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Original Research Article

Comparative Study of the Gravestones of Qaleh Shadab of Dezful and Shahsavar of Izeh from the Perspective of Cultural Ecology

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Abstract

Introduction: Within the province of Khuzestan, situated amidst the Zagros Mountains, in two distinct regions approximately 250 kilometers apart, two cemeteries of the Bakhtiari people, despite sharing a common cultural foundation, exhibit significant differences in the structural form of the graves and their symbolic visual elements. These cemeteries, located in Izeh and Dezful, are known as «Shahsavar» and «Qaleh Shadab», respectively, and their similarities are primarily influenced by their proximity to each other. This research aims to understand the cultural foundations of these two cemeteries, as well as the nature and manner of their similarities and differences. The current research question is to explore the nature and reasons for these differences and similarities, and how they manifest from the perspective of cultural anthropology, drawing on Stewart's cultural ecology theory.

Research Method: This study, which falls under the ethnographic branches of qualitative research, is described and analyzed using a comparative method, leveraging semiotic knowledge and relying on visual evidence. The data for this study are derived from both field and library sources.

Findings: The cemetery of Shahsavar reflects the commemoration of significant figures and benevolents, warriors, and heroes with memorial environmental elements in the form of gravestones; whereas in the cemetery of Qaleh Shadab, these elements are somewhat ritualistic and related to mourning itself or the representation of the virtues of the deceased's life period in the form of more coherent visual narrative elements.

Conclusion: Based on what was derived from Steward's theory, the impact of the three concepts of Steward's bioregionalism theory—namely, adaptation, bidirectional causality, and the mutable cores of culture—was observed in the mourning rituals of these two locations. The environmental cultural elements manifested more prominently and distinctly in the symbolic aspects of both regions, which in turn led to a clear differentiation of the visual and symbolic aspects of these two areas. This reproduction of meanings occurs where, in the Shahsavar cemetery, the grand narrative of bravery, combined with the commemoration of the greats, is highlighted by the stony lion monument, while in the Qaleh Shadab cemeteries, life and its elements appear more pronounced.

Keywords

Gravestone, Cemetery, Stony Lion, Qaleh Shadab of Dezful, Shahsavar of Izeh, Khuzestan

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Introduction and Problem Definition

One type of stone carving is a gravestone. These works represent people's beliefs and thoughts regarding death and the afterlife. Similar to modern-day portraits, they introduce the deceased while also expressing the feelings of the survivors towards them. Gravestones, in addition to determining an individual's identity, contain symbols related to attributes, profession, gender, social status, personal interests, and the heartfelt sentiments of the survivors towards the deceased. Examples of what has been described are represented in two cemeteries from the Middle Zagros region within Khuzestan Province. Shahsavar of Izeh, approximately 400 years old, is one of these cemeteries where tribal memorials and symbolic elements are prominently displayed. Another cemetery is the Paqaleh Cemetery, located in Qaleh Shadab, the village of Islamabad, Shahyoun District, Dezful, which is over a hundred years old. Both cemeteries belong to people from the Bakhtiari tribe, who share a common ethnic and cultural background, and are located approximately 250 kilometers apart in two different places. The mountainous terrain, tribal culture, and similar climatic conditions are common elements in both studied regions. These two cemeteries, despite their similarities due to shared ethnic cultural concepts and clear distinctions arising from the culture and relationships of their locations, each have notable similarities with nearby interconnected places that align with Steward's ecological theory. In the present study, which examines the visual and symbolic elements of two cemeteries with a common tribal foundation but distinct differences, in addition to describing and analyzing the visual elements of these two places, questions regarding the nature and reasons for these differences and how they manifest from the perspective of cultural anthropology based on Steward's cultural ecology theory will be addressed by comparing the motifs of these two cemeteries.

Research Method

The approach of this research is qualitative, presenting its results by examining and comparing the motifs and symbolic elements of the tombs in the two regions: Shahsavar, Izeh, and Qaleh Shadab, Dezful. This analysis was conducted using a combination of semiotic knowledge and a comparative method; for this purpose, nearly 100 images of the stone tombs in the studied areas were collected. In this process, the images of each cemetery were categorized, structurally compared, and the engraved elements on them were examined and analyzed. The data for this research is a combination of field data, database, and library data. The final result is presented from the perspective of cultural anthropology, based explicitly on Steward's cultural ecology theory.

Research Background

There are numerous articles and theses on the topic of Iranian cemeteries, each focusing on a specific aspect of this subject. In this article, only the studies related to the topic are mentioned. In an article entitled «Semantic and Structural Analysis of Stone Paintings of Shahsavar Izeh Islamic Period Mausoleum», «Kolahkaj and Naderi» (2023) have categorized gravestones and interpreted the meanings derived from them as commemorating the significant and brave figures of that time. In a study entitled «Crowned Stony Lion: A type of Tombstones in the Islamic cemetery of Shahsavar, Izeh» «Mosavi Haji et al.,» (2023) stated: The installation of the stony lion was a source of pride and superiority for the tribe over other tribes, and if a tribe or clan unjustly and without meeting

