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Fig.7. Waterfalls, animal rites or holy sprinklers. Source : safarnewes.com.



Fig.8. Masks found in the Kalmakra Cave. Source : tripyor.com.

identity of the Mithraeum in Kalmakare.

## Conclusion

Regarding natural geographical characteristics including Mithraism elements such as rocky mountain, the fig tree at the cave entrance, and water implying the birth of Mehr, this cave has been named Kalmakare. Therefore, the impassable calcareous cave not preferable for living became one of the most significant Mithraism Mithraeum in the second half of the first millennium BC. The large number of objects, variety and aesthetic delicacy of ritual vows and sacrifices to the Kalmakare Mithraeum has led to excelling ritual art in later centuries. These features have also developed Mithraism in the area. Hence, later, the area Mithraism identity has emerged in the name of Mehrgan Kuh.

Unfortunately, it is unclear how Kalmakare Mithraeum has declined. However, it seems that it has been gradually ruined in the age of Parthian once Pol-e Dokhtar, and temples of Mehr and Anahita emerged in 'Vizenhar Mountain'. Proponents of Mithraism including Gavkosh tribe have largely tried to save this desolated Mithraeum over centuries so that the mysterious privacy of Kalmakare is kept from any attack and violation.

## Endnotes

\*.The present article is based on the "An Approach to the Traditional Function of Kalmakare Cave" workshop which has been held by the author's lecture in 2018 at Nazar Research Center.

- 1.To verify the hypothesis, refer to the etymology of Kalmakare.
2. For more information on Ghazanfari attitudes, refer to Kalmakare Mithraism characteristics.
- 3.Toponymy
4. phyto toponym
5. zoo toponym
6. mytho toponym
7. theo toponym
8. For more information on Mithraism religious leaders
9. According to Motamedi, on the cave humidity, the heat in the cave was 33-39° and the humidity was 75% except the second hall during summer 1992.

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or springs) in the cave have been emphasized because it was necessary for ablution. Over the demeanour, the devotees were passed through dark corridors naked while their hands and eyes have been closed; then, they were suddenly thrown into the water. And one of the devotees freed him (Coman, 2001; Razi, 1980). Ablution ceremony with difficult testing of passing maze-like corridors was incredibly correlated with passing from the first hall to the second hall of Kalmakare. In Mithraism natural caves, the rocks were often used rather than the Mehr cow killing sculpture (Lavani, 2006). Several amazing stalagmite rocks in the halls, especially the second, may signify cow sacrificing in the Kalmakare Cave (Fig.6).

### **Traditional function of objects in Kalmakare**

Of total 117 gold wares and silverware, dishware, glasses, cups, piped pitchers, amphora, Raytheons, animal and man sculptures, as well as masks listed in Kalmakare by Khosravi, about 90 objects have been reported to serve a ritual-ceremonial function (Khosravi, 2013). Among animals symbolizing Mehr, lion, bull and eagle can be noted in addition to antelope (Razi, 1980; Ferray, 2006). Of the listed objects, 13 antelopes, 8 bulls and two eagles have been recorded (Khosravi, 2013) (Fig.7). Sculpture of the lion fighting a bull- similar to the eastern relief in Persepolis- (Ibid; 67) among other objects in the cave quietly associates bull sacrifice in Mithraism. Masculine presence of the goddess and the archer soldier (Ibid: 93) along with the absence of any human sculpture or symbols of Anahita or other goddesses might be other reason revealing that Kalmakare has been a Mithraeum.

There have been found 10 golden masks in Kalmakare. Kaboli and Khosravi, examining the faces, believe that the masks have been fixed on the wooden sculptures (Kaboli, 1991; Khosravi & et al., 2014:47). Khosravi attributes -masks to the mysterious Mithraism and explains “Mithraism people attended in the public ritual ceremony of the Mehr birthday while wearing



Fig.6. Interiors of Kolmakrar Pvdhkhtar Cave. Source : tasnimnews.com.

animal masks” (Khosravi & et al., 2014: 160). It seems that masks in the Kalmakare referred to the second stage of spiritual progress i.e. veiled where at this step of spiritual progress, Mithraism young people attended in the ceremonies wearing mask (Razi, 1980: 102).

