



RITUALS OF SACRIFICING FOLLOWERS IN THE ARABIAN GULF CEMETERIES DURING THE THIRD MILLENNIUM BC AND THEIR CIVILIZATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

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ABSTRACT

The article aims to study the doctrinal and funeral rituals of the phenomenon of human sacrifice after the death of their masters in some Gulf burials and their cultural significance, in addition to discussing the civilizational evidence found in the tombs of Umm Al-Nar in the Emirates and the burials of Dilmun in Bahrain, which demonstrates the existence of this common ritual in the civilization of the third millennium BC; the article also aims to study the influence of ancient eastern beliefs between the Gulf, Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt in terms of burial rituals followed inside the royal tombs. The article also aims to search answers. The most important questions related to the phenomenon of human sacrifice: which was older than the other in the practice of this ritual? So which one borrows from the other this ritual? Thus, it should be noted that the evidence in Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt precedes the evidence in the Gulf, and the origin of this ritual in the last civilization is not certain; the article also answers another important question: Did all the cities in the Gulf practice this ritual or did some of them not practice it? Despite the difference of opinions, this ritual was practiced in most Gulf burials.

KEYWORDS

Human sacrifices, Dilmun, Umm Al-Nar, Mesopotamia, Ancient Egypt.

المخلص

يهدف المقال إلى دراسة الطقوس العقائدية والجنائزية لظاهرة التضحية بالاتباع بعد موت أسيادهم في بعض المدافن الخليجية ومدلولها الحضاري، بالإضافة إلى مناقشة الأدلة الحضارية التي وجدت في مقابر أم النار بالإمارات ومدافن دلمون في البحرين التي تدل على وجود هذا الطقس الشائع في حضارة الألف الثالث ق.م، كما يهدف المقال إلى دراسة التأثير والتأثر في العقائد الشرقية القديمة بين الخليج وبلاد الرافدين ومصر القديمة من حيث طقوس دفن الاتباع داخل المقابر الملكية؛ كما يهدف المقال أيضا إلى البحث عن أجوبة لأهم الأسئلة التي تتعلق بظاهرة التضحية بالاتباع: أيهم كان أقدم من الآخر في ممارسة هذا الطقس؟ وبالتالي أيهم استعار من الآخر هذا الطقس؟ وبالتالي تجدر الإشارة إلى أن الأدلة في بلاد الرافدين ومصر القديمة تسبق الأدلة في الخليج، كما أن أصل هذا الطقس في الحضارة الأخيرة ليس مؤكداً؛ كما يجب المقال على سؤال آخر هام: هل مارست جميع المدن في الخليج هذا الطقس أم أن بعضاً منها لم يمارسه؟ وبالرغم من اختلاف الآراء إلا أن هذا الطقس تمت ممارسته في أغلب المدافن الخليجية.

الكلمات الدالة

الأضاحي الأدمية، دلمون، أم النار، بلاد الرافدين، مصر القديمة.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Human sacrifices represent the most important and greatest sacrifices offered to the gods, as humans have offered human lives as a sacrifice. The phenomenon of human sacrifices among peoples has deep roots since ancient times in general (M. Verhoeven 2002, 6:8). However, in the Gulf burials, burial customs during the third millennium BC reflected the nature of life and religious beliefs that were prevalent during that long period (Weinstein – Evron 2003, 96). Since the beginning of the third millennium BC, civilizations flourished in the different cities of the ancient Gulf, each of which ruled smoothly and independently of the others, and despite the differences between these civilizations, all of them appear to have practiced this ritual (Legrain 1930, 34). In some sites in the Gulf region, many human burials were found, representing the ritual of sacrifice by followers in the tombs of their masters, especially in royal tombs or the tombs of rulers. This ritual is believed by some to have been transferred to the Gulf region as a result of the influences of religious and funerary beliefs from the civilizations of Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt (Iskander 1942, 295-313).

2. THE CONCEPT OF HUMAN SACRIFICE

The concept of human sacrifice refers to the process of killing one or more persons as part of religious rituals or funerary practices. Some researchers believe that the first evidence of human sacrifice appeared in ancient Egypt, especially during the Second Dynasty period around (3500-3200 BCE), which marks the end of prehistoric times and the beginning of the era of dynasties (Bard 2000, 57-82).

