



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Section: *History and Anthropology***The civilizational role of the Arabian gulf islands according to classical Sources: From the 4th century BC to the 4th century CE**Munirah Ali Saleh Alaqeel^{1*}¹History and Heritage Department, Faculty of Arts, Dammam, Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University, Saudi Arabia*Correspondence: maaqeel@iau.edu.sa**ABSTRACT**

This paper examines the civilizational role of the Arabian Gulf islands as depicted in classical sources from the 4th century BCE to the 4th century CE. Classical Greek and Roman historians and geographers produced a wealth of significant scholarly works that serve as authoritative references for the history of regions within their sphere of interest and influence, most notably the Ancient Near East, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Arabian Gulf region in particular.

In this context, the study focuses on monitoring the invaluable information provided by classical writers regarding the Arabian Gulf islands, including their strategic locations, physical features, and geographical characteristics. Furthermore, it explores accounts that illuminate their civilizational role, social conditions, and economic activities during that era.

The research employs a scientific methodology based on the descriptive and analytical treatment of information found in classical sources, synthesizing these accounts with archaeological findings to reach objective historical facts.

KEYWORDS: civilizational role, islands, Arabian gulf , classical sources**Research Journal in Advanced Humanities**

Volume 7, Issue 4, 2026

ISSN: 2708-5945 (Print)

ISSN: 2708-5953 (Online)

ARTICLE HISTORY

Submitted: 21 June 2026

Accepted: 11 July 2026

Published: 01 October 2026

HOW TO CITE

Alaqeel, M. A. S. (2026). The civilizational role of the Arabian gulf islands according to classical Sources: From the 4th century BC to the 4th century CE. *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities*, 7(4). <https://doi.org/10.58256/f3k8zb56>



Published in Nairobi, Kenya by Royallite Global, an imprint of Royallite Publishers Limited

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INTRODUCTION

The term “Classical Sources” refers to the writings of Greek and Roman historians and geographers regarding the Arabian Gulf region during the period from 331 BCE until the 4th century CE. Greco-Roman interest in this region reached its zenith during the reign of Alexander and his Seleucid successors, followed by the Romans, driven by strategic economic and political considerations. This interest is evident in the detailed information preserved in their contemporary accounts of the Arabian Gulf and its islands. These sources provide scattered yet vital references to the geographical locations, nomenclature, and natural features of these islands, reflecting various aspects of the social life and economic activities of their inhabitants.

This study seeks to elucidate the significance of the Arabian Gulf islands, their geographical advantages, and natural characteristics. It aims to uncover the features of social life, economic activities, and the prevailing conditions of these islands by citing historical and geographical data found in classical literature. Furthermore, the research integrates findings from archaeological excavations in the Arabian Gulf, which have corroborated many of the accounts provided by ancient classical writers.

The study aims to trace the early origins of Greek and Roman historical and geographical knowledge concerning the Arabian Gulf, exploring the motives behind their interest and the methods employed to extend their influence and exploit the region’s natural and commercial advantages. It further identifies key islands in the Arabian Gulf as cornerstones of their expansionist schemes, defining these islands and their nomenclature while pinpointing their locations through classical accounts and the application of Geographical Information Systems (GIS). Subsequently, the research highlights the civilizational role of these islands during a pivotal era of ancient history, which witnessed burgeoning relations between the Greco-Roman West and the East. This is achieved by describing the reality of economic activities and social life through the analysis and interpretation of narratives from classical authors contemporary to the period of study.

The research relies primarily on classical sources and their authorized translations in the Loeb Classical Library, as well as the series “Arabia in Classical Sources” published by the King Abdulaziz Foundation (Darah) in 2019. The methodology involves a comparative approach between English and Arabic translations of these sources, reviewing the texts to extract significant data that serves the core objectives of the research.

1. Early Historical and Geographical Knowledge of the Arabian Gulf in Greco-Roman Sources

1.1. Alexander the Great and the Arabian Gulf

Opinions vary regarding the earliest contacts between the Greeks and the Arabs. Some scholars believe these ties date back to the 7th century BCE, driven by the trade of aromatics—such as myrrh and frankincense—which were known in Greece by their Semitic names (‘Abd al-Jayyid 2020, p.156: 157). Others argue that Greek exploration of Arabia is evidenced by references in the writings of Herodotus in the mid-5th century BCE, followed by descriptions of Bahrain as the “Blessed Island” in the works of Aristophanes and Euripides around 400 BCE (Retso 1442-2020, 63f).

However, the most probable earliest direct reference to Greek knowledge of the Arabian Gulf dates to the 6th century BCE. A fragment in the works of Stephanus of Byzantium quotes the Greek writer Hecataeus (500 BCE) in his lost work *Periegesis* (Tour of the World), mentioning an island in the “Persian Sea” (*Persikos Pontos*) (Stephani Byzantii 1849, 396:15) (Büts 2003, p.654). Scholars remain divided on the reliability of this citation as evidence of Greek awareness of the Gulf’s existence. (Büts 2003, p.654).

Further evidence confirms that the Greeks were aware of the Arabian Gulf during that period. Exploratory voyages date back to the reign of the Achaemenid King Darius I (522–486 BCE) (Muhammad 2021, p.134). Records indicate Greek contact with the Achaemenid Empire as early as 547 BCE, (Hīrūdūt 2001, 97-107) (Bāqir 2011) (al-Aḥmad 1985, 310) which explains why Hecataeus referred to the Gulf as “Persian,” as it was under Achaemenid hegemony at the time. (Bin Şarrāy 2000, 37-40) (H. M. Bin Şarrāy 2007, 36: 52)



Fig.1: Map of Arabian Gulf
Drawn by the author using (GIS)

While these early contacts provided preliminary data, substantive information only emerged following the Eastern Campaign of Alexander the Great (336–323 BCE). Alexander's control over the Mediterranean coast was a watershed moment for the Arabian Peninsula and the Arabian Gulf in particular; the Gulf became a primary objective in his expansionist strategy after the fall of the Achaemenid Empire and the conclusion of his Indian campaign (Fig.1)

The inner obverse margin reveals the mint and date formula: Oman, 354 AH, the last year of Nāfi's rule before his deposition at year's end.

Arrianus explicitly outlines Alexander's motivations regarding the Arabian Gulf as follows:

A- Imperial Expansion and Maritime Control: Alexander sought to expand his empire and secure control over the "inhabited world" and the seas extending from India to Greece (Arriyānūs 1949, 7. 20: 9-10: 89.) (Büts 2003, p.655).

B- Colonization and Prosperity: Citing Aristobulus, Arrian notes that Alexander planned to colonize the Arabian coast and its islands, believing these lands could reach a level of prosperity rivaling Phoenicia. He was further enticed by reports of the region's fertility—hearing of lakes producing cassia, trees yielding myrrh and frankincense, and shores lined with vibrant trading ports. (Arriyānūs 1949, 7. 19: 5: 80.)

C- Political Submission: A secondary motive was the Arabs' perceived lack of submission. In 323 BCE, while various nations sent envoys to Alexander in Babylon, the Arabs did not. Alexander used this absence of diplomatic representation as a pretext for war (Istrābūn. 1439H, 16. 1: 11: 69) (Diodorus of Sicily 1933, 113).

D- Religious Ambition: According to Arrian and Strabo, Alexander learned that the Arabs worshipped

only two gods: Uranus (the Sky) and Dionysus. Alexander believed that his achievements rivaled those of Dionysus and intended to position himself as a third deity for the Arabs to worship upon their conquest (Arriyānūs 1949, 7. 20: 1-582) (Istrābūn. 1439H, 16. 1: 11-69) (A. Brunt 1965, 215).