Apparently, the common western masquerade ball custom might have been inspired from Mithraism as Mithraism has prevailed throughout Rome Empire for over 5 centuries. Over decades, the tradition has remained and changed into Christianity customs (Javadi, 2017) (Fig. 8).

As Kaboli reported, one of the most damaged works was two silver winged antelopes with the normal size in the cave. The antelopes were standing facing each other, holding hands up, and guarding the sacred life tree (Kaboli, 1991: 30).

Parham, studying the damaged monuments, pointed out that one of the antelopes has been quietly broken into the pieces but only its thigh, as large as the sheep thigh, has remained safe (Parham, 2013). Aziz Gavkosh claims that there was a relief, with similar size and form, engraved on stone in Kalmakare, which has been destroyed by local people (Beyranvandi, 2012: 31).

According to Parham, this silverware is the most precious and honorable objects in Kalmakare, which is unique over the 10 thousand years of Iranian history (Parham, 2013: 116). There has been found a silver inscription, too (Ibid: 117). It spears that this artistic outstanding relief can be viewed as the most critical

Mehrjan Ghazagh has been forgotten since 9th century (Gholghashandi, 1987:368).

The meaning of Mehrgan kade, and the traditional background of this region namely its in convergence with Christianity (as the continuity of Mithraism in the 5th century) show that Mithraism symbols can be explored in the Mehrgan kade. It is worth notifying that Anahita temples, serving as female shrines, have been established around or in the vicinity of Mehr temples, which belonged to the men (Javadi, 2007: 14; Coman, 2001: 177; Motamedi, 1994: 10). Among the Mehr temples around Kalmakare, man-made Gokan cave- 8 km Khorramabad road to Kermanshah at Balagariveh-can be mentioned (Ghazanfari, 1997; Izadpanah, 1998). However, so far, there has been reported no indications of Anahita around Gokan; while, at 6 km west Meleh Mountain and Kalmakare Cave, an interesting Mehr temple has been situated in Kahzad castle. Anahita temple exists outside the castle in the Vizenhar Mountain (Motamedi, 1994: 9; Geographical Atlas of National Mountains, 2000: 246 & 251). It appears that the extant temples of Mehr and Anahita in Vizenhar Mountain may largely contribute in discovering the relationship between Pol-e Dokhtar and Kalmakare.

Pol-e Dokhtar's full name is Pol-e Keruo Dokhtar. It is a romance story of love between a boy and girl on both sides of the Kashkan River. Finally, a bridge has been built over the river on the order of King to connect the two lovers. That is why this bridge is called 'Keruo Dokhtar' or 'boy and girl' (Izadpanah, 1989: 35/2). The term 'Kor' indicating 'boy' has been eliminated from the the name of the bridge over time. Hence, the bridge has been known as Pol-e Dokhtar that has been considered, by scholars, as the place of Anahita worship. They argued the name of daughter and the meaning of Kashkan River derived from the term 'Kizh', which means 'daughter' in Kurdish. In the past, the river has been called 'Kazhaki River'- 'the Daughter River' (Saki, 1964: 179; Bastani parizi, 1997; Goviri, 2000; Hezhar, 1997). However, some scholars (like Ghazanfari) relying on the full name of 'Kerou Dokhtar' bridge have assigned it to Mehr

temple and the place of denotation (Ghazanfari, 1997). Apparently, the term 'Kor' (boy) has been excluded as Kalmakare has been used as Mithraeum. This word is used together with the temple.

### **Traditional geography of Kalmakare**

In addition to the Kashkan River and Pol-e Dokhtar down the Kalmakare, other traditional geography surrounding Kalmakare may embrace several monuments including Babzeid at 8 km north of Pol-e Dokhtar, the tomb of Baba Kharazm<sup>8</sup>, and the scope of Gavkosh descent from Gavkosh village to the dry and unfertilized land of Darebagh referred as 'Dare Begh' (Izadpanah, 1989: 42; Ghazanfari, 1989: 3; Motamedi, 1994: 5; Parviz, 2006: 111).

