BURHANPUR—BURIAL I. PRE-ACHAEMENID BURIAL SITES

The earliest human skeletal remains found in Persia date from before the 8th millennium B.C. They have been excavated at several cave dwelling sites: Hotu Cave (Angel) and Belt Cave (Coon, 1951a, pp. 199-207; 1951b, pp. 81-92; 1952, pp. 231-49), both on the southeastern shore of the Caspian Sea; Behistun (Bisotun) Cave (Coon, 1951a, pp. 199-207) near Kermanshah; and Konji and Arjana Caves in Luristan. Most of the human remains in these caves seem to have been left where they fell, and it cannot be determined whether or not any of them was buried according to organized procedures; it is therefore not possible to argue that these sites represent the earliest graves in Iran. Between this early cave-dwelling period and the beginning of the historic period the ancient peoples of Iran developed an elaborate and complex set of burial procedures, including preservation of grave goods, which provide valuable evidence of their material culture that would otherwise have been lost to modern eyes.

When prehistoric human beings left their cave dwellings to settle on open land, they began to form agricultural communities and to develop visible form and order in their burials. Scientific excavations at such sites as Tepe Sialk (Sialk) near Kâsan (Ghurshman, I, pp. 10-11, 44, pls. 10, 24-25), Tepe Hissar (Hešar) near Dâmgân (Schmidt, pp. 62-87, figs. 45-60), Tepe Yahya (Yahyâ) near Kermân (Lamborg-Karlovy, p. 156, figs. 6, 32), and Zagheh (Zâgâ) in the Qazvin plain (Negâbah, 1973, p. 129) have produced some information about the organization and construction of these early agricultural settlements, including burial customs. The earliest burials were made under house floors; only gradually did burials come to be made outside houses. Eventually some funerary objects came to be interred with the dead, as early peoples slowly developed belief in an afterlife in which the deceased would have need for such objects.

At Zagheh, a prehistoric agricultural community (with some traces of industrial activity) dated to the 6th millennium B.C., a number of burials illustrate some of the earliest funerary practices (Malek, 1988, pp. 10-12). The graves at Zagheh are located within the village. Infants under three years old were buried under the floor of roofed enclosures, which may have been used for either living or storage; sometimes very small infants were placed in holes dug into the walls. No burial objects were found with these skeletons. Adults over fifteen years old were buried in open areas like courtyards or even entirely outside the living quarters, in alleys or other open sites. The bodies were coated with red ochre and were not positioned in any special way. These remains were accompanied by simple ornaments, tools, and small pottery vessels. Many graves were topped by piles of elongated sun-dried bricks. A few instances of very low brick walls aligned in the same way as the bodies beneath are the earliest indications of tomb construction at the site.

This type of burial pattern was also found at Tepe Hissar (Schmidt, pp. 62-87, figs. 45-60), an early village settlement with three main excavated levels dating from the 5th to the 2nd millennium B.C. In Hissar I (5th-4th millennium B.C.) bodies were found under houses, open courtyards, and lanes, as well as in uninhabited areas. They had been placed on their right sides with arms and hands positioned naturally, often in front of the face. Men and women were about equally supplied with funerary gifts, including pottery vessels, copper pins, daggers (for men only), seals or seal-shaped ornaments, and large numbers of beaded necklaces, bracelets, armlets, diadems, belts and anklets, made of gypsum and other materials. These objects were usually placed near the head and upper part of the body. There were no remains of coffins, but in several instances traces of matting and fabric remained, suggesting that bodies
Marlik, tomb no. 52, trench XXIII G. Body of warrior in ceremonial costume with gold buttons, buried over his weapons may have been wrapped or dressed and that matting lined the floor of the grave.

By the time of Hissar III (3rd-2nd millennium B.C.) strict rules for positioning body and skull were no longer observed; the arms and hands were still arranged naturally, with a few exceptions: One corpse held an alabaster cup in both hands, and the limbs of another were arranged in a spread-eagled position, apparently deliberately. Among the many objects recovered from graves of the latter part of this period were pottery, metal, and alabaster vessels; ornaments of semiprecious stones; copper wands; seals; and, with the male skeletons, weapons. For the first time, the graves were massed in one area, the first suggestion of a cemetery in Iran.

The clear establishment of a distinct area for burial of the dead, who were surrounded by all the objects needed in the afterlife, can be recognized in the Royal Cemetery at Marlik (Märlik) in Gilan province (Negahban, 1343 Š./1964). At the end of the 2nd and beginning of the 1st millennium B.C. the inhabitants of this area buried their rulers in tombs roughly cut from a stone hilltop; the bodies were surrounded by gold, silver, bronze, pottery, and stone objects, ranging from such simple everyday items as cooking utensils and toilet articles to bronze weapons in vast quantities; elaborate jewelry of gold, silver, and semiprecious stones; figurines and long-spouted ritual vessels of pottery and bronze; and decorated ceremonial vessels of precious metals.

The well-developed burial pattern of the Marlik people is exemplified in tomb 52 (Plate xxx), a fairly large tomb incorporating the large natural boulders of the mound, which were connected by walls of broken stone and clay mortar, faced only on the inner side. At one end lay a long stone slab on which several large daggers and spearheads had been placed, pointing inward. The body, with legs partly contracted, was placed on top of these weapons. Many textile fragments and gold buttons were scattered over the upper torso, indicating that it had been buried in elaborate clothing fastened with gold buttons. Behind the deceased was a gold bowl adorned with designs of gods and goddesses.

