era, was the issue of virtue and sanctity of the site of the holy shrines and tombs of *imams* and *imamzadehs*¹. Shah Abbas I died in Mazandaran in the first *Jamadi* of 1038 AH. His body was left for a while in the *Imamzadeh* of Habib Ibn Musa in Kashan, to be later transferred to one of the holy places (Turkmen, 1972, Vol. 3., p. 1079). The transfer of corpses to cellar, family cemeteries and cemeteries near the shrines of the Imams was first common among kings, clergymen and government officials, and after the Safavid era, it became common among the general public, especially the affluent (Ahmadvand, 2016: 66). The rapid growth of pilgrimages to the tombs of Imams in Karbala, Najaf, Samarra, Mashhad, Qom, Ray, and the recitation of prayers and supplications and the recitation of the Qur'an in these places led to a strong desire for being buried next to these religious leaders. These cities play a significant role in enjoying political, religious and economic functions. (Kiani, 2012, p. 61)

During the Safavid rule, relations with European countries were cultivated for political, commercial and religious reasons. European tourists flooded to Iran to pursue the interests of their governments. (Ahmadvand, 2016: 62) The travelogues of the Europeans, written from this period onwards, provided us with valuable and abundant information about the beliefs, customs and religious rites of the Shiite Iranians. One of the beliefs that were practiced among the Shiite people of Iran and was discussed by European tourists in their travelogues was the belief in burying the dead bodies near the holy shrines of *Imams* and *Imamzadehs*. Iranians also addressed this issue in their writings.

The population studied in this study is *Sadat*² Hussein Dehdashti Aghamiri, one of the *Sadat* families in the south of the country. This family maintained their religious beliefs over time due to their affiliation with the *Imams*. One of the manifestations of their beliefs was in the burial of their dead in the vicinity of Shiite holy shrines. During the study, the researchers came across two pieces of research on "the tradition of transferring bodies to holy places and its consequences in the Qajar period" and "the importance of burying the dead near Shiite holy shrines from the perspective of European travel writers." But the present study has focused on the tradition of transferring the body practiced by the *Sadat Hussein Dehdashti* family. As the tradition of shifting the body to holy

1- Imamzadeh means descendant of an imam.

2- *Sadat* (lit. means noble) is an Arabic honorific title denoting descendants of prophet Muhammad (s). According to fiqh, it is a title given to the descendants of Hashim b. Abd Manaf (the Prophet's great grandfather) Fa.wikishia.net



places had a long history in this family, they had important rituals and ceremonies related to how to bury the dead body in the temporarily grave and exhume the body, and protect it against decomposition. In addition, some information was found about the shape of the temporary grave. It may be said that other tribes in Iran performed similar rituals to transfer their dead to holy sites, but this is not mentioned in any sources. To carry out this research, the members of this family helped a lot, and Sajjad Yazdanfar Husseini, one of the seniors of this family, gave the permission to publish the related information. It should be noted that owing to the improvement of means of transportation, it became possible to move corpses faster and hence it was no longer necessary to perform the ritual of burying the dead in the temporarily grave or *dakme*. For this reason, the authors of this article have tried to record this valuable information before it is erased from memory of the nation or before being totally forgotten.

Historical sources do not provide extensive information on the subject of digging in the body of the dead. This issue is mostly related to the approach taken by the historians and their style of historiography. Of course, this, for example, has been written in some historical books, such as *Alam Aray Abbasi* and *Zobadat-al tarikh*. It is worth mentioning that historiography in Iran mostly focused on the political history, or the history of the rulers than on the social history, involving different layers of society. As such, issues, such as the burial of the dead, appeared more in the writings of foreign tourists.

Discussion

The Burial of the Dead in the Vicinity of the Holy Shrines as Reflected by European Tourists/ Explorers and Iranian writers

As mentioned above, European tourists, in their travelogues, have given valuable information about the beliefs, customs and religious practices of the Shiite people of Iran, including their belief in the burial of the dead near holy shrines of *imams* and *imamzadehs*.

