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## Was the VOC funding Mozart? The diaries of Wilhelm Buschman on Kharg Island

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### Abstract

This article considers the evidence for the business practices, goods traded, and accounts of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) upper merchant, Wilhelm Buschman, on Kharg Island in the Persian Gulf during the 1760s. Previous scholarship indicates that his widow, Anna Maria Pack, had a large inheritance, acquired on her death by her second husband, the VOC surgeon Ferdinand Dejean, who commissioned most of Mozart's flute works. A historical audit of Buschman's reports in this article reveals that the existence and source of most of that wealth was hidden from the official diaries which Buschman sent to the VOC headquarters in Batavia, on Java. The dwindling profits of the VOC, at a time of military turbulence involving Mir Mohanna, do not support Buschman's money originating from bribes even factoring in rake-offs. There is, however, evidence for a private, ring-fenced pearl trade on Kharg, which provides a good explanation. Pearls were not just jewels, but an ideal cryptocurrency for concealing, storing, selling, or shifting private wealth. The findings substantiate that it was possible for the VOC to lose out hugely to private enterprise, which was part of the culture among senior merchants. That wealth could do intercontinental economic damage. Occasionally, it was put to lasting good use.

**Keywords:** Dutch East India Company/VOC; Kharg; pearl trade; Mozart; Wilhelm Buschman; Ferdinand Dejean; Anna Pack; Mir Mohanna; uxorial inheritance; forensic audit

While seeking work in Mannheim in 1777, Mozart described in letters to his father, Leopold, that a 'Dutchman' named Dejean had commissioned what turned out to be the bulk of his solo flute works. This was Ferdinand Dejean, a surgeon in the Dutch East India Company (VOC).<sup>1</sup> His life story was published in detail recently,<sup>2</sup> with further analysis of the immediate source of his wealth which came from his wife,<sup>3</sup> whose first husband had died in Batavia.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie = United East India Company.

<sup>2</sup> Otto P. Bleker and Frank Lequin, *Ferdinand Dejean 1731–1797 VOC-chirurgijn, wereldburger en opdrachtgever van Mozart* (Wormer, 2013). A revised version in English is in preparation.

<sup>3</sup> Otto P. Bleker, 'Ferdinand Dejean (1731–97): surgeon of the Dutch East India Company, man of the Enlightenment, and patron of Mozart', *The Historian* 78 (Spring 2016), pp. 57–80, [https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Ferdinand+Dejean+\(1731-97\)%3A+Surgeon+of+the+Dutch+East+India+Company%2C...-a0449417196](https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Ferdinand+Dejean+(1731-97)%3A+Surgeon+of+the+Dutch+East+India+Company%2C...-a0449417196) (accessed 7 October 2022).

<sup>4</sup> There is a helpful chronology at <https://ferdinanddejean.jimdofree.com> (accessed October 2022) by Falk Steins, MA, to whom, along with Professor Otto Bleker, I am most grateful for advice and the kind sharing of sources.

There are three letters<sup>5</sup> to his father in which Mozart refers to a 200 guilder fee<sup>6</sup> agreed with Dejean for the commission. He mentions Dejean twice in an Asian context: ‘Unser indianer’ (our Indian), interestingly without thought of racial origin, and ‘Der wackerer Holländer’ (the courageous Dutchman),<sup>7</sup> echoing the perceived bravery of going out to Asia and surviving against the odds. That Mozart alluded to Asia in two separate letters says something of his sense of wonder about it, and he clearly liked ideas about Asia. In Mannheim one could see images of Asia personified in Turkish dress, with Frankenthal porcelain *Continents* decorating the Mannheim elector’s residence and the giant chancel statues of the Jesuitenkirche. That church was dedicated to Franz Xaver,<sup>8</sup> later the name the Mozarts gave to their youngest son. This dedication did not occur in the churches of Vienna or Salzburg,<sup>9</sup> so Mannheim is a potential source for this name in Mozart’s mind. He liked the acoustics of the Jesuitenkirche, which, when he visited, had a large ceiling fresco of St Franz Xaver evangelizing in India, and showing him washed ashore after a shipwreck.<sup>10</sup> Mozart stayed at the Mannheim elector’s Schwetzingen, where de Pigage had already begun the courtyard of the mosque, driven by aesthetics and the freemasons’ tolerant principle of belief in any supreme being. The stunning Chinese decorations of the Bath House had also been completed.<sup>11</sup> Five years later, Mozart composed *Zaide* and *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, evoking danger, rescue, and the Ottoman exotic. He composed *Mitridate re di Ponto* when he was 14 from a cast list and libretto based on Jean Racine. These were artistic, dramatic, and romantic ideals of a simplified Asia.

Dejean was unusual, but not alone, in putting uxorial inheritance into intellectual development. For example, Johan Mohr’s wife’s money from her late husband funded the building of a giant astronomical observatory in Batavia in 1765.<sup>12</sup> In his portrait,<sup>13</sup> Dejean is shown with two strong emblems of biblical judgement (Figure 1). This begs

<sup>5</sup> 10 December 1777, 27 December 1777, 4 February 1778, sourced at [dme.mozarteum.at/DME/briefe/doclist](https://dme.mozarteum.at/DME/briefe/doclist) (last accessed November 2020). The first letter mentioned three ‘small, easy and short’ concertos and a pair of quartets planned for Dejean.

<sup>6</sup> About £2,300 is the modern equivalent. 1 guilder (Dutch Republic currency) = 1 florin (VOC currency). Mozart wrote to his father on 14 February 1778 from Mannheim explaining that Dejean had paid 96 guilders for two concertos, (K. 313, K. 314) and three quartets (with the flute as the lead instrument, K. 285, K. 285a, K. 285b). He expected Dejean’s balance as agreed. <https://dme.mozarteum.at/DME/briefe/letter.php?mid=987&cat=> (accessed September 2022). The payment record dries up after that. Judging by their characters, it is hard to doubt that eventually the contract was mutually honoured. The concertos were long, not short, and Dejean got three, not two quartets. Mozart also wrote the Andante in C (K. 315), totalling six works for Dejean, albeit with his D major concerto (K. 314) being slightly modified and transposed from his concerto for oboe in C.

<sup>7</sup> Dejean was born in Bonn, which long misled historians about his full identity, first published in: F. Lequin, ‘Mozart’s rarer Mann’, *Mitteilung der internationalen Stiftung Mozarteum* 29.1–2 (1981), pp. 3–19.

<sup>8</sup> Georg Dehio, *Handbuch der deutschen Kunstdenkmäler Baden-Württemberg* (Munich, 1964). Under Mannheim: Jesuitenkirche. St Francis Xavier (1506–1552) was the Jesuit co-founding missionary. Franz Xaver was also the name of Mozart’s pupil Süßmayr.

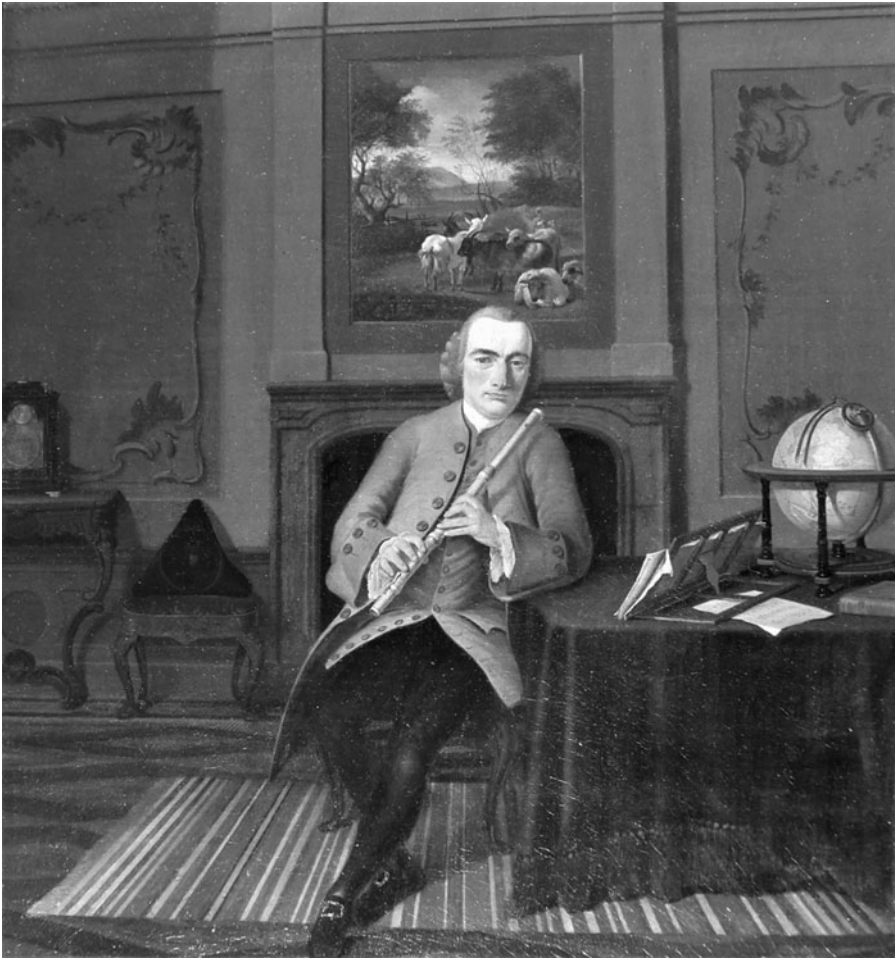
<sup>9</sup> Reinhardt Hootz, *Kunstdenkmäler in Österreich. Ein Bildhandbuch. Vols: Salzburg, Tirol, Vorarlberg* (Munich-Berlin, 1975) and *Wien* (Darmstadt, 1968).

<sup>10</sup> These details are discernible on an engraving by A. Gatternicht, Heckel (Mannheim, 1840).

<sup>11</sup> Dehio, *Handbuch*, under Schwetzingen. It is essentially a freemasons’ architectural theme park.

<sup>12</sup> H. J. Zuidervaat and R. H. Van Gent, ‘A bare outpost of learned European culture on the edge of the jungles of Java. Johan Maurits Mohr (1716–1775) and the emergence of instrumental and institutional science in Dutch Colonial Indonesia’, *Isis* 95.1 (2004), pp. 1–33. Jakarta was a small village outside the VOC citadel.

<sup>13</sup> S. Martin, ‘The symbolic portrait of Mozart’s patron, Dr Ferdinand Dejean’, *Hektoen International Journal of Medical Humanities* (Spring 2018), <https://hekint.org/2018/04/12/symbolic-portrait-mozarts-patron-dr-ferdinand-dejean/> (accessed September 2022). Eileen Deeley and members of the Siam Society kindly furnished me with several interpretive ideas at a 2019 presentation in Bangkok.



