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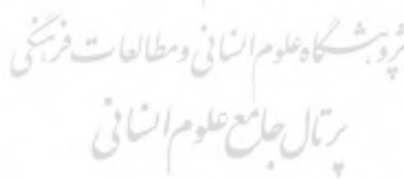
# Introducing Troglodytic Spaces in Bostanu; Sasanian Rock-Cut Tombs on the Edge of the Persian Gulf


Ali Hozhabri<sup>1</sup>,  Seyed Hamed Kamali<sup>2</sup>, Abbas Norouzi<sup>3</sup>

## Abstract

Due to its specific location, the Persian Gulf has been at the center of attention throughout Iran's history. Apart from commercial ships that passed through this strategic waterway, the Persian Gulf turned into a major point for the emergence and export of various thoughts and religions from one place to another in the region and beyond. In addition to historical texts, burial practices and rites seem important enough to evaluate and assess religious tendencies of the people who lived in this area. Among these rituals, those belonging to Zoroastrians on the edge of the Persian Gulf are of immense importance, which include some known samples found in Khark Island, Siraf Port, and Bushehr's Shoghab. Man-made caves located on the Persian Gulf shores near the Parsian (=Gavbandi) next to cultural remnants of Islamic periods called "Javad Al-Aemeh Fishing Port" near the Bostanu Village help us know this kind of architecture. It seems that Bostanu caves served as rock-cut tombs and were included in the burial tradition of the Sassanian period that was also used in the Islamic period. Also, the location of Bostanu can be matched with the ancient Apsaneh and take its history back to the era of Alexander of Macedonia.

**Keywords:** Rock-Cut Tombs; Bostanu; Persian Gulf; Religion; Burial Practices.



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## Introduction

Hormozgan has two mountainous and plain areas, with the first covering a larger part of the provincial zone whereas some plains with various zones between mountains being suitable for agriculture. This elongated part of Zagros Mountains in Fars has appeared in the southeast of the country and in scattered form in the center. The mountains become low elevated in the range from northwest to southeast. In the east and northeast, these mountains reach the internal depressions such as Jaz Murian in the northeast of the Strait of Hormuz and the Lut Desert from one direction and extend to low-height shores along with the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman from another direction. Many large landslides and faults have appeared among these heights.

Gavbandi City, which is the capital of Gavbandi County, is located 225km from the northwest of Bandar Lengeh and the western end of the Hormozgan province. With an area of 6.5 km<sup>2</sup>, this city is located in geographical coordinates of 53° 01' - 53° 03' east longitude and 27° 12' - 27° 13' north latitude at 54m height from sea level, and in the main route of Bandar Lengeh in Bushehr. Gavband is indeed one of the units used for dividing farmlands in this area, and another meaning of the term "Gavband" is where "Gav" (=cow) is fastened for grazing<sup>1</sup>.

The mountains in this area play a vital role in the rainfall of Hormozgan Province embracing the north of the Strait of Hormuz dominating it like a strong castle. The average height of villages in

this area is 50m among which, Khome-shan Village is the highest with 75m and Bostanu Port Village at the lowest with 3m. The most important mountains in Hormozgan include Poshtkooh, Zoratu, Fareghan Homak, Sho (Shab= night), Keno, Bashagard, and Barkho.

Although Bandar Abbas is considered to be the "gate for trade between East and West and is among important ports of East" (Sykes, 1957: 321), the area contains "hot" and "bad" climate in Iran. Kaempfer (1981: 9) in the 17<sup>th</sup> century introduced Bandar Abbas as a place with the driest and unhealthy climate. Such geographical conditions have been one of the barriers to population attraction either in the past or present meaning more importance for cities located at far from the coast, such as Lar (Zia Tavana, 1997: 16).