Haft Tepe, subsidiary massive tomb with 23 skeletons, 14 packed on the floor and 9 thrown over these broken into two pieces. (In other tombs such gold vessels, which seem to have held a sacred liquid, were placed before the mouth of the deceased.) On and around the body there were jewelry of gold and carnelian, shell beads with gold pendants, a gold chain and hair ornament, bronze buttons, and silver loops. In addition to the weapons under the body, there were several bronze mace-heads and many bronze arrowpoints of various shapes, with fragments of the leather cover of a bronze quiver. Under the stone slab were fertility figures and vessels of pottery, along with bronze cymbals, belts, and small tools and equipment. At one side of the tomb were large numbers of simple pottery and bronze vessels, including two large bronze cooking pots containing bird and animal bones with a bronze ladle and a skewer. There were also about two dozen small bronze figurines of animals, both wild and domesticated, and a small bronze model of oxen with yoke and plow. Apparently it was believed that the deceased would need his horse in the afterlife, for a small adjoining tomb contained a set of horse teeth, a bronze bit, and several bronze loops.

Around this Royal Cemetery were a number of burials of ordinary people, similar in type but on a simpler scale. In each the skeleton was laid on its side, with a few simple bronze ornaments and a plain pottery vessel positioned in front of the face.

The practice of burying the dead with a variety of objects that might be needed in the afterlife was known in other parts of Iran as well. Modern knowledge of the culture of Luristan in the 3rd-1st millennia B.C. is almost entirely derived from the elaborate funerary goods found in graves scattered throughout the area (Contenau and Ghirshman; Vanden Berghe, 1982; cf. also Thrane, pp. 27-35; Vanden Berghe, 1971, pp. 263-71).
Another royal burial surrounded by elaborate material remains was excavated at Haft Tepe, an Elamite site of the mid-2nd millennium B.C. on the southern alluvial plain of Kāzestān (Negahban, 1355  Ş./1977). There, in a large baked-brick tomb with a vaulted roof, the body of the king, along with that of his principal wife, was laid out on a raised terrace. They had been washed with sacred water, covered with red ocher, and left with only a few simple objects. A smaller subsidiary tomb, also of baked brick with a vaulted roof, was tightly packed with several dozen carefully laid-out skeletons, perhaps attendants sacrificed for the burial of their master (Plate XXXI). To serve these tombs a large temple complex had been constructed; the duties of the ministering priests were carefully detailed on stone stelae installed in the courtyard. Throughout the entire complex there were additional burials, both contemporary (in sarcophagi or large jars) and later (unmarked, except perhaps by a few bricks placed beside the body).


(EZZAT OLLAH NEGAHBAH)

ii. REMNANTS OF BURIAL PRACTICES IN ANCIENT IRAN

The burial practices of pre-Islamic Iran are known partly from archeological evidence, partly from the Zoroastrian scriptures, namely the Avesta and the later Pahlavi and Persian literature. Both should be viewed in light of the other.

The original meaning of the Old Iranian (Avestan) word daxma was most probably “grave” (Hoffmann), which indicates that the ancient Iranians practiced interment (cf. Cinqubre; Fukai and Matsutani, 1982). With the advent of the Zoroastrian religion, however, burial was explicitly prohibited, and exposure to flesh-eating animals was prescribed in the Vişnūdād as the only acceptable way to dispose of a body (see iii. below). Nevertheless, there are a number of indications, even in the Zoroastrian texts, that significant portions of the population resisted the change in funerary practice (see below). For example, unlike the sin of cremation, which meant desecration of the fire, the sin of burial was not punishable by death: In Vd. 3.36-42 only corporal punishments were prescribed, depending on the elapsed time between interment and exhumation; in practice, these punishments were convertible into fines. Although the sin was theoretically irremissible after two years, it could still be cleared if committed on bad advice and repented. The land on which a grave had been dug became pure again after fifty years (Vd. 5.14). Some Sasanian commentators favored still lighter penalties (Pahlavi Vd. 3.37-40, 5.14), obviously in an effort to come to terms with persistent ancient practices. On the other hand, there is evidence that as late as the Sasanian period an accusation of burying relatives was the occasion for execution of a political enemy (Perpious, 1.11.37), and mass exhumations were committed in Christian cemeteries during a period of persecution (see the passion of Pēroz of Bēt Lāpaţ, in Hoffmann, p. 39).

In any attempt to reconstruct actual burial practices from the Achaemenid period onward, archeological evidence must be used with caution. The first difficulty is that there is very little evidence from western Iran, compared to the wealth of information from eastern Iran provided by Soviet excavations in Central Asia (for a survey of the latter, see Grenet, 1984a). Another problem is how to evaluate the surviving evidence, which may distort the relative importance of burial and
exposure. Exposure is well documented for eastern Iran, where bones were preserved in ossuaries (datable as early as the 5th–4th centuries B.C. in Choresmia; see astrodan). In western Iran, however, it seems to have been less common to gather bones, and there is no tangible trace of the typical Zoroastrian practice before the Sasanian period, though it is mentioned in Greek sources as early as the Achaemenids.

