

## **Investigation of Aspects of Religious Beliefs of the People of Guilan from Prehistory to the Historical Period (North of Iran)**

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**Abstract:** *Even though religious beliefs are one of the most important aspects of life in any society, the supernatural beliefs of the people of Guilan in the prehistoric period remain unknown. Long before the Aryans, natives were living on the Iranian plateau, as the most notable natives in Guilan during the migration of the Aryans and in the Median and Achaemenid empires were the Amardians, Caspians, and Cadusians. Archaeological excavations in various parts of Guilan revealed that the natives had a great culture and civilization. Archaeological findings from Guilan's prehistoric sites dating back to the Iron Age also showed that these people had faith in life after death and in social classes. They used to sacrifice animals for the gods, aiming to please them, though more data from future excavations are needed to substantiate this. The findings suggest that throughout the historical periods, the people of Guilan believed in original Aryan gods and resisted the acceptance of the Zoroastrian religion, believing in gods such as Mitra and Nahid, who were the gods of the demons group. Hence, the holy Zoroastrian book and the Iranian literature refer to these people as worshipers of demons.*

**Keywords:** Religious beliefs, Iron Age tombs, historical period, Guilan.

### **Introduction**

Neither do we know for sure when the beliefs unfolded regarding supernatural forces and beliefs on the beginning and end of the universe and its creator or creators and how the universe was created, nor do we know whether the ancient people were more religious than the modern people or not; however, data suggest that religious beliefs in some societies, especially in the West, are declining. According to the research literature, none of the primitive tribes were seemingly faithless in supernatural forces that aided earthly humans. The annual permission for the growth of the flowers from beneath the soil and the blossoming of trees in spring, rainfall, and migration of birds and animals, the sunrise and the sunset, and other natural events were not regarded as accidental. Religious beliefs including, birth, marriage,

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lifestyle and death, and even burial, have greatly contributed to the development of societies until nowadays. There are two main approaches of the emergence of religion: the first one advocates for a developmental process of religions from the prehistoric era to the present time, and the second, which holds on to the monotheistic premise, emphasizes that humans were originally monotheists; however, in this study, only archaeological data are reviewed to delve into some aspects of religious beliefs, disregarding these two mentioned approaches.

Archaeologists and researchers who study prehistoric eras have always sought to identify objects or structures that pertain to religion<sup>1</sup>. Objects such as effigies and motifs on objects are considered to be symbols of religion. Of course, one would say that the context from which the works are obtained assumes importance and serves to attribute these objects to religious beliefs. It is argued that burials serve as one of the most important cases to study religion in prehistoric eras, as this present article aims to review them throughout the prehistoric Guilan. (Fig. 1)



**Fig. 1.** Geographical location of Gilan province

Archaeological evidence from Ganj-Par and Darband Cave sites in Rostam Abad in Roudbar suggests that the history of human dwelling in Guilan dates back to the Paleolithic period. After this period, i.e., in the Neolithic or post-Neolithic period, no evidence of human dwelling has ever been found so far in Guilan. This area, dated using a limited number of stone

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<sup>1</sup> Ken Dark, *Theoretical foundations of archeology*, 2008, p. 178.

tools, is referred to as the Neolithic or post-Neolithic period<sup>2</sup>. The only found and published Neolithic evidence pertains to the Arg-e- Dasht site<sup>3</sup>.

From this period to the Iron Age, the situation in Guilan has remained unknown, prompting the researchers to describe this situation. Kroll and some experts held that before the Iron Age, some nomadic tribes were dwelling in a small community in Guilan (west of Guilan to Ardabil) who had no contact with the important centers of civilization of that time because of the Caspian Sea in the north and the hard-to-reach mountains and massive forests in the south.

Others maintain that Guilan was uninhabited before the Iron Age (1400-1500 BC) due to the environmental and ecological situation of the region, and it was only after the Iron Age that Guilan suddenly entered a period characterized by abundant wealth and various emirates and technology of that time. Fallahian also argues that the regional climate in prehistoric times had emptied the area from inhabitants.

