

A Historical Study of the Persian Gulf and Indo-Arab Trade Until the 5th Century AH

Hojjatollah Hezariyan^a and Ghaffar Pourbaktiar^{b*}

^a MA, Department of History, Shushtar Branch, Islamic Azad University, Iran.

^b Assistant Professor, Department of History, Shushtar Branch, Islamic Azad University, Iran.

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Abstract: Since the very ancient times when glorious civilizations of Mesopotamia and the Aryan empires evolved, the Persian Gulf assumed great economic and connection importance and was considered a bridge between the ancient civilizations of those times. Ancient artifacts found in prehistoric civilizations of Iran show the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman played a key role in trade relations and trade exchanges between the old Iranian cities and settlements with Southeast Asia, Europe and Africa, while being regarded as the connecting chain between central and internal civilizations with the South Iranian islands and ports, Iraq, Mesopotamia, India, China, Egypt and East Africa.

Researches have suggested that relations between the Persian Gulf and India remained strong during the Islamic period. Following the expansion of trade relations between the Islamic world and the Indian subcontinent, some ports were set up in the Persian Gulf to settle merchants and to stop ships. These ports played an important role in trade relations between India and the Islamic world. In this paper, we discuss the status of the Persian Gulf in Iran-India relations.

Keywords: Persian Gulf, Iran, India, trade routes, economic relations, ports, islands

1. Introduction

In the historical and geographical work within the Islamic era, the Persian Gulf is known as "Persian Sea", "Persian Ocean", and "Persian Gulf". Abolghasem Ubeidallah Ibn Ahmad Ibn Khordabeh was the first Muslim chronicler who mentioned the Persian Sea, as he writes in his book "Almasalek and Al-Mamalek":

"The Persian Sea, which is a large sea, has no tide when the moon rises, except twice a year"

In the book *Moravvej Al-Zahab and Maaden Al-Jawher*, Masoudi writes: "From the Indian Sea, extends another Gulf which is the Pars (Persian) Sea as it leads to the cities of Ublah, Khashab and Abadan"

In the World Map, Abu Reihan has shown the Persian Gulf nicknamed the Persian Sea. In yet another map, during the Abbasid caliphate, the Persian Gulf is known as the Persian Sea and the Arabian Gulf, which is situated in the West of the Arabian Peninsula.

The Persian Gulf has been a connecting chain between Iran and India. Iranians have been connected with the inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent for a long time, whether through the Persian Gulf ports and coasts or by means of land routes. This has been due to economic relations and working needs. On the other hand, cultural and historical similarities paved the way for relations between the two nations.

The Persian Gulf waterway has been the most significant channel for transporting goods and communications between the two nations. Seafaring in the Persian Gulf has been a key part of Iran's trade and maritime activity in the Sassanid period. Post-Islam Muslims assumed great importance for the trade and commerce, in ways ports and the Persian Gulf remained strong and played an important role in trade relations between India and the Islamic world.

Maritime maps of the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman were drawn by the Iranians. According to Dr. Hadi Hassan: In shipping affairs, Iranians were the leaders and Arabs were the laggards.

Roman Gershaman was a French archaeologist who wrote many works on archeology, history, inscriptions and Iranian and Afghan coins. One of his seminal works is the book "Iran: from the beginning to Islam" which was translated by Dr. Mohammad Moin in Iran in 1992. In this book, he has sought to describe the Iranian past from about 15,000 years BC to the invasion by Arabs while introducing the Iranian and non-Iranian culture and civilization to the audience. In this book, Roman Gershaman provided valuable information about the relations between the two ancient civilizations of Iran and India, pointing out to the trade and commerce between Iran and India through the ports situated in the Persian Gulf.

The book "The Impact of Islam on Indian Culture" is the second book by Tarachend, a renowned Indian scholar, philosopher, historian, Islamologist, Iranologist, and statesman. It is one of the most valuable works written in this field, and is also unique in terms of diversity, inclusiveness, and because it involves various evidence and true knowledge. This book discusses trade relations between India and the coasts and islands in the Persian Gulf.