To implement these plans, Alexander took several measures during the final year of his life:

- **Naval Reconnaissance:** He dispatched fleets to gather intelligence. Archias reached Tylus (Bahrain) but feared to go further (Arriyānūs 1949, 7. 20: 7-88) (Istrābūn. 1439H, 16. 2: 2-4-108-110). He was followed by Androstenes, who sailed around part of the Arabian coast and documented the pearl fisheries. Hieron of Soli was also dispatched to circumnavigate the entire peninsula toward Egypt; although he turned back, his reports provided crucial data on the size of the Gulf and the Musandam Peninsula (referred to as Macae) (Arriyānūs 1949, 7. 20: 7-9-87-89.).
- **Urbanization and Settlement:** Alexander aimed to establish cities to serve as naval bases and commercial hubs. While Plutarch claims he founded seventy cities (Būts 2003, p.661) (Plutarch 1990, p.1: 5), sources mention a fortified city built for Greek mercenaries and veterans near the head of the Gulf. Some scholars (Būts 2003, p.662) identify this as “Alexandria on the Tigris” (near modern Kufa/Basra), intended as a military outpost and a port for Eastern goods. Others suggest Failaka Island as the site of this settlement (H. M. Bin Şarrāy 2007, p.46: 47).

Ultimately, Alexander’s death in 323 BCE halted these expansionist ambitions. Nevertheless, accounts by Pliny (Bilīniyūs. 1439H, 12-32: 62-154), Quintus Curtius (Quintus Curtius n.d.), and Plutarch (Plutarchos 1439, 4.25, 38) regarding his “conquest” or his possession of Arabian frankincense suggest either early raids during the Siege of Tyre or successful small-scale naval acquisitions (Arriyānūs 1949, 7. 20: 1-10-81-89).

1.2. The Seleucids and the Arabian Gulf

Greek knowledge of the region expanded significantly during the reign of Alexander’s successors, the rulers of the Seleucid Empire. The Seleucid monarchs demonstrated a profound interest in the Arabian Gulf (Tarn 1929, p.11), and their activities within the Arabian Peninsula were largely concentrated in this maritime region. Their naval policy in the Gulf functioned as a direct continuation of the strategic vision established by Alexander the Great. These activities can be summarized as follows:

A- Seleucid Naval and Colonial Activity in the Arabian Gulf: The Seleucids established a permanent military fleet in the Arabian Gulf during the reign of Seleucus I, a tradition maintained by his successors. Pliny (Pliny 1942, p.167) noted that Greek soldiers in the East sailed from the Indian Ocean, traversing the seas toward the Caspian region by navigating via the same constellations. The Seleucid commitment to the Gulf was so pronounced under Seleucus I and Antiochus I that they reportedly intended to name the sea after themselves (the *Seleucid* and *Antiochian* Sea) (Būts 2003, p.680) (al-Aḥmad 1985, 323).

B- Administrative and Military Control: Sources indicate that in 220 BCE, following the suppression of the revolt of Molon, the Satrap of Media, Antiochus III appointed Tychon, the chief of his army’s administrative staff, as the commander (*Strategos*) of the Erythraean Sea (the “Province of the Arabian Gulf”). This appointment signifies active Seleucid colonization in Eastern Arabia; Antiochus entrusted a high-ranking military official to restore control over the Gulf province and oversee the construction of a new fleet to defend against future insurrections in the south (Būts 2003, p.680) (al-Aḥmad 1985, 323).

C- Naval Expeditions and Strategic Conflicts: Pliny (Bilīniyūs. 1439H, 6. 32: 147-109) provides the clearest evidence of the Seleucid fleet’s capabilities, mentioning that Antiochus IV Epiphanes dispatched an expedition to explore the coast of the Arabian Peninsula. Pliny also explicitly details a joint land-and-sea operation in the Gulf of Oman during the reign of Antiochus III. He records that Numenius, the governor of Mesene, launched a campaign along the coast of Carmania with an accompanying fleet against the Parthians. Numenius defeated them both at sea and on land with a cavalry force, erecting monuments to Jupiter and Neptune at the site to commemorate the victory. (Bilīniyūs. 1439H, 6. 32: 152-115) Scholars suggest that this campaign was likely intended to reclaim the Strait of Hormuz or the Musandam Peninsula from Parthian control to secure maritime trade routes to India (Būts 2003, p.671:

672).

D- Scientific Interest and Urbanization: The Seleucid presence was characterized by an active colonial movement and a scientific curiosity regarding natural phenomena. The renowned astronomer Seleucus of Seleucia—who hailed from the Erythraean Sea province—conducted pioneering studies on the tides in the Arabian Gulf. (Cumont 1927, 83f) Despite the region's harsh and arid climate, the Seleucids committed to settlement, establishing at least nine colonies along the coasts of the Gulf in Persia, Mesopotamia, and Arabia. These included: Seleucia on the Erythraean Sea, Antioch in Persis, Antioch in Charax, Arethusa, Larissa, Chalcis, Artemita, Gerrha, and Trapezus.

Furthermore, the Seleucids implemented a structured taxation system in the Gulf region similar to those across their empire. They derived substantial revenues from port duties and taxes on commodities such as slaves, salt, and luxury imports, including pearls, dates, and dried fish (Büts 2003, p.680: 681).

1.3. Rome and the Arabian Gulf

The Roman engagement with the Arabian Gulf was fundamentally shaped by their geopolitical and economic rivalry with the Parthian Empire and its successor, the Sasanian Empire. Seeking to monopolize Eastern trade routes, Rome expanded its influence across the Near East, securing pivotal commercial hubs such as Petra, Palmyra, and Egypt. Subsequently, the Romans launched several strategic attempts to extend their hegemony over the Arabian Gulf region. These efforts can be categorized into five primary phases:

A- The Augustan Initiatives: During the reign of Emperor Augustus, there was a concerted effort to gather strategic intelligence on the Parthians and the Arabs. Augustus dispatched the Eastern Greek geographer, Isidore of Charax, to document the topography and resources of the East. Concurrently, the Emperor's grandson, Gaius Caesar, was preparing a military expedition against Armenia, targeting Parthian and Arabian influence (Pliny 1942, p.141). Scholars (H. M. Bin Şarrāy 2007, P.80) suggest that these maneuvers were precursors to a planned annexation of the Arabian Peninsula. This is corroborated by King Juba of Mauretania, who provided Gaius with detailed intelligence to facilitate the campaign. However, the plan collapsed following Gaius's death in Armenia. While Pliny (Bilīniyūs. 1439H, 2. 67: 168- 37.) the Elder suggests that Gaius reached the Arabian Gulf—citing the discovery of Spanish shipwrecks during his campaign—he elsewhere clarifies that Gaius merely observed the Arabian territories from a distance, casting doubt on the extent of his penetration into the region.

B- The Tiberian Mission: Under Emperor Tiberius, Rome sought diplomatic or commercial inroads into the Gulf. Inscriptions record an embassy led by a Palmyrene named Alexandros, dispatched by the Roman commander Germanicus to Charax Spasinu, the capital of the Kingdom of Mesene at the head of the Gulf. While the inscription identifies the Mesenian King Orabazes, the precise nature of this mission—whether political alignment or trade regulation—remains historically ambiguous. (H. M. Bin Şarrāy 2007, P.81) (Nodelman 1959-1960, P.100).