Historians and researchers have pointed out the use of violence for these sacrifices, as some burials have been found in the cemeteries of Naqada and Hierakonpolis, especially in the HK43 cemetery, where the body of the deceased was dismembered, such as beheading or removing the brain, in addition to signs of torture or punishment, which may have been a type of funerary ritual (Jones 2007, 11)(Fig.1).

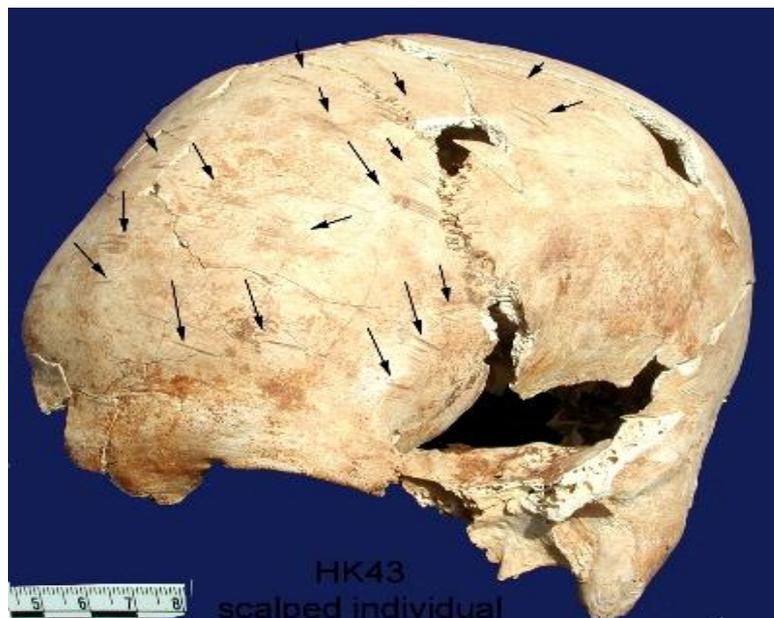


Fig.1. Human skull that underwent scalp removal (HK43 cemetery). Dougherty, S.P., *A Little More Off the Top*, in: *Nekhen news*, Vol. 16, 2004, P.11, Fig.4.

3. THE CONCEPT OF HUMAN SACRIFICE THROUGH FOLLOWING IN THE CIVILIZATION OF MESOPOTAMIA

The concept of human sacrifice was introduced to Mesopotamia in the Middle Paleolithic era, we learned this from the excavations in the Shainder cave from 1951 to 1960 (Pomeroy, et al. 2017, 102-118). The inhabitants of Mesopotamia believed that death was an inevitable fate for humans, but they also believed that the soul left the body to enter the underworld (the world of spirits). Burials were conducted under the floors of houses, royal palaces, or great tombs, and after the burial, funeral rites were performed. These rites were limited to children who served the soul in the afterlife (Shahood and Al Hawash 2006, 685-701) With the development of civilization in Mesopotamia and its contact with the civilization of the Nile Valley (Woolley 1965, 36), the practice of human sacrifice was limited to royal tombs only (Woolley 1965). In southern Mesopotamia, where the Sumerian civilization emerged in Sumer, funeral rites and the selection of tombs became a vital part of religious belief. Stepped tombs were built, as was the case in Ur?, where some burials were found that involved the burial of servants and followers of animals with the kings as a kind of funeral provision (Woolley , UR of the Chaldees 1954, 11)- (Fig.2). There are tombs located outside the cities, as in Aridu and Nefer, and there is also burials in separate shrines for the "Ur Kings", such as in the shrines (Siddall 2020, 10-15) where they were buried under special shrines containing many rooms where funeral rituals were performed, and human sacrifices were offered to the kings who rested there to serve them in the afterlife (Wadi and Mousa 2018, 76-96) (Shahood and Al Hawash 2006, 685-701) (Woolley, The Sumerians 1965, 36-37).

