



## LĀRAK

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**LĀRAK**, a small island in the Straits of Hormuz to the south of Hormuz Island, located approximately 45 kms southeast of Bandar Abbas and 18 kms southeast of the eastern end of Qeshm Island at lat 26°51'0" N, long 56°21'0" E. Lārak was identified by William Vincent (p. 348) with ancient Organa, a rugged and deserted island (Ὀργάνα; Arrian, *Indica* 37.2; Ptolemy, 6.7.47; Pauly-Wissowa, XVIII/1, cols. 1022-23); cf. Turgana [Amm. 23.6.47]; Orgina [Schnetz, ed., *Ravannatis Anon. Cosmog.* 5.17]), but most scholars have identified Organa with Hormuz. According to Strabo, following Nearchus and Orthagoras, the island of Ogyris/Ὀγυρίς (Strabo, *Geog.* 16.3.5 and 7; Pauly-Wissowa, XVII/2, cols. 2080-82), 2,000 stadia from **Carmania**, was the burial place of the eponymous Erythras (of the Erythraean Sea, according to ancient legend), who ruled in that region as king. Paul Goukowsky (p. 122, n. 54) suggested that Ogyris might have been Lārak. A more convincing ancient identification, first suggested by Wilhelm Tomaschek (p. 47), is with the island of Agedana mentioned by Heracleota Marcianus (p. 22), of which it is said: “[From the river Cathraxis] to the mouths of the river Corius 700 stadia. Off this coast lies an island called Agedana [Sagdana?], in which much red-lead is produced.” This recalls the presence of hematite or specular iron ore on the island noted in the 19th century (see below).

The island appears as Laraque, Larequa, Lareca, and Careca in Portuguese sources. During the siege of Hormuz by Portuguese admiral **Alfonso de Albuquerque**, one of his four ships was deployed to guard Lārak, as it was the main source of sweet water for the Portuguese squadron due to the fact that



the wells of Qeshm had been fouled with rotten sardines (Campos, p. 160, n. 39). It appears for the first time on a Portuguese map dated to about 1510 and attributed to the cartographer Pedro Reinel. This probably incorporates intelligence gathered during the first expedition to Hormuz in 1507 (Biedermann, p. 58). It also appears on the Bartolomeu Velho (1560) and Lázaro Luís (ca. 1563) maps (Loureiro, p. 136).

A small, nearly square fort with four bastions was built close to the beach, on the north side of Lārak, by the Portuguese, possibly in the late 1550s. Based on structural similarities with the modifications carried out on the larger fort on Hormuz in 1559-60, the Lārak structure has been tentatively attributed to the military architect Inofre de Carvalho (Campos, pp. 153-54, 160). Although it does not appear in the *Livro das plantas das fortalezas*, written between 1633 and 1641 (Silveira, ed., pp. 11-13), the Lārak fort is shown on an English Admiralty chart of 1820, where it is misidentified as a Dutch fort (Stol, pp. 25-26 and n. 84; but see below on a possible Dutch fort). Indeed, when Edward Stack visited Lārak in 1881, he noted that “A village and an old Dutch fort of small dimensions stand on the northern shore” (Stack, pp. 20-21).

Early in the Portuguese period Lārak was associated with the Niquelus (i.e., “people of Naḳilu”), a tribal group from Oman. According to Francisco Rodrigues da Silveira (cited in Floor, 2008, p. 89, n. 2), the Niquelus, finding themselves unable to compete successfully for access to the pearl-fishing banks in the Persian Gulf, were ousted from their homeland by the Alimoeiros. This account may relate to a conflict between the inhabitants of Naḳl, in the interior of Oman, and their neighbors, the Bani Ma’āwil, with whom they had a standing feud (Wilkinson, p. 202). In any case, the Niquelus applied to the Portuguese captain of Hormuz for the right to settle on Lārak, which was uninhabited at that time, and were granted permission to do so, in return for policing the Straits of Hormuz against the piratical attacks of the Nautagues of Makrān (the coastal region of southern Baluchistan) at no additional cost to the Portuguese (Floor, 2006, p. 45; idem, 2008, p. 89). This would seem to be confirmed by Diogo de Couto, who said that Rui Gonçalves da Câmara, captain of Hormuz from 1577 to 1580, agreed to the Niquelu settlement of Lārak in Década IX (Floor, 2008, p. 90).

The date of the initial Niquelu settlement on Lārak remains uncertain, and although the sources differ over whether the Portuguese did or did not wish the Niquelus to settle there, recent oral tradition on both Lārak and in the northern Mosandam peninsula of Oman, which stands opposite the island on

the southern side of the Straits of Hormuz, would seem to confirm the tradition. According to Ḍahuriyin informants at Ḍaṣab in northern Ra's Mosandam, an unnamed king of Hormuz gave them the Ro'us al-Jebāl region (a mountainous district just south of Ḍaṣab) and Lārak at some unspecified date (Lancaster and Lancaster, p. 547). This tradition may well reflect the granting of permission to the Niquelu by the Portuguese captain of Hormuz to occupy Lārak. Moreover, Lārakis interviewed in 1977 preserved a memory of their arrival from Komzār, in Ra's Mosandam, sometime after the Portuguese period, and this is also consistent with the fact that they call their dialect "komzāri" (Nadjmabadi, p. 67; on this dialect see also Thomas). In fact, in the late 19th and early 20th century, Lārak's population was Ḍahuriyin (Lorimer, II/B, pp. 1086-87; see below).