**Figure 1.** Ferdinand Dejean by Jacobus Buys, *circa* 1780. The emblems of judgement are sheep versus goats, and legs bared or covered. The globe's steel latitude gauge points to Batavia. Source: Kind permission of BDBEC.

the question of whether he was praying he had done enough good, or even expiating some guilt about the source of his income.

Dejean was the financial and intellectual lead in Mozart's commission, assisted by his fellow freemason, the virtuoso flautist Wendling.<sup>14</sup> Proportionately, though, most of the money for Mozart appears to have been rooted in the wealth of Anna Buschman's first husband, Wilhelm Buschman. For two full trading years he was the VOC upper merchant<sup>15</sup> and managing Resident on Kharg, before it was abandoned under siege by Mir Mohanna, the ruler of Bandar Rig.

<sup>14</sup> E. J. Gunson, 'Jean Baptiste Wendling (1723–1797): Life, Works, Artistry and Influence, including a Thematic Catalogue of all his Compositions', (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Western Australia, 1999). I thank Dr Gunson for much general advice.

<sup>15</sup> Professor Mathew Grenby, University of Newcastle, kindly suggested that I undertake research involving the VOC funding Mozart. This article, too, draws on questions posed in an Royal Asiatic Society presentation on Dejean's portrait, namely 'What was traded in the Gulf to generate the funds?' and 'Is this the end of the road—what more can be researched?' I am grateful to Professor Stockwell and the Society for these ideas.

There is already a good précis of some of Buschman's reports to Batavia<sup>16</sup> on the broader military and political events. Dutch trade on Kharg has been considered from the perspective of the reasons for its failure<sup>17</sup> and Kharg's general history and archaeology.<sup>18</sup> There is other discussion of the fall of Kharg.<sup>19</sup> These publications reasonably leave aside the source of Kharg VOC private profit and the Kharg pearl trade in Buschman's time there as upper merchant. After a broad, introductory review, this article looks afresh at the primary source records of Buschman in the National Archives of the Netherlands (Nationaal Archief, NA), newly digitalized for this study.<sup>20</sup> We consider the relevant time period in detail, with a forensic accounting eye, while appraising Buschman's behaviour and circumstances.

### *Wilhelm Buschman and Anna Pack*

Wilhelm Johannes Buschman<sup>21</sup> graduated in law from Groningen in 1752 at the age of 19.<sup>22</sup> His father, Jacob, was a Dutch Republican pastor in Elburg, a tolerant old Hansa town, where, in Buschman's boyhood, the Jewish community was already holding services.<sup>23</sup> Jacob Buschman was a prolific theologian and published six religious works.<sup>24</sup> Two of them were in print and therefore potential influences on W. J. Buschman before he left for Batavia. They covered the Old Testament, including a 340-page Judaism-facing commentary on Jacob and Moses.<sup>25</sup>

At the age of 19, Wilhelm Buschman published a legal treatise in Latin on the rights of man, which says more about his character and intellect than any VOC transcripts.<sup>26</sup> It is dedicated with humility and a discernment of moral values to his father and two uncles, namely Petrus, 'a respected Amsterdam businessman', and Huybert, 'a successful, pious merchant of integrity'. His work is thoroughly referenced and analyses human rights legislation, historically and contemporaneously, covering gender, liberty, servitude, marriage, ownership, and inheritance. It shows a good standard of both Latin and ideology. The professional, academic, and moral origins of Buschman in an ecumenical culture are evidence for his extracontractual VOC income being more subcultural, rather than individually psychopathic, for that organisation; there is nowhere near sufficient evidence in summated sources for a generally antisocial personality disorder, even though it was noted that he upset colleagues when in drink.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Sultan bin Muhammad al-Qasimi, 'Power Struggles and Trade in the Gulf. 1620–1820', (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Durham, 1999).

<sup>17</sup> W. Floor, 'The Dutch on Khark Island: a commercial mishap', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24.3 (August 1992), pp. 441–460.

<sup>18</sup> W. Floor and D. T. Potts, *The Persian Gulf Khark. The Island's Untold Story* (Washington DC, 2017).

<sup>19</sup> A. A. Amin, *British Interests in the Persian Gulf* (Leiden, 1967), passim.

<sup>20</sup> I thank Nadine Groffen and colleagues at the Nationaal Archief (hereafter NA) for extracting and scanning hundreds of pages. Buschman's reports from Kharg are all catalogued in NA Fonds code 1.04.02.

<sup>21</sup> Latinized by him to Wilhelmus in most documents.

<sup>22</sup> *Naamlijst van de Studenten, sedert de oprichting de Hoogeschool te Groningen ingeschreven*, Vol. 1, p. 382, in Bleker and Lequin, *Ferdinand Dejean*, pp. 57–58.

<sup>23</sup> [jck.nl/en/page/elburg](http://jck.nl/en/page/elburg) (accessed September 2022).

<sup>24</sup> P. C. Molhuysen, P. J. Blok and K. H. Kossmann, *Nieuw Nedlandsch Biografisch Woordenboek. Zesde Deel* (Leiden, 1924).

<sup>25</sup> J. Buschman, *Jacobs en Moses Testamenten* (Campen, 1752).

<sup>26</sup> G. J. Buschman, *Disputatio Juridica Inauguralis de Statu Hominum* (Groningen, 1752), pp. 1–16. The 'G' initial abbreviates the Latin form of Wilhelm.

<sup>27</sup> Considering criteria for antisocial personality disorder in DSM-5, APA (Arlington, 2013). R. Perry, 'Mir Muhanna and the Dutch: patterns of piracy in the Persian Gulf', *Studia Iranica* 2 (1973), p. 90, reviewed Niebuhr's account.

Buschman married Anna Maria Pack in Bombay in 1755<sup>28</sup> during his preliminary VOC duties. They spent eight years together on Kharg from 1757, until Mir Mohanna<sup>29</sup> drove them out.<sup>30</sup> Buschman became an upper merchant in late 1762, tasked with bringing tighter management to Kharg, replacing Jan van de Hulst.<sup>31</sup>

Anna Buschman was highly likely to have been Anglo-Indian. Even by the 1860s, when the concept of marital racial integration in India was at rock bottom, only 6 per cent of British East India Company (EIC) personnel were accompanied by their wives. In the eighteenth century, interracial marriage was encouraged by the EIC, and mixed race daughters almost invariably married soldiers of lower ranks.<sup>32</sup> For Anna Pack to have married a VOC merchant was a rare chance at extra security after her father, an accountant and warehouse man, died of gangrene in Bombay in 1746.<sup>33</sup> She had unusual wealth for an Anglo-Indian widow, though less unusual for a VOC widow.

### *Pearl fishing on Kharg and the pearl economy*

The Persian geography *Hudud al-'Alam*, *حدود العالم من المشرق الى المغرب*, finished in 372/982, mentioned Kharg as a good source of pearls:

... Kharak lies south of Basra at a distance of 50 farsangs.<sup>34</sup> It possesses a large and prosperous town called Kharak. Near it excellent and costly pearls are found.

Also, in the medieval period, the Gulf traded pearls with Song dynasty China via Sumatra. In other early Persian references, Kharg had smaller pearl yields than the major sites like Bahrain, Jolfar, Qatar, and Sharjah, but more Yatima pearls of exceptional quality.<sup>35</sup>

Nineteenth-century British accounts record Kharg as having the best pearls in the Gulf and, crucially for the thread of this article, with pearl beds found at all depths, from just below the low waterline.<sup>36</sup> These depths remain shallow on modern chart data, too. Kharg itself grew its pearl output from the time of the Dutch as a prodromal financial economy, emerging from a subsistence one. In 1907 Kharg had 40 pearl boats.<sup>37</sup>

The Kharg VOC base's founder, self-styled as 'Baron' Tido Friedrich von Kniphausen, attempted to obtain six glass diving bells in 1757 to harvest pearls, as reviewed by Floor.<sup>38</sup> Such work and the accompanying huge costs were not speculative and reflected richer pickings at a faster turnover, based on oyster bed knowledge. Kniphausen said he expected a four-fold

<sup>28</sup> EIC Marriages, Bombay, 1755, British Library (hereafter BL).

<sup>29</sup> This is Buschman's own spelling, presumably phonetic to him.

<sup>30</sup> The Persians had invited the VOC to Kharg, approved by the VOC headquarters in Batavia in 1753.

<sup>31</sup> NA, 3003, p. 1893.

<sup>32</sup> P. J. Marshall, 'British society in India under the East India Company', *Modern Asian Studies* 31.1 (February 1997), pp. 89–108.

<sup>33</sup> British India Office Ecclesiastical Returns, 1 January 1746–14 November 1747. Records on Anna's mother's birth and ethnic origin have not come to light, the likely explanation being that she was either Indian or Anglo-Indian.

<sup>34</sup> Anon., *Hudud al-'Alam. The regions of the world: a Persian geography, 372 AH/982 AD*, V. Minorsky (ed. and trans.) (London, 1937), p. 58. Written for a prince of Guzgan, now northwest Afghanistan. A *farsang* or *parasang* is an Arabian day's walk of 3.5 miles, remarkably accurate for the 150 mile distance as the crow flies.

<sup>35</sup> D. T. Potts, 'Pearl ii. Islamic period', *Enc. Iranica* (2008), pp. 1–14.

<sup>36</sup> Chhaya Goswami, 'Pearls, pearlers and Indian pearl traders in the Persian Gulf', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 71 (2010–2011), pp. 928–940.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Carter, 'The history and prehistory of pearling in the Persian Gulf', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 48.2 (2005), pp. 139–209.

<sup>38</sup> W. Floor, 'Pearl fishing in the Gulf in 1757', *Persica* 10 (1982), pp. 209–222.

increase in productivity. Batavia, however, barred the potential use of diving bells by Gulf locals and they never materialised.<sup>39</sup> While there is no reason to doubt the potential of the bells, other evidence suggests that the pearl harvest was already going well in secret.

Floor emphasised Knipphausen's drive for personal and VOC profit, including his proposed conquest of Bahrain in 1754,<sup>40</sup> motivated by the pearls. In recent years Bahrain had been conquered and ruled by Mir Mohanna's father, Mir Nasir. Knipphausen also considered taking Bahrain as an anti-British bastion, militarily and economically. The VOC directors barred him from invading Bahrain, though, preferring consolidation to expansion, which contributed to the VOC's downfall in the Gulf. In 1757, Knipphausen described Simi oysters around Kharg 'in rather large quantities',<sup>41</sup> a statement smacking of deliberate vagueness.

Buschman first appears in correspondence as 'Under Merchant on Kharg', writing with Knipphausen in January 1757.<sup>42</sup> Importantly, Knipphausen's interest in pearl fishing was documented in the same year as Buschman's arrival.<sup>43</sup> The types of oysters and relations with Arabs were considered, but, again vaguely, there was no comment about absolute quantities or prices. After that, the record about pearls in Buschman's time on Kharg stop dead. It is possible that the pearl beds' yield around Kharg and the wider Gulf fluctuated, but they could not have died off totally as this would not account for their sudden and time-limited disappearance from history during Buschman's time on the island.