There are various sources about people and tribes, including the tribes living on the southern shorelines of the Caspian Sea throughout historical periods. These tribes included those dwelling on the Iranian plateau by the time of the Aryans migration in the west called Kas-Su, whom the Greeks called Kussiyân or Kissi; the Elamites living in south-western Iran; the Kadussiyâns and Kas in the northern Guilan regions<sup>4</sup>; the Tapuriyâns in Mazandaran and the Amardians living with the Kadussiyâns and Tapuriyâns. Historical literature also refers to some tribes positioned in Guilan and Mazandaran under the Medes and Achaemenid empires, living in a semi-independent way free from the domination of the central government. Strabon, the Greek historian and geographer cite Aristofanos to name some tribes living in the southern shores of the Caspian Sea as Hircanians, Amardians, Aryakayan (non-Aryans), Kadussiyâns, Golha or Golan, as well as some ancient offshoots of these tribes in Guilan and Mazandaran such as Anariens, Docovsions, and derbiks<sup>5</sup>.

Because there is a lack of written sources on the early tribes living in Guilan and historians have largely remained silent about their prehistoric and early historical beliefs, the research method is based on archeological evidence and written artifacts to investigate the religious beliefs of these tribes. In this research, the religious beliefs of the people of Guilan from the beginning to the end of the Achaemenid period are investigated in two parts; one pertains to the prehistoric periods and the beginning of history to the early historical period.

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<sup>2</sup> Fereydoun Biglari and Hossein Abdi, *The Preliminary Study Report of Khal Vasht Rock Shelter in Amarloo Area of Guilan*, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Gabriel Nokandeh, *Arg-e Dasht, the First Neolithic Discovered Region in Gilan Province*, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Igor M Diakonoff, *History of the Medes*, 1968, p. 54.

<sup>5</sup> Ebrahim Eslah Arbani, *Gilan Book*, 1995, p. 595.

## **Prehistoric Religious Beliefs**

Investigating the religious beliefs of the ancient people, especially those of the prehistoric period, is very appealing, albeit complex. We can speak with relative confidence about the presence of religions, names of gods, and religious practices of ancient societies whose written artifacts are still available. However, as regards prehistoric times, researchers refer to archaeological evidence and ethnographic studies of primitive people, often referred to as The Middle Range Theory, developed by Robert K. Merton; it is an approach to sociological theorizing aimed at integrating theory and empirical research. It seeks to analyze the lives of ancient people by comparing the lives of modern primitive people to help better understand the immaterial aspects of the lives of those people.

The first material representation of religious beliefs traces back to the Middle Paleolithic (200,000 to 40,000 years ago). Although beliefs in non-earthly creatures were held, archaeological evidence is yet to confirm it.

Apart from some Neanderthal effigies from the Middle Paleolithic, we come across intentional burials with special rituals. In the Levant region, this evidence was obtained from Ghafza, Sokhul, Tabun, Amud, and Kobbareh. Corpses were usually buried in a curved manner, with parts of the animals' bodies sometimes placed next to them. The body of a young individual (about 13 years old) was found from the Ghafzah Cave in 1971, laid on its back with a deer antler in its hands. Many stone tools and small bones were found from a tomb pit in the Kobbareh cave<sup>6</sup>.

Following this period, we have various evidence representing religious beliefs across the world. We have evidence apart from burial ceremony from the Neolithic period about 10-12000 years ago, an example of which is the Shamanism rite from the Shanidar Cave, where carcass and large hunting bird bones were found from a pit. Also, structures used to construct temples were found from the Goobkeli Tappe, NavaliChori, Chatal Hoyrak, etc.

## **Religious Beliefs in Prehistoric Guilan**

Archaeological findings of the Iron Age sites have revealed the religious beliefs of the people of Guilan in the prehistoric era. These findings are varied and are discussed separately below.

### ***Gifts***

The gifts placed in the tombs of the dead indicate that they believed in life after death. Although the gifts were likely dedicated to the dead or gods, or to repel evil spirits or bad gods, whatever they may have been, they

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<sup>6</sup> O Bar-Yosef, B Vandermeersch, B Arensburg, A Belfer-Cohen, P Goldberg, H Laville, L Meignen, *The Excavations in Kebara Cave, Mt. Carmel*, 1992.

represent the religious beliefs of ancient people in Guilan. These objects were diverse and included common life tools and crafts and personal items and ornaments, indicating that they were used for life after the death of the dead.