Nevertheless, even after the spread of Zoroastrianism it appears that inhumation continued among nomads or former nomads in Bactria and Sogdia (Stuviskij, pp. 120-26; Mandelshtam, 1966, 1975; Litvinškij and Sedov, 1983, 1984; Grenet, 1984b, 1985) and among the population of Deylam and Gilān, as late as the Seleucid and Parthian periods (Litvinškij, pp. 98-100; Fukai and Matsutani, 1980). The graves, either simple or lined with stones, were sometimes arranged in short catacombs, as in Deylam and Gilān, or marked by cairns or mounded earth (kurgans), as in Bactria and Sogdia. Burial goods included pots for offerings, small personal ornaments, and weapons.

On the Iranian plateau in Achaemenid times burial is scantily documented by archeology (Naumann, pp. 30-34). The bodies of kings were laid in freestanding or rock-cut tombs (see Boyce, II, pp. 24-26, 54-55, 59, 182; iii, below). Herodotus, writing in the 5th century B.C., mentioned that corpses were coated with wax before burial (1, 104); this custom has been interpreted either as a means of preserving the earth from pollution (Kamennihuber, p. 306) or as a primitive form of embalming—a practice thoroughly alien to the spirit of Zoroastrian regulations (Boyce, II, p. 182).

The burial of entire corpses in ceramic containers spread from Mesopotamia to western Iran soon after the Greek conquest (perhaps even before; see Schmidt, pp. 117-23, pls. 85-89, on the "ceremony of the Persepolis spring"), but it is impossible to decide whether or not the adoption of this fashion had religious significance. Furthermore, the extent to which specimens of such containers discovered in Kushan Bactria betray influence from the Parthian empire is difficult to assess (for a substantial critical survey, see Litvinškij, pp. 115-20; cf. Litvinškij and Sedov, 1984, pp. 135-50).

At approximately the same time a type of freestanding mausoleum was developed in Bactria and Margiana. It has been tentatively interpreted as a compromise between practicing burial and meeting Zoroastrian requirements forbidding it; corpses were left to decompose naturally on benches inside the vaults in order to avoid polluting the earth, and the mausolea themselves were raised on platforms (Grenet, 1984a, pp. 94-101, 230, 232-24; but other writers consider such mausoleums to have received bones gathered after exposure in regular Zoroastrian fashion, see Litvinškij and Sedov, 1983, pp. 107-16, and Rveladze, 1987).

Direct burial in the earth was still sporadically practiced in Sasanian Iran (see especially Balcer; for Hephthalite burials, see McNicoll, p. 49; the "Kushano-Sasanian" burials published by Shaffer and Hoffman may also be Hephthalite).

The placing of a coin in the mouth or hand of the deceased, attested at many sites in both western and eastern Iran, was probably a continuation of the Greek custom of supplying the deceased with "Charon's obol," a coin given the dead man to pay his passage across the river Styx in Hades (Hansman and Stronach; Balcer; MacDowall; Grenet, p. 219). See also astrodan.

nale et leur rapport au zoroastrisme,” in Cultes et
monuments religieux dans l’Asie centrale préislamique,
J. G. Shaffer and M. A. Hoffman, “Kinship and
Burial among Kushano-Sasanians. A Preliminary
Assessment.” East and West 26, 1976, pp. 133-52
(these graves may be Hephthalite). B. J. Staviskij,
La Bactriane sous les Kushans, Problèmes d’histoire et de
culture, Paris, 1986, pp. 120-26. L. Trümpermann,
“Sasanian Graves and Burial Customs,” in R.
Mésopotamie et Iran méridional de l’âge du fer
317-29.

(FRANZ GRENET)

iii. IN ZOROASTRIANISM

The Zoroastrian faith teaches that the earth, one of
the seven holy creations, belongs to the amaša spāmata
(q.v.) Spānti Armati (q.v.) “Bounteous Devotion.”
Death being regarded as an evil brought about by Ahrār
Mainyu (Ahuramazda, q.v.), the Destructive Spirit, the
corpse of a holy creature, particularly man or dog, is
considered to be greatly infested by the druj Nasu,
the creature of the Lie called Corpse-matter. Burial of
“corpse matter” (nasē-mignām) would defile the earth
(in the Sad dar, chap. 33, it is said that Spandarmad
shudders when a corpse is buried) and was therefore
prohibited. Equally, to exhume buried corpses was
regarded as meritorious (Vd. 3.12).

Cremation, too, was an early practice, and Zoroas-
trianism similarly prohibits the defilement of the sacred
creation of fire by corpse matter; one of the twenty-one
kinds of fire purified in the consecration of the highest
grade of temple fire, the Atasi i Bahram, is a fire used
for cremation (presumably, by non-Zoroastrians, from
whom it is to be rescued; see Mistrec, pp. 96-99). Most
human communities are particularly conservative in
matters of funerary rites, so, although instances of
cremation appear to have been rare in historical times,
elaborate and diverse measures were taken to circum-
vent the strictures against interment, and various forms
of burial in the earth, or interment in tombs and
ossuaries, were practiced in historical Zoroastrian
communities, in Iran and Central Asia (see Boyce,
Zoroastrianism II, pp. 54-55, 210-11).

