


Archaeology of the Persian Gulf


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Abstract

For years, archaeologists have investigated and excavated the peripheral lands of the Persian Gulf and accomplished considerable achievements in this regard. The findings were published in the form of articles and books. Nevertheless, despite efforts by some historians to come up with works on this field, there lacks a comprehensive archaeological book on the Persian Gulf. In the present study, the author attempts to critically evaluate a book entitled *Persian Gulf Archaeology in Parthian & Sasanian Periods*.

Keywords: Persian Gulf; Parthian Period; Sasanian Period; Strait of Hormoz; Underwater Archaeology.



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Introduction

Although some articles and books have been published about the Persian Gulf (Vothoqi, 2005; Khosrowzadeh *et al.*, 2006; Sarlak, 2011; 2012; Mirhosseini, 2024), the lack of a comprehensive book that could investigate the subject archaeologically is felt more than before. The book *Persian Gulf Archaeology in Parthian & Sasanian Periods* has investigated the evaluations, excavations, and studies by archaeologists on the northern and southern shores of the Persian Gulf in the Parthian and Sasanian periods.

In recent years, articles have been published about prehistoric periods (Poodat, 2023), the Achaemenid period (Rahbar, 2023b; Kavousi, 2024), the Parthian period (Rahbar, 2023a; Rahbar, 2024), the Sasanian period (Hozhabri *et al.*, 2024), and relations between Iranians and Arabs (Rostami & Ghasemian, 2023).

Also, Donald Scott Whitcomb's archaeological research and excavations on the Persian Gulf and Bushehr province (Aryamanesh, 2024), as well as Willem Flore's research on the The Persian Gulf Khark Island (Tajrishy, 2024), are very important.

Persian Gulf

The book begins with a prologue, in which the author delves into the historical presence of Iranians in the Persian Gulf region, a fact that is confirmed by the archaeological data as well.

The first chapter of the book provides valuable information about the natural, geographical, and ecological specifications of the Persian Gulf and the islands in this strategic waterway the ports and construction as well as countries surrounding it.

Since the author has primarily dealt with the archaeology of the Persian Gulf, the book tells us about ups and downs of Iranian history, especially the Parthian and Sasanian periods. Considering the extensive presence of the Parthians and Sasanians who ruled Iran for 898 years as well as considerable archaeological works remaining from that period, it would have been better for the author to investigate and explore each period in a separate book, and show the presence of Iranians in the northern and southern shores of the Persian Gulf in a comprehensive manner.

The degree of coherence and logical order of the contents in the book and between its chapters and as such the arrangement and continuity of the chapters are not very suitable. Also, the chapters have lengthy titles that could be shorten too. For instance, the second chapter which deals with the natural, geographical, and ecological situation of the Persian Gulf, could be simplified with the title such as "The History of the Persian Gulf in the Parthians and Sasanian Periods". He could then review the related literature in the third chapter. It would be better if the second and third chapters of the book were replaced accordingly so that the reader could get familiar with the history of the Persian Gulf in the Parthian and Sasanian periods and its ups and downs after getting enough knowledge about the geography of the region. Then, in the Chapter Three, the reader can get some information about the

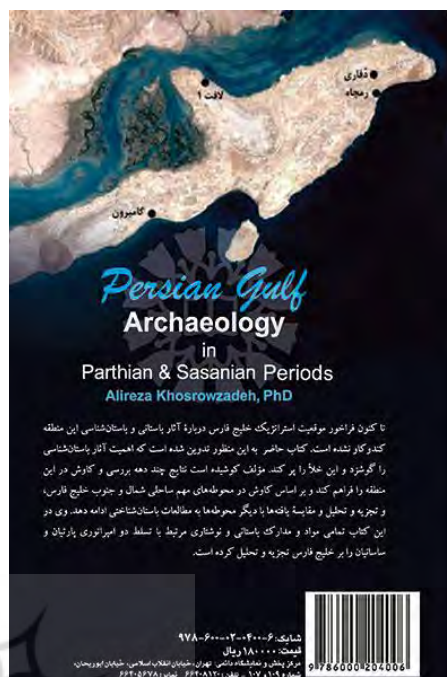
archaeological background of the shores of the Persian Gulf. Since the book is all about the archaeology of the Persian Gulf, based on the historical texts, the reader should first know why the Persian Gulf was so important during the Parthian and Sasanian periods, before coming across the archaeological discussions and the related literature.

