Encyclopædia Iranica

KHARG ISLAND II. HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY
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Published: July 20, 2004
Last Updated: September 16, 2015

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ii. *History and archaeology*

Archaeological evidence of occupation on Kharg was first noted by A. W. Stiffe (Stiffe, pp. 179-180) and later discussed in more detail by Ernst Herzfeld and Friedrich Sarre (Sarre and Herzfeld, 63-66; Herzfeld, 1935, pp. 103-105, Pls. 18-19; Herzfeld, 1941, p. 276, Pl. 93). Thus far, the earliest remains recorded are probably two large tombs, known as the Eastern and Southern Tombs. The plans of the two tombs are nearly identical, although the Southern Tomb is 13 m. deep (i.e. from entrance to back wall), whereas the Eastern Tomb is only 9.3 m. deep. Each tomb presents the viewer with a double-arched, colonnade-like façade leading into a vestibule and a main chamber, to which up to twenty burial chambers (*loculi*) are attached, all hewn out of the living rock (for full details see Haerinck). Along the interior wall facing the entrance, the Southern Tomb is decorated with a bas-relief depicting a single reclining male on a couch (*kliné*), holding a cup in his left hand. This immediately recalls representations of the 'funerary banquet' scenes in various media at Palmyra, Edessa, Dura Europos, and Hatra (Haerinck, pp. 147-48). At Palmyra the banqueter represented is in fact the deceased, shown reclining on a couch, with a cup in the left hand, suggesting a direct, Palmyrene inspiration for the Kharg scene, even though non-funerary images of a reclining Heracles, such as

those known at, Masjed-e Soleymān, Tang-e Sarvak and Kuh-e Tina, are attested in Iran itself during the Seleucid and Parthian periods (for refs. see Haerinck, 1975, p. 149). Marie-Joseph Steve, on the other hand, has suggested that the inspiration for the plan of the Southern Tomb can be traced to Petra and Nabataean funerary architecture, rather than to Palmyra, and he attributes the influence to trans-Arabian caravan traffic which linked *emporia* at the head of the Persian Gulf, such as Spasinou Charax, with Petra (Steve, 1999, pp. 75-76). An actual Palmyrene presence on Kharg, however, appears far more likely than a Nabataean one, particularly as we know from a Greek-Palmyrene bilingual inscriptions found at Palmyra that in 131 CE a Palmyrene merchant named Yarhai served as *satrapes Thilouanôn*, i.e. a satrap of the Thilouanoi (inhabitants of Tylos, i.e. Bahrain), for the king of Characene/Mesene (Seyrig, pp. 254-55; Starcky, p. 25; Potts, 1997, p. 95), and it is plausible to suggest that Palmyrenes were active on Kharg as well.

A second, badly preserved relief of Nike or Victory mounted on a globe above a half-column, adorns the right side of the entrance to the main *loculus* in the Southern Tomb. Damage to the left side of the entrance makes it impossible to ascertain whether a second Nike once stood there as well. The Kharg example belongs to the relatively rare group of wingless Nikes (Haerinck, 1975, p. 154).

A further eighty-three rock-cut tombs have also been documented on Kharg. These comprise four main types (A-D), which include single-chambered cavities (A), some small and niche-like (e.g. tomb 10, .50 x .70 m, .28 m deep) and others large (e.g. tomb 74, 1.9 x .9 m., 2.6 m. deep), with flat ceilings; cavities of varying size with vaulted ceilings (B); shallow tombs of variable shape (C), ranging from trapezoidal and semi-circular to triangular; and pit burials (D) excavated out of the surface rock of the plateau (D) (Haerinck, 1974, pp. 160-3). Ernie Haerinck has suggested that the tombs of type C may be regarded as Zoroastrian *astōdān*s, whereas those of type D may be, on analogy with similar ones at Siraf, the graves of a Jewish community on Kharg (Haerinck, 1975, p. 165). In this regard it is important to note that Steve reported an incised *menorah* amongst the graffiti in the Eastern Tomb. This he compared with a menorah in the 'tomb of Jason' at Jerusalem, dated to 30/31 CE at the latest (Steve, 1999, p. 75). Steve has also pointed to the presence of 'Nestorian'-style crosses just below roughly a dozen of the rock-cut tombs as well as traces of effaced inscriptions which might be Pahlavi (Steve, 1999, p. 75).Two further burial areas were investigated by Steve. One of these consisted of 15 burial pits (c. 1.5-2.3 m. long) cut into the rock and originally covered

