



AHMADABAD

AHMADABAD, the major city of [Gujarat](#) state in western India and a former center of Persian culture. It was founded on the left or eastern bank of the Sabarmati river in 813/1411 by Aḥmad Shah I, the third of the Gujarat sultans, after whom the city was named. Since its foundation, the city has been the metropolitan capital of the province, a center of art and culture as well as of commerce and industry. One of the most picturesque cities in India, it attained great prosperity during the first century of the Gujarat sultanate (805-981/1403-1573). After a brief decline in the middle of the 10th/16th century, it again flourished as an important Mughal provincial capital from 981/1573 until it was occupied by the Marathas in 1171/1758.

Exact details of Ahmadabad as originally planned are not available, although it appears to have been modeled after a contemporary Persian city. In the center, a square citadel-palace (*qaḷ'a-ye arg*) with imposing towers and formidable bastions overlooked a spacious court, the *maydān-e šāh* in front and an impressive stone mosque at the rear; residential quarters lay on three sides; and the whole was encircled by a city wall of burnt brick and mortar, pierced by fourteen gates and wickets and strengthened by bastions and battlements. A prominent feature of the planning seems to have been the water system, particularly underground carriage of water through clay pipes and basement storage tanks to feed gardens, pools, and fountains laid out in the Persian style; even today the locality in front of the citadel where once stood the main water tank is known as *kāranj* (a corruption of the Persian *kārīz*).



By the end of the 16th century, Ahmadabad, with its well-arranged, paved and spacious streets lined with two- or three-story shops, came to be regarded as the finest and largest city of India. At one time, the metropolitan region is reported to have comprised 360 fairly well defined occupational quarters and suburbs, of which eighty-four were still flourishing during the reign of the Mughal emperor Akbar (d. 1014/1605); each of them focused on the house of a noble and functioned as a city in itself with a congregational mosque, mansions, and all classes of inhabitants. Numerous Persian and European travelers remarked favorably on its size and charm (see M. S. Commissariat, *History of Gujarat, 1297-98 to 1573*, Bombay, 1938, pp. 91-117).

From the sultanate period Ahmadabad's merchants trafficked in gold and silver embroideries, velvets, taffetas, and other textiles. Textiles were manufactured, especially cottons, and the city excelled in the production of such items as gold and silver brocade, silk carpets with gold and silver threads, and silk and cotton cloth with gold flowers. The very names for luxury goods, e.g., *mašrū'*, *kamkāvāb*, *maḳmal*, *zarbāft*, *maḳmal-e bādlabāf* and *kāṛčūbī*, resonate with Persian influence. Ahmadabad became famous for goods such as light and warm shawls, red Kashmiri wool garments, saltpeter, indigo, bronze and brass pieces, mother-of-pearl ornaments, inlay work, musk, and ambergris. The *mašrū'* cloth became the city's most profitable export. Hormoz (modern Bandar 'Abbās, at the mouth of the Persian Gulf) was the principal port for the city's exports to Persia and neighboring countries. Armenian merchants, some from New Jolfa at Isfahan, traded at Ahmadabad (*Journal of the Oriental Institute, M. S. University, Baroda* 17/1, 1967, pp. 22-25). The land trade with Khorasan consisted mainly of horses for royal stables at the capital. The Dutch founded a factory here in 1614, followed by the British in 1618.

Under the sultans Ahmadabad did not have direct political relations with Persia; a diplomatic mission from Shah Esmā'īl II, arriving in Gujarat in 917/1511, failed to make any headway, due as much to religious differences as to Persia's cordial relations with the Deccani kingdoms, whom the Gujarat sultans never trusted and often opposed. Yet Persian influence in Ahmadabad was considerable. Apart from the trade relations already mentioned, the city witnessed great literary activities in the Persian language, which was the common medium for instruction and official business; the Italian traveler Pietro Della Valle noted that Persian was more used in Ahmadabad than the local language (*The Travels of Pietro Della Valle in India*, I, London, 1892, p. 96). As late as the early 19th century, Persian dominated official correspondence



and transactions; there are even manuscripts in Persian of official and personal letters, diaries and notes by the city's Hindu officials of the Nāgar community. Until India's independence, the Nāgars remained so familiar with Persian that some of them recited their evening prayers (*sandhyā*) in Persian; others learned the Sanskrit text from its Persian transcript (R. C. Naik, *Contributions of the Nāgars of Gujarat to Persian Language and Literature* [Gujarati], Ahmadabad, 1950, p. 28).