The most revealing accounts of actual pearl activity on Kharg are by the British observers Francis Wood of the EIC in the Persian Gulf and Edward Ives RN. Wood's 1756 account. The latter came from his observations and verbal report from Under Merchant van de Hulst: Kharg was rich in pearl beds. Knipphausen ran diving teams who delivered the oysters to him for private opening, so, central for our argument, only Knipphausen knew how many pearls there were.<sup>44</sup> Knipphausen recorded his knowledge of the pearls' potential, citing Bahrain generating Rs 240,000<sup>45</sup> annually.

Knipphausen tried to impress upon Ives that Kharg's pearl production was limited, obviously exaggerating the depth at which they were found:

*Pearl oysters have been found near this island, but as they lie in considerable depths, not less than 13 or 14 fathom water, the divers (who were not very expert at the business) had not met with much success, at the time we were there. Some pearls of considerable value however had been found, particularly one, very handsome and large, which the Baron was so polite as to present to Mr Doidge.*

Ives did not indicate if he had even been to the shoreline to see the oyster beds.<sup>46</sup> Knipphausen also said then that he was keen to learn about diving bell technology from Ives's party, so his interest was genuine.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.

<sup>40</sup> W. Floor, 'The Bahrain project of 1754', *Persica* 11 (1984), pp. 129–148.

<sup>41</sup> Floor, 'Pearl fishing', p. 213.

<sup>42</sup> NA, 2909, pp. 9–14.

<sup>43</sup> NA, 2937, pp. 33–40.

<sup>44</sup> BL, India Office Records (IOR) G/29/9, 24 July 1756 and G/29/10, 5 August 1756. Quoted secondarily in al-Qasimi, *Thesis*.

<sup>45</sup> £24,000 contemporaneous equivalent; at least £3.362 million modern equivalent on the most conservative axis, as per [www.measuringworth.com/pierremarteau.com](http://www.measuringworth.com/pierremarteau.com) (last accessed November 2020).

<sup>46</sup> Edward Ives, *A Voyage from England to India in the Year 1754* (London, 1773), Book I, Chapter 14, p. 215. A Dutch edition was published in Amsterdam in 1779. From the 2016 bathygraphy of Kharg and Khargu, the reefs are all shallow, at around 2 fathoms, less than 5 metres. Also, nothing climatic, seismic, or volcanic is on record to explain a loss of pearls at the time that is of interest.

<sup>47</sup> At the time, this was the diving bell invented by the astronomer Edmond Halley.

The VOC realised that pearl cryptocurrency was a problem just over a year into Knipphausen's private pearl activity on Kharg, although the Dutch also sourced pearls off Chennai and Sri Lanka. Sumptuary laws banning pearls worth over 4,000<sup>48</sup> rand were introduced by the VOC in the Cape in 1755 to control damage from a soaring black market economy rather than to enhance puritanism. A particularly extravagant string of pearls valued at 1,000 rand in the Cape would have bought 66 horses.<sup>49</sup> That is around £400,000 today, based on modern draft horse prices and consistent with the present-day cost of the highest value pearl necklaces. VOC communities were spending too much money on pearls; the Company and its bases were not benefitting.

### *Mir Mohanna and the political geography of the Gulf*

Mir Mohanna has already been reviewed well and at length in secondary sources, but his interactions with Buschman and role in Kharg's history linked to pearl wealth warrant a recap here. The Mir was a key actor in shaping the demise of the VOC and the future structure of Gulf government. Kharg's location allowed local coastal pearl fishers to trade from a wide area and the political structure of the Arabs who lived around the Persian coastal region at the time lent itself very well to unregulated trading. Carsten Niebuhr, a German scientist on the Royal Danish Arabia Expedition, described the Arabs as possessing all the northern Gulf coast adjoining Persia, and confirmed their ready ability to hide from any trouble on the islands.<sup>50</sup> Knipphausen's report to the VOC in 1756 described the locals living by navigation, pearl diving and dealing, and fishing. When approached for tax or servitude by Persian court officers, the pearl fishers simply paddled out to sea.<sup>51</sup> Importantly, too, in terms of the Arabs' free trade potential, there is a lack of positive evidence, at least in Buschman's early years, that the coastal and island Arabs belonged formally to any other state.<sup>52</sup> The existence of a distinctive Khargi island language, related to other Persian coastal linguistics,<sup>53</sup> appears to be rooted in a balance of isolation and maritime territorial dissipation, consistent with Niebuhr and Knipphausen's cultural descriptions of competent, seafaring trade and easy local migration. Such political isolation suited Mir Mohanna.

While Karim Khan Zand was ruling most of Persia following the last of the Safavids, local Mirs between the Ottoman frontier and Hormuz ruled Gulf islands and ports in their own right.<sup>54</sup> There is a significant gap in their history from their own perspective. Western accounts focus on piracy and extortion, not their day-to-day fishing, pearling, trade, or family life. Perry could only review evidence for Mir Mohanna maintaining devotion from the magnitude of his income.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Stan du Plessis, 'Pearls worth Rds 4000 or less: Reinterpreting eighteenth century sumptuary laws at the Cape', *Economic Research Southern Africa*, Working paper (2013), p. 336.

<sup>49</sup> J. Fourie, 'An Inquiry Into the Nature, Causes and Distribution of Wealth of the Cape Colony, 1652–1795', (unpublished PhD dissertation, Utrecht University, 2012).

<sup>50</sup> Carsten Niebuhr and Robert Herron (trans.), *Niebuhr's Travels Through Arabia and Other Countries in the East* (Edinburgh, 1792), Vol. 2, pp. 110–112.

<sup>51</sup> NA, Fonds code 1.11.01.01, item 461.

<sup>52</sup> C. L. O. Buderer and L. T. Rikart, 'The Iran-UAE Gulf Islands dispute. A journey through international law, history and politics', in *The Gulf Islands Dispute in Historical Perspective*, (eds) M. Fitzmaurice and S. Singer. Queen Mary Studies in International Law, Vol. 29 (Leiden, 2018).

<sup>53</sup> Habib Borjian, 'The language of the Kharg Island', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 29.4 (October 2019), pp. 659–682. I also thank Dr Borjian for his most kind help excluding a Turkish Arabic text for this article.

<sup>54</sup> J. R. Perry, 'Mir Muhanna and the Dutch: Patterns of piracy in the Persian Gulf', *Studia Iranica* 2 (1973), pp. 79–95.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

Jacobs<sup>56</sup> concluded that in 1750 VOC Governor General Mossel was motivated to establish a base on Kharg, not for pearls, but primarily to trade sugar with which to supply Batavia. Fort Mosselsteyn on Kharg lasted for 12 years, with the town population rising to 10,000. The Roman Catholic Bishop of Isfahan even moved his residence there.<sup>57</sup> Mir Mohanna himself reportedly confirmed Kharg as a Dutch territory in 1753 after Knipphausen gave his father Rs 2,000. Later, he refuted this in support of his claim to take the island.<sup>58</sup> Knipphausen and van der Hulst were to be proven wrong when they recorded in 1754 that there was: ‘... such anarchy that from that side one has to fear nothing. With regard to the Arabs, they all live in discord with each other and are unable to prevent our plan.’ Knipphausen believed the Khargi islanders appreciated the Dutch for preventing them from being ‘plundered by all passing Arab vessels’<sup>59</sup> and that Bahrain would be similarly grateful.

Mir Mohanna made himself sheikh of the coastal Al Zaab tribe and ruler of Bandar Rig in repeated coups. After killing his father, Mir Nasir, in 1754, in 1756 he killed 15 family members, including his elder brother, Mir Hussain.<sup>60</sup> Straightaway Mir Mohanna made a rent demand to the Dutch for Kharg, which Knipphausen refused to pay. Knipphausen was familiar with the details of local history and politics,<sup>61</sup> the standard of his report to Batavia on the Gulf in 1756 is so well-considered and consistent that his vagueness on the matter of pearls could hardly have been the result of incompetence.

Three years on, a maritime skirmish occurred off Kharg when a Dutch boat beat off two of Mir Mohanna’s ships attacking a vessel from Basra. A later attack by 200 of Mir Mohanna’s men on Kharg in March 1762 was foiled.<sup>62</sup> By the time Kharg fell to Mir Mohanna in 1765, it was the last of the Dutch bases in the Gulf, with Bandar Abbas (= Gombroon/Gomron) and Basra already having closed.<sup>63</sup> Mir Mohanna did not rule Kharg for more than a few months. He was ousted by forces loyal to Karim Khan Zand and reached Basra, but was arrested and executed in 1769 by Karim Khan’s governor. His demise was pivotal in Karim Khan Zand gaining control of most of the Gulf coast and cementing the political geography.

### *Income, death, and inheritance in the VOC*

The VOC’s pay levels were geared to providing basic comforts (Table 1). Lasting wealth was widely attained by the more senior merchants in a culture of bribes and rake-offs. Sultan al-Qasimi summarised that the VOC Residents bought cargoes and charged the VOC for sales.<sup>64</sup> Despite many references to foreign ships’ cargoes in the Batavia records, Buschman provides no numerical evidence for this.

<sup>56</sup> Els M. Jacobs, *Koopman in Azië. De handel van der Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie tijdens de 18de eeuw* (Zutphen, 2000), p. 126.

<sup>57</sup> The VOC buildings appear to have been cleared in the twentieth century. Photos of Kharg circa 1880 by Albert P. H. Hotz, a Dutch businessman, now in the Nederlands Fotomuseum, show pearl fishers, the VOC fort, and a large, arcaded stone building.

<sup>58</sup> Perry, ‘Mir Muhanna’, p. 85.

<sup>59</sup> Floor, ‘The Bahrain project’, p. 139.

<sup>60</sup> Mir Mohanna draws popular interest in Iran today, most recently with a recent play about him by actor Sirus Kahurinejad (*Tehran Times*, 28 January 2018). An oil tanker was named after him in 1991. A heavily restored, conical-domed tomb on Kharg, sometimes attributed as his, is actually six centuries old. Nevertheless, it perpetuates the status of his fascinating character in Kharg folklore.

<sup>61</sup> W. Floor, *The Persian Gulf, the Rise of the Gulf Arabs, the Politics of Trade on the Persian Littoral 1747–1792* (Washington DC, 2007), pp. 30–31, comments on an English translation of the 1756 report to Batavia.

<sup>62</sup> Perry, ‘Mir Muhanna’, *passim*.

<sup>63</sup> Jacobs, *Koopman in Azië*, *passim*.

<sup>64</sup> al-Qasimi, *Thesis*, p. 162.



