

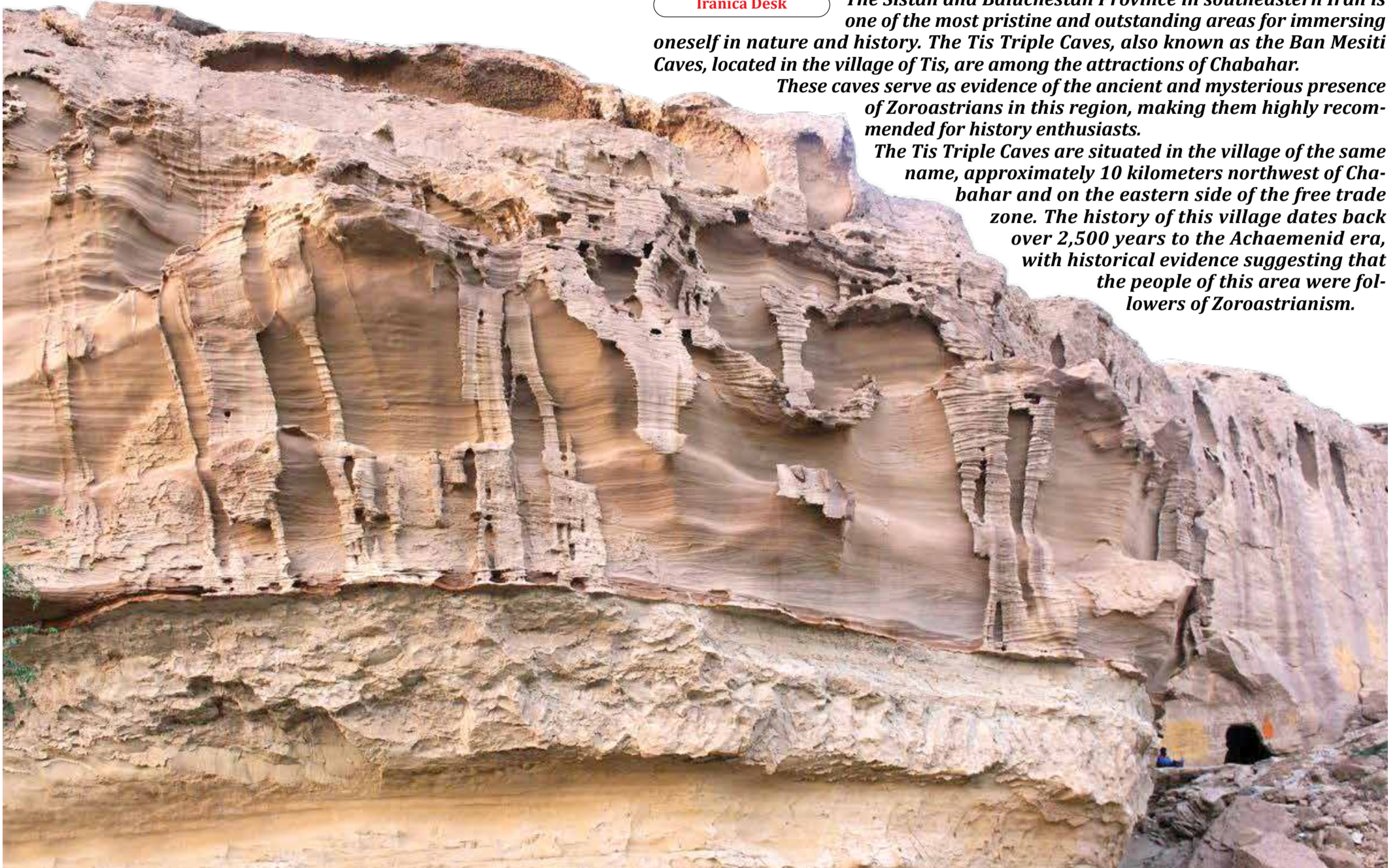
# Unearthing the past at Tis Triple Caves

Iranica Desk

*The Sistan and Baluchestan Province in southeastern Iran is one of the most pristine and outstanding areas for immersing oneself in nature and history. The Tis Triple Caves, also known as the Ban Mesiti Caves, located in the village of Tis, are among the attractions of Chabahar.*

*These caves serve as evidence of the ancient and mysterious presence of Zoroastrians in this region, making them highly recommended for history enthusiasts.*

*The Tis Triple Caves are situated in the village of the same name, approximately 10 kilometers northwest of Chabahar and on the eastern side of the free trade zone. The history of this village dates back over 2,500 years to the Achaemenid era, with historical evidence suggesting that the people of this area were followers of Zoroastrianism.*



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Historically, this village was known as Tis Port and was considered one of the important commercial ports of the Sea of Oman. The ruins of this ancient port can still be seen around the village, and the remaining graves on the heights of Tis indicate the settlement of sedentary and pastoral tribes in the caves of this region.

