

Original Research Article

Analysis of the Architectural Features of the Shisheh-Riz Tombs of Jalq in Baluchestan, IranFaramarz Hassan Pour^{1*}, Kamran Shahnavazi¹**1. Department of Architecture, Faculty of Art & Architecture, University of Zabol, Zabol, Iran**

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Abstract

Problem statement: Tomb architecture is one of the prominent domains of Iranian architecture. In the Islamic period, the Seljuk and Ilkhanid periods were turning points in Iranian tomb architecture development; a trend that continued in later periods. This research is dedicated to examining the architectural features of tomb buildings in the village of Shisheh-Riz in Golshan County, Sistan and Baluchestan Province. These buildings have not been studied systematically and with an architectural analysis approach. Therefore, analyzing the architecture of these tombs can pave the way for a better understanding of another part of Iranian architectural heritage.

Research objective: The main objective of this research is to identify and analyze the structural and physical features of Shisheh-Riz tombs, along with examining their visual, conceptual, and formal similarities with other tomb buildings in Iran, especially those belonging to the same historical periods.

Research method: This research was conducted using a descriptive-analytical method, with observations and field visits, and the study and review of archives such as travelogues and historical documents. The selected cases were the eight historical tombs in the village of Shisheh-Riz. The reason for selecting this number was based on access roads, the possibility of its documents, and field research. Therefore, the sampling method was purposeful, and finally, the data were analyzed qualitatively.

Conclusion: Unique architectural features of the Shisheh-Riz tombs include banded hole decorations in walls, the use of patkin arches in the interior space, and particularly the method of making domed corners with pendentive, which is distinct from the tradition of making domed corners with squinch in previous periods of Iranian architecture and largely determines the age of the building, since pendentive was common in tomb buildings during the Ilkhanid period in Iran. Also, some decorative motifs inside the buildings were partially identified by examining historical texts.

Keywords: *Tombs, Mausoleum Architecture, Shisheh-Riz, Jalq, Baluchestan.*

Introduction and Problem Statement

The Jalq tombs in Baluchestan, Iran was built during the Seljuk, Ilkhanid, late Safavid and Qajar dynasties, and the architecture and decorations of these buildings reflect the architectural art of these periods. During the Seljuk period, special attention was paid to the construction

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of tombs, a trend that continued during the Ilkhanid and Timurid periods. Many non-religious tombs in Iran, belonging to people whose names no longer exist, are often ignored and are sometimes abandoned and destroyed due to rumors surrounding such buildings. The Jalq tombs have also suffered the same fate and are gradually being destroyed. Similar tombs can also be

seen in the city of Nushki in the province of Baluchistan, Pakistan (Rastegar Jhaleh & Kalanouri, 2017, 34).

Due to the proximity of this region and the exchanges that they had with each other before the Qajar era, these tombs were renovated in 2009 by the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism Organization of Sistan and Baluchestan Province. This research attempts to analyze and explain their architectural features by examining the tomb buildings of the Shisheh-Riz village located in Golshan County, Sistan and Baluchestan Province. These buildings have not been systematically studied from an architectural perspective so far, one of the reasons for which may be the accessibility due to the long distance from the provincial center and the physical condition of the buildings. Analyzing this issue and examining the architectural features of the tombs of Golshan County can help shed more light on this part of Iranian architecture. The main goal of this research is to recognize and analyze the architecture of Shisheh-Riz tombs and examine their similarities from a visual, conceptual, and physical perspective with other tomb buildings in Iran, especially in the periods contemporary with these tombs. This research seeks to answer the following questions.

1. What are the architectural features of Shisheh-Riz tombs in Baluchestan, Iran?
2. How are the architectural elements used in Shisheh-Riz tombs categorized?

Research Methodology

This research was conducted using a descriptive-analytical approach and a combination of field observations and archival method. In the first stage, to collect accurate and comprehensive data, field observations were conducted in the village of Shisheh-Riz, which included visiting eight historical tombs in the region. The cases were selected based on criteria such as access road to the buildings, historical importance, and unique architectural features. To strengthen the theoretical foundations of the research, historical documents and related travelogues were also reviewed. These primary sources played a significant role in interpreting and analyzing the various architectural and cultural dimensions of the tomb buildings. The sampling method was purposefully designed so that the cases could

well reflect the architectural diversity of the tombs in the region. The collected data were evaluated using a qualitative analysis approach, which led to a deeper understanding of the classification of architectural elements and the characteristics of Shisheh-Riz tombs.

