

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CULTURE OF TIS BASED ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEYS AND STUDIES (ISLAMIC ERA)

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Abstract: The port of Tis, located along the Makran coast, was one of the most significant Iranian ports during the 11th and 12th centuries CE, administered under the Seljuks of Kerman. This port has been mentioned by numerous geographers and historians, and over several archaeological seasons, many valuable artifacts have been identified from the area. With the development of Tis during the Islamic period—particularly under the rule of the Kerman Seljuks—this study seeks to investigate the port's cultural influence on the coastal and hinterland regions of Makran, and whether similar patterns can be observed elsewhere. The main objective of the present research is to evaluate the position of Tis and its extensive commercial connections in shaping settlements and sites across the coastal and hinterland regions of Makran, using archaeological investigations and historical sources. This article adopts a descriptive-comparative and historical-analytical approach, employing both documentary methods and field studies to answer the question: what was the commercial role and significance of Tis in the formation and development of settlements in the coastal and hinterland areas of Makran during the Islamic era? Today's port of Chabahar can be considered as inheriting the historical role of Tis. A review of historical sources regarding Tis's commercial ties with ports in the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, alongside the distribution of Tis-type ceramics—particularly Islamic glazed wares and Chinese celadon—demonstrates the importance of the port and its influence on regional settlement growth. The decline of Tis as a commercial center coincided with the downturn of settlements and archaeological sites from the same period.

Keywords: Tis culture, Seljuks of Kerman, coastal and hinterland Makran, archaeological evidence, historical sources.

چکیده: بندر تیس در سواحل مکران، یکی از بنادر مهم ایران در قرون پنجم و ششم هجری قمری بوده است که تحت نظارت سلجوقیان کرمان اداره می‌شد. از این بندر، نه تنها در منابع بسیاری از جغرافی‌دانان و مورخان سخن به میان آمده، بلکه طی چندین فصل بررسی، آثار بسیار ارزشمندی از آن شناسایی شده است. با توسعه بندر تیس در دوره اسلامی، به‌ویژه در دوران حکومت سلجوقیان کرمان، این پرسش مطرح می‌شود که تأثیر فرهنگی آن بر مناطق ساحلی و فراساحلی مکران چگونه بوده و آیا می‌توان آن را با سایر بنادر منطقه مقایسه کرد. هدف اصلی پژوهش حاضر، بررسی جایگاه بندر تیس و ارتباطات بازرگانی گسترده آن در توسعه استقرارگاه‌ها و محوطه‌های مناطق ساحلی و فراساحلی مکران، بر اساس مطالعات باستان‌شناسی و منابع تاریخی است. این مقاله با رویکرد توصیفی - تطبیقی و تحلیل تاریخی، و با استفاده از شیوه‌های اسنادی و مطالعات میدانی، در پی پاسخ به این پرسش است که نقش و جایگاه تجاری - بازرگانی بندر تیس در شکل‌گیری و توسعه استقرارگاه‌ها و محوطه‌های مناطق یادشده در دوره اسلامی چگونه بوده است؛ به‌گونه‌ای که می‌توان بندر امروزی چابهار را ادامه‌دهنده نقش تاریخی بندر تیس دانست. مطالعه منابع تاریخی درباره ارتباطات تجاری بندر تیس با بندر خلیج فارس و اقیانوس هند، و همچنین گسترش سفال نوع تیس - که از مهم‌ترین ویژگی‌های آن، سفال لعاب‌دار اسلامی نوع تیس و سفال سلادون چینی است - نشانگر اهمیت این بندر و تأثیر آن بر توسعه استقرارگاه‌ها در منطقه مکران است. به‌گونه‌ای که با افول جایگاه تجاری بندر تیس، شاهد رکود در استقرارگاه‌ها و محوطه‌های هم‌زمان هستیم.

کلیدواژه‌ها: فرهنگ تیس، سلجوقیان کرمان، مناطق ساحلی و فراساحلی مکران، شواهد باستان‌شناسی، قرآن تاریخی

I. Introduction

During the Islamic period, with the flourishing of maritime trade in the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, the Makran coast and the port of Tis drew considerable attention from merchants and seafarers. Many Muslim geographers from the 9th to the 14th centuries CE mentioned this port in their works. Historians and geographers such as Sulayman al-Sirafi in *Akhbar al-Sin wa'l-Hind* (10th century CE) (2002: 44), Ibn Hawqal in *Surat al-Ard* (10th century) (1366: 281), Istakhri in *Masalik al-Mamalik* (951 CE) (1994: 180–182), *Hudud al-'Alam* (983 CE) (1993: 364), al-Muqaddasi in *Ahsan al-Ta'asim* (996 CE) (2006: 703–

704), Bayhaqi in *Tarikh-e Bayhaqi* (1119 CE) (1976: 235), Ibn Balkhi in *Farsnama* (1116 CE) (1995: 31), al-Idrisi in *Nuzhat al-Mushtaq* (1154 CE) (2009: 173), Afzal al-Din Kermani in *'Aqd al-'Ala li al-Mawqif al-'Ala and Bada'i' al-Aziman fi Waqa'i' Kerman* (12th century) (1994: 109), Yaqut al-Hamawi in *Mu'jam al-Buldan* (1214 CE) (2001: 786), Qazvini in *Athar al-Bilad* (1276 CE) (1992: 359), Abu al-Fida in *Taqwim al-Buldan* (1321 CE) (1961: 397), and Hamdallah Mostowfi in *Nuzhat al-Qulub* (1340 CE) (1983: 262), all refer to Tis as the principal port and harbor of the Makran coast (Table 1).

