

**ALEXANDER THE GREAT AND THE HELLENISTIC
NAVAL PRESENCE
IN SOUTH MESOPOTAMIA AND THE GULF**

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Abstract:

The presence of Alexander's the Great naval in southern Mesopotamia region as well as the Hellenistic control on the Arabian / Persian Gulf Basin in the areas, has not attained a sufficient share of the archaeological studies yet ,therefore, study of these areas relies heavily on what is contained in the classical sources through the reported Alexander assigned to marine commanders (Niarchos, Arkhias, Androsetheins, Heron) to discover the coasts of the Gulf. Moreover the linguistic, historical and geographical area studies (southern Mesopotamia and the Gulf) .

So the search has adopted to reconcile the classical studies and contemporary studies, taking into considerations the modern archaeological discoveries in some Hellenistic settlements in southern Mesopotamia, such as a city site (Alexandria on the Tigris) that has been identified in the north of Basra in area Khiabr which was one of the cities marine Logistics linking Babylonia and Sosa with India and Gulf regions and the rest of other marine areas.

On the other hand, the archaeological excavations in the coasts of the Gulf (east and west) Supplied the research good information to know the extent of the obvious Hellenistic naval presence so that some modern scholars are calling the Persian-Arabian Gulf (the Hellenistic Gulf).

الاسكندر الكبير والوجود البحري الهيلنتي في جنوب بلاد الرافدين والخليج العربي

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المستخلص:

يعد التواجد البحري للاسكندر الكبير في منطقة جنوب بلاد الرافدين وايضاً السيطرة البحرية الهلينستية على حوض الخليج العربي / الفارسي من المناطق التي لم تتل قسطاً كافياً من البحث الاثاري والتاريخي ، لذا فان دراسة هذه المناطق تعتمد بشكل كبير على مايرد في المصادر الكلاسيكية من خلال ما ذكر عن تكليف الاسكندر لقادته البحريين (نيارخوس وآرخياس وأندروسيثيس وهيرون) في اكتشاف سواحل الخليج فضلاً عن الدراسات اللغوية وكذلك الجغرافية التاريخية للمنطقة (جنوب بلاد الرافدين والخليج) ، لذا فان البحث عمد الى التوفيق بين الدراسات الكلاسيكية والدراسات المعاصرة مع الاخذ بنظر الاعتبار الاكتشافات الأثرية (الطفيفة) في بعض المستوطنات الهلينستية في جنوب بلاد الرافدين مثل موقع مدينة (الاسكندرية على دجلة) والتي حددت في شمال البصرة في منطقة جبل خيابر والتي عدت من المدن اللوجستية البحرية التي تربط بلاد بابل وسوسا مع مناطق الخليج والهند وباقي المناطق البحرية الاخرى.من جانب اخر فان التنقيبات الاثرية في ساحلي الخليج (الشرقي والغربي) افادت بدرجة لا بأس بها في معرفة مدى الحضور البحري الهلينستي الواضح الى درجة جعلت بعض الباحثين المحدثين يطلقون اسم الخليج الهلينستي على الخليج العربي الفارسي .

Historical background

To understand Alexander 's strategic and tactical moves, we need to know his perception of the world (OIKOYMENH) and the Greek's view consider the inhabited world being surrounded by the outer ocean; Through the Caspian sea, they thought they could sail around India, from the Persian / Arab Gulf(Erythrean Sea).They could sail to India and around Africa through Gibraltar back to the Mediterranean sea "our sea".This was Alexander's grand scheme to sail around the ocean and conquer the world and then become the rightful King of Asia and King of the World⁽¹⁾.

On 1st of October 331 B.C in Arbela, Alexander made his last and decisive victory against the Achaemenid king(Darius) in Gaugamela battle⁽²⁾ and he was declared “ King of Asia”.After twenty days (21st of October) 331 B.C., he entered Babylon where he was greeted as " King of the World"⁽³⁾.

It was the first time South Mesopotamia and Babylonia that created the first World Civilization was conquered by people who had a different and less advanced civilization.The Greeks had their own traditions, religions, rituals, philosophical thought, arts etc. On the other hand, the Babylonians had their own unique advanced features of culture and civilization. Behaved with tolerance and respect to the local traditions /religion. Their concern was to have military and the economy control with its trade and commerce, they kept the local institutions like temples untouched and integrated them in their administrative structures in order to get loyalty, taxes, and revenues⁽⁴⁾.