Pietro della Valle, an Italian author, who came to Iran during the reign of Shah Abbas (1038-1099 AH), gave an interesting description of the Ashura ceremony and the devotion of the Iranians to the martyrs of Karbala. (della Valle, 2002, p. 100) Regarding the burial of Mohammad Taher Beig, one of the courtiers of Shah Abbas, he wrote: People, wailing and crying, took his body to a mosque in Isfahan. As the king was in the hunting ground, the body was placed in a tent overnight, waiting for the king's permission. The day after, the king issued the order and the body of Mohammad Taher Beig was transferred to Mashhad to be buried near the tomb of Imam Reza. (della Valle, 2002, p. 160) Every faithful Muslim wishes to be buried in the vicinity of the Imam's tombs after death. That is why, wealthy believers put in their will specifying that, after their death, their body be transferred to Karbala, Mashhad and Najaf. At certain times of the year, large wagons set off, carrying the corpses of the dead on the back of the mules. (Rene D'Allemagne, no date, p. 281) In Iran, metaphorically, as if the dead were violently awakened after few months of rest. They were wrapped in white clothes, put on the back of a mule and transferred to holy places. Those who witnessed these wagons of the dead crossing the desert said that they were frightened to death seeing these strange and mourning people, passing by (Bell, 1984, p. 124). The bodies of affluent people, immediately after death or exhumation, were transported to one of the holy places of Karbala, Mashhad, Qom or *Shahzadeh Abdulazim*. The price of each site depended on the sanctity of the place and the distance and proximity to the tomb of the *Imam* or *Imamzadeh*. In terms of transportation, the corpses were wrapped in felt and fastened with two rods from the side, and then placed horizontally on



the mule. Usually the transportation of the dead body was done by the animal, but sometimes a group of servants accompanied the body, as well. On trips, we often came across a wagon of corpses. One could sniff the smell of corpses from the distance, as the wagon was approaching. Although the harms of carrying corpses to the health of the living were undeniable, owing to the fact that such beliefs were deeply rooted in people's minds, it was hardly possible to overcome or contain this tradition (Pollack, 1989, p. 250). The French archeologist, Sir Austen Henry Layard, who travelled to Iran during the reign of Mohammad Shah in 1840, wrote about his observations as: I woke up early in the morning due to the uproar of mule attendants. As I looked carefully at the cargo I was lying on, I noticed that it was a coffin wrapped in felt so that its stench would not pass through the felt. Apparently, this small wagon was one of the many wagons of this type that used to travel on this highway (Baghdad road) at this time of year and according to a religious tradition, the skeletons and remains of the bones of the dead Iranian Shiites were buried in the vicinity of the holy shrines. (Layard, 1988, p. 313) During his journey through Dasht-e Kavir (a desert, lying in the middle of the Iranian Plateau), the Hungarian tourist Vambery wrote: At midnight came the sound of a wagon that had left an hour before us and was now passing in front of us. The smell of the wagon was unbearable. I reached out to the wagon owner, who was an Arab man, and asked his purpose of traveling: [T]he Arab man said that he had been traveling for ten days and that it would take another twenty days to take the bodies of the dead to Karbala, where the true lovers and believers wished to be buried. (Vambery, 1999, pp. 90-91)

In their writings, Iranian historians have quoted the burial of royal families and important figures near the tombs of *imams* and religious leaders. Here are a few examples: In the time of Ismail II, after several Safavid princes had been killed in a power struggle and were buried in *Imamzadeh* Hussein in Qazvin, their bodies were dug out and placed in a coffin. After several days resting in Qazvin *Chehelston* Hall, in which incense and candles were burning, finally the corpses were transferred to the holy city of Mashhad. (Mostofi, 1996: 85) In the thirty-second year of the reign of Shah Abbas, Hussein Khan Shamloo Biglerbeigi and the governor of Herat died. He was buried in Mashhad by the order of the Shah. In the same year, Mehdi Gholi Beyk, one of the Shah's confidants and close attendant, died in Qazvin. His body was transferred to Mashhad and "buried in the holy shrine". (Turkmen, 1972, Vol. 1., p. 942) The tombs of Safavid kings were located in Qom and Sheikh Safi al-Din Shrine. Shah Suleiman was buried next to the tombs of other Safavid kings in the Dar al-Momenin of Qom in 1105. (Mostofi, 1996, p. 114)

