

A Study of Settlement Patterns in the Central Highlands of Baluchistan, Bent, Nikshahr; Based on Ethnoarchaeological Surveys

Type of Study: Original Research

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Abstract

South-eastern Iran has been one of the important regions in cultural interactions with the Indus Valley, Mesopotamia, the Iranian Plateau and the coastal strip of southern Iran. Sefidkuh is located in Bent sector, Nikshahr county of Iranian Sistan and Baluchistan province. This region is a settlement of communities with semi-settled settlement patterns in the form of scattered and coherent villages with a specific placement pattern along rivers or intermountain plains. The settlements follow the circular, oval and in a limited way rectangular architectural pattern. The livelihood strategy of these communities is very broad and is based on agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry, hunting, food gathering, trade and labor. It seems that this strategy follows unique cultural and economic patterns and political and social relations similar to prehistoric times. Since the ethno-archeological studies are one of the main pillars of archaeological researches today and are of high importance, the present research is trying to better understand the human societies of Bent by examining, introducing and comparing the dynamic findings of ethnology with the static findings of archaeology. This research was conducted with a combination of field methods in three stages: In the first stage, the survey and identification of the ancient sites of the region were done. In the second stage, the current living communities of the region were examined from the point of view of ethnology and finally in the last stage, in order to identify differences and similarities with each other, a comparative comparison of the findings of both studies was done. Based on the obtained results, it should be acknowledged that the current architectural model of the region has its roots in the culture and traditions of the Baloch people, which have existed in a circular form for a long time. A pattern created by settling in flat areas between mountains or river terraces has been formed in the form of oval, circular, cluster, irregular, linear and similar plans with the past societies and based on the way of living of a wide economic spectrum. By examining the comparative results, it can be acknowledged that the common way in the region is completely consistent with the way of life of primitive semi-sedentary societies in every aspect.

Key Words: Settlement Pattern, Ethnoarchaeology, Circular Architecture, Village, Bent.

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Introduction

South-eastern Iran has been one of the important regions in cultural interactions with the Indus Valley, Mesopotamia, the Iranian Plateau and the coastal strip of southern Iran. Sefidkuh is located in Bent sector, Nikshahr county of Iranian Sistan and Baluchistan province. This region is a settlement of communities with semi-settled settlement patterns in the form of scattered and coherent villages with a specific placement pattern along rivers or intermountain plains. The settlements follow the circular, oval and in a limited way rectangular architectural pattern. The livelihood strategy of these communities is very broad and is based on agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry, hunting, food gathering, trade and labor. It seems that this strategy follows unique cultural and economic patterns and political and social relations similar to prehistoric times. Since the ethno-archeological studies are one of the main pillars of archaeological researches today and are of high importance, the present research is trying to better understand the human societies of Bent by examining, introducing and comparing the dynamic findings of ethnology with the static findings of archaeology.

The study area

Bent is a small region located about 20 km northwest of Nikshahr in south-central Sistan and Baluchistan. The terrain of this region is mostly mountainous, with the southernmost portion lying on the coast. Southern Baluchistan has a rich fauna. Nowadays, animals like the leopard, black bear, hyena, fox, jackal, wild goat, wild sheep, onager, crocodile and various types of snakes can be found there. A wide range of domesticated animals (such as cattle, camel, goat and sheep) play an essential role in the subsistence economy of the region. The hot climate of Makran allows only sparse flora. The mountains are rocky and without vegetation. Only, some plants of the Nubo-Sindian type are concentrated in the wadis and alluvial plains. The most frequent species in the valleys of the southern Makran are the Egyptian thorn, caper tree, desert thorn, Prosopis, tooth brush-tree, Tamarix, Christ's thorn, wild pistachio, Rohida tree, the Pipal tree and Mazari palm (Sabeti, 1994). The climate and temperatures of Nikshahr vary, with the tropical, warm and humid climate central area. In the western regions (Bent) the climate is hot and dry with hot summers and mild winters (Hamidi and Ramezanifard, 1995: 23). Irrigation is provided by flooding, subterranean channels (kārez), riverbed pools and springs. Sheep are also bred (Vahedi, 2020a:74-91). Its population comprises the majority of the Baluchi Med who live in their traditional mud huts.

