



ḲOR-E MUSĀ



Figure 1. The Bay of Ḳor-e Musā and its surroundings.

(Ḳowr-e Musā; Khor Musa; Musa Bay), a north-south running, tidal inlet about 64 km long, situated north of the [Persian Gulf](#) and approximately 48 km east of the mouth of the [Shatt al-Arab](#) (Leader, 1929, 244), and a village at the head of it, within the province of [Khuzestan](#) (N 30° 05' 20" E 48°59'08"). The [Karun](#), or



“Dorack” river (Horsburgh, 1817, 421) debouched into it until its course changed in 1766 to flow into the Shatt al-Arab (Harrison, 1942, 45). Fresh-water springs once bubbled up and emptied into it (Harrison, 1942, 51). It has also been known as “Khor Musu,” “Khor Moosa,” “Moï Allah” (Ainsworth, 1888, 183- 85), and “Kore Moosah” (Horsburgh, 1817, 421). It is divided in two by a shoal called Kaseir bint Sisuan (Qassār bin Siswān) and the narrow bank that extends south of it. The area to the west, on the side of Khor Bahmishir [Kor-e Bahmanšir], is low and swampy” (Constable and Stiffe, 1890, 293). It also appears as “Chôr Mašûr” (Kor-e Māhšahr) on some naval charts (Sachau, 1916, 966). The Nahr Buzi, a branch of the Jarrāhi river, also empties into the Persian Gulf at Kor-e Musā (MacGregor, 1871, 196), creating a large tidal fan (Walstra et al., 2010, 274) that was covered with water at high tide but formed a vast area of mud-flats at low tide with many small islands (Leader, 1929, 244; Bourke-Burrowes, 1931, 41). Soundings taken during marine surveys in the 19th century determined that depths in Kor-e Musā ranged from 4 to 18 fathoms (Brucks, 1856, 581; MacGregor, 1871, 247). Describing his visit to Kor-e Musā in 1902, Rear-Admiral Henry Boyle Townshend Somerville (1863-1936) wrote that “there stretched on all sides of us a brown sandy plain, flat, smooth, devoid of life, reaching everywhere to the horizon” (Somerville, 1920, 818). Commander Walter Sinclair (1905) and Commander Charles William Shearme (1907) both authored reports on their marine surveys of Kor-e Musā. In times of extreme flooding the Shadegan Marshes (Bātlāq-e Šādegān) empty into Kor-e Musā (Walstra et al., 2010, 269).

Kor-e Musā has sometimes been identified with the ancient Mosaios river (Gk.: Μώσαϊος, Cl. Ptolemy 6.3.2; see e.g., Vincent 1797, 394; Ainsworth 1890, 116; Wilson 1929, 510). Wilhelm Tomaschek identified the Pylodes kolpos (χόλπος Πηλώδης) of Ptolemy and Illodes of the *Cosmographia* of Ravennas Anonymous with the marshy area on the west side of Kor-e Musā (Tomaschek, 1890, 75; Potts, 2018, 62). Derah (Dārā) island in Kor-e Musā has been identified with Margastana, “a small island” at the mouth (Arrian, *Anab. II. Indica*, 41.2; see Chesney, II, pp. 354-55; Potts, 2019a, 386) of “a lake, full of fish called Cataderbis” (Arrian, *Anab. II., Indica* 41.2; Tomaschek, 1890, 73; Wilson, 1929, 513; by the late 20th century commercial fishing in Kor-e Musā was greatly reduced; see Abbes and Farrugio, 1977, 9, 11). J. B. B. d’Anville identified Arrian’s Caterderbis with site of the “Bender Madjour” ([Bandar-e Māhšahr](#)) on the shores of the lake or inlet in the northern Persian Gulf mentioned in the *Jehān-nomā* (1732) of Kâtip Çelebi (1609-57) and thus inferred that Cataderbis denoted the Kor-e Musā (Bourguignon d’Anville, 1764,



169; Potts, 2019b, 342). Similarly, John Watson McCrindle (1825-1913), who identified the bay of Cataderbis as “that which receives the streams of the Mensureh and Dorak,” and at the entrance of which “lie two islands, Bunah and Āderi” (McCrindle, 1879, 218, n. 87), also implied its identification with Kor-e Musā.