## Historical Background

According to divisions provided by Muslim geographers, the Persian Gulf coasts are divided between several states of large Islamic land; its southern shores belonged to the Arabian Peninsula states, its western shores attached to Iraq, and three Iranian states are on its northern shores, which includes Khuzestan, Fars, and Kerman from west to east, respectively (Hoseinzadeh Shanechi, 2007: 34-36). By traditional divisions rooted in the administrative structure of ancient Iran, Fars province was divided into five boondocks or large districts of Ardashir-Khwarrah, Shapoor-Khwarrah, Estakhr province, Darabgard-Khwarrah, Shabankareh or Ghobad. What made this area more important during the ancient era was its proximity to the southern basin of ancient Elam and Parseh (Ach-

<sup>1</sup> The name Gavbandi may be related to land proportions and water and land division.

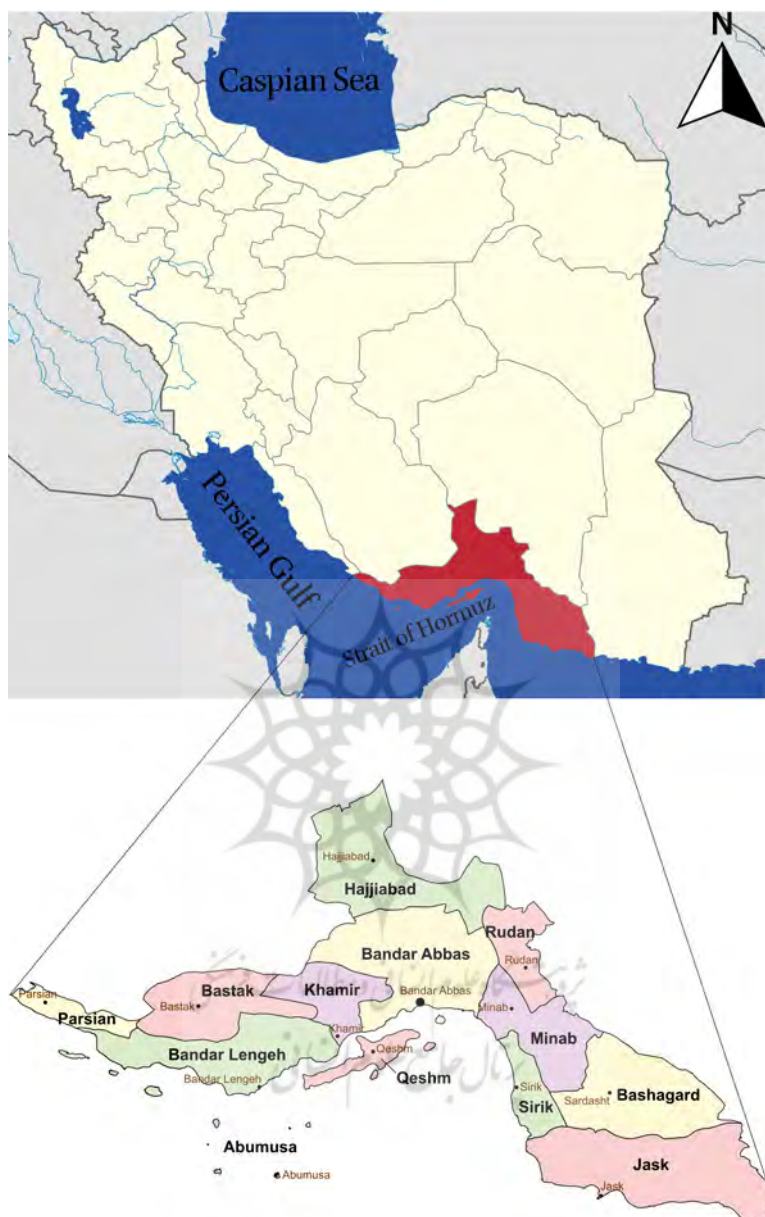


Fig. 1. Persian Gulf and Hormozgan Province, Iran

aemenid era). The present Gavbandi is located within Lian (as a trade port) and Parse (as a governance place) linking two the fields of power (politics) and economy. The major ports and islands of the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman were

mainly located in Ardashir-Khwarrah boondock and some of its areas were in Shapoor-Khwarrah boondock. Ardashir-Khwarrah boondock started from Shiraz and reached the southern areas to the Persian Gulf shores, and Khark to



Fig. 2. The View of Javadalaime Fishing Pier

Qeshm islands were located in this area. The coastal areas of Ardashir-Khwarrah boondock were called Seyf which means shore and included the Amareh shore in the east of Kish Island, Zahir shore on the southern coast of Irahestan (southeast areas of Fars, Larestan), and areas around Siraf Port and Mozaffar shore in north of Najirom (a small port between Siraf and Bushehr) (Iqbal Ashtiani, 1986: 7-276).

