



Chronology of the Madrish Castle Site in Sistan Based on the Study of Pottery Obtained from a Systematic Survey

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ABSTRACT

The Sistan Plain in the north of Sistan and Baluchistan Province, Southeast Iran was known for its suitable environmental conditions and favorable position of communication and commerce in ancient times as one of the most important centers of human societies. Since the limited archaeological research in this area and the lack of data from the historical periods of the Sistan Plain, it is necessary to conduct a systematic survey of one of the most important Islamic castles in this area. For this purpose, during the survey and sounding project to determine the core zone and propose the buffer zone of the Bibi Dust mounds in July 2016, was surveyed systematically Madrish Castle, located north of the Bibi Dust site. This survey was conducted using "methodically classified sampling of indicators". 218 finds were collected, including pieces of pottery, stoneware, manganese (glass) bangles, and glassware. According to the objectives of the research, 77 indicative pottery pieces were selected and subjected to typological comparisons. The main question of the research was, what periods does Madirish Castle belong to based on the classification, typology, and comparative studies of pottery? Data collection was done by field and documentary method and descriptive-comparative research method. Data was analyzed based on comparative studies. The results of the studies conducted on this site clearly show the settlement date between the middle 5th and 9th centuries AH and the cultural connection with neighboring areas, such as Greater Khorasan, Afghanistan, Kerman, and Baluchistan. In addition, the most prominent type of pottery at this site is the unglazed pottery with carved geometric patterns.

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Introduction

As one of the main artifacts of human societies, Pottery has an important place in the reconstruction of past cultures and civilizations. The classification, typology, and chronology of pottery are very important in archaeological studies. One of the least-known regions in the archaeology of the Islamic era of Iran is the Sistan Plain, in the northern Sistan and Baluchistan Province. This Province, with an area of about 187,502 km² is equivalent to 9.1% of the area of Iran, of which 8,117 km² belongs to the Sistan Plain (Najjar Saligha, 2007: 25). Sistan is a region where humans have been in constant interaction with the natural environment, and it has also been a land of myth, religion, and culture. Sistan has always had a significant population due to its suitable and unique environmental characteristics. On the other hand, due to its strategic and military position, it has been the focus of various governments in the past. However, despite the importance of this region from the viewpoint of agriculture, ecology, and its communication and commercial position, as well as the existence of many ancient monuments and sites, our archaeological knowledge about this region is very little. Therefore, in this research, one of the important castles of Sistan belonging to the Middle Islamic Centuries is carefully studied.

Methodology

In this research, data collection has been done in the field and documentary ways; the research method is descriptive-comparative and the results have been analyzed based on comparative studies. In the documentary method, all the information and data related to the site, including the history of field research, geographical sources, and pottery comparison sources, were collected. In the field method, a systematic archaeological survey of the site was conducted in three distinct stages: mapping, sampling, and documenting the findings including washing pottery samples, registration of sample information, selection of index samples, design, and photography of samples. After preparing and drawing the topographical map, the site was gridded into grids in 9 rows and 8 columns with the dimensions of 10

× 10 m. Rows and columns of each unit were used to number these units. Then, the rows were named with numbers 1 to 9 and the columns with letters A to H. The site was divided into 72 units. Finally, sampling was done from 18 units, which included about 25% of the entire site.

Discussion

The location and appearance of Madrish Castle

Madrish Castle is located 16 km northeast of Zabol City and on the west bank of the Niatek River (Canal) at an altitude of 493 meters above sea level and geographic coordinates N:3106740 E:6136897 (Fig. 1). This site with an area of about 1 hectare, is the remains of a fort with an almost circular plan with a scattering of cultural materials in an area of 90×80 m, which has become a circular mound with a diameter of 70 m today. The highest point of this site is about 7 m above the surrounding ground. The fence around the castle can be seen in the form of a very thick wall made of clay and mud with 4 m thickness, which is severely eroded. At certain distances from the fence, there are rectangular towers with dimensions of 5×3 m, completely overlooking their surroundings. These towers are completely similar to each other and are constructed on two floors. The surface of this site, which includes the inner space of the castle, is deeper than its edges and fence. The only remains of the rooms are connected to the fence, and no architectural space is left. In the north of the inner space of the castle, there are remains of a brick well with a diameter of 70 cm, which is now mostly filled and is only 40 cm deep. This well was probably used to store water for the castle. The surface cultural materials include broken pieces of bricks, clay, manganic (glass bangles), broken pieces of glass containers, and pieces of glazed and unglazed pottery, which have a relatively high density. The dimensions of the surface bricks are 23×32×5 cm and the dimensions of the bricks in the well are 13×28×5 cm. There are two types of mud bricks, one with dimensions of 30×30×7 and the other with dimensions of 27×27×6 cm (Fig. 2).