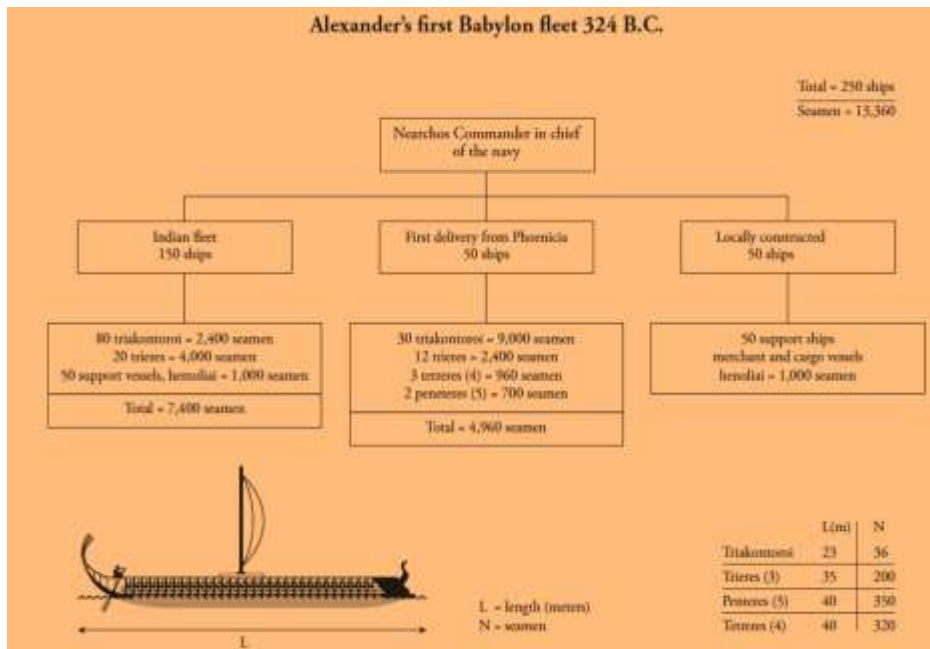
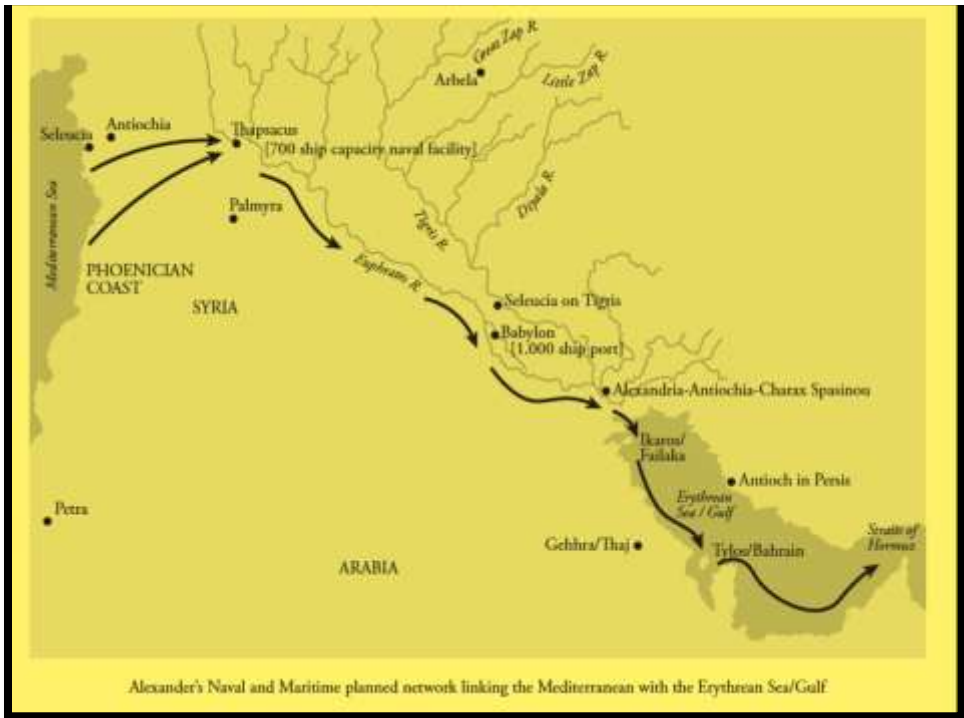
The Greek's naval presence in south Mesopotamia

