ANCIENT TRADING CENTRES OF THE PERSIAN GULF.

By Captain ARTHUR W. STIFFE, R.I.M.

II. KAYS, OR AL-KAYS.

This island, the successor of Siráf and predecessor of Hormuz as an emporium of trade between the West and East, lies off the Persian coast of the Persian Gulf, from which it is separated by a fine navigable strait 9 miles wide. It is of low appearance and convex profile, rising gradually from a rocky shore to a height of 120 feet above the sea in the centre. The length from east to west is 8½, and its breadth 4½ geographical miles. It contains at the present day many small villages, and a large one called Máshi, standing on the north-east corner, lat. 26° 34′ N., long. 54° 2′ E. Máshi is inhabited by about 500 Arabs of the Al 'Ali tribe, who are all pearl-fishers, and send out a large number of boats to the banks, which lie off the Arab coast. It is built of the usual Arab houses of mats made of the stalk of the date fronds, with two square masonry castles, and is nearly a mile in length along the beach. The other villages are also inhabited by Arab pearl-fishers, but have only a few boats each. There is some cultivation, especially on the north coast, with scattered small plantations of date and other fruit trees. On the island also are large flocks of sheep and goats, and some cattle. The interior of the island is rocky and barren, sparsely grown with stunted shrubs and herbage, on which the flocks feed. We visited the island several times in 1837 during the survey. This island, in common with all the others in the Gulf, suffered severely from the depredations of the Joasmi pirate Arabs in the beginning of the century, when they were mostly depopulated, and have been only gradually reoccupied since the establishment of British supremacy. It now belongs to Persia, and was then subject to the chief of Chárek.

Near the centre of the north coast are the extensive ruins, now known to the people of the island as Harira, of the old city, once the head-quarters of the trade with the East. They extend half a mile along the shore, and consist chiefly of mere mounds of stones and fragments of masonry, and the ground is strewn with fragments of pottery and Chinese porcelain, of which latter I have placed some in the British Museum. Of the large mosque some remains exist. A fine minaret of well-cut stone, which was standing only a few years before our visit, lay in heaps of ruin. The fallen pillars of the mosque lay around just as they had fallen; they were of cut stone, octagonal in section, and the several courses had a hole through the centres, evidently for the purpose of dowelling them together. There are several large water-cisterns of oblong shape, which had been roofed in, but the arched roofs had fallen in, partially filling up the cisterns with the débris. Two of these measured each 150 feet by 40, and
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were still 24 feet deep. They were lined with masonry inside, and cemented. Near these begun a fine kanát,* or subterranean aqueduct, of better execution than those generally seen at the present day. It was cut in the solid rock, and carried at a depth of 20 feet or more from the surface; there were about forty shafts, 15 to 20 yards apart, so that its length was nearly half a mile. Four of these shafts (see sketch) had steps cut in the rock, 4 feet wide, to descend by. There were twenty-three steps in one that I descended. The bottom of this aqueduct was partly choked with rubbish, and there was no water in it. The pointed vault over the steps, cut out of the rock, was 9 feet high.

There are ruins of smaller extent at other points on the north coast of the island. We could not find or hear of any inscriptions, or of coins being found. The stone of the island is not very durable—a coarse shelly calcareous breccia of probably late Tertiary age.

The ruins are thus much less extensive than those at Siráf (Tahiri); indeed, the prosperity of the city was, as we shall see, not of long duration. The plan shows the position of the town, and the sketch one of the staircases leading to the kanát. As there is no harbour in the island, the anchorages being open to one or other of the prevailing winds, the “ships” were probably hauled up on the beach, or inside the reef, as they seem to have been of small burden; or, in certain seasons, they may have anchored off the north-east point, which is a safe anchorage except in the winter easterly gales.

Of the history of this place, only scanty fragments have been handed down to us. Sir W. Ouseley† relates a curious legend which he considers, on the authority of a Persian manuscript, may be assigned to the tenth century, as to the first settlement on the island. It sets forth how one Kais, a son of a poor widow of Siráf, embarked for India

* A kanát is made by sinking a line of pits to the water-level, and connecting them at the bottom by short tunnels, the bottom being slightly inclined to allow the water to flow along it.

with his sole property, a cat. He arrived there at a time when the king's palace was so infested by mice or rats, that they invaded the king's dinner-table, and persons were employed to drive them from the royal banquet. Kais produced his cat, the noxious animals soon disappeared, and magnificent rewards were bestowed on the adventurer of Siráf, who returned to that city, and afterwards, with his mother and brothers, settled on the island, which from him has been denominated Kais, and so on. I doubt whether much importance can be attached to this myth, which may possibly be the original of the similar English tale.