The body of Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar was first buried in Shushi in 1211 AH and in *Jamadi Al-Thani* 1212 AH in Tehran, in *Shah Abdolazim* shrine and after a week it was transferred to Najaf and was buried there. (Hosseini Fasaee, 1988, pp. 667-670) It was written in the newspaper *Vaqaye Etefaqiyeh* in Muharram of 1300 AH / 1882 AD, years before, an infectious disease broke out in Shiraz and this was assumed to be because of the bodies that were placed temporarily in the *Bibi Dokhtar* Shrine. (Saeedi Sirjani, 1983, p. 176) Abbas Milani writes in the book, "*A Look at the Shah*": Contrary to the claims of Reza Shah's opponents who said that he established the North-South Railway at the behest of the British, his decision to build the railway was opposed by the British and the Soviets. Therefore, they tried to dissuade Reza Shah from building a railway. When the British realized that Reza Shah was not backing down from his decision, they tried to at least dissuade him from the north-south axis and convince him that the east-west axis was more cost-effective. As Reza Shah assumed that the east-west axis would be used for transporting the dead to



be buried in the holy shrines, he did not agree with the British, and eventually the north-south axis was constructed. (Milani, 2013, pp. 75 -80)

Another important point is that placing the dead in the temporary grave and transferring them to holy places was very expensive. Hence, it was less common among ordinary and less-privileged people. This is true today, with the difference that, at that time, due to the distance, the dead bodies had to be first protected against complete decomposition, and then be transferred to Karbala, Najaf or other cities. These costly endeavors made the tradition more common among the affluent and important families. The other point was that many of these prominent families were faithful to or pretended to be faithful to Shiite Imam. Then, they stated in their will that their bodies to be buried near the shrine of the *Imams*. Apparently, this tradition would bring some kind of social status to these families as well.

It was also customary to bury the dead in local shrines, but the reputation and sanctity of the shrines encouraged most people to transfer their dead to those cities unless they, during their lifetime, had made a different will for their burial location.

The burial process in the vicinity of the holy shrines was performed by skilled people. Drying the dead body with special tools and materials, then transferring them to holy places and burying them required special professions. For instance, the drying of the dead was mostly done by perfumers. Then, there were people whose job was to put the dead in a building, called *dakme*, and finally, there came those who put the dead bodies on the back of the mules to transfer them to holy places. This last job required special skill and tolerance. Not everyone could do that. The stench of the dead annoyed not only the companions, but also the cattle, and hence, they had to be patient, hardworking, and tolerant. Of course, they, in return, made a lot of money.

Because of the sanctity of the dead, no special guards were needed to secure *dakme*; only those familiar with the construction would occasionally go there to prevent the body from natural damage. In fact, taking care of *dakme* was just because of maintaining the construction of *dakme* and the dead; otherwise it did not need to be guarded.

Sadat Husseini Dehdashti Aghamiri

Sadat Husseini Dehdashti Aghamiri, one of the Sadat families in the south of the country whose great ancestor was the *Imamzadeh* of Maulana Seyyed Ali Naghi, known as the *Imamzadeh* Aghamir. *Imamzadeh* Aqamir was the descendant of Imam Zina Al-Abidin (AS) in the *genealogy*. The mausoleum of this *Imamzadeh* is located on the northwest side of the old and historical city of Dehdasht, known as the Old City, which is located next to *Naqal* Hill. (Mousavinejad Souq, 2009, p. 191) This Sadat family, who is mostly known as Husseini Dehdashti, Sadatmir, with the suffix Aghamiri, is now present in cities such as Dehdasht, Behbahan, Dezful and Yasuj. Prior to their migration to these cities, they belonged to the *Kalantar* social class (*lit. governor of cities*) of Dehdasht (Belad-e Shahpoor) and were known for their wealth. (Mousavinejad Souq, 2009, p. 191) Owing to their affiliation with the *Imams*, the members of this family preserved their religious beliefs throughout history. One of the manifestations of this belief was their adherence to Shiite customs related to the burial of their dead. According to the Shiites, one of the manifestations of love for the family of the *Ahl al-Bayt* of the Prophet (PBUH) and religious leaders was to be buried, after death, near their tombs; They believed that if the body of the deceased was buried in these places or near them, they would be blessed. (Shojaei, 1997, p. 255) In a narration attributed to the Prophet of Islam, it is said: Bury your dead among good people, because, like the living, the dead also suffer from a bad neighbor. (Mohammadi Reyshahri,