To maintain continuity of development and growth, the Macedonians needed to maintain the economy. For this, they had to develop trade and sustain the agriculture by irrigation in Mesopotamia. Among other things they had to build and operate a maritime and naval infrastructure with a network of ports and naval stations in the Gulf; They Maintain stand by the fleet to control the sea lanes and to direct the sea trade and to regulate the irrigation canals and river flows inland.

Alexander planned to combine his established naval supremacy in the Mediterranean with a corresponding domination of the Gulf (Erythrean Sea) into one unified naval and maritime empire. He wanted to make the Gulf area “ just as prosperous a country as Phoenicia “⁽⁵⁾.

For this purpose he went ahead with the following actions:

1. Exploration of the Gulf by his Marshals: Nearchos, Archias, Androstenes and Hieron⁽⁶⁾.
2. Building keels for 700 ships at Thapsakos (Carchemish)⁽⁷⁾.
3. Building ships in Phoenicia, disassembling them, transporting them to Thapsakos and then assembling them again and sailing to Babylon through Euphrates river⁽⁸⁾.
4. Building a " harbor in Babylon large enough to be an anchorage for a thousand ships of war, with dockyards in the harbor ⁽⁹⁾.
5. Building additional ships and acquire naval expertise in Babylon⁽¹⁰⁾.
6. Building Alexandria on the Tigris in the south⁽¹¹⁾.

