



KISH

KISH (Kiš or Qiš; Ar. Qays), small island in the lower Persian Gulf (lat 26° 37' N, long 54° 00' E), about 16 by 8 kilometers in size and 19 kilometers from the coast (Figure 1). Generally flat, Kish has always been noted for its palm gardens (so described by [Ebn Kordāḏbeh](#), Ebn al-Mojāwer, and Yāqut; see Schwarz, p. 88), which are particularly dense on the island's north side (*Handbuch des Persischen Golfs*, p. 177). Kish is mentioned in itineraries, for example on the route from Shiraz to India and as a further destination appended to the Baghdad to Basra route, as related by Ḥamd-Allāh Mostawfi (Le Strange, pp. 750, 762) and on the route from Obolla to India or China, given by Ebn Kordāḏbeh and Edrisi (Sprenger, p. 79; cf. Aubin, 1969).

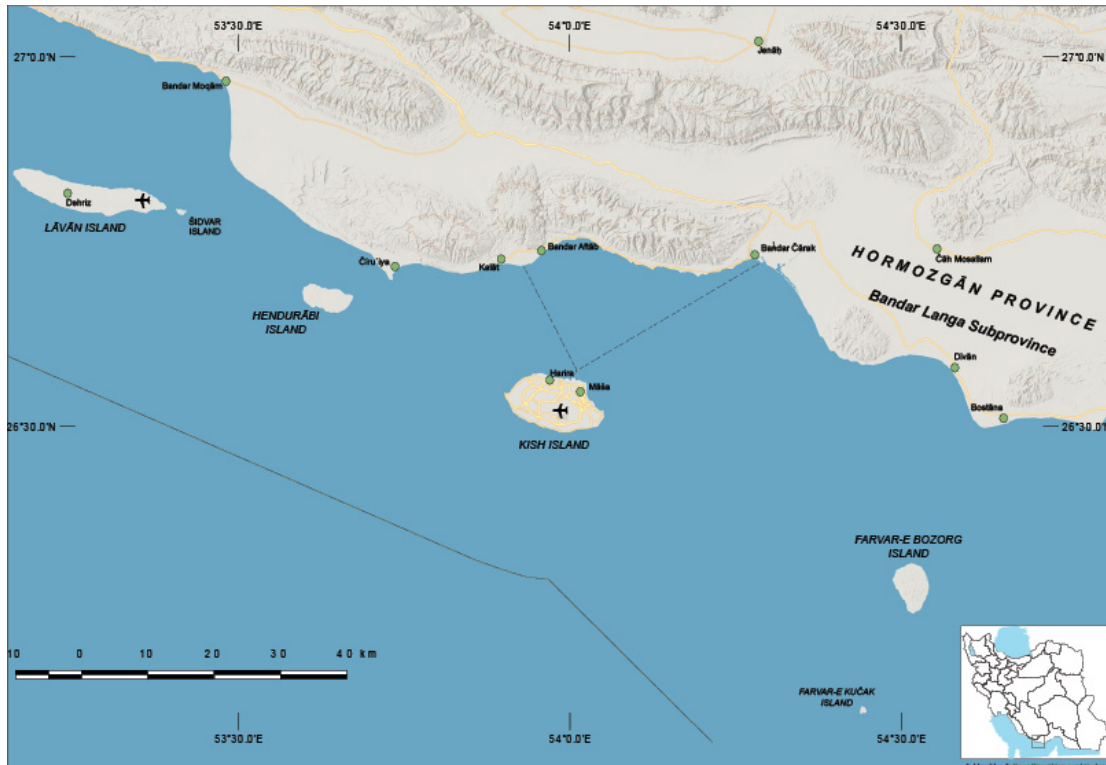


Figure 1. Kish and adjacent islands and areas of the Persian Gulf. Map data under CC BY 3.0 by OpenStreetMap, ODbL.

Although a Nestorian bishop, David of Kish, is mentioned in 544 CE (Chabot, 1902, p. 680) this almost certainly refers to Keš (q.v.; Šahr-e Sabz) in Transoxania (Bosworth, 1986, p. 181) and not to the Persian Gulf island of the same name (*contra* Sachau, 1916, p. 972; Streck, 1927, p. 649).

Reckoned to be part of *Ardašir-korra* (q.v.; Streck, p. 649), Kish rose to prominence around the middle of the 11th century, when a line of rulers (*amirs*, *maleks*, or *khans*) of Kish was established there. The origins of these rulers, or indeed that of the population in general, are not entirely clear. According to traditions recounted by Waṣṣaf (Šehāb-al-Din Širāzi; d. ca. 1323) and Ebn al-Mojāwer, Kish may have first begun to be populated by settlers from Sirāf who left the trading center after its collapse (Aubin, 1959, p. 297). The new population presumably included some of the Jewish population which, by the time of Benjamin of Tudela's visit at about 1170, numbered about 500 (Benjamin of Tudela, pp. 62-63; Fischel, 1950, pp. 207-8; Aubin, 1959, p. 297). Yāqut says Kish was also known as Jazirat al-Qays b. 'Omāra or Banu 'Omāra (Streck, p. 649). Based on this information, both Maximilian Streck and