It was, in any case, not long before the Niquelus moved to the mainland and established themselves on the coast at Naḑilu with the permission of the ruler of Lār. From there they engaged in piracy, but in 1581 Don Gonçalo de Menezes, captain of Hormuz (1580-83), instructed Don Jerónimo de Mascarenhas, in command of a Portuguese fleet off Lār, to force the Niquelus to return to Lārak as earlier agreed upon and to refrain from piracy. At least a portion of the Niquelus complied, respecting the order until 1583 (Floor, 2008, p. 94).

In December, 1622, after visiting Hormuz on board an English ship, Pietro della Valle made a short stop on Lārak, where he saw the remains of abandoned houses, destroyed by the Makrāni Nautiques (Floor, 2008, p. 89). Here the English captain went hunting with two greyhounds and killed "an abundance of goats" (cited in Fryer, II, p. 158, n. 2; Brancaforte, p. 204). A year later, Ruy Frere retired to Lārak before falling back on Ḍaṣab (Miles, p. 191), following his aborted attempt to reclaim Hormuz from the Safavids, who, in 1624, had an ambassador in The Hague, Musā Beg, requesting Dutch military support to help take the forts at Masqat, Lārak, and elsewhere from the Portuguese (Floor, 2006, p. 329). Although the Italian traveler Ambrosio Bembo said that, with English assistance, "Abbas I, king of Persia, took Hormuz, Bandar 'Abbas, and the islands of Qeshm and Larak from the Portuguese at the time when the king of Spain was also reigning in Portugal" (Bembo, tr., p. 269-70), the attempt owed just as much to Dutch assistance for its success (Floor, 2006, pp. 330-32).

According to both Jean de Thévenot and Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, the Dutch began building a fort on Lārak in the early 17th century, but this was stopped



after the Safavids protested. This is plausible in light of views expressed by the Dutch VOC (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie; see [DUTCH-PERSIAN RELATIONS](#)) director in Iran, Wollebrandt Geleynsen de Jong, to the effect that “the Dutch were protecting Persia’s southern borders against the Portuguese” (Floor, 1987, p. 33; idem, 2007, p. 3) and given the fact that in 1645 Geleynsen was on Lārak (Slot, pp. 25-26). However, a fort is not mentioned in any of the Dutch sources, although the idea of establishing a factory there was entertained. A letter sent by the factors at Basra to the Honourable East India Company on 13 April 1646 says of the Dutch, “Larrack, these people [merchants at Gombroon, i.e. Bandar Abbas] say, they make their place of rendavoze; where they have built a large seroy [i.e., caravansary] to disimbarque their owne and other merchant goods. Some report they have built a small castle on the said island of Larrack ... Not any Moors juncks or vessells arrived this yeare in Persia, for feare the Dutch should force them to pay custome at Larrack” (Foster, p. 40). It is possible that this caravansary was mistaken for a fort by Thevenot and Tavernier. Its ruins may have been those of “an old fort” in the interior of Lārak noted by Lorimer (II/B, p. 1087; see below).

In 1651 Tavernier visited Lārak on his way from Basra to India, noting “Laree is an Island nearer to Ormus than Kechmishe [Qeshm], well inhabited, and so stor’d with Stags and Hinds, that in one day we kill’d five and forty” (cited in Fryer, II, p. 158, n. 2; the abundance of “goats,” “stags,” and “hinds” on Lārak is consistent with the large number of gazelle observed on Lārak in the late 19th century; see Lorimer, p. 1086). Fearing an English and Portuguese attack, the governor of Bandar Abbas reinforced the fort on Lārak in 1665 (Floor, 2006, p. 318). Lārak was in Safavid hands and in 1683, as tensions rose between the Dutch and the Safavids, the fort there was again reinforced (Slot, p. 207).