Archaeological evidence from Tis — including Islamic glazed ceramics, sgraffito ware, turquoise-glazed

pottery, Chinese celadon, glass vessels, and remains of kilns — indicate the prosperity and importance of the port during the Islamic period (Sa'adatian, 2018; Dorrazehi, 2020). Cultural materials associated with Tis have also been discovered across a wide range of archaeological sites in Chabahar, Dashtiari, Konarak, and even the Talang district of Qasr-e Qand. A key feature of these sites is the remarkable similarity of their artifacts with those from Tis. Based on this resemblance, Shirazi has referred to these remains collectively as the “Tis Culture” (Shirazi, 2002: 110).

II. Research Methodology

This study is categorized as fundamental research within the domain of historical and cultural studies. It employs a descriptive-analytical methodology with a historical approach, aimed at examining the cultural and commercial significance of the port of Tis during the Islamic period. Data collection was conducted through two primary channels: first, the analysis of archaeological surveys and fieldwork reports archived in the Research Institute of Archaeology and the Cultural Heritage Organization of Iran; and second, the review and examination of historical texts and geographical accounts authored by Islamic-period geographers and historians who directly or indirectly referenced Tis. This integrated method facilitates the cross-referencing of material and textual evidence, thereby offering a comprehensive perspective on the historical and cultural role of Tis within the studied timeframe.

III. Research Background

Compared to other regions of Iran, archaeological studies along the Makran coast have a relatively brief history. Sir Aurel Stein, a British archaeologist of Hungarian origin, was the first to conduct surveys from Sindh to Fars. He briefly examined Islamic-period remains in the Dashtiari region, with the most notable site being the Castle of Batal. He also conducted several trial trenches at the port of Tis. Although Stein's investigations were mostly superficial and survey-oriented, they played a pivotal role in introducing the port of Tis and the so-called “Tis-type” artifacts across the Makran coastline (Stein, 1937). Prior to the Islamic Revolution, Eghtedari visited the port of Tis and the Makran coast, documenting and describing its ruins and historical remains. Given that the site had experienced less modern disturbance and destruction at the time, his descriptions are of considerable historical value (Eghtedari, 1969: 600–680).

Following a long hiatus, a wave of archaeological surveys was launched in the early 2000s across the Makran coast. Notably, Shirazi conducted an extensive reconnaissance from Jask to Chabahar aimed primarily at identifying and recording archaeological sites (Shirazi, 2002). Over time, these surveys became more focused and geographically specific. Key examples include Moradi's archaeological survey in Zarabad, Konarak (2007), Talash's survey in central Konarak (2009), and Shirazi's work in Chabahar County (2010).

Among the most recent efforts are the archaeological documentation and zoning studies at the pre-Islamic site of Damb Kuh (2016), and the archaeological survey of Dashtiari district in Chabahar (2018). Of particular significance is the archaeological investigation of Tis Valley by Mojtaba Sa'adatian (2018), which contributed to the delineation of cultural boundaries and protection zones for the port of Tis. Although these studies were primarily conducted for heritage registration and preservation purposes, they have significantly enriched our understanding of the Islamic-period cultural landscape of the Makran coast and laid the groundwork for further academic research. Among the other relevant research efforts, one can mention the M.A. thesis by Maryam Zour (2012) entitled “*A Study of Islamic Period Pottery Collected from the Surface of Sites in Nikshahr and Chabahar Counties.*” Likewise, the M.A. thesis by Leila Kikha (2015), “*The Impact of Climate and Environment on the Formation and Development of Architecture in the Makran Coasts during the Islamic Period,*” and the thesis by Farahnaz Hekmatizadeh (2015), “*A Study of Sasanian Coins in the Zabedan Museum with an Emphasis on Coins Discovered in Tis, Chabahar,*” conducted at the University of Sistan and Baluchestan, are significant contributions to the field. Among the most notable studies on Islamic pottery from southern Makran are two key articles: the work of Mousavi Haji et al. (2013), titled “*Typology and Introduction to Islamic Period Pottery in Baluchestan (Makran),*” and that of Hashemi Zarjabadi et al. (2015), “*Cultural Relations between Baluchestan and the Khorasan Region during the Islamic Period (Based on Pottery Evidence).*” These studies are largely based on data derived from Shirazi's archaeological surveys in Nikshahr (2009) and Chabahar (2010), as well as findings presented in Maryam Zour's M.A. thesis (2012).

One of the most recent academic contributions is the author's own M.A. thesis, entitled “*The Role of the Makran Coasts in Commercial Networks with the Persian Gulf and Its Extra-Regional Ports during the Early and Middle Islamic Periods (A Case Study of the Port of Tis)*” (Dorrazahe,

2020). Notably, previous research has rarely addressed the intra-regional cultural and economic dynamics centered around the port of Tis. The present study is among the first to explicitly explore the pivotal role of Tis in the development of the cultural and economic landscape of both coastal and hinterland areas of Makran during the Islamic era.

IV. Geographical Location of the Port of Tis

The historic port of Tis—referred to in historical sources as “Tiz” or “Tays”—is today known as the village of Tis. It is located in the Kambel Soleiman rural district, within the Central District of Chabahar County,

in southern Baluchestan, along the Makran coast (Sam-Ara, 2005: 2). Situated in a relatively wide valley between two low mountain ranges, the village lies approximately 5 kilometers northwest of the city of Chabahar and to the northeast of the Chabahar Bay. Today, the city of Chabahar has assumed the historical role of this ancient port (Safarzayi & Sepahi, 2012: 2). The village of Tis is positioned at an elevation of 5 to 10 meters above sea level and is naturally enclosed by surrounding highlands: the Pilband Mountains to the south, the Shahbazband range to the north, and the Lawari Heights to the east of the Tis Valley. This distinct geographical setting has long played a crucial role in shaping the cultural, economic, and strategic significance of the port.



Figure 1: The Port of Tis in Chabahar Bay (Google Earth, 12/14/2015).