The Avestan word dāxna-, which later came to be
used of the open, amphitheatre-like “towers of silence”
in which the corpses of Zoroastrians are exposed to be
eaten by birds meant originally “grave” (Hoffmann),
and the Videvdād, the only Zoroastrian scriptural
authority on the disposal of the dead, requires that
graves, and evidently, raised tombs as well, be de-
stroyed. Burial in the earth was so abhorred by the
orthodox Zoroastrians that interment was regarded even
as a punishment for the wicked; denied exposure to
the rays of the morning sun on the fourth day (Pahl.
čahārom) after death, the soul could not ascend heaven-
wards from the body and was doomed to a gloomy
eternity in the underworld of shadows (see Boyce,
Zoroastrianism I, pp. 325-30). The “towers of silence”
are unattested in Iran until the Islamic period, clearly
because in times of Zoroastrian sovereignty there was
no need protectively to enclose places of exposure
against defilers or trespassers. However, it is interesting
to note that the stage of the Greek theatre at Bactria
AY Kanom (q.v.) seems to have been used for the
exposure of dead bodies, most likely after the departure
of the Greeks from the area (see Frye, p. 190).

The entombing practices of the Achaemenid kings,
evidenced by the free-standing tomb of Cyrus at
Pasargadæ and the rock-cut tombs of the other
Achaemenid kings at Naqš-e Rostam, may indicate that
the Achaemenids were bringing old customs into har-
mony with Zoroastrian doctrine, which they had prob-
ably embraced, by encasing the body in stone and
protecting the earth thereby from pollution by corpse
matter. Before inhumation, the body was most likely
exposed for the čahārom. There seems to have been a
general Achaemenid respect for tombs. Thus Arrian
reports that Magi performed regular sacrifices for the
soul of Cyrus before his tomb down to the time of the
conquest of Iran by Alexander (Stronach, p. 24; Boyce,
Zoroastrianism II, pp. 56, 290-91); and Nehemiah
appealed to Artaxerxes I, “Send me to Judah, to the city
of my fathers’ sepulchres (Heb. qibrōt), that I may rebuild
it” (Neh. 2:5).

A practice difficult to reconcile with Zoroastrian
regulations is the one reported by Herodotus (7.114)
that the Persian queen Amestris (q.v.), married to
Xerxes I, propitiated “the god who is said to dwell
beneath the earth” by burying alive fourteen children
distinguished Persians; the Magi buried alive nine boys
and girls of the place called Nine Ways, during Xerxes’
invasion of Greece. Perhaps the god in question was the
pre-Zoroastrian prototype either of Yima or of Spantii
Armati.

In the Parthian period, according to Isidore of
Charax, kings were buried in royal tombs (Gk. basilikai
taphai, at Parthavaria; Caracalla is recorded to have
sacked the tombs of later Parthian kings at Arbela), and
burial in slipper-shaped ceramic coffins was also com-
mon. In pre-Christian Armenia, whose religion was
particularly strongly influenced by the Zoroastrianism
of the Parthians, similar forms of interment were
common, the word for a coffin, jaban, being a loan from
Middle Iranian. Such practices undoubtedly continued
in Armenia into the Sasanian period, when in Iran itself
methods of interment less conformable with orthodoxy
were probably suppressed; hence the Bundahšn decrees
the particular virulence of the Ahrimanic practice of
burial among the Armenians (see, with refs., Russell,
chap. 10).

In the Sasanian period, the bones of the exposed
deceased were often interred in stone or ceramic ossu-
aries, called cédina- in Avestan and astodān (q.v.) in
Pahlavi; some stone examples bear Pahlavi inscriptions.
Literary sources suggest the Sasanian kings were inter-
red in tombs, but there is as yet no archeological confirmation of this. Following the fall of the Sasanians, however, local rulers in northern Iran who adhered to pre-Islamic customs were interred in tomb towers, of which a notable example is the early 5th/11th-century Gonbad-e Qâbis (illustrated in Camb. Hist. Iran IV, pl. 5): the body of Qâbis is said to have been suspended at the top of the tower in a glass coffin on which the rays of the rising sun could fall through a small opening on the east side of the roof (see Matheson, p. 69). This would have allowed the xwaršêd nigerišn “sight (of the body) by the sun” on the čahârom to take place. Many ceramic ossuaries have been excavated on the territory of pre-Islamic Central Asia: Choresmia, Bactria, and Sogdia. Some are decorated with scenes of worship before a sacred fire, indicating that, of those interred, a number were Zoroastrians (see Grenet; on Sogdia, see Gershevitch). Boyce regards the Nuristani (Kafiri) practice of “post-exorcism” burial, i.e., exposure of the corpse in a wooden coffin on a mountain-top, as a “local derivative of Zoroastrian observance” (Zoroastrianism I, p. 113 with n. 24), though the Nuristanis, who do not speak an Iranian language, are unlikely to have been Zoroastrians in the past. Until fairly recent times, it was common custom in southern Kûrâzm to place the dead in a sarcophagus (sagoma) or box (sandyk), which was kept above ground. One reason given by informants for not interring corpses in the earth was šafâqa, “compassion” for the deceased (Snesarev, 1969, pp. 148-51; 1963, pp. 127-40). This seems to be a survival of the Zoroastrian belief, noted above, that the soul of one buried in the earth cannot ascend on the čahârom.