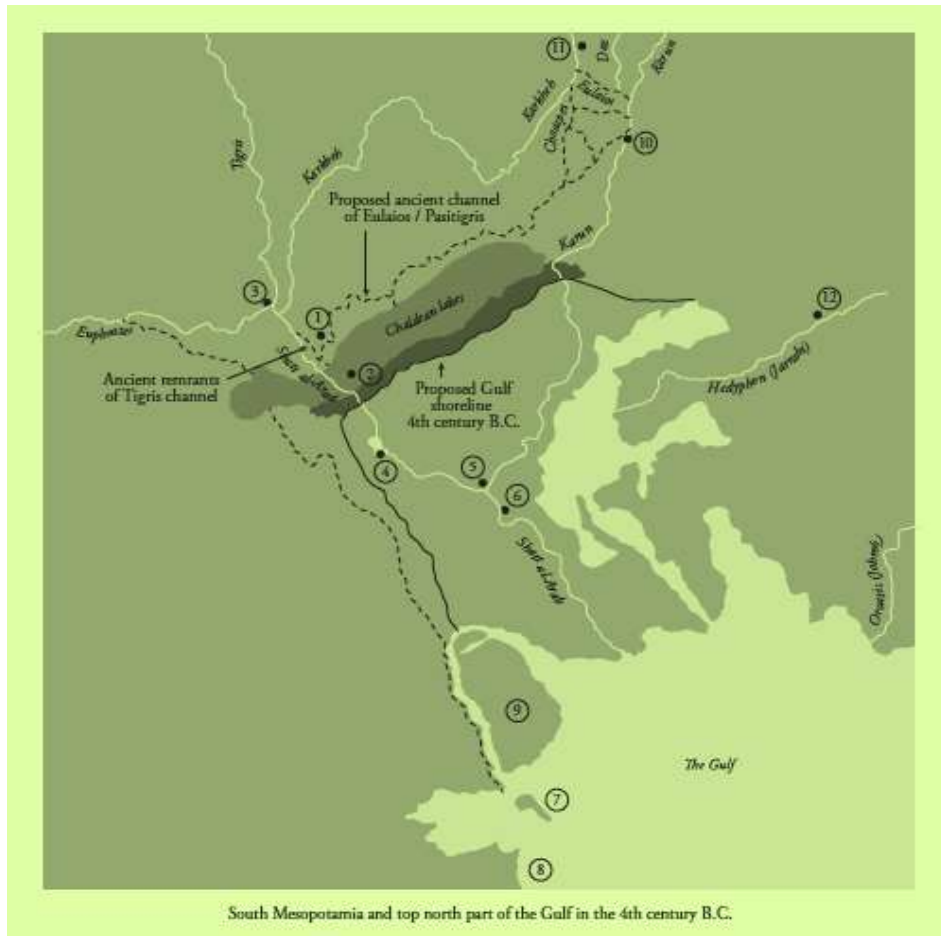


The Waterways in South Mesopotamia

The sea shore of the Gulf during the time of Alexander(4 century B.C.) was much more to the north than what it is today.The Euphrates was discharging by its own separate mouth close to the village of Diritodis (Teredon), about 20 km north of Ikaros (Failaka). Most rivers of Southern Mesopotamia were all flowing into the Chaldean lakes (The Marshes North of Basra today) and from there by their separate mouths to the Gulf.The Tigris and the combined water flow of (Ulaya/Eulaios/Choaspes/Karun/Karkebcch /Pasitigris) were flowing into the lakes and(Shatt Al-Arab today) and from there to the Gulf.The lakes were separated from the sea by a strip of marshy and swampy mud-waters⁽¹²⁾, Later on, during the 2nd and 1st centuries B.C., the Euphrates joined the Tigris at Shatt al- Arab and both started discharging water in a combined stream into the sea⁽¹³⁾.

The Chaldean lakes, at some stage, dried outDuring that period, there was no distinct shoreline and it was gradually reduced to today's boundaries after being in constant change due to the tidal effects and the recurrent seasonal floods.

A map of the proposed shoreline and flow of rivers and water channels in that period is shown below:

