Prehistoric shell middens, seascapes and landscapes at Lake Siranda (Las Bela, Balochistan)

Preliminary results of the 2011 fieldwork season

Paolo Biagi, Alberto Girod and Renato Nisbet

Abstract

The first season of archaeological surveys carried along the shores of Lake Siranda (Las Bela, Balochistan) in January 2011 has shown the presence of two prehistoric shell middens characterised by fragments of mangrove and marine shells as well as chipped stone artefacts. The shell middens were AMS dated to the middle Holocene by one single specimen of Terebralia palustris gastropod. Their presence indicates that mangrove environments exploited by groups of shellfish gatherers existed in the area at least since the above period, and that the present-day lake depression was in fact a shallow tidal lagoon of the Arabian Sea, the shores of which had been settled at least during part of the Neolithic.

Keywords

Balochistan, Las Bela, Lake Siranda, Shell middens, Mangrove environments, Shellfish gatherers

1. Preface

This paper is a preliminary report of the surveys carried out at Lake Siranda in January 2011. Its scope is to describe the finds we discovered, discuss the results we obtained and frame them into the general picture of the archaeology of Las Bela province and the northern coast of the Arabian Sea.

Very little is known of the archaeology of Lake Siranda and the region that surrounds it. This is mainly due to the absence of any systematic survey along the coast of Las Bela (Khan, 1979a), the only exception being that of Sir A. Stein, who provided us with a detailed description of the geography of the province (Stein, 1943: 194-219), during his research aimed at the definition of the route followed by Alexander on his retreat to Babylon across the country of the Oreitai.