Tarachand writes in this book that commercial ties between India and the Persian Gulf's coasts and islands have had a long history. This is while Seleucids had set up ports in the Persian Gulf for expanding relations with India.

Iran and Iranians have long been connecting with the inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent, either through land routes and the Persian Gulf's ports and coasts. This has arisen from economic necessity on the one hand, and cultural and historical commonality between the two nations on the other. Many of the inhabitants and tribes of the subcontinent used to migrate to Iran and established permanent residence. Some were employed in the Sassanid era corps and some got engaged in agriculture, shipping and other areas. Included in these tribes, one can refer to "Zat", "Mead", "Siabjeh", "Asavareh", "Ahmareh", "Biasreh" and "Takatreh".

Because the north and northwest routes were difficult to pass and exposed higher risks, the relations between the inhabitants of the subcontinent and people of Iran and Mesopotamia were of great importance. Although both land and sea routes were important, connecting India to the civilized world of that time, those routes were risky because bandits could sabotage the passage of the caravans, thus causing many inconveniences. This is while sea liners were capable of carrying more goods and passengers and their security had to be provided. The movement of the inhabitant and their passage from the subcontinent to the ports and coasts of the Persian Gulf was very important. In reality, economic exchanges and intellectual and cultural relations of the subcontinent could materialize through the Persian Gulf with the Iranian commercial and cultural hubs and those of Mesopotamia.

Aim: This study aimed to investigate the position of the Persian Gulf in the relations between India and Iran in ancient times. Because of the old Iran-India relations through the Persian Gulf connection routes, it was necessary to conduct research in this field. This paper can be applied in historiographical institutes such as the Institute of Persian Gulf Studies and other historical institutes as well as by historians who study the relations ancient nations.

Research method: The research method was a descriptive-analytical method, i.e., the research aimed to analyze and describe the subject. Obviously, data were collected via library methods.

History of India's economic ties with the Persian Gulf

Trade relations between India and the Persian Gulf coasts and islands have had a very long history. Before the rise of Islam, economic relations with India and other territories were so important that intense rivalry arose between Iran and Rome. Iran and Rome had managed to bring much of the Indian Ocean and eastern Mediterranean markets out of the Arabs' hands, but now they had reached the threshold of a war over it. In 525 AD. at the instigation of Rome, Abyssinia conquered Yemen located at the mouth of the Red Sea. The Romans aimed to have direct access to the Indian Ocean and Asian markets. Iran, which was fully controlling the Persian Gulf and establishing ports along its shores to Makran, sought to develop some economic goals and interests as Egypt and Syria were captured in 616 AD. When Egypt was conquered in 626 AD by Romans, Iran was dealt a harsh blow. Thus, the political-military conflict between Iran and Rome was accompanied by intense economic and trade rivalries, resulting in the weakening of both countries such that the Arabs misused their weakness for their own interests.

The Arabs also had many advantages geographically. Bahrain, Oman, Hadramaut, Yemen and the Hejaz were located along the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf and were naturally situated in a spot where maritime trade and commerce were of great importance. Moreover, the Arabs had several good positions to transfer goods to other areas including Europe. After leaving the Indian coast, the ships would reach the Yemeni ports, from where they would carry their goods by camel and transport them to Europe via the Mediterranean Sea.

Merchants first arrived in Yemen from Egypt and Syria by land via the eastern shores of the Red Sea. From there they boarded the ships, with some departing to Africa and others to Hadramaut, Oman, Bahrain and Iraq, and from there to the shores of Iran in the Persian Gulf. Through Iran, merchants arrived to the Tiz port of Makran or the port of Dibel in Sindh, or to remote areas to Kombayat and Katyavar. From there they arrived in Calicut or Cape Comorin via sea routes, and from there to Coromandel, and after stopping at several ports in the Bay of Bengal, they arrived in Burma, Malaya, and China, while they did the same journey when coming back.