2001, p. 654)

Sadat Husseini family, of Dehdasht - the village of Bova³ Sofla, owing to their religious background and their strong devotion to the *Imams*, in adherence to these beliefs, also preserved and at times created certain traditions throughout history. The practice of keeping the dead in temporary graves until they were transferred to holy cities/locations was one of these traditions. These temporary graves were called *dakme* or *deime* in the local language. The *dakme* or temporary grave, with a rectangular or cubic structure, was a place where the dead were kept and buried for a certain period of time until suitable conditions were provided for their transfer to religious cities. The tradition of the temporary burial of the dead in the *dakme* continued from an unknown time in the past until 1996 in this family. Although the burial of the dead at the *dakme* was performed in different parts of Dehdasht, as far as the authors inquired, there were few graves there mainly because the transfer of corpses in the past was difficult and expensive. The hot and cold weather would make accomplishing this more difficult. In hot weather, the probability of the dead body stinking multiplied; Along the way, there were also dangers of robbery, stealing passengers' property; So the people who took on this responsibility expected possible risks and dangers. Furthermore, not everybody afforded transferring the bodies to holy cities; so only those who were affluent or had strong devotion to *Imams* or religious leaders would undergo such hardships and could cover the cost.

As mentioned above, as the Husseini Dehdashti family, living in the city of Dehdasht, held the position of *kalantar* of the Dehdasht region, they were affluent. Hence they were able to bury their dead in religious cities. Although in Dehdasht and other southern regions there were also non-Sadat people who, in order to respect the deceased's will, transferred the body of a wealthy person to a religious city, the Sadat Husseini Dehdashti family, being rich and having firm beliefs in the *Imams* and *Imamzadehs*, have preserved this tradition so that this family in 1996 AD bought a number of graves for other members of the family in the city of Qom and the Ulema hall.

The Shape of *Dakme*

Before talking about the shape of the *dakme*, in the case of Sadat Husseini Dehdashti, it is necessary to mention the history of *dakhme* in the history of Iran. The construction of the *dakhme* dates back to ancient times. Of course, the first part of Vandidad states that the use of *dakhme* was not common in ancient Iran. (Hawar, 1996, p. 200) This is rooted in Zoroastrian beliefs. The Zoroastrians respected for the four elements of

3- A village belonging to the central section of Kohgiluyeh.



water, wind, earth and fire. Hence, they believed that the corpse would contaminate water or soil, and that anyone who touched the corpse should take a bath immediately. In Vandidad, it is stated that in order to keep water and soil clean, the body should be placed on a rock or on top of a mass of lime. Or the body should be placed in a closed coffin made of stone, called a *dakhme*. Europeans call these tall buildings silent tower. (Nass, 2006: 473) Zoroastrians believed that the soul of the dead was present around the corpse for three days after death. After that, a demon named “nasav”, whose job was to decompose the corpse, would come. The wind then would take the soul to the chinvato bridge so that the three judges, Mithra, Soroush, and Rashnu, pass judgment on their souls. (Hawar, 1996, p. 199) Pietro della Valle stated that the *gabrs* (Zoroastrians) did not bury their dead, but would keep the corpses in special places with the help of scaffolding with their eyes open so that the corpse either decompose itself or becomes the prey of birds. Of course he wrote that he saw the graves of *gabrs* from outside, but never saw inside the construction. (della Valle, 2002: 67) With this explanation, we described the *dakme* of Dehdasht, although they were different from the above *dakhme*. (Figures 1 and 2)



Figure 1. A Dakhme in the village of Boai Sofla in Kohgiluyeh (Dehdasht) (The picture is taken by the author)



Figure 2. The front view of a Dakhme in the village of Boai Sofla in Kohgiluyeh (Dehdasht) (The picture is taken by the author)