V. Tis in the Sources of Historians and Geographers

Most historians and geographers have mentioned the port of Tis in their works. The earliest reference to Tis near the Gulf of Chabahar dates back to the time of Alexander the Great (356–323 BCE) (Pirnia, 1953: 1776–1779). After mentions of "Tiz" in the notes of Alexander's historians and generals, the oldest documented reference to this port appears in Ptolemy's *Geography*, written in the 2nd century CE, where the region is referred to as “Tise” (Olsen, n.d.: 57).

The next earliest information about Tis comes from the Sasanian period. At that time, Tis was considered the western port of the Makran province and connected via a road to Puhul Pehrag or Fuhl-Fahre, a Sasanian

border station along the Bampur River. Tis also lay along the maritime Silk Road (Ra'in, 1971: 240).

During the Islamic period, with the expansion of maritime trade, the Makran coasts and the port of Tis gained renewed importance. From the 3rd and 4th centuries AH, references to Tis gradually appear in historical sources. One of the earliest Islamic references comes from Sulayman al-Sirafi in *Akbar al-Sin wa al-Hind*, who names Tis as the center of Makran (Sirafi, 2002: 44). The anonymous author of *Hudud al-'Alam*, one of the earliest geographical texts, refers to Tis as the first city along the borders of Sind on the shores of the "Great Sea" and describes it as a tropical area, although it does not mention its commercial importance (Hudud al-'Alam, 1993: 364).

Politically, while Tis was within Makran, some historians attributed it to provinces such as Sind, Kerman, or even Fars. The anonymous author of *Hudud al-'Alam* and other early Islamic geographers considered it part of Sind (ibid.).

By the mid-4th century AH, the renowned geographer Istakhri considered Tis part of the Sind region and described it as the principal trading port (furḍah) of Makran (Istakhri, 1994: 180–182). Ibn Hawqal, another 4th-century geographer, wrote: "Tiz is the port of Makran, on the western bank of the Mehran River, near the gulf where it opens toward Mansura" (Ibn Hawqal, 1987: 281).

The most detailed description of Tis among early Islamic geographers comes from al-Muqaddasi in his *Ahsan al-Taqasim*. He writes: "Tiz is on the sea coast, full of palm groves, with several fine ribats and a beautiful mosque. The people are of average means, lacking in knowledge and eloquence, but it is a well-known port" (Muqaddasi, 2006: 703–704). From a trade route perspective, Tis was the primary commercial hub of Makran, while its inland capital was the city of Fannazbur (modern Panjgur). According to al-Muqaddasi, Fannazbur had two gates: the Tis gate in the southwest, leading to the Gulf, and the Turan gate in the northeast, leading to the Turan region (ibid.). With the rise of the Seljuks of Kerman, Tis attracted greater attention due to its strategic location. A north–south trade route was established from Tis to Transoxiana, passing through Makran, Sistan, and Khorasan, eventually linking with the Volga. This created a maritime-commercial axis connecting the Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean, Red Sea, and Central Asia (Kheirandish & Khalifeh, 2007: 80–81).

Another major trade route—the East–West axis—linked Tis to Kerman, and then to Isfahan, Jibal, Azerbaijan, and Anatolia (Tanomand, 2014: 155). The Seljuks, especially Qavurt, invested heavily in rebuilding roads, securing caravan routes, and establishing caravanserais, cisterns, and guideposts to facilitate trade and ensure safe travel (Afzal al-Din Kirmani, 2004: 321–322; Rousta & Mohammadi, 2015: 123). Due to the special attention of the Seljuks to the eastern edges of Kerman and southern Sistan, the port of Tis emerged as one of the most prosperous maritime hubs in southern Iran during the Islamic period. Tis was one of the most important ports of the Makran region on the coast of the Oman Sea, serving as a central hub for trade. Merchants used it to connect with ports in North Africa and India. A substantial portion of eastern Iran's commercial goods destined for Africa, Oman, Egypt,

the Hejaz, and Yemen was exported through this port. Tis also served as a destination for caravans traveling eastward from Fars, Oman, and Kish Island (Idrisi, 2009: 173). One of the most detailed sources on Tis, written during its period of prosperity, is *'Aqd al-'Ali li al-Mawqif al-'Ali* by Afzal al-Din Kirmani, composed during the Seljuk rule in Kerman. Afzal al-Din Kirmani (530–615 AH) described Tis in the 6th century AH as part of Kerman and on the border with Makran. He discusses the taxes paid by the port to the rulers of Kerman and highlights its commercial significance as follows:

"One of Kerman's distinguished features is the port of Tis, from which abundant revenues from merchants'

and ship tolls reach the royal treasury. It is a designated harbor for the people of India, Sindh, Abyssinia, Zanj, Egypt, and the Arab lands of Oman and Bahrain. All kinds of rare commodities such as musk, ambergris, indigo, brazilwood, Indian spices, Indian and African slaves, fine silk fabrics, simple Persian cloths, Dunbuli cottons, and other exotic items of the world are exported from this harbor. Nearby lies the province of Makran, rich in sugar and sweet goods, which are sent from this land to both Islamic and non-Islamic regions" (Afzal al-Din Kirmani, 1994: 109).

According to this source, during the reign of Tughril Shah (551–562 AH), customs revenues from imports and exports in Tis reached 15,000 dinars, which was half of Kerman's total silk tax of 30,000 dinars (ibid.). The goods traded in and out of Tis were not limited to Makran's local production or consumption. Rather, it functioned as a regional and international trade hub. According to many sources, the port's main export was *fand* or *panid* (a type of sugar) (Istakhri, 1994: 180). Dates, widely cultivated in Baluchistan, were also exported through this port. Given the extensive trade routes, goods from Kerman and Sistan were transported via Tis to other parts of the world. It is likely that some of Sistan's exported wheat was also sold through this port (Sykes, 1984: 136). Sykes noted that by 574 AH, Tis had become one of the most important and well-known ports in southern Iran. As the Hormuz route became insecure, commercial caravans redirected toward Tis. Their route likely went from Iraq to Kerman, then to Bampur, Qasr-e Qand, and finally to Tis (ibid: 147).