Literature Review

Tombs in Iran are so important that sometimes their location has acted as a key factor in the formation or expansion of cities (Costa & Eccles, 1996, 84). In pre-Islamic times, burial of the dead was also ritualistic and important, and sometimes other utensils, objects, and belongings were placed in the grave along with the body (Hatefi et al., 2025; Lohari et al., 2024; Desset et al., 2021; Abbasnejad Seresti & Sattari, 2022). The book *Ganjnameh*, in one volume, introduces the tombs of Iran and their historical and architectural features (Haj Ghasemi, 2010). The book *Islamic Architecture* by Robert Hillenbrand (1994) in addition to introducing the buildings, also pays attention to their meanings and concepts to some extent. Pimia, in his two books titled *Stylistics of Iranian Architecture* (Pimia & Memarian, 2001) and *Islamic Architecture of Iran* (Pimia & Memarian, 2018), has analyzed and examined a number of Iranian tombs in different historical periods. Research conducted in the field of tombs includes Seyyed Hashem Hoseyny's articles entitled "Investigating the Process of Formation of Tomb Complexes in Iranian Architecture during the Islamic Era Based on the Opinions of Abu Saeed Abu al-Khair" (Hoseyny, 2009) and "Introducing the Sufi Tomb-Building Style of Azerbaijan" (ibid., 2010), among other studies related to tomb architecture. Also, the book *Islamic Architecture* by Hattstein and Delius (Hattstein & Delius, 2004) and the book *Ilkhanid Architecture in Natanz* by Blair (1986) have referred to this field of study. Amirhajloo and Riahiyan Gohorti (2022) studied the paleontology of the Green Dome buildings in Kerman in a study that the buildings of this complex, which also included a tomb, date back to the Qara-Khattai period and the reconstruction in the Timurid and Qajar periods. Geometric and numerical analysis of the proportions of the architectural plans and arrays of the tomb of Shah Nematollah Vali Mahan has also been carried out in studies in recent years (Mehrizi et al., 2023). In a study

focusing on the decorations and air vents used, Davtalah et al. (2023) studied the tomb buildings of the Hozdar region of Sistan, along with other significant buildings in this region. Davtalah et al. (2022) studied the architecture of the castles of the Saravan region in another study, but did not mention the history of tomb architecture in this region. Also, in relation to the analysis of the features and elements of local architecture in the province, Fathi et al. (2024) studied the buildings of the British Consulate and the Bank of Iran and England in Sistan. According to Table 1, which has summarized the tomb research background; so far, no detailed research has been conducted on the characteristics and elements of vernacular tomb architecture in Iranian Baluchistan, especially the Shisheh-Riz funerary monuments of Golshan (Jalq) county, which shows the tomb research gap in this region.

Theoretical Foundations of Research

From the first to the third centuries AH, no significant tombs have survived in Iran. Perhaps the tomb of Harun al-Rashid

in Khorasan can be considered one of the early examples of the tomb-building tradition in Iran (Gharavi, 1997, 99).

Due to the long-term prohibition of tomb-building in Iran until the Samanid period, the tomb-building model was transferred to Iran from other countries with two different theories:

1. Wilber, a researcher in the field of Iranian architecture, believed that the tomb-building model had come to Iran from Syria, a land under the domination of the Roman Empire. The similarity of important temples such as the Pantheon to the tomb towers of Iran seriously raises this hypothesis.

2. The tradition prevalent in the northern and eastern regions of Central Asia has also been influential in this regard. In these regions, tombs were built in yurt-like forms with durable materials, with the body placed inside for public viewing, and mourning ceremonies were held around it. The hill on which these tombs were located was called Gorkan (Sobuti, 1991).

However, the accuracy of these theories cannot be proven

Table 1. Background of research on tombs. Source: Authors.