As mentioned, one of the customs of the Husseini Dehdashti family, living in the city of Dehdasht, was the burial of the dead in temporary graves, which in the local language was called *dakme* or *deime*. *Dakme* or the temporary grave was a cubic or rectangular structure or room, located on a hill or a high place, far from where people lived. There, the wind would diminish any possible odor from the *dakme*. *Dakmes* were made several times the space occupied by a corpse; for example, if the dead body was one meter and fifty centimeters long, the length and width of the *dakme* were approximately three meters. Although this was not always constructed with precision, it was tried to allocate enough space for the corpse. This was necessary for the corpse to be placed at enough distance from the surrounding walls to prevent the transfer of moisture to the corpse and thus to preserve it from decay and decomposition. On the other hand, this space had to be designed in such a way that while transferring the body, people could have enough space to protect the corpse from collapsing or the skeleton from detachment. (Yazdanfar, 2015, July 22)

The materials used in constructing the *dakme* were mostly stone and plaster, and less mud; this was because the locals knew by experience that mud enhances the disintegration of the corpse. For this reason, the body was not placed on the ground inside the *dakme*. Rather, it was placed on a bed made of reeds and mats, at a height of half a meter from the ground. The bed was fixed to the plaster walls by iron or wooden bars; this prevented the wood from being ruined by termites⁴. If the termite attacked the wooden bar, the bed would fall to the ground and the corpse would break up. (Yazdanfar, 2015, July 22)

When making a *dakme*, a number of holes, the size of a straw or a little wider, were drilled into the walls. But the holes were blocked for several days before the body was removed. A few days before the body was transferred to a religious site, the holes were opened to help to ventilate the air inside the *dakme*. These holes were the only way the air could go inside. (Yazdanfar, 2015, May 10)

According to Khairullah Yazdanfar Husseini, a few nights before removing the body of his father, Seif-Allah Yazdanfar Husseini⁵, he himself, with the help of some friends and relatives, opened these holes and even made several other larger holes to facilitate ventilating the *dakme* overnight. (Yazdanfar, 2017, August 6)

Just like the permanent grave, the *dakme* was constructed in the qibla direction and the corpse was laid out so that either its foot or head facing the door. Hence, they did not need to turn the corpse to take it out of *dakme*.

4- In the local language, the termite is called «Remiz».

5- These two people are the last members of this family who were buried in the *dakme*, Mohammad Ali Hosseini Dehdashti (1967) and Seif-Allah Hosseini Dehdashti (1995).



It was important to protect the *dakme* from rain and moisture. In the old days, to prevent water and moisture from reaching the walls, the *dakme* was covered with shed, and in modern times, plastic sheets were used to serve this purpose. Fatemeh Yazdanfar, an old woman from this family, stated that: owing to long time gap between the death of her father Mohammad Ali Husseini and her brother Seif-Allah Yazdanfar (Hosseini), some burial customs or rituals were consigned to oblivion. Accordingly, when Haj Yusuf Seif-Allah Husseini was put in the *dakme* and because winter was approaching, a person, named Haj Seyyed Musa Afshin from *Sadat* Rezatofiq, whose father, called him Mir Gholam Afshin, had been buried in the *dakme* for some time informed us that the *dakme* should be covered with reeds or mats to prevent water and moisture from entering the *dakme* and to prevent the body from decomposition. But since it was not possible to make mats, a plastic sheet was used for this purpose. Mats were suitable all year-round, but the plastic was not suitable for the summer because it would cause moisture. (Yazdanfar, 2015, May 6) Therefore, the *dakme* or temporary grave had no architectural decorations, and no bedding, moqarnas, tiling, woodcarving, etc. In fact, this process was done, as the reflection of their belief and devotion to the *Imams* and *Imamzadehs*. In general, from the Safavid period onwards, the tendency to bury the dead near the tombs of religious leaders did not correspond with constructing glorious tomb structure. From this time on, magnificent tombs, like the Qaboos Dome or the tomb of Amir Ismail Samani, were not built. (Kiani, 2012, p. 77)

