

READING THE CULTURAL SPECIFICITIES OF THE IRAQI MARSH ARABS FROM THEIR LANDSCAPE

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ABSTRACT

Iraqi marshlands are irregular clusters of small islands constructed by alternating layers of reed mats and layers of mud that dredged from the marsh bottom to constitute one of the most fascinating regions of the world. Marshlands in Iraq are intriguing environments for scholars because of their long history dating back to the Sumerian civilization. My goal in this paper is to examine how the socioorganization and the landscapes of the marshlands fashioned certain cultural specific knowledge of the Marsh Arabs in a sustainable manner. The objective is to contribute to a better understanding of the built environment of Iraqi marshlands and its relationship to the space in creating a place for Marsh Arabs. It also provides a comprehensive image about the society of the marshlands which sustains its continuity and adapts to its habitat to establish awareness about the cultural landscape of Iraqi Marshes. Until 1992, Iraqi marshes remained relatively unknown to the general public but widely known to archeologists and scholars of Mesopotamia. The Iraqi marshlands have captured the attention of the international community from their depletion by the dictator Saddam Hussein in 1991 as retribution to the inhabitants who opposed his government. The draining of the swamps led to severe environmental, social, and economic consequences for local residents which drained away their organizational way of life that is organically inseparable from the environment. The marshland is a woven society in reeds, a place where people and nature are closely bound together in symbiotic sustainable relationships.

Keywords

Iraqi marshlands, Marsh Arabs, landscape settlements, cultural specificity.