the necessary conditions installed a stone lion on the grave of their deceased, they would immediately face a strong reaction from the elders of the Bakhtiari tribe, and the grave would be destroyed. This research has focused on the stony lions of the Shahsavar cemetery. In his master's thesis entitled «Intertextual Study of Bakhtiari Gravebstone Motifs», «Kazemi» (2016) has attempted to examine the intertextual connections of gravebstone motifs with their contexts, focusing on the stony lions and the carved gravestone designs of the Qaleh Shadab cemetery in Dezful. In a study entitled «Analyzing Designs and Patterns of Tombstones in Bozlar Hafshejan Cemetery and Sirak Armenian Cemetery with a Comparative-Analytical Approach (Emphasising on Plant and Animal Designs and Patterns)», «Ebrahimi Naghani and Khara Hafshejani» (2023) have stated that in the visual culture of the gravestones of «Bozlar» and «Sirak» in a single region with two different religions, the function of art and beauty prevails over specific religious biases, although the latter has a significant impact. In their article entitled «A Research on the Recognition of Types and Motifs of Graves in the Historical Cemeteries of the Samghan Village (Fars Province)», «Ashayeri et al.,» (2023) have stated that the visual symbols of this cemetery are rooted in the customs of ancient rituals, religious traditions, and specifically the traditions of Islam, the reputation (positive moral characteristics) of the deceased, cosmic concepts, nature concepts, and the afterlife, and they are a manifestation of the ideological, cultural, and religious issues prevailing in their time. In a thesis entitled «Comparative Study of the Stone Carvings in the Sousan and Shahsavar Region of Izeh and the Qaleh Shadab Area in Dezful Based on Feldman's Theories», «Sadeghi» (2023) has analyzed their meanings and symbolism at four general levels. In the article entitled «A Study on the Ritualistic Motifs of Gravestones in Hafshejan, in the Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province of Iran», «Mehrabi Hafshejani» (2016) has addressed the history and background of these gravestones, stony lions, and the connection of some elements of this cemetery with Iranian Armenian cemeteries. The distinguishing feature of this research, compared to previous studies — particularly the works of Naderi, Kolah-Kaj, and Kazemi, who have both independently examined this field of study — is the articulation of the similarities and differences in the symbolic elements and meanings associated with two geographical regions that share a common culture. However, the results of this article overlap with those of Sadeghi's thesis, which was supervised by the author. This article examines how the factor of location, or geography, and its related elements influence the culture, communication, materials, and cultural rituals of an individual or tribal community. On the other hand, examining the two subjects under study based on the theoretical concepts of cultural anthropology, beyond the structural analysis and the initial meanings of motifs or narratives, has revealed a new aspect of the semantic concepts related to human mourning.

Theoretical Foundations

This research is based on the theory of cultural ecology, a theory that highlights explicitly the role of place. Cultural ecology was first introduced by the American theorist Julian Haynes Steward in the early 1950s in his book entitled «Theory of Culture Change». The main idea of Steward's theory is as follows: «Similar and identical environments create identical or similar societies and cultures» (Steward, quoted in Fakouhi, 2007, 218). In Stewart's view, habitats are independent variables that influence the formation of similar cultural traits, lifestyles, and shared social systems. In his view, the theory of cultural ecology goes beyond the impact of habitats on human life. In this theory, three levels of adaptation, bidirectional causality, and the core of culture are considered essential.

Adaptation in this context does not mean the absolute subservience of culture to place; rather, this situation serves as a force that enhances human life. Additionally, the concept of bidirectional causality in Steward's cultural ecology theory refers to the reciprocal relationship between culture and environment, or, in other words, the interaction between humans and their environment. Finally, certain parts of the cultural core have a greater propensity to be influenced by the environment.

Shahsavar Cemetery

The cemetery and shrine of Shahsavar are situated in the village of Kahbad 1, in Izeh, approximately 8 kilometers from the city. This cemetery is one of the most numerous sites with stony lions in the Bakhtiari region (Kolahkaj & Naderi, 2023).



Fig 1. Overall view of the Shahsavar cemetery in the city of Izeh and the arrangement of its lions in the open space. Source: Sadeghi, 2023.

The Shahsavar cemetery has different shapes and sizes (Fig. 1). With a closer look at this cemetery, there are five types of graves, including simple stony lion graves (Fig. 2), combined stony lion with a crowned (crenellated) lying stone (Fig. 3), standing double-sided gravestones (Fig. 4), crowned (crenellated) lying gravestones (Figs. 7 & 8), and simple graves[1].



Fig. 2. The stony lion statue in the Shahsavar cemetery of Izeh. Source: Sadeghi, 2023.



Fig. 3. The stony lion statue (combined with the lying crowned stone) in the Shahsavar cemetery of Izeh features symbolic images behind the lion's foot and on the crown in front of the lion. Source: Sadeghi, 2023.

1. The Commemorative Gravestones of Shahsavar: The stony lions of the Shahsavar cemetery generally have round heads, neck manes, a primitive appearance, and often display defensive and aggressive postures (Kolahkaj & Naderi, 2023). The symbolic elements of the stony lions of Shahsavar are engraved on their sides. The special feature of this carving is the presence of elements and tools related to war and battle, alongside them

(Figs. 2 & 3). As seen in Fig. 3, the stony lion in this image is unique and is combined with a lying crowned gravestone, referred to as the crenelated stony lion (Mousavi Haji et al., 2023).