1- Reasons for Burying the Dead in a *Dakme* or Temporary Grave

In the past, due to inadequate roads and lack of means of transportation, people had to wait for a wagon to set off, and more importantly, people who died in winter and summer, because of the unfavorable weather and because summer heat would cause the body to stink, it was difficult to transfer the dead or corpse to religious cities. Hence, people had to keep their dead in the *dakme* for a certain period of time until the right time and conditions arrived. Based on the recommendation of knowledgeable people, the bodies were transferred to the city in early spring and mid-autumn. (Mohammad Hussein, 2015, June 1)

Fatemeh Reza Tofighi, then a young woman, who witnessed and cooperated in removing the body of her father-in-law, the late Mir Mohammad Ali Husseini Dehdashti Aghamiri, at mid- night, stated that another reason for putting the dead in the *dakme* was that the deceased person should remain with his family for a while before being moved to another place. In this way, the family members would hold a mourning ceremony and the passage of time would bring comfort and peace to the family members of the deceased. (Reza Tofighi, 2015, April 2)

2- Burying the Body and The Call for Trust

After bathing the body, some camphor and salt were placed on sensitive parts of the dead body, including the eyes, armpits and genitals. This prevents the decay of these parts and its spread to other parts of the body. He, then, wrapped the body in the shroud, and while conducting a Shiite funeral and saying the funeral prayer before a large number of people, the body was taken to the *dakme*. The bed was already covered with thick layers of salt and camphor to prevent the corpse from decomposition. The corpse was then placed on the bed, covered with fragrant plants available in each season, such as Narcis-



sus flower and especially *Ferulago*⁶. Sometimes some *Ferulagos* were placed under the head of the dead man. These plants perfumed and disinfected the *dakme* for a while. (Reza Tofighi, 2015, April 2)

One of the most important steps in burying the dead and before the door of the *dakme* was closed was to announce the duration of the temporary grave and the time the body should be removed from *dakme*. This was done in such a way that a believer or clergyman would stand on a hill near the *dakme* and asked the funeral attendants to gather around or near the *dakme*. The cleric recited prayers and *azkars* aloud, including the verse of Ayatul Kursi and four verses, and then said: "O people! You will witness from now until the Day of Judgment that we entrust the corpse of a certain child, who died on a certain day, for a certain period of time (for example, one year) and to protect it against the snake, insects and the decomposition. (Yazdanfar, 2015, July 22) For the funeral ceremony of Seif-Allah Yazdanfar (Hosseini, Dehdashti, Aghamiri) a trustworthy cleric, named Abdolnabi Reza Tofighi, recited the prayers. But the important point to note was that the duration of the temporary burial of the dead in the *dakme* should have been specified: one year, one year and a half and the like. If it was not possible for the dead's relatives to remove the body from the grave at the end of the determined time and transfer it to the permanent grave, then the same person, called the trust, or someone else should come and be present again in the presence of others. He would then extend the burial period of the deceased for another specified period of time. (Yazdanfar, 2015, July 22)

Another point of interest was that they were not allowed to put the dead in the *dakme* for, or take it out, less than six months. Otherwise, they would face the opposition of the authorities and local clerics. Sajjad Yazdanfar (Hosseini, Dehdashti, Aghamiri), was the most knowledgeable person about the ritual of temporary burial of the dead in the *dakme*. He himself was from *Sadat* Husseini Dehdashti family and his father and grandparents were transferred to the cities of Qom and Karbala after temporary burial in the *dakme*. He explained about the importance of keeping the body in the adventure *dakme* for six months as follows; Once, the condition for transferring the body of Mohammad Ali Husseini Dehdashti, the ancestor of Mr. Yazdanfar's body, to Qom was provided in less than six months; but since this issue was strictly forbidden by the clergy and the official authorities, they were forced to remove the body of Gholam Hossein, who died a year before that date, from the *dakme* instead, transferring it to its destination. Mr. Yazdanfar believed that

6- This plant grows in spring, in late April and early May, with the melting of the first snowdrifts of the rocks and mountains of Kohgiluyeh, Boyer-Ahmad and Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari provinces. This plant is assumed to be sacred in the culture of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad. People in this area, especially the elderly, feel nostalgic when they hear the name of this plant. Many public places, such as libraries, restaurants, etc. in this area are named after Chouil (*Ferulagos*). We assume that the reason for the sanctity of the chouil (*Ferulagos*) plant among the people of this region should be sought in the lifestyles of these people; in the past, most people of the region were nomads, living in temperate climates and in the heart of mountains and plains, covered with fragrant plants such as Chouil. The sanctity of this plant was so great that people recommended that some *Ferulagos* be placed under their heads when they die. Numerous poems have been written about this plant.