### **Haft kani**

Haft kani, the closest symbol of Mehr and Nahid to Kalmakare, has been situated at the top of a strait where Kalmakare cave is located at east. Haft Kani is of large extended lands covered with massive vegetation with some springs running at the top of Meleh Mountain. According to Ghazanfari, number '7' and the word 'Kani' symbolize Mehr over Kalmakare (Ghazanfari, 1989: 5 & 28). However, if 'Kani' means 'Daughter'; then, it would associate symbol of Anahita.

### **Mithraism symbols in Kalmakare cave**

Due to unauthorized drilling that not only destructed historical documents and evidences, but also ruined the natural cave surrounding, it is really hard to study Mithraism symbols in the Kalmakare Cave. The primary cave area has been totally destroyed by smugglers (Motamedi, 1994). The first hall approaches the second through a corridor. The second hall is 15 m lower than the cave entrance; hence, it is less wet and humid<sup>9</sup> and habitable (Motamedi, 1994). The hall total area is 740 m<sup>2</sup> with 8-15 m height. Ghazanfari described the second hall as significant, important and wonderful with natural symbols such as waterholes(Ghazanfari, 1989).

In Mithraism, the existence of water (e.g. in waterholes





Fig.4. Muzzle. Source : [www.yjc.ir](http://www.yjc.ir).

powered. Further, she wore the foliage (Coman, 2001: Razi, 1980: 62). Thus, it is inferred that the traditional and mystical concept of the Toponym “Kalmakare” is closely connected to Mithraism.

### Traditional history of Pol-e Dokhtar

In order to explore the traditional background of Kalmakare, it is necessary to initially study the traditional history of Pol-e Dokhtar, which is located 5 km east of Kalmakare so that the area is historically, traditionally, and geographically characterized (Fig.5).

This region was earlier known as ‘Madakto’- the second capital city of Illam around the present Dareshahr- and Simere originated from ‘Samatoureh’- the center of Mehrjan Ghazah in Islamic era (Bashash, 1999: 8; Bayat, 1988: 42).

There are several effigy and reliefs from Buddha on the fig tree. However, several pictures of Mehr with cedar and pine trees have been abundantly observed in European mithraeums. The reason for the similarity of Christian choice results from the belief that Mehr has been given birth by the cedar (Javadi, 2017).

According to Yaghout, etymology of the ‘Mehrjan Ghazagh’ consists of three elements of ‘Mehr’ as sun, affection and compassion; ‘Jan’ referring to the soul; and ‘Ghazagh’ derived from the name of a ‘man’ (Yaghout, 1965: 4/698). Beside his oversight about the meanings ‘Jan’ and ‘Ghazagh’, it can be stated that the meaning



Fig.5. Poldokhtar district 5 km east of Kolmakra. Source : [tasnimnews.com](http://tasnimnews.com).

of Mehr is totally matched with the characteristics of Mitra. Ghodame Ibn Jafar recorded ‘Kade’ derived from ‘Mehrgan kade’ (Ghodame Ibn Jafar, 1991: 143). ‘Kade’ stemming from ‘Kata’ is an Avestan word used as suffix a for place in Persian language (Razi, 2002: 3/1597 & 1598). Kasravi regarded Mehrgan as the worship place for ‘Mehr’ (Kasravi, 1999: 243). Thus, Mehrgan kade implies the land of Mehr worshipping or the place of Mithraism.

It seems that the land has been named within the era of Parthian. In 5 th century, khorani considered the reign of Mehrgan-e- katk as a part of kustkhorbaran (Marquart, 1994). Furthermore, Christianity has been also prevailed here in the second half of the fifth century (Ibid: 49). Following the ‘Hormozan’ Peace covenant, in 17 th century, Mehrgan Ghazagh was conquered in peace by Atighe Ibn Ghazvan who was from Mehrjan Ghazagh (Belazari, 1988: 433 & 530; Tabari, 1996: 1883 & 1885, & 1902/5).