2. Standing Gravestones (Placed in Shahsavar cemetery): The shape of the standing stones in the Shahsavar cemetery is different and is often engraved on both sides. The side facing the grave of these stones frequently bears an inscription indicating the identity of the deceased. In contrast, the back side typically features an engraved image that often represents the character, beliefs, professional identity, interests, and gender of the individual during their lifetime (Kolahkaj & Naderi, 2023). The standing gravestones of Shahsavars are diverse, and six examples of them with various types of crowns have been counted. In terms of subject matter, the images on these stones fall into five categories: human figures, animals, religious objects, work objects, scenes of daily life, hunting, and defense. On these stones, images of a woman, child, ibex, lion, prayer stone, sandals (shoes or slippers), and tools of work, life, and hunting such as a comb, cricket, spinning tools (spindle or whorl), scissors, pitcher (basin), gun, sword, shield, dagger, stirrup, pistol, powder horn, and axe have been observed (Kolahkaj & Naderi, 2023). The standing gravestones, compared to stony lions and lying gravestones, appear more crude and primitive in terms of writing and decorations. In these examples, the main grave of the deceased is simple (without a lying stone), and stone piles surround some of them. However, one cannot overlook the modern graphic representation of the standing stone in Fig. 4, which shows both sides of the stone. Examples of crude images of standing tombstones are shown in Figs. 5 and 6, where symbolic elements are typically engraved on the stone.




Fig. 4. The inscription section of the standing stone. Facing the grave and the back side, source: Kolahkaj and Naderi, 2023.



Fig. 5. Standing stone with illustrated elements. Source: Kolahkaj and Naderi, 2023.



Fig. 6. Standing stone with illustrated elements. Source: Kolahkaj and Naderi, 2023.

The composition of the inscriptions on the standing stones and stony lions is inconsistent and varied. Also, among the graves of Shahsavar, the most picturesque are the standing gravestones first, followed by the stony lions.



Fig. 7. Lying stone with two crowns, where the second crown seems to indicate the grave of a woman. Source: Author.



Fig. 8. Lying stone with motifs, decorations, and inscriptions. Source: Kolahkaj and Naderi, 2023.



Fig. 9. Lying stone with motifs, decorations, and inscriptions. Source: Kolahkaj and Naderi, 2023.



Fig. 10. Lying stone with motifs, decorations, and inscriptions. Source: Kolahkaj and Naderi, 2023.

3. Single-Piece Crown-Topped Lying Tombstones (Cradle-Shaped): In some examples of this type of stone, except for the surface on top of the crown of some stones, most parts are worked on, and a complete set, including pictorial writing, frame, and margin, is present on various surfaces with specific protrusions (Kolahkaj & Nadri, 2023). These types of stones often vary in size, thickness, and material, and they feature a crown integrated at the top. The predominant type of crown on these stones is also diverse. Typically, the upper surface of these crowns features images of a parying stone and a comb, as well as similar motifs, giving them a resemblance to the tombstones of Bazlar Hafshejan in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari. Figures 7 to 10 are examples of this. Some of these crowns are short and thick, while others are long and thinner. Short crowns with nearly equal length and width stand out like a sculptural piece. Some of the other stones have tall crowns. The image of an ibex with elongated horns, a hunter, a pitcher, a double-sided and single-sided comb, a wheel-like shape, a star, and a tree-like image, which have not been previously found in the gravestones of this cemetery, constitutes the collection of images and symbolic elements of the lying stones in this cemetery. Overall, the lying stone carvings exhibit greater diversity in terms of execution methods and compositional decorations in this cemetery, which is evident in their designs, motifs, crowns, and, to some extent, their inscriptions. The decorations on the lying stones are visible in combination with their text and margins. Lying gravestones, compared to the other two types of gravestones in the Shahsavar cemetery, exhibit greater diversity.

Symbolic Elements of the Shahsavar Cemetery: The symbolic elements of the Shahsavar cemetery include animal symbols such as horses and ibexes; plant symbols like a tree resembling a palm; geometric symbols like stars and circular spokes; human symbols such as women, men, and children; symbols of objects and tools (professions) like combs, single-sided and double-sided combs, spindles (spinning wheel parts), pitchers, scissors, shoes (footwear), hookahs, and also symbols of warfare and bravery including guns, powder horns, pistols, shields, axes, daggers, and religious symbols like prayer stines, rosaries, prayer niches, and more. The symbol of the stony lion is a single stone lion and a combination with a crowned lying stone.

The Cemetery of the Qaleh Shadab (Shahyun, Dezful)

The castle (Qaleh) known as Shadab is situated above the village of Islamabad in the Shahyoun district of Dezful, 42 kilometers north of the city, east of the Dez Dam lake, and near the tourist village of Pamenar in the Shahyoun district of Dezful. The village of Islamabad in Qaleh Shadab has two old cemeteries located close to each other; the first is newer, and the second, known as the «Paqaleh Cemetery», is older. The location of Qaleh Shadab is at the geographical boundary of the Bakhtiari tribe's habitat with other tribes in Lorestan and Ilam provinces. This article focuses on the older cemetery, and its essential elements for discussion are the standing stone carvings, which, based on the recorded dates on some of the graves, date back more than a hundred years. This cemetery is situated on the sloping foothills of the castle, and its primary distinction from the Shahsavar cemetery is the lack of variety in its graves and the presence of images on the facing side of the graves. The stones of the Qaleh Shadab of Dezful cemetery include two types of standing and lying gravestones, which will be explained further (Figs. 11 & 12).



Fig. 11. View of the two cemeteries of Qaleh Shadab from the bottom of the castle. Source: Author.



Fig. 12. View of the two cemeteries of Qaleh Shadab from the foot of the castle down the slope. Source: Author.