Important commercial hubs in the Persian Gulf

Following the expansion of trade and commerce relations between the Islamic world and the Indian subcontinent, some hubs and ports were established in the Islamic territories and Indian coasts to settle merchants and to stop ships. Near Basra, stood a very important port for trade with India called Ubla. The number of Indian merchants in this port was very high. Ships from China and India would anchor at this port. The Muslims considered India and its coasts and islands to be realms filled with jewels and all kinds of medicines and exquisite goods, while attaching great importance to trade with India. Ubla lost its influence since Basra got more prosperous, albeit Basra never reached the status and importance of Ubla. The reason for this is due to the political and military importance of Basra and the superiority of these features over its economic and commercial aspects. The Abbasids would take as much as 20,000 dinars a year from taxes on ships anchored in Basra. The Siraf port in the Persian Gulf was also

very critical as it played an important role in trade relations between India and the Islamic world. Merchant ships would sail from this port to India and China. The Hormuz port was also very critical in trade with India and other parts of the world at that time, where ships would sail to Sarandib, Gujarat and other territories.

Necessity of economic ties between India and the Persian Gulf

Considering the importance of and economic interests from relations with India and China and the mediating role of Arabs and Muslims in transporting goods to Europe, the security of economic and commerce routes was of paramount importance. When Muslims conquered Sindh, the Caliphate court would earn at least one million dirhams in taxes annually from this area alone. This is while, much of the money collected would either be spent in the same area, or allocated for local government expenditures. Muslims considered the security of trade and commerce to be very critical. The economic advantages from doing business in these routes were very important to Muslims. When Muslims seized Iran and some surrounding territories, they controlled many trade routes and tried to secure economic channels by seizing important bottlenecks and clamping down on bandits. Many of the Muslims were entrusted by the caliphs and their ministers to gather information about the distance of roads, products, cities, and other natural, human, and economic features to be found in the book Masalek and Mamaleek.

The Muslims' invasion of Sindh may be regarded an economic necessity, or at least an economic pretext for waging a war. Upon conquering Makran and Baluchistan, Muslims gained control of some ports and commercial hubs such as Tiz, but no assurance was to be found for the security of Muslim roads and economic interests. People of tribes such as Mead and Zat were making inconveniences. Seyyed Suleiman Nadavi, witnessing many of the eventualities leading to the conquest of Sindh and some other parts of India, believes that the first Muslim invasions of Tan, Bruch and Dibel Bana had aimed for economic necessities. One may argue that Hajjaj ibn Yusuf Saghafi's insistence on invading Sindh and his attempt to persuade the Umayyad caliph was from his economic greed. Having returned from India and China, many Iranian Muslim sailors and travelers spoke or wrote about the customs, beliefs, animals and products of these countries, in ways the travelogues by Abu Zayd Hassan Sirafi, Bozorg Ibn Shahriyar, and Suleiman the Merchant can be included in this area. Scientific and cultural exchanges and other connection routes were also established.

Maritime trade in Persian Gulf

At the end of the Sassanid period, Iranian merchants gained such power in the ports of the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf and in the Indian Ocean that they managed to maintain their position in any situation. Important ports such as Ubla, Basra, Siraf, Jeddah, Qolhat and Sohar, considered as the heritage of the Sassanid era, remained mostly in the hands of Iranians. After the rise of Islam, the expanded presence of Muslims on the shores of the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea and Mesopotamia led to the political integration of these regions, thereby increasing the exchange of goods between these ports.

With the fall of the Umayyad Caliphate and the rise of the Abbasid dynasty (132 AH), Sassanid sea trade evolved into the Islamic Caliphate trade; this is while an expansion of political movements in Mesopotamia caused insecurity in the northern ports of the Persian Gulf, including the ports of Basra and Ubla. This resulted in these ports to come out of the economic competition while more attention was focused on such ports as Siraf, Sahhar and Golhat. The economic balance shifted towards the Iranian regions, with the economic sphere of the Persian Gulf during the first three centuries of Islam playing a major role in economic exchanges in the region. During this era, Persian Gulf maritime trade expanded with China and Southeast Asia, as well as East Africa, with the volume of regional economic exchanges seeing a rise. Sea crafting evolved and expanded and Islamic maritime culture, a set of Iranian, Arabic and African cultural achievements, was established. The 10 most important developments of this era included the flourishing and expansion of trade with China and East Africa.