Despite the efforts of experts and archaeologists over the years, caves remain some of the most mysterious places that captivate the human mind. Generally, caves have historically been used as stopping places for livestock during nomadic migrations or as shelters for settled tribes. Limestone caves undergo fracturing and cracking in their internal crust due to erosion and the action of internal forces, and geologists determine their age by counting these lines. The Tis Triple Caves are located at the foothills of Mount Shahbaz, about 10 kilometers northwest of the port city of Chabahar. Due to their size and branching structure, these caves continue to be a source of stories and legends for the local people.

Some locals believe that these caves were the home and place of worship for a pure, righteous, and respected woman named Lady Masiti, claiming that her tomb is located in one of the caves; however, there is no evidence on the grave to support this story. The Tis Caves are situated about 25 meters above the road on the northern side of the village of Tis, at the foothills of the mountain. These caves are

quite interesting in terms of their structure and use. The central and eastern caves are accessible for visiting, while the western cave is blocked due to a rockfall and is not accessible. The caves include two artificial or manmade caves and one natural cave.

Existing evidence suggests that the Tis Triple Caves, or the shrine of Lady Masiti, were places of worship or sacrifice, with the entire front section of all three caves featuring platforms for performing religious or ritualistic practices. It appears that the first cave was used for burial, while the western cave served for pilgrimage and worship.

The first cave of the Tis Triple Caves is natural and semi-circular in shape; however, it has been expanded through the carving of the mountain's wall, both inside and at its entrance. Within this cave, there is a tomb with white, plastered walls structured in two horizontal levels stacked upon each other. This tomb lacks inscriptions, tablets, or any writing and is located one meter below the cave's surface.

On the tomb, there is a cubic structure made of stone and plaster, which forms the foundation of a small dome. The entrance of the tomb is parallel to the cave's entrance and faces the Tis valley. One notable feature is the lines and symbols seen on the walls of three sides of the dome, written in red and purple ink in Gujarati and Hindi scripts. The end of this cave is closed off.

The second cave of the Tis Triple Caves is artificial and man-

made. It is located seven steps away from the first cave, and the signs of carving and chiseling on the walls of the cave are easily recognizable. The entrance to the second cave is 80 centimeters wide, and its ceiling is low; for this reason, one must bend down to enter, and it is impossible to stand upright inside the cave.

The end of the second cave has gradually become closed over time; however, archaeologists believe that this cave had access to sea wells. According to evidence, it is said that the residents of the area would throw their dead bodies from the well and the outgoing path of this cave into the underground waters, and these wells were considered burial sites in ancient times. They did not bury their dead in the ground but instead cast them into the underground waters to serve as food for sea creatures. It is worth mentioning that the underground waters in Tis village flow toward the sea.

The ancient residents of the village of Tis believed that they should throw their dead into the underground waters so that they would appear in another part of the ocean and become food for marine life. This practice was once considered very sacred and was essentially a way to seek forgiveness for the deceased and to show gratitude to the sea for providing sustenance to the residents of the area.

The third cave of the Tis Triple Caves is located on the left side, 50 meters from the main cave. This cave is manmade and features an entrance with

an arch length of 20 meters, a cavity, and a large chamber. It is believed that the third cave is connected to a place deep within the mountain. On the walls of this cave, sentences are written in red and purple ink in Gujarati script. Chabahar literally means "land of eternal spring" and has a mild, humid climate. Generally, the best time to visit the south of the country is from the second half of the year until early spring. Night visits to the Tis Caves are possible, which would be an interesting experience; however, a guide is required for this.

Accessing the Tis Triple Caves is not very difficult, and no special equipment is needed, as the path has been improved for easy access for visitors. Considering that these caves are located at the foothills of Mount Shahbaz, it is advisable to wear proper walking shoes. Bringing a camera, sunglasses, sunscreen, and a sun hat is also recommended.

The local souvenirs of Tis Village include wickerwork, embroidery, and taxidermied aquatic animals. Purchasing souvenirs from the locals can greatly contribute to the area's economy. Enjoying delicious dishes such as fish stew, pakora, and shrimp rice in the village of Tis will be a delightful experience.

Given that Sistan and Baluchestan Province has pristine and unparalleled nature, protecting it is an important aspect of travel. Respecting the culture and beliefs of the local residents is a key factor in any visit.



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