



Effective Factors on the Location of Active Seaports of South Iran in the First Centuries of Islam

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Abstract

Cities and urban life in south Iran's seaports are as old as the history itself. Most of the cities in that area have ancient roots. The Muslim Arab invasion of Iran delayed their activity and caused some of the cities to lose function forever. Some resumed activeness after Islam's arrival-caused incidents abated and some survived to continue their social life up today. In this research, the cities are studied that were active from the rise of Islam until the Mongol invasion of Iran and were directly connected to seas without the need for caravan routes or rivers. Twenty-two cities met the requirements and were studied. The purpose of the research is to find the answer to this question: "Which factors affected the location of active seaports of south Iran in the period of Islam's arrival until the end of the Abbasid Caliphate?" Studying library resources and historical records in a descriptive-analytical method and using diagrams, maps and statistics demonstrated that various factors including geopolitical, climatic, strategic, economic and political conditions affected the development of these cities in their certain locations.

The location of all the cities studied in this research enabled easy accessibility to the east-west sea lane of that time. Most of the mentioned cities were developed next to freshwater sources. Some, such as Dawraq, Reishehr, Mahruban, Siniz, Janabeh, Khark, Kish, and Laft had fertile lands around them as well as adequate water sources. These



three factors (accessibility to trading lanes, adequate water and fertile lands) are known factors affecting the location of historical cities in Iran. However, phenomena such as islands, bays, lees and estuaries exclusively occur alongside the waters and shores and each of them presents advantages and challenges to the residents of cities nearby. Five of the studied cities, named HasneMahdi, Soleimanan, Ebadan, Dawraq and Najirom, were developed on the estuaries of different rivers connected to the south shores. Numerous bays of south shores developed three active cities named Machul, Siniz and Janabeh at that time. Six seaports, named Mahruban, Reischehr, Siraf, Navband, Shahrawa, and Tiz, were developed next to lee shores. Five cities including Khark, Aval, Kish, Laft and Jashak were developed in different locations compared to other cities, because of their accessibility to the gifts of seafaring. They were located on the islands of the Persian Gulf. The location of the three cities of Tarab, Khabs and Moqun has remained unknown. As mentioned before, some cities have more than one significant characteristic. The more numerous and significant the different characteristics of a city were, the more important that city used to become. For example, Dawraq was the main city of its nearby area because of its access to fresh water, fertile lands, rich backshore and a harbor with the right depth. Siraf had a near 200 years of heyday and no city could compete with it because of its excellent lee, a deep harbor and safe transportation routes connected to backshores. The east-west trading lane made the economic life of these cities dependent on the life of near and far seaports around the world. Therefore, if an unpleasant occurrence happened in any of those seaports, all or a part of the economic activities of the cities would face stagnation or collapse. The chaos that devoured China's Khanfu Seaport in the eighth century A.D. is an example of such occurrences and as a result, some of the economic guilds in Siraf City and some other seaports in south Iran faced dire challenges. Seafaring brought various risks, including violent storms, ocean currents and other marine dangers such as Muslim and non-Muslim pirate attacks, to involved residents of the cities. The pirates' attacks robbed the safety of cities, shores and seas and made the south Iran seaports border cities and hosts of Muslim border guards and fighters. The research findings unveiled that various factors have contributed to the formation of seaports. One of the key reasons that



southern cities were site-selected was the availability of roads and shipping lanes on the southern coasts. The fertile soil and plentiful water supply fostered the development and revitalization of some southern seaports throughout the early centuries of Islam. The aforementioned cities' site selection was also varied in terms of the coastline features that differentiated them in roles and status. Such features include estuaries, bays, leeward, and numerous islands. Each and every one of these site selections had advantages as well as challenges. The aforementioned islands' advantages, when combined with stable water supplies, reliable transportation, and fertile terrain, set the basis for the development of a thriving city. *Doraq*, for example, possessed all of the site selection advantages of an established seaport. As a result, the city drew a large population and flourished considerably, to the point that it had a grand mosque with a prominent sermon and a "branching" bazaar. According to the studies, although issues such as aridity and food shortage caused challenges, they were minor compared to the location's advantages and were worth solving. *Siraf* is an example of such seaports that flourished despite lacking water supplies and rich soil due to its unique location. Instead, it collected its water and food supplies from other nearby or distant areas. Another factor that contributed to seaports' ongoing development was security. This factor affected both the business relations in a city as well as the existential foundations of a city. Whenever a seaport's security was in danger, the residents confronted it and went about their daily lives once the threat was removed. *Siniz* port, for example, was invaded by *Qaramatians* in the 10th century A.D (4th-century A.H), disrupting everyday life, but after forcing the enemy out, its residents resumed their normal lives. However, if the trading routes were damaged, residents would flee the city and relocate to another area with active trading lanes. This is what happened to *Siraf* inhabitants and forced them to move elsewhere. Islands were the best locations for seaport residents to seek safety during the period of turmoil. They re-established their cities on those islands because they assumed the new location's sea superiority might protect them from enemies.

keywords: south Iran shores, first centuries of Islam, city, location.



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