since the corpse might get disintegrated and smelled in less than six months, the official and spiritual authorities, in order to preserve the dignity of the dead, prevented the corpse from being taken out prior to six months. (Yazdanfar, 2015, July 22)

3- Removing the Corpse from the *Dakme* and Transferring it to Religious Cities

With the end of the appointed time and the arrival of the appropriate season, the relatives of the deceased, by performing certain rituals, took the body out of the *dakme*. The removal of the corpse from the *dakme* was done by the confidant, and courageous people as well as the close relatives of the deceased around midnight. Or they were assisted by strangers, who lived in a region away from that of the deceased, whose job was to bathe the corpse and remove the corpse from the *dakme*. This was done to preserve the dignity of the deceased and his family, so that if the corpse was disintegrated, those who exhumed the corpse would not talk about the bad shape and decay of the corpse later.⁷ Another possible reason for this was that these people were more familiar with the method of removing the body and could better prevent the body or the skeleton from being fallen apart. Sadat Husseini Dehdashti stated that to take the bodies of the dead out of the *dakme*, either people from their own families did this or they asked people from Behbahan whose job was to wash the dead and take the bodies out of the *dakme*. Sajjad Yazdanfar (Hosseini, Dehdashti, Aghamiri) in August 1996, with the help of his brother, Khairullah Yazdanfar (Hosseini -Dehdashti-Aghamiri) and a trusted courageous person, named "Qudratullah Peykari", removed the body of their father, Seif-Allah Yazdanfar Husseini Dehdashti-Aghamiri who died in August 1995, at midnight in summer 1996. He was taken out of the *dakme* and after holding a brief ceremony, he was taken to Qom, accompanied with some family members for burial. He was buried in Wadi-al-Salam Cemetery and Ulema Hall. (Yazdanfar, 2015, July 22; Tarighi Nejad, 2017, August 6)

Mohammad Ali Husseini Dehdashti (Yazdanfar) died at the end of October 1967 and his body was temporarily buried in a *dakme* in the village of Boai Sofla in Dehdasht for about 6 months. The transfer of his body from the *dakme* to the holy city of Qom took place at midnight in April 1967. Fatemeh Reza Tofighi (wife of Seif-Allah Yazdanfar Husseini Dehdashti), as a young lady and the bride of the family, along with other people, participated in the exhumation and transportation of the body of her father-in-law, Mohammad Ali. (Reza Tofighi, 2015, April 2)

7- Concerning the mystery of the transfer of the body, it is worth mentioning that during the burial of Genghis Khan in 624 AH, owing to his deep respect for the mountains of Burqan Qaldun in Mongolia, his body was buried in that area. The point is that the Mongols used to keep the burial place of important people secret. Accordingly, when Genghis Khan's sons buried the body, they killed the people who were carrying the body as well as those who witnessed the transfer of the corpse to keep the burial place of Genghis Khan secret. (Rashid al-Din Hamedani, 1995, p. 386) This was common among the Iranian ancestors before they became Muslims. For instance, in 663 AH, when Holakukhan died, he was buried next to the Jaghato River, but its exact location was kept secret. (Rashid al-Din Hamedani, 1995, p. 736)



Considering that exhumation of a corpse was forbidden in Islam, they had to get the consent of the official and religious authorities before opening the *dakme* for taking out the body. Sajjad Yazdanfar (Hosseini Dehdashti), to remove the body of his father, Seif-Allah Yazdanfar (Hosseini Dehdashti Aghamiri), in August 1996 from the *dakme* in the village of “Lower Boay”, referred to the local police station in the village of “Filgah” and asked for their permission. (Yazdanfar, 2015, July 22)

After wrapping the body in a linen shroud again, they placed it inside the coffin. The coffin was put in a white clothed bag, and the official and religious authorities wrote the name of the deceased, the name of the deceased’s father, the date of his death and date of his burial in *dakme* as well as the date of removal from *dakme*, stamping and sealing the clothed bag. This act was considered as a legal permission for transferring the dead to the destination, crossing different cities and borders. (Yazdanfar, 2015, July 22) It should be noted that in other regions of Lorestan, such as Lorestan and Chaharmahal Bakhtiari, such customs for entrusting the body of the deceased and transferring it to holy places rarely occurred, so that it was not comparable to the study area.⁸

8- It should be noted that there are humorous and interesting anecdotes in Iranian literature about carrying a corpse. We will refer the interested reader to the books, *Koliat-e Obaid Zakani* and his *Delgosha* treatise.