### ***Effigies***

Burial sites of the Iron Age have revealed human and animal figures made of metal and clay. On the Marlik hill, where most Guilan effigies and figures have been excavated, animal effigies such as bison, goats, deer, rams, bears, leopards, horses and dogs, have been found, the likes of which are also found in Deghgar where Guilan tombs of the Iron Age are located. Also, the figures of birds such as eagles were excavated from this site<sup>7</sup>. According to Ucko and Voigt's interpretations<sup>8</sup>, one would say that the figures were not undoubtedly toys or training tools because they were found from the tombs of adults. All-powerful animals can be interpreted in two ways: representing a god or a deity symbol or an idol and totem for regional families.

Another interesting point is rhytons in the form of animals and humans. These rhytons were used to contain liquids with a religious and specific function, although we are not still sure about the functions of these liquids as they may have been intoxicating, hallucinogenic, or alcoholic. However, the emphasis by makers of rhytons in the form of animals, humans with strange and frightening characteristics was quite significant. Did they feel that they could be blended with the spirit of an animal or a god represented by the animal by drinking the liquid from the animal-shaped rhytons? Unfortunately, questions of this type cannot be answered; however, what is clear is that these animals, like animal figures found, symbolize power, speed, and glory.

### ***Human Sacrifices***

Killing humans for sacrifice has been common among the various ancient tribes, persisting until recently. Most of these sacrifices were dedicated by mysterious tribes to the dead or worshiped gods. These sacrifices in the Iron Age of Guilan suggest the presence of the ruling class, however, by showing servants being killed to serve the lord or the ruler in the life after death or to please the god/gods of death. Archaeological excavations by the Japanese delegation of the Kouti Castle in tombs A-III, A-V, AVI, and C-I provide examples of this reality<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Ezatollah Negahban, *A Review of Fifty Years of Archeology in Iran*, 1999, p. 477.

<sup>8</sup> P. Ucko, *The Interpretation of Prehistoric Anthropomorphic Figurines*, 1962; M. M Voigt, *Catal Hoyuk in Context: Ritual and Early Neolithic Sites in Central and Eastern Turkey*, 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Namio Agami, Shinji Fukai, Seichi Masuda, *Deilaman: Archaeological Excavations in Kouti and Leslokan Castles in 1960*, 2017, p. 17.

Sacrifice was carried out by beheading, suffocation, and burning. These people were often killed in connection with the main individual's burial or following his burial, and that gifts were placed in their tombs shows that those killed were neither offenders nor convicts. There are some layers of ashes between the main person's burial and the sacrificed burial, indicating the complex ceremony held for the burials. In addition to the main body, three skulls were also found from Tomb No. 9 of Tamajan<sup>10</sup>. In Leslukan cemetery, two skeletons without skulls were found. The Iron Age people of the region seem to have believed that slaves and servants (if they were to be sacrificed) could serve their lords in the life after death.

### *Animal Sacrifices*

In Marlik, we have three tombs where horses are buried (Tombs Nos. 49, 51, and 53)<sup>11</sup>, which according to the excavator, belong to the dead of the tombs next to them. Burials of this kind are available from Joban Rudbar of Gilan<sup>12</sup> from Tombs Nos. 10 and 20 of Maryan Talesh<sup>13</sup>. This indicates the importance of horses both in the life of people and in their life after death. In Avestan texts, the horse symbolizes gods and the god of the sun, which was killed as a dedication for some gods.

For him, Hooshang Pishdadi sacrificed on the top of the Mt. Hera a hundred horses, a thousand bulls and ten thousand sheep, demanding him to bestow upon him the grandeur, the happiness "O' the good doer, the most capable, O' the strong river, i.e., Nahid, bestow on me the power so that I would rule over all nations and territories...."<sup>14</sup> Remnants of horse bones were also excavated from tombs in Hasanlou sites in Western Azarbaijan, Babajan in Lorestan, Godin in Kermanshah and Khorram Abad in Ardabil<sup>15</sup>. Horses would be sacrificed for the combatant class<sup>16</sup>. Excavations in Ghias Abad sites from Tomb No. X where a human was buried revealed a turtle cut in half with an ax left in its body<sup>17</sup>. In addition, Tomb No. 24 of Maryan

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<sup>10</sup> Hamid Fahimi, *Iron Age Culture on the Southwestern Shores of the Caspian Sea*, 2002, p. 112.