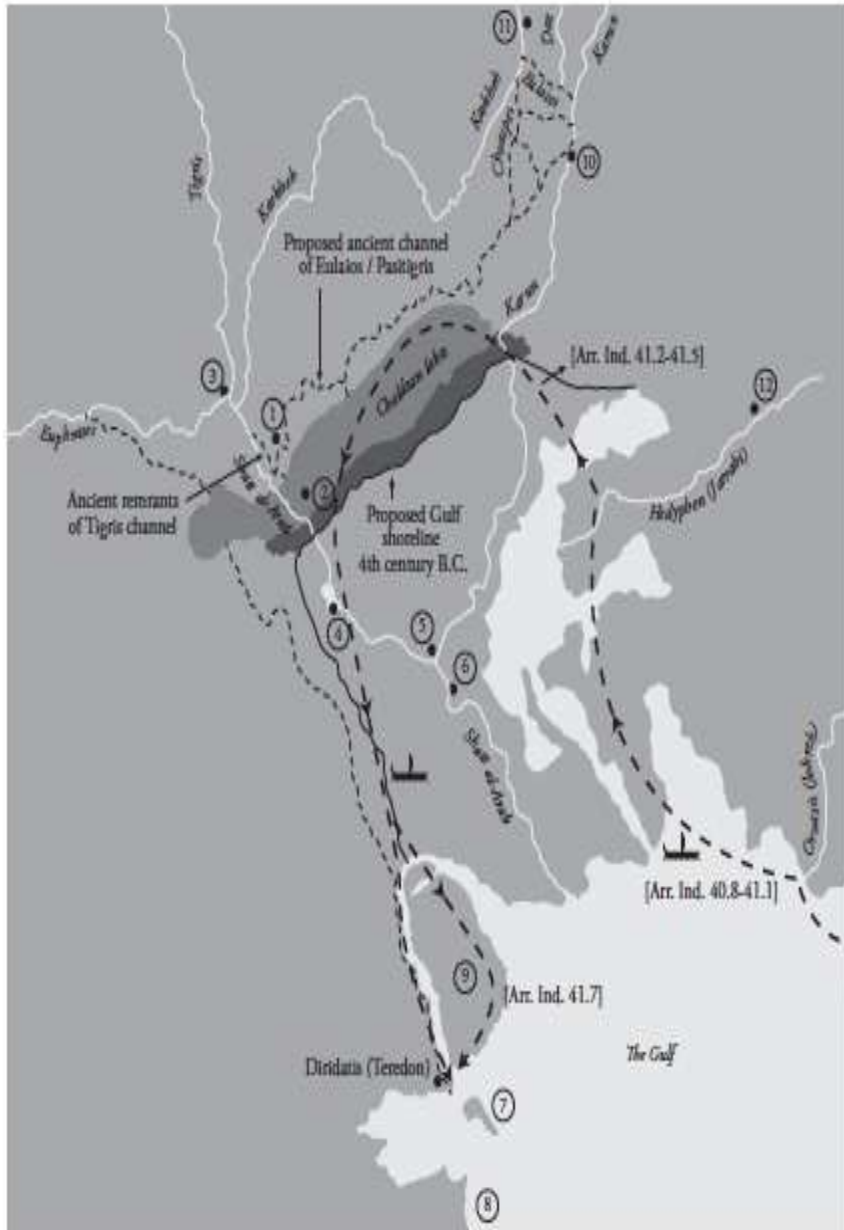


- | | |
|---|---|
| ① Ancient Alexandria - Antiochia - Spasinou Charax /
Modern Naïsan - Al-Khayaber | ----- Proposed ancient rivers and water channels
4th century B.C. |
| ② Forat | ● Proposed Chaldean lakes |
| ③ Qarna | — Proposed Gulf shoreline 4th century B.C. |
| ④ Basra | — Modern rivers and water channels |
| ⑤ Khorramshahr | ● Proposed marshes |
| ⑥ Abadan | |
| ⑦ Ikaros | |
| ⑧ Kuwait city | |
| ⑨ Bubiyan island | |
| ⑩ Aschwaz | |
| ⑪ Susa (Seleukeia on the Eulaios) | |
| ⑫ Seleukeia on the Hedyphon | |
| | - - - - Total Nearchos voyage
on the Susian coastline
2000 stadia
[Arr. Ind. 42.4] |

The Greek Naval Activities in South Mesopotamia

Nearchos and his navy were ordered to sail from India to the straits of Hormuz and along the Persian side of the Gulf until they reached the mouth of the Euphrates opposite Ikaros island. Then, they turned back and met Alexander with his army at Ahwaz and all together sailed up the Eulaios(Eulaeus river) to Susa. The reuniting of the Greek forces occurred in March 334 B.C ⁽¹⁴⁾. Most probably the army consisted of 25,000 infantry and 5,000 cavalry, and Because of the environmental conditions and the limited ability of the army to live off from the conquered lands in Arabia, the navy was entrusted the important task of food supply ⁽¹⁵⁾.

Alexander and Heaphastion with the army, sailed down the Gulf and after identifying the place where Alexandria on the Tigris was to be built they sailed up the Tigris until they reached Opis city. The rivers, waterways and irrigation canals of Babylonia were closely inspected and improved in order to facilitate commercial and military navigation ⁽¹⁶⁾. Archias, Androsthene and Hieron explored the Gulf especially its Arab side and reported their findings as part of the plans to colonize the Gulf and conquer Arabia ⁽¹⁷⁾; Most probably the islands Ikaros and Tylos and the other anchorages along the Arabian coast were intended to serve as resupply bases ⁽¹⁸⁾. The expedition against Arabia was interrupted by Alexander's sudden death and it involved a navy of probably double the size of Alexander's first Babylon fleet.



Nearchos coastal trip at the top of the Gulf on his return from India

Alexander built two new cities in South-eastern Mesopotamia, Alexandria on the Tigris and Alexandria on the Euphrates or in Babylonia(near Uruk). Alexander established Alexandria on the Tigris with settlers from the city of Durine and Greece but mostly Macedonian wounded soldiers from his victorious army who resided in their own *demos* called Pellaem after his hometown Pella in Macedonia

"...it is situated upon a Mount artificially raised between the Confluence of Tigris on the right Hand and Eulseus on the left: with an Expansion of three Miles. It was first founded by Alexander the Great; who, having drawn Colonists out of the royal City Durine (which then was ruined), and leaving there behind him those Soldier which were not fit for service, ordained that this Town should be called Alexandria⁽¹⁹⁾.

Alexandria(on the Tigris) was founded with the purpose of controlling commercial and military navigation from the Gulf to Babylonia and Susiana. It was intended to become the commercial, naval and military center of South-eastern Mesopotamia. Day by day the repeated flooding destroyed the city and it was rebuilt by Antiochos IV and renamed Antiochia in 160 B.C⁽²⁰⁾.