During the rise of Islam, Iranians were settled in the famous port of Sahhar in Oman more than anywhere else. Amr As was entrusted by the Prophet (PBUH) to deliver letters to Abd and Ja'far, the elders of the Azd tribe. The first house where Amr As entered was named Dastjerd, later to become a city, which was built by the Iranians.

In his work, Sarhan ibn Sa'id wrote that Sahhar and the desert and coastal areas of Oman were under Iranian administration of that time, with their internal territories being ruled by two brothers, named Abd and Jaifar, from the Jalandi clan, as they were also administered by the Azdis. With the Iranian and Arab Muslim trade flourishing in the Persian Gulf, they expanded their commerce towards the east. In later eras, the Iranians preserved maritime trade with India and the archipelagos of Malaya and China, which was common since the Sassanid era in southern Iraq. It was certain that the newly Muslim Iranians, even during the Arab domination, were more gallant in sea-crafting. The obstruction of some caliphs from Muslim naval attacks on Iran is evidence of this claim. Unlike Muslim Iranians, Muslim Arabs rarely had a geographical interest in exploring new territories, but commerce importance forced them to do so. According to sources in the 3th and 4th centuries AH, it was the Iranians who

continued to dominate the maritime trade and culture in the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, and Southeast Asia, during the first Islamic centuries. Historical and geographical evidence confirms this claim.

Iranian maritime trade in the Persian Gulf in the early Islamic centuries

The exact history of the Iranian settlement on the southern islands of the Persian Gulf is unknown. We know that the coasts of Oman and the adjacent islands were considered to be part of Iran since the middle of the Parthian government, around 80 BC. "Bahrain, Oman and Yemen" and their remote territories were still administered by the Iranians until the rise of Islam and the fall of the Sassanid dynasty, as Iranian immigrants were active in those areas.

In his seminal book "Detailed History" written in the early 7th century AH, Ibn Mujaver, the historian from Damascus, has listed the names of non-Arab kings who ruled over "Yemen" and its various areas. Sassanid kings encouraged Iranians to engage in maritime trade. During these routes, the ports of Oman, Bahrain, and Apologos, later to be known as "Ublah," were used as hubs of activities.

In his work, "Arab Sea-crafting", Hourani regarded the Iranian element in the Arab port as strong, considering all ports more or less the territory under the Sassanid Empire. He added: "Most of the Azdi Arabs from Oman had converted to Zoroastrian religion". The Iranian religions had flourished until the early 4th century AH can be seen in this area.

The region "Oman" was generally called "Mazun" before the rise of Islam, which is an Iranian word. The migration of southern Arabs from Yemen to the Oman region was seen one of the important pre-Islamic developments that was directly related to the Iranian history and its southern areas. There have probably been several influxes of migration from southern Saudi Arabia to Oman, but the migration trend to be carefully examined historically pertains to the Azd tribe, which was led by Malik ibn Fahm.

The second wave of contacts between the Iranians and the Arab "Azd" migrants took place in the late Sassanid era and probably during the invasion of Yemen by the Iranian troops led by "Wahrz Dailami".

Iranian ships departed to "Bahrain" via Ubla and then to "Oman" and from there to Yemen. Ibn Balkhi reported that two ships of the Iranian fleet sank there.

Sarhan Ibn Saeed's reference to the Iranians' settlement in the coastal areas, on the advent of the rise of Islam along with the continuation of the political life of the Iranian kings on the Oman's shores under the general title of "Marzban" can be a hallmark of the domination of the Iranians over maritime trade.

"Aibleh" considered Iran's important trading port on the north coast of the Persian Gulf as the gateway and anchorage for Bahrain, Oman, India and China.

"Spooler" considers the rise of Persian as a language of trade, signifying the superiority of Iranians in sea trade.

The presence of Iranians in the famous port of "Sahhar" in Oman, in the era when Islam rose was more visible than other places. The first house that Amr al-As entered was named the city of Dastjerd, which was set up by the Iranians.