with flag stones. Although the human skeletal remains there were generally disturbed, one of the tombs in this group contained 24 crania. A coin of Honorius Flavius (395-423) and an incised gem (Haerinck, 1998, Fig. 4) with a portrait resembling Attembelos III were found here, along with ceramics dating to the late Sasanian and early Islamic era (Steve, 1999, p. 76). Steve suggested these might have been much older tombs re-used by the Christian population on the island (see below) at this time.

Finally, a further 62 'megalithic' tombs, of Abbasid date, consisting of rectangular, individual graves c. 1.5-2.10 m. long, were excavated by Steve, who suggests this may have been a Jewish cemetery (Steve, 1999, p. 75).

Religious architecture on Kharg includes a 'temple' of coarsely dressed stone masonry, 7.5 m. on a side, with walls 1.5 m. thick. A plastered structure (.75 x .65 m., .52 m. high) in the center of the building is interpreted as a fire altar. A renovation of the original doorway and its replacement by a niche, interpreted as a *mihrab*, suggests the re-use at some point of the building as a mosque (Steve, 1999, p. 75). A *Čahārṭāq* 5 m. on a side, only fragments of the four original arch supports of which were preserved, was also documented by Steve.

But it is undoubtedly the large enclosure (96 x 85 m.), complete with a library, refectory, monks' cells, and church, which is the most important complex of antiquities on Kharg. Interpreted as a monastic community, the Kharg complex is the largest single document of Christian archaeology in the Persian Gulf region. Nineteen virtually identical monks' cells (4 x 5 m.), each with a single entrance; vestibule; and bedroom divided in two, were uncovered. The church, oriented east-west, had a large nave (5 x 15 m.) to which access from the south or north was gained via galleries opening out onto the courtyard which surrounded the building. A martyrs' chapel with a reliquary was located in the southeast corner of the main church, while a *diaconicon* (*bêth diaqôn*) for the preparation of the sacrament was located in the northeastern corner. The library consisted of two large, 8 m. long rooms, equipped with double rows of niches along the walls, each measuring .58 x .45 m., suggesting the existence of a substantial collection of books and manuscripts. A refectory (5 x 15 m.) with a bench running around all four walls and a room for instruction in the catechism, in which plaster fragments of a cross incised in a circle, were located in the eastern wing of the church complex.

The Christian community on Kharg is nowhere mentioned in any of the early

Nestorian sources (Fiey, 1969, p. 196). Indeed, this could be explained by Jean Maurice Fiey's conjecture that the community was in fact not Nestorian but Monophysite, a suggestion based on the specific form of the church. Steve, on the other hand, suggests that Kharg's monastery was one of those founded by the disciples of Abraham of Kashkar (491/2-588), a native of southern Iraq who, according to the *Chronicle of Seert*, returned from a visit to Egypt with Abraham of Netpar and promulgated a new form of monastery (Steve, 1999, p. 80). The ceramic evidence, however, suggests a date in the 8th and 9th centuries, although Steve has suggested the complex may have been founded as early as the 7th century.