S. D. Goitein suggested the founder of the dynasty may have been South Arabian, a view at first glance supported by the testimony of Edrisi who says the island had been seized by “a certain governor of Yemen” who “fortified it, peopled it and fitted it with a fleet by the aid of which he made himself the master of the Yemen littoral” (Wilson, p. 98). According to Eṣṭakri, however, the coastal area opposite Kish was known as Sif ‘Omāra, or “coast of the Jolandā,” and he attributed the stronghold there, Qalāt-e Ebn ‘Omāra, to the Jolandā (Schwarz, p. 77). Originally a title used for the vassal rulers of Oman under Sasanian overlordship, Jolandā became a family name in Oman (Wilkinson, 1975), where Qays b. ‘Omāra is identified in local genealogies with the Jolandā b. Karkar family of the Banu Salima (Wilkinson, 1977, pp. 135, 174-75). This tradition undoubtedly explains why Yāqut referred to the capital of Kish as the residence of the “prince of Oman” (Wüstenfeld, p. 419). In publishing a Hebrew letter from the Cairo Geniza mentioning an attack by the king of Kish on Aden in 1135 (Cambridge University Library MS 20.137; see Goitein, 1954, p. 256), S. D. Goitein emphasized that the leader, called “son of al-‘Amid,” had an Arabic name, but as Jean Aubin has stressed, al-‘Amid is well attested amongst the Buyids and Seljuks of Persia (Aubin, 1959, p. 298). Furthermore, one of the rulers (*malek*) of Kish, with the good Persian name of Jamšid, is known to have built a palace there, called Qaṣr-e Ayvān, modeled on that of the Buyid ruler ‘Azod-al-Dawla at Naband, near Sirāf. Additionally, Yāqut says that the ruler of Kish dressed in the Daylamite (i.e., Buyid) style (Aubin, 1959, p. 298).



PLATE I. Ҳarira archeological site, Kish island. Photograph courtesy of Ali



Mousavi and the “Archaeological Gazetteer of Iran,” UCLA Pourdavoud Center for the Study of the Iranian World (irangazetteer.humspace.ucla.edu).

The power of Kish, which Mostawfi called a great emporium (*dawlat-kāna*; Le Strange, 1902, p. 527), has been attributed to its control over commercial maritime traffic between India, Yemen, Persia, and Iraq. Edrisi suggested that with his fleet, the ruler of Kish preyed upon shipping (Wilson, p. 98), while Aubin referred to its rulers as “les pirates de l’île de Qays” (Aubin, 1959, p. 297). Indeed, Ebn al-Mojāwer claimed that, “The prince of Qais has neither cavalry nor infantry; but all the people of the island are mariners” (Wilson, p. 100). According to Benjamin of Tudela, “The islanders act as middlemen [i.e., between foreign merchants], and earn their livelihood thereby” (Benjamin of Tudela, p. 63; Wilson, p. 99). Though unsuccessful, the attack on Aden in 1135 by the king of Kish (Goitein, p. 256) nevertheless reveals the remarkable extent of Kish’s power in the Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf during the 12th century. In 1229, however, Kish was itself conquered by the ruler of Hormuz (Piacentini, 1975, p. 76). It enjoyed a sort of renaissance (Whitehouse, 1983, p. 330), however, under the **Il-khanid** (q.v.) governor of Fārs, Jamāl-al-Din Ebrāhim Ṭibi (d. 1306), known as the “first king of Kish” by the 14th-century author Šabānkāra’i (q.v.; Whitehouse, 1976, p. 146; see also Kauz, Gill). At that time, Kish became the center of a commercial empire with revenue of 400,000-700,000 dinars and was the site of an Il-khanid mint (Lowick, p. 332). Abu’l-Fedā visited Kish in the same period and noted its flourishing pearl industry (Whitehouse, 1976, p. 146).

The antiquities of Kish were first described in detail by Stiffe (pp. 644-49) who particularly noted the main historic settlement on the north side of the island, Ḥarira (PLATE I), where mounds were strewn with Chinese porcelain, examples of which he sent to the British Museum. Stiffe also pointed to the presence of large water cisterns and an underground irrigation system (*qanāt*). Ḥarira was investigated briefly in 1974 by W. E. Hamilton and David B. Whitehouse, who identified the remains of numerous buildings, including a mosque, loading bays for boats, cisterns, kilns, shell middens, and quantities of imported ceramics, including East Asian exports such as Martaban stonewares, celadon, porcelain and Ting ware (Whitehouse, 1976, pp. 146-147).

During the Qajar era, ownership of Kish changed hands several times, and in 1972 the Kish Development Organization was founded with a view to turning

the island into a major tourist resort. In 1989, ministerial approval was given for the creation of a special industrial trade zone on Kish, and in 1992 the Kish Free Trade Organization was established (see KISH FREE TRADE ZONE). Significant infrastructure investment has now taken place, making Kish an important tourist destination as well.

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