The city became the capital of the Seleucid district of the Erythrean Sea(Arab/Persian Gulf) and later on the capital of Characene (Mesene) known by the name CharaxSpasinou. At the completion of the restored port (in 166/65 b.c.e.) Antiochus appointed Hyspaosines, son of a certain Sardodonacus, as governor (*eparch*) of Antiochia and its surrounding district⁽²¹⁾. Both of these names were Hellenized Persian forms, and we may deduce from this that the family of Hyspaosines was of Persian background or may be Aramaic⁽²²⁾.

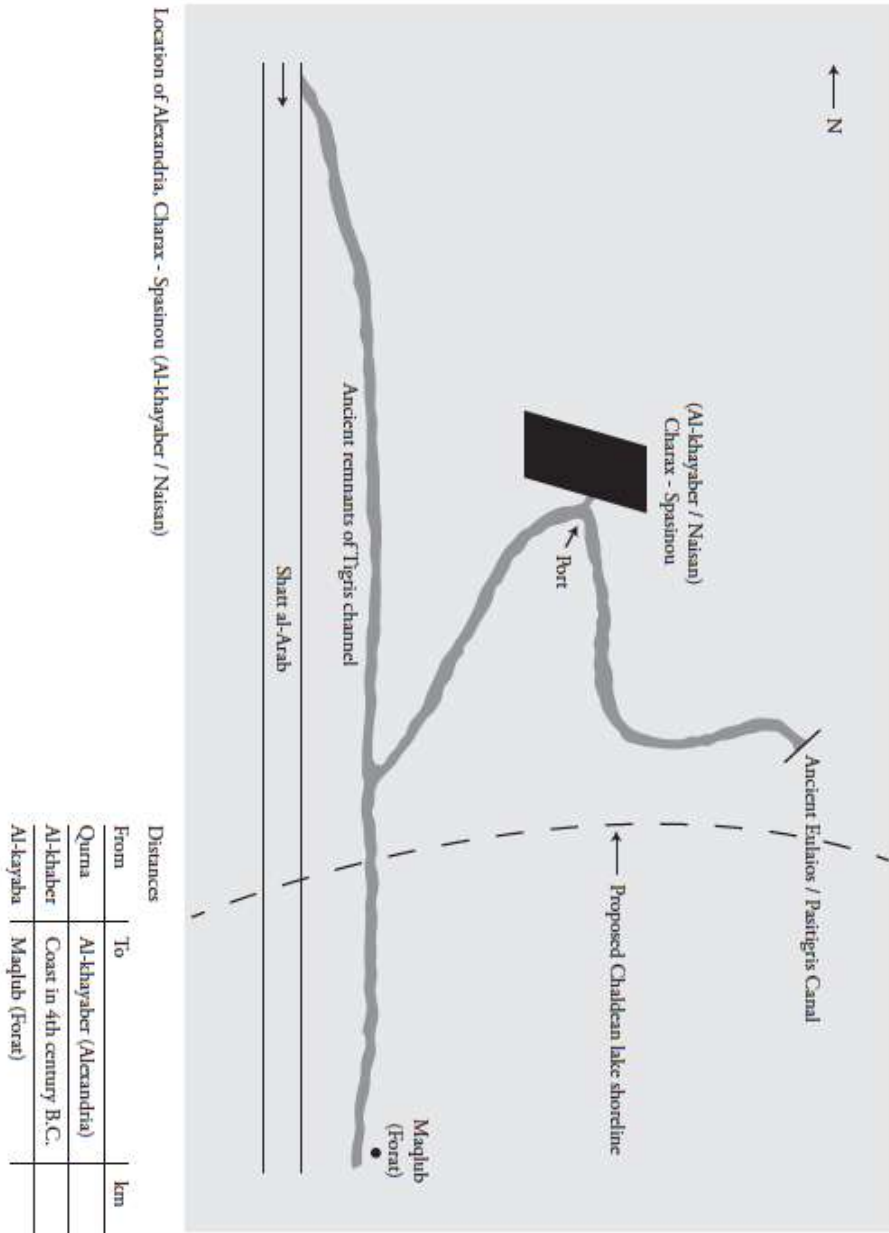
According to Arrian, Alexander also founded Alexandria on the Euphrates. The new foundation which was intended not only as an outpost towards Arabia but also to control trade and communications along the Euphrates; The foundation process was similar to Alexandria on the Tigris, the city was fortified and settled with people from the neighboring region and Greek mercenaries and old or wounded soldiers from the army⁽²³⁾.