<sup>11</sup> Ezatollah Negahban, *A Review of Fifty Years of Archeology in Iran*, 1999, p. 133-134.

<sup>12</sup> Ali HakEmi, *Archaeological Excavations of Rudbar, Guilan, 1968 to 1969, in collaboration with Shahin Ariamanesh*, 2017, p. 217-220.

<sup>13</sup> Mohammad Reza Khalatbari, *Archaeological Excavations in the Ancient Sites of Talesh*, 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Ebrahim Pourdavood, *Yashtha*, 1998, p. 234.

<sup>15</sup> Reza Rezalou and Yahya Ayermlou, *Horse Burial Ritual among Scythian Tribes: A Case Study of Khorramabad Meshginshahr Cemetery*, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> J. P Mallory, *In Search of the Indo-Europeans: Language, Archeology and Myth*, 1991, p. 130-136.

<sup>17</sup> Hamid Fahimi, *Iron Age Culture on the Southwestern Shores of the Caspian Sea*, 2002, p. 120.

contained birds' bones<sup>18</sup>, though excavators did not specify the type of the birds found. From Leslukan, antelope bone was found, while sheep bones were also unearthed from the Tamajan cemetery excavations<sup>19</sup>.

Animal remnants suggest that horses had been buried like humans as they had separate tombs, while other animal remnants such as antelopes and sheep would be killed for feeding the dead in the life after death and pleasing gods and souls.

### **Weapon Position Pattern in Some Tombs**

Here, one can refer to notable examples of Tombs X and XI in Ghias Abad, where four daggers were laid in four corners facing the sky. In another tomb in Kouti /Leslukan Castle, a strange case of weapons pattern was found. The dead in the said tomb were surrounded by other tombs westwards, probably sacrificed for them; though the buried had not been protected from the north, east and south sides, the weapons buried along with the dead were aimed at the north, east, and south sides<sup>20</sup>. We do not know why this had happened and what creature or supernatural beings could have disturbed the dead from these angles.

The way commanders and objects were buried in Marlik cemeteries reveals the beliefs of life after death and of religious people of the Marlik tribes. For these tribes, combat and warriors were very important. If one of the great commanders with military honor died, his body would be laid on daggers, swords, and spears and then buried to keep his name and honor last forever<sup>21</sup>. Burying the dead with weapons, including swords, though it may represent the ideal form, indicates a belief similar to Scandinavian people about entering Valhalla in which the dead must be buried with a sword. These weapons were aimed to repel the evil, an example of which was found in Tomb No. A-V in Kouti Castle.

### **Motifs on Objects**

The motif of the sun on the surviving remnants is critical, which helps researchers figure out how the head and face of the dead are positioned and linked with the sun's position during the burial. A cup embossed with winged cow motifs known as the Marlik Gold Cup was found on the Marlik hill. On the edge of this cup, there are decorative geometric chain-shaped margins with spiral geometric strips on the bottom of the cup. The motif in the middle of the cup shows the tree of life, with two winged cows seen

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<sup>18</sup> Mohammad Reza Khalatbari, *Archaeological Excavations in the Ancient Sites of Talesh*, 2004, p. 111.

<sup>19</sup> Hamid Fahimi, *Iron Age Culture on the Southwestern Shores of the Caspian Sea*, 2002, p. 114.

<sup>20</sup> Namio Agami, Shinji Fukai, Seichi Masuda. *Deilaman: Archaeological Excavations in Kouti and Leslukan Castles in 1960*, 2017, p. 51.