In the anonymous *Ḥodud al-ʿālam* (c. 982) Kharg is mentioned as a source of superior pearls (*Ḥodud al-ʿālam*, tr. Minorsky, p. 58; Eṣṭakkri, *Masālek al-māmālek*, ed. de Goeje, p. 32). Considered part of the district of Ardašir-ḵorra by Abu Esḥāq Eṣṭaḵri (Schwarz, p. 82; see also Ebn al-Balḵi, p. 150, which mentions it as part of Qobād-ḵorra), Kharg was an important staging post for merchant vessels moving between India and Baṣra. In 1218 Kharg was visited by Šehāb-al-Din Abu ʿAbd-Allāh Yāqut (Wüstenfeld, 1864, p. 419). Alongside pearling and trade, Kharg's economy was based on fruit and date palm cultivation (Le Strange, 1905, p. 261; quoting Yāqut). A saint's tomb from the Mongol era known as the Emāmzādaof Emām Moḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya (however, Yāqut's reservations about this attribution needs to be mentioned, G. Rentz, art. "Khārag," *E.I.*2 IV, pp. 1056-57) bears a date of A.H. 738/CE 1337 as well as the inscription, "This is the tomb of the Prince of the Believers, Moḥammad, son of the Prince of the Believers, ʿAli-inscribed by Ḥosayn of Bokhara." A second inscription from 740 AH /CE 1339 refers to "recurring alms and lasting gardens, at every breath and moment, in the year 740" (Mostafavi, p. 94). The building over the tomb itself has a pyramidal dome with dentate design and is largely built of local stone. Its construction may be related to Qoṭb-al-Din Tahamtan II (1318-1347), ruler of Hormuz, who brought Kharg under his control (Piacentini, 1975, p. 85, n. 126).

In 1645, a small Dutch fleet bound for Baṣra picked up a pilot on Kharg, christened "Delft" by the Dutch in honor of the seat of one of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) offices (Slot, 1993, p. 157-58). Jean de Thévenot visited Kharg in 1665 and noted that the island engaged in trade both with Baṣra and with Bandar Rig and Isfahan (Stiffe, 1898, p. 182). He also commented on the presence of *qanats* on the island (Steve, 1999, p. 74). During the 18th century Kharg continued to be known as the place at which the best pilots could be

engaged by ships sailing to Baṣra (Slot, 1993, p. 15). Kharg was raided in 1751 by Ḥuwala Arabs who are said to have left with large quantities of booty (Perry, 1973, p. 82) but two years later the VOC agent, Baron Tiddo Frederik van Kniphausen, devised a plan to turn Kharg into a free port (i.e. open to all nationalities), securing perpetual ownership of the island from Mir Naṣir Waqāʾi, the Arab ruler of Bandar Rig, in return for a present of 2000 rupees (Perry, 1973, p. 84-85). Houses and a fort (named *Mosselsteyn*, after Kniphausen's superior in Batavia, VOC Governor General Jacob Mossel), situated in the northeast corner of the island (shown clearly on the map in Stiffe, 1898, p. 180), were constructed by Kniphausen, who arrived with three ships (the *Fortuyn*, *Getrouwigheid*, and *Batavier*) during the winter of 1753-4. German Catholic mercenaries were used to garrison the fort and Armenian traders were soon busy in Kharg, while the completion of a church in 1757 led to the arrival of a Carmelite priest, Father Angel Felix, ministering to what was then the largest Catholic community in Persia (Perry, 1973, p. 87). The Roman Catholic Bishop of Isfahan even moved his residence from Isfahan to Kharg at this time (Slot, 1993, p. 358).

Kniphausen soon began pearling operations, as well as engaging additional Turkish and Arab troops, but in 1755 he was given strict instructions not to meddle in the affairs of the Arab tribes resident on Kharg and the Persian coast (Slot, 1993, p. 366). In August 1756, Mir Muhannā, son and successor of Mir Naṣir, demanded 900 *tumans* in annual rent for the Dutch concession on Kharg but this was refused. An eyewitness account of Kharg in March 1758, is preserved in Dr. Edward Ives' account of his journey from India to England (Abu Hakima, 1965, pp. 54-55, citing Ives, 1773, p. 207-16). Eventually, open hostilities broke out in 1759 and as civil war on the mainland precipitated the loss of the Dutch base at Bandar ʿAbbās, Kharg became the only Dutch enclave in the region. In the spring of 1762 Mir Muhannā launched an assault on the Dutch fort on Kharg. This was repulsed by the Dutch garrison when reinforcements, hired by Kniphausen's successor, Jan Van der Hulst, arrived from Bušher and Ganava.

