



# HORMUZ I. PRE-ISLAMIC PERIOD

---

**HORMUZ** (Hormoz, Ormuz, Ormus), an island and a strategic strait (Tanga-ye Hormoz) in the Persian Gulf, linking it to the Gulf of Oman, as well as the name of a medieval port near the strait. This entry will be treated in the following two periods:

i. *Pre-Islamic period.*

ii. *Islamic period.*

## i. PRE-ISLAMIC PERIOD

Evidence for pre-Islamic occupation around the Straits of Hormuz was first documented in 1930-31 by Sir Aurel Stein (Stein, 1937) and subsequent surveys by a number of scholars (Šāmlu; A. Williamson, unpubl.; Prickett, pp. 1269-72). Most of this work has centered on the eastern area, north and south of Mināb; but, as this is a geomorphologically complex area (Carls), with definite evidence of considerable alleviation and Holocene shoreline changes, archeological evidence of early occupation is probably skewed.

The Stein and Williamson-Prickett surveys identified approximately 27 archeological sites “on the Persian Gulf coastal plain or associated with the first range of coastal ridges in an area extending from Mināb to about 40 km southward, and to the Gulf shore about 30 km westward” (Prickett, p. 1270)



which have evidence of pre-Islamic occupation. The earliest site (K 9) recorded thus far yielded sherds comparable to so-called “Lapui” ware, of early fourth-millennium date, from sites like Tal-e Bākun in the Marvdašt, Fārs province (Prickett, 1986, p. 1270). Most of the prehistoric sites recorded, however, have been dated on the basis of parallels to Tepe Yaḥyā in east-central Kermān province. A single prehistoric site (K 14) was characterized by painted black-on-orange wares paralleled in period IVC at Tepe Yaḥyā (ca. 3100-2900 B.C.E.), but the greatest number of prehistoric sites in the area show parallels to the Iron Age and Parthian-period levels there (e.g., K 84, 96, 98, 100, 104-6, 109, 110B, 112, 124-26, 130G, 137).

At least two sites along the coast (K 102A and 102B) and perhaps half a dozen slightly inland (Whitehouse and Williamson, 1973, p. 38 and Fig. 6) yielded sherds of black-on-fine orange ware, a type which has often been dated to the Sasanian period (e.g., Sajjadi, who calls it “Namord ware” after the site of Tom-e Namord in the Rudbar region). Some of this material, however, belongs to an earlier, pre-Sasanian variant of black-on-fine orange which can be dated to the 1st century C.E. on the basis of parallels to similar finds at ed-Dur, on the coast of Umm al-Qaiwain (United Arab Emirates), where such pottery has been found in consistent association with Roman pillar-molded glass bowls known to have been manufactured principally between 50 and 100 C.E. (Potts).

Williamson and Prickett also recorded the presence of Indian Red-Polished Ware on at least two sites near Mināb (Whitehouse and Williamson, Fig. 7). This ware, often dated to the first three centuries C.E., has in fact a much longer period of use, extending from the 1st century B.C.E. to the 5th century C.E. (Orton, p. 46).

Turning now to the extant literary sources, we begin with Arrian’s account of the voyage of Nearchus, where we read, “they . . . moored by the river Anamis at a place called *Harmozia*. Here there was an abundance of products of all kinds, except that olives did not grow” (Arrian, *Ind.* 33.2-3; cf. *Armoza Regio* in the Anon. Geographer of Ravenna 2.5.3; see Schnetz, p. 26). In a slightly different version, which Tarn believes comes from a separate source (Tarn, p. 481), Pliny refers to Harmozia as *Armysia* or *Armuzia* (*Natural History* 6.107). The toponym *Harmozon*, used for a promontory near the mouth of the Persian Gulf presumably in the immediate vicinity of Harmozia, is also attested (Eratosthenes, apud Strabo, *Geog.* 16.3.2; cf. Cl. Ptolemy, 6.8, Amm. Marcellinus, 23.6). Thus the settlement of Harmozia must have existed by the late Achaemenid period, and is perhaps to be associated with one of the Iron



Age sites found by Williamson and Prickett, though some scholars have identified it with Mināb itself (e.g., Sykes, p. 302). Nothing suggests that the settlement itself was first founded by Nearchus (contra Forbiger, p. 553).

The Anamis river (Anamis: Arrian, *Ind.* 32.2, 35.7; Ananis: Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 6.107; Andanis: Ptolemy, 6.8.4; Sandis: Mela, 3.75) has been identified with the Mināb river by most scholars (e.g., Forbiger, p. 551; Sykes, p. 302; cf. Silberman, p. 302).