1. Standing Gravestones (Vertical): The standing gravestones in the Qaleh Shadab cemetery are often rectangular with a curved shape at the top of the stone. Figure 13 of this cemetery, like the Shahsavar cemetery, represents a significant aspect of the social history of the local people. Some of the headstones in this cemetery are double-sided, with one side featuring inscriptions and the other side images. Visually, these stones are unique in their own right. In these gravestones, images are depicted with a specific technique and method on the side facing the grave. Despite the uniform visual style, a different narrative of the deceased's life is presented on them. In all these stones, which have an above-ground size of approximately 50 to 70 centimeters, the engraving of images has been carried out using a specific technique and method. Considering the number of graves and the region's population, it appears that this tradition of image-making has been prevalent for over a hundred years and has been pursued by a limited and specific, yet diverse, group of stone carvers.

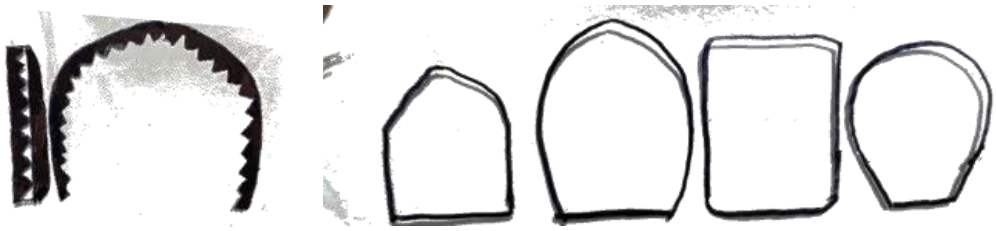


Fig. 13. Examples of margin decorations and some of the crowns from the Shahsavar cemetery. Source: Author.

The image engraved on each of these stones is quite different and represents the life cycle of the deceased. On some of the stones, individuals are depicted riding horses, hunting, and others performing the ritual ceremony of Kotal. What is common in most of the gravestones in Qaleh Shadab is the presence of organized human chains, which «Masouri» has also mentioned (Masouri, 2017, 85). The interesting point of this ritual is the different designs on three different stones. The details of these images can be seen in the collection of images in Fig. 14. It is worth mentioning that the tradition of the inhabitants of this region, the Bakhtiari people, has been influenced by the culture of the northern part of the Central Zagros, particularly areas such as Ilam and Lorestan. The overall design of some of the human figures in this cemetery resembles specific human images from the Elamite period and is similar to some pre-fourth-millennium vessels found in Susa. On these gravestones, images of women have been observed. In Fig. 15, which appears to depict a woman's grave, all the symbols are feminine; even the performers of the mourning ritual, «Ra Ra», are women. The central image on this stone is a carpet loom. Images of women's activities, such as weaving carpets and dhurrie rugs, and the depiction of dairy processing products, like buttermilk (shown with an image of a three-legged musk), and poultry farming (the image of a chicken on top of this stone), are some of the symbols engraved on this stone. Like the cemetery of Shahsavar and some other areas, the image of a hookah or pitcher has been a symbol of hospitality. The style of the stone carvers in this region has been, like the methods of thousands of years ago, abstract and enigmatic, as seen in Iranian stone carvings. At first glance, some of the visual elements of these stones are similar to those found in the graves of people living in the Zagros region, and traces of these elements have also been discovered in the artifacts of the Bakhtiari nomads from this area. On the headstones, various and different motifs can be seen; for example, the depiction of a man on horseback with a sword in hand or at his waist often indicates that the deceased was a warrior or hunter. The depiction of the horse in this cemetery appears in three forms: The horse as the mount of the hunter, the horse in the ritual ceremony of Kotal, and the horse combined with a tree. The presence of this symbol in three different applications indicates the significance of this role within the tribe's community. The role of the ibex is also represented in three distinct forms, and the depiction of the «Ra Ra» ceremony is observed in two types of images: Feminine and masculine. The depiction of the ibex, with its distinctive horizontal horns, is another symbol of this cemetery. Plant clusters resembling wheat in this cemetery seem to symbolize the deceased's status as a farmer. The symbol of fire in some graves is likely a sign of a skilled blacksmith or a lit hearth, indicating a large family or the continuation of the deceased's lineage. Figure 16 is another gravestone, the center of which features an image of a hunter, with the name of the deceased inscribed above it, and the date likely corresponding to around the year 1306 A.H., which corresponds to 1267 in the Solar Hijri calendar. In the standing stones, the main feature of the deceased is visible in the center of

the stone, while other features of theirs are depicted in the margins. The image of the kotal was usually engraved on the graves of men who held a high social status. In the depiction of the mourning ritual of Kotal on several gravestones, a pedestrian sometimes holds the reins of two horses between two riders, or occasionally holds the reins of one rider's horse (Fig. 17). In some other stones, the Kotal ceremony has been held alongside the «Mafe» memorial (a stone pile memorial for the deceased). This stone pile was square-shaped (Fig. 18). Notably, circular and round examples, such as «Mafe», have also been observed in the cemetery of Shahsavar. Figure 19, which appears to be a woman's grave, is organized with a creative combination of the warp and weft patterns of a carpet and an organized writing style. This stone is one of the most unique gravestones in Qaleh Shadab. At the top of Fig. 20, two ibexes are eating a plant, and in the middle, there is an image of a hookah, a horseman, and a figure resembling a table set for hospitality. At the bottom, like most gravestones in this cemetery, the «Ra Ra» ritual is depicted.