The following year Van der Hulst's successor, Buschmann, successfully negotiated a truce with Mir Muhannā and, by the early winter of 1763, Kharg was again able to receive vessels and to trade freely. Thus in 1765 Carsten Niebuhr visited Kharg during his journey up the Persian Gulf (Hansen, 1962, p. 141), paying his respects to Buschmann, whom he found to be a hospitable host and an energetic merchant (Perry, 1973, p. 90). But Buschmann's

successor, Pieter Houtingh, made the mistake of acceding to Karim Khan Zand's request for assistance in pursuing Mir Muhannā, with whom Karim Khan vied for the control of the Persian coast. A Dutch attack on Mir Muhannā, who had fled to Ḵārgu, proved disastrous. After inflicting a large number of casualties on the invaders, Mir Muhannā advanced to Kharg, blockaded the garrison of 80 Europeans and 120 Arabs inside and, on 1 January 1766, following a ten-day siege, took possession of the fort. Thus ended twelve years of Dutch occupation on Kharg. At its height, the Christian population of the island is said to have been around 10,000 (Perry, 1973, p. 93).

In the following three years Mir Muhannā used Kharg as his stronghold, resisting attempts by Karim Khan, occasionally with the aid of the British East India Company (Perry, 1971, pp. 144-145), to dislodge him. Finally, on 26 January 1769, Mir Muhannā was forced to flee Kharg by a hostile mob, the leader of which, Ḥasan Solṭān, seized control of the island in the name of Karim Khan who promptly installed a garrison there (Perry, 1973, p. 94). Six months later the East India Company agent Henry Moore made a futile attempt to seize the island from Ḥasan Solṭān, but was repulsed, and simultaneously Pyrault, the agent of the French Compagnie des Indes at Baṣra, tried to obtain Karim Khan's permission to occupy Kharg. Although permission was obtained in September 1769, the French never acted on their concession (Perry, 1973, p. 95).

A commercial treaty accompanying the Treaty of Finkenstein, signed 4 May 1807 by representatives of Napoleon and Fath-ʿAli Shah and ratified by the latter on 20 December 1807, called for Kharg to be ceded to the French in return for the French restoration of Georgia to Persia (Savory, 1972, p. 33) but the French inability to satisfy this condition, among other things, led to the expulsion of their embassy from Persia on 12 February 1809 (Savory, 1972, p. 39), and to the cancellation of the agreement (Curzon, 1915, p. 281).

A British force occupied Kharg briefly in 1837 as part of a strategy to force the Persians to withdraw from Herat (English, 1971, p. 23; Perry, 1973, p. 95). It was then re-occupied by Persian troops but abandoned prior to the outbreak of the Anglo-Persian War and eventually seized by a British force in December 1856 (English, 1971, p. 84). At the time of the second Persian Gulf Survey (1857-1860) the population of the island was estimated to be around 400 males in addition to a Persian garrison quartered in the citadel of the otherwise ruined Dutch fort (Stiffe, 1898, pp. 179, 181). Subsequently the inhabitants of Kharg reverted to their traditional pursuits of pearling, pilotage, and

gardening and around 1900 were subject to the Khan of the Ḥayāt Dāwud, based at Bandar Rig, represented by a deputy (Lorimer, 1986, pp. 1020-1021).

In 1956 work began on the construction of oil reservoirs on Kharg to hold oil piped from the Gačsarān petroleum fields (Steve, 1999, p. 74). By the mid-1970's Kharg had three major oil (Kharg Terminal, Sea Island Terminal, Darius Terminal) and one gas terminal (Kharg Chemical Complex or Khemco Terminal). Able to accommodate ten oil tankers up to 200,000 tons, Kharg Terminal was equipped with an 1840 m. long pier, while Sea Island Terminal had two bays for tankers up to 500,000 tons, and Darius had a single bay for tankers up to 160,000 tons (Handbuch des Persischen Golfs, 1976, 195). The facilities are today managed by the National Iranian Oil Company, and the loading berth at the Khemco Terminal is also used by ships picking up crushed sulphur.

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February 24, 2004