**Table 1. VOC posts and earnings/florins per month, in Buschman's time under Governor van der Parra.**

Surgeon major, or main post in Batavia (Batavia town surgeon), and Government upper surgeon	28
Common upper surgeon	20
Surgeon or under surgeon	14
Third surgeon	10
Upper merchant	40
Merchant	30
Under merchant and ordinary clerk	20
Book-keeper or assistant	15
Junior or provisional assistant	12

Source: *Beknopte beschryving der Oostindische etablissementen* (Amsterdam, 1792).

Buschman's father was comfortably well off in Elburg's *pastorie*, but there is no apparent notarial evidence that he was rich. Some inheritance from Buschman's merchant uncles is a possibility, but searches have not brought to light any notarial documents of this. If a Dutch legacy to Buschman was a factor in Anna Pack's final inheritance, it was probably still in Europe. Regardless of any undetected Dutch inheritance, Buschman's Asian-generated wealth was immense, as will be demonstrated. Anna would have inherited from her father, but, as a middle-ranking accountant and warehouse man, his opportunities for generating much income beyond his salary were not as great as those of a senior EIC officer.

A 1761 description lists only two merchants on Kharg island outside the VOC,<sup>65</sup> one a Persian, the other a Jewish merchant with a monopoly to trade sugar and spice into Basra. Buschman had no significant competition on Kharg for trading outside the VOC. He had every opportunity to sell pearls to foreign captains, mostly on British ships, who could, in turn, make big profits.

Samuel van de Putte spent several years touring China, Tibet, India, Persia, and the Malay peninsula, relatively unscathed.<sup>66</sup> Yet, after arriving in Batavia in 1745, he was dead less than two months later.<sup>67</sup> Buschman's will, transcribed a few months after he reached Batavia from Kharg on 23 October 1766,<sup>68</sup> described his wife as 'Anna Pack, Englishwoman'. They were already officially married,<sup>69</sup> yet notably the clerk used her maiden name and origin, emphasising the presence of a British affinity. Although in the hand of a Batavia secretary, it was signed by Buschman himself, who died in January 1767, exactly three months later. His handwriting is tremulous and veers off. Neurobehaviourally, it looks as if he was already frail with his last illness when he signed his name. Most premature deaths in Batavia were the result of malaria. It is unlikely that

<sup>65</sup> BL, Gombroon diaries, Vol. 13, EIC Agent's letter to the Presidency, 24 December 1761.

<sup>66</sup> Frank Lequin and Albert Meijer, *Samuel van de Putte, een mandarijn uit Vlissingen (1690-1745)* (Middelburg, 1989), Vol. 1, p. 168.

<sup>67</sup> He directed the destruction of his papers. Similar to Ives, geographic travel lacked credibility—why destroy papers if you were a scientific geographer? Historiographically, Asian espionage formed a high-quality, primary source.

<sup>68</sup> NA, 6850, p. 1186, line 7.

<sup>69</sup> British India Office Ecclesiastical Returns, Bombay, 8 September 1755.

yellow fever existed by then in Southeast Asia,<sup>70</sup> and febrile jaundice was probably malaria, as were ruptured spleens.<sup>71</sup> Buschman could have simply died from skin exposure to mosquito bites in Batavia's rainy season, in contrast to healthy Kharg.<sup>72</sup>

Otto Bleker<sup>73</sup> discovered that when she married Dejean, Anna Pack, Buschman's widow, put a portion of their assets into the Batavian orphans' fund for her son with Buschman, a sum totalling close to 275,000 florins.<sup>74</sup> In real wages and real wealth purchasing power today in buying goods or services, that is around £3.46 million.<sup>75</sup> Bleker discussed how this was legally binding. In his own right<sup>76</sup> Dejean had 15,386 florins from left over pay and the sale of goods in Amsterdam, so he had generated an estimated 6 per cent of the declared pot he and his wife had on returning to Amsterdam.<sup>77</sup> Therefore Buschman's wealth comprised the bulk of Dejean's. Buschman may have been wealthier than Anna declared in Batavia. Nikolas van Maseyk,<sup>78</sup> the Dutch consul general in Aleppo, reported Buschman leaving Kharg with 'zijne rijkdomme', clearly meaning his personal wealth, of 'drie Lack', which is Rs 300,000. That converts to £30,000 at the time and roughly a colossal £4.2 million in present day currency. Buschman's hidden assets were obviously converted into cash.

Buschman recorded very sporadic deaths on Kharg (Figure 2), a surprisingly low rate of around 0.5 per cent of personnel per annum for 1763–1764.<sup>79</sup> That is a massive contrast to the estimate given to James Cook in Batavia in December 1770 when VOC captains reported losing half their crew.<sup>80</sup> Bruijn identified that most VOC surgeons in Buschman's time did not live to return; 70 per cent died.<sup>81</sup>

There is a revealing retrospective detail about one death and inheritance on Kharg from 17 October 1760,<sup>82</sup> when an *onder stuurman* (second mate) left 3,000 florins. His wage was 15 florins a month.<sup>83</sup> Extrapolating from that, with adjustment for extra lifestyle costs, Buschman dying at the same age means he would have left approximately 200 times his basic VOC monthly income, totalling about 8,000 florins. Buschman actually left Kharg

<sup>70</sup> Goro Kuno, 'The absence of yellow fever in Asia: history, hypotheses, vector dispersal, possibility of YF in Asia and other enigmas', *Viruses* 12 (2020), p. 1349, and kind personal communications.

<sup>71</sup> Thanks to Dr Harriet Mitchison for this, on presenting to Newcastle Lit and Phil in 2019. Recorded by C. G. Grüner, quoting Dejean on Batavia post mortems in H. D. Gaub, *Anfangsgründe* (Berlin, 1797).

<sup>72</sup> Mosquitoes were only discovered as the vector as late as 1897. The Dutch in Batavia blamed malodorous, silted-up mud flats. Reviewed in P. H. Van der Brug, 'Malaria in Batavia in the eighteenth century', *Tropical Medicine and International Health* 2.9 (1997), pp. 892–902.

<sup>73</sup> Bleker, 'Ferdinand Dejean', and personal communication.

<sup>74</sup> CBG Centrum voor Familiegeschiedenis Versamelingen, VIBDNI004853.

<sup>75</sup> As per [www.measuringworth.com](http://www.measuringworth.com) (accessed September 2022) for historic-modern conversion, 2019 data, and [www.pierre-marteau.com](http://www.pierre-marteau.com) (accessed October 2022) for historic guilder-pound conversion. [www.measuringworth.com](http://www.measuringworth.com) was used for monetary conversions in this article as it is multiaxial. Figures are approximate on the most conservative axis for modern values. Data from other instruments vary, but remain within the order of magnitude.

<sup>76</sup> Bleker, 'Ferdinand Dejean'.

<sup>77</sup> Gemeente Archief Amsterdam, Notarieel Archief 13.647, Notaris Geniets 755, 780. Sourced by Otto Bleker.

<sup>78</sup> NA, 1.02.20 VOC Het archief van de Legatie in Turkije, 1668–1810 (1811), inventory number: 671. Brieven van Pyrault, de Lon and Mareyk, 1767. A gracious translation for me by Kioumars Ghereghlou, Libraries of Columbia University, helped exclude another text in Turkish Arabic script, mentioned in Floor, 'The Dutch on Khark Island', p. 449. Conversion instruments as per [www.measuringworth.com](http://www.measuringworth.com), note 75.

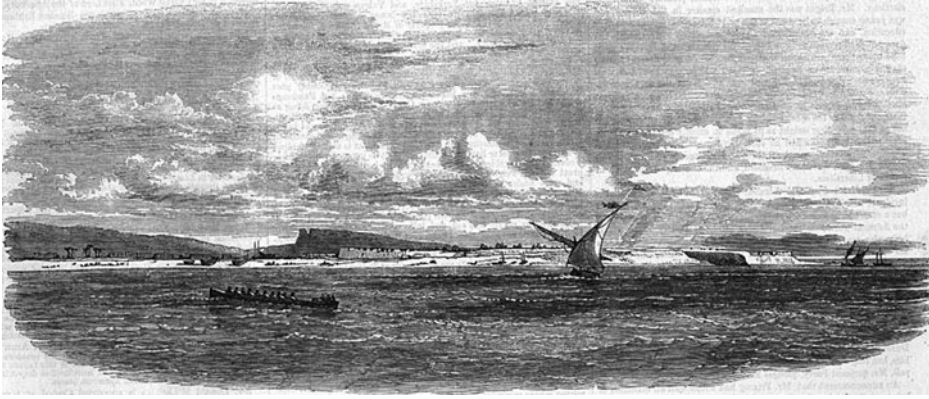
<sup>79</sup> NA, 3156, p. 46.

<sup>80</sup> James Cook RN., *Captain Cook's Journal During his First Voyage Round the World Made in HM Bark Endeavour, 1768–1771. A Literal Transcription of the Original Manuscripts*, (ed.) W. J. L. Wharton (London, 1893), Chapter 9 'From Torres Strait to Batavia'.

<sup>81</sup> Out of a total of 720 VOC surgeons, in the third quarter of the eighteenth century. Iris Bruijn, *Ship's Surgeons of the Dutch East India Company. Commerce and the Progress of Medicine in the Eighteenth-Century* (Leiden, 2009), p. 199.

<sup>82</sup> NA, 3156, p. 16.

<sup>83</sup> *Beknopte beschryving der Oostindische etablissementen* (Amsterdam, 1792), p. 276.



**Figure 2.** Northeast corner of Kharg. The open and dry terrain was a good antimalarial landscape, conducive to lasting survival and lasting embezzlement. Source: ILN, 4 April 1857.

with two orders of magnitude greater in florins—strong evidence for the size of his extra-contractual income. Buschman's extra income could have been shipped back to Amsterdam and banked, but this was not detected in VOC or notarial searches. The implication is that it went as cash and/or assets to Batavia.

The VOC had distinct legal benefits for widows, who were able to inherit property and maintain control over their finances and husbands' wills.<sup>84</sup> In the Cape Colony, widows were able to set up households independently of their children, with sizeable inheritances relative to other heirs.<sup>85</sup> In the Dutch Republic, as well as the VOC, inheritance ethics were progressive.<sup>86</sup> The egalitarian distribution of property and the strong commitment to the nuclear family embedded in law was strengthened by wills. Dutch widows benefitted more than British women. The VOC also had a relatively outstanding welfare state for orphans.<sup>87</sup> There was a lot of flexibility in Dutch testamentary law which could be dictated by women. Aasdom law could conversely apportion a child's inheritance to a husband.<sup>88</sup> It was also common for colleagues to marry VOC widows, with a noticeable small trend for surgeons to marry the widows of other surgeons.<sup>89</sup>

### *Outsider observations of the VOC on Kharg*

In 1758, Edward Ives actually met Buschman and Anna Pack on Kharg. Ives had witnessed Kniphausen disparagingly negotiating a hard bargain to buy camels from an Arab merchant. He threatened to get them from Aleppo instead. Ives tellingly quotes Kniphausen's subsequent comment:<sup>90</sup>

<sup>84</sup> S. Schama, 'Wives and wantons: versions of womanhood in seventeenth-century Dutch Art', *The Oxford Art Journal* 3.1 (April 1980), pp. 5–13.

