

Iranians, Pioneers of Navigation in the Persian Gulf

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After conquering the territories on the banks of Sind river in India, Alexander from Macedonia wished to cross Sind through sea and reached Oman Sea and Persian Sea, and perhaps toyed with the idea of conquering territories of Arabia, Yemen and Africa. That is he ordered Ne'arak, his commander and admiral, to embark on what he thought to be an exploratory voyage with enough soldiers and sailing ships, and to go from Sind river to Hormuz Strait, hence to Persian Gulf waters and then join his army in Abadan. Perhaps imitating [Darius](#), Alexander intended that when Ne'arak had covered this route, to send him to Red Sea and Africa along the same route that had been covered by Scylax Cariana, the Darius' commander. It should be mentioned here that according to many researchers, Alexander from Macedonia had never traveled to Iran.

In the book "Mer'at-ul-Baldan," Sani-ul-Dowlah writes that Alexander, by sending Ne'arak to this Sea voyage, intended to accurately study the coasts of Baluchestan, Kerman and Fars, and to see whether or not it was possible to establish trade relations with Iran and India through Egypt. Perhaps, Alexander intended to accurately know the countries he had conquered and their borders that had extended as far as the sea. In any case, Ne'arak began his voyage on October 2, 326 BC, coinciding with 11th year of the reign of Alexander, with 32 big vessels and several small ships for carrying provisions, as well as 2000 soldiers and after 146 days of adventurous journey docked in Karoon river in Ahwaz. Of course Ne'arak has written a description of his sea voyage in a travel diary. Its original is destroyed, and its summary has remained in a book entitled "Alexander's mobilization," written by a Greek historian in one century BC, compiled from Ne'arak's writings.

Foreign writers always introduce Alexander from Macedonia, as a pioneer in identification of waterways from Sind river as far as Persian Gulf, and consider his commander and admiral Ne'arak as the discoverer of these ways. But as regards the views expressed by foreigners, a contemporary researcher of our country writes: "This group of political historians, i.e., Lord Curyon, Arnold Wilson, Belgrave and Francis Arskin Lock have included historical falsehoods so tactfully and so cleverly among their writings that even some fair-minded researcher as John Marlow are led astray, because he says that Alexander from Macedonia was the first person who embarked on sea exploration and identification of Pars Sea."

It is surprising that Arnold Wilson, when discussing pioneers and discoverers of waterways of Persian Gulf is suffering from a kind of amnesia, and points out that the first person who has identified the unknown ways of Persian Gulf was Alexander from Macedonia.

Marking of Seas by Iranians

The route followed or, so to speak, discovered by Nesark in Persian Gulf, as alleged by foreign writers, had been followed and marked by Iranians two hundred years before his entry in Persian Gulf. The evidence in support of this claim is that centuries before

Nesark's entry in Persian Gulf, Iranians had installed some marks along the coasts and ports and in the islands of the Persian Gulf to guide ships and boats and particularly, to prevent floating objects from being drowned at night. These marks proved highly effective in protecting buoys and floating objects and preventing pirates and enemies' surprise attacks on coasts. It is unjust to say that a nation which was pioneer among other countries in the matter of navigation, and which had covered from Hormuz Strait up to Abadan by means of big wooden poles and lighthouses did not know its own waterways, and was waiting for Alexander's admiral to come from the other part of the world and recognize its waterways which the nation itself sailed every day by means of ships and boat and where it searched for pearls and caught fish! The fact is that centuries before the entry of Nesark or any other colonialist in waters of our country, Iranian navigators and fishermen knew Persian Gulf just as well as they knew their own palms, and had identified and discovered waters of their own territories.

Four Pioneering Navigators

While describing rare events and happenings of five centuries BC, historians mention four daring and pioneering navigators, none of whom were geographers but were, in fact, tourist explorers and adventurers. According to George Sarten, the purpose of their journey was political and economic problems, but the results obtained increased man's knowledge about the surface of the earth. The existence of the four navigators and the purpose of their journey seem to be plausible, but it is not certain whether or not the voyage has actually taken place. Then the writer introduces four ancient navigators. Two of them by the names of Scylax and Sataspes were Iranians, and the other two called Hannon and Himilcon were from Cartage, who were allies of Iran and acted against Greece. That is because there were fierce competitions over colonies of the Mediterranean Sea between the Greek on the one hand and Phoenicians and Cartagians on the other.