Author	Research area	Findings
Blair (1986)	The Ilkhanid Shrine Complex at Natanz	Study of Ilkhanid architecture in the Natanz region
Godard (1998)	Iranian art	General introduction of the monuments and descriptions in physical terms
Kiani (2000)	History of Iranian Architecture Art	Division of Iranian architecture into several time periods
Pirnia & Memarian (2001)	Iranian architectural stylistics	A study of some tombs in Iran in different periods
Hillenbrand (1994)	Islamic architecture	Introducing buildings and their meanings and concepts
Hoseyny (2010)	The process of formation of tomb architecture and the Sufi tomb-building style of Azerbaijan	Direct connection between the construction of tomb architecture in Iran and Sufism trends and the architectural and decorative features of Azerbaijani tombs
Haj Ghasemi et al. (2010)	Book of Ganj Nameh	Introduction to the buildings and their historical and physical characteristics
Hattstein & Delius (2004)	Islam: Art and Architecture	The great diversity of forms of artistic expression from the beginning of Islam to the present day
Kalanouri (2017)	Tombs of the city of Jalq, Saravan	Investigating the theory of infant burial in the walls of Jalq tombs
Masoudi Asl et al. (2018)	Fundamentals of the Architecture of the Tombs of the Imams of Iran	The Place of the Fundamentals of the Architecture of Sacred Religious Tombs in the Shiite School
Pirnia & Memarian (2018)	Islamic Architecture of Iran	A Study of Some Tombs of Iran in Different Periods
Belali Oskuyi & Jamali (2020 & 2021)	Physical-Spatial Typology of Ilkhanid and Safavid Religious Tombs in Isfahan	Identifying, Codifying, and Categorizing the Physical-Spatial Characteristics of Tomb Spaces in Isfahan in the Ilkhanid and Safavid Periods

with precise historical references, and the existence of ancient burials dating back several thousand years in Iran, for example in Shahr-e Sokhteh in the north of Sistan and Baluchestan province in 3200 BC, shows the opposite of these claims.

The char-taqi (four-vaulted) architecture, as the foundation of Iranian ritual architecture, has played a significant role in shaping the form and space of tombs after Islam. The char-taqi architectural pattern, which is a relic of the Sassanid era, lost its central position in Iranian ritual architecture for a while with the arrival of Islam (Soltanzadeh, 1983); but gradually, in the form of funerary architecture, it became a common pattern in Iranian architecture again. The tomb of Amir Ismail Samani in the Samanid era, with a square design and a dome in the center of the intersection of the building axes, is a sign of this. In the early Islamic era, the construction of square tombs with domes was proposed as one of the old methods in Islamic tomb construction. One of the oldest examples of this type of tomb is the tomb of Ismail Samani in Bukhara, which has survived and is noteworthy (Ettinghausen & Grabar, 1906/1999, 301). The tomb of Amir Ismail Samani in Bukhara is an example of early Islamic architecture. Some call it a “strange building” because it displays primitive architectural forms that later spread throughout Iran during the Seljuk period. For example, here is a new way of placing a dome on a square building, and there are examples of various brick designs inside and outside the building. On the one hand, the structure has features of pre-Islamic architecture, and on the other hand, it has new features that later became the principles of Iranian architecture (Wilson, 1891/1987, 138). During the Ilkhanid period, domed tombs underwent new developments, as these structures became larger and larger. A prominent example of this type of structure is the Soltaniyeh Dome in Zanjan (Breton, 1998, 95). The design of Timurid tombs was based on quadrilateral geometry and was mostly small in size. This architecture usually focused and emphasized a specific aspect of the structure, such as the iwan or the dome drum, or both (Hillenbrand, 1998, 359). The use of a spatial physical composition of a square with a dome and similar forms, such as the octagonal dome, unlike the tomb towers, which were structurally dead-end and were mostly used for decoration,

primarily provided a suitable space for detailed decoration and, at the same time, encouraged the experience of space-making. For this reason, they were given a more important role in funerary architecture (Hillenbrand, 1994/2008, 290). Based on the discussed topics, according to Tables 2 and 3, the evolutionary process of architectural historical periods and the characteristics of tomb architecture in the periods leading up to the construction time of the Shisheh-Riz tombs were considered.