In the second half of the first century AH, Mehrjan Ghazagh turned into Azariqa, the strongest branch of Khawarij (Masoudi, 2011: 2/133). In the Islamic era, Seimare was the capital of Mehrjan Ghazagh (Ibn Khordad, 1992; 35; Ibn Rasteh, 1986; 122; Ghodame Ibn Jafar, 1991; 143; Yaghoubi, 2002; 36; Moghadassi, 1982; 588/2). As Mostofi reported, Seimare was ruined in the eighth century (Mostofi, 1983: 71). Despite the existence of the name of Seimare, the name of

is investigated relying on linguistics, geography, and history (Refahi, 2001: 49&50).

The term Kalmakare and its origin have been neglected by all scholars. Only Beyranvandi focused on the etymology of the Kalmakare. Under the influence of Aziz Gavkosh, he wrote “The term ‘Kalmakare’ is specially attributed to this cave and the hunters succeeded in killing their hunts there; further, local people also called this cave Kalmakare.” (Beyranvandi, 2012: 13)

The essence of any geographical name is conceptualized in close relation with the element of time. Therefore, geographical names are historically classified into Oldpaleo Toponym Middle meso Toponym, and Neo Toponym (Refahi, 2001: 47&48). The main criterion of the classification is the complexity and simplicity of the geographical name concept elements. In other word, as elements and concepts of the Toponym get older, they would be much more complicated. However, the newer would be the simpler. Hence, it seems that Toponym of Kalmakare is regarded of paleo Toponym due to the concept and element complexity. As Aziz Gavkosh reported, Ghanbar Gavkosh, his uncle, in 1971 reminded that “The hole is called Kalmakare” (Beyranvandi, 2012: 32). It seems unlikely that the complex delicate word of Kalmakare stemming from its old origin is unconsciously uttered by a local illiterate hunter unless the word has been historically and traditionally established in the ritual memory of The Gavkoshs.

There are two hypotheses on the etymology of Kalmakare. Some assert that the term derives from the two words of “Kalma” and “Kare” (Motamedi, 1994:15). Kalma refers to protection and shelter; and Kare signifies a type of fig tree growing in the mountains (Yavariyan, 2006: 572; Asgari alam, 2005:221). Thus, Kalmakare means a place and fig tree. While, some others define Kalma as cave and call Kalmakare as the cave of fig tree (Motamedi, 1994: 15; Izadpanah, 1998:3 & 104).

Proponents of the second hypothesis view Kalmakare

composed of three names including ‘Kal’ as the male antelope, ‘Ma’, which is the older form of ‘Man’ meaning place and home, and ‘Kare’ as a type of fig tree growing in the mountain. Thus, Kalmakare is the descriptive definition of a cave, which is the home of an antelope where a fig tree has been planted in the opening (Beyranvandi, 2012: 113; Khosravi, 2013: 8; Parham, 2013: 112). Although this descriptive meaning exactly coincides the cave physical opening; it appears that conceptualization and implication of the term ‘Kalmakare’ may require studying the Toponym in terms of its constituents.

In general, in terms of constituents, Toponyms are divided into eleven classes (Refahi, 2001: 145&158). The conceptual complexity of Kalmakare Toponym elements consists of the Toponyms stemmed from trees<sup>4</sup> and animals<sup>5</sup>, on one side; and the Toponyms originated in the mythical<sup>6</sup> and traditional<sup>7</sup> concepts, on the other side (Ibid, 153&157 & 146-148). Therefore, it is deduced that the terms ‘Kal’ and ‘Kare’ imply symbolic, mythical and traditional (ritual) concepts in addition to ‘male antelope’ and ‘the fig tree’ (Fig. 4).