Fig. 14. The «Ra Ra» ceremony with an image of a woman and a man selected from three different stones of the Qaleh Shadab cemetery. Source: Kazemi, 2016.



Fig. 15. The standing stone of the cemetery of Qaleh Shadab, with a central motif of a carpet loom and female weavers. Source: Kazemi, 2016.



Fig. 16. An example of a standing stone from the cemetery of Qaleh Shadab. Source: Kazemi, 2016.



Fig. 17. Standing stone of the cemetery of Qaleh Shadab. Source: Kazemi, 2016.



Fig. 18. An example of a standing stone from the cemetery of Qaleh Shadab, with a square-like image that is probably a Mafe, and during the Kotal ceremony, people circle



Fig. 19. An example of a standing stone from the cemetery of Qaleh Shadab appears to be a combination of carpet patterns and inscriptions. Source: Kazemi, 2016.



Fig. 20. An example of a standing stone from the cemetery of Qaleh Shadab, with what appears to be an image of a tablecloth. Source: Kazemi, 2016.

around it. Source: Kazemi, 2016.





Figs. 21 & 22. An example of standing and lying combined stones in the cemetery of Qaleh Shadab. Source: Kazemi, 2016.

2. Lying Gravestones of Qaleh Shadab (Horizontal): The horizontal or lying gravestones in the Qaleh Shadab cemetery usually include information about the deceased. Words such as «deceased», followed by the name of the deceased, «son» or «child», or the phrase «from the tribe» (indicating tribal affiliation), and the date, which is typically recorded in the lunar calendar, are inscribed on these gravestones. The remaining inscriptions have varied according to the circumstances of the deceased. Figures 21 and 22 are three examples of horizontal inscribed gravestones. These gravestones have been placed freely without mortar on the graves. In this region, due to high erosion, most of the lying tombstones are fragmented, displaced, or illegible, and more standing gravestones are prominent. In the cemetery of Qaleh Shadab, the lying gravestones are mostly inscribed and represent the identity of the deceased. Linear or inscribed gravestones refer to those where only inscriptions and border lines are visible in their carving. In this type of stone, simple and unadorned inscriptions are used. Most of these gravestones in Qaleh Shadab consist of three parts: The headstone, the main text, and the margin. In some of the gravestones, inscriptions and writings serve as supplementary information, which are primarily found in the margins of the central motifs.

Symbolic Visual Elements of the Qaleh Shadab Cemetery: The images of the Qaleh Shadab cemetery include animal symbols such as horses, ibexes, and a reptilian creature resembling a lizard (possibly a monitor lizard), poultry, and birds; plant symbols like a tree resembling a palm (with a bent-tipped branch and a square-shaped root) and a wheat ear; human symbols such as men and women; object and tool symbols (occupations) including a comb, a one-sided and two-sided comb, possibly a mirror or an upside-down cup, a carpet weaving comb, a pitcher, scissors, a shoe (footwear), a hookah, a cradle, a scale, a three-legged musk stand (Malar), a carpet loom, fire; warrior and bravery symbols like a gun, a spear, a pistol, an axe, and a shield; and religious and devotional symbols like a prayer rug and prayer beads.

Comparison of the Similarities and Differences between Two Cemeteries

Continuing the discussion, the similarities and differences between the two cemeteries will be examined based on the types of graves, crowns, decorations, embellishments, and their symbolic elements. As previously mentioned, the Shahsavar cemetery has five types of graves, whereas in the Qaleh Shadab cemetery, we encounter one type of grave, sometimes accompanied by one or two types of standing and lying stones. In Table 1, the overall structure of the two cemeteries in question is compared. The difference between these two cemeteries lies in the four types of stones, while their similarity lies in the standing stones.

Table 1. Structural comparison of two cemeteries. Source: Author.

Similarities and Differences	Qaleh Shadab	Shahsavar
Similarity: The similarity between the two cemeteries lies in the standing stones with images and inscriptions, which also have distinctions from each other. **Distinction:** The Shahsavar cemetery has five types of graves, two of which are in stony lions, including single stony lions and combined stony lions with a lying stone (with crenellations). Additionally, Shahsavar has standing and lying gravestones with crowns as well as simple ones.		   

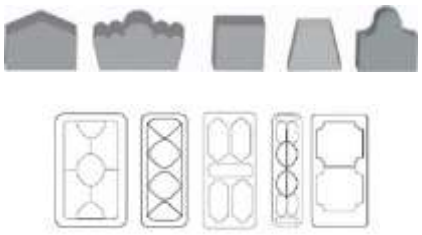
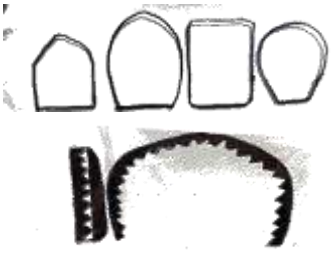
1. Comparison of the Narrative Structure and Visual Arrangement of Symbolic Elements of Two Cemeteries: The comparative narrative structure of the two cemeteries is depicted in Table 2. In the Shahsavar cemetery, diversity and variety are evident in some of the graves, as seen in the stony lion statues' structure, the design of the decorations on the lying stones, and the single image associated with the altar, as well as the graphic praying stone. In contrast, the narrative structure of the standing stones in the Qaleh Shadab cemetery is depicted with more diverse and primitive elements and symbols. However, one cannot easily overlook the visual value of the combined stone with the motif and inscription in Fig. 19 of the Qaleh Shadab cemetery, just as one should not ignore the graphic and creative nature of Fig. 4 in the Shahsavar cemetery. The stones in the Qaleh Shadab cemetery are more pictorial and have a more suitable narrative structure. In contrast, in the Shahsavar cemetery, the visual elements are often layered over each other, resulting in less visual continuity in the images.

