



ĀBĀDĀN I. HISTORY

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In medieval sources, and up to the present century, the name of the island always occurs in the Arabic form 'Abbādān; this name has sometimes been derived from 'abbād "worshiper." Belādorī (d. 279/892), on the other hand, quotes the story that the town was founded by one 'Abbād b. Ḥosayn Kabeṭī, who established a garrison there during the governorship of Ḥajjāj (75-95/695-714). An Iranian etymology of the name (from *āb*, "water," and the root *pā*, "watch, guard," thus "coastguard station") was suggested by B. Farahvašī ("Arvandrud," *MDAT* nos. 71/72, 1348 Š./1969, pp. 75-87). Possible supporting evidence is the name Apphana, which Ptolemy (2nd cent. A.D.) applies to an island off the mouth of the Tigris (*Geographia* 6.7). The 4th-century geographer Marcian, who, in general, draws his information from Ptolemy, renders the name Apphadana (*Geographia Marciani Heracleotae*, ed. David Hoeschel, Augsburg, 1600, p. 48). Thus there may have been some grounds for revising the name to Ābādān; the latter form had begun to come into general use before it was adopted by official decree in 1314 Š./1935 (see, e.g., Kayhān, *Joḡrāfiā* I, pp. 77, 111).

The island is bounded by the Šaṭṭ-al-'arab on the west, the Kārūn on the north, the Bahmanšīr on the east, and the Persian Gulf on the south. The island, 64 km long and from 3 to 20 km wide, thus forms part of the combined delta of the Kārūn, Tigris, and Euphrates rivers, together with their numerous



tributaries, including the Karḡa and the Gorgor. It is not certain how long Ābādān has actually been an island. According to the most generally accepted theory, it became one when the Bahmanšīr, originally the outlet of the Kārūn to the Gulf, was linked to the Šaṭṭ-al-‘arab by an artificial canal (later known as the Ḥaffār channel) passing to the south of present-day Ḳorramšahr. Others have held that the Bahmanšīr was formerly one of the two outlets to the sea from the great swamp extending from Kūfa to Baṣra into which both the Tigris and the Euphrates used to drain until they took their present courses. According to this view the Kārūn’s outlet would have been farther to the east, running from the present village of Mared to the Ḳowr Mūsā, and the term Ḥaffār should refer to the section of the present Kārūn river between Mared and Bahmanšīr. One thing is certain, that there was an island there in quite early times. Several of the early Greek geographers mention it, the clearest account being found in the 4th century A.D. work of Philostorgius (*Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte*, Leipzig, 1913, p. 36). He describes the Tigris as dividing into two great streams before reaching the sea, thus enclosing and making an island of a large tract of land inhabited by the tribe of the Mesenians (a name which may mean no more than “those who live between” the two arms of the river). Much earlier, the accounts of the voyage from India to Susa of Alexander’s general Nearchus in the 4th century B.C. suggest that already ships could pass to both sides of the island. At that time it was certainly much smaller than it is now, the greater part of the present island having been built up over the centuries from the alluvial deposits brought down by the rivers.

There are no hills or elevations on the island, its highest point being only 3 m above sea level. Ābādān seems to have been largely covered, at some point in the past, by salt marshes; at present the salinity of its soil has diminished considerably, but the ground is still unsuitable for growing grains. Dates form the island’s primary crop and long constituted its chief source of income; extensive groves line the island’s shore. The region of Ābādān and Ḳorramšahr in fact comprises Iran’s most productive date-growing area; the number of trees has been estimated at more than 5.5 million, yielding about one-quarter of Iran’s entire date crop. Henna is Ābādān’s second crop, and green vegetables are also found in modest quantity. The climate is hot and generally humid. Ḳūzestān lies within the North Temperate Zone, but from ancient times it has been notorious for its torrid climate. In recent times maximum and minimum temperatures of 52° and 0°C have been recorded; but in July-August, 1949, a temperature of 58° was noted. The humidity may reach 99



percent, depending on wind direction.

The city of 'Abbādān (at present about 15 km from the northwestern tip of the island, at 30°22 ' north latitude, 48°15 ' east longitude) is first mentioned by name by Ebn Kordāḍbeh (ca. 250/864). At that time it was evidently sufficiently well established to serve as a boundary marker of the sea and land areas of the Persian Gulf and Iran and Iraq. Later Muslim geographers followed this example. During the medieval period the town was situated on the coast at the point where the Tigris flowed into the sea; it was of some importance to travelers and navigators. Several writers mention the fact that there was no inhabited place between 'Abbādān and the sea; the earlier ones add that the town was almost surrounded by water, while in the 8th/14th century Ebn Baṭṭūṭa (see bibliography) found it to be 3 miles (*amyāl*) distant from the shore. Most accounts describe it as a small town, lacking in amenities. The chief manufacture was woven straw mats (*ḥaṣīr*), known as 'abbādānī and sāmānī, and according to Maqrīzī, writing at the end of the 8th/14th century, these mats were much sought after as far afield as Egypt. The anonymous author of *Hodūd al-ālam* (372/982) states that Ābādān supplied salt to Baṣra and Vāseṭ. Its importance as a center of shipping and navigation was emphasized by the construction, in the channel opposite 'Abbādān, of wooden lighthouses (*kaṣabāt*), described by Eṣṭakrī (340/951), Ebn Ḥawqal (368/978), and Nāṣer-e Kōsrow (439/1047). Eṣṭakrī also refers to a coastguard garrison to ward off the attacks of pirates. Ḥamdallāh Mostawfī Qazvīnī (741/1340) states that the tax revenue from 'Abbādān remitted to the Il-khanid provincial treasury in Baṣra came to 441,000 dinars. In view of the known saline character of the soil (as was noted above), which may be assumed to have precluded the possibility of a substantial income from agriculture, we must conclude that this figure reflects a high degree of commercial prosperity.

'Abbādān was also distinguished in medieval times as the site of the first Sufi monastery (*ṣawma'a*), founded there in 150/767 by followers of 'Abd-al-Vaḥīd b. Zayd, a disciple of Ḥasan Baṣrī. For about a century this place was visited by mystics and pilgrims, including Vakī' and Sahl Tostarī; and prayers offered there (*al-ṣalāt be-'Abbādān*) were said to be of particular efficacy (see, e.g., L. Massignon, *Lexique*, p. 157). Although this monastery was said to have been destroyed in 260/874, the presence of other shrines, monasteries, and pilgrim hostels is attested by Moqaddasī (375/985), Yāqūt (622/1225), and Ebn Baṭṭūṭa (756/1335). One shrine, devoted to Keẓr, remains on the island to this day. In 1909 Arnold Wilson reported that the island was known locally as Jazīrat al-



Keẓr, “the island of Keẓr” (*S. W. Persia: A Political Officer’s Diary*, London, 1941, p. 94).

By the end of the Middle Ages Ābādān, perhaps because of the steady movement southward of the coastline, together with the commercial growth of Baṣra and Moḥammara (modern Kōrramšahr), had lost importance and dwindled to an insignificant village. From the 11th/17th century onward, the island was part of the lands of the Arab Ka’b tribe, one section of which, the Moḥaysen, had its headquarters at Moḥammara until the removal of Shaikh Kaẓ’al in 1924. Though many European travelers passed that way during the 18th and 19th centuries, the village rarely attracted sufficient attention to warrant a mention in their accounts. It is shown on a map by Colonel Chesney in 1849, and H. C. Rawlinson in 1857 noted that it lay about 20 miles from the sea (“Notes on the Ancient Geography of Mohamrah and the Vicinity,” *JRGS* 28, 1857, pp. 185-90).

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