Figure 1: The location of Madrish Castle in the Sistan Plain, in northern Sistan and Baluchistan province, Southeast Iran (Keikha, 2015: 507).



Figure 2: General view of Madrish Castle, seen from the east (Authors, 2022).

Data analysis

After the surface survey of the site, 187 potsherds, and also a number of pieces of glass, stoneware, and bangles (manganic) were collected. For the relative dating of the obtained pottery, a find with a better condition than the others, was selected from each group. In total, 77 samples were analyzed. Results of studying the pottery in the Madrish Castle site and their relative and comparative chronology showed that out of 30 types of Islamic pottery known in the Sistan Plain (Mousavi Haji *et al.*, 2018: 13-14), there are 10 types in the castle; 1: Unglazed and simple pottery (Table 1); 2: Unglazed and patterned pottery with carved patterns; 3: Unglazed and patterned pottery with added patterns; 4: Unglazed and patterned pottery with molded

patterns; 5: Unglazed and patterned pottery with combined carved and added patterns; 6: Glazed and simple pottery; 7: Simple sgraffito pottery with single-color glaze (Table 2); 8: Gulabeh patterned pottery (Table 3); 9: Pottery with black pattern under turquoise/green/blue glaze; 10: Pottery with black and turquoise pattern can be seen on the white background under the colorless transparent glaze in Madrish Castle. The ceramics of this site, from various aspects such as decoration, form, motif, and pattern, are similar to pottery from the region, such as Neishabur, Bojnord, Mashhad, Gorgan, Mesopotamia, Ghazna, Bamyan, Kandahar, Baluchistan, Makran, and Jiroft. Therefore, the assignment of these ceramics to the fourth to the eighth century can be justified.

Table 1: Unglazed and simple pottery (Authors).


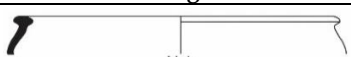

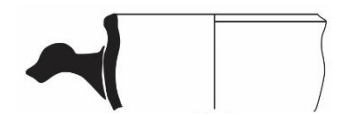


No.	Comparable Source	Picture	Design	Age
1	Gorgan (Kiyani & Karimi, 1985, Figure 37)			6 AH
2	Iran (Nasser Khalili Collection) (Grube, 1994, 182. No. 183)			6 Ah
3	Zahedan Kohnah (Mousavi Haji, 2003, Plate 30, Design 1) Hozdar, Sistan (Keikha, 2018, plate 25, plan 2)			6 AH

Table 2: Simple sgraffito pottery with a single-color glaze (Authors).









No.	Comparable Source	Picture	Design	Age
1	South Makran (Mousavi Haji <i>et al.</i> , 2012: Plate 7, Figure 34)			6 AH
2	Sistan (Mousavi Haji & Atai, 2010: plate 71, drawings 220, 221, 222, plate 72, drawing 223)			6 AH

Table 3: Gulabeh patterned pottery (Authors).

No.	Comparable Source	Figure	Design	Age
1	Neishabur (National Museum of Iran) (Rafiei, 1998, 213, Figure 115)			4 AH
2	Sistan (Mousavi Haji & Atai, 2010, plate 48, drawings 79, 80, 81, 82, 84)			4 AH

The results of the comparative typology of the ceramics of Madrish Castle clearly show the similarity of these samples with the pottery of the neighboring regions, especially the Greater Khorasan. The cultural connection of the Sistan region and Madrish Castle with the Greater Khorasan can be seen from the similarity of the ceramics of Madrish Castle with the ceramics of Neishabur, Bojnord, Mashhad, Gorgan, Mesopotamia, Ghazna, Bamyan and Kandahar. In addition, the comparability of some samples with unglazed and glazed pottery of the Islamic era, especially unglazed pottery with molded and carved motifs, clarifies the connection of this site with Kerman and its western neighbors in the Islamic era.

Conclusion

This study aimed to identify settlement duration, pottery types, and cultural connections at the Madrish Castle site. Based on the findings of the systematic archaeological survey on the Madrish Castle site, the comparative typology of cultural materials, and their relative chronology, it can be concluded that this site was inhabited between the 4th and 8th centuries AH. It is also worth mentioning that since the distribution of the ceramics of the 6-7th centuries AH such as the silhouette pottery is higher than other types, the era of peak settlement in the site seems to be related to these centuries.