In the Sasanian period, places of exposure of the dead were probably not enclosed, being merely waste tracts at a prescribed distance from dwellings, roads, and cultivated fields, but under Muslim rule enclosures became necessary. One early observer, Moḩammad b. Karrâm (d. 255/869), founder of the Karrâmiyâ, seems to have confused the dakma with a fire-temple structure, perhaps with deliberate malice, writing that, should a Muslim taste wine third-hand and die, “it would not be lawful to pray over him. But he should be cast onto a Magian fire-temple so that the birds may devour him” (Zysow, p. 583).

The custom of leaving the dead in protected open places appears to have continued for a time among the Parsis in India, which is tolerant of religious practices, for the traveller Odoric writing in 1325 noted that the Parsis exposed the dead in open fields (Firby, p. 88). Subsequent reports seem less reliable: Teixeira in the late 16th century reported from Iran that the Zoroastrians abandoned the elderly in caves to die; their bodies were then allowed to dry there. Pietro della Valle, early in the 17th century, wrote that corpses were propped up in a place enclosed by walls; other travellers mentioned exposure of corpses in the open hollows of tree trunks or on stakes in the open. (For these reports see Firby, pp. 57f.)

The reports of travellers of the late 17th and 18th centuries described more accurately the dakma, its dimensions, the nasâ-sâlûr, and the manner of laying out the dead. Cornelius Le Bruyn in the 18th century wrote of the Iranian Zoroastrians that they left the bones of the dead in a mountain dakma for one year, and then buried the bones (for this and other reports, see Firby). The latter inaccurately calls the nasâ-sâlûr “grave-diggers,” though, as Henning showed in his critique of Onescirits (pp. 21-23), the Persian term gûrkan “beaver,” lit. “grave-digger,” seems to have persisted since ancient times.

The report of burial of bones seems to attest to a survival of the old custom of interring the dry bones of an exposed corpse in ossuaries, but it is at variance with Zoroastrian doctrine in the Persian Rivayats, which prescribe the manner in which the bones are to be taken from the stone biers that line the dakma and placed in the sarâda, the central well (tr. Dhabhar, p. 108). Geleynsen described this as a brick-faced central pit, below which nails were driven into the earth—an ancient form of purification. The sarâda, called tâhûdr by the Parsis, is now filled with lime and has underground filters and channels, through which decomposed matter passes.

Many Zoroastrian communities, unable or forbidden to use dakmas, inter their dead in coffins lowered into shafts lined with concrete, protecting the sacred earth of Spentâ Armaîtî from corruption. But the absolute prohibition in the Videvdâd against interment of any king is so strongly felt that Parsis are studying the possibility of disposal of corpses by such methods as acid baths and lasers, which are not quite the same as water or fire. There are problems even where dakmas still exist: because of the rapid growth of metropolitan Karachi, the dakma, once on the edge of town, is surrounded by densely populated neighborhoods, and there have been no vultures for 25 years. The bodies dry quickly in the hot sun of Sindh but are not stripped of their skin and have crowded the dakma, whose pit cannot handle their bodies. The community of Anjo- man has therefore resorted (1968) to the immediate expedient of depositing the dried corpses in an open, stone-lined square building.

Among modern Zoroastrians outside the Indian subcontinent exposure of the bodies of the dead is impossible, so orthodox Zoroastrians are buried, following the xwaršêd nigerišn and other necessary rites, in graves lined with concrete to prevent pollution of the earth.

Although replete with reminders of death and its significance, the Koran is silent on the subject of funerals. The books of prophetic Hadith customarily contain chapters entitled "janāʾiz" (e.g., Bokārī, Šahīh, Cairo, n.d., II, pp. 85-109), but the instructions found there are mostly general in nature (injunctions to bury the dead swiftly, to handle them gently and with respect, and to refrain from excessive lamentation). It is in the handbooks of feqh that the detailed procedures for washing, enshrouding, praying over, and burying the dead are expounded, with little variation among the different schools of Islamic law (in Shi'ite books, however, these regulations are to be found as a subdivision of tahara, ritual purity).

When it is apparent that a person is in a state of impending death (ehiţār), he should be laid out so that the soles of his feet are turned to the gebel; it is desirable that the head should be slightly raised so that it too faces the gebel. The articles of faith should be repeated by those in attendance, and the dying person should be urged to accompany them if at all possible to do so. It is also advisable to recite certain Koranic passages (Sūrat yāsīn (36), Sūrat al-ahzāb (33), Ayat al-Korsi (2:255), and the last three verses of Sūrat al-baqara (2:284-86)) until the moment of death. If the expiring person experiences difficulty in giving up the ghost, he should be placed on the floor in the place where he customarily offered his prayers.

Once death has occurred, the eyes and mouth of the deceased should be closed and his limbs straightened. The body should then be covered with a piece of cloth. If death takes place at night, a candle or lamp should be left burning next to the corpse.