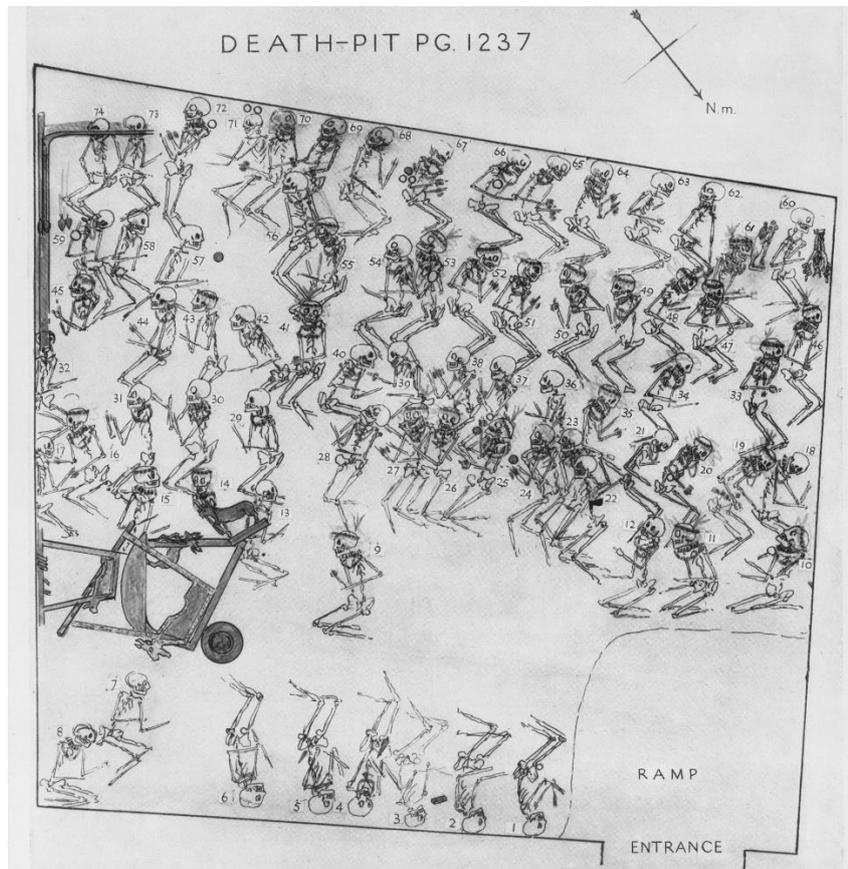


Fig.2: Represents one of the mass burials in the "Royal Cemetery of Ur" labeled as (PG1273). It shows a group of followers (servants) they were forcibly killed by poison or mass suicide to accompany the queen or king as a kind of funeral ritual. (<https://www.iraqinhistory.com/2018-10-19-21-38-44>).

4. The CONCEPT OF HUMAN SACRIFICE (SERVANTS) IN THE GULF CIVILIZATION

The concept of sacrificing followers in Gulf civilization was passed down from the Sumerians, who carried out major burial operations in the city of Dilmun, which they considered a sacred land for the god Enki, who was their patron after death. In Dilmun, tombs of hundreds of thousands of Sumerians were found (Shahood and Al Hawash 2006, 685-701), and this ritual then spread to most Gulf cities.

Many researchers have denied that the people of the Gulf region were aware of the concept of sacrificing followers and that they replaced it with animal sacrifices such as bull heads, as a religious and funerary ritual that was passed down to them from their Egyptian or Sumerian ancestors, along with some spells and magic tools (Grosman, Belfer-Cohen and Munro 2008, 17665-17669) However, in the mid-1940s, Cornwall, who was the first to conduct excavations in Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and some scattered places in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, discovered during the excavations some tombs built on hills and shrines that may belong to kings or rulers, with separate chambers where the servants (followers) were buried to serve the king. These burials were conducted in a separate chamber next to the king or a ruler's chamber. Alongside them, the remains of animal bones were found as a type of funerary ritual, especially during the third and second millennia BC (Cornwall 1944, 3-11).

5. HUMAN BURIALS FOR SERVANTS (ATTENDANTS) IN GULF TOMBS DURING THE 3RD MILLENNIUM BC

5.1 Places of discovery (human burials for servants):

During excavations in most Gulf tombs, human burials for servants (attendants) dating back to the 3rd millennium BCE were discovered. These include Royal tombs in the mounds of the city of Dilmun and the mounds of Tylos in Bahrain, Umm Al-Nar tombs in the UAE, collective tombs of young people in Kuwait, Ras Abrouq tombs and Umm Al-Nar tombs in Qatar, and tombs in the Hail region of Saudi Arabia (B. Cornwall 1946, 3-11)- (Map.1).