Table 2. Comparison of the narrative structure of the standing stones' images from two cemeteries. Source: Author.

Shahsavar	Qaleh Shadab
	
Similarity: Some elements related to the deceased, such as a comb and scissors, are common elements in these two cemeteries. **Distinction:** The narrative trend of images and composition in the Shahsavar gravestones is scattered, but in the Qaleh Shadab gravestones, they are interconnected, and the symbolic elements are dispersed throughout the entire surface of the stone**.**	

2. Comparison of Elements and Decorations of Two Cemeteries: As seen in Table 3, in the Shahsavar cemetery, there is greater diversity in the shapes of standing and lying stones; additionally, the decorations and embellishments of the Shahsavar cemetery's lying stones have a suitable execution quality, which stands out and is distinct compared to the rough craftsmanship of some of the standing stones in this cemetery. In the Qaleh Shadab cemetery, the structures of the standing and lying stones are often uniform, and in a few cases, diverse. The embellishments on the Qaleh Shadab gravestones are visible on the edges of the standing stones, exhibiting relative diversity in execution, and are a function of the visual and geometric shapes of some images in this collection. In the Qaleh Shadab cemetery, the engraving, pictorial, and symbolic narration on the standing stones make them appear as interconnected elements with a unified visual identity; however, in the Shahsavar cemetery, this aspect is evident in the stone lions and the lying stones. From this perspective, apart from the engravings on the standing stones, there is not much similarity between the two cemeteries.

Table 3. Comparison of structural form and decorations. Source: Author.

Shahsavar	Qaleh Shadab
	
Similarity: The two cemeteries share standing stones with images and inscriptions. **Distinction:** The diversity of shapes and inscriptions in the Shahsavar cemetery is numerous; however, in the Qaleh Shadab cemetery, most of the stones are identical. Additionally, the standing stones of the Shahsavar	

graves have images on the back side and inscriptions on the grave side, while the lying stones with crowns have inscriptions on the lying side and images on the standing side.

3. Comparison of the Structure of the Script and Writing of Two Cemeteries: The writing structure of the two cemeteries is presented in Table 4. As seen in this table, the script of the text in these two cemeteries does not follow a specific rule and appears to be from scripts known as Molamahali scripts (Mehrabi Hafshejani, 2016). Additionally, although these scripts are used decoratively in the Shahsavar cemetery, they are primarily employed in simple designs in the Qaleh Shadab cemetery. In some of the standing inscriptions of Qaleh Shadab, writing designs are also observed, and no significant difference in script has been noted between the writings of these two cemeteries.

Table 4. Comparison of the writings of two cemeteries. Source: The author.

Shahsavar		Qaleh Shadab	
			

Similarity: The inscriptions of the two cemeteries are similar in that they do not follow a specific script; also, their horizontal and vertical applications are quite alike.
Distinction: In the Shahsavar cemetery, some inscriptions are placed among various motifs and designs, whereas in the Qaleh Shadab cemetery, an example of this has been found.

4. Visual Comparison of Some Symbolic Elements of the Two Cemeteries: The symbolic elements of the two cemeteries are shown with image cuts in Table 5, and their similarities and differences are described and analyzed in front of each table.

Table 5. Comparison of the symbolic elements of the stones in two cemeteries. Source: Author.

Animal Symbols	
Qaleh Shadab	**Shahsavar**
	
Similarity: The depiction of a horse exists in both regions; however, in the Shahsavar cemetery, the horse is seen without a rider, while in the Qaleh Shadab cemetery, it is depicted with a hunter and as a motif combined with a tree. **Distinction:** The depiction of a ram, ibex, an unknown reptilian creature, and a bird resembling a chicken are among the symbols, along with another bird seen in the of Qaleh Shadab cemetery. In the Shahsavar cemetery, a depiction of a lion lying on a grave has also been observed.	
Plant Symbols	
Qaleh Shadab	**Shahsavar**
	
Similarity: No similarity **Distinction:** The motif of the tree in the Shahsavar cemetery is seen as a main element and frequently appears in various forms on the stones, whereas in Shahsavar, there is only one image of the tree.	
Geometrical Symbols	
Qaleh Shadab	**Shahsavar**
Not Image	
Similarity: No similarity **Distinction:** In the Shahsavar region, geometric motifs in the form of stars and wheel-like shapes are observed, whereas in the Qaleh Shadab cemetery, they are seen as margin decorations with a different execution style.	
Human Symbols	
Qaleh Shadab	**Shahsavar**



Similarity: No similarity
Distinction: The human motif in the Shahsavar region is individual and as a grave of a brave and warrior man. However, in the Qaleh Shadab cemetery, the human motif is as a hunter, participating in the (Kotal) ceremony, and group participation in the ritual symbol «Ra Ra». In the Shahsavar cemetery, the man symbolizes warrior spirit and bravery, depicted with cold and hot weapons, whereas in the Qaleh Shadab cemetery, he is seen in ceremonial and hunting contexts. In the Shahsavar cemetery, the image of a woman is presented as a symbol of the female grave; whereas, in the Qaleh Shadab cemetery, the housewife participating in the ritual ceremonies is depicted alongside elements related to homemaking.