C- The Trajanic Expansion: The most significant, albeit ephemeral, Roman success occurred during the reign of Emperor Trajan. Following his victory over the Parthians and the capture of Ctesiphon, Trajan advanced to the Kingdom of Mesene. According to Dio Cassius, Trajan stood upon the shores of the Arabian Gulf, watching ships depart for India from the port of Apologos (Dio Cassius 1925, P.415) (H. M. Bin Şarrāy 2000, P.82: 85) (al-Turkī 2012, P.285: 287) . To solidify this achievement, a statue of Trajan was erected on the coast, and he ordered the stationing of a Roman fleet in the Gulf as a strategic prelude to a planned Indian expedition (Tacitus 1883, 2.61.2). The contemporary historian Tacitus further asserts in his Annals that the Roman frontier reached the Arabian Gulf during this era. Nevertheless, Roman authority remained largely fiscal; Trajan focused on imposing customs duties and taxes on goods transported via the Tigris and Euphrates (al-Turkī 2012, P. 287). This control vanished quickly as the Parthians regrouped, delivering a decisive blow that halted Trajan's broader Eastern ambitions (Millar 1993, P.101).

D- The Severan Attempt: During the 3rd century, Emperor Alexander Severus (222–235 CE) attempted to capitalize on his military successes in Armenia and Mesopotamia to project Roman power into the

Gulf. However, these efforts failed to establish a permanent Roman presence in the region (Herodianus 1969-1970, P.9-10).

E- The Campaign of Philip the Arab: Emperor Philip the Arab (244–249 CE) led an offensive against the Sasanian Persians with the objective of reaching the Arabian Gulf. Like his predecessors, his efforts were ultimately unsuccessful in securing a foothold in the region (‘Alī 1993M, 2: 68).

2. The Islands of the Arabian Gulf in Classical Sources

2.1 Islands Situated at the Head of the Arabian Gulf (Eastern Arabia) (Fig.2)

2.1.1 Tylos and Arados (Modern Bahrain and Muharraq)

The identification of Tylos (Bahrain) and Arados (Muharraq/Arad) is firmly rooted in the reports of Alexander’s admirals: Archias, Androsthene, and Hiero (Arriyānūs 1949, 8. 20: 6-7; 86-88). Strabo (Istrābūn. 1439H, 16. 3: 3-4/ 109-110) identifies Arados as the first major landmark encountered after departing from Gerrha (al-Suḥaybānī 1439 H, p.54). He notes that it featured temples reminiscent of Phoenician architecture and was situated approximately ten days’ sail from Teredon. Ptolemy refers to this same landmass as Arathos (Istrābūn. 1439H, 16. 3: 3-4/ 109-110). According to Arrian (Arriyānūs 1949, 7. 20: 6; 86.), Archias reached Tylos and described it as being located a day and a night’s sail from the mouth of the Euphrates under favorable winds. There is a scholarly consensus that Pliny the Elder provided the most precise description. He positioned Tylos fifty miles off the coast of Attene (near Gerrha), highlighting its renown for pearl production. Pliny also mentions a smaller neighboring island (Arados/Muharraq) located roughly twelve miles from the main headland of Tylos. Modern researchers conclude that “Arados” is the etymological origin of the village name Arad on Muharraq Island (Bilīniyūs. 1439H, 6. 32: 148; 110-111).

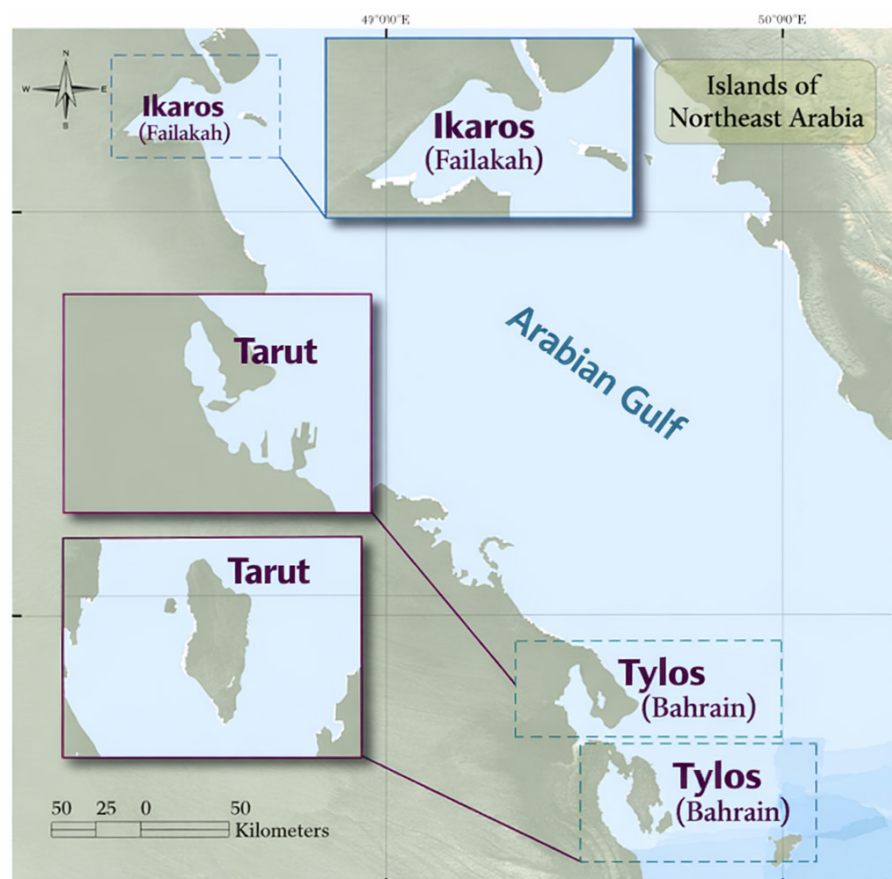


Fig.2: “Islands situated at the head of the Arabian Gulf, on the eastern edge of the Arabian Peninsula
Drawn by the author using (GIS)

2.1.II. Tharo (Tarut Island)(Fig. 3)

Ptolemy refers to this island as O-Tharo. As the second-largest island in the Gulf after Tylos, it is located approximately 6 km east of Qatif (Baṭlamyūs 1439 H, 6. 7: 47, 156.).

The island is home to the ancient town of Darin. Etymologically, some scholars link “Tarut” to the goddess Ashtarut (Astarte), suggesting the name was abbreviated over time to its current form (‘Alī 1993M, p.175: 176) (Ḥ. M. Bin Ṣarrāy 2000, p.76).

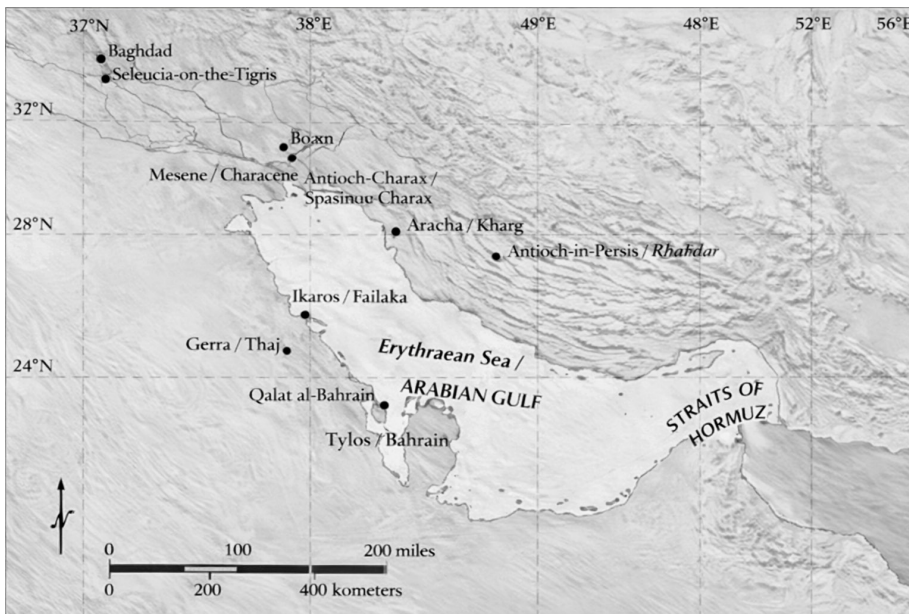


Fig.3: Tarut Island

Kosmin, P., “Rethinking the Hellenistic Gulf: the New Greek Inscription from Bahrain”, in *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* Vol. 133 (2013), 63.