In the early 7th century AH, Yaqut al-Hamawi wrote: "Tiz is a city on the coast of Makran or Sindh, facing Oman to the west. There are five stages between here and Kiz, the capital of Makran" (Yaqut, 2001: 786).

In *Athar al-Bilad*, Tis and Makran are described as follows:

“It is a region between Sindh and the territories of Tis, with numerous cities and villages” (Qazvini, 1992: Vol. 1, 359). Quoting Ibn Hawqal and Idrisi, Abu al-Fida regarded Tis as the largest and most significant

port of Makran (Abu al-Fida, 1961: 397). One of the last Islamic sources to refer directly to Tis was Mostowfi, who, in the mid-8th century AH in *Nuzhat al-Qulub*, wrote: “Tiz is one of the great cities of Makran” (Mostowfi, 1983: 262).

Table 1: Tis in Historical and Geographical Sources (Sam-Ārā, 2005: 5; edited by the author)

No.	Title of the Work	Author	Date	Page	Spelling of 'Tis'
1	Ancient History of Iran	Pirnia	327 BCE	1779	Nīs
2	Geography	Ptolemy	2nd century CE	364	Tise
3	Akhbār al-Sīn wa al-Hind	Sulaymān Sīrāfi	4th century AH	46	Tīz
4	Ṣūrat al-Arḍ	Ibn Ḥawqal	4th century AH	281	Tīz
5	‘Ajā’ib al-Aqālīm	Suhrāb	334 AH	36	Tīz
6	Masālik al-Mamālik	Istakhrī	340 AH	180–182	Tīz
7	Ḥudūd al-Ālam	Anonymous	372 AH	364	Tīz
8	Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm	al-Muqaddasī	375 AH	703	Tīz
9	Tārīkh-e Bayhaqī	Bayhaqī	492 AH	235	Tīz
10	Fārsnāmeḥ	Ibn Balkhī	510 AH	31	Tīz
11	Nuzhat al-Mushtāq	al-Idrīsī	548 AH	173	Tīz
12	‘Aqd al-‘Alī li al-Mawqif al-‘Alī	Afḍal al-Dīn Kirmānī	6th century AH	—	Tīz
13	Badā’i’ al-Azmān fi Waqā’i’ Kirmān	Afḍal al-Dīn Kirmānī	610 AH	—	Tīz
14	Mu’jam al-Buldān	Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī	611 AH	786	Tīz
15	Āthār al-Bilād	Qazwīnī	674 AH	359	Tīz
16	Taqwīm al-Buldān	Abū al-Fidā’	721 AH	397	Tīz
17	Nuzhat al-Qulūb	Mustawfī	740 AH	262	Tīz

VI. Archaeological Evidence of the Port of Tis

Aurel Stein, the Hungarian-born geographer and archaeologist, was the first to conduct limited yet systematic excavations and surveys in the village of Tis and its surroundings. His surface surveys and

small test trenches revealed the remains of a defensive wall approximately 10.4 miles (15 km) long in the eastern part of Tis. He also noted that the rock-cut tombs in this port were similar to those in Siraf. Among other findings were glazed Islamic pottery with relief

decorations and glaze comparable to other Islamic sites. Based on the discovery of kiln remnants (such as tripods, kiln balls, pottery molds, and baked glaze residues), Stein identified Tis as a production center for sgraffito pottery and also documented evidence of Chinese celadon ware (Stein, 1937). Eghtedari, who visited the port during the Pahlavi era, described the ruins as follows:

“Moving eastward from Tis, extensive ancient ruins become visible, revealing remnants of houses, rooms, cemeteries, and fortifications of the old city. The rooms were generally small (4×3 meters or smaller), sometimes arranged around a central courtyard. The tombs, scattered across elevated areas of the site, typically followed the Islamic style—raised above ground with three to five stepped platforms, a common feature in southern Iran. These structures, built of stone and plaster, are now ruined, though traces remain. The scattered construction materials, including carved limestone and marine stones, indicate extensive digging and relocation activities in the past. This area likely served as the city or a seasonal settlement during Tis’s heyday, while the Tis Valley was its agricultural heart. The core residential area was probably at the foot of Kalat, which may have functioned as a maritime watchtower and administrative center.” (Eghtedari, 1969: 624–625).

He further mentioned architectural remains in the southern and western edges (near the sea), such as houses, cisterns, squares, alleys, and vast cemeteries (ibid.: 663–664), now within the naval base of the IRGC. Sa’adatian, in his surveys, also recorded local accounts of numerous artifacts in this area (Sa’adatian, 2018). The location of these walls (previously reported by Mirza Mehdi Khan, an engineer before Stein’s time) suggests Tis faced threats from the east and north (Chahbahar region) (Seyyed Sajjadi, 1995: 327). Thus, the abundance of glazed Islamic pottery, the vast contemporary cemetery, the defensive wall, and evidence of pottery production collectively attest that Tis was a significant and densely populated region during the first six centuries of the Islamic era (ibid).

Another significant archaeological project in the port of Tis was a test trenching program at the so-called “Portuguese Castle of Tis,” carried out in 1997 by Ali Asghar Mirfatah as part of field training for archaeology students from the University of Sistan and Baluchestan. The report of this investigation has not been published. Another important endeavor was the archaeological survey of Chahbahar County, conducted under the supervision of Rouhollah Shirazi in May and June of 2010, during which the port of Tis was also surveyed and cultural data such as pottery were collected (Shirazi, 2010).