Findings and Discussion

By examining the available historical documents, it was determined that there is no precise information about the method and exact date of construction of the Jalq tombs. However, considering the different architecture of these tombs, these works have sometimes been of interest to orientalists who visited Baluchestan of Iran during the Qajar period. Therefore, the traces of these monuments can be explored in the historical travelogues of these orientalists: Pottinger (1816), in his travelogue, mentions tombs on the way from Sindh to Saravan. By analyzing the time interval with the surrounding areas mentioned in the travelogue, it was determined that the monuments mentioned by Pottinger are the same as the Shisheh-Riz tombs. He describes: “About four miles from our halting-place to-night, there were signs of very strange and extraordinary graves on the left bank of the river, four hundred yards distant. These graves were rectangular in shape, each enclosed by short stone walls, which, despite their simple construction, had a strange appearance. These walls enclosed areas of about four or five yards square, and the direction of the entrance and of their construction was directed towards the east. In this region, large mounds of earth and stone were also visible for a considerable distance. The only information the guide gave was that these works belonged to the time of the Gabries. However, it is common in this land to attribute any unusual and unexplained phenomenon to this source, so this claim cannot be trusted with complete certainty. But in this particular case, this assumption is likely to be correct, since no signs of Muslims or Hindus are observed in the structure of these tombs. If we are not to attribute them to Muslims or Hindus, they must probably be attributed to the Persians or to much more distant times. The antiquity

Table 2. An overview of Iranian tomb architecture from the Samanid to the Timurid period Source: Authors.





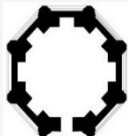
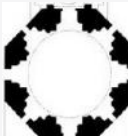




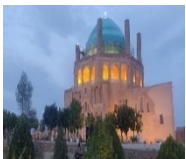



Period	Landmark tomb	ictureP	Description
Samanid period	Amir Ismail Samani		Quadrilateral domed buildings inspired by the Chahar-Taqi and the fire temple of the Sassanid period
Seljuk period	Three Domes of Urmia		Popularity of building tomb towers with brick decorations Circular or regular polygonal plans With a tomb chamber or crypt Addition of an entrance arch to the building
Ilkhanate period	Soltaniyeh Dome		Utilizing the tomb tower design with an emphasis on the vertical axis Dividing the exterior walls of the building with a vault Placing different functions in a building complex
Timurid period	Tomb of Goharshad Begum		Verticality to create a sense of grandeur Building a school and mosque adjacent to the tomb Adding more complex decorations in tiling Continuing to use the divisions of the arch in the facade Using the dome drum to further raise the dome

Table 3. Plans of tombs from the Seljuk and Ilkhanid periods. Source: Authors.

Tomb	Çelebi Oğlu Tomb	Soltaniyeh Tomb	Kharaghan Tower	Jabaliyeh Dome, Kerman	Ali Abarkooh Dome
Plan					
Picture					

of these works is undoubtedly remarkable because, despite the high hardness and resistance of the stones, their remains have fallen into a state of destruction and erosion. Among the hearsay stories that have been told about these tombs, if true, can help to better understand their condition. This is a subject that Murad Khan was talking about. He pointed out that the stones used in the construction of these buildings are not found anywhere else in this land, and added that the value of these buildings is not properly recognized, because the people of that time were not capable of working with such skill and mastery. I am still in doubt whether these buildings were once tombs or the remains of a temple or shrine. Within each of these buildings, there was a considerable elevation, covered with stone, and giving the

appearance of a tomb. However, there is another possibility; perhaps this section was an altar-like place for the sacred fire of the fire temple. The great number of such buildings is more a sign of their being tombs than any other point” (Pottinger, 1816, 162).

Another historical document that describes these buildings is General Sir Percy Sykes (1902), who describes these buildings in his travelogue titled General Sir Percy Sykes’ Travelogue or Ten Thousand Miles in Iran: “In the upper oasis, several buildings with brick domes are seen, which are said to be the tombs of the Kayani kings, but it cannot be said with certainty that the Saffarid emirs who ruled in Balochistan for more than five centuries were buried in these tombs. Tiled works can be seen under some of



Fig. 3. Entrance to Tomb No. 1 from the eastern side (right), image of Tombs 2 and 3 from the southern view (left). Source: Authors.