2.1.III Ikaros (Failaka Island) (Fig.4)

The location of Ikaros remained a subject of intense archaeological debate for centuries, with candidates including Failaka, Kharg, Bubiyan, and Abu Ali (Būts 2003, p.928: 930) (J. ‘Alī 1980, 35-36, 53.). However, modern scholarship predominantly identifies it as Failaka (Kuwait).

Arrian (Arriyānūs 1949, p.82: 83) records that Alexander named the island after the Aegean “Ikaros.” He describes it as the smaller of two islands near the Euphrates delta, approximately 120 stadia from the shore. Strabo (Istrābūn. 1439H, p.109) places Ikaros immediately after Teredon for those sailing south along the Arabian coast. Claudius Aelianus mentions Ikaros as a significant island within the “Erythraean Sea.”

While Arrian attributes the name to Alexander, other scholars suggest a linguistic evolution from the Assyrian and Aramaic name E-kara (or Ichara in Ptolemy’s work), referencing a local temple. Locally known as “Failaka” (possibly derived from the Greek Phylakion, meaning an outpost or garrison), it was a critical station for managing trade between Mesopotamia and the lower Gulf (Arriyānūs 1949, p.83).



Fig.4: Ikaros of the Gulf

Lawler, A., Ikaros of the Gulf, *archaeology Magazine*, march-april-2013

<https://archaeology.org/issues/march-april-2013>

2.2. Islands Situated at the Entrance of the Arabian Gulf (Eastern Arabia) (Fig.5)

W.W. Tarn (Tarn 1929, p.110) argued that the southeastern region of the Arabian Peninsula remained “entirely unknown” to the Greeks until the 1st century BCE. However, a wealth of evidence from classical itineraries and geographical treatises contradicts this view, indicating that significant information regarding the coastline and its offshore islands had reached the Hellenistic world much earlier—primarily through the naval expeditions of Alexander the Great and subsequent maritime trade.



Fig.5: Islands situated at the entrance of the Arabian Gulf, on the eastern side of the Arabian Peninsula
Drawn by the author using (GIS)

2.2.1. The “Island” of Macae (Musandam Peninsula) (Fig.6)

The Musandam Peninsula was a focal point for classical navigators due to its strategic position at the Gulf’s entrance. Arrian records that Nearchus, while sailing along the coast of Carmania (modern Iran), observed a massive headland projecting from the opposite shore, which he identified as the land of the Macae (Arriyānūs 1949, 2. 3: 1-7 + 105-107) (H. M. Bin Şarrāy 2000, p.25: 26).

Strabo, citing Eratosthenes, provides a precise description of the Strait, describing it as a passage so narrow that the promontory of Macae in Arabia is visible from the coast of Harmozeia (Carmania). Strabo further emphasizes its location by stating that Tylos (Bahrain) is situated approximately one day’s sail from the “entrance of the Macae (Istrābūn. 1439H, 16. 3: 2+ 108).

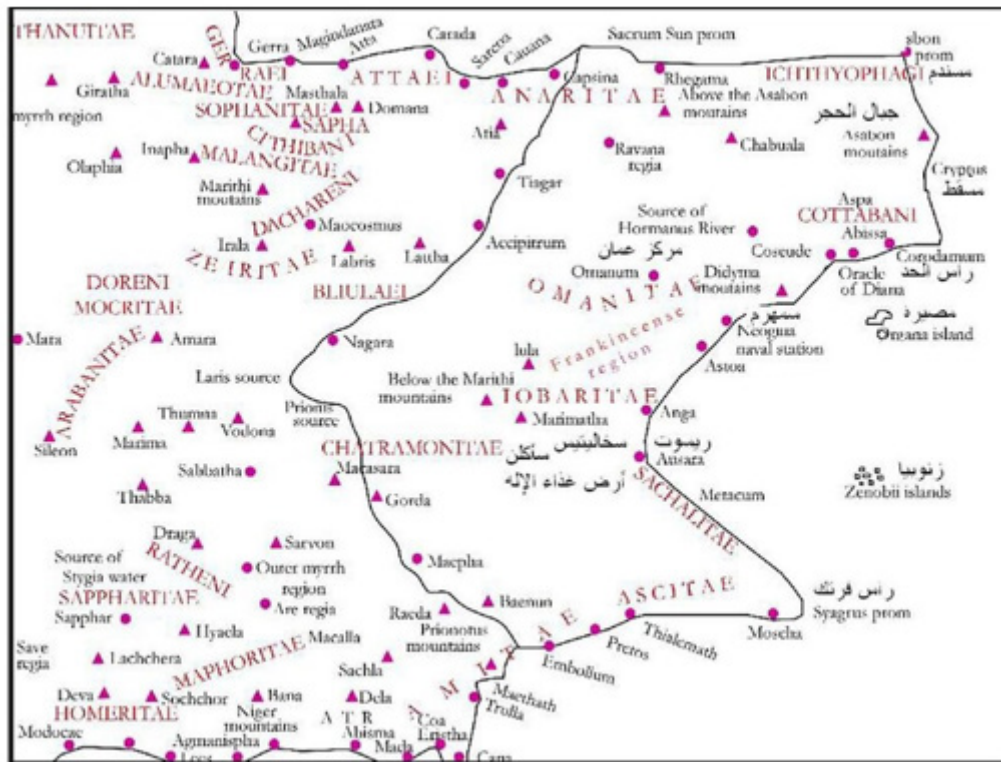


Fig.6: Musandam in Claudius Ptolemy's Map

Asmahan Al-Garoo., Ancient Sources on Musandam, Ras Makita (Maka / Magan / Oman) and the Shihuh Tribe, 2018, 6

2.2.II. Oaracta, Oggris, and Turgana (Qeshm Island)

Strabo mentions that during their voyage, Nearchus and his companions diverted from their maritime route, traveling inland to visit Alexander [the Great] in Carmania. Nearchus reported that Mithropastes encountered them in the company of Mazenes, who was the governor of an island in the Arabian Gulf named Oaracta (Istrābūn. 1439H, 16. 3: 7-111). Similarly, Pliny the Elder notes that off the Persian coast in the Arabian Gulf, there are “three islands, including the island of Oaracta, which is the only inhabited one, located twenty-five miles from the mainland” (Bilīniyūs. 1439H, 6. 26: 98-83-84).

The island of Oaracta, situated opposite the coast of Persia, is identified as Qeshm Island (A. W. Stiff 1897, p.330). Some scholars (Istrābūn. 1439H, 16. 3: 5-110) (Asmahān al-Jarrū 2011, p.100: 102) suggest that Oaracta might be the same as Oggris, a location referenced in numerous ancient sources (Bilīniyūs. 1439H, 6. 32: 153-115) (Istrābūn. 1439H, 16. 3: 5-110).