Method and materials

The main purpose of the two field seasons, which took place between January 2019 and March 2020, was to survey and identify the archaeology and ethnography of the communities living in the region. The studies were carried out according to the objectives of the Organization of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism of Iran. This research was conducted with a combination of field methods in three stages: In the first stage, the survey and identification of the ancient sites of the region were done. In the second stage, the current living communities of the region were examined from the point of view of ethnology and finally in the last stage, in order to identify differences and similarities with each other, a comparative comparison of the findings of both studies was done.

Conclusion

Our surveys include 12 villages inhabited by Baragdan, Koddap (A and B), Kopeydap, Siyahdan, Tangsam, New Sorkh Kalot, Kuchkodam, Javanja, Dinger, Torkgouash and

Kupchou people. These settlements are best described as residential base camps. They form the point of view of locational stability, degree of investment and seasonal continuity of occupation, take one principal form and are year-round permanent villages. These factors contribute to residential stability at sites. Therefore, many villages are more than a hundred years old and some of them have been occupied for fewer years. They are not much different from each other in size and composition of social groups, location relative to resources, degree of investment in structures and site morphology including size, layout and construction materials. The territory of each village is usually within a radius of 2 to 4 km and as a village inhabitant, everybody will inherit land from their ancestors. Usually, houses (in the local named log), water resources such as reservoirs, springs, semi-deep-water holes and gardens, flat and agricultural lands are located in this area. Much of the terrain is either sandy, salty, mountainous or lacking good soil, and though the agricultural potential is low, the pastoral potential is excellent. The predominant economic activity in these villages is pastoralism of various types and agriculture which is also conducted employing irrigation, from springs, diversion of run-off and to a limited extent by direct rainfall. It should be noted that villages rely on agriculture and pastoralism in varying proportions and remain inhabited year-round by a majority of households. They have a subsistence type of economy and try to produce everything they need in their daily life. They are self-sufficient not only in food production but also in many other daily needs, utensil-making and home-building. At all times the incomes are at a subsistence level. Gardening, gathering, hunting, labour and fishing, respectively, are other types of main and complementary living patterns. Families constitute the core group of villages. The villages are surrounded by a stone fence. Spatial separation within all villages has been done according to blood relations. There are neighbourhoods in every village. These neighbourhoods are made up of members of one family which include the head of the household with children and couples who are from the same village. The spatial separation of neighbourhoods and the residential area of each family from the others are done by creating a wooden (or stone) fence inside the main area of the villages. We studied 12 uninhabited villages (ancient sites) called Baragdan Dom, Borkoj, Gerandchil, Habib Lah Gori, Javanja, Lalak Marjaei, Menzeli, Sar Rud, Damb Sarta, Siyahdan, Siyahob Dar and Sohr Koch which were occupied during the past 2–18 centuries, and we were able to identify several distinctive features in the ground. Based on the obtained results, it should be acknowledged that the current architectural model of the region has its roots in the culture and traditions of the Baloch people, which have existed in a circular form for a long time. A pattern created by settling in flat areas between mountains or river terraces has been formed in the form of oval, circular, cluster, irregular, linear and similar plans with the past societies and based on the way of living of a wide economic spectrum. By examining the comparative results, it can be acknowledged that the common way in the region is completely consistent with the way of life of primitive semi-sedentary societies in every aspect. In the Bent region, it is possible to interpret the archaeological sites based on the ethnographic recorded in 2019 and 2020; the pattern itself is based on the behaviour observed in a contemporary setting. This approach provides evidence of the borrowing of techniques concerning the various historical contexts of the past few centuries in the studied area.

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