Objects and Tools Symbols

Qaleh Shadab	**Shahsavar**



Similarity: Some of the symbols in the two cemeteries, such as the comb, scissors (weaving symbol), carpet weaving comb (weaving symbol), hookah (symbol of hospitality), and pitcher (symbol of hospitality), as well as the men's sandal (next to the prayer mark symbolizing worship), are similar in the two cemeteries in question.
Distinction: In the Qaleh Shadab cemetery, symbols such as the carpet loom, scale (symbol of justice or trade), cradle (possibly indicating the deceased had children), and three-legged musk (malar) differ, with three of these symbols being feminine and the scale likely being masculine. Additionally, a carpet weaving comb has been seen in the hands of a weaver woman in the Qaleh Shadab cemetery, and the presence of a fire symbol (possibly representing the extinguishing of a hearth) or burning and mourning; furthermore, a lit fire could also symbolize hospitality.

Battle and Barvory Symbol

Qaleh Shadab	Shahsavar
	
	

Similarity: Tools of hunting and daily life, such as axes and guns, have been seen in both cemeteries.
Distinction: The tools of the Shahsavar cemetery are a combination of the triad of warfare, the bravery of the hunter, and the man of labor; whereas the symbols of the Shahsavar cemetery are hunting and labor.

Religious Symbols

Qaleh Shadab	Shahsavar
	 

Similarity: The prayer stone and rosary are both religious symbols in the cemetery.
Distinction: In the Shahsavar cemetery, a combination of a prayer stone, prayer beads, a prayer rug, a mihrab, and a standing prayer shoe (Sandals) has been observed.

Discussion

The two cemeteries of Shahsavaran in Izeh and Qaleh Shadab in Dezful, situated in the central Zagros region and within the province of Khuzestan, belong to the Bakhtiari tribe. The Bakhtiari people of Izeh, due to geographical conditions, are connected to the cold regions of Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari province. In contrast, the Bakhtiari-inhabited areas of Dezful are connected to the neighboring provinces of Ilam, Lorestan, and the cold borders of these regions. In fact, Qaleh Shadab, located in the north of Khuzestan, is the border where the Bakhtiari tribe merges with other ethnic groups. Given these communication conditions, the two cemeteries under discussion, despite some similarities including symbolic elements that are sometimes shared with other regions of the country, have a clear distinction from each other. The Shahsavar cemetery, which has an Elamite relief

overlooking it on the mountain above. Some of the earliest graves stand out as significant volumetric and environmental monuments, with their carvings and inscriptions being secondary. In contrast, the narrative and ritual display of the Qaleh Shadab cemetery are among its most distinctive features. The Shahsavar cemetery features various volumetric and structural elements, which suggest that the owners of these graves were affluent individuals. The reason is likely due to its proximity to the city of Izeh, one of the most important areas inhabited by the Bakhtiari people in Iran. This city is the connecting link for the Bakhtiari people of Khuzestan Province, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, Isfahan, and to some extent, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad. Additionally, in the past few centuries, when the central Safavid and Zand governments were close to this city, Izeh had become a prominent political and tribal center. Conflicts between government forces and tribes, as documented in historical records, and intra-tribal conflicts in this region, particularly during the Qajar period, along with the struggles of tribes and nomads over territory and pasture, have led to various social events in this city. It is evident that in such a context, the status and rank, the elders of the tribe, the hosts, the benefactors, the warriors, the brave, the self-sacrificers, the mediators, the martyrs, and the champions of the tribe are prominent and distinguished. With such illustrious ancestors and their burial in a cemetery like Shahsavar, this cemetery has been distinguished as a warriors' cemetery in comparison to the Qaleh Shadab cemetery. The multitude of stony lions and the abundance of weapons are some of the evidence for this claim; additionally, according to the people of Izeh, some stone carvers from Hafshejan, who have an eight-hundred-year history in this craft, have been present in this region. The combination of these factors and the significance of Izeh and its surroundings seem to have led to the diversity of the graves in this region, such that some of the stones, including the lying crowned stones and the engravings of the Izeh cemetery, such as the wheel motif, are similar to those in the «Bozlar» cemetery of Hafshejan. On the other hand, the simplicity and uniformity in the shape of the graves in the Qaleh Shadab cemetery are likely derived from its strategic fortress-like location and seem to be influenced by the site of this cemetery and the connection of these people with the people of Lorestan province and the Bakhtiari residents, as well as the neighboring provinces of Ilam and Lorestan. The primitive, abstract, and pristine nature of the images in the Qaleh Shadab cemetery is one of its most essential characteristics. Written information (information and personal identity of the deceased) combined with decoration is another characteristic of it. The motifs in this region are more diverse, and the details (vegetal, human, animal, written) in the lying gravestones are much more extensive. Another difference between the two cemeteries is the large number of stony lions in the Shahsavar cemetery. The stony lions were used for men. The central motifs for men are those related to the concepts of hunting and warfare, including depictions of horses, ibexes, and predatory animals. The distinctive feature of the Mazarestan of Qaleh Shadab is the presence of ritual symbols and elements of life, such as the loom, poultry, fire, scales, and other ritual concepts. One of the similarities of these two cemeteries is the ability to understand the gender of the gravestones from the images and symbolic elements. One of the other similarities in both cemeteries (Qaleh Shadab and Shahsavar) lies in the realm of motifs (shield, sword, spear, gun, dagger, and axe for men, and scissors, carpet weaving comb, and hair comb for women). Since the subject of this research is a comparative study of the cemeteries of the Bakhtiari ethnic group with a shared culture in two different locations within a common area, but with a significant distance, different elements have been used in the cemeteries of these two regions, which are more influenced by the environmental, spatial, and regional culture of their residence. Therefore, based on Stewart's assertion that