<sup>21</sup> Ezatollah Negahban, *Preliminary Report of Marlik Excavations*, 1964, p. 14.

climbing the tree on each side of it. In the bottom of the Marlik Gold cup, there is a neatly embossed decorative flower, in the center of which is the sun, radiating the surroundings quite orderly, with the leaves of the tree of life shining from the radiation (Figure 1). The artist has, in this cup, well portrayed the importance of the sun and the dependence of life on the presence of this luminous body<sup>22</sup>. The portrayal of the sun on the Marlik's cup bottom seems to have been inspired by the religious beliefs of Marlik people, as they had wished to reveal its importance on such objects. The burial situation in Maryan and Tandvin of Talesh cemeteries also confirms this. They used to expose the skeletons of their dead to the sunlight<sup>23</sup>. The phenomenon of life and death has preoccupied the human mind throughout history. The beautiful images of a golden cup embossed with the motif of a legendary life in Marlik well portray this. This cup, which is 20 cm high and has a mouth of 70 cm, shows four scenes. The lower row shows an antelope breastfeeding its baby. The second row shows a young antelope feeding on the branches and leaves of the tree. In the third row, a boar is seen, and in the fourth, the body of an antelope fallen to the ground is seen being eaten by carnivores. On the top of the cup, away from the carnivore motifs, there is an animal similar to a monkey holding a stick-like object in its hand<sup>24</sup>, which seems to tell the story of the fate of life and death (Figure 2).



**Fig. 2.** Cup embossed with winged cow motifs

<sup>22</sup> Ezatollah Negahban, *Preliminary Report of Marlik Excavations*, 1964, p. 46.

<sup>23</sup> Mohammad Reza Khalatbari, *Archaeological Excavations in Talesh Archeological Sites*, 1999, p. 136.

<sup>24</sup> Ezatollah Negahban, *Preliminary Report of Marlik Excavations*, 1964, p. 34.





**Fig. 3.** Marlik Gold Cup with life cycle pattern

### **Religious Beliefs in the Historical Period (331-708 BC)**

As the Aryans set foot on the Iranian plateau, they gradually dominated the natives and established Medo-Achaemenid empires in collaboration with the Medes and Persians. It is believed that the tribes dwelling in Guilan were not under the governance of the Medes as they enjoyed political independence. The remarks of the ancient historian about the connection between the Medes and the tribes living in Guilan confirm this theory. Katzias argues that the tribes living in Guilan were hostile to them during the reign of the Medes (559-708 BC)<sup>25</sup>. The establishment of a strong government in the adjacency of the territory of Guilan could have caused concerns for these tribes.

Unfortunately, no data are available to describe the religious beliefs of the people of Guilan under the Median Empire. The worship of the natural symbols among the Marlik tribes, who seem to have been Amardians<sup>26</sup>, inferred that the tribes living in Guilan worshiped some elements of nature.

Zoroastrian beliefs are unlikely to have influenced the Guilan region at this time, as the people of the region have seemingly practiced the beliefs of their predecessors. For example, from a traditional point of view, Zoroaster wanted to make changes to the Moghs' beliefs, who, upon their position, was forced to disseminate his own beliefs in the east<sup>27</sup>.

According to Katzias, as the Achaemenid Empire was formed (331-559 BC) by Cyrus II in 559 BC, the people dwelling in Guilan began to obey

<sup>25</sup> Igor M. Diakonoff, *History of the Medes*, 1968, p. 608.

<sup>26</sup> Ebrahim Eslah Arbani, *Gilan Book*, 1995, p. 529.

<sup>27</sup> Hsan Pirnia, *Ancient Iran*, 1983, p. 220.

the founder of the Achaemenid Empire for the first time<sup>28</sup>. Historical documents suggest that the tribes living in Guilan had good relations with the Achaemenid dynasty.

Unfortunately, no evidence is available about the tribes living in Guilan so far, making it hard to comment on their religious beliefs during the Achaemenid period. It appears that the relatively good political relations between the people living in Guilan, such as the Kadusis and the Caspians with the Achaemenids, must have inspired the religious beliefs of the Persians in this region. The similarity of some beliefs inherited from the ancient period in the Guilan region and its comparison with Achaemenid religious beliefs substantiates this theory.