An extensive legacy of Persian prose and poetry was left by the Muslim literati who were attracted to Ahmadabad during the sultanate period from many parts of *dār al-eslām*. The city itself produced a large number of local saints, savants, scholars, poets, and writers who composed works in Persian, ranging from commentaries on standard religious texts and mystical works to original poetical and prose compositions. Many works were translated from Arabic into Persian, including two very early Persian renditions of the Qur'ān.

The Mughal occupation of Ahmadabad gave fresh impetus to literary activities in Persian, especially through the new, almost exclusively Persian, influx of literati, many of whom are mentioned in Ṭaqī Awḥadī's famed *tadkera*, *'Arafāt al-'āṣeqīn*. Saints from different Sufi orders also flourished in Ahmadabad; some, such as Sohrawardī Boḳārīs, Češtīs, and Šaṭṭārīs, were local, while others, including Hamadānīs, Moršedī Kāzarūnīs, and Aydarūsīs, emigrated mostly from Persia to western India. Ahmadabad was even for some time the seat of Fatimid *dā'īs* originating from Yemen. Among the most famous Sufi scholars of the city were two commentators on Rūmī's *Maṭnawī*: 'Abd-al-Laṭīf 'Abbāsī (d. 1048/1638-39) and 'Abd-al-Fattāḥ 'Askarī (d. 1091/1680). The latter earned the nickname *Maṭnawī-dān* "one well versed in the *Maṭnawī*," while the former collated more than eighty manuscripts in preparing a recension of the *Maṭnawī* with introduction, indices, paraphrases, annotations, glossary, and commentary,

Ahmadabad is a living monument to the brilliant achievements of the Gujarat sultans as builders. It reached its peak as a center of art and architecture at the close of Maḥmūd I's reign (863-917/1459-1511). Two seemingly opposite styles, the local trabeate and Islamic arcuate, were so satisfactorily harmonized, while archways and minarets were so skillfully combined with indigenous Hindu pillars and flat aisles, that it is not easy to detect which architectural specimens belonged to one style and which to the other. By the middle of the 16th century the great creative period of the city's architecture was over; subsequent monuments were fewer in number and less perfect in style. Of



Ahmadabad's buildings, almost all in stone and in an excellent state of preservation, only two from the sultanate period betray Persian or foreign influence: the massive 15th century mausoleum of A'zam Mo'azzam, a heavy, gloomy looking structure in the Togloq style that bears little resemblance to the typical Ahmadabad architecture, and an equally massive brick tomb from the same period containing the remains of Daryā Khan. Both structures must have been designed by Persian architects, as were the gardens of flowers and fruit trees, together with the *sarāy* cloisters, preferred by the Gujarat sultans. In contrast the city's outstanding Mughal monuments all represent the typical Persian Timurid style, conforming to contemporary monuments elsewhere in India: for instance, the stately palatial mansion at Šāhī Bāg (ca. 1027-31/1618-22); the artistically imposing *sarāy* and *madrassa* built by A'zam Khan, the provincial governor under Shah Jahān (1047/1637); and the small mosque and tomb of Sardār Khan (ca. 1095/1684), with its striking pear-shaped domes. The city is singularly rich in Arabic and Persian inscriptions, some of the Mughal items being executed in extremely elegant *tolt*, *nask*, and *nasta'liq* styles, while *toḡrā* strokes dominate the earlier inscriptions.

Ahmadabad was an important mint under the Gujarat sultans and the Mughals. The Persian mint epithet *šahr-e mo'azzam* "the magnificent city" occurs on the sultanate coins; and for the first time in Islamic coinage Persian metrical legends appear, first under Sultan Moḥammad Shah (846-55/1442-51) and later under Sultans Bahādor (932-43/1526-37) and Moḡaffar III (968-81/1561-73; 991-92/1583-84). The city remained a favorite mint for the Mughals, who issued coins in all metals bearing its epithets or metrical legends; it was almost the only mint to issue the famous zodiacal rupees of Jahāngīr.

The schools and colleges of Ahmadabad were numerous and well endowed; some of them built up rich collections of books in both the religious and rational sciences. A few of these libraries have survived in private hands, but are not as a rule accessible. The one at the Dargāh of the 18th century poet-saint, Pīr Moḥammad Shah "Aqdas," is an exception. It is the largest and most important library not only of the city but of the entire region, containing, apart from printed works, a fairly large number of old, rare, and sometimes unique manuscripts in Arabic, Persian, and Urdu, e.g. the only extant copy of Bīrūnī's *Ġorrat al-azyāj*.



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For notices of Arabic and Persian inscriptions, see *Annual Reports on Indian Epigraphy*, published by the Archeological Survey of India, and M. A. Chaghtai, *Muslim Monuments of Ahmadabad, Through its Inscriptions*, Poona, 1942.