<sup>85</sup> Dieter von Fintel, Sophia du Plessis and Ada Jansen, 'The wealth of Cape Colony widows: inheritance laws and investment responses following male death in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries', *Economic History of Developing Regions* 28.1 (2013), pp. 87–108.

<sup>86</sup> A. Schmidt, 'Generous provisions or legitimate shares? Widows and the transfer of property in seventeenth-century Holland', *The History of the Family* 15.1 (March 2010), pp. 13–24.

<sup>87</sup> W. M. Bons, 'Kinderen van der Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie. De levenslopen en carrières van der in Azië geboren zonen en dochters van VOC dienaars in de 18<sup>e</sup> eeuw', (unpublished MA dissertation, University of Leiden, 2015).

<sup>88</sup> Bruijn, *Ship's Surgeons*, p. 217. Aasdom law originated in North Holland.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 226–227.

<sup>90</sup> Ives, *A Voyage*, p. 224. Falk Steins spotted that Bosman was Buschman and kindly shared that extract.

In Europe perhaps it may sometimes be a proper maxim for people to desire to be thought rich; but in this part of the world, all should endeavour to be esteemed poor, for the supposed rich man will ever be imposed upon, and it is out of his power to prevent it. Gentleman's servants also have a peculiar vanity in exaggerating the wealth of their masters, and thereby often put them to an extraordinary expence (sic).

Ives' very next paragraph brings in Wilhelm and Anna Buschman:

... we took frequent opportunities of visiting our several friends upon the island, particularly Mr and Mrs Bosman, in whose gardens we passed some hours very agreeably, and smoked the Calloon and the Kerim Kan, pipes which are used by the gentlemen here, in the same manner as the Hookah is in Bengal.

Figure 3 shows a *qalyān* from one edition of Ives' book—his *Calloon*—adjoining his account of the Buschmans. Ives does not stipulate the origin of the Persian-looking pipe in this plate. Did it emblematised cultural affinity and immersion, and actually belong to the Buschmans? There are no clues as to the source of the image.

Ives described newly built houses for Europeans and an esplanade.<sup>91</sup> He was obviously gathering intelligence, because, most unusually, he was still being paid for his five-year trip, after hopping off a naval commission to tour Arabia with unconvincing 'ill health'. He was later free to publish a travelogue. His insights into Kharg appear to have survived because of the detailed levels of espionage observation transferring into the public domain. Ives described the practice of the British and Dutch at Bandar Abbas (then Gombroon) of siding with no particular trading partners, 'and sometimes presents have been thought indispensably necessary'.<sup>92</sup>

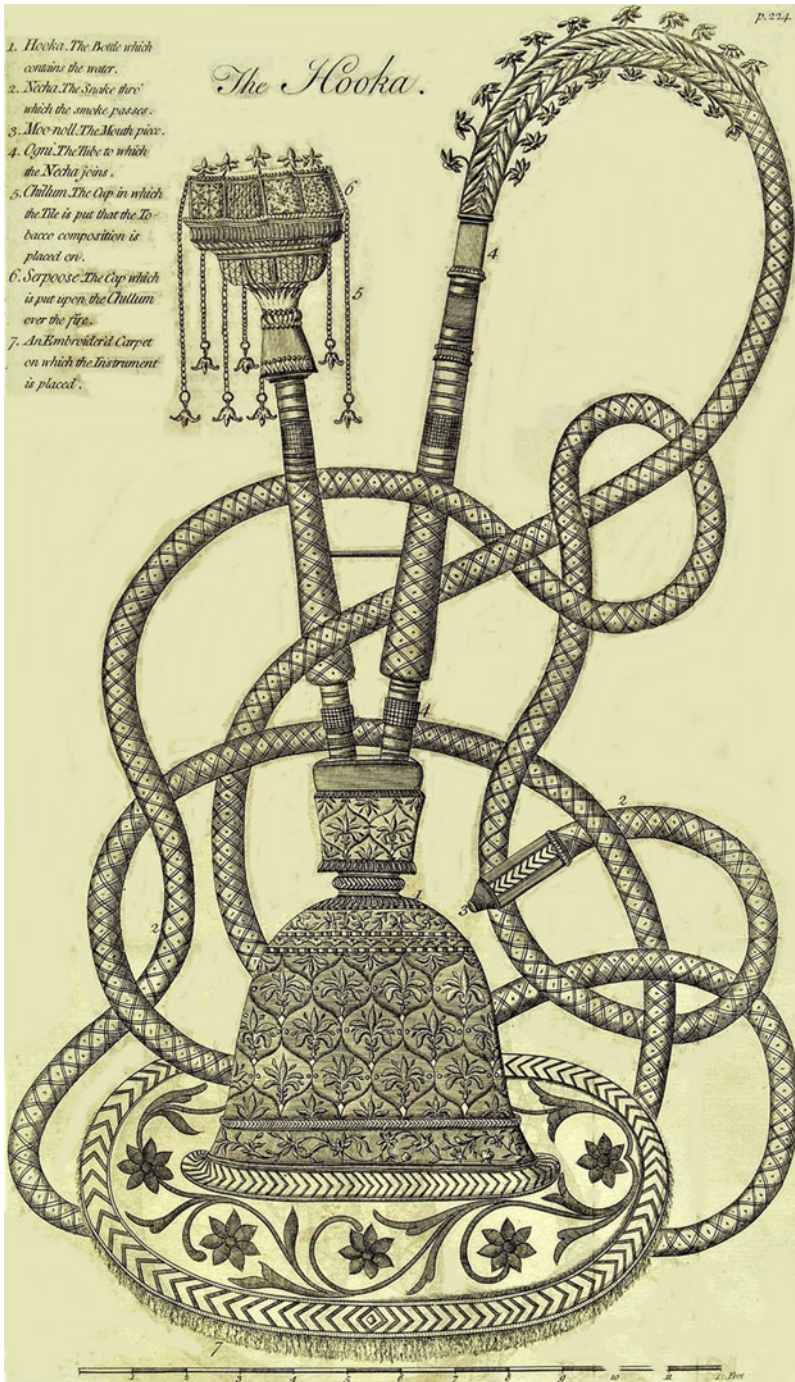
Niebuhr visited Kharg in June 1765. He said that while he was there Buschman governed Kharg like a small sovereign.<sup>93</sup> Niebuhr noted that Buschman was law-abiding and respected. He was aware that Buschman's father was a pastor, so Buschman must have told Niebuhr that to give a favourable impression of his character. He described Buschman arranging an intimidating reception for Mir Mohanna's envoy and Buschman's 'handsome entourage', with the VOC soldiers at their posts and the sailors shipboard. Buschman sat on a large armchair with his secretary and ensign, 'und alle seine Schwartzten und die übrigen bedienten', on both sides of the white-pillared hall. Describing separate groups of 'all his blacks and the various servants' implies that the sub-Saharan Africans were slaves. Niebuhr also mentioned that sub-Saharan Africans who had been sold as slaves continued to practise African religions on Kharg under Buschman. That speaks of his religious tolerance, but does not disclose whether they were sold at the Cape, the main VOC slavery centre, or whether this was another trade on Kharg omitted from the VOC books. Unlike the pearl trade, there is no evidence for primary slave trading by the VOC on Kharg at any point. They were almost certainly transported on VOC ships to Kharg from the Cape.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214. Ives was also interested in the 1740 Batavian massacre and recorded a second-hand account from a former VOC governor, which is detailed, interesting, and impartial. The whole book is well written.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>93</sup> Niebuhr, *Travels through Arabia*. These are my translations from the German edition: C Niebuhr, *Reisebeschreibung nach Arabien und andern umliegenden Ländern* (Copenhagen, 1778), Chapter 'Anmerkungen zu Charedsch', section June–July, 1765, *passim*. Charedsch is Kharg.

<sup>94</sup> After the Dutch departure from Kharg, there was an evident upsurge in slavery. Floor reviewed how, in 1841, there were 1,217 slaves on 117 ships harboured at Kharg. W. Floor, *The Persian Gulf. The Rise and Fall of Bandar-E Lengeh. The Distribution Center for the Arabian Coast, 1750–1930* (Washington DC, 2010), p. 14. The sheikh of Lengeh charged a half dollar for each slave transported through his port. African slave trading was banned



**Figure 3.** Persian-style *qalyān*, with floral narrow base flange, illustrated next to Ives' description of smoking with the Buschmans. Source: Ives, English edition, 1773. Digitally remastered, the author.

Buschman showed the Arab delegation the fort and the gunposts. Niebuhr described Buschman's characteristic, lively determination. The Mir's envoy placed his hand on Buschman's shoulder saying 'If you had to give up such a fort, you would no longer be worthy of being Governor here.' Notably, the word 'governor' was used even though Buschman was not one. Either that was the Arab envoy's perception, or Buschman's chosen word fed into the envoy's retrospective account, or both. Niebuhr described a subsequent strong and peaceful trade at Kharg, but, six months later, Buschman's show of strength and swagger did not deter Mir Mohanna.

Wood described the VOC in their last year on Kharg as having two gunboats, 60 European military personnel, and 100 African slave auxiliary troops.<sup>95</sup> These numbers are consistent with Buschman's 1763–1764 troop costs. He later shed light on a Dutch strategy to settle Chinese in Kharg as a 'peaceful' labour force. An element of this must have been to avoid dependence on Gulf Arabs or African slaves with greater potential for conflict and rebellion.

## Buschman's reports from Kharg to Batavia

### *Early years as under merchant*

In the year to 1759, the goods traded report by van de Hulst and Buschman does not mention pearls.<sup>96</sup> The year to 1760 account details individual ships and sale agent involvement, but no pearls.<sup>97</sup> All this suggests that Buschman's predecessor as upper merchant, van de Hulst, was following in Knipphausen's footsteps trading in clandestine pearls, while Buschman, still under merchant, was learning the trade. The account of goods traded to September 1761 omits pearls.<sup>98</sup> A lengthy audit of October 1762 contains no pearls.<sup>99</sup> The 1763 records submitted again by Jan van de Hulst and Buschman show no pearls at all,<sup>100</sup> nor do the cargo manifests.<sup>101</sup> The VOC books at Surat, down the chain of VOC harbours in what is now Gujarat, did not record any pearls in Buschman's time.<sup>102</sup>

### *First full trading year as upper merchant, 1763–1764*

Two sets of annotated, annual accounts for 1763–1764 and 1764–1765 span the heart of Buschman's time in the powerful position of upper merchant on Kharg.<sup>103</sup> This period was his prime opportunity to accumulate personal wealth. Before these two years, the annual record overlapped with his less privileged time as under merchant. From late 1765, the records are incomplete. This analysis of Buschman's business style and accounts

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in Persia in 1848, while the British developed increasing agreements with Gulf states to search ships and prevent it. Disbrowe briefly seized Kharg in 1856, declaring it a free port, to keep trade flowing and prevent slavery, during the war over Herat. *Illustrated London News*, 4 April 1857, p. 310.