It is noteworthy that Roman writers in the 4th century AD continued to reference Qeshm Island within the context of Perso-Roman relations and the role of the Arabs in the conflict between these two powers. However, a shift in nomenclature is observed; Ammianus Marcellinus refers to it as the island of Turgana. Furthermore, there are numerous islands in both seas, near the coast, which we need not mention. Among the most famous of these is Turgana, where it is said there is a great temple of Serapis” (Marcellinus n.d., p.45-47). In this passage, Ammianus identifies Turgana as one of the most significant islands in the Arabian Gulf. It is believed that this is the same island known as Organa in Arrian's *Indica*, which has been identified as Qeshm Island in the Strait of Hormuz (Arrian 1983, p.37).

2.2.III. The Kalaios Islands (Al-Daymaniyat Islands)

The *Periplus* describes a chain of islands known as Kalaios, stretching nearly 2,000 stadia along the coast. (Mu'allif majhūl n.d., 5. 34-35-70-73). These are widely identified as the Daymaniyat Islands northwest of Muscat. The “Calon Mountains” likely refer to the Jabal Akhdar range, while the “Great Asabon Mountains” are identified with the Musandam range (specifically Ru'us al-Jibal) (Wilfrīd Shūf 2014, 199: 201). The *Periplus* links this region to the port of Apologos (the port of Mesene/Ubullah) at the head of the Gulf, illustrating the continuity of the trade route (Periplus 1989, p.174).

2.2.IV. The Zenobian Islands, identified as the Khuriya Muriya Islands—now the Al-Hallaniyat Islands; and Sarapis Island, known as Masirah Island:

The author of the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* noted that these islands are situated in the Arabian Gulf, describing them as follows: “Beyond Syagrus, there lies a neighboring gulf extending far inland, known as the Gulf of Omana, spanning six hundred stadia. Beyond it lie the Zenobia [islands]. Past these is an external region not belonging to the kingdom itself, but subject to the Persians. Sailing along this coast for approximately two thousand stadia from Zenobia, one encounters an island known as Sarapis, located one hundred and twenty stadia from the mainland. This island is about two hundred stadia wide and six hundred stadia long” (Mu’allif majhūl n.d., 5. 32-33 + 68-70)

It is evident from this description that the author of the *Periplus* indicated that after passing the port of Moscha identified as the port of Sumhuram/Khor Rori in the modern Dhofar Governorate, one encounters the Asichon mountain range (the Samhan Mountains in eastern Dhofar (Wilfrīd Shūf 2014 , p.198). Following this are seven islands known as the Zenobian Islands, which correspond to the Khuriya Muriya Islands, currently known as the Al-Hallaniyat Islands (Mu’allif majhūl n.d., 5. 32-33 + 68-70).

Beyond these islands lies a region that did not belong to the local kingdom but was under the influence of the Parthian Persians. This suggests that during the era of the *Periplus* (circa 1st century BC – 1st century AD), a local ruling kingdom existed in Oman, though its control over northern Oman was contested by the Parthians. Continuing the voyage, one reaches the island of Sarapis, identified as modern Masirah Island. Notably, Ptolemy also referenced the seven Zenobian Islands and the island of Sarapias (Baṭlamyūs 1439 H, 7. 6: 47+ 156) Furthermore, Ptolemy (Baṭlamyūs 1439 H, 7. 6: 14+ 131) mentioned a location called Promontorium Hierahielios (the Sacred Cape of the Sun). One scholar (Sprenger 1875, p.164) proposed that this toponym was derived from the goddess Shams, whose worship was prevalent in the pre-Islamic era. Another researcher (Miles 1878, p.168) hypothesized that this location corresponds to the triangular peninsula comprising Khor Ash-Sham, Khor Ghub Ali, and the high peak of “Jebel Al-Sham.”

3. The Civilizational Role of the Arabian Gulf Islands in Classical Sources

3.1. Economic Activity

Classical authors are credited with uncovering the fundamental components of the civilizational role played by the islands of the Arabian Gulf. Their accounts addressed the region’s economic history, natural wealth—characterized by agricultural productivity and water resources—and the prominence of pearl diving, harvesting, and trade, alongside various industries and crafts.

For instance, Strabo (Istrābūn. 1439H, 16. 3: 6-7+ 110-111), quoting Nearchus, mentions the presence of laurel and olive trees discovered “along the entire coast of the Erythraean Sea.” In deeper waters, trees resembling laurel and olive were observed. Furthermore, Nearchus recounts an island encountered at the beginning of his voyage in the Arabian Gulf that abounded in precious pearls. On another island, he found small, round, transparent, and exquisite stones. In the islands near the Euphrates, trees grew that emitted the scent of frankincense, with aromatic liquid exuding from their stems. The crabs and shrimp were notably large, a common feature in the “Outer Seas,” with some exceeding the size of a Macedonian hat, while others approached the volume of two drinking cups. He also reports sighting a sea monster cast upon the shore, measuring fifty cubits in length. Scholars suggest these descriptions likely refer to the island of Tylos (Bahrain) (H. Strasburger 1952, 456ff).

The classical description clearly illustrates the civilizational impact of the Arabian Gulf islands on the rich maritime culture and coastal cities. It highlights the cultural interaction between the islands and the mainland, as these areas served as hubs for cultural and commercial exchange. These islands acted as maritime corridors since prehistoric times and throughout historical periods—particularly the Classical era—contributing significantly to the formation of existing cultural and trade relations. The marine environment influenced the daily lives of the inhabitants, serving as a gateway for maritime exploration and a source of income through crafts such as trade, agriculture, fishing, and shipbuilding.

In the same vein, a reading of classical sources and archaeological evidence reflects the paramount importance of the Arabian Gulf islands in the region’s history and their prominent influence on the growth of civilizational activity and cultural development locally and through links with neighboring centers. Understanding

this role is vital for preserving the heritage of these islands and highlighting their sustainable contribution to the maritime history of the region.

Theophrastus, for example, provided a clearer and more detailed account of the economy and natural wealth of Tylos in his two works: *Historia Plantarum* (The History of Plants) and *De Causis Plantarum* (On the Causes of Plants). He noted the following:

1. **Vegetation and Cotton:** He reports that on the eastern part of Tylos, trees form regular hedges during low tide. These trees are similar in size to fig trees, with highly fragrant flowers and inedible fruit resembling lupin. The island also produces the “wool-bearing tree” (cotton), with leaves similar to those of the vine but smaller. The pods, containing the wool, are the size of a spring apple. When ripe, they open to reveal the wool, from which fabrics—varying in quality and price—are woven (Thiufhrastus 1965, 4. 7: 7-8; 51-53).
2. **Timber and Shipbuilding:** On Tylos, a type of wood is used for shipbuilding that is highly resistant to decay in seawater, lasting over two hundred years. Paradoxically, it decomposes more quickly if kept out of the water. He also mentions a heavy wood used for walking sticks, characterized by a mottled appearance like leopard skin, which is extremely brittle, breaking like pottery when dropped on hard ground (Thiufhrastus 1965, 5. 4: 7-8; 55).

A- Identification of Flora in Classical Accounts

Based on Theophrastus’ descriptions, scholars have identified several plant species:

- **The Mangrove (*Avicennia marina*):** Known as *Al-Qurm*, this coastal plant thrives in saltwater and is prevalent throughout the Gulf (Bretzl 1903, p.72).
- **The Cotton Tree (*Gossypium*):** While some scholars debate whether cotton was cultivated locally or imported from India (Sprenger 1875, p.153), Pliny explicitly refers to it as *gossypinum* in Tylos (Pliny 1942, 12. 22. 39).
- **Tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*):** Described as having flowers resembling cloves with a unique diurnal movement (opening at sunrise and closing at night) (Bretzl 1903, p.131)
- **Indian Cane (*Calamus Rotang*):** The leopard-mottled wood used for walking sticks is identified as Indian cane, indicating early trade links between Tylos and India (Bretzl 1903, p.131).