5.2. The Burial Mounds of the Followers in the Gulf Burial Mounds:

Bahrain Mounds: The mounds of the burial mounds are spread over a wide area of the island of Bahrain, extending from the south to the north of Bahrain, passing through the center of the island. Most of the mounds date back to the third millennium BC and take the form of the Saluki style (Al-Hashimi n.d., 17-37), which is stone tombs covered by mounds of sand. These mounds were discovered in 1953 by the Danish mission led by P.V. Glob and Geoffrey Bibby from 1953 to 1973. The mission proved the existence of flourishing cities in Bahrain since the third millennium BC (Rice 1985, 24-28) including the burial mounds of Um Jidar, the mounds of Dar Kulayb, the Karzakan mounds field, the Buri mounds field, the Wadi Al-Seel mounds, and the royal mounds located in the mounds of Dilmun and Tylos (Rice 1985, 24-28).

and elite tombs, characterized by their large size and detail-filled burial chambers, have an average diameter of 4 to 6 meters and were built as two-story burial chambers resembling towers with four to six compartments and coated the walls (Lowe 1986, 73-84)- (Fig.5,6). Also from four or six cavities with walls with cladding layer (Højlund 2007, 26), the archaeological evidence suggests that the construction of Dilmun tombs occurred during the early Dilmun period between the third and second millennia BC. Cornwall divided the tombs into two types: early and late mounds, the latter distinguished by a massive layer of earth covering the burial chambers. The average height of the mounds is about 2 to 3 meters, and their diameter ranges from 6 to 11 meters (Laursen 2008, 155-166).



Fig.5

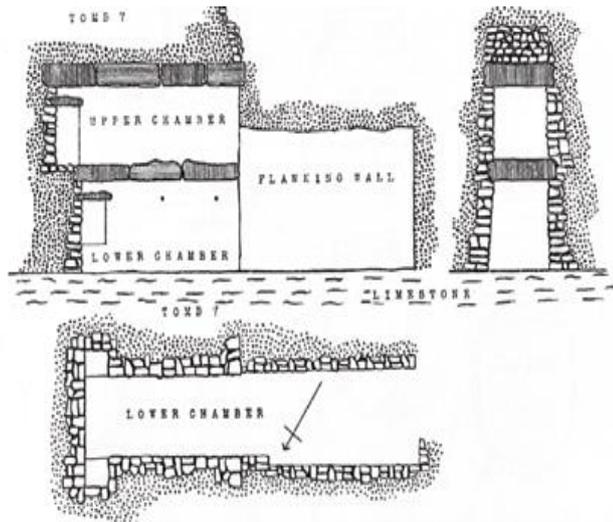


Fig.6

These are drawings of a plan and sections of a two-story burial chamber in one of the royal mounds. Mackay, Bahrain, *London: British School of Archaeology in Egypt*, 1929, 7, 8, Plate 3, 6.

It is worth mentioning that the tombs of the royal mounds contained separate lower burial chambers where the followers (servants) of kings and rulers were buried to serve them in the afterlife. Archaeological evidence indicates that the follower was buried alone in the room in a squatting position with his hands placed either behind his head or in front of his chest on the right or sometimes left side, facing north or south in turn (Soweileh 1995, 196-198). Next to him were some funerary furniture, such as pottery and seals, and sometimes there were also animal bones, such as sheep and goats, and sometimes the bones of monkeys and rabbits, whose use in the funeral rite and personal tools of the king or ruler is not clear (B. Cornwall 1946, 3-11). For example, the archaeological survey in the royal mound (1) revealed a lower burial chamber that contained human remains belonging to a male adult, and Prideaux mentioned in 1983 that "the excavator in this mound presented an assumption that the bones had fallen through the ceiling", so the man may have been one of the slaves who were sacrificed (Rice 1985, 126-129) (Fig.7,8). As for the human remains in most of the excavated tombs, scattered skeletal structures were found inside the burial chamber or placed in a pile in a corner, some of which were exposed to looting and theft (Soweileh 1995, 197). It is noted that the burial mounds in Dilmun share common features with ancient Egyptian tombs, such as the southern subsidiary tombs in Qubbet el-Hawa, which were found in the Qattana Valley in terms of the construction style using dry masonry and the size of the tombs, ranging from 3 to 6

meters, in addition to the funerary furniture represented by seals and pottery (Strouhal 1984, 97).

