

THE PRACTICE OF MUMMIFICATION IN ANCIENT IRAN

The mummified body of a Persian princess was smuggled out of Iran to Pakistan. While trying to sell it, the Pakistani authorities were alerted and now the body lies in the Pakistan museum. Since then, there have been many theories and many questions have been raised. The most important question has been about the practice of mummification among ancient Iranians. It has been claimed that Iranians and Zarathushties in particular did not practice any kind of mummification.

Here I would like to draw your attention to what Herodotus has said. "The Persian in general cover a (dead) body with wax and then bury it." (Book I chapter. 140).

There are also a few verses from the Shahnameh of Ferdowsi, which suggest some kind of mummification material being used.

1 Yazdgard (Sassanian King) being slain by the miller:
(Translation of Dr. Bahman S Surti Vol.7 Chapter 896 pg. 1656)

They prepared a "dakhmah " in the garden and raised his head high in the clouds. They dried up the wounds of the king with acacia (a gum bearing shrub), pitch, camphor and musk. They wrapped up his body in yellow silk woven with gold thread below and Russian amethyst above. Wine, acacia, camphor, musk and rose water were poured. They made these preparations in the sleeping room.

2 In another instance the head of Iraj is stuffed with musk and incense and sent to his father Faridoon. (Ibid chapter 43 pg.26)

There are others like Arrian, Alexander's' historian, who reports of mistreatment of the body of Kurosh the Great when Pasargadae was conquered about two centuries after the death of Kurosh.

We invite a discussion on this subject. Please send in your findings for publication in our next issue of IRAN ZAMIN.