Pliny the Elder (Pliny 1942, 12.21, 23. 38-40) provides a description echoing that of Theophrastus regarding the flora and hydrography of Tylos. He states that the eastern portion of the island is covered by forests which are submerged during high tide. The trees, comparable in size to fig trees, possess flowers with an indescribable fragrance and fruit resembling lupin, yet are so heavily guarded by thorns that no animal can touch them.

Furthermore, accounts by Strabo and Diodorus Siculus emphasize the region’s climatic and agricultural richness. Strabo describes the innovative “floating gardens” in the marshlands of the Persian Sea, where soil is placed on reed mats to allow vine growth. Diodorus refers to the region as Eudaimon Arabia (Arabia Felix), highlighting its production of aromatic reeds, frankincense, and myrrh, which were exported throughout the known world (Istrābūn. 1439H, 16. 4: 1; 111-112).

B- Water Resources

Theophrastus noted the presence of numerous freshwater springs on Tylos (Thiufhrastus 1965, 4. 7: 8; 53.). Although he and Pliny (Pliny 1942, p.12: 23) offer varying reports on rainfall—likely due to the seasons in which their sources (such as Androstenes) visited—Theophrastus describes a sophisticated irrigation method. Inhabitants would “wash” the fields with spring water even after rainfall to mitigate the effects of salt deposits on the crops (Thiufhrastus 1965, 4. 7: 8; 53).

C- Regional Fauna and Resources

The island of Ikaros (Failaka) was noted by Arrian for its dense forests and abundant wildlife, including wild goats and oryx. Later historians emphasize the sacred nature of these animals, noting that hunters required divine permission to ensure a successful and safe hunt. Additionally, Arrian records that spices such as cinnamon

were transported from Makai (the Musandam Peninsula) to Assyria, indicating the Gulf's role as a vital link in the ancient spice trade (Arriyānūs 1949, 7. 20: 305-83-84).

D-The Pearl Industry

Theophrastus, in his treatise *De Lapidibus* (On Stones), classifies the pearl as a precious stone. He describes it as transparent, forming within a shell similar to a small leaf, and roughly the size of a large fish eye. Both Pliny and Strabo corroborate Tylos's reputation as a primary center for the production and export of high-quality pearls, a sentiment echoed in the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (Thiufrastrus 1965, p.36) (Bilīniyūs. 1439H, 32: 8-14-110) (Istrābūn. 1439H, 16. 3: 7-111).

E) Numismatic Evidence and Commercial Exchange

I. Hellenistic Coinage and Local Imitations

The commercial vitality of Bahrain and the surrounding region is evidenced by the discovery of significant hoards. One such hoard, containing 292 silver coins, was unearthed near the northern wall of the Bahrain Fort (Morkholm 1960, 183ff). It included:

Series I-A: Imitation Alexander the Great tetradrachms featuring the head of Heracles on the obverse and a seated deity with a scepter and eagle on the reverse.

Series B-1: 212 pieces depicting the head of Alexander (rather than Heracles). Some reverse images show the deity wearing a crown or a cavalry helmet, often accompanied by the South Arabian letter Shin or the name "Shams (Morkholm 1960, p.53) (H. M. Bin Şarrāy 2007, p. 40: 45).

Scholars suggest that these coins were minted in regional centers such as Ed-Dur, Mleiha, Failaka, Tylos, and Thaj. They served as the official currency for the region, utilized by the Gerrhaeans to pay tributes—such as the 500 talents given to the Seleucid King Antiochus III (H. M. Bin Şarrāy 2007, p. 29).

Excavations in Tarut and Thaj have revealed vast quantities of Hellenistic artifacts, reflecting the Seleucid interest in controlling Eastern trade routes. The Gerrhaeans, acting as intermediaries between the production centers in Asia and Africa and the consumer markets of the Mediterranean, amassed immense wealth. Strabo describes their luxury, noting houses adorned with ivory, gold, and silver (Istrābūn. 1439H, 16. 4: 19-120).

II. Maritime Stations and Strategic Ports

The Macedonian fleet under Nearchus utilized islands like Qeshm (Oaracta) due to its freshwater resources and inhabited status. Ammianus Marcellinus describes the eastern Arabian society as "Arabes Beati" (Blessed Arabs), living in a state of high prosperity characterized by magnificent coastal cities, royal palaces, and medicinal thermal springs (Bilīniyūs. 1439H, 6. 26: 98-83-84). He specifically identifies the island of Turgana (likely Qeshm) as a significant site featuring a great temple dedicated to Serapis.

Artifacts found across Southeastern Arabia—including Roman glassware, pottery, and coins from the reign of Tiberius—confirm direct or indirect contact with the Roman and Hellenistic worlds. These goods likely reached the Gulf via re-exportation from Indian ports like Barygaza or through terrestrial and maritime routes connecting the region to Mesopotamia and Syria (Potts 1997, 51ff) (J. F. Salles 1990, 19ff) (H. M. Bin Şarrāy 2000)

4. Social Life

Classical sources identify various peoples and tribes who inhabited the Arabian Gulf region, its coasts, and islands, providing insights into their characteristics and languages. These accounts suggest that the Phoenicians were among the settled populations in the Gulf, primarily for commercial reasons, before migrating to the Mediterranean coast and subsequently establishing distant maritime colonies. Herodotus (Hīrūdūt 2001, P.18) corroborates this, noting: "*The learned among the Persians assert that the Phoenicians... came to [our sea] from the sea called 'Erythraean' [the Red Sea/Arabian Gulf], and having settled in the land they still inhabit, they immediately began to undertake long voyages.*" In another passage, he mentions that the Phoenicians serving in the Persian army claimed to have previously resided near the Erythraean Sea before crossing over to settle on the Syrian coast during his time (Hīrūdūt 2001, 7. 89: 1-2-90-96).

Strabo (Istrābūn. 1439H, 16. 3: 3-4, 109-110) also references the Phoenicians, stating: “*The Gerrhaeans carry... there are islands there, including Tyros and Arados, which contain temples resembling those of the Phoenicians. The inhabitants of these islands claim, if we are to believe them, that their islands and cities bear the same names as those bestowed by the Phoenicians themselves.*” While Strabo (Istrābūn. 1439H, 1. 2: 35: 39-40) critiques those who trace the origins of the “Sinai” (or certain Eastern peoples) to the Phoenicians of the Arabian Gulf, such accounts reflect the evolution of Greek geographical knowledge regarding Arabia.

Although definitive evidence confirming a Gulf origin for the Phoenicians remains elusive, their Semitic roots are undisputed. Their early history remains obscured by the scarcity of archaeological excavations in Levantine coastal cities such as Tyre, Sidon, and Beirut. Nevertheless, some scholars lean toward the “Gulf origin” hypothesis, citing the existence of the small port of Sur on the Gulf of Oman—phonetically identical to the Phoenician Tyre (Sur)—alongside the linguistic parallels between Arados and Arwad, and the architectural similarities in temple styles noted by Strabo (Jamīl 1966, P.46: 47).

4.1. Hellenistic Settlement and Cultural Interaction

Based on the aforementioned economic activity, it can be inferred that the Hellenistic period witnessed robust settlement and coexistence between the indigenous populations of the Gulf islands and Greek communities. In Bahrain, for instance, archaeological evidence of Hellenistic habitation is abundant. The Danish Archaeological Expedition unearthed an unglazed, pale brown pottery shard at Qal’at al-Bahrain inscribed with the Greek word *Agraopo* (signifying land division), serving as clear evidence of Hellenistic administration. The fortress remains the primary settlement of this era, later designated as “City V.” (J. F. Salles 1987, P. 181).