Carindian Scylax, the Most Ancient Iranian Navigator

[Herodotus](#), the famous historian, who lived during the period 325-484 BC, has, before other historians, made some interesting remarks about the exploratory voyage of Carindian Scylax, the commander of Darius, the Great, that had been effected in 512, that is two centuries before Nesark entered the Persian Gulf, Herodotus' remarks nullify the confusing statements made by foreign writers about Nesark's sea explorations in the Persian Gulf. According to Herodotus, the major part of the continent of Asia was discovered during the reign of Darius, the [Achaemenian](#) king. Professor Hadi Hassan, the Indian scholar quotes Herodotus' saying as follows:

"The major part of Asia was discovered under the rule of Darius. Wishing to know where Sind river joins the sea, Darius sent two of his trusted friends whose reports he could rely on, to sea voyage together with Scylax from Carindia. They started from Kaspatirus and Baktis territory and after crossing the river set out for sea. In the sea they turned toward the west and after 30 months reach the Suez Canal where the king of Egypt had dispatched Phoenicians to explore around Libya. Upon their return Darius triumphed over Indians and began to travel and move along the sea."

Herodotus' writings which have been translated into Persian by Iranian researchers show that 200 years prior to Nesark's entry in Persian Gulf, Darius had issued the order for investigation of waterways from estuary of Sind river to the Persian Gulf, and from this sea to Suez Canal and finally round Africa. Two centuries after Darius, Alexander assigned Nesark with the task of investigating the region with due regard to the route taken by Scylax, the commander of Darius; it is certain that the path covered and the time spent on this exploratory voyage are several times more than the path and the time spent by Nesark, the commander of Alexander; on covering the route from the estuary of Sind river to Karoon river, George Sarten's saying about Scylax' voyage can be understood from Darius' inscription which is installed at the Suez Canal at the time of digging of the canal. The inscription indicates that Darius had a canal dug between the Nile river and Red Sea, so that Iranian ships could pass through it. Hence Scylax' trip to that region seems to be logical.

It is to be remembered that there used to be doubts about Herodotus' writing and Scylax' trip, and it was believed that such a trip had not been undertaken and there was nobody by this name. Later, with due regard to Aristotle's view in "Politics," doubts were dispelled. It is said in the book "Ancient Iran" that it was imagined that the first person to send a mission for sea research was Alexander. But later the veracity of Herodotus' narration was proved, because it came to be known that Scylax has written his travel diary, and Aristotle has referred to it. According to Herodotus, it should be said that this mission passed through Sind river, the border of Baluchestan and Mokran of today, then, from the border of Arabia and Bab-ul-Mandab, they entered the Red Sea, then on to the lower Egypt through a canal dug by the order of Darius, and from there to the Maghreb (western) Sea.

Professor Grischman, the French archaeologist, who headed the mission of archaeologist excavators in Susa and Chogazanbil and Persepolis for years and who made valuable discoveries, believes that the Persian Gulf waterway had been recognized for years. Achaemenians knew this way very well, and Scylax who was in the service of Darius, built a lighthouse on Sind river and was assigned with the task of finding the way to Egypt through the Red Sea. He fulfilled this mission by 30 months navigation, and the great task was accomplished by means of digging of Suez Canal.

A Seaman Called Sataspes

After the legendary trip of Scylax, an Iranian, which had begun two centuries before Nesark, Alexander's commander began his journey. The second Iranian navigator who started his journey courageously round Africa, was Sataspes, the Achaemenian. According to Herodotus' narrative, Sataspes, which is the Greek pronunciation of the Persian word "hundred horses," was Darius' nephew. As he had kidnapped the daughter of a nobleman, so he was condemned to death. But his mother implored Xerxes to change his punishment and instead to sentence him to another one which she considered heavier, and force him to go round Africa on to Persian Gulf. Xerxes accepted this suggestion, and Sataspes went to Egypt, took some ships and seamen from Egyptians, set sail, and after a length of time of navigation, turned round to African cape of Soloeis and sailed southward, and after several months when he had still a long way to go, returned to

Egypt.

