The First Archeological and Ethnoarcheological Survey Project in the Sefidkuh Makran Mountains of Baluchistan

By Hossein Vahedi

Iran is one of the most important regions in the ancient and modern Middle East, with multiple climates and cultural contexts. Baluchistan has tropical, desert and mountain climates and a rich culture, making it a most unique area for human settlement from the past to the present.

The presence of Paleolithic cultures in Baluchistan in the areas of Ladiz, Simash and Mashkid, as well as other cultural periods from the Chalcolithic to the Islamic, indicate the long continuity of human habitation. Baluchistan also has many untouched areas that have not undergone any scientific studies.

One of these is the Sefidkuh region, a huge and nearly impassable mountain range. The mountains acted like a wall, shaping cultural, political and economic interactions of the Makran coast and Persian Gulf areas with interior valleys of Kerman, Hormozgan and the Sistan and Baluchistan area. The region has a warm and dry climate during the spring and summer and is cool and wet in the fall and winter. The vegetation and animal diversity of this area is especially rich.
Map showing the location of the study area. All figures courtesy Hossein Vahedi unless otherwise noted.
A scientific project began with a survey in 2016 and in 2019 with the author’s thesis at the Shahrekord University, with the permission of the Institute of Cultural Heritage and the Archeology Institute. The aim of this project is to identify communities living in the highlands of Sefidkuh and to compare the biological, cultural and political patterns of these with other parts of the Middle East, as well as to conduct an archaeological survey.

Other projects are also being undertaken under my supervision in collaboration with the Cultural Heritage and Tourism Research Institute. Launched in 2020, these examine areas including architecture, archaeology, anthropology and ethnoarchaeology, as well as study of the region’s linguistics and handicraft studies. They are designed to both study and help preserve these communities in the Sefidkuh area.

In the first season of the study in Sefidkuh Makran we identified 12 modern-day villages. These are similar to prehistoric societies (exclusively Neolithic and Chalcolithic) in terms of location, type of architecture, lifestyle, and even political, economic and social interactions. They are constructed using a circular and oval pattern of stone, matte, and mud, and in rare cases, use simple mud and stone chambers that resemble prehistoric architecture. Large sites and their satellites are located along the rivers in linear, clustering, and circular patterns. They also exploit water resources such as ponds and springs.
A typical village in the region.

A typical circular house with thatched roof.
Interior of a circular house.

Inside a village.

Examples of local crafts and industries.
The economies of these sites are based on hunting and fishing, agriculture and animal husbandry, horticulture, as well as trade. Economic interactions are based on trade in goods that are collected or produced in the region, as well as barter and money exchange within the region or with the extensive urban settlements outside the mountains. In addition to the political patterns within each village, they are subordinate to the Khan or chief, who manages the village along with a council.

The first season of the archaeological survey of the area also provided evidence of ancient settlements with circular architectural plans and prehistoric pottery, as well as sites dating from the second and third centuries BCE. Circular gravestones and stacks of stones dating from various periods as well as Islamic cemeteries and fragments of Islamic glass bangles were found. We have gathered evidence of prehistoric, historical, and Islamic occupation in the region.

Examples of prehistoric and historic pottery and funerary monuments.
This evidence indicates the settlement of the region from prehistoric times to the present day, and perhaps some measure of continuity. For archaeology and ethnoarchaeology these societies are invaluable sources for comparative analyses. But there is no guarantee of preserving these unique societies in the coming years. In the meantime, the project will expand its studies with the participation of archaeologists and other interdisciplinary scientists.

Residentsofa village.

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