Heidari’s survey, aimed at defining the boundaries of Cemetery No. 1 and the Tis Castle, confirmed that the main city of Tis was located to the east of the castle. In this investigation, which included test trenches around the Tis mound, the most significant artifacts were recovered from the eastern side. Notably, in trench G3, a large ceramic jar with a stone lid was discovered (Heidari, 2009: 69). The form and decorations of this jar closely resemble those of jars found in Jiroft (Chubak, 2005: 255).

The most comprehensive and recent archaeological survey of the port was conducted by Mojtaba Sa’adatian. According to his research, the historic port of Tis is visible as a disjointed collection of several distinct archaeological zones. Altogether, these zones constitute the structural core of the port and show strong consistency in terms of movable cultural materials. Functionally, the spaces include cemeteries, settlements, industrial areas, and defensive structures (Sa’adatian, 2018: 40).

The large Islamic-era site at Tis—undoubtedly the main commercial port of that time—was identified as a cluster of large and small archaeological mounds. These are visible not only within the current boundaries of Tis village but also beyond its limits. These findings are based on the analysis of surface-distributed movable cultural materials.

Eighteen homogenous yet distinct units were surveyed, and the cultural remains from each unit were studied individually. These remains include both immovable (architectural features) and movable (mostly pottery) objects from the Islamic period, found in all units. In total, 390 pottery sherds were recovered from the 18 identified units of the port’s core. These can be categorized into painted glazed, unglazed painted, plain glazed, and plain unglazed types. The main techniques used in the production of these ceramics include sgraffito, celadon, mold-made, incised, and applied decoration. In addition, 108 notable cultural items were recovered, including copper coins, glass fragments, stone objects, kiln balls, kiln tripods, and part of a camel figurine. Alongside these movable objects, numerous architectural remains built with sedimentary stones (kepraks) were discovered (Sa’adatian, 2018: 17). Among the most important finds from Tis are Sassanian silver coins attributed to Peroz I. In 2001, during road construction in the village of Tis, 183 silver coins were discovered by workers. Based on the designs and inscriptions on both sides of the coins, they belong to Peroz I (r. 459–484 CE), the seventeenth king of the Sassanian Empire. These coins were minted in various

mints across the empire, including Veh-Ardashir, Darabgerd, Espanvar, Hormozd-Ardashir, Iranshahr, Istakhr, Rayy, Neyriz, Kerman, Qom, Gorgan, Jay, Shapur, and Balkh (Hekmatizadeh, 2015: 83–91).

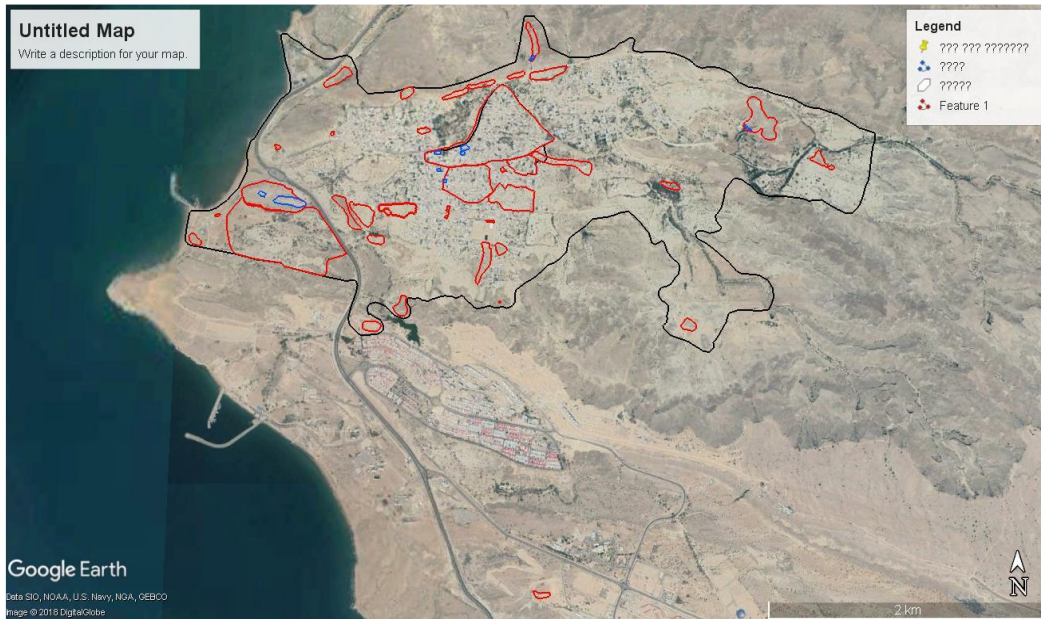


Figure 2: Distribution of Archaeological Remains and Settlement Areas in the Port of Tis (Sa'adatian, 2018).

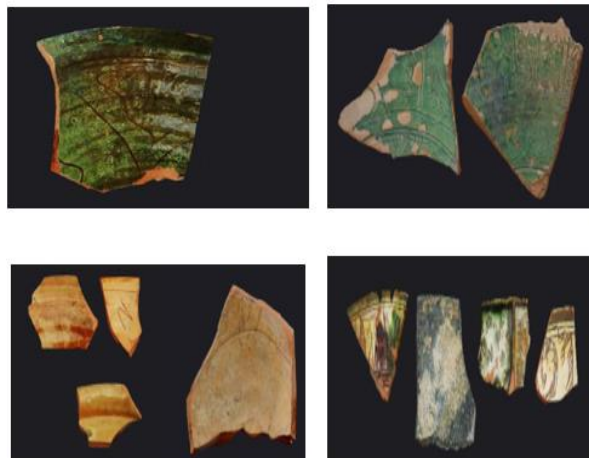


Figure 3: Sgraffito Ware from the Port of Tis (Sa'adatian, 2018).