After Alexander the Great's return from India to Babylon, he sent out three expeditions for the purpose of circumnavigating the Arabian peninsula. Thus it is certain that, in addition to Nearchus and his companion Onesecritus, Androsthene and Hieron of Soli also sailed through the Straits of Hormuz in 324 B.C. (Högemann, pp. 74-103). Firsthand Greek observation of the region is more likely to have taken place during Nearchus's voyage, however, as it was in his direct interest to survey the Persian coast, whereas the later voyages were more concerned with exploring the Arabian side of the Straits and the western shores of the Arabian Sea.

The archeological evidence of occupation around Mināb in the Sasanian era is complemented by a disputed reference to Hormuz as the seat of a Nestorian bishopric. Gabriel, bishop of Hormuz under the catholicos Aba I, ca. 540, is mentioned by 'Abdisho of Nisibis (cited in J. S. Assemani's *Bibliotheca Orientalis* III/2, Rome, 1728, p. 784; see Fiey, 1969, p. 205). Jean Maurice Fiey suggests, however, that there may be some confusion in the text between Hormuz and Hormizd Ardashir, i.e., Ahwāz.

Nevertheless, the strategic position of the archeological sites found in the Minab region, combined with the archeological evidence of contact by sea with India, suggests that the region, which later became so important under the Kingdom of Hormuz, was already actively involved in long-distance trade by the 1st millennium B.C.E. Parallels with Tepe Yaḥyā, in particular, suggest that we may, however, push back the threshold of inter-regional involvement into the 3rd millennium B.C.E. By the time of Nearchus's voyage up the Persian Gulf there was clearly a substantial enough settled, coastal population to have left some impression in the Greek sources, even if many of Tarn's suggestions about the 'lost kingdom of Hormuz' (Tarn) must be treated very cautiously pending confirmation by epigraphic and archeological sources. The presence of Indian Red Polished Ware suggests that the Straits of Hormuz were as important to Indian Ocean trade in the late pre-Islamic era as they were in the



more recent historic past.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

H.-G. Carls, *Alt-Hormoz—ein historischer Hafen an der Strasse von Hormoz (Iran)*, Munich, 1982.

J.-M. Fiey, “Diocèses syriens orientaux du Golfe Persique,” *Mémorial Mgr Gabriel Khouri-Sarkis (1898-1968)*, Louvain, 1969, pp. 177-219.

A. Forbiger, *Handbuch der alten Geographie aus den Quellen bearbeitet I-II*, Leipzig, 1844.

P. Högemann, *Alexander der Große und Arabien*, Munich, 1985.

N. P. Orton, “Red Polished Ware in Gujarat: A Catalogue of Twelve Sites,” in *Rome and India: The Ancient Sea Trade*, Madison, 1991, pp. 46-81.

D. T. Potts, “Namord Ware in Southeastern Arabia,” in *Arabia and its Neighbours: Essays on Prehistorical and Historical Developments Presented in Honour of Beatrice de Cardi*, Abiel 2, Turnhout, 1998, pp. 207-20.

M. E. Prickett, “Man, Land and Water: Settlement Distribution and the Development of Irrigation Agriculture in the Upper Rud-i Gushk Drainage, Southeastern Iran,” unpubl. Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, Cambridge, 1986.

M. Sajjadi, “A Class of Sasanian Ceramics from Southeastern Iran,” *Rivista di Archeologia* 13, 1989, pp. 31-40.

G. ‘A. Šāmlu, “Kāvoš dar aṭrāf-e Bandar-e Mināb,” *Bāstān šenāsi wa honar-e Irān* 9-10, 1972, pp. 124-28.

J. Schnetz, *Ravennas Anonymus: Cosmographia, eine Erdbeschreibung um das Jahr 700*, Uppsala, 1951.



A. Silberman, *Pomponius Mela, Chorographie*, Paris, 1988.

M. A. Stein, *Archaeological Reconnaissances in North-Western India and South-Eastern Iran*, London, 1937.

P. Sykes, *Ten Thousand Miles in Persia*. London, 1902.

W. W. Tarn, "Ormuz: A Lost Kingdom," in *The Greeks in Bactria and India*, Cambridge, 1951, pp. 481-85.

D. Whitehouse and A. Williamson, "Sasanian Maritime Trade," *Iran* 11, 1973, pp. 29-49.