Upon his return from the trip, he reported to Xerxes that he had seen some dwarfs who made their clothes out of palm leaves and that whenever he and his men went ashore, they fled to mountains. He also reported that when he and his men went on shore, they did not do any injustice, and only took whatever they needed from the natives. Yet Xerxes had him killed because he had not completed his task.

Although Herodotus describes the historical trip of Sataspes, the Achaemenian briefly, yet in George Sarten's opinion, the account quoted by Herodotus contains interesting points. Firstly, that Sataspes' mother talks explicitly about navigation round Africa and considers it to be difficult; secondly, according to this anecdote, Sataspes took ships and seamen from Egypt or Phoenicians, as at that time there were trade relations between these two nations, and Phoenician vessels had sailed along the Nile since the time of Totmus; the third point is how far Sataspes advanced along west coast of Africa. It seems that after passing through Soloeis he advanced for several months till he reached a point that ships could not go any farther, and stopped there. Had he reached a windless equatorial region at the same latitude as the Green Cape, or that the warm winds and the northward sea current on the coast of Guinea stopped him? One of the reasons that supports the thesis that he had reached the coast of Guinea is his saying that there were some dwarfs whose clothes were palm leaves. In any case even if he had advanced farther than this point, for instance up to the latitude of 10 degrees north, he was still far from his destination. It is certain, however, that our predecessors could not fathom the grandeur of the continent of Africa, as it is.

It should be said that George Sarten, at the end of his account of the navigation and travels of Hannon, the Cartagian, and comparing it with that of Sataspes of Iran, refers to a very important point as follows: "Hannon has covered almost up to 2600 miles of west coast of Africa, and has perhaps gone as far as Palmas. Has Hannon gone farther southward than Sataspes did? This is possible, but not much importance should be attached to it. In any case both these navigators or at least one of them could recognize the coasts of north west Africa. In order to understand the importance of their feats, it should be remembered that Portuguese navigators accomplished this task in the middle of fifteenth century, and no one has exceeded the limits of these two ancient navigators."

The Iranian Sataspes' Treatment of the Natives

Although Herodotus sometimes deviates from truth or suffers from prejudice, yet he should be praised for having written an account about the Iranian Scylax and Sataspes. The little account he has left behind, is the source of pride of Iranians among other nations, and by recounting the voyages of these two great Iranian navigators, he has both made his name eternal among navigators of the world, and has also honored and exalted Iranians for having such great navigators.

As is inferred from writings and memories of navigators of the centuries after the birth of Jesus Christ, the brave Iranian navigators sailed in Persian seas and the Indian Ocean and reached the lowest points in east Africa.

On the other hand, the same Iranian navigators, with their handmade sail ships, traveled to coasts of Pakistan, India and China and returned safely. It may have often happened that they had covered longer distances than those covered by Scylax and Sataspes and returned safely, without having left behind any memories and writings about those trips. But one interesting point about Herodotus' account, which is more or less overlooked in accounts of George Sarten and others, is the chivalry and good treatment of "hundred horses", the ancient Iranian navigator, which is seldom seen in the accounts concerning Nesark and other foreign navigators. Regarding the time when Sataspes and his companions reached the coast of Guinea, and encountered native dwarfs, Herodotus writes: "Whenever Sataspes and his men approached the coast, the people used to flee to mountains, but when he and his men landed they did not do any injustice, and only they took food they needed from the natives." But as regards Nesark's encounter with natives, a historian writes quoting Nesark: "When we got to the mouth of Tomirus river, the inhabitants upon seeing our ships, took up arms, were mobilized and waited for the war to begin. When I noticed this boldness I kept away my ships far from the shore out of their reach, and ordered the soldiers to land. When they landed, they attacked the natives. I showed the same treatment toward Baluchis, killed some of them and captured others." Nesark's memoirs about the trip to coasts and ports are also full of such unchivalrous killings, plunders and kidnapping.