Figure 4: Chinese Celadon Ware from the Port of Tis (Sa'adatian, 2018).

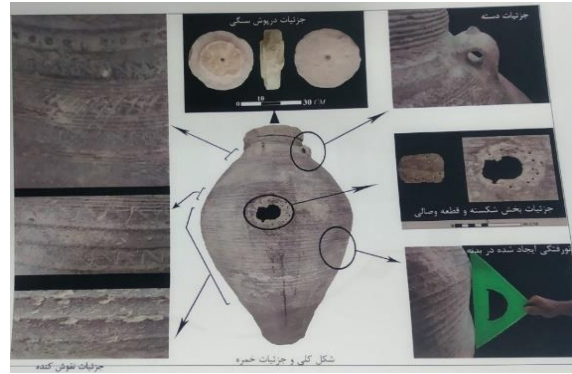


Figure 5: Ceramic Jar from Trench G3 (Heidari, 2009), Silver Coins of Peroz I (Sasanian) (Sa'adatian, 2018).

VII. Distribution of Coastal and Hinterland Sites and Artifacts

Archaeological remains and evidence related to the Tis cultural sphere are observable across a wide area of southern Makran and its hinterland regions, including the counties of Chabahar, Konarak, Nikshahr, Qasr-e Qand, and Dashtiari. Among these, the Dashtiari plain stands out as the most significant area, yielding the highest concentration of Tis-related artifacts (Shirazi, 2010).

The Dashtiari plain—currently encompassing Dashtiari County, as well as the Plan and Pirsahraab

districts of Chabahar County and the Talang district of Qasr-e Qand—has produced a substantial number of Islamic-era ceramics attributed to the Tis cultural tradition.

Analysis of the ceramic data from these sites suggests that, concurrent with the prosperity of the port of Tis, the Dashtiari region also experienced notable growth. This was due to its position at the intersection of two important trade routes linked to Tis. According to the geographer al-Muqaddasi, two commercial routes converged at the port of Tis (Muqaddasi, 2006: 701–705).



Figure 6: Distribution of Coastal and Hinterland Sites in Makran.

Extensive archaeological evidence in the hinterland regions—especially in the Dashtiari area, which is contemporaneous with the port of Tis—indicates that due to the commercial and industrial nature of the port, the lack of sufficient water and arable land in the Tis Valley, and the residents' need for food and agricultural products, Dashtiari—much like today—was one of the main centers for agriculture and the provision of essential resources to the port's inhabitants.

Stein, who conducted fieldwork in the Dashtiari region and its surrounding sites, reported the presence of Islamic glazed pottery with green, yellow, and blue glazes, along with fragments of glassware. He also noted the limited presence of Chinese celadon ceramics. He dated these artifacts to the Islamic Middle Ages, considering them similar to ceramics found at Sarbisheh in northern Sistan. Additionally, he mentioned colorful glass bangles decorated with raised designs (Stein, 1937: 83).

The most significant survey of this vast plain—formed by alluvial deposits from the Bahu Kalat and Kajo rivers—was conducted by Shirazi. His work uncovered numerous settlement sites and cemeteries, some spanning up to ten hectares, yielding cultural materials such as pottery, glass, and even remains of pottery kilns (Shirazi, 2002: 110). Similar finds associated with the Tis cultural tradition have also been identified in the western region of Chabahar, particularly in Konarak, Zarabad, and the Ben Davood Fortress (Moradi, 2007: 105). Among the most important coastal and hinterland sites with Islamic-period cultural materials and evidence of Tis-related traditions are: Gowatr Fortress, Negour Cemetery, Ben Davood Fortress, Misuri, Mir Bazar, Batel Fortress, Bandgah Cheb Cemetery, Cheb site, Kalat Jadgalabad, Kalat Chilsar, Bel site, Voshin Chat, and Ebrahim Kalat Shark (Shirazi, 2010). The hallmark of these sites is the presence of decorated glazed ceramics with green, brown, and yellow glazes and sgraffito designs.

Analysis of data from the Dashtiari region and the Kajo River basin suggests that this area lay at the crossroads of trade routes leading to the port of Tis. During a period of intense activity, numerous sites emerged along these routes. The most characteristic ceramics from these settlements include Islamic glazed wares, sgraffito, incised, and celadon pottery—all comparable to those found at Tis.

According to al-Muqaddasi, during the Islamic era, two main trade routes led to the port of Tis. The first was a continuation of the north–south trade route that linked the provinces of Khorasan, Sistan, and Kerman,

passing through Bampur, Espakeh, Geh (Nikshahr), and Qasr-e Qand, reaching Dashtiari and eventually Tis via Talang. The second route connected Panjgur, Kech, and Tiz, joining the first route in the Dashtiari region and continuing on to the port of Tis (Muqaddasi, 2006: 701–705).

Based on archaeological evidence from the northernmost sites in the Telang region—such as Ebrahim Kalat-e Shark, Voshin Chat, the Bandgah Cheb cemetery, Cheb site, Mir Bazar, Kalat Jadgalabad, Batel Fortress, and Misuri—as well as from eastern and southern parts of this vast plain, including the sites of Bel, Chilsar, and Negour, it appears that these settlements are aligned along a defined trajectory. This alignment corresponds closely to historical accounts of the trade routes associated with the port of Tis.

Among these, the Misuri site and Batel Fortress are the largest and most significant within the Plan sector, located along a north–south route. Misuri, which spans approximately 10 hectares, has yielded glazed pottery, kiln slag, and millstone remains. These findings, coupled with the site's proximity to the river, emphasize its importance and suggest the presence of a flourishing village with a long-term settlement (Shirazi, 2010: 14).