The island is not mentioned in Ebn Haukal's geography (middle of tenth century), and the earliest reference to it which I have been able to find is in the Sefer Nameh,* where the name only of the island is given in the text, but in a note the learned translator says, "Ibn Moujávir;† in his 'Tarikh Mostanssery,' has a chapter on the island. He says it is of 3 square farsangs, abounds in date trees and plantations of Garazh" (probably the hardy acacia called Gháf at the present day), "the property of the king. It is sufficient to make a hole with the hands in the sand to obtain fresh and pure water. A subterranean canal" (see description, ante), "dug by the kings at a former period, runs through the garden of the prince, fed by water coming from springs and streams, and it fills the reservoirs. The houses in stone and plaster are very high, as much as seven stories;‡ and each one is a fortress." The island owes its name, "according to some, to Qais-ibn-Moulawah, others to Imr-el-Qais, but the most correct is that which attributes it to Qais-ibn-Zobair. The prince of Qais has neither cavalry nor infantry; all the people of the island are mariners. They eat only fish pounded (pilé) with dates. The king has a monopoly of building stone (grès) and bamboos."

Rabbi Benjamin, of Tudela.§ (A.D. 1164 to 1173), apparently visited the island, but his account is not very intelligible, as he was not a geographer. It appears he sailed from the Tigris, "which runs into the Indian sea, or Persian Gulf, and passes the island Nikrokis." This name has given rise to various conjectures. One commentator explains it Nikra = called, Kis = name of island; however this may be, it is doubtless meant for that place. He says the island is six days' journey in extent (an exaggeration); has only one canal of fresh water, and they gather water during rain in cisterns; the land is not cultivated; and he goes on to say, "This island is famous for commerce with India and the

† This author, whose full name was Jemal-ed-dín Abul-Fath-ibn-Yakoub-el-Dimicheuy, composed a treatise of geography in 1226-42, dedicated to the Kaliphah Abu-Jafar-Mansur-Mostansser. I give the abstract of M. Schefer's quotation here, although, in point of time, the author is later than Yakut.
‡ Such high buildings of many stories may be seen at the present day, as at Linga; they are an Arab type of building.
§ Kerr's Collection.
islands of the Indian sea and Sennar (China?), Arabia, and Persia. The traveller thence went to Katif, and so on to India and Ceylon."

I have not been able to discover the date of the original settlement of this place, but conjecture there was some settlement here from the Arab coast before 1100 A.D., and that it grew into predominance when Siraf was abandoned, as I have elsewhere suggested, after 1200 A.D. Yakut al Rumi, whose book \(^*\) dates from 1218 A.D., refers to it as a fine and picturesque island surrounded with gardens and houses. He continues, "In this isle are the vessels which trade with India; there are numerous cisterns supplied by rain-water, and good, well-stocked bazaars. It is the residence of the King of Oman, who is respected by the sovereigns of India on account of his naval strength and riches, and all the neighbouring isles belong to Kisch. His features are Persian, and costume that of Deilim." (a port in the north-east angle of the head of the gulf). He also mentions the pearl fisheries. It is stated that Yakut personally visited this place, as also Siraf, which latter he found almost deserted.

Edrisi,† whose book dates from the latter half of the thirteenth century, states that the trade of Sohar with China sea "has now ceased." Sohar is in the Arabian country of Oman, formerly of importance, and still existing as a port. He assigns the following as a reason: "A certain governor of Yemen possessed himself of an island called Kish, in the centre of the Persian Gulf, and opposite to Maskat"—this is not

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\(^*\) *Dictionnaire geogr. de la Perse, from Yaqout.* By C. Carbier de Meynard. 1861.

correct—"fortified and peopled it, and equipped a fleet, by means of which he became master of the littoral of Yemen. He did much damage to trade and merchants, plundering them so that the commerce was diverted to Aden. With his fleet he ravaged the coasts of Zenj (Zanzibar) and Ghamran. The inhabitants of India fear him, but resist him with vessels called el-Mechiat, which, although made of a single piece of wood, are capable of carrying up to two hundred men." Large canoes, carrying about thirty men, are at the present day in use at some places on the Arab coast, but the above number is doubtless an exaggeration.

The account then continues, "The governor of Kish is reported to have fifty of these vessels, all of one piece, besides many others. He still continues his depredations, and is very rich. At Kish are cultivated fields, cattle, sheep, vines, and pearl fisheries." The account, however, gives the distance of the isle from Sohar as two days' sail, and one from Maskat, which is incorrect.