tombs and buildings was built in various sizes and shapes according to the recognition and status of the deceased. It is possible that the original buildings in this tomb complex were damaged in the late Seljuk era and during the Mongol invasion, but the results of field observations indicate that the overall damage is related to their natural erosion over many years. The common method of building domes on square plans on the walls without using earrings and elephant ears. In this way, sometimes by using date tree trunks that were placed at the four corners, the building was made from a quadrilateral to an octagonal shape, and then by repeating this work, the roof of the building was brought closer, and then the dome ring was placed, and the dome was built on it. The tendency to build tombs with a domed cube design began in the Seljuk period with the construction of the tomb of Sultan Sanjar in Merv and reached its peak with the construction of the tomb of Oljaito in Soltaniyeh. This tendency to use octagonal geometric forms and design domed tombs, along with the simultaneous construction of the tomb of Rukn-e-Alam and the tomb of Oljaito, shows that there are significant similarities between these works. According to the correspondences observed in the architectural plans in [Table 3](#), it can be suggested that the architecture of some Jalq tombs also followed the Seljuk period style in its design and use of the domed cube form and octagonal geometric pattern. Based on the analysis of the architectural elements used, as shown in [Table 6](#), Tomb No. 1 is distinguished from the other tombs in this complex by the use of octagonal turrets at the corners, and Tomb No. 2 by the highest dome. Tombs 1, 3, 6, and 8 have pendentive corner construction, which is a characteristic

of the Ilkhanate period. Tombs 2, 4, 5, and 7 have Patkin construction for dome corners and decorative corbel arches, which in Tomb 7 was implemented with greater quality and dimensions than in other tombs. The use of banded hole framing for the arches on the interior walls and the use of these decorative holes in the form of a strip under the dome were observed in Tombs 1, 4, and 7, which, of course, may exist in other tombs, considering the plaster and thatch coatings in later restorations and reconstructions.

Conclusion

Although the tombs of Shisheh-Riz have physical similarities with some tombs of the Seljuk and Ilkhanid periods, one of the unique architectural features of Shisheh-Riz tombs is the pendentive method of making corners under the dome, which is contrary to the previous traditions of making corners with squinches in previous periods of Iranian architecture, and this cornering largely determines the age of the building, because this method of making corners was common in tombs during the Ilkhanid period in Iran. The use of corbel arches and banded small decorative holes in horizontal and vertical layouts in the interior space under the dome, and the burial of infants and premature births in the walls are other physical features of these tombs. The minor physical differences of the Shisheh-Riz tombs can confirm the gradual development and construction of this tomb complex. There are currently no specific designs left from the interior architectural decorations of the buildings, but a review of historical texts, including Sykes' observations, indicates that tiling and elephant and peacock designs were among the decorations inside these buildings.


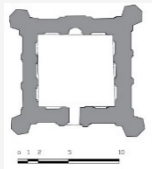
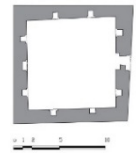
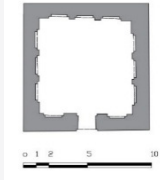
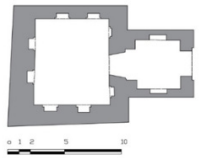
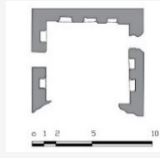
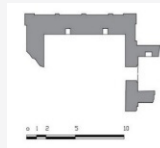

According to the findings of research and architectural analyses, most of the Shisheh-Riz tombs have quadrangular and square plans, and the entrance to these tombs is often located on the eastern front of the building. Only two cases

have entrances from the south and one case from the west, which is similar to the orientation of the entrance to the Zoroastrian rock-cut tomb. The reason for this orientation could be based on the direction of sunrise from the east,

Table 4. Examination of the physical condition, views, location, and direction of the entrance to the building in the Shisheh-Riz tombs. Source: Authors.

Tomb	Physical condition and orientation of the building entrance	North view	South view	East view	West view	Latitude	Longitude	Entrance position
1	The entrance to the building is from the south. The building has been renovated.					27°35'33.75"N	62°42'7.27"E	
2	The entrance is from the east. The eastern wall and part of its northern wall have collapsed, and a high dome stands on top of it as the tallest tomb in the complex.					27°35'33.05"N	62°42'6.52"E	
3	The entrance is from the south. Currently, the northern wall has collapsed. A circular wall with a diameter of about 65 cm has been built parallel to the border of the palm grove.					27°35'32.97"N	62°42'6.00"E	
4	The entrance is from the east. It consists of two square spaces of different dimensions that are interconnected. The smaller domed room serves as the domed pre-space of the tomb.					27°35'32.71"N	62°42'5.14"E	
5	The entrance is from the west. The body of the building has been renovated.					27°35'35.41"N	62°42'2.20"E	
6	The entrance is located on the eastern side, and the domed roof of the tomb has now completely collapsed. The walls are brick.	It has been destroyed.				N ³⁵ 35.93-27°35	62°42'0.94"E	
7	The entrance is from the east and is located about 17 meters north of Tomb No. 6. The building is intact on the north and east sides, but its western and southern parts have been destroyed.					27°35'36.76"N	62°42'1.03"E	
8	The entrance is from the east. Many parts of the building have been destroyed.					27°35'37.45"N	62°41'59.41"E	