This settlement includes the remains of two two-room houses within the western city wall. Significant discoveries made in 1964 near the northern wall revealed a street paved with plaster and a sophisticated subterranean drainage system comprising two plastered rectangular basins connected by a long auxiliary drain (G. Bibby 1965, p.103). These structures were associated with a cluster of three rooms containing distinct “City V” pottery. While the original city wall (City II) dates back to the early second millennium BCE, it was renovated during the Hellenistic period using gypseous stone (G. Bibby 1965, p.152). Adjacent to the northern wall, a residence and a silver hoard of 292 coins were discovered (O. Morkholm 1972, p.188).

Geoffrey Bibby (G. Bibby 1965, p.105) categorized eight types of Hellenistic pottery from the Qal’at excavations based on color and form. Other finds include wide-rimmed bowls, fish plates, short-necked glazed amphorae, and black-glazed Greek shards, all of which align with Seleucid-era characteristics in Mesopotamia (G. Bibby 1965, p.112). Conversely, some researchers argue that fish plates and low-luster pottery from the 3rd and 2nd centuries BCE were imported goods rather than evidence of local Hellenistic-style production (R. Boucharlat 1986, 441f). A notable fluted hemispherical cup, currently held in the Bahrain National Museum, is dated between the 3rd and 1st centuries BCE (Būts 2003, 2: 724-725).

Hellenistic funerary sites have also been identified across Bahrain, including Isa Town (J. F. Salles 1987, P. 154) Bu Ashira (57 graves), Umm al-Hassam (60 graves), and the “Moon Plaza Hotel” site (27 graves (J. F. Salles 1987, P. 154) In southern Barbar, some graves were described as being constructed from finely dressed stones marked with Greek alphabetic characters to guide the masons during assembly. Similar burials were found on the islands of Nabih Saleh and Umm al-Nasan (J. F. Salles 1986, p.450).

4.2. Evidence from Tarut Island and Failaka (Ikaros)

Archaeological data also points to Hellenistic settlement on Tarut Island. A large cemetery from this period yielded sarcophagi made of raw plaster, polished fish plates, and a small funerary stele inscribed in Greek: “*Habib-Il Noumat, Greetings*” (Potts 1997, p.2) In 1964 and 1966, agricultural and road works near Al-Rafia revealed various glazed and unglazed Hellenistic vessels and a Greek-inscribed tombstone (Salāmah 2013, p.270; 279). A headless limestone statue, approximately one meter tall and sculpted with Hellenistic-style drapery and anatomical realism, was also recovered. It is suggested that Tarut was built over older structures, possibly serving as a temple for the goddess Astarte, from whom the island’s name may be derived (J. ‘Alī 1980, p.175: 176) (H. M. Bin Şarrāy 2000, p.76).

In Failaka (Ikaros), classical sources emphasize Greek settlement and the presence of temples. Arrian (Arriyānūs 1949, 7. 20: 305: 83-84) describes a temple dedicated to Artemis, where local inhabitants performed

daily rituals and protected sacred wild goats and oryx. The Greeks' identification of an Eastern goddess with *Artemis Tauropolos* prompted Alexander the Great to name the island Ikaros. Strabo also mentions a temple to Apollo and an oracle of Artemis on the island, while Aelian (3rd century CE) notes the continued presence of the temple and the strict religious regulations regarding hunting (Potts 1997, p.927). Key Hellenistic epigraphic finds in Failaka include:

1. **The Soteles Inscription:** Found in 1937, it records a dedication by Soteles and his soldiers to *Zeus Soter*, *Poseidon*, and *Artemis Soteira* (Charlotte, and Susan, 1985, 1ff) (M. N. Tod 1945, 112f). Artemis was worshipped here as a protector of navigation (Arriyānūs 1949, 7. 20: 3-4, 83). Some scholars suggest this was an offering of thanks for surviving a maritime disaster, likely dating to the 4th or 3rd century BCE, possibly linked to Alexander's sacrifices for Nearchus' fleet (M. N. Tod 1945, p.112).
2. **The Ikaros Stone:** A 44-line Greek decree (c. 239 BCE, during the reign of Seleucus II) detailing a letter from Ikadion, the Seleucid governor of Susa, to Anaxarchus, the governor of Ikaros. The inscription outlines instructions for relocating a temple, establishing athletic and cultural competitions, granting tax exemptions to farmers, and regulating grain storage to ensure food security. This artifact is crucial for understanding the political, religious, and administrative integration of Failaka into the Seleucid Empire (Kirīstiyān Jībīsin 2011, 188; 218).
3. **Fortifications and Material Culture:** Excavations at Tell Sa'id in Failaka revealed a fortified enclosure (the *Temenos* or Acropolis), a square limestone structure (58.6m per side) built without foundations directly on the sand (Potts 1997, p.134). Based on numismatic evidence (coins dated 210–200 BCE), the fortress likely dates to the early 3rd century BCE. It housed "Temple A," a premier example of Hellenistic architecture in the Gulf, and the remains of "Temple B." These fortifications served either as a maritime station for supplies and protection or as part of a Seleucid effort to divert the Arabian incense trade through Failaka (O. Callot and Other 1987, p.39). Material remains from Failaka include a terracotta workshop producing figurines (e.g., heads of Heracles, *Thymiateria*, and images of Nike) and a wide array of Hellenistic ceramics (Attic black-glazed pottery, Rhodian wine amphorae, and locally inspired *chytra*). These artifacts indicate two distinct periods of occupation: the first from the mid-3rd to the late 2nd century BCE, and the second extending into the 1st century CE (al-Turkī 2012, p.137).
4. Archaeological excavations conducted southeast of the fortified citadel on the coast of Failaka Island revealed a small sanctuary, identified as a shrine dedicated to the goddess Artemis. Due to marine erosion destroying its southern section, the structure is only partially preserved; it was originally constructed using simple rubble masonry. The original sanctuary comprised a small, two-chambered building: a rear chamber known as the *naos* (the holy of holies) and a front chamber designated as the *pronaos*. The sanctuary contained two additional simple sandstone altars. One of these altars bore traces of a red-painted dedication to Artemis, thus confirming the building's attribution as the shrine of Artemis (Y. Calvet 1984, 10ff).
5. Furthermore, excavations uncovered a terracotta workshop containing clay molds utilized for producing small, reddish-brown figurines (al-Turkī 2012, p.137). A corpus of Hellenistic ceramics was also retrieved, manufactured based on original Greek prototypes produced in various Hellenistic production centers across the Levant and Persia. This assemblage includes lamps and bowl-shaped pots; Greek *chytra* cooking pots; amphorae influenced by Greek styles; glazed fish plates; inverted-rim glazed bowls; rounded glazed bowls decorated with figurine reliefs; glazed drinking cups (with or without handles); short, thick unguentaria with ring handles; narrow-necked water flasks; and small pitchers (J. F. Salles 1987, p.178) (Büts 2003, p.30: 36). Additionally, a Greek-style incense burner was identified, alongside ceramics of Greek origin, including amphorae produced in Rhodes and Attic "black-glazed ware." The dating of this ceramic material spans two distinct periods: the first between the mid-3rd century BCE and the late 2nd or 1st century BCE, and the second between the late 1st century BCE and the 1st century CE (J. F. Salles 1987, p.178).

4.3. Ethnography of the Eastern Coast

Classical sources provide ethnographic details on the inhabitants of the eastern Arabian Peninsula (Mu'allif

majhūl n.d., 5. 32-33 ‘ 68-70.) The author of the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* describes the inhabitants of Sarapis (Masirah Island) as “Fish-Eaters” (*Ichthyophagi*) who spoke Arabic and wore loincloths made of palm fronds. Scholars suggest that “speaking Arabic” likely refers to South Arabian dialects such as Himyaritic or Mahri. The label *Ichthyophagi* was a Greek descriptor for coastal populations reliant on marine resources, appearing frequently in Greek geographical literature from the time of Alexander the Great (Wilfrīd Shūf 2014 , p.199).

