

Study of the settlement pattern in Alashtar Plain during Parthian Period

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Abstract

Alashtar is one of the prominent valley plains in central Zagros Mountain Range. The main focus of this study is based on the activities performed in this plain in 2006-2007 periods with the aim of identifying and studying the ancient relics as well as the studies conducted in 2010 to identify and analyze Parthian settlement patterns in this area. Archaeological survey in the area identified 72 historical sites and ancient monument. The current studies suggest that first settlements in this area date back to Copper and Stone Age and the most recent settled sites belong to the later centuries of the Islamic period. Among the historical relics found in Alashtar plain, 42 relics contained remnants of the Parthian. The overall perception of the settlement pattern in this plain during Parthian period reflects variation in population or distribution of settlement patterns compared to the former and later periods. The distribution pattern of the identified historical sites suggests that the settlements were mainly in the form of rural units with no evidence of urban centers. Overall, the distribution pattern of Parthian settlements has been strongly influenced by climatic characteristics, environmental capabilities and the special geographical position of the region. This paper attempts to study the Parthian settlement pattern in this plain; moreover, it seeks to examine these historical sites and interpret the settlement patterns in the Parthian period.

Keywords: Central Zagros, Lorestan, Alashtar Plain, Parthian Period, Settlement Pattern.

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Introduction

The geographical position of Alashtar Plain clearly shows the importance of this area in archaeological studies of central Zagros and Western Iran. The identification of settlement patterns can provide important information about regional and cross-regional communications in this area. Due to its exceptional position and the importance of its sites, this plain has been the subject of growing attention of ancient geographers and geologists. To date, in north and northwest of Lorestan province, none of the Parthian sites has been explored, though some of activities have been carried out regarding Parthian period in central Zagros (Stronatch, 1975; Kleiss, 1970; Azarnoush, 1976; Kambakhsh Fard, 1972, 1974, 1995(a); Haerinck, 1983; Mohammadifar, 2005; Shahbazi, 2002). The only activity related to the Parthian period in Alashtar Plain is the intensive archeological study of Davoud Davoudi in the last few years (Davoudi, 2006-2007).

Given the importance of the region, the ancient sites in this plain were studied in 2012 to identify and analyze the settlement and environmental patterns in the Parthian Period. Today, in their archeological studies and investigations, archeologists seek to introduce and register ancient sites, propose a possible chronology and determine the location of these historical sites on the map. Then, based on the data obtained, they analyze the settlement patterns, spatial distribution of the monuments, and the interrelations of different settlements and so on.

It should be noted that archeological studies of the land's surface have limited ability in terms of providing insights about ancient sites. Thus, despite the special position of these studies in investigating

the dispersion pattern of the settlements and their relations, they do not have access to the deeper layers. As such, the results of these studies should be considered with caution until more comprehensive and systematic studies are carried out. Generally, the purpose of this study is to identify the characteristics of archeological sites in the region based on surface relics (especially pottery) and the impact of critical factors in development of these settlements as well as the analysis of their settlement patterns.

The research method was mainly library research to identify the sources and references. Besides that, the findings of pertinent literature, results of explorations, and archeological studies were used. Statistical methods and field studies were also employed to classify and analyze the data. This study aims at understanding the effects of various factors on the settlement patterns in Parthian period in Alashtar Plain, which was carried out as an intensive survey. The simple random sampling method was used to collect cultural material samples from the studied site, which included Clinky pottery (including simple, painted and engraved Clinky pottery), painted pottery, glazed pottery (including corroded green and blue glazes) and simple pottery from Parthian period (Fig 1 and Table 1).

Historical geography and the archaeological literature on Alashtar Plain

In the Parthian and Sassanid texts, there has been no reference to the city and plains of Alashtar, but the historians from the early centuries to the contemporary Islamic era have mentioned the name Alashtar in their books, referring to it with such titles as Lashtar (Istakhri, 1994: 203-208 ; Ibn