Abulfeda, in his geography (translated by M. Reinaud, 1848), which dates from 1273 to 1331 A.D., mentions the island, "between Ind and Basrah," also the pearl fishery, and says there are many orchards and palm trees and water in wells, and that "the people are well brought up and behaved;" but he says nothing about the town or the trade.

The account of Ibn Batuta (1325–54 A.D.) is to me unintelligible, except on the assumption that he confuses Siraf and Kais, and has compiled a description from other sources than personal knowledge.

Sir W. Ouseley (op. cit.), who went up the Persian Gulf in H.M.S. Lion, and anchored on the north side of the island, but did not land, says that Zakaria Casvini (who died in A.D. 1275) states that the town is of pleasing appearance, with a castle and many gates, gardens, and various structures, "so that it is one of the most delightful places in our time," and that the island was the resort of ships from Persia and Arabia for commercial purposes. Hamdallah Cazvini, a writer of the following century, mentions it in similar terms.

Further on, Ouseley states that Ahmad al Ghafari records that the prince of Hormuz (which town then stood on the mainland), Shehab-ad-din Ayáz, purchased the island of Gerun (Hormuz) from the kings of Kish, and began to build there about A.D. 1302.

This is confirmed by Mirkond's history,* where it is stated that the name of the king of Keys was Neyn, and that all the islands in the Gulf of Persia belonged then to Keys. This history, which was written before 1378 A.D., says that Keys, so called by the Arabs and Persians, is a small island, once the head of a kingdom, though now not inhabited, "since the trade has fallen off for fear of certain pyrates continually infesting that sea." It formerly had "all the trade that has since been removed to Harmuz." The building of the city on the island of

* The history of Persia, etc., to which is added an abridgment of the lives of the kings of Hormuz . . ., now rendered into English by Capt. Jno. Stevens, 1715.
“Harmuz” is given as 1302, under King Ayaz. The next king of Hormuz, Gordon Shah, was soon at war with Neyn, king of Kais; he was assisted by the governor of Shiráž, and after varying fortunes Kais was reduced to subjection about 1320 under his successor, Mir-sha-Kodbadin, from which date I can find no mention of it, so that it may be presumed to have lapsed into insignificance.

I take the following information from Hammer-Purgstall,* referring to an earlier war with Hormuz. He begins by stating that the most brilliant of the conquests of Abubekr (the Attabeg king of Persia) is that of the island Kais, or Kish, and Bahrein. The first of these islands is called after Kais, one of three sons of Kaissar, a shipowner of Siráf, the haven and emporium of the Southern Persian coast. [Then follows the story of the cat, nearly as already given.] The sons of the widow became mighty shipowners, and extended their operations to the coasts of India, etc. They built on Kais a great palace, which they called Aferide, and which rivalled the palace of Adhad-ed-Doulat at Naband,† and the Hall of Columns, attributed to the same person, at Siráf. The Khalifah, Nassir-ed-dín-illah, gave them the lordship of Kais with the title Sultan-ibn-al-Malik-Jamshíd. Thus the Beni-Kaissar, whose very existence, as well as that of the Beni-Amara in Fars, has escaped European historians, reigned on the island of Kais, until Seyf-ad-dín-Abu-Nadhr-Alí-bin-Kaikobad, the lord of the island Hormuz,‡ offered the Attabeg king of Fars his assistance in the conquest of Kais in A.D. 1229. The commanders of the GarmSír (the hot coast of Persia on the gulf) were ordered to subdue Kais, and the Malik Jamshíd was killed. This war is represented in Mirkhond’s history (vide ante) as a merely domestic war between Kais and the Hormuzians, which latter did not retain possession of the island, although it was overrun by them under Seyf-ad-dín, as already stated, at a later period.

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**DIAGRAM FOR THE PREDICTION OF OCCULTATIONS.**

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The diagram was designed for the purpose of obtaining rapidly, and with some degree of accuracy, the parallaxes in declination and right ascension of the

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* 'Geschichte der Heliane.' Von Hammer-Purgstall. Darmstadt: 1842. I have somewhat modified the German orthography, as in the cumbersome disch (the only way of expressing the sound in German).
† A village where there are many ruins, situated to eastward of Siráf.
‡ This is a mistake; Hormuz was not at that time on the island. I do not find the authorities given throughout in von Hammer’s history; it is doubtful in part from Wasáf.
§ Diagrams, p. 688. Separate copies of this paper with the diagrams mounted may be obtained by application at the Society’s rooms.