Alexandria-Antiochia-CharaxSpasinou is located next to an ancient channel of the combined flow of Eulaios/ Karkeh/ Choaspes and Karun rivers called Eulaios/ Pasitigris which was intersecting the old Tigris water flow ,it was located some 20 km south of Shat al-Arab and a couple of km from the proposed Chaldean shoreline during the 4th century B.C. The modern name of the city isJabalKhayaber⁽²⁴⁾.



The ancient site of Alexandria – Antiochia – CharaxSpasinou
Satellite pictures from www.bing.com

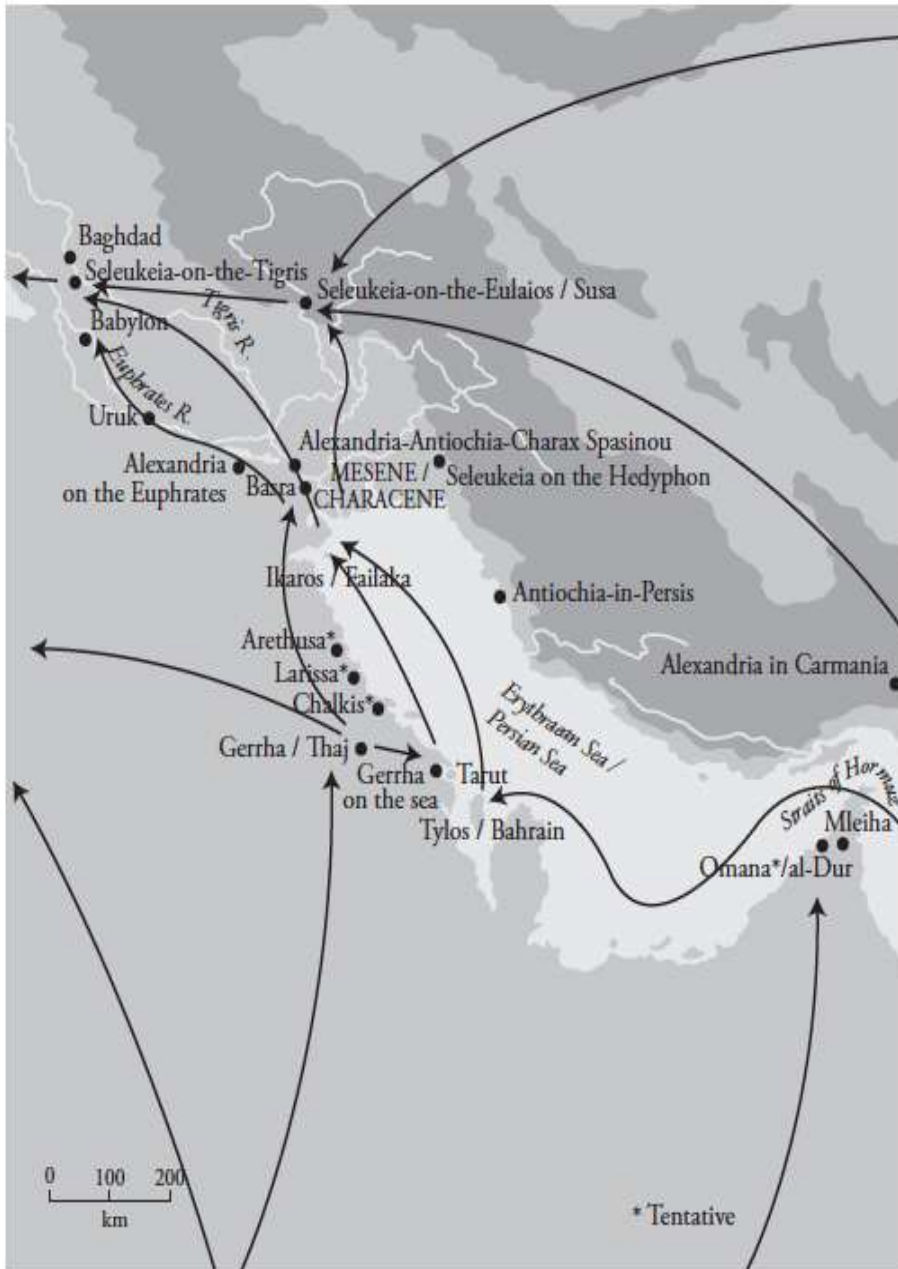




Alexander's and later on the Seleucid intention in the Gulf and South-eastern Mesopotamia was to control the trade from Arabia and India, there were two types of trading routes: by land and by sea. The primary land route from India was from Central Asia, the Zagros mountains and Ekbatana(Hamadan)⁽²⁵⁾ to Seleukeia on the Eulaios and then Seleukeia on the Tigris(The Capital) to the Mediterranean. The other one was through Dragiana (Sistan in modern Iraq), Karmania and Persis .The trade from south Arabia reached the Mediterranean by a direct land route along the western coast of the Arabian peninsula.

A second route was through the caravan route to Gerrha and from there either by sea or by land transported to Babylonia and Seleukeia on the Tigris and from there to Mediterranean.

A third land route was to Mleiha and al- Dur In the northern Emirates and from there by sea to the northern top region of the Gulf. The sea route through the Gulf used communication lines through Tylos , Ikaros, Alexandria- Antiochia - CharaxSpasinou and from there through the Tigris to Seleukeia on the Tigris or the Euphrates toThapsakos and from there to the Mediterranean⁽²⁶⁾.



Trading routes at the Gulf during the Hellenistic Period

It was in the interest of the Seleucids to divert and control as much of the trade through their territory. They, therefore, established a maritime empire in the Gulf on which they had based their domination of the region; The Seleucid naval infrastructure in the Gulf was supported by fortified garrisons on islands and suitable anchorages.