The richest archaeological site in the Dashtiari plain is Batel Fortress, situated in the Plan sector, approximately 4 km south of the Kajo River and immediately south of the village of Gitig. In his surveys across Makran, Stein referred to this site as the "Fortress of Jamshid"—after the mythical first king of ancient Iran—in the village of Giti (Stein, 1937). He noted the presence of Islamic glazed pottery, Chinese celadon ware, vessel fragments, and Islamic-period glass bangles. The Islamic glazed ceramics, decorated with vegetal motifs and Kufic inscriptions, appeared in shades of yellow, brown, and green (Stein, 1937: 85).

In Shirazi's surveys, a variety of cultural materials were recorded on the surface of the fortress, including pottery, iron, bronze, and glass fragments. The pottery consists predominantly of Islamic glazed wares—white, blue, and green—closely resembling the ceramics from the port of Tis and likely dating to the same period. The surface of the fortress and its surrounding hills are strewn with red-paste pottery. Decorated ceramics include sgraffito wares, splash-glazed, and plain-glazed vessels, as well as incised and painted types. The sgraffito patterns correspond to those of the Islamic Middle Period, and the stamped designs are typical of the Seljuk period (Shirazi, 2010: 41–42).

The dark green sgraffito-glazed ceramics with polychrome splash glazes in green, yellow, and brown,

decorated with incised underglaze and hatching designs, are comparable to sgraffito wares found at Ras al-Hadd in Oman (Whitcomb, 1975: 135) and Ras Sharmah in Yemen (Rougeulle, 2005: 12). Both Whitcomb and Rougeulle, drawing on Stein's reports on Batel Fortress and the port of Tis, identified these sgraffito wares as export goods produced at Tis during the 11th and 12th centuries CE. The closest site to the port of Tis from which contemporary glazed ceramics have been recovered is the Negour cemetery. Shirazi, who

surveyed this site, believes that based on the glazed ceramic types and the comparative analysis of adobe structures, the cemetery likely dates to the Ilkhanid and Timurid periods (Shirazi, 2010: 14–15). However, comparative analysis of its ceramics—such as eggplant-colored glaze with incised decoration and undecorated dark blue glaze—with finds from Jiroft (Choubak, 2005: 301) and Narmashir (Amiranipour, 2016: 69, 140) suggests that the site may actually date to the 11th–12th centuries CE (5th–6th centuries AH).

Table 2: Coastal and Hinterland Sites

No.	Site	Location and Description of Data	Source and Chronology
1	Gwatar	Gwatar Port – Glazed pottery, celadon ware, glass, metal, bone, shell	Jiroft, Chubak, 2005: 301; Narmashir, Amiranipour, 2016: 69–140; 11th–12th centuries AH
2	Negour Cemetery	City of Negour – Eggplant-colored glazed pottery and dark blue glaze, mudbrick structures	Kush, Kennet, 2004: 174 cp6; Tanga, Tanzania, Elinaza Mejema, 2014: 69 fig. 5.11; 11th–12th centuries CE
3	Kalat Chilsar	Dashtiari, Chilsar village – Glazed pottery with yellow glaze and underglaze incised decoration; green-glazed ware with applied handles	Zahedan Kohneh, Mousavi Haji, 2003, Plate 58 Fig. 3; Priestman, 2013: 711, Plate 162; 11th–12th centuries CE
4	Bel Site	Dashtiari, Bel village – Blue and white glazed pottery with painted decoration; celadon with milky glaze and incised design	
5	Misuri	Plan District, Sandakzehi Bala village – Area of 10 hectares, kiln slag remains, pottery, millstone	Ras al-Hadd, Oman, Donald Whitcomb, 1975: 135; Ras Sharma, Rougeulle, 2005: 12; 11th–12th centuries AH
6	Batel Fortress	Plan District, south of Kajo River, Gitig village – Dark green glazed pottery with multicolored splash (green, yellow, brown), incised and hatched decoration under glaze, celadon, metal, iron	Ras al-Hadd, Oman, Donald Whitcomb, 1975: 136–137; Priestman, 2013: 711, Plate 162; 11th–12th centuries CE

7	Kalat Jadgalabad	Glazed pottery in green, yellow, and black; Chinese celadon ware	
8	Cheb Cemetery and Site	Telang, Cheb village – Islamic glazed pottery	
9	Ebrahim Kalat Site	Telang, Shark – Glazed pottery and sgraffito ware	Al-Ali, Tatsuo Sasaki, Hanae Sasaki, 2011: 33, fig. 9; 11th–12th centuries AH
10	Ben Davood Fortress	West of Konarak, southern edge of Konarak–Zarabad road – Islamic glazed pottery with geometric design, underglaze incised and splash decoration (green/yellow), unglazed ware with incised, applied, and molded patterns	

The Bel and Chilsar sites are located in the eastern part of Dashtiari, near the international Rimdan border road. These sites were situated along the historical route connecting the port of Tis to Kech and Panjgur. From the Bel site, blue-and-white glazed pottery with painted decoration, as well as celadon ware with a milky glaze and incised decoration, have been recovered. The blue-and-white pottery is comparable to that found in Old Zahedan (Mousavi Haji, 2003, Plate 58, Fig. 3), dated to the 11th–12th centuries AH. The celadon ware with a milky glaze and incised motifs has also been dated and compared with examples analyzed by Priestman (2013: 711), belonging to the 11th–12th centuries CE, which corresponds to the peak of activity at the port of Tis in the 11th–12th centuries AH.

Outside of the Dashtiari plain, to the west of Konarak County, lies the site of Ben Davood Fortress, one of the significant sites contemporary with Tis. This site contains a high density of pottery sherds, mostly consisting of Islamic glazed wares in white, blue, and green. These ceramics bear strong resemblance to those from the port of Tis and likely date to the same period (Shirazi, 2002: 40). The surface pottery at this site represents a broad spectrum of Islamic Middle Period and Seljuk-era ceramics. Notable examples include Islamic glazed pottery with geometric designs, underglaze incised decoration, splash-glazed motifs in green and yellow, as well as unglazed wares with incised, applied, and molded decorations (Moradi, 2007: 105).