The Tombs of Tylos: The name Tylos dates back to the Greek era, and researchers note that these are surface tombs built on rocky ground, which differ in their layout and design from the Dilmun Burial Mounds. The Tylos tombs usually contain a number of individual graves, some of which are built horizontally and some vertically. The graves are located next to each other or on top of each other, and the deceased was buried in a cut rock coffin that was sized to fit them. The deceased was placed in a lying position with their hands extended along the body. Beside the rock coffins, a collection of ceramic jars was found, in which fetuses, infants, and young children were buried. Some of them were apparently presented as human offerings to the deceased (Herling 2000, 150-155).



Fig.7



Fig.8

These are examples of the skeletal remains of servants buried in a crouched position inside the early Dilmun burial mounds, one intact and the other subjected to violence and torture. Bahrain National Museum cited in Suwaileh, AbdulAziz, *"The Dilmunic Cemetery of the Kingdom of Bahrain"*, Bahrain, 2018, 227-255, Plate 15.

6. GRAVES IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Oman: It has the most common graves, characterized by stone structures on top of grave "cairns" and are divided into two types of graves: beehive cells and Umm Al-Nar graves:

Beehive cell graves: These are graves shaped like a beehive, circular and built with a double wall made of thin stone panels, with a wall thickness of about 50 cm. The burial chambers inside these graves are individual, and the domes are covered with an inner wall. The height of these graves reaches 4 meters, and no lower rooms, or burial places for followers have been found (Nayeem 1996, 171-173).

Umm Al-Nar graves: Umm Al-Nar graves are named after the place where they were discovered, which is the island of Umm Al-Nar located in the city of Al Ain in the United Arab Emirates (Cleuziou and Tosi 2007, 163-178). Excavations at this site were carried out in four stages by missions from France and Denmark, starting from 1984 and ending in 1989, and excavations were completed in February 2001. The excavations produced a huge number of tombs, some of which are complete and some are incomplete, and 29 of them are listed on the UNESCO World Heritage List (UNESCO 2015b) - (Cleuziou and Tosi 2007, 163-178).



Fig.10



Fig.11

Cairn II and V depict two tombs in the Umm Al Nar area, one of which is engraved with two animals (a gazelle and a camel), and the other shows a model of one of the followers in a prone position lying on his left side with a smashed head. Thorvildsen, Knud, *OP.Cit*, 191-219, Fig. 7, 17.

The archaeological remains date back to the period between 3000 and 2300 BC and are older than the Dilmun graves. They are circular and conical tombs built

with rubble stones, and sometimes you can find circular walls of large buildings decorated with engravings representing animals such as Oryx, bulls, snakes, and camels (Cleuziou and Tosi 2007, 163-178)- (Fig.10). The importance of the Umm Al Nar tombs lies in the fact that they contain the largest number of collective burials in Gulf tombs, with remains indicating the presence of approximately 300 to 600 skeletal structures of followers in separate circular chambers within the tombs. Some were found in a prone position, with their hands extended in front of their faces or towards their chest, and their heads facing north to south or south to north, and mostly lying on their right side (Thorvildsen 1963, 191-219), and sometimes on their left side. For example, a cemetery (CairnV)- (Fig. 11).

The followers are lying on their left side in a squatting position with their hands extended in front of their faces and their heads smashed, while the human remains produced from the excavations in February 2001 by the French archaeological mission in the United Arab Emirates in collaboration with the Department of Antiquities and Tourism in Al Ain two graves (Tomb A Hili North & Hili Tomb N) with two of the huge circular stone tombs, whose diameter from the inside is 10.5 meters, date back to the period from about 2700 to 2000 BC (Sophie 2008, 200-208), and were designated for the burial of leaders. In the lower chambers, more than 300 skeletal remains of the followers were found, all of whom had been subjected to violence before death. The human remains, after analysis with carbon 14, showed that some of them had their hands and feet cut off, and others were subjected to harm to the forehead or head (Sophie 2008, 1-14). In addition, in one of the tombs (Tomb A Hili North), hundreds of followers were found in a pit that had been burned. Moreover, in compartment 3 inside the same tomb, 31 skeletal remains of adult males were found with their right arms folded in front of their faces; it appears that these funeral practices, including the violence committed against the followers, were a kind of funeral ritual according to their religious beliefs at that time, and may have been acquired from the Sumerian and Egyptian civilizations, as it is similar to the funeral ritual inside the Egyptian tombs in Hierakonpolis and Nagada, which includes violence against the followers (Sophie 2008, 1-14).