In order not to contaminate the soil, the Persians used to rub the dead with wax before burial and position it between the ground and the corpse<sup>29</sup>. Traces of ancient beliefs in Iran, especially in Guilan, such as "water is luminous" and "setting fire to a piece of cloth for removing bride infertility," can confirm the worship of elements among the tribes.

In addition to worshipping natural elements, the Achaemenids also believed in such gods as Ahuramazda, Mitra, Anahita, and Arta. For the Iranians of the Achaemenid era, Ahuramazda or the All-Knowing Ahura was regarded as a great god. In his inscription, Arshameh introduces him as the greatest of the gods<sup>30</sup>.

In his inscription, Xerxes (465-486 BC) says: "The great lord Ahuramazda, who created the earth, the skies, provided comfort for all humans, and made Xerxes the king; it was he who made one of us the king to rule over others<sup>31</sup>.

Ahura Mazda is considered the creator and guardian of all living creatures, and it is he who, by his own will, directed the king's authority, the authority he has bestowed upon the king<sup>32</sup>. To the people of the Achaemenid era, the fire was a cause of purity, and light and neatness were seen to be symbols of Ahuramazda as the people used to set fire to him when worshipping him. The fire was made in an open setting<sup>33</sup>, and they used to put the holy fires out while they lit them up again after practicing the burial ceremony anew<sup>34</sup>.

Following Ahura Mazda, the Achaemenids believed in single beings, not in the ranks of the great gods. These single beings must have been the holy immortals of the next centuries (Ibid). Darius the King describes this in his inscription:

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<sup>28</sup> Igor M Diakonoff, *History of the Medes*, 1968, p. 169.

<sup>29</sup> Hassan Pirnia, *Ancient Iran*, 1983, p. 1528.

<sup>30</sup> R. G Kent, *Old Persian*, 1953, p. 116.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 148-149.

<sup>32</sup> Roman Gershaman, *Iran from the Beginning to Islam*, 1986, pp. 171-172.

<sup>33</sup> Hassan Pirnia, *Ancient Iran*, 1984, p. 168.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 1528.

“... Let Ahuramazda help my tribe and protect this country along with the gods. Let Ahuramazda save the army from famine, us from lies, and the country from the famine and the lies. I implore this from Ahuramazda and the gods of this family...”<sup>35</sup>

Ahura Mazda and single beings cannot be seen nor portrayed; thus, they cannot be worshiped anywhere. They are pure and should be offered sacrifices with pure clothes and a high place where the air is fresh<sup>36</sup>.

To add to the Iranian beliefs in the Achaemenid era, one would say that the inscriptions of the Ardashir II era (355-405 BC) mention Mitra and Anahita, as he describes in his inscription: “Ahura Mazda, Anahita and Mitra protect me against any evil and what I did and made.”<sup>37</sup>

In the Achaemenid era, Ahura Mazda was regarded as the great god, not the only god, indicating the importance of other gods that cannot be ignored. Some support the idea that the mentioning of Mitra and Anahita by Ardashir II is a kind of religious heresy and a clear evolution in the religious beliefs of the Achaemenid era<sup>38</sup>.

It is widely acknowledged that Anahita's inspiration for Iran has originated from the Babylonian astronomical beliefs. Some claim that this has been something common among the Aryans since old times. Anahita was regarded as the god of the waters worshiped in Asia long after the fall of the Achaemenids<sup>39</sup>.

As for Mitra, it is argued the Avesta had described it as the religion of the Aryans, the clear example of which is the mentioning of the name Mitra along with the names of such gods as Indra Verona and Nasatya in the Boghazkoy inscription in Turkey. The said inscription was written between the reign of Sebilolyoma, the king of Hiti, and Mativaz, the king of Mitani. What is interesting is that this inscription has named Mitra for swearing and covenants<sup>40</sup>. Mitra, along with the god of the sun, was in close connection with the sun, considered to be the intermediate between the transcendental world (light) and the lower world (darkness). During the Achaemenid era, Mitra was the god of contracts and covenants, known since the rule of Ardashir II as its name was repeated when swearing or by the time of wars<sup>41</sup>.