similar and identical environments create communities with the same culture, in the cemeteries of these two regions with a common ethnic background, the symbolic elements and style of the cemeteries have followed the spatial element first and then the ethnic element. The changes observed in cemeteries are consistent with Stewart's tripartite theory. First, the spatial similarity of the Qaleh Shadab cemetery, located on the borders of the Bakhtiari region, reveals a lack of absolute conformity with the culture of neighboring areas, such as Lorestan and Ilam. Similarly, the similarity of the gravestones in Izeh indicates a lack of absolute conformity with neighboring areas such as the Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari regions. For example, the presence of concepts such as work, effort, and community service in both cemeteries, with different execution methods in each location, indicates a lack of absolute adherence to the local culture, which aligns with Stewart's concept of non-conformity. On the one hand, the factor of bidirectional causality, referring to the relationship between culture and environment, is considered a bidirectional relationship, or, in other words, the interaction between the environment and humans. This seems to have been realized in the two cemeteries, and examples of this are the narrative images of the Qaleh Shadab cemetery, similar to the surrounding areas, as well as the symbolic and commemorative elements of the stony lion at the Shahsavar cemetery, which align with the culture of the neighboring regions and are consistent with Stewart's discussion of bidirectional causality. Additionally, the cultural practices of mourning among the Bakhtiari people in the Qaleh Shadab region have changed the materials, resources, and artisans (stone carvers) available in that area, which has manifested differently in the Shahsavar cemetery. For example, some of the gravestones in Shahsavar did not have satisfactory execution quality due to the lack of skilled stone carvers like those in Hafshejan, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari. This is also in accordance with Stewart's theory, where he states that the part of the cultural core that has a greater propensity for change adapts in the new location. In this situation, the physical formal elements of the ethnic group have changed more than the semantic concepts.

Conclusion

From the comparison of the Shahsavar cemetery in Izeh and the Qaleh Shadab in the Dezful area, with people from the Bakhtiari tribe and a shared cultural foundation, it was concluded that despite some similarities in the symbols of the two regions, there is a clear difference in the structure and symbolic elements of these two cemeteries. The structural and symbolic aspects of these two cemeteries are similar to the cultural and environmental elements of the cemeteries and other nearby areas. Shahsavar cemetery reflects the commemoration of elders, benefactors, hosts, warriors, and heroes with memorial ecological aspects, including gravestones. In contrast, in the Qaleh Shadab cemetery, these elements are somewhat ritualistic, related to mourning, with a representation of the virtues of the deceased's life period through coherent and continuous visual narrative elements, and somewhat the concept of life and affinity with its elements, such as fire, trees, birds, and child-rearing, is evident. As mentioned in the research text, while it is expected that due to shared cultural roots, structural, visual, and symbolic similarities would prevail in these two cemeteries, the content of the symbolic elements in the Qaleh Shadab of Dezful cemetery resembles nearby and related regions such as Ilam and Lorestan, while the content of the images and symbols in the Shahsavar of Izeh cemetery is similar to its nearby areas, such as Hafshejan in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari and the like. Although these two nations share cultural sources and almost identical meanings, the grand narrative of the Shahsavar of Izeh

cemetery is one of bravery, warfare, and heroism, whereas in the Qaleh Shadab of Dezful cemetery, this grand narrative is life, depicted in a naive technique and manner that resembles childlike illustration. This conclusion is noteworthy in the temporal and spatial context of the two subjects under study. The connective context of Qaleh Shadab, despite its proximity to Dezful, has been somewhat more mountainous and is located at the foot of a fortress-like castle, which has been significant in preserving that castle; whereas the Shahsavar ce,etery, due to the movement and settlement of various tribes of the Bakhtiari tribe, has somewhat served as a tribal center. The findings of this research align with Steward's theory, which states that environmental and spatial culture have a greater long-term impact on people's lives compared to shared tribal and ethnic culture. The influence of the three concepts of Steward's ecological theory—namely, adaptation, bidirectional causation, and mutable cultural cores—was observed in the mourning rituals of these two locations. The environmental cultural elements had a clear, distinct, and meaningful impact on the symbolic elements of both regions. This led to a noticeable differentiation in the visual and symbolic elements of the two studied areas, reproducing meanings where, in the Shahsavar cemetery, the grand narrative of bravery and the display of tribal leaders' authority were prominent, while in the Qaleh Shadab cemetery, life and its elements were more pronounced.

Author Contributions

This study had no contributors other than the author.

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Conflict of Interest

The author (s) declare that there are no potential conflicts of interest related to this research, in writing, and publication of this article

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Appendix

1. «Mousavi Haji et al.» have divided the stones of this cemetery into five categories with slight differences, as mentioned here (Mousavi Haji et al., 2023); however, «Kolahkaj and Naderi»in their research mentioned three types of garves for the Shahsavar cemetery (Kolahkaj & Naderi, 2023), the reason being the categorization of stony lions and the exclusion of simple garves.

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