<sup>95</sup> BL, Gombroon diary, Vol. 8, Francis Wood to agency, 3 May 1756.

<sup>96</sup> NA, 2996, pp. 4–16.

<sup>97</sup> NA, 3027, pp. 24–25.

<sup>98</sup> NA, 3064, pp. 15–19.

<sup>99</sup> NA, 3092, pp. 320–322.

<sup>100</sup> NA, 3092, p. 320 et seq.

<sup>101</sup> NA, 3092, pp. 316–318.

<sup>102</sup> NA, 1.04.02 Surat papers.

<sup>103</sup> Profuse thanks to the historian Dr Jordy Geerlings for expert help with the eighteenth-century Dutch. The dictionary *Nederduitsch en Engelsch Woordenboek, Tweede Deel* (Amsterdam, 1824) proved to be the most useful for this project, because it was advanced in scholarship, yet close enough in time to the then demised VOC to retain a rich source of specialist mercantile vocabulary. Earlier and later dictionaries were less helpful.

begins when the records pertain to Buschman's time as upper merchant, until his departure from Kharg and the closure of the base.

In the penultimate full year of trading on Kharg, from September 1763–1764, the total sugar profits were 103,003 florins<sup>104</sup> and Buschman excused that as a poor year. Profits from pepper, steel, and tin were very small in comparison. Buschman would have been very unlikely to rake off something like one-third to one-quarter of the VOC profit to create even a fraction of his lowest-estimated wealth. There was no mention of pearls with those commodities, nor in any other goods lists.<sup>105</sup> The year after that, in a time of escalating warfare, the total profits for the prime commodity of sugar was down 75 per cent, to only 26,995 florins.<sup>106</sup> The total of those two years of sugar profits totalled less than Buschman's wealth. Unit prices of the major commodities in the period showed negligible fluctuation. It was simply a flat market,<sup>107</sup> with trade at a standstill.<sup>108</sup> He was upfront in justifying his use of the VOC account to pay 23,201 florins for land-based soldiers 'which has occasionally been provided at the expense of this (budget)'. Another insight without extra justification is the cost of staffing the two VOC ships at 2,512 florins for European marines and more than double that at 6,606 florins for Arab marines.<sup>109</sup> There was a further cost of 5,700 florins for land soldiers,<sup>110</sup> after 'unrest from last year until the end of February' who were 'very necessary and needed to be kept on'.

A bribe in the amount of 435 florins, described as a 'small present',<sup>111</sup> was made to an anonymous Arab to clinch a deal, with the justification that the British had already offered a bribe. Buschman also considered debts owed to the VOC by Arabs. First, he wrote an update pertaining to a notorious episode of VOC corruption.<sup>112</sup> A loan of 7,056 florins made in 1749 to Suliman Pasha by the VOC's Frans Canter had still not been paid back 15 years later. His successor, Ali Aga Pasha, had also not repaid this debt,<sup>113</sup> and Buschman noted Ali Aga's contemporaneous military expense in suppressing insurgency around Basra. Ali Aga Pasha had insisted that the debt had already been repaid.<sup>114</sup> In 1750, Canter owed 32,271 florins to the VOC and Buschman records that sum as still outstanding. The Dutch had always struggled to control corruption. Frans Canter was summoned to Batavia from Basra for trading misconduct in 1750. He escaped by fleeing the VOC's jurisdiction to the protection of the Amsterdam burgermasters.<sup>115</sup> This was a paradoxical sanctuary and a stark contrast to Robert Clive and Warren Hastings facing the London liberals, when Edmund Burke had rehashed the quote of good people doing nothing. Why the good people of Amsterdam did nothing in

<sup>104</sup> NA, 3156, p. 7.

<sup>105</sup> NA, 3156, pp. 18–19.

<sup>106</sup> NA, 3184 passim; details in the next section below.

<sup>107</sup> NA, 3156, pp. 6–7.

<sup>108</sup> NA, 3156, p. 8.

<sup>109</sup> NA, 3156, p. 8.

<sup>110</sup> NA, 3156, p. 9. Van Mareyk recorded that they numbered 200–300, implying an individual black slave soldier's annual pay was 20–30 florins, which is £250–£380 per annum modern equivalent and equating to a VOC under merchant or merchant's monthly pay: NA, 1.2.20, 671.

<sup>111</sup> NA, 3156, p. 11.

<sup>112</sup> NA, 3156, p. 12.

<sup>113</sup> NA, 3156, p. 13.

<sup>114</sup> NA, 3156, p. 15.

<sup>115</sup> *Deductie gedaan uit den name ende van wegens bewindhebberen van de Oost-Indische Compagnie ter kamer Amsterdam, eerst requiranten van appointment van anticipatie, en nu gedaagdens by mandament van revisie, ter eenre, op ende jegens Aaltje Fransse, weduwe van Cornelis Canter, Jan Canter, en Hendrik van Greuningen, als in huwelyk hebbende Anna Canter, zeggende te zyn moeder, broeder, en zwager respectieve, van Frans Canter, alle wonende te Amsterdam.* Injunction, VOC (Amsterdam, 1752). Remarkably, this injunction against his assets in VOC Roman-Dutch law was made into a printed publication. The VOC was angry.

Canter's case is evidence of efforts to maintain civic power, independent of the global monopoly of the VOC. It was not puritanism. Buschman's writing also redirected the focus on guilty behaviour away from himself.

In addition to Canter's two bad debts, Buschman recorded that the family of Mir Nazier, lord of Bandar Rig, had failed to settle debts from 1754 with the VOC. To recap, Mir Nazier was later killed in July of that year by his youngest son, Mir Mohanna. A British report<sup>116</sup> said that the trigger was when Mir Nazier gave one of Mir Mohanna's most beloved concubines from Georgia to the Dutch at Kharg. Only the previous year, Mir Nazier had offered Kharg to Kniphausen and Batavia had clinched the deal. What started as a family power struggle eventually escalated into an all-out Arab civil war with Shiraz. Mir Mohanna's debt to the VOC might have been a potential lever in later negotiations with him by Buschman. Despite that debt, though, Buschman still gave Mir Mohanna a bribe mentioned later in the 1764 diary, with his studied excuses of 'in celebration of the peace' and 'unavoidable, given the local customs'.<sup>117</sup>

On 17 August 1763, the VOC ship *Amstelveen* ran aground in fog and heavy seas off the coast of Oman, bound for Kharg.<sup>118</sup> Buschman reported<sup>119</sup> that some of the *Amstelveen* cargo was handed over to local Arabs at the urgent request of Ali Pasha of Baghdad to keep the peace. Buschman blamed poor trade progress on the loss of the *Amstelveen*. He also made a case that the loss was offset by profitable sales from the cargo of the *Rebecca Jacoba van Rustwoude*.<sup>120</sup> Buschman told Batavia that the British were trying to exploit the supply gap from the wreck and bring in lots of goods.<sup>121</sup> The VOC counter-strategy was to attempt to sell more sugar to Basra. Sugar prices went up, helpfully, as the British had no competitive sugar stock, but Buschman expressed his anxiety to Batavia that the price might not hold: 'Don't blame me for that. They can't always be the same.'<sup>122</sup> He also discussed the shawl cloth trade, but there was no mention of pearls.

The VOC base in Basra had closed in 1753 due to a dispute with the Ottomans. Ten years later Buschman was still describing residual stock from the Basra closure in Kharg. He added that some off-loading was done 'to lighten the load' and that he was 'not sure where some of the items went'. Not all of the Basra residue could be sold.<sup>123</sup> Buschman showed courtesy in asking for permission to be reimbursed for giving provisions to a particular captain. A final table covers Persian goods and rosewater, but there is nothing about pearls.<sup>124</sup> He also kept Batavia informed about regular contact with Mir Mohanna's merchants coming onto Kharg, but did not describe specific goods. There was no mention of pearls or bribes passing in either direction.<sup>125</sup>

Between 5 September 1763 and 21 August 1764,<sup>126</sup> 24 foreign ships were recorded at Kharg. Fifteen of these were British and basic cargo lists were done for seven of them.

<sup>116</sup> BL, IOR, Gombroon diaries 29/8, 6 and 7 April 1755.

<sup>117</sup> NA, 3156, p. 18.

<sup>118</sup> K. Doornbos, *Shipwreck and survival in Oman, 1763: the fate of the Amstelveen and thirty castaways on the South coast of Arabia* (Amsterdam, 2014). Based on the log book of the third mate, Cornelis Eyks, 30 survivors made a gruelling desert trek all the way to Muscat.

<sup>119</sup> NA, 3156, p. 21.

<sup>120</sup> NA, 3156, p. 22.

<sup>121</sup> NA, 3156, p. 28.

<sup>122</sup> NA, 3156, p. 30.

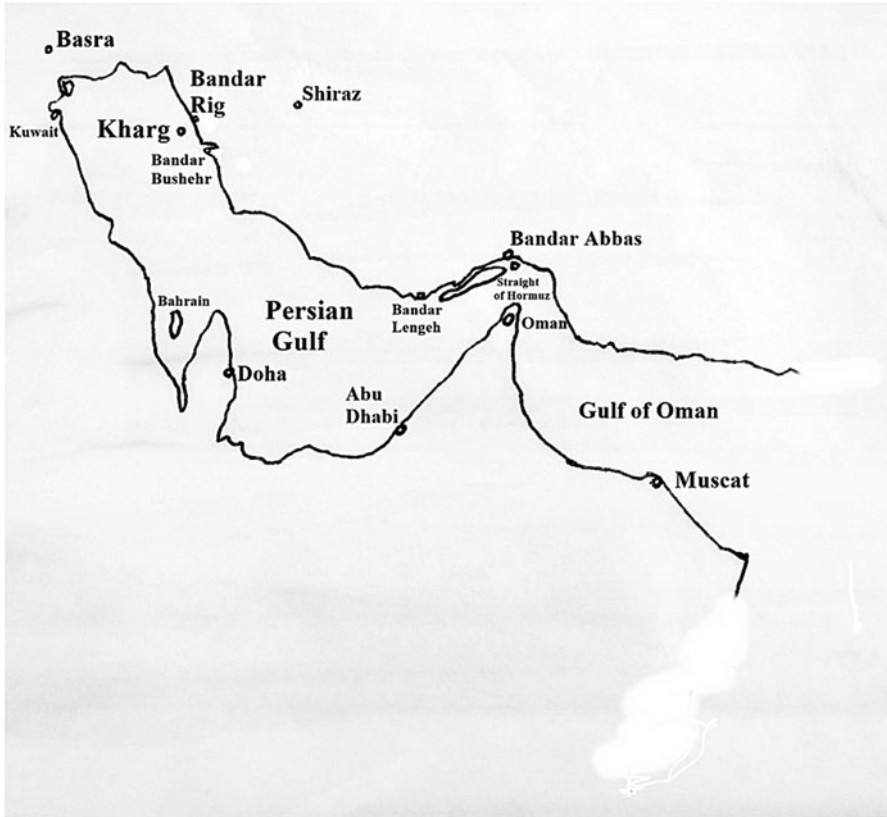
<sup>123</sup> NA, 3156, p. 31.