The ritual status of ‘Kal’ (male antelope) dates back to the pictogram. More than 90% of Iranian petroglyphs are paintings of antelopes inspired by religious instructions. However, the locations with antelope petroglyphs have been revered (Mohammadifard, 2008: 132&133). According to Mithraism, an antelope enjoys as high position as fire and is used along with the sun (Razi, 2006: 2/619). Once sun-worshipping spread out, it was called the ‘Sun Animal’ in the Persian Plateau, particularly in Lorestan.

Bakhtootash, in a in-depth study on the male antelope, concluded that ‘Kal’ symbolizes swastika (Bakhtootash, 2001:140). According to Ferray, an antelope signifies Mitra in Iranian tradition (Ferray, 2006: 250). Mithraism also reveres both fig tree and antelope. According to Mithraism mythology, Mitra was born naked from the mother rock. She had to be protected from the wind and rain; so, she sheltered under the shadow of the fig tree, ate the fruit and got

By reading inscriptions on the silverwares in Kalmakare and the rise of Samatoureh dynasty, a new insight has emerged. Beyranvandi, Parham and Khosravi, criticizing the above hypothesis, regarded Kalmakare as the treasury of Samatoureh. They believed that the last ruler of “Samti” dynasty- probably “OunSak”- had transferred and hidden his ancestor’s treasure in the impassable cave to keep it safe from Assyrian invaders (Parham, 2013: 112 & 118; Beyranvandi, 2012: 84; Khosravi, 2013: 204).

Verifying the assumption, Khosravi commented that “According to remaining of a garret foundation on top of the mountain overlooking the cave, there were several men serving as guardians of the treasure. However, later, the guards, who were 12 men, were killed for unknown reasons, and buried at the cave opening” (Khosravi, 2013: 204). However, Parham criticized this story as a mystery and archeological fantasy (Parham, 2013:112).

Despite the researchers’ controversy on how and when the objects have been transferred to Kalmakare (in the first half of the 7th century BC or the second half of the 4th BC), there is a consensus that Kalmakare is treasure (Fig. 3).

### **Mithraism characteristics of Kalmakare**

It is a difficult activity to study Mithraism symbols and signs in the ritual geography of ancient Iran as archeologists have been historically challenged with proving Mithraism in some caves and constructs. Kalmakare cave is undoubtedly no exception. As earlier mentioned, almost all scholars assumed Kalmakare as the place where political authorities saved their treasury; whereas, Ghazanfari, by an illusionary attitude, introduced the ritual and perhaps Mithraism usage of Kalmakare. Visiting the second hall, Ghazanfari asserted that “The hall defines the incredible life of Mithra. Such an imaginary hall over a companionway rock retreated on the east opening encouraged the idea that these people have been lived in one of the most strangest holy places

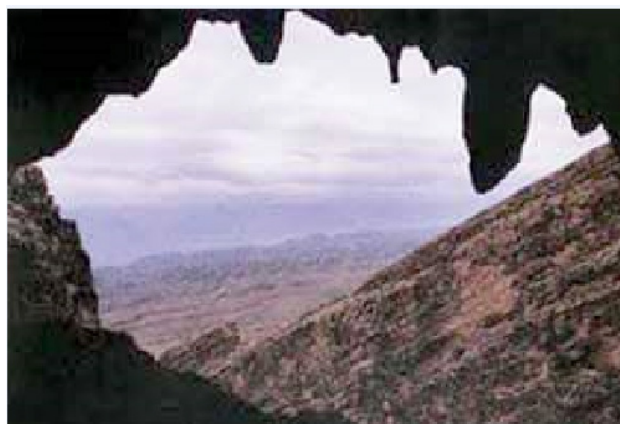


Fig.3. Calyso Cave’s mouth. Source : poldokhtariran41.blogfa.com.

throughout the history (Ghazanfari, 1989: 5). To test the hypothesis of Mithraism, it is better to first study Mithraism characteristics in Kalmakare Cave.