The body should be washed and prepared for burial as soon as it is cold. Washing, together with enshrouding, performing the funeral prayer, and burying the corpse, is a farz kefāya (or wajib kefār); a duty incumbent on the community as a whole but performed on its behalf by certain individuals. A male deceased should be washed by men and a female deceased by women; a spouse, however, may wash his or her dead partner. The obligatory minimum is one complete washing; three washings are sonna. The body may be washed an odd number of times in excess of three, but this is discouraged (makrūh). According to Shi'ite and Shafi'ite feqh, the water used should be cold; Hanafites view the use of warm water as preferable (mandāh). First the clothes of the deceased should be removed, but the private parts (awrat) must remain covered at all times (Shafi'ites specify, however, that the whole body be covered with a thin and porous garment). The limbs and the trunk should be washed in a fixed sequence (gool-e tarībah); it is not proper simply to pour water over the whole body. Sunnite feqh requires that the water used in the first two washings be mixed with soap or some other cleansing agent and that used in the third and final washing be mixed with some perfume, preferably camphor. Shi'ite feqh specifies that the first washing be done with water mixed with the perfume of the lotus; the second, with water mixed with camphor; and the third, with pure water.

Next the body should be anointed—preferably with freshly ground camphor—at the points that touch the ground in the course of prostration: the forehead, the palms of the hands, the tip of the nose, the kneecaps, and the tips of the big toes. This process is known as ḥana'īt. Camphor should also be applied to the eyes, the ears, and the armpits.

Providing oneself with a shroud before death is disapproved; the heirs of the deceased should purchase it, using for the purpose the money he has left. The material used should be white and have been washed at least once. Shi'ite and Ḥanafite feqh forbids the use of silk, as well as saffron-dyed or gold-embroidered cloth, for both men and women; Shafi'ites regard it as permissible for women. No inscription of any kind should be made on the shroud. The shroud for men consists of three pieces: the ēzar (Pers. long), which must cover the area from the navel to the knees but may extend upwards to the chest and downwards to the feet; the qamīs (Pers. pīrāhan), also known as qamīs al-âkera (shirt of the hereafter), reaching from the shoulders to the upper half of the shins; and the lefāfa (Pers. sartāsarī), which encloses the whole body. Two additional pieces of cloth are used in enshrouding women: a kemār to cover the face and a band wound around the breasts. It is permissible to secure the shroud with a strip of cloth tied around the waist.

The final point in preparing the body for burial is the insertion in each armpit of a freshly cut branch, preferably from a date-palm, the two branches being known as jarīdatayn.

Martyrs are exempt from all the foregoing procedures, and are buried in the state in which they fell.

Once the preparations are complete, the prayer for the dead (namāz-e mawzu'et) is performed. It consists of five takhūs and is made without either rokū' (bending) or sajd (prostration). The one who leads the prayer should position himself close to the body, with his head to his right. Ḥanafite and Shi'ite feqh are agreed that
namáz-e mayyet must not be performed in a mosque, with the exception of the Masjed al-Ḥaram in Mecca, but Shi‘īites regard it as preferable to do so.

The body must be carried to the cemetery in a tābūt (coffin) on the shoulders of the mourners; the use of a beast of burden or other conveyance is forbidden, unless there is a considerable distance to be traversed. It is meritorious to assist in the carrying of a tābūt, even if only for a few paces. At the cemetery, the body should be rested on the ground three times while approaching the grave. The grave should be dug deep enough to protect it from wild animals and to prevent any odor from reaching the surface. A pillow of earth is made on which the head of the deceased is laid, and the area above the head is strengthened with bricks, stones, or clay to protect it from the falling soil. It is permissible to strengthen the sides of the grave if there is danger of its collapsing, but the floor of the grave must be pure earth. The body is inserted in the tomb head first and laid on its right side with the face turned to the qibla. The one who places the body in the tomb should be bareheaded, barefooted, and in a state of ritual purity. Before leaving the tomb by its lower end, he should recite the Islamic creed into the ear of the deceased in order to prepare him for the interrogation by Monker and Nakīr. After the grave is filled with earth, the soil covering it is liberally sprinkled with water, and the mourners plunge their fingers into the moist soil, reciting certain Koranic passages and prayers.

Shi‘īte practice adds to the foregoing certain distinctive features of its own. The recitation of true beliefs (‘aqqā’ed-e haqq) made in the presence of the dying and in the grave before closing it includes an enumeration of the Twelve Imams. According to Mohammad-Bāqer Majlesi (Haqqa al-yaqin, p. 386), the dying believer is in fact visited by the Prophet and the Twelve Imams who assist him in leaving this world. The dying are given ab-e torbat—water into which a small amount of soil from Karbalā has been mixed—to drink, and torbat is also mixed into the camphor used in hanūṭ. Shi‘īte feqh recognizes a prayer of two rak‘as, known as namáz-e wāḥšat, performed on the first night spent by the deceased in the tomb in order to lessen his terror. Shi‘ism also regards as desirable the transport of the body for burial in the shrine cities of Qom, Mahāsh, and the ‘atābāt in Iraq (also Ardabīl, in the Safavid period), although exhumation for this purpose is not recommended.