From the available evidence, the interior land was dominated by indigenous populations and trading centers (e.gGerrha) while the coast and the islands were Hellenized to a certain degree under imperial control and domination⁽²⁷⁾.

A maritime district “ Tylos and the islands” was formed with command headquarters at Tylos administered by a Greek Strategos . The Tylos naval administration was reporting the eparch at Alexandria-Antiochia-CharaxSpasinou or the Characene king⁽²⁸⁾.

Antiochia in Persis(Bushir peninsula) was another important naval center from where Antiochos III started his campaign against Gerrha.Furthermore, Numenios⁽²⁹⁾ re-established Seleucid control at the straits of Hormuz which was most probably established initially by Nearchos and Alexander The Great⁽³⁰⁾.



The Hellenistic Gulf

Abbreviations of Ancient sources

Arr Arrian

Curt..... Quintus Curtius Rufus

Polyb.....Polypius

Notes

- 1- Parpas (2014) pp. 161-163.
- 2- Austin (2006) p. 39 .
- 3- Kuhrt (2010) pp.447-448.
- 4- freeman(2011) p 188.
- 5- Arr. 7. 19.5
- 6-Arr. Ind., 32.6-37.10, Arr. ,7.25.2-5
- 7- Curt.,10.1.19
- 8- Arr.,7.19.4
- 9- Arr.,7.19.4
- 10- Arr.,7.19.4
- 11- Pliny. 6.31.138
- 12- Potts(1999) p. 28 .
- 13- Cole and Gasche (2007), pp. 9-14, p53 .
- 14- Heckel (2003) . p. 232 .
- 15- Hammond (1998) p. 34 .
- 16- Arr. 7,7 , 381 .
- 17- Arr 20, 410 .
- 18- Pliny 6, 28, pp. 147-148.
- 19- Pliny 6, 31.138
- 20- Ibid , 138 .
- 21- Ibid , 139 .
- 22-Hansman (1967). P22
- 23- Arr7,21.7
- 24- Khayaber is an Arabic word , it's mean (fortresses) , it's the same meaning of Aramic(Charax / Karkha)
- 25-Capital of median state 720 B.C - 550B.C
- 26- Pottes(2009) , p 41.
- 27- Polyp , 13, 9. 1-5.
- 28- Kosmin (2013) , p5 .
- 29- Governor of Mesen kingdom .
- 30- kosmin, Op cit , p.7 .

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- www.bing.com/maps/#