The green-glazed pottery with underglaze incised designs and incised motifs combined with splash glazing

is comparable to ceramics from the site of Al-'Ali in Bahrain, dated to the 11th–12th centuries CE (Tatsuo Sasaki & Hanae Sasaki, 2011: 33).

According to historical sources, during the Seljuk period of Kerman, fortresses and roads were constructed or restored and security was established across Makran along trade routes connected to the port of Tis (Afzal al-Din Kermani, 2004: 321–322). Based on this context, and the ceramic evidence at the site, the connection between Ben Davood Fortress and the port of Tis should be investigated—just as with other Dashtiari sites such as Batel Fortress. Given the fortress's location at the entrance to the Konarak–Kahir plain, it likely had a defensive and security-related function for Tis, especially if threats to the port came from the west.



Figure 6: Pottery from Kalat Jadgalabad.



Figure 7: Pottery from Kalat Chilsar.

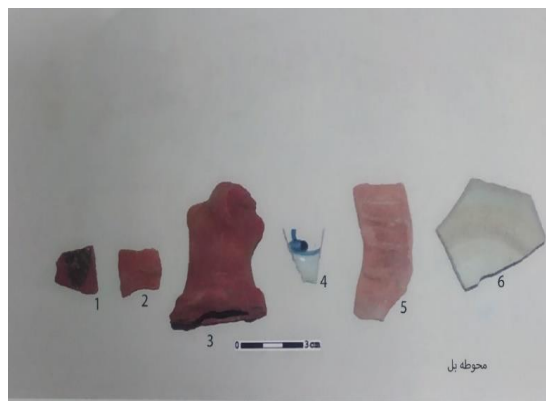


Figure 8: Pottery from Bel Site.



Figure 9: Pottery from Negour Cemetery (Shirazi, 2010).



Figure 10: Sgraffito Ware from Batel Fortress (Shirazi, 2010).



Figure 11: Pottery from Ben Davood Fortress (Moradi, 2007).

VIII. Conclusion

Based on historical sources and archaeological evidence, the port of Tis was one of the major harbors of Makran during the Islamic period. It is frequently mentioned in Islamic-era texts, especially those from the medieval centuries. With the expansion of commerce and trade—particularly during the rule of the Seljuks of Kerman in the 11th–12th centuries AH—Tis became one of Iran's most important ports. Its trade route evolved into one of the busiest commercial corridors of the region, beginning at Tis and extending inland to the cities of Makran, and further into the provinces of Kerman, Sistan, and Khorasan.

Among the regions most influenced by the economic and trade activities of Tis were the coastal and hinterland areas of Makran, particularly within the counties of Chabahar, Konarak, Dashtiari, and the Telang district. Due to the passage of the Tis trade route through these zones, numerous settlements and archaeological sites developed with direct connections to the port. These sites are characterized by pottery and cultural materials that closely resemble those found in Tis, reflecting a high level of cultural homogeneity and interaction.

Significant coastal and hinterland sites where Islamic-period artifacts and Tis-related materials have been discovered include: Gowatr Fortress, Negour Cemetery, Misuri, Mir Bazar, Batel Fortress, Bandgah Cheb Cemetery, Cheb Site, Kalat Jadgalabad, Kalat Chilsar, Bel Site, Voshin Chat, and Ebrahim Kalat Shark. These sites are primarily distinguished by their decorated glazed ceramics in green, brown, and yellow glazes with sgraffito motifs, and a limited number of Chinese celadon wares. Similar finds have also been recovered in the western part of Chabahar, particularly in Konarak, Zarabad, and Ben Davood Fortress.

A review of archaeological surveys and comparative analysis of material culture—especially Islamic glazed

pottery—reveals that many of these artifacts date to the 11th–14th centuries AH. The presence of sgraffito ware and limited celadon imports confirms that the formation and prosperity of these sites were directly linked to the trade network centered at Tis. Many of the Chinese celadons likely entered Iran through Tis, then were distributed inland to regions such as Sistan, Kerman, and beyond.

The positioning of these sites follows a clear trajectory, starting at Tis, moving through Negour northward into Dashtiari, along the Kajo River, toward Telang, and eventually reaching Qasr-e Qand via an old caravan route. During this period, Qasr-e Qand was a key agricultural and commercial hub—particularly for the production of panīdh (sugarcane molasses). The predominant ceramic type across these settlements is sgraffito ware, with Tis serving as a main production center.

Sites such as Kalat Chilsar and Bel, located in eastern Dashtiari along the route to Kech and Panjgur, have yielded both sgraffito and Chinese celadon pottery. These archaeological findings support historical accounts of the Panjgur–Kech–Tis trade route, one of the most vital in Makran—so much so that one of Panjgur’s gates was reportedly named “Tis,” according to al-Muqaddasi.

Comparative studies of these ceramics with similar finds from across Iran and coastal hubs along the Sea of Oman, Persian Gulf, and Indian Ocean show that the glazed, sgraffito, celadon, and carved or molded plain pottery from these sites mostly date to the 11th–12th centuries AH, a period that coincides with the Seljuk administration of Tis when it reached the height of its influence.

The temporal alignment of these coastal and hinterland settlements with the prosperity of Tis indicates that the decline of the port also led to the abandonment of these sites. Over time, the collapse of trade routes and the instability brought by invasions—from the Ghaznavids in Makran and Kerman to the devastating Mongol incursions—resulted in the depopulation and eventual abandonment of Tis and its surrounding trade settlements.

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