In 1708 a combined Dutch and Persian force ousted a group of Indian pirates, subject to the Mahratta dynasty in Angria, that had settled on Lārak (Slot, p. 226). The Omanis attacked and occupied Lārak in 1711 (Floor, 2006, p. 417). How long the island was occupied is unclear; it presumably reverted to the Safavids, but in 1717, after reversion of control of Bahrain, Lārak was again seized by the Omanis (Floor, 2006, p. 420; idem, 2009, p. 248; Slot, p. 237). In February 1718, Ṭahmuraṭ Beg was dispatched to Goa to request Portuguese assistance in ejecting the Omanis from Lārak, Qeshm, and Bahrain (Floor, 2006, p. 421). Two years later, following the collapse of the Ya’rubid dynasty and the outbreak of civil war in Oman (Floor, 2006, p. 423), Lārak was restored

to the Safavids as a result of negotiations between Loṭf-‘Ali Khan, governor-general (*beglerbegi*) of Fars and Azarbaijan and commander-in-chief (*sepāhsālār*) of Iran, and the Omanis (Slot, p. 244). In 1729, however, during the turmoil that engulfed the region as a result of the Afghan-Safavid conflict, Lārak was occupied by the Portuguese as part of an attempted *reconquista* in the Persian Gulf, though they quickly lost it again (Slot, p. 66). Desiring to assist the Afghans, the English ferried Afghan troops to Lārak, according to VOC documents (Slot, p. 268). In anticipation of all-out war between Moḥammad-Taḳi Khan Širāzi, the beglarbegi of Fars, and Nāder Shah Afšār, the governor of Bandar Abbas reinforced Lārak late in 1743 (Slot, p. 315). A Dutch account of the Persian Gulf, composed in 1756, called the island “Lareek” and passed over it saying that, like Hormuz, “these have been known to us for many years” (Floor, 2007, p. 26). In 1765 Lārak was in possession of the Banu Mo‘in of Qeshm (Davies, p. 175). In 1786, Tipu Sultan Fath Ali Khan, ruler of the Indian kingdom of Mysore, sent an embassy led by Sayyed Ġolām-‘Ali Khan to the Ottoman Sultan Abd-al-Ḥamid I. K̄āja ‘Abd-al-Qāder, one of his secretaries accompanying the embassy, recounted in his diary that “at the island of Larak, several men are despatched to the local town in search of ‘sweet water and sheep’ for the troops’ provisions. They are unsuccessful and Abdul Qadir records their fatigue and distress on their return” (Brittlebank, p. 205).

In the early 19th century, the Šehlul families in Dibba, Lima, and Komzār had strong ties with Lārak, which exported salt, necessary for the fish trade, to Musandam, Oman, and Qeshm (Lorimer, II/B, p. 1086; Lancaster and Lancaster, pp. 307, 554). In his report of 1818, Capt. Robert Taylor, Assistant Political Agent in Turkish Arabia, quoted from descriptions of “Larrack Island” by Capt. Wainwright and Lt. Tanner, of the East India Company Marine, noting, “There is no danger within half a mile of the shore. This island has near its centre a small volcanic, conical hill, the most perfect in its form I ever saw” (Taylor, p. 38). The slightly later account by Captain Brucks noted, “The fort is on the north side; the island has water on it, and is barren. Good anchorage may be found under it in a north-wester or south-easter” (Brucks, p. 607). Lieutenant Whitelock said that Lārak was “rarely visited” and was “inhabited by a few fishermen, who, to the number of about 100, reside in wretched huts, within the walls of an extensive fort,” noting their “resemblance to the tribe ... who reside in the vicinity of Ras Masandam, with whom, and in this they are singular, they maintain a friendly intercourse. They have a great aversion to mixing with their neighbours. ... They subsist on



fish and dates. No part of the island is cultivated, and the few cattle they rear, for the sake of their milk, partake in general of the same food as their masters” (Whitelock, p. 182). During the maritime surveys that produced the earliest editions of the Persian Gulf Pilot, C. G. Constable collected samples of specular iron ore (hematite) on Lārak (Carter, p. 42; Pilgrim, p. 141). On 11 January 1897, Lārak was rocked by a severe earthquake occasioning some loss of life (Wilson, p. 108). Traditionally, leatherback turtles (*Dermochelys coriacea*) were caught near Lārak, where their oil was used to caulk boats (Pritchard, p. 747).

Lorimer noted in 1908 that the population of about 200 on Lārak was “Dhahūriyīn; but they are closely connected by intermarriage with the Bani Shatair Shihūh of Kumzār and they speak the Kumzāri language. ... The people assert that they are independent of any ruler except of their own Kumzāri Shaikh at Labtiyāb village, and up to the end of 1905 no visible signs of Persian authority existed, but the island was said to be nominally included ... among the places farmed to the Mu’-īn-ut-Tujjar of Tehrān” (Lorimer, II/B, pp. 1086-87). Lārak’s villages in the late 19th and early 20th century included Kuh, in the interior, near the ruins of an old fort (Dutch?) called *Ḳarābestān*, which “bears traces of former occupation by a civilised people”; Labtiāb, on the north coast, near the Portuguese fort; and Salmi, on the west coast (Lorimer, II/B, p. 1087).

Lārak was home to an oil transfer site that was destroyed in May 1987 by Iraqi forces, “apparently with assistance from Saudi Arabia” (Sick, p. 300). Today it houses an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN) base, complete with “presurveyed missile and air defense sites ... visible in satellite imagery of the southern coast” of the island (Talmadge, p. 86).

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