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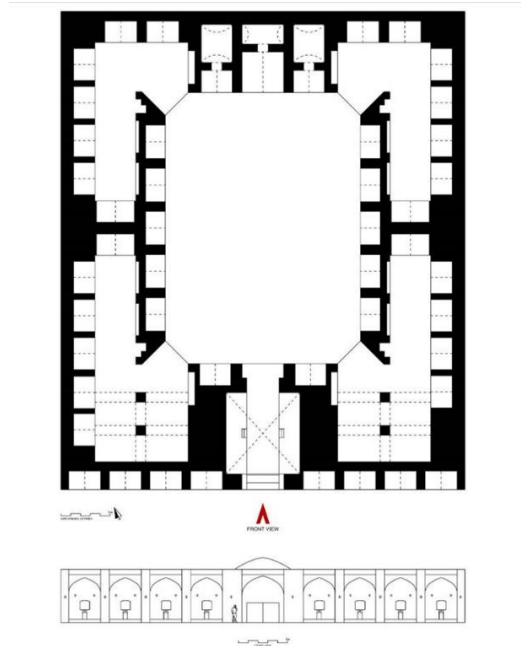


Figure 3: Plan and View of the Astaneh Caravanserai.

Bayaz Caravanserai

This building is located in the Bayaz district, about 150 meters north of the communication road between Kerman and Anar, approximately 25 kilometers west of the city of Anar. The plan of this building is four-iwan (vaulted hall) and oriented in the northeast-southwest direction. The total area is around 2,500 square meters, with a length of 51 meters and a width of 50 meters. All the roofs of the caravanserai are domed, and the entrance is from the northeast side. There are small iwans on both sides of the entrance for the accommodation of the caravans.

There is an open entrance that leads to the central courtyard through a corridor. There are two small iwans on either side of the entrance corridor, with rooms behind them (Fig. 4).

The side opposite the entrance corridor is symmetrical, but the main iwan on that side has collapsed. On the southeastern and northwestern sides, there is a central iwan with two smaller iwans on either side, but the southeastern iwan has also collapsed. Behind the northwestern iwan, there is a two-story space, with the upper level being lower in height.

The construction materials of the caravanserai are brick, mud, and plaster, and its date of construction is attributed to the Safavid to the Qajar periods. Various restoration efforts have been carried out on the building over different eras, and more recent renovations have been done using different techniques. Currently, the structure is abandoned and left in a derelict state.

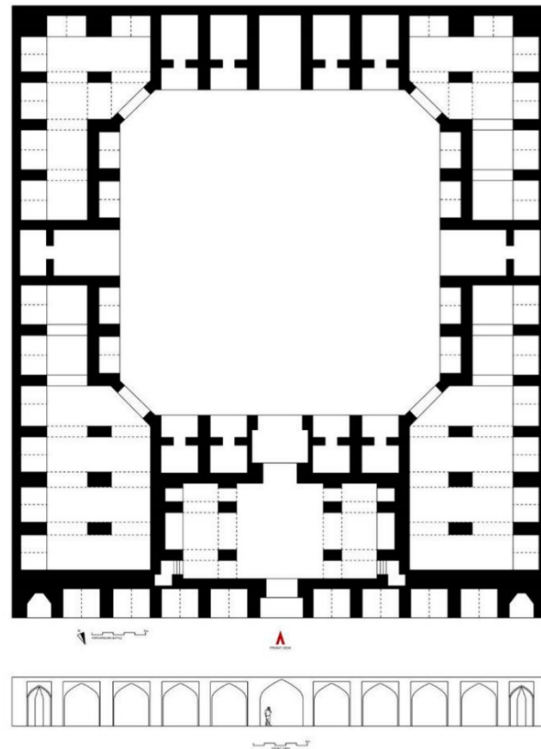


Figure 4: Plan and View of the Bayaz Caravanserai.

Conclusion

Anar is one of the northern cities of Kerman province that was subjected to archaeological surveys in 2020. During this survey, 120 cultural-historical sites were identified. Several historical buildings, mostly from the late Islamic periods, were identified, among which the Astaneh and Biyaz caravanserais were recognized. These two caravanserais have rectangular plans, central courtyards, iwans (vaulted halls), small iwans, and surrounding chambers, belonging to the Safavid period, which have been completely restored during later periods.

The geographical location of Anar, situated between the main commercial centers in central Iran (Fig. 5), namely Yazd, Kerman, and Fars, has historically made this area highly important for the passage of caravans, given the dry and desert conditions of the region. The necessity of constructing accommodation centers along the

Yazd-Kerman route led to the construction of these two caravanserais. Anar is located on one of the main communication-commercial roads of Iran, and this factor has led to the construction of the Astaneh and Biyaz caravanserais in this area. In addition to the caravanserais, the presence of numerous Ab-Anbars (cisterns) in the region could have also provided the water needed by the caravans in the central Iranian deserts.