During the Qajar era, the Gavbandi area was one of the blocks in Larestan<sup>2</sup> and Gavbandi village (current city) was chosen as the center of Gavbandi district in 1933. The country divisions were changed from late Qajar to 1937 and a new political-administrative system appeared. Iran was divided into 27 states

according to this new system. The 26<sup>th</sup> state included islands and ports of the Persian Gulf, Bandar-e Lengeh, and its subordinate areas that were among specific areas of that state (Vadiee, 1974: 192-193; Jafari Valdani, 2001: 89-90). Bandar-e Lengeh was one of the areas of Lar County in Fars Province until 1951. According to the 1956 census in Bandar Abbas, Minab and Jask formed the major areas of the current Hormozgan Province then belonging to Kerman province, and Bandar-e Lengeh districts and western areas of the province were located in Fars province. Current Hormozgan province was known as "Governance of all ports and islands of Oman Sea" in 1966 and included three counties of Bandar Abbas, Bandar-e Lengeh, and Minab covering 14 districts and 29 rural

<sup>2</sup> The name of Gavbandi is called Gobandi in the texts that remained from the Qajar era.





Fig 3. Satellite Photo of Bostanu

areas. At that time, Bandar-e Lengeh included Bastak, Gavbandi, Shib Kuh, and Kish and 15 subordinated rural areas. In 1976, the title of “Governance of all ports and islands of Oman Sea” was changed to “Hormozgan Province” which included 5 counties. Bandar-e Lengeh County had 4 districts that year. Following 1996 divisions, Bandar-e Lengeh County included five districts (Bastak, Shib Kuh, Markazi, Gavbandi, and Kish), 17 rural areas, and 6 cities. In 2007, Gavbandi was separated from this county and became an independent county called Parsian<sup>3</sup> which

included two districts (Central (Markazi) and Kushkonar), three cities (Parsian, Kushkonar, Dashti), and 4 rural areas (Buchir, Behdasht, Kushkonar, Mehregan). Kushkonar city and district of Parsian County is located in the westernmost area of Hormozgan (Fig. 1) in the proximity to south Pars bordering Hormozgan Province. This district of Parsian County has many natural recreational and tourism areas. Kushkonar District includes marine, plain, and mountainous areas. There are large palm forests in the Gavbandi area, so date and grain products were exported from this area to other countries in the past and people there made a living through trade and traveling to India and Africa. Sheikh Yaser Nasoori

<sup>3</sup> The Board of Ministers approved in the meeting on 12 May 2007 to change the name of Gavbandi County to Parian County in Hormozgan Province.



Fig. 4. The Location of Bostanu is next to Javadalaime Fishing Pier



Fig. 5. A View of Bastano's Troglodytic, View from East to West

can be introduced as the founder of New Gavbandi.

#### **Bandar-e Bostanu (Bostanu Port)**

Bostanu Port is a village subordinated to

Kushkonar District in Parsian County of Hormozgan Province and is one of the most important villages in terms of fishery and trade. Now, Bostanu Port is one of the most important villages of Parsian





Fig. 6. View of Largest Bastano's Troglodytic, View from West to East



Fig. 7. The Entrance of the Largest Bastano's Troglodytic

County because of Javad Al-Aemeh Fishery Wharf (Fig. 4) and shopping centers for foreign products.