Table 5. Analysis of physical and architectural features of Shisheh-Riaz tombs. Source: Authors.

Tomb	Building specifications and dimensions	Architectural features	Plan 
1	Dimensions: 13.80*14 meters Each of the doorways is separated by turquoise clay reliefs 20 centimeters in diameter, like strands of a necklace.	Square plan with an entrance porch on the south side and a stone foundation In the four corners of the building are small tombs, doorways, and a mihrab-like space with pointed arches. In the inner wall of the building are rectangular frames Turquoise-colored clay reliefs of the roof	
2	Dimensions: 13 x 12.50 meters The entrance door is 130 centimeters wide. The wall thickness is 130 centimeters	Square plan Entrance on the east side Niches inside the building	
3	Dimensions: 8.80 x 9.5 meters with a height of 10 meters The thickness of the building's beams is approximately 130 There are three rectangular boxes 360 centimeters high on the western and eastern walls.	This tomb has a square plan. The walls of the building are made entirely of mud bricks and have a stone foundation. Holes in the inner wall measuring about 30 x 40 cm for burying a newborn	
4	Area: 105 square meters The entrance is about 3 meters wide, and its niche is 90 centimeters wide. The interior space of the tomb is 7.50 by 8.20, and its exterior space is 10.50 by 10.	It consists of two square spaces with different dimensions, and the smaller space, which is the pre-space of the tomb, has dimensions of about 66.50 square meters, with dimensions of 6 by 6.5 meters and a height of 3.60 meters to the top of the dome. And the tombs are located in a stepped form in the form of several brick platforms on top of each other.	
5	Dimensions: 10.80 x 10.50 meters It is located about 3 meters above the surface of the area, and the size of the entrance door is 150 centimeters.	The entrance to the tomb is from the east. It is believed that the height of its dome from floor to ceiling was about 10 meters.	
6	Dimensions: 9*9 meters Wall thickness 90 centimeters	Interior niches Dome roof and stone foundation Entrance to the tomb from the east	-
7	Dimensions: 8.70*8.90 meters Wall thickness 120 centimeters Entrance door width 120 centimeters	Doorways with pointed arches Entrance to the tomb from the east Has an entrance porch	
8	Area: 110 square meters with a height of 10 meters The thickness of the walls on all four sides is 150 centimeters, and the entrance door is 100 centimeters wide	Chalipa-shaped decorations Tomb entrance: South Dome roof (25 cm thick) include an entrance iwan	

based on ancient Iranian rituals, based on climatic reasons and the prevailing wind of the region, or based on the way the body was buried in the direction of the Qiblah and the body's face facing the entrance. These hypotheses can be examined in future research. On the other hand, the tombs known as Soru and Kohkan are located a few kilometers from the Shisheh-Riz tombs. Due to the lack of sufficient documentation, it was not possible to examine their

architectural, structural, and decorative features in this study due to time constraints, and this is recommended for future research.

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Table 6. Analysis of architectural elements used in Shisheh-Riz tombs. source: Authors.

Tomb number	Entrance gate	Pre-entrance space	Pointed arches and facade framings	Turrets	Niches of medium height with low height	Small openings in the dome	Small openings in the walls	Interior framing	Dome corners with pendentive	Patkin corners under the Dome	Corbel decorative arch	Banded hole decorations	Chalipa motifs
1	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*			*	
2	*					*				*	*		
3	*				*	*		*	*				
4		*			*	*				*	*	*	
5	*	*	*		*	*				*	*		*
6									*				
7	*	*	*		*	*				*	*	*	*

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest in conducting this research

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