In conclusion, the archaeological survey of Anar has revealed the existence of two significant caravanserais, the Astaneh and Biyaz, which are prime examples of Safavid-era architectural heritage that were later restored during the subsequent periods. The strategic location of Anar along the major commercial routes of central Iran explains the importance of constructing such caravanserais to facilitate the movement and accommodation of caravans passing through this area.

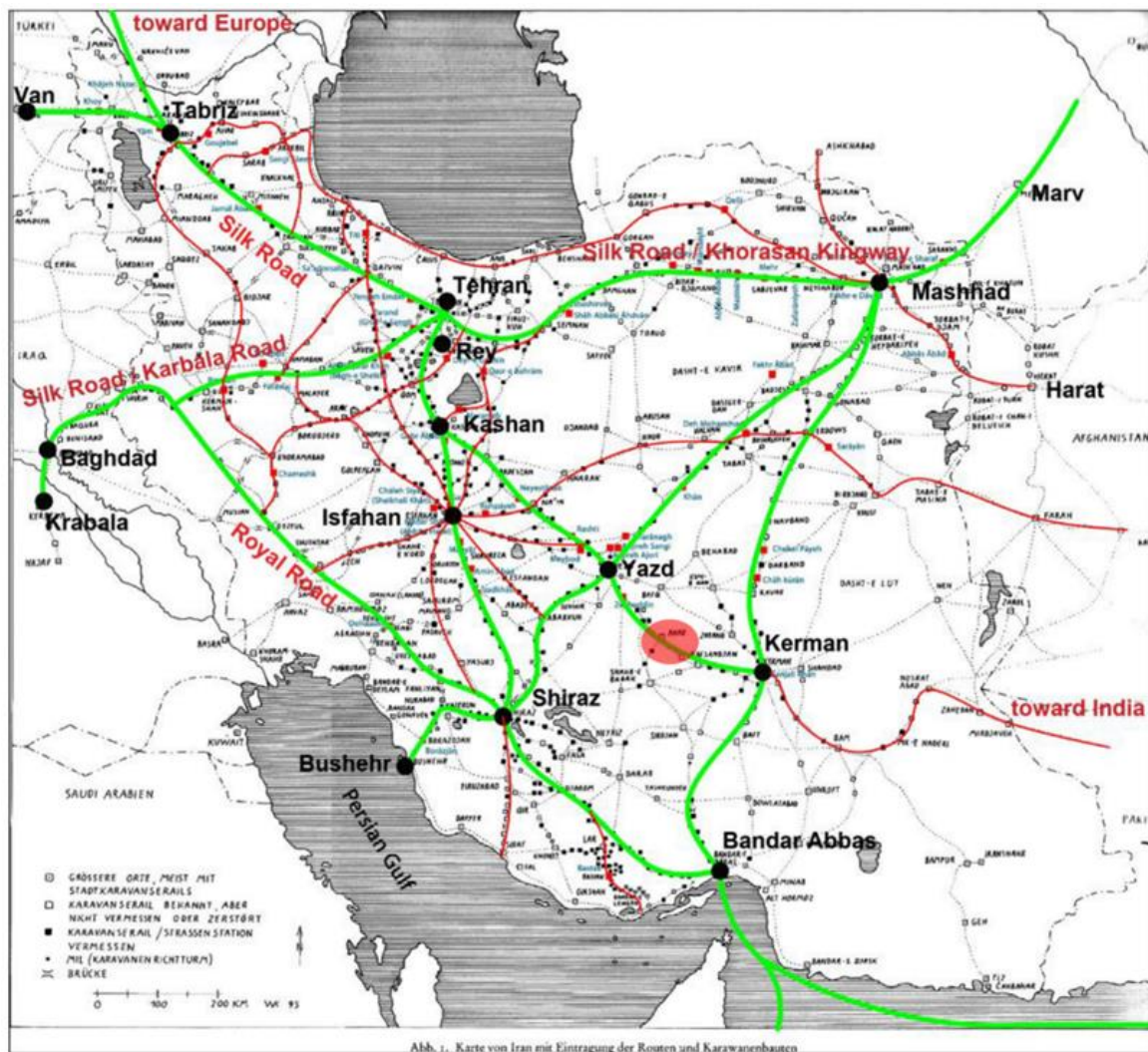


Figure 5: Main and Secondary Commercial Routes and the Location of Caravanserais in Iran (Talebian, 2022: 4), with the location of the Anar Caravanserais highlighted in red in the center of the image.

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