Other tribal designations include the Sabae in Oman and the Macae (or *Myci*), the latter being a Persian satrapy under Darius the Great (Istrābūn. 1439H, p.10). The presence of Arab tribes is well-documented; Pliny (Bilīniyūs. 1439H, p.109: 110) (Ḥ. M. Bin Ṣarrāy 2000, p.156: 166) mentions the Gaulopes and Chattaei near the Bay of Capeus (likely Qatif or Kuwait). Researchers identify the *Chattaei* with the region of Al-Khatt and the *Gaulopes* possibly with the Taghlib tribe. Other mentioned groups include the Nochaeti, Zurazi (linked to Al-Zarah in Qatif), and the Catharrei (associated with Qatar).

According to Ptolemy (Bilīniyūs. 1439H, p.6: 7), a tribe designated as the Thaemae (also referred to as *Themoi* or *Themii*) inhabited the Magorum Sinus (Gulf of Magorum). Researchers identify this tribe without hesitation as the Bani Tamim (Jamīl 1966, P.47: 48). Ptolemy noted that their territory was adjacent to a region named Laenitae, which possessed a bay known as Laenitae Kolpos—identified as the Gulf of Bahrain—though some researchers argue that the Laenitae constituted a branch of the Bani Kayan (Jamīl 1966, P.48).

Ptolemy further documented the Bliulaei region, inhabited alongside the Omanitai (*Omankitoi*), and situated the land of the Dosareni (*Dosareoi*) tribe to the west of the former (Baṭlamyūs 1439 H, 6. 7. 23-24: 137- 138). Scholars hypothesize that the Bliulaei represent the Bani Ali, a tribe of Oman, and that the Dosareni are situated in Wadi ad-Dawasir. An alternative view suggests the former are the Bahilah, while the latter are the Thawr tribe of Kalb (Jamīl 1966, P.48).

Furthermore, Greek communities established themselves in several settlements throughout the Gulf. Herodotus records that the Persians forced their Greek prisoners of war to settle in specific Gulf cities, such as Ampe, which was populated by captives of Darius (Hīrūdūt 2001, p.310).

Pliny (Bilīniyūs. 1439H, 6. 26: 98: 83) notes that beyond the region of Carmania, under Achaemenid control, lies the Cape of Carmania, from which the distance to the Macae tribe—an Arab group settled on the Omani coast—is fifty miles.

Pliny also mentioned the Omanitai people inhabiting a region extending to Charax. Among their most famous cities mentioned are Semiramis, Abansamis, and Soor Actia. According to Pliny, the Chaldeans inhabited the region near the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers on the left bank, while Bedouin, nomadic tribes, and the Arab Saraceni (Abū Sa‘dah 2020 , p.202: 234) resided on the right bank (Bilīniyūs. 1439H, 6. 32: 145: 107-108) .

In a similar vein, the author of the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* described the inhabitants of the Calaeu Islands—identified as the Daymaniyat Islands northwest of Muscat—as treacherous and uncivilized (Mu‘allif majhūl n.d., 5. 34-35: 70-73). Some suggest these descriptions imply the islanders’ inability to gaze directly at the sun due to ophthalmia or blindness (Wilfrīd Shūf 2014 , p.199: 201), while others argue it constitutes evidence of their engagement in piracy, smuggling, or illicit activities under the cover of darkness. It is more probable, however, that the inhabitants’ pursuit of independence from foreign control, or their attempts to evade Greek taxation, prompted Greek writers to attribute negative characteristics to them, such as piracy and smuggling.

Furthermore, Strabo (Istrābūn. 1439H, 16. 3: 5: 110), citing Eratosthenes, provided critical information regarding the ruler of Qeshm Island and the amicable relations between its inhabitants and the ruler of Phrygia, who had fled to this island escaping the Persian King Darius.

Conclusion

This research highlights several significant findings regarding the Hellenistic and Roman engagement with the Arabian Gulf:

- While the earliest evidence of Greek awareness of the Arabian Gulf dates back to the 7th century BCE, this knowledge remained superficial. Substantive information was only acquired following the

eastern campaign of Alexander the Great in the 4th century BCE. Subsequently, Roman knowledge and interactions were driven by the strategic imperative to control eastern trade routes amidst conflicts with Parthian and Sassanid rivals.

- Alexander the Great, his successors, and the Romans employed similar expansionist strategies in the Arabian Gulf, including the construction of naval fleets, the commissioning of exploratory voyages along its coasts and islands, and the establishment of settlements. However, the Seleucids and Romans introduced a fiscal dimension by imposing taxes and customs duties on goods traversing the Gulf toward their respective spheres of influence.
- The islands of the Arabian Gulf served as the cornerstone of the Greco-Roman expansionist agenda. Classical authors emphasized their role as a primary attraction for Western interests and ambitions. Key islands included Bahrain, Muharraq, Failaka, and Tarut in the upper Gulf, alongside Qeshm, Masirah, Daymaniyat, Salamah and her daughters, Hormuz, Hallaniyat, and Sir Abu Nu'ayr at the Gulf entrance.
- Classical sources indicate that the civilizational role of these islands was underpinned by their strategic geographical position. They functioned as nodes in a network of maritime and terrestrial trade routes connecting to local and foreign markets, including inner Arabia, Assyria, Persia, and India. Furthermore, their economic viability was supported by rich vegetation, abundant water resources, fertile pastures, pearl fisheries, and raw materials such as high-quality timber, complemented by the maritime expertise of the inhabitants.
- In the absence of extensive alternative sources, classical texts are invaluable for revealing the economic activities practiced by the inhabitants of the Gulf islands and coastal cities. These included agriculture (specifically palm products, frankincense, tamarind, grapes, figs, olives, mangroves, cloves, and various fruits), shipbuilding, the manufacturing of sturdy walking sticks, pearl diving and trade, and the commerce of wines, beryl, copper, and textiles.
- Greco-Roman accounts shed light on the social and domestic life within the islands. Sources hint at peaceful coexistence between the indigenous population and Greek settlers. Authors referred to local leaders as kings, noting the prosperity, luxury, and royal palaces witnessed therein. References are made to temples dedicated to Artemis and Apollo, as well as Alexander's permission for the Arabs to worship Uranus, Dionysus, and other Greek deities. Classical travelers acted as eyewitnesses to the assistance provided by the local population to the Greek fleet and noted diplomatic relations, such as the account of the ruler of Phrygia fleeing from Darius to Qeshm Island.
- Classical sources implicitly confirm the ancient Arab presence through mentions of local beliefs attributing ruins to the people of 'Ad, and the identification of inhabitants based on Arab tribal names such as Bani Tamim, Bani Taghlib, Bani 'Abd al-Qays, Bani Ali, Bahilah, and Thawr from Bani Kalb. Furthermore, they describe the indigenous inhabitants speaking the Arabic language.
- Records exist regarding the customs, traditions, dietary habits, clothing, and daily lives of the inhabitants. It is probable that the inhabitants' pursuit of liberation from foreign control, or their attempts to evade Greek taxation, prompted certain Greek authors to attribute negative characteristics to them, such as piracy and smuggling.
- The results of archaeological excavations frequently validate and complement the information provided by classical sources concerning Greek settlement, the prosperity of agricultural, industrial, and commercial activities, and the social and religious aspects of life on the Gulf islands.

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