Sahhar and coastal areas of Oman were under Iranian administration at the time, with its internal areas being ruled by the Azdi Arabs, led by two brothers, Jaifer and Abd, from the Jalandi tribe. All the Oman's inhabitants, except for the Iranians, converted to Islam, and that's why the Azdis invaded the Iranians for this reason, killing their king, Meskan, and the city of Jamshid Gerd was surrounded. The Iranians were forced to surrender and left all their property and cash and emigrated from there. The transfer of power from Sassanid to Islam in the Persian Gulf had no impacts on the economic and social structure of the ports. The merchants and traders of Ublah, Basra, Siraf, and Sahhar remained predominantly Iranian.

Accordingly, during the first three centuries AH, Oman was practically divided into two parts under the Iranian and Azdi domination. Azdis were dominating over the internal territories while Iranian were ruling over the Oman's coasts, the most important ports of which were Sahhar and Muscat as cited by historians and geographers of the time.

An investigation of the history of "Oman" developments, especially in the early Islamic centuries, indicated us that the "Iranians" played a very crucial role in both the political and economic sectors of this key region, as they were able to dominate the coastal parts of Oman during this chaotic period. Thus, the use of the general term "Oman", especially in the Persian literature of this era, tends to represent the "coastal lands of Oman" as strategic trade hubs between Iran, India and China; this is while, the term "Oman" was used by Arab historians, especially the writers of "Abazi", representing the "internal Oman", with its center located in the city of "Nazwa". Internal Oman witnessed long and ongoing wars between Arab immigrant tribes during this era.

The settlement of Iranians in three critical trade hubs of Siraf, Sahhar and Jeddah during the 4th and 5th centuries suggests the rising power of Iranian elements in the maritime trade scene while the fall of these three strategic ports rang the wake-up call for the political and economic affairs in these regions. This forced large groups of people to emigrate to continue their social life and seek their efforts to reclaim economic power by choosing new territories.

Muslims' acquaintance with India

The Arabs have long known the land of India. The Indian subcontinent's relations with the Arabs have roots back in the Sumerian era. In ancient times, there were commerce ties between Saudi Arabia, especially Yemen, Hadhramaut, Sindh and the Malabar coast.

Trade relations between India and Western countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Palestine and Egypt, were long standing since ancient times, with the Arabs playing a major mediating trade role between East and West. Before the advent of Islam, the Arabs were living in Chul, Kalyan and Supara. In the era of the Agatha Sayyids, the Arabs lived in large groups on the Malabar coasts and the natives had converted to their religions. The Arabs probably were Sabeans. On their path to China, Arab merchants crossed the Coromandel Coast, where traces of pre-Islamic Arabs can still be seen in the canton. Islam spread to India centuries before the Muslims invasion. Trade relations between the Arab world and India were on the rise at that era. Travelers were commuting from both sides, and these relations and exchanges increased as a result. This made the Indians be acquainted with the new religion Arabs had brought. Gradually, Muslim missionaries came to India and developed the new religion and were welcomed.

There is evidence that Islam arrived in the Indian subcontinent through merchants shortly after it was established on the Arabian Peninsula. The first territories of the subcontinent to be exposed to this cultural transfer were the southern and western coasts, especially such areas as Malaya, the Gulf of Kabila, Gujarat, Deccan and Ceylon.

Indo-Arab trades

Bahrain, Oman, Hadhramaut, Yemen, and the Hejaz were more familiar with the Persian Gulf, the Indian Ocean, and sea crafting. Arab ships returning from India docked in Yemeni ports, and of Arab goods brought by merchants were transported from Yemen to the Levant and Egypt by camels via land on the shores of the Red Sea, from where they could be transported to Europe via the Mediterranean Sea. The oldest historical document about the nations that we have is the Torah. In this book, we read that two generations after Abraham, Arab caravans used to travel in the same path and one of them had taken Joseph to Egypt.

Suleiman the trader describes in the book *Selseleh Al-Tavarikh* the Iranian ports in the Persian Gulf, such as Reishahr, Siraf, and Hormoz, which were ruled by the Iranians. There are abundant Farsi terminologies for maritime voyages indicating the Iranians were intermediaries in Indo-Arab trades.

Hamzeh Esfahani has written about the port cities developed by Ardeshir. In the contemporary era, professor Hadi Hassan and Ahmad Eghtedari and some other historians have released articles based on which the names and locations of these cities can be summed up.