### **The cave contribution in Mithraism**

Religious geography of Mithraism considers a special position for caves (Lavani, 2006: 313). According to Mithraism mythology, Mitra carried the beaten cow to the cave where she resided. The cow escaped from the cave; then, Mitra found the cow by the help of the crow and sacrificed it in the cave (Coman, 2001: 137; Razi, 1980: 62 & 63).

According to Iranian mythology, Mehr has been born to a thunderbolt on top of Alborz Mountain. Since almost in all traditional beliefs the cave and mountain have been honored and revered, the tradition of Mithraism started being practiced in the natural mountainous caves. Rome also followed this eastern long-established custom; however, Mithraism ceremonies were held in natural caves or otherwise in natural cave-like temples (Razi, 1980: 77; Lavani, 2006: 320 & 314-315).

### **Etymology of Kalmakare**

The etymology of Kalmakare as a geographical name (Toponym) requires a Toponym methodology<sup>3</sup> in two vertical and synchronous Diachronic method using history and archeology, and horizontal Synchronic method through geography and sociology. Thus, the geographical name of Kalmakare and its appellation



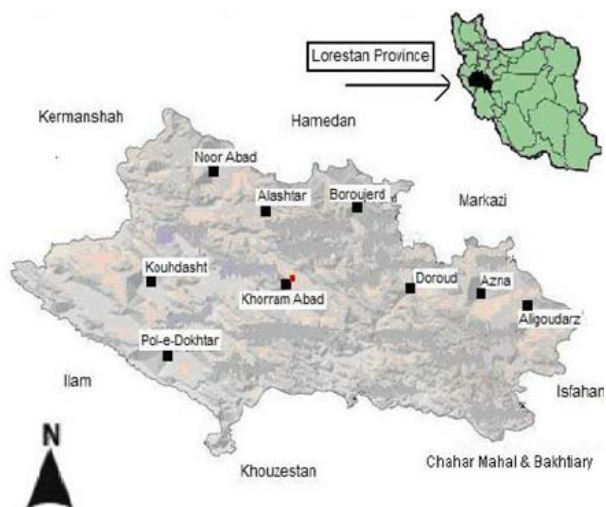


Fig.1. Map of Lorestan Province. Source : <https://www.researchgate.net>.

discovered the cave. According to Aziz, he entered the cave and saw the broken jugs and skulls (Ibid: 32&33). He asserted that Ghanbar has also observed some jugs in 1974 (Ibid: 35). In 1979, Aziz and his other uncle, Alimorad, once again went to the Meleh Mountain. He entered the cave alone and found two wooden and glass sugar bowls and a waxy rope (Ibid:37&38). Hence, the first hall has been discovered in 1979. According to Aziz, there has been nothing but the aforementioned objects in this hall (Ibid: 39). In 1988, the second hall was detected by Abdoreza Gavkosh, his cousin (Ibid: 42). And finally, in 1989, Aziz and Abdoreza turned around about 728 m of the four halls in the cave and found some silverwares and a gold sculpture (Ibid: 45). Since then, the cave has been continuously under theft by lovers of mysterious treasures until 1993. During this period, two official delegations have entered the cave in 1989 and 1993. Ghazanfari and Motamedi provided the delegation reports.

How this cave has been discovered is a hotly debated issue because its objects have been so delicate and large in number. However, not much exist on this. Beyranvandi has devoted much of his research to interviewing Aziz Gavkosh. Without bias, he wrote that “Kalmakare has been identified by a local hunter in 1971, and has been interestingly discovered in 1989.” (Ibid: 8)