Throughout the history of Islamic Iran, various supplementary customs and practices can also be noted; some of them violate the prescriptions of feqh. The participation of women in funeral processions and burials, strongly discouraged by feqh, seems to have become standard practice early on. Extravagant forms of lamentation, forbidden by various Hadith, have been extremely common: these include loud wailing, laceration of the face, the breast, and the arms, the tearing of garments, the plucking out of the beard and the hair, the pouring of dust on the head, and the rubbing of mud on the face. A class of professional women mourners came into being not later than the Safavid period and continued to exist until quite recently (Masse. pp. 96, 99). Not even ‘olamā‘ were immune to the temptation of unrestrained mourning; when the great Shi‘īte scholar Emām-al-Ḥaramayn Abū’l-Ma‘ālī ‘Abd-al-Malek Jovaynī died in Nišāpūr in 478/1085, his students and colleagues ripped their turbans, broke their pens and inkpots, and destroyed the menbr from which Jovaynī had preached (Rāvandī, pp. 340, 342).

The privileges the royal and the rich enjoyed in their lifetimes were frequently reflected in the manner of their burials. Their bodies would invariably be washed at home instead of being taken to the public house for the washing of the dead. The Safavid court had its own washer of the dead (gāsālībāt), who in addition to receiving a fee would be allowed to keep the rich garments the deceased had been wearing (Rāvandī, p. 365). When the Buyid minister Suyf-al-Dawla died in 356/967, his body was washed nine times in rosewater to which sandalwood and camphor had been added, dried with rich brocade, and completely embalmed in camphor (Rāvandī, p. 319). Instead of being carried in a simple tābūt, the bodies of the rich were often conveyed to the cemetery in a palaquin (tāk-e ravāt) covered with silk curtains (Rāvandī, p. 317). During the Safavid and Qajar periods, the funeral corteges of the rich would often include a number of horses that carried the garments of the deceased (particularly his turban) as well as his weapons—in the case of a soldier—and other personal effects. This feature was probably derived from the mourning processions held during Moharram. The playing of mournful music on trumpets and drums was also common.

The bodies of the poor would be taken to the house for the washing of the dead (gāsālī-kāna or mordāsāt(r)-kāna). Feqh prefers that the deceased be washed by a close relative of the same gender, and strictly speaking a fee may be charged only for certain supplementary services, not for the act of washing itself. The professional gāsālī or mordāsāt(r) has nonetheless been a universal and unquestioned institution. He even plays a role in seeking forgiveness for the deceased: saying al-tawf (forgiveness), he blows into a bowl of water known as kāsā-ye ‘afw, which he pours over the head of the deceased at the conclusion of the washing (Hedāyat, p. 73).

Other popular traditions include the placing of a Koran on the breast of the deceased immediately after expiration; leaving a glass of sherbet next to him in the hope that he will drink from the fountain of Kawṭar in paradise; carrying a leg of lamb and a quantity of ḫalvā in front of the corpse; and, on the first night of the deceased’s absence from his home (sām-e ġarābān), leaving a brick with a candle burning on it in the spot where he lay during his last hours. There are also numerous local funerary traditions. In Mahāsh, for example, the tābūt is carried around the tomb of Imam Rezā in order to gain his intercession for the deceased (Ṣākūrzāda, pp. 180-81).

Bibliography: Shi‘īte sources: Ḥorr ‘Āmeili,
specifed in Bahai law, the practice in Iran has been for a close relative, a friend, or the staff of the Bahai cemetery to wash the body with soap and water and then to anoint it with perfume ('atir), rose water, or similar essences. Washing may take place in the residence of the deceased, in a hospital, or at the cemetery. If the deceased was an adult, a burial ring is then placed on one of the fingers; it is inscribed, “I came forth from God, and return unto Him, detached from all save Him, holding fast to His Name, the Merciful, the Compassionate.” The body is wrapped in a shroud of white cotton or silk. The length and manner or wrapping are not specified; the shroud can be either a single piece of cloth or, if the family can afford it, as many as five pieces. The body is then placed in a coffin, which must be made of crystal, stone, or the hardest wood available.

The funeral service. Before interment of any person who has lived fifteen years or more an obligatory congregational prayer for the dead is to be recited; the recital of this prayer for children is, however, not prohibited. All the participants stand in silence while the prayer is spoken, but there are no further prescriptions for this part of the ceremony. Usually excerpts from Bahai writings and additional prayers are also read. The coffin is then placed in a grave or vault. The dimensions of the grave or the use of various kinds of vaults is left to the discretion of the family. The law states that it is more appropriate to assign an individual grave to every dead person. The law also requires that the body be buried so that the feet point toward ‘Akká (Acre), the qibla, or primary holy site, of the Bahais. The headstone may be inscribed with a nine-pointed star (the nine-pointed star being the numerical value of the word bahá’) and/or an appropriate extract from Bahai writings, in addition to the name of the deceased. After the interment a varied selection of Bahai writings may be read or recited at the graveside, but there is no fixed format. Funeral expenses are normally covered by the estate of the deceased, but, if the family does not have sufficient funds, it is the responsibility of Bahai institutions to offer financial assistance to provide a dignified funeral. Although memorial services are not obligatory, the Bahais of Iran do hold such gatherings if the family wishes; they may be held at any time after the funeral. At such a gathering the program usually consists of readings from Bahai writings and recitation of prayers for the progress of the deceased’s soul. Members of the family may also make charitable donations in the memory of the person who has died. If a non-Bahai desires a Bahai funeral, individual Bahais are permitted to conduct it, but Bahai institutions may not sponsor it.