Maritime maps of the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman had been drawn by the Iranians, who called it "Rahnameh" and in Arabic it was known as "Rahnamj" (Taj al-Arous). Therefore, as the late Dr. Hadi Hassan, a professor at the University of Aligarh said: "... Iranians were the leaders in shipping, and the Arabs were laggards. Iranian maritime activities were not affected by the fall of Sassanid empire".

When the Greeks controlled the land of Egypt, trade path of that country to the Levant became safer for them, and they dominated the trade in that area, and as a result, Arab trade lost its popularity.

However, it seems that the Indian sea channel was not fully controlled by them after the Greeks seized Egypt. The Greek historian Agathressides, who lived in the 2nd century BC, states: The ships sail to Yemen from Indian coasts and from there, they reach Egypt. There is also evidence that the Arab trade did not stop completely during the Greek ruling of Egypt and continued to exist in the Greek trade.

In addition to the Red Sea, there was a second path between the Arabs and India, which was never shut to the Tazians, and that path was the Persian Gulf. The inhabitants of the Persian Gulf used to continue their trades with the India through lands and seas, and the Arabs would frequent the Indian ports through the same waterways.

What is clear is that the Arabs from the Hejaz were to some extent familiar with the maritime and sea crafting trade.

The lands of Bahrain and Oman were involved in shipping, but the main trade in the Arabian Peninsula belonged to southern Saudi Arabia, especially Yemen and Hadhramaut. "It has been said that before Islam, sea-specific ships came from India and sailed to the Tigris to Madain". To Blazeri and Tabari, Ubla was a port for ships coming from China, India, Oman and Bahrain at the time of the Muslims' conquest. The Arabs conquered Iraq as well as Bandar

Ublah, the largest and most credible trading area in the Persian Gulf near Basra in the year 14 AH. Trade with India via Ublah had flourished so much that the Arabs considered it a part of the Indian territory. Ships coming from India and China docked in Ublah (for provision) and sailed from there to India and China. The traditions still respected in India's Karrol Pati, and myths attributed to Muslims, as well as narrations by Muslim historians and travelers, point to the fact that Muslims appeared on the shores of India shortly after the death of the Prophet, and very quickly gained influence and prestige among the Hindu rulers in Malayar. However, the Arab view of trade with India can be seen in an Arab tourist's answer Omar bin Khattab about the situation in India. He says: "There is gem in the sea and its mountains are filled with rubies and its trees are perfumes." This intense interest of Muslims and Arabs in Indian trade can be traced to the location of Saudi Arabia, the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean.

The land of Saudi Arabia is surrounded by the sea in three directions; Most of this land is covered by waterless and grassless plains or bare and impassable mountains with other territories being low-yielding lands. Considering these harsh natural conditions, the need for trade was quite clear to the people of these territories. Bahrain, Oman, Hadramaut, Yemen, and the Hejaz, situated on the shores of the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Persian Gulf, were more suitable areas for maritime trades. Muslims' ships returning from India docked on the Yemen's coasts and goods were transported by camel caravan to Syria and Egypt. It is worth noting that the Indian Ocean was a calm sea and was in a better position than the Mediterranean Sea, and this led to the development of trade in the post-Islamic era. But it was the Persian Gulf that was very effective in trade with India. The Persian Gulf was one of the sea routes that connected the Arab lands and India. This route was always open to Muslims. The inhabitants of the Persian Gulf coasts, both Iranian and Arab, were always involved in sea and land commerce. They crossed the Indian Ocean islands on their way to India and through Bengal and Assam on their way to China. The way back was from China and India to Yemen. Suleiman and Abu Zaid Sirafi and Masoudi have provided reports on this maritime route and its eventualities, indicating the old credibility of this route. Many ships have transported goods various merchants in this way, and many trade ties were established between Muslim countries and India. Trade with India flourished with the conquest of Sindh. Basra become a market for trade with India since then, and customs duties related to merchant goods were levied on ships as they were seen as important source of revenue for the Caliphate. Trade with India reached its highest levels during the Abbasid period. According to narrations from the time of Mansour, the second Abbasid caliph, the road from Basra to China was passed. The first information we have of Arab-Iranian maritime relations with India is a report on the journeys of Suleiman the merchant and other Muslim merchants in the 3rd century AH. This trade was based on the silk trade from China to the West.