Lack of pursuing his alleged ei=ghteen-year time period

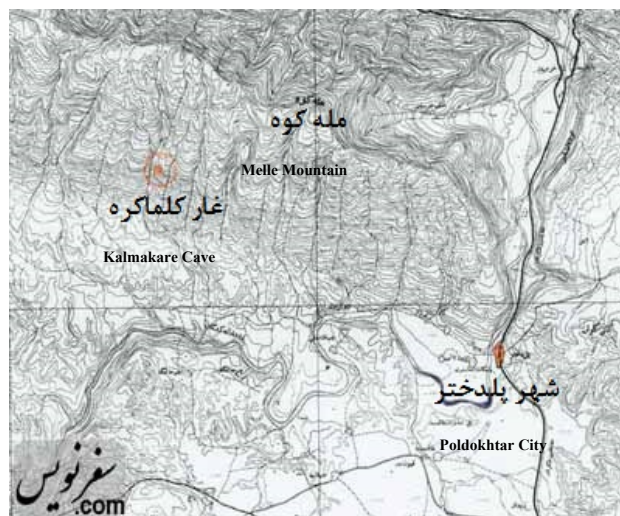


Fig2. Map of the Clymakra Cave. Source : safarnevīs.com.

seems a little weird and unreal. Therefore, apparently, Kalmakare has been mystically rooted in the history of Gavkosh tribe over time.

However, some also believe that the cave has been unnoticed by passers because the cave opening was approached one meter and half away from the entrance area (Ghazanfari, 1997: 26). The steep slope of the cave opening which has been named “Ghove-e-Gholamreza” (Ghazanfari, 1989: 7) indicates the awareness of Gavkosh’s tribe of the existence of the cave<sup>1</sup>.

### Testing the hypothesis of the function of Kalmakare use

The cave discovery has been more largely interested by scholars than the cave use. Cultural heritage delegation asserted that the cave has been historically used for the burial, temporary residence, and storage (Parviz, 2006:113; Beyranvandi, 2012:84). However, Motamedi rejected the cave burial usage as it was contrary to the ritual funeral of the second half of the first millennium BC (Motamedi, 1994: 7). Kalmakare has been highlighted as a treasury in all reports but Ghazanfari who firstly reported the cave in 1989<sup>2</sup>. According to Motamedi and Iyzadpanah, Kalmakare was part of Achaemenid kings’ treasury taken to the cave from Persepolis and Shush to be protected and survived from Alexander’s raid (Motamedi, 1994: 10 ; Izadpanah, 1998: 3/26).



prepared by Ghazanfari's report. Ahmad Parviz, in the archeological reports of International Archeological Conference of Iran proceedings in 2006 in Kermanshah, introduced inlay silverwares of Kalmakare. In addition to the aforementioned descriptive reports, the following research can be also mentioned.

Reading the inscriptions on the wares, Bashash has made a great step discovering these mysterious dishes and introduced the unknown Samatoureh dynasty. Biranvandi published the first independent book of Kalmakare in 2012 and took a fundamental step of secrets of how the cave was discovered. His interview with Aziz Gavkosh- the cave explorer- is critically important. Khosravi, in a thesis paper "Kalmakare Treasure" published in 2013 by Cultural Heritage, has also presented and analyzed the form and function of silverware and golden masks.

Parham, in a paper named "secrets of the ancient treasure of Kalmakare" published by Bokhara in 2013, scientifically criticized non-scientific contents about Kalmakare.

Almost all the scholars have been concentrated on how the cave has been explored, reading the inscriptions, presenting and analyzing the objects, and defining the tremendous story of the cave's depredation. The most important thing about Kalmakare that has remained unsolved is the function of the cave, which requires scrutinizing the ritual spectrum of Kalmakare.

### **Geographical location**

Kalmakare Cave is located 13 km northwest of Pol-e-dokhtar city (Parviz, 2006: 111). Today, it is part of Rumashkan district, city of Kuhdasht; however, it has been situated within the 5 km west of Pol-e-dokhtar (Beyranvandi, 2012: 8 &13). Kalmakare is located in northeast of Darebagh village on the slopes of southern highlands of Meleh Mountain (Parviz, 2006: 111). Meleh Kuh with a height of 1693 m has been located in the area of Kuhdasht city, Kumashkan district, village of east Roshkan at 35 km southwest of Kuhdasht city (Geographical Atlas of National Mountains, 2000;

2/246). The mountain is sited north of Kashkan River forming northeast of Simreh valley along the Ghashab mountain range.