<sup>124</sup> NA, 3156, p. 44.

<sup>125</sup> NA, 3156, pp. 37–38.

<sup>126</sup> NA, 3156, pp. 55–60.





**Figure 4.** Gulf trading bases, settlements, and political centres, second half of the eighteenth century. Source: The author.

They carried sugar, some originating in Bengal or Cochin (Kochi), and tin, iron, and steel. The records described sailings between Colombo, Bombay, or Surat and Basra, or Bandar Bushehr (Figure 4).

It is notable that in the Batavia diaries attention is given to British activity, while there is nothing on VOC merchants' personal activity. The under merchant who preceded Buschman documented English and Arab ships in more consistent detail than Buschman, in particular the cargo details and quantities.<sup>127</sup> Some of Buschman's reports on British activity are annotated with lines in different ink in the Batavia diary, so VOC headquarters were paying close attention to the EIC.

On 29 August 1764, Buschman addressed a letter in very good French to Peter Wrench, the British agent in Basra, complaining about a British party chasing Persians around the VOC lodge, hitting doors and windows with axes, and setting fire to gun platforms.<sup>128</sup> There is no log of any taxes on cargoes or harbouring fees by Buschman. It is fair to assume that as he knew the captains' names, he had every opportunity to levy them. If he did, though, it is hard to see it generating his massive fund.

<sup>127</sup> NA, 2909, pp. 1–8, 194.

<sup>128</sup> NA, 3101, p. 2760 et seq. This was far more likely a drunken affray than military action.

**Table 2. VOC goods traded and profits, Kharg, 1764–1765.**

<i>Fine spices</i>		<i>Goods by the pound</i>	
Goods	Profit/florins	Goods	Profit/florins
Cloves	57,574	Powder sugar	20,098
Nutmeg	15,252	Candy sugar	6,897
Mace*	76	Tin	6,296
		Benzoin†	117
		Chinese silk	0
		Thread	0
		Sandal wood	1

\*Mace is a strong spice from nutmeg husk for medicine and flavouring.

†Benzoin is *Styrax* tree resin for incense burning.

Source: NA, 3184, pp. 38–39.

### *The final trading year, 1764–1765, until evacuation*

Buschman finalised accounts to Batavia for September 1764–1765<sup>129</sup> only at the point of evacuation from Kharg in December 1765. These were incorporated into the May 1766 Batavia diary with his report on the fall of the base to Mir Mohanna. The goods traded, with profits for the VOC's last full year on Kharg, are summarised in Table 2.

There is no mention of pearls. Additional itemised goods, including 447 shawl cloths and 570 items of bedclothes, were sold at a small loss. Other profits from waist bands and lapis lazuli pigment totalled just 40 florins. Buschman explained that goods were sold at a loss due to trade paralysis.<sup>130</sup> It is interesting that the items sold at a loss during the rebellion were domestic luxury objects, potentially explicable by a wartime fall in demand, but also convenient for extraction from stock as gifts or personal stowage.

After fleeing Kharg under siege in May 1766, Buschman had to document the goods<sup>131</sup> that had been stowed on the VOC ship *Walcheren* under his direction amid the urgency of the evacuation,<sup>132</sup> and those that were already on board the *Kronenburg* (Table 3). The inventory is simple, but of convincing financial and quantity detail, consistent with other tables. It must have reflected Buschman's expectation of exceptional scrutiny from Batavia, given the catastrophic loss of the other assets. Buschman emphasised the excuses of the defeat of the small island and the fear of a new attack.<sup>133</sup> He documented the salvage of 53,976.12 florins in cash. The stock of salvaged powder sugar alone amounted to nearly 1.9 million pounds in weight. There is no record of how much sugar remained on the island. The total weight of powder sugar sold in the previous complete trading year was 293,380 pounds. In the evacuation, the VOC had removed over six years of saleable material, at the recent rate of sale. The lost trade opportunity was huge. Importantly, though, the last year of VOC sugar profit amounted to only a modest portion of Buschman's wealth. The final year's total VOC Kharg profit was about half of

<sup>129</sup> NA, 3184, pp. 38–39.

<sup>130</sup> NA, 3184, pp. 40–41.

<sup>131</sup> NA, 3184, p. 31.

<sup>132</sup> NA, 3184, p. 30.

<sup>133</sup> NA, 3184, p. 31.

**Table 3.** Goods evacuated from Kharg, December 1765.

Goods saved after urgent evacuation to the ship <i>Walcheren</i>		Goods saved already stored on the ship <i>Kronenburg</i>	
900,090 lb	powder sugar net	995,222 lb	powder sugar
99,765 lb	candy sugar net	99,757 lb	candy sugar
25,007 lb	tin	19,993 lb	tin
3,607 lb	cloves net in 90 cases	7,500 lb	sappan wood†
1082 lb	nutmeg net in 10 cases	12 x	large floor construction beams
Additional rosewater in the hold*			

\*Noted besides Buschman's table. Rosewater was used for food flavouring, perfume, and blessings.

†Sappan wood yields red dye.

Source: NA, 3184, p. 31; NA, 3184, p. 30.

Buschman's apparent final Asian wealth. Again, it does not fit becoming rich on bribes and rake-offs from the transparent commodities.

In the last full year of trading, it cost 58,292 florins to run Kharg Island, including ship and building repairs, heating, lighting, food, and wages;<sup>134</sup> 15,700 florins went on pay for temporary Arab seamen. On this, Buschman was careful to clarify:<sup>135</sup>

... the expenses of Moorish seafarers for which the regulations do not say anything, of which some were shown in greater detail from the added statement of accounts among the attachments.

His concern to cover his back reveals something of the VOC view of money going to Arabs. There is also a rare insight into VOC hospital costs:<sup>136</sup>

Hospital expenses, medications used, linen for bandages, bed linen and what was provided according to specifications further submitted for the purchase of fresh and energising food: 1874.8 florins.

That hospital budget was only down 27 florins from the previous year. It was not raided to fund trade losses and it stands as a credit to Buschman that he preserved the expenditure on healthcare.

Buschman was upfront about spending 905 florins for a ducal reception<sup>137</sup> and a bribe, described as a 'Gift bill for a small present', to the Armenian Sarkies of 447.7 florins (Sarkies was the Shiraz trade envoy).<sup>138</sup> Notably, bribes in went to the merchants, bribes out came from the VOC funds. There are no accounted incoming 'gifts'.

The expenses are carefully accounted for in the profit and loss accounts and are consistent with Buschman's later textual description in the diary. Once more, even with the highest conceivable percentages as bribes and rake-offs, his money had to have come from something else, something hidden.

<sup>134</sup> NA, 3184, p. 41.

<sup>135</sup> NA, 3184, p. 44.

<sup>136</sup> NA, 3184, p. 42. The concept of consuming fresh, energising food when ill dated back to at least medieval times.

<sup>137</sup> NA, 3184, p. 42.

<sup>138</sup> NA, 3184, p. 43.

Weight for weight, the value of pearls was far more than that of sugar, tin, wood, or spices. Pearls are much easier to stow and carry, well-suited to personal baggage. There is no mention of pearls in the evacuating ships' cargo. There is mention of Buschman getting on board quickly, though, 'in case the ships left'. That must have been with his wife, son, and baggage,<sup>139</sup> including his cash, reported to Mareyk at the VOC's Aleppo consulate by some unknown astute observer. Buschman was at pains to excuse the escalating trade failure:

It is to my eternal regret that the profits have been small, caused by the bad circumstances mentioned above, which no human being could have foreseen or known about.

He also emphasised 'my tireless attempts and vigilance, to which my ambition and the interests were united'.<sup>140</sup> There is also one rare example of Buschman politely asking Batavia to leave some goods on his account, at their discretion.<sup>141</sup> It refers to 80 carabasse storage bottles of rosewater, worth 1,280 florins. He separated the account of the rosewater from the rest of the table in the *Walcheren* inventory, perhaps making the peripheral labelling assist him in deflecting the Batavian directors' focus. The rosewater was less than 1 per cent of his minimum apparent wealth generated on Kharg. Again, Buschman's money must have come from something hidden.

### *Siege and abandoning the island, December 1765*

Kharg was significant to Mir Mohanna. In 1754, he had forced his elder brother Mir Husain to seek refuge there.<sup>142</sup> In Buschman's time, Mir Mohanna attacked Kharg itself twice. He actually seized Dutch gunboats on blockading the base in 1762.<sup>143</sup> Buschman himself negotiated the settlement. After Mir Mohanna attacked again in December 1765, which led to the Dutch giving up the base altogether, Kharg never returned to lasting European control and its population was greatly reduced until the oil boom of the mid-twentieth century.<sup>144</sup>

The complexities of Mir Mohanna's violent rise to power and overthrow of Kharg came to Niebuhr's attention. Just before Buschman's eviction, a British ship tackled Mir Mohanna head on, alongside what can be seen as Buschman's masterly inactivity in only firing warning cannon shots. Buschman had recently done a deal with Mir Mohanna to camp and graze on neighbouring Khargu Island,<sup>145</sup> appearing to accept it as the Mir's refuge from Shiraz and not suspecting hostility from him. Opportunities for bribes to Buschman were there and they were certainly in contact. Not surprisingly, though, those crucial details are not on record.

At the point of the VOC surrender, Mir Mohanna had taken up menacing positions on sea and land. Buschman described these in the Armenians' houses outside the bastion of the town; they also had multiple cannon batteries and small guns. A few months previously the envoy had certainly worked out how to vanquish Buschman.<sup>146</sup> Buschman

<sup>139</sup> NA, 3184, p. 41.

<sup>140</sup> NA, 3184, p. 41.

<sup>141</sup> NA, 3184, p. 46.