Bahaic cemeteries. ‘Abd-ál-Bahá’ described the appearance of the Bahai cemetery (golestāne-ye jāvid, lit. eternal garden) in a letter to the spiritual assembly of the Bahais of Bombay: The cemetery should be bordered all around by trees; its beauty would be enhanced if it had a pool with a tree in its center, and each grave must be separate and have a flower bed on all four sides (Akhbār-e amrī, 12 Farvardin 1328 S./1 April 1949, pp. 5-6).

\*\*\*
Cemeteries can be purchased by Bahai communities, donated by individual Bahais, or sometimes granted by governments. Ideally there should be a Bahai-owned cemetery in each community, but circumstances do not always allow it. Sometimes plots are set aside in public cemeteries for Bahais. Bahai law does not prohibit burial of a Bahai in a non-Bahai cemetery or burial of non-Bahais in Bahai burial grounds.


(Vahid Rafati)

BURNES, ALEXANDER (1805-41), the fourth son of James Burnes, a Scottish lawyer, educated at Montrose Academy and appointed ensign in the Bombay Army in 1821. Burnes had a natural aptitude for languages, acquired a good knowledge of Hindustani and Persian, and qualified as an interpreter, in which capacity he served in Kutch in 1825. In the same year he transferred to the army staff, rising to become assistant quarter master general in 1828. In the following year he entered the political service as assistant to the Resident in Kutch, Henry Pottinger. In 1831, as an early step in a plan to expand British influence in central Asia, Burnes led a mission up the river Indus, through Sind to Lahore. Immediately afterwards he submitted a proposal, which was accepted, to conduct an exploratory mission to Afghanistan, Turkestan, and Iran. His account of this mission, carried out in 1832, was published in 1834 under the title Travels into Bukhara, ... At that time he was in London, acclaimed as a great explorer and awarded the Gold Medal of the Royal Geographical Society. Returning to Kutch in 1835, he conducted a second mission to Sind and in 1836 was chosen for a commercial mission to Kabul. Because of the conflict between Dōst Moḥammad, ruler of Kabul, and Ranjit Singh of Lahore and because of the Iranian attack on Herat in 1837 Burnes’s mission developed a political character, and he strove to find a compromise to settle the Sikh-Afghan dispute and also to unite the Afghan states against Iran. He failed and left Kabul in 1838 although he was knighted for his exertions. It was then decided that Britain should replace the Bārakzay rulers of Kabul and Qandahār with the former Sadōzay ruler of Afghanistan, Shah Šojā’-al-Molk, and Burnes accompanied the expedition to Afghanistan in 1839 as assistant to the envoy and minister, William Hay Macnaghten, leading missions to Upper Sind and Kalat. From 1839 until 1841 Burnes served in Kabul as deputy to Macnaghten and was engaged in collecting intelligence relating to Turkestan and assembling information concerning trade. Burnes was critical of the policy pursued in Afghanistan during these years and set out his views in a memorandum in 1840. His hopes of succeeding Macnaghten muted his criticisms, however. He was killed in the uprising in Kabul on 2 November 1841. Burnes was a clever, occasionally brilliant man, fond of reading and a gifted writer and conversationalist. His great weakness was his ambition.


(Malcolm E. Yapp)

BURNOUF, EUGÈNE (1801-52), virtually the founder of Iranian linguistics, as well as of the study of the history of Buddhism in France. He was born in Paris the son of a Hellenist and studied Sanskrit with de Chézy at the Collège de France; in 1829 he began to teach comparative grammar at the École Normale Supérieure, and in 1832 he replaced Chézy at the Collège de France. Although he continued to teach Sanskrit, he pursued his Indian and Iranian studies throughout his life.

Of Burnouf’s works in the field of Iranian linguistics, his most important publication is the Commentaire sur le Yasna (1833), in which he established the basis for understanding Avestan and for Iranian linguistics as a whole. The documents then at his disposal consisted only of four manuscripts of the Avesta, A. H. Arquerril-Duperron’s translation of the Pahāvī commentary (1771), and the 15th-century Sanskrit translation by the Parsi Nerosengh of this same commentary. Burnouf’s aim was to test these different translations and to understand the Avestan text. To do so, he relied on Nerosengh’s text and above all on his own knowledge of Sanskrit, Persian, and comparative grammar. His constant reference to Vedic Sanskrit inspired Burnouf with the intuition of what would later be labeled the “Indo-Iranian” branch of the Indo-European languages. He recognized concomitantly that, “in its present state, [Avestan] is a mixture of forms of varying age” (1833, p. 15). Commentaire sur le Yasna is at once a dictionary, a grammar of Avestan, and a commentary on the text of the Yasna. Burnouf succeeded in furnishing an improved though not yet definitive version of the Avestan alphabet; elucidating much of the vocabulary in the opening portion of the Yasna; and explaining a great many grammatical forms, as well as some of the contracted forms, of Avestan writing. In this process he established the place of Old Iranian within comparative