Kuwait graves: The Dutch-Kuwaiti mission discovered several graves, especially in the Sabiya area, which were built on hills. These graves date back to the 4th and 3rd millennia BC, with some dating back to the Islamic era. They are oval in shape and cover an area of 1800 hectares. They are usually circular, with a length ranging from 6 to 10 meters. They consist of a burial chamber in the middle of the hill, surrounded by a stone cover, and were used for individual burials. However, some of the mass graves of servants and commoners were found on the hills of Sabiya, perhaps buried as a funeral sacrifice for the followers (Rutkowski 2011, 107-108).

7. THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF BURYING FOLLOWERS (3,000 BC)

The archaeological studies and research resulting from excavations in Gulf countries indicate that the ritual sacrifice of followers was not a well-known religious practice in Gulf civilization, but rather it was borrowed from neighboring

civilizations such as the Sumerian civilization in Mesopotamia (M. Verhoeven 2002, 6-8). This is evidenced by the fact that no burials of followers have been found in Qatar and Saudi Arabia. There are several indications in Gulf tombs that suggest the adoption of this practice, including:

7.1 Funerary Architecture:

The funerary architecture in the Gulf region is similar to that of Mesopotamia and Egypt during the third millennium BC, where all of them took the form of mounds on which stone buildings or cylindrical towers with shared characteristics were built. For example, the southern tumulus tombs in Qubbet el-Hawa in Egypt are similar in terms of dry construction method and the size of the tombs, which range from 3 to 6 meters, as well as the royal tombs in Aro, which consist of stone buildings on mounds, and also the use of demolished stones and the design of burial chambers with circular or oval openings (Rice 1985, 126-129) (Strouhal 1984, 97).

7.2 Burial Practices and Funerary Furniture:

The archaeological evidence indicates that there are also common features in the burial practices of the followers between the Gulf tombs, Mesopotamia, and Egypt. It is noted that the burial was done by placing the body on its side, either the right or left, and some of them were subjected to violence and harm, such as cutting off the hands and feet or bending the hands or burning, as found in tombs in Umm al-Nar in the UAE, especially in two cemeteries (Tomb A Hili North & Hili Tomb N), which is similar to the pre-dynastic civilizations in Egypt, where they were found inside cemeteries of Naqada and Hierakonpolis, especially in cemetery HK43, as cutting off the deceased's limbs like in slaughter and beheading, or removing the skull cap, in addition to the traces of torture or punishment. Moreover, this is similar to the strange burials in the "Royal Air" cemetery in Mesopotamia numbered (PG1273), where a group of followers (servants) were found dead by poison or collective suicide to accompany the queen or king as a kind of funeral ritual (Wadi and Mousa 2018, 76-96) (Shahood and Al Hawash 2006, 685-701) (Woolley, *The Sumerians* 1965, 36-37). It is worth noting that there are common features in the way funerary furniture was placed, such as animal bones like rabbits, turtles, and ostriches, and some magical tools and pottery that takes a circular or cylindrical shape and seals (Shahood and Al Hawash 2006, 685-701).

CONCLUSION

Human sacrifices were one of the most important funerary rituals practiced in the 3rd millennium BC in Gulf tombs. This ritual involved killing followers and burying them in underground or individual chambers next to the burial chambers of leaders and rulers to serve the main tomb owner in the afterlife. Violence was practiced in some burials, such as burning or cutting the intestines. Through this article, an important result has been proven, which is that the sacrifice ritual of followers was not a well-known religious ritual in Gulf civilization, but rather borrowed from neighboring civilizations such as Mesopotamia and Egypt, evidenced by the fact that no follower burials have been found in tombs in Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

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