4- The Names of a Number of Members of This Family Buried in the Religious Cities of Iraq and Iran

1. Naz Beigom Husseini Dehdashti Aghamiri: Karbala, Wadi al-Salam Cemetery
2. Mohammad Husseini Dehdashti Aghamiri: Karbala, Wadi al-Salam Cemetery
3. Golab Husseini Dehdashti Aghamiri: Karbala, Wadi al-Salam Cemetery
4. Abolghasem Husseini Dehdashti Aghamiri: Karbala, Wadi al-Salam Cemetery
5. Mohammad Ali Husseini Dehdashti Aghamiri (Yazdanfar): Ghom, Wadi al-Salam Cemetery (North Western Branch)
6. Golabatoon Husseini Aghamiri (wife of Mohammad Ali Husseini Dehdashti Aghamiri): Karbala, Wadi al-Salam Cemetery. (Reza Toofiqi, 2015, April 2; Yazdanfar, 2015, July 22)
7. Seif-Allah Husseini Dehdashti Aghamiri (son of Golabatoon Husseini Aghamiri and Mohammad Ali Husseini Dehdashti Aghamiri): Ghom, Wadi al-Salam Cemetery (Ulama Hall)

5- The History of Burial of the Dead in Sadat Dehdashti Family in *Dakme*

The burial of the dead in a temporary grave or *dakme* in this family has a long history. In this study, effort are made to

determine the exact date of that, but we could only find the exact date of death of three of these people, as follows: Seif-Allah Yazdanfar (Husseini, Dehdashti Aghamiri) who died in August 1995, Mohammad Ali Husseini Dehdashti, in October 1967 and Golabatoon Husseini Dehdashti, in 1952. A reference to the family tree of this family show that the number of members of this family buried in the *dakme* and the exact date of their death are not known; it is assumed that this dates back to two or three generations before Golabatoon Husseini, and if each generation is considered to be approximately 30 years old, the history of this tradition must go back to more than 150 or 160 years.

Conclusion

The importance of Shiite beliefs in the Iranian society of the Safavid era and after, as well as the approval of the Shiite clergy on the issue of virtue and sanctity of the soil of the shrines and tombs of *Imams* and *Imamzadehs*, made the burial in the vicinity of their graves the dream of many Iranian Muslims. Being buried in holy places, they believed that God would bless them and forgive their sins. Therefore, affluent people always longed for being buried near these tombs after death. These families kept their corpses in a grave or a place for a while until the proper conditions were provided for the transfer of their dead bodies to holy places. The temporary grave (*dakme*) had no architectural effect; it was just a temporary storage for the corpse. Sadat Husseini Dehdashti was one of the families who, due to their financial prosperity, had the opportunity to bury their dead in the vicinity of holy places. They have kept this as a tradition in their family until the present time. Therefore, this family has performed rituals related to the temporary burial of the dead in the temporary grave, preservation of the body during this period, the transfer of the dead body from this temporary grave, using the experience of others who buried their dead in this way, as well as their own experience.

Although this custom has no longer been practiced for several years due to reasons, such as the development of hospitals and morgues, as well as various means of transportation, such as the airplane, there are still a lot of people in this family who witnessed and even participated in this ceremony. They, then, remember the details of this ceremony. The authors of this article intend to record and introduce this ancient custom to the scientific community before such memories sink into oblivion. This will help future generations to understand the purpose and functions of such customs and will not make farfetched assumptions about these monuments or customs. Also, in some villages and mountains around some cities, there are still some semi-ruined stone buildings whose exact functions are not known, and some mistakenly make wrong conjectures.

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