Kalmakare is easily accessed through Pol-e-dokhtar stretching to Kave Kali village and Darebagh (Parviz, 2006: 111). Darebagh villages consist of two separate rural areas named as Darebagh Mohammad Hossein and the Second Darebagh; these two as Malavi district of Khoram Abadare located 45 and 46 km away from the northeast of Pol-e-dokhtar, respectively (Geographical Atlas of national rural areas, 1996: 57/214). The time to reach the cave through Darebagh Mohammad Hossein is about two hours of walking and hiking along Meleh Mountain. Kalmakare is placed at 550 m of the plain area in the vicinity of arête in the rocks. To reach the opening requires a 15-meter decent from the top (Ghazanfari, 1989; 6, & Mohammadifard, 2008: 492). So, without technical climbing equipment, it is hardly accessed (Parviz, 2006: 111) (Fig. 1&2).

### **Stories of Kalmakare discovery**

Unfortunately, though studying the discovery of Kalmakare Cave is one of critical subjects, it has been largely neglected. Almost all the scholars have followed the common haphazard discovery story of Kalmakare by Aziz Gavkosh in 1989. This is the only formal story defining how this cave has been explored (Parham, 2013: 112).

One of the pertinent studies was carried out by Beryanvand who, interviewed the cave explorer. Aziz Gavkosh claimed that his uncle- Ghanbar Gavkosh- and he – went to the Meleh Mountain for antelope hunting. Chasing the chamois, they found a hole in the middle of the mountain which the goats went to. His uncle refused chasing the antelope in spite of his insist; however, he reminded that "this hole is called Kalmakare". (Beyranvandi, 2012: 31&32). It indicates that Ghanbar Gavkosh has already been informed of the cave name and place. This issue will be discussed later in the following sections.

In 1972, Aziz and Ghanbar, chasing three antelopes,

Persian translation of this paper entitled:  
 رهیافتی بر کارکرد آیینی غار کلماکره  
 is also published in this issue of journal.

## An Approach to the Traditional Function of Kalmakare Cave\*

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### Abstract

Kalmakare Cave was discovered in 1989. The ancient objects have been exhibited in the National Museum of Iran, museum of Falak-ol-Aflak, Illam, Tabriz, and international museums of Louvre, Britain, New York Metropolitan Museum, Miho Museum in Kyoto, as well as private collections. Archeologists and historians have been largely interested in Kalmakare due to a large number of golden and silver objects attributed to Kalmakare, the elegance, art, and innovative technologies of the so-called objects dating back to the local reign of Samatoureh in Neo-Elamite period. Kalmakare treasure is known as the world's sixth largest treasures. Scholars have mainly focused on reading the inscriptions, and introduced dishware, silver human and animal sculptures, as well as golden masks, and conceptually analyzed symbolic and mythological motifs in Kalmakare. This research seeks to develop a new approach to analyze the function of the cave's indoor and outdoor space through using a historical-analytical method with reference to Kalmakare's etymology. In doing so, this paper is an attempt to understand whether Kalmakare has been the place for the treasure of Smatoureh local rulers or Achaemenid kings; and whether Kalmakare have served the ritual function such as Mithraism due to its human geography. So far, no similar research has been conducted in this area. Thus, testing the Mithraism hypothesis of Kalmakare requires a deep reflection on Loni Deger views. Hence, the present research is an investigation of the ritual function of Kalmakare.

**Key words:** *Kalmakare, Ritual caves, Mithrasim, Pol-e Dokhtar.*

### Introduction

The glow of silver and gold wares in Kalmakare encouraged scholars, based on the personal interest and expertise, to explore secret aspects of this cave. Ghazanfari's (1989) report was the first and most important report on the cave geography and indoor area. Mirabedin Kaboli (1991), in a paper "studying

pre-Islamic works in the repertoire" published by cultural heritage, described a collection of Kalmakare objects. Later, Motamedi (1993) presented a report on the cave and its wares published in Cultural Heritage. However, due to the indoor destructions by smugglers within 1989 to 1993 inside the cave, the report of Motamedi was not as significant as one