



KHARG ISLAND I. GEOGRAPHY

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i. Geography

Kharg Island is situated at about 30 miles northwest of the port of [Bušehr](#) and 20 miles west of the port of [Ganāva](#). The island stretches about 5 miles longitudinally and half of that at its widest point; it has a total area of 8.1 square miles, amounting to one-third of the size of the island of Manhattan in New York City. The coordinates of the centroid of Kharg Island are lat 29.25° N and long 50.33° E. Associated with Kharg is [Kārgu](#) (or [Kārku](#)) Island, 2 miles to its north. Essentially uninhabited, [Kārgu](#) is a narrow island with the shape of a finger and has an area of 1.3 square miles (Statistical Center of Iran, 1966, *passim*).

The interior of Kharg is hilly, terminating in cliffs at the northern and southern ends of the island. A short range stretches from northwest to southeast, with the highest point approximately 270 feet above sea level. The surface of Kharg is predominantly covered with lime, with patches of silt-clay mostly in the south of the island. Kharg's location near the Persian Gulf's continental shelf is a source of moderately high seismicity (IIEES [online]); a significant earthquake was recorded in 1954 (*Sāzmān-e joġrāfiā'i*, pp. 12-13). The inorganic soils covering the island support little flora, while fauna is virtually absent (*idem*, 41-43). Kharg is characterized by hot and humid summers and mild winters, with an average annual temperature of 75 degree Fahrenheit and precipitation of 10.9 inches (Weatherbase [online]).



Administratively, Kharg is a district (*baḵš*) consisting of two islands: Kharg and Kārgu. The Kharg district is under the jurisdiction of Bušehr Sub-province (*šahrestān*), Bušehr Province (*ostān*). The sole settlement of the Kharg District is its administrative center, the city of Kharg, which is located at the northeastern “horn” of the Kharg Island; it gained its current urban status in 1969. The population of Kharg (Table 1) was reckoned 650 souls in the first national census of 1956; it rose sharply within a decade to 5,460 within a decade, and continued to grow thanks to the industrialization of the island in the Pahlavi era. The population plummet reflected in the first decennial census after the establishment of the Islamic Republic may be justified by the devastation inflicted by the Iran-Iraq War. Still, the population was restored in the following decades, as shown in Table 1.

The traditional economy of Kharg was based on modest agriculture. The inhabitants cultivated date palm groves, citrus orchards, and vineyards, whose produce was partly exported to Bušehr. To irrigate the land, the subterranean water was extracted through digging of a network of underground channels (*kāriz*). These channels were deserted through industrialization of the island, and wells became the main source of drinking water, requiring electrical water pumps in every house. Moreover, Kharg was a center of fishing and hunting corals and particularly pearls, for which Kharg has been known since medieval times (‘A. Razmārā, p. 6; Enjavi, p. 31; Āl-e Aḥmad, pp. 53-59, 62-63; Sāzmān-e joḡrāfiā’i, 37-39; Lorimer, I/2, pp. 1019, 1022, 2223; Floor, 1982, pp. 221-22).

The geographical economy of Kharg was transformed with the expansion of the oil economy in Iran. Since the 1960s, the island has become a crude oil terminal and loading facility; in more recent decades, supertankers have docked at Kharg rather than at Abadan for bulk loading (de Planhol; McLachlan). In 2014, the satellite images of Google Earth [online] show the industrial areas of the island dotted with petroleum reservoirs and facilities. Wharfs project out from the southeast harbor, which is equipped with a network of piers and warehouses necessary for handling the ships. A disproportionately large airport runway dissects the inhabited part of Kharg, signifying the geopolitical importance of the island.

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