The reason why Ardashir II resorted to Anahita and Mitra was for the protection they provided. Anahita and his holy temple were in Pasargad, and she saved his life against a plot made by his younger brother, the young Darius. This was seen as a kind of protection for Ardashir II. This led Darius

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<sup>35</sup> R.G Kent , *Old Persian*, 1953, p. 135-136.

<sup>36</sup> Hassan Pirnia, *Ancient Iran*, 1983, p. 1528.

<sup>37</sup> R. G Kent , *Old Persian*, 1953, p. 155.

<sup>38</sup> Abdul Hossein Zarrinkoub, *History of the Iranian People before Islam*, 1985, p. 192.

<sup>39</sup> Hassan Pirnia, *Ancient Iran*, 1983, p. 169.

<sup>40</sup> E. Kuzmina, *The Origin of the Indo-Iranians*, 2007, p. 322; Ali Sami, *Achaemenid Civilization*, 2010, p. 66.

<sup>41</sup> Hassan Pirnia, *Ancient Iran*, 1984, p. 169.

to break his covenant with Aradshir upon returning from Asia Minor, but he faced the wrath of Mitra and failed<sup>42</sup>.

No written sources indicate whether or not the people of the southern regions of the Caspian Sea in the Achaemenid and Parthian periods had faith in Ahuramazda and the Zoroastrian religion; this is while they were not probably Zoroastrians until the Sassanid period; however, in the Parthian period, a delegation from Hyrcania traveled to Rome practicing Zoroastrianism worships there. The Avesta reveals that before the holy book (Avesta) was fully developed, Mazandaran and Guilan had still been following the ancient Aryan religion, believing in gods or demons. The demons of Mazandaran (Mazan) and the lie-worshippers of Deylam and Guilan (Vern) are often cited in Avesta<sup>43</sup>.

However, as for Mitra and Anahita, being pre-Zoroastrian gods, one can still find evidence of popular belief, as the belief of people in Talesh is similar to that of the Achaemenids in Mitra and Anahita, which leads us to conclude that the people in Guilan used to worship Mitra and Anahita. As stated, Mitra had a prominent role in pre-Zoroastrian religions on the Iranian plateau. Her main task was to guard the covenants and truthfulness and to punish those who violated the agreements. The people in Talesh believe in an angel who protected the covenants. She rewarded those with decent conduct and punished those with indecent conduct. The violation of the covenant culminated in the angel's wrath, as she went to the violator at some proper time and judged his/her conduct. This is also true of those who deliberately deceived others. The covenant breaker could do two things to suppress the angel's wrath and to escape her punishment. One was to provide seven-year wine called Mazou, and the other was to say a prayer exclusively for the angel that it had to be recited perfectly without any misspelling. The covenant breaker repeatedly mentioned the names of popular domestic quadruped such as goats, sheep, cows, horses, dogs, and bees and allegorically referred to the reproduction and fertility periods by mentioning the Nahid star, which symbolizes the god Anahita to ask for forgiveness<sup>44</sup>.

### **Conclusion**

It is concluded that the religious beliefs of the people of Guilan were impressive, and they enjoyed a great culture in the prehistoric and historic eras. They had complete faith in life after death. According to their beliefs, the dead would need food in the other world, so they placed food in their tombs. The dead were also believed to need their personal belongings for the other world. According to their beliefs, the dead could maintain their

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<sup>42</sup> Abdul Hossein Zarrinkoub, *History of the Iranian People before Islam*, 1985, p. 192.

<sup>43</sup> Ebrahim Pourdavood, *Yashtha*, 1998, p. 13.

<sup>44</sup> Ali Abdoli, *History of Caduses*, 1999, p. 239.

professional and social status after death. Servants or slaves were killed to continue serving their lords in the other world, and people with different occupations such as farmers in the other world would become farmers. In the meantime, the dead could face threats from demonic creatures, an example of which was the position of swords and weaponry in some tombs, some of which aimed towards demons. Some figures as symbols of idols or various gods or totems of tribes would be placed in tombs. In historical times, the conflict of the people of the northern region with the religious beliefs of the Zoroastrians caused the territory to be called the land of demons and liars; however, the people of this region either believed in their former gods or the original Aryan gods, the demons, especially Mitra, as sacrifices of the horses may have been related to these gods.

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