Iranians and the trading prosperity of the Arabian Peninsula in the 3rd to 6th centuries AH

The geographical and religious location of the peninsula helped expand its domestic and foreign trade, and the long coastlines of the Red Sea to the west of the peninsula along the northern border with the Levant provided a very good opportunity for merchants of the peninsula to trade with neighboring lands.

The Aden and Jeddah ports, in the west and southwest of the peninsula, regularly received trading ships from such lands as Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Abyssinia, India, and China.

Iran's strategic position and Iranian maritime skills had eased the usual and continuous voyages of Iranian merchants to the east, west, and south coasts of the peninsula, as well as east Africa, with their ships always transporting a variety of goods between commercial hubs on these coastlines. The Persian Gulf also provided access to the Indian and Chinese markets as well as the Far East, as Chinese and Indian ships were passing through the Iranian coast to reach the coasts of peninsula.

One of the key features of the Persian Gulf was that it provided for navigation and shipping all year round. The bustling ports of the Persian Gulf, such as Ublah, Siraf, Hormoz, and Kish, also played a crucial role in international trade between East and West; however as different sources have mentioned, the Siraf port is more important and is considered to be a major hub for navigation with India, China and Africa. Moghaddasi believed Siraf to be "the gateway to China and a warehouse of Khorasan" as it played a key role in trade ties with China compared to Oman.

In the 4th century AH, there was an extensive and significant connection between the ports of southern Iran, especially Siraf, with the port of Khanqua (Canton) in China and those of India; This understanding comes mostly to us from the notes of Suleiman the Merchant and Abu Zayd Sirafi, we have made aware of in the books Akhbar al-Sin and Al-Hind and Rahla al-Sirafi.

Citing geographical sources of the 4th century AH, Siraf was not only the most famous trading port of the Persian Gulf in that era, but also the most renowned and effective sailors of this era were traders and merchants from Siraf; they were known in the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean, the China Sea, and other important seas of that time, to the extent that in some dangerous seas only Siraf captains could navigate the sea.

Masoudi, a historian, tourist and geographer of the 4th century AH, who himself had traveled to Oman from the east coast of Africa in 304 AH along with Sirafi sailors, has cited the relation between the Persian Gulf and the east

coast of Africa (including Abyssinia and Sofaleh). The reports suggest that Iranians played an important role in the development of trade in both areas via sailing and traveling to the port of Khanqua in China and the port of Sofaleh in East Africa and the transportation of goods from these regions to the Iranian ports and the peninsula and vice versa. Sahhar as the main commercial market in Oman was also owned by Iranian merchants and sailors, and according to Moqaddasi, people in Sahhar market were speaking Persian. The commercial prosperity of the port of Jeddah was also due to the presence and activity of Iranian traders.

2. Conclusion

When the first organized and purposeful economic efforts began by man, the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman proved to be crucial waterways for mankind. The existence of this strategic waterway in the international relations, i.e., several millennia BC created a focal point for the political, cultural and economic ties in different world societies as it became an eclectic center for the development of new evolutionary ideas. Mesopotamia, the origin of the first world civilizations, found close ties with its maritime borders. They must be among the first human groups to realize the economic value of the Persian Gulf. The progress of seawater in the past millennia and the proximity of many lands at the foot of the port and away from the coast today with the shores of the Persian Gulf, paved the way for more exchanges. The advent of civil societies and political systems in Mesopotamia and the tendency to develop land and sea resulted in a better understanding and sovereignty over the islands and ports of these areas; this is while, progress in shipping and navigation led to knowledge of more commercial routes while more economic ties were established between the nations and ports were playing a critical role in this way. Also, the role of transit and intermediary of the Persian Gulf, by which many people had actively participated in the distribution of goods to various territories and markets across the world by using the loading locations, was one of the factors for economic prosperity of the Persian Gulf since ancient times.

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