It also better if the author could divide the fourth and fifth chapters, which are the most important ones, based on the historical periods instead of the current division of the northern and southern shores of the Persian Gulf during the Parthian and Sasanian periods. In other words, he could separately dedicate the chapters to the Parthian and the Sasanian periods. For instance, the fourth chapter could be entitled "The Archaeology of the Persian Gulf in the Parthian Period" and then deal with the northern and southern shores as subcategories. Also, he could entitle the fifth chapter "The Archaeology of the Persian Gulf in the Sasanian Period" and then explain the northern and southern shores likewise.

The book would have been more interesting for its readers if its chapters were arranged in the following ways:

- **First Chapter:** The Natural, Geographical, and Ecological State of the Persian Gulf;
- **Second Chapter:** The History of the Persian Gulf during Parthian and Sasanian Periods;
- **Third Chapter:** Archaeological Literature of the Persian Gulf during Parthian and Sasanian Periods;
- **Fourth Chapter:** The Archaeology of the Persian Gulf during the Parthian Period;
- **Fifth Chapter:** The Archaeology of the Persian Gulf during the Sasanian Period;
- **Discussion and Conclusion.**

The coherence and logical order of the contents in each chapter have also not been observed well. The second chapter "The Background of Archaeological Researches on the Northern Shores of the Persian Gulf with a Review of the Researches Carried



Persian Gulf Archaeology in Parthian & Sasanian Periods, Alireza Khosrowzadeh, The Organization for Researching and Composing University textbooks in the Humanities, 2017, 360 Pp, ISBN: 978-600-02-0400-6.

out during the Parthian and Sasanian Periods on the Southern Shores of the Persian Gulf". When dealing with the archaeological background on the northern shore of the Persian Gulf, the author also discusses the excavations related to the Elamite and Achaemenid periods, in addition to the Parthian and Sasanian ones. However, when he is talking about the archaeological excavations on the southern shore of the Persian Gulf, he only mentions the excavated areas belonging to Parthians and Sasanians. He should have made a balance between the northern and southern shores of the Persian Gulf and the archaeological investigation related to the Parthian and Sasanian periods.

This incoherence can be also seen in the third chapter which he has dedicated to the ports and important trade and settlement centers of the Persian Gulf during the Parthian period with classical references. The readers expect to read about the Parthian ports and commercial centers based on the background, which they come across on later pages, where the author has explained the areas belonging to the Achaemenid era and Alexander's time as well as that of the Seleucid and Sasanian periods, more than the ports and commercial centers of the Parthian period. Also, a logical order based on the historical periods is lacking in this chapter, while the author could have a short overview of the history of Persian Gulf and its shores during Parthians and Sasanians by choosing an appropriate title such as "The History of the Persian Gulf in the Parthian and Sasanian Periods".

The fourth chapter "Northern Shore of the Persian Gulf in the Parthian and Sasanian Periods" in which the important areas and settlements of this body of water are investigated. The fifth chapter is also titled "Northern Shore of the Persian Gulf in the Parthian and Sasanian Periods" in which he once again introduces the Northern Shores of the Persian Gulf in the Parthian and Sasanian Periods, and then, compares and analyzes the findings obtained from there. As was mentioned, the author could divide the chapters based on the historical periods (Parthian and Sasanian separately) instead of dividing them into northern and southern shores. Nevertheless, several drawbacks can be seen in these chapters.

The most important drawback in Chapter 4 is the inappropriate organization of contents. Since the Parthian and Sasanian sites are not separated from each other, the readers get confused while going through the contents of this chapter.

Another criticism of this chapter is the short introduction of some of the mentioned sites. In some cases, the author has failed to provide a complete and comprehensive information about the geographical location of the site. For example, when introducing the Shoghab Cemetery (Khosrowzadeh, 2017: 158-9), he does not mention the city, province, or even the region where this site is located, and the reader has to locate Shoghab himself. When the author talks about Bastak excavations, he again does not mention its geographical location and in the current place of its existence (Khosrowzadeh, 2017: 173-4).