By 1745, a geomorphological change to the Kor-e Qubbān (Kor-e Abu Kazayr), through which the Karun entered the Persian Gulf (Wilson, 1925, 233), prompted the Banu Ka’b tribe, who had been resident at Kor-e Qubbān on the Persian Gulf, to move further north to Dawraq or Dawraq al-Falāḥiya (formerly a settlement in south-western Kuzestān, also called Dawraq al-Furs ‘Dawraq of the Persians’; Lorimer, 1908, 961; Floor, 2006, 281). With the death of Nāder Shah two years later, the Banu Ka’b were able to oust the Afšārs from Dawraq while maintaining their hold over Kor-e Qubbān (Perry, 1971, 134-35). Kor-e Musā thus came under Banu Ka’b control. In 1761, when Alexander Douglas, the British East India Company Resident at Bandar-e ‘Abbās, was on a tour of inspection to the Residency in Basra, ‘Ali Āqā, the Ottoman-appointed governor there, prevailed on him to help organize a blockade of Kor-e Musā, using the Company’s brig *Swallow* and some smaller vessels in order to compel Shaikh Salmān, the Banu Ka’b chieftain, to pay his taxes (Perry, 1971, 136-37). The effort failed as the Banu Ka’b were able to retire inland to Dawraq (Perry, 1979, 163). The Banu Ka’b found themselves claimed, for purposes of taxation, by both the Ottoman and Zand regimes, and March 1766 saw the start of a bootless East India Company naval campaign up the Kor-e Musā in response to the Banu Ka’b seizure of three of its vessels, the *Sally*, the *Fort William*, and an unnamed yacht, the previous year (Lorimer, 1915, 140; Perry, 1971, 143-45; Floor, 2006, 285)

In 1902, fearful of Persia granting Russia permission to build a naval base in the Persian Gulf, contingency plans were drawn up and reconnaissance surveys were undertaken with a view to bolstering Britain’s position there. One of the coastal areas surveyed was Kor-e Musā (Somerville, 1920, 812-25; Busch, 1967, 254). The results of these surveys were published in the 1924 edition of the Persian Gulf Pilot (Wilson, 1929, 511). Already in 1906 Lord Ellenborough (1841-1915), a British Royal Navy officer and member of the House of Lords, raised the possibility of Kor-e Musā becoming the southern terminus of the Baghdad Railway, in preference to either Basra or Kuwait (Wilson, 1929, 512). The Khor Musa Agreement, whereby Kaz’al Khan, the chieftain of the Banu Ka’b tribe of Kuzestān, entered into an agreement to give



the British first refusal for the lease of land around Ḳor-e Musā, was signed in 1912 (IOR, File 240/1913). In 1924, an aerial survey was conducted of Ḳor-e Musā and the adjacent mud flats (Wilson, 1929, 513).

In 1927, American engineers surveyed, charted, and buoyed the deep channel leading into the Ḳor-e Musā from the Persian Gulf (Leader, 1929, 244). Writing in 1929, Arnold Talbot Wilson (1884-1940) noted the presence of only two landmarks, a small, ruined mud brick fort known as the Kut “of Mister Zubaid el Farangi” (al-Ma‘qil, in Basra district) and the tomb of an unknown pilot, “Qabr-an-Nakhuda” (Qabr-e Nāḳodā) (Wilson, 1929, 512). When the Pahlavi dynasty (r. 1925-79) decided to construct a Trans-Iranian railway (Rāhāhan-e sarāsari-ye Irān; see [RAILROADS i. THE FIRST RAILROAD BUILT AND OPERATED IN PERSIA](#)), joining the [Caspian Sea](#) and the Persian Gulf, the village of Ḳor-e Musā (later [Bandar-e Šāhpur](#), present-day Bandar-e Emām Ḳomeyni; for the name change see Field, 1939, 256) was chosen as its southern terminus (McClenaghan, 1931, 110). The site chosen had the virtue of not being located within the contested Shatt al-Arab, over which a dispute with the new nation of Iraq was then simmering, and of being as far from British India as possible.

Hence, political reasons (Melamid, 1959, 211) and nationalist concerns (Lemańczyk, 2013, 239) played a role in the choice of Ḳor-e Musā. The location, however, proved costly as it required the construction of a bridge across the Karun river at [Ahvāz](#) as well as a very long pier and causeway across swampy ground (Melamid, 1968, 355). In 1938- 39, an enquiry into the viability of the construction of an oil refinery and pipeline and tanker terminal on Ḳor-e Musā found that, with some dredging, the inlet could be made usable by tankers of up to 40,000 tons (Melamid, 1959, 211). The Second World War put a halt to those plans but by 1948 a new port, Bandar-e Māhšahr, was opened on Ḳor-e Musā “for the sole purpose of delivering Agha Jari [see [ĀĠĀJĀRI](#)] crude oil by gravity-flow pipeline to tankers” (Melamid, 1959, 213). Ḳor-e Musā is today dominated by the petrochemical and container port of Bandar-e Emām Ḳomeyni. The possibility of harnessing tidal energy to generate electricity in Ḳor-e Musā has been explored in recent years (Hashemi Aslani et al., 2017, 15-22).



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