Some researcher knows Bostanu Port an ancient Apostanae believing that Ne-archus ships anchored in Naiband Bay





Fig. 8. The Western Wall of the Largest Bastano's Troglodytic

(Zarrinkoob, 2001: 274). Apostanae was located on the northern shore of the Persian Gulf where Alexander's fleet anchored under the command of Nearchus<sup>4</sup> in its marine route from Indus to Shush (Arian, 1966). However, the most interesting point is the number of designated cities and actual wharves on Iranian shores of the Persian Gulf, which are mentioned by Nearchus (325-326 BC) (Hasan, 1992: 53).

Although Nyberg translated the word Apostam as "shelter" (Nyberg, 1974, II:24), there might be a connection between "Ap-Astan" which means threshold of water, and "Abestan" which means a place for water storage (MacKenzie,

<sup>4</sup> Nearchus (around 300-360 BC) was one of Alexander's Generals and head of his navy. Arian has described its marine travel from the Indus to the Tigris in a book. The marine travel of Nearchus continued from November 326 BC to July 325 BC (Ghirshman, 1993: 278).

1971: 3). The name of village "Bostaneh" or "Bostanu" on the shore of the Persian Gulf draws the attention more than anything else. The location of "Bostanu" most probably matched with ancient Apostane. As reported by Nearchus's travelogue, a small bay with many villages around it existed near Apostanae Port where date and some fruits like those grown in Greece were produced. That village might be Apostanae because no name of it has been taken. The Nearchus refers to pearl fishing near Apostanae which may be a clue to find its real place. Current Bostanu on the shore of the Persian Gulf has been considered one of the pearl fishing centers until a few years ago.

According to the 2005 archeological assessments of the County (Askari Chavardi, 2005), these man-made caves were unclear because they were buried under the coastal sediments. It was during civil operations in Javad Al-Aemeh Fishery



Fig. 9. The Entrance of the Largest Room of Bastano's Troglodytic

Wharf in 2009 that a coastal soil road was created and these man-made caves unearthed. The Cultural Heritage Organization of the province recorded these monuments under the title "Bostanu's Man-Made Caves."

### Initial Description

Bostanu's man-made caves were carved in the sandstone substrate near the shore at a height of about 4m above sea level (Figs. 9 & 10). An outcrop of big red sandstone layers on the coastal edge of Parsian City (=Gavbandi) with dissolution holes and a south-facing slope (30-50degree) create a part of the southern edge of Anticline in the northwest-southeast direction along with Gavbandi anticline and its south Mishan Formation is the oldest outcrop of it.

Seven man-made caves are now visible, which contain small spaces with dif-

ferent sizes and dimensions (Figs. 8 & 9). Unfortunately, the sudden appearance of these caves while a road was under construction for a fishing wharf led to the emptying of sand sediments inside them, so they could be explored in a better way. Accordingly, these man-made caves require more accurate and thorough archaeological studies.

The discovered man-made caves in this complex have 1.30-2m openings, 1.20-5m depth, and a height of about 2m. The largest cave in this complex (Figs. 7-10) has a small porch and a room with 3.30m in length, 3m in width, and 2m in height, and its gate is 1.20m in height and 0.5m in width. What are seen in the upper parts of these man-made caves are some created cuts that help find the remnants of cultural layers, which might have been used until the early Islamic period.



Fig. 10. The Eastern Wall of the Largest Bastano's Troglodytic

### Conclusion

It seems that this architecture is matched with the burial practices identified in the Sassanian period, which existed in the form of a rock-cut tomb in Siraf. For better identification of this relic, it is hoped to preserve this complex and create a proper tourism site through exploration of these tombs. Historical evidence shows that this area may have been at the center since the Alexander's period, and it may happen to find some relics

from the Achaemenid era by doing more precise archeological activities. Northern shores of the Persian Gulf have been less investigated and explored archeologically; hence, there is limited information about the archeological sites of this area. Several archeological enclosures discovered from the Achaemenid era imply the importance of this area. Bardak Siah is one of the Achaemenid sites, which are known with a set of other Achaemenid buildings in the north of the Persian Gulf.

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