The lack of an appropriate organization of the contents can be also seen in Chapter 5. The Parthian and Sasanian sites are not separated here, too. The historical se-

quence is also not observed at all. The author could introduce Parthian and Sasanian sites in subcategories. There might be some sites that do not fall into a specific period and cover the findings from both periods. In this case, too, the site that includes both Parthian and Sasanian periods can be mentioned in a separate subcategory and only introduce the relevant layers.

The fifth chapter begins with the introduction of the Sasanian and Islamic sites. For example, on the very first page of Chapter 5, he introduces the Sohar site as a famous and big port belonging to the Sasanian/Islamic period (Khosrowzadeh, 2017: 180). He then introduces the findings from the Parthian period at this site, among which, some glass fragments belonging to both Parthian and Sasanian periods can be noted (Khosrowzadeh, 2017: 185). Also, he first introduces the Kush site in the Ras Al-Khaimah Region, 70 kilometers off the Strait of Hormoz from the Sasanian period (Khosrowzadeh, 2017: 230). Afterwards, he explains the Dibba site from the Parthian and Sasanian periods (Khosrowzadeh, 2017: 243-4). Or, in the following, when he introduces the Qatif in Al-Ahsa Province in Saudi Arabia, he first talks about the findings from the Sasanian period (Khosrowzadeh, 2017: 282), and then deals with those from the Parthian period (Khosrowzadeh, 2017: 283). Moreover, he introduces the Failaka site from the Seleucid-Parthian period (Khosrowzadeh, 2017: 284) where too, in the introduction, the author deals more with the findings from the Seleucid period such as buildings, coins, and the like, and at the end of the chapter, he mentions the cultural objects found in this site such as those found in Khuzestan from the Parthian period (Khosrowzadeh, 2017: 287). First, it is not clear why the Seleucid findings are dealt with in detail when introducing this site, although this content is not related to the title and subject of the book. On the other hand, why does the author attribute the findings in this site to the Parthian while only the pottery objects are explained when introducing this site?

As was mentioned, a short introduction to some sites is among the shortcomings of this book, which could well be observed in Chapter 5. For example, the author has introduced the Khatt Region in the southeast of Ras Al-Khaimah in nine lines where he states that interesting cultural evidences have been obtained related to the Parthian and Sasanian periods (Khosrowzadeh, 2017: 251), while misses to mention the findings except few pottery designs (Khosrowzadeh, 2017: 252, Fig. 88). Also, the geographical location of some sites is not precisely, or even partially, provided. Some examples are Jumeirah in Dubai (Khosrowzadeh, 2017: 253), Sharm Site in Sharjah (Khosrowzadeh, 2017: 354), Qalat Site in Bahrain (Khosrowzadeh, 2017: 259), Tylos Graves (Khosrowzadeh, 2017: 267), and Tarut Site (Khosrowzadeh, 2017: 278), etc.

The lack of the use of underwater excavations another drawback of the book. It is not clear why the author has not mentioned such findings. For example, Rig Port and the Underwater archaeology excavations have not been mentioned. The site was excavated by Tofighian in 2002 and 2004 (Tofighian, 2014). Many valuable artifacts have been obtained from this site. These include torpedo-shaped pots from the late Sasanian period (Tofighian, 2014).

Also, although the author has mentioned the very important site of Siraf, he has missed to hint about a ship found in these waters, from where, some torpedo-shaped pots were obtained probably belonging to the Parthian and Sasanian periods (Tofighian, 2014).

Conclusion

Despite drawbacks and shortcoming, this work is relatively comprehensive in the Persian language about the Persian Gulf. It is appreciated that the author has written such a book, in which, he has tried to study archaeological excavations conducted on the northern and southern shores of the Persian Gulf. However, as mentioned before with examples, the logical coherence and order of the contents in the book and in between the chapters are not very appropriate. The reader would get confused since the sites belonging to the Parthian and Sasanian periods are not separated from each other throughout the book. The lack of Underwater archaeological findings is another drawback of the book that better be dealt with in later publications. The author has not used original references or primary sources in some cases and rather took help from secondary sources or those translated into the Persian language.

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