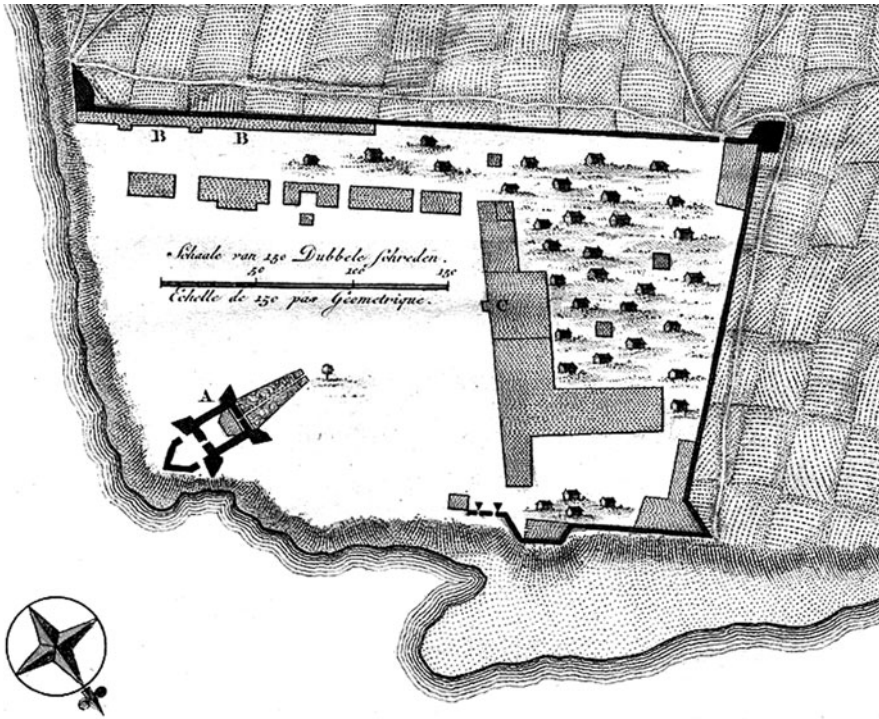
<sup>142</sup> Discussed in al-Qasimi, *Thesis*, p. 128.

<sup>143</sup> Amin, *British interests*, passim.

<sup>144</sup> [iranicaonline.org/articles/kharg-island-02](https://iranicaonline.org/articles/kharg-island-02) (accessed 7 October 2022), for interim historic population data.

<sup>145</sup> Niebuhr, *Reisebeschreibung nach Arabien*. June–July, 1765, passim. Niebuhr did not clarify what animals he grazed.

<sup>146</sup> NA, 3184, p. 30.



**Figure 5.** Plan of the VOC fort, warehouses, and Kharg town, northeast corner of the island, the site of modern Khark. Source: Niebuhr, Dutch edition, 1776, Table 38.

boarded ship as the town became entirely surrounded. The two VOC ships *Walcheren* and *Kronenburg* were completely cut off from land access by Mir Mohanna's large, armed fleet.<sup>147</sup> Knowing that the attackers had scaling ladders, Buschman described 'great morosity' among the European and Moorish residents of the town. His colleague van Houting came out from the ramparts to negotiate surrender terms under a white flag. Some records were left behind with the goods. Buschman wrote defensively to Batavia that:<sup>148</sup>

... with the unforeseen siege and the thwarted correspondence, the papers drawn up from that, and made ready to be sent on with the ship *Walcheren*, remained at the office, which the expected resident Houtingh will do me the satisfaction of confirming, and which could also be indicated from his letters.

Kharg was a sizeable VOC town, fort, and trading base (Figure 5). Succumbing to a menacing and far bigger Arab army and navy than the VOC had under Buschman was, therefore, inescapable.

It is possible that Mir Mohanna, from existing knowledge and having got wind of Buschman's wealth, seized Kharg to control its pearl trade. Arguably, Buschman and Mir Mohanna were both actors in the slow genesis of commerce in modern Kharg. On the other hand, it was doing well in the tenth century. One view is that a few driven individuals

<sup>147</sup> NA, 3184, p. 30.

<sup>148</sup> NA, 3184, p. 45.

like Buschman were the only source of success on Kharg in the first place,<sup>149</sup> and the Dutch were inflexible in their dealings with the Gulf Arabs, leading to the failure of their expensive enterprise. Jacobs argued that the VOC failed because it did not take corruption in hand, and that corruption was a constant factor, not a clear precipitant for decline.<sup>150</sup> That view fits a more nuanced consensus—that the VOC could not compete against the tighter-managed and later Napoleonic-militarised EIC,<sup>151</sup> though they too had struggled in the Persian Gulf.

Pearls on Kharg emerge again in records very soon after Buschman. When Mir Mohanna fled Kharg himself in 1179/1766, soon after the Dutch, an Armenian Shiraz official reported that he had left behind ‘many pearls’.<sup>152</sup>

## Conclusion

Was the VOC funding Mozart? We already have a good idea from Bleker and Steins’ work that the answer is ‘yes’—in part and indirectly. The findings here substantiate that around 94 per cent, if not more, of the source fund paying Mozart for his flute compositions came from Wilhelm Buschman’s Persian Gulf activity. Dejean might still have sponsored Mozart out of his personally generated funds, but he was a lot richer due to the Buschmans’ money and uxorial inheritance. Without Anna Pack it would have been harder for Dejean to commission so many fine compositions. Buschman left Kharg with so much cash that some of his wealth may have been undeclared in Batavia, though it was similar to the sum in the Batavian orphans’ account, which is helpfully consistent. That similarity also gravitates away from much of the money we know Anna had banked in India<sup>153</sup> which came from her father. Buschman could have hidden the possible £600,000 discrepancy somewhere else, such as India, in his wife’s name on the way back. Equally, Anna’s wealth declaration may have been accurate, with any discrepancy being within conversion or an estimate error. Whatever the case, a sum of over £4 million gravitates even further away from bribes, rake-offs, and declared commodities as the source. Buschman had more wealth than the whole of the annual Kuwaiti pearl output. It is credible that the sum derives from Kharg pearls alone. That Kharg is an island, with a clear geographical reference point and a boundary for a set of records, has helped this article; it is a historian’s test tube.

The professionalism and detail of Buschman’s diaries are rich and informative; there is still scope for more to be published on it. To the VOC, personal business conducted by its senior merchants was regarded as an entitlement, not theft from the company, even though it was technically illegal. Why it was ever criminalised to the point of arrest is also a matter for further research; the sums of money described by Buschman in the case of the criminalised Frans Canter were only a fraction of Buschman’s minimum likely wealth. Details of treading on someone else’s toes are rarely recorded in history, as the offended party naturally hides reasons for their anger and embarrassment.

You rarely need to look far beneath the surface in eighteenth-century research for slavery to appear. Huge numbers of sub-Saharan Africans were traded in the Cape by

<sup>149</sup> Amin, *British interests*, p. 150.

<sup>150</sup> Jacobs, *Koopman in Azië*, pp. 16–17, 218–219.

<sup>151</sup> B. Kromhout. ‘Het faillissement van ’s werelds eerste multinational. “De VOC redder was een prestigekwestie”’, *Historisch Nieuwsblad* (July 2001). This is not an academic journal, but the article is a very good review of the spectrum of opinions.

<sup>152</sup> BL, Bombay archives, Basra diaries, Vol. 199, p. 361.

<sup>153</sup> Detailed copy of the deed discussed in Bleker, ‘Ferdinand Dejean’. Minutes of notarial deeds, 1753–1789, 506, Regionaal Archief, Leiden. She also declared valuable pearls, though still valued under the legal limit. An exceptional portrait of a Javanese-looking girl in the Art Gallery of Ontario wearing lavish pearls could be Anna’s maid, Anna Canangan, in 1772 on the occasion of her baptism in the Hooglandse, Kerk: Leiden Archief. With extraordinary rarity, the Dejeans had adopted her, giving her the opportunity for such privileges.

the VOC. Comparing the Arhuysers pay rates with Buschman's accounts and the reported numbers of military personnel, they were paid half to a quarter of the pay of the lowest VOC ranks. They laboured under despicable ethics and were not free to leave. Buschman paraded slavery and was accustomed to it; he was probably culture-bound, but not clinically psychopathic. Ironically, the VOC lost out vastly to having a slave militia, which, in apparent wisdom, never fired a shot under attack.

Buschman's writing indicates that he was officially dutiful, busy, and organised. The magnitude of his wife's eventual inheritance indicates that he applied the same attributes to his personal benefit. Niebuhr proved Buschman could be assertive and swanky, but he also verified that he kept to social norms and was not psychopathic. Transparent commodities on Kharg, including sugar, spices, cloth, dyes, and scents, were available for achieving additional income in bribes and rake-offs. To generate Buschman's wealth it would have been dangerous to take a massive percentage from the VOC's official goods, especially in hard times. Buschman would have risked being treated as another Frans Canter had he done that. Nevertheless, some personal factoring in goods sales by Kharg merchants may not have been recorded in order to conceal evidence. Buschman's platitudes to Batavia on his modest stock of evacuated rosewater were an obvious smokescreen in overall context. With the extraordinary original wealth involved in the Buschman-Pack-Dejean-Mozart fiscal trail, there had to be more to it than income from transparent goods.

Low volume, high value pearls are the only reasonable explanation for generating such huge sums in just over two years, helped by a position where Buschman was perceived as a sovereign. Nothing suggests precious metals were covertly traded; although their prices were defined, they do not figure around Kharg before, during, or after our period of interest. Pearls vanished from the records in Buschman's time for no plausible climatic, seismic, ecological, or global volcanic reason. They instantly reappeared with Buschman's Persian successor, Mir Mohanna. Military expansion by Mir Mohanna formed continuing threats to and opportunities for Buschman's personal profits. From wider evidence, it is not convincing that Buschman's predecessor, Knipphausen, maintained that pearls were hard to reach. He was obviously trying to put Ives off the scent in several ways: greatly exaggerating the pearl bed depths, talking of poor success, and implying new inventions were crucial. He also actively sought to dispel any potential evidence that he might be wealthy. Knipphausen's secret pearl activity was documented coincidentally by foreign observers in likely intelligence gathering, when they could travel in relative peace. In Buschman's time as upper merchant during Mir Mohanna's campaign, foreign observation of VOC merchant pearl activity was even less likely. Buschman probably had no records, was unobserved, and had a pearl monopoly.

In the author's professional experience of modern international fraud, it is still very difficult to get the complete picture; hence, there is nothing trickier in history than when someone has actively covered their tracks. Buschman had the intelligence and the opportunity to succeed. He completely compartmentalised his private trade from official VOC business, certainly in practice and possibly in mental denial. Kharg's natural, anti-malarial landscape was a fortunate coincidence, allowing Buschman to survive long enough to become rich. Pearls can be seen as the eighteenth-century equivalent of the compact, high value 500 Euro note to today's money launderers. Also, it looks like the principle of *Do not steal an item from a box, steal the whole box*; it is a lot less likely to be noticed. With Gulf pearls at one end, Batavia in the middle, and Mozart at the other end, history seldom has such colourful forensic audit trails. The reality was more dramatic than the art and the operas.

**Conflicts of interest.** None.

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**Cite this article:** Martin S (2023). Was the VOC funding Mozart? The diaries of Wilhelm Buschman on Kharg Island. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 33, 489–511. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S135618632200030X>