



AHVĀZ I. HISTORY

Ahvāz was apparently a flourishing town in pre-Islamic times, to be identified either with the Aginis of the Greek geographers or, more probably, with the Achaemenid Tareiana, where the royal road from Susa to Persepolis and the heartland of Fārs crossed the river on a bridge of boats; Alexander's general Nearchus sailed his fleet to this city at the end of his epic voyage from India to the head of the Persian Gulf. The name Ahvāz goes back to the Kūzī, the original people of the province, the Ouxioi of the Greek authors, who also gave their name to the province (Kūzestān) and whose distinctive language apparently survived till Sasanian times (cf. K̄vārazmī, *Mafātīḥ al-'olūm*, ed. van Vloten, Leiden, 1895, pp. 117; tr. J. M. Unvala, "The Translation of an Extract from Mafātīḥ al-'Ulūm of al-Khwārazmī," *Journal of the K. R. Cama Research Institute* 11, 1928, pp. 80, 90).

The Arabic geographers are confused about the original name of the town. It seems that the founder of the Sasanian dynasty, Ardašīr I, rebuilt it and renamed it Hormoz-Ardašīr (Ṭabarī, p. 820), a name which appears in the Arabic sources in various forms. According to Maqdesī (or Moqaddasī, p. 416) it was that king's son Šāpūr I who built the town on two sides of the river, calling one after God and the other after himself; they were then united under one name, Hormoz-Ardašīr, contracted to Dārāvāšīr (*ibid.*, p. 406). Elsewhere, one town is named as the mercantile center, Hūjestān-vāčār (the market of Kūzestān), and the other as the seat of the governor and the nobles, with the contracted form Hormošīr; the latter was destroyed in the course of the Arab invasions of the 1st/7th century, but the name of the former was translated by



the Arabs as Sūq al-Ahwāz. P. Schwarz conjectured that the varying explanations of the sources are attempts to rationalize a popular name Hormošīr (*Iran*, pp. 315-18; Markwart, *Provincial Capitals*, p. 96). In the Syriac Christian sources, the region is called Bēt Hūzāyē, after the Kūzī, and the town itself is mentioned as a bishopric (from the time of the Synod of the Patriarch Isaac in 410 onwards) under the names of Hormozd Ardašīr or Hormezdšēr (I. Guidi, “Ostsyrische Bischöfe und Bischofssitze im V., VI. und VII. Jahrhundert,” *ZDMG* 43, 1889, pp. 393ff.).

When the Arabs invaded Kūzestān in the later 630s, after the overrunning of Iraq, the general ‘Otba b. Ġazwān destroyed the administrative half of the town of Ahvāz, as noted above, but preserved the commercial one. The Persian general Hormozān withdrew from Ahvāz to Šūštar, and after a long siege, surrendered to ‘Omar’s troops in 21/641-42 (Spuler, *Iran*, pp. 11-12; *Camb. Hist. Iran* IV, pp. 14-15). Later in this century, the region around Ahvāz was the scene of operations led by the Omayyad general ‘Otmān b. ‘Obaydallāh b. Ma‘mar against the Kharijite sectarians (cf. Mobarrad, *al-Kāmel*, Cairo, 1376/1956, III, pp. 307-08). The geographers note that the town suffered badly during the Zanġ rebellion of the later 3rd/9th century which enveloped lower Iraq and Kūzestān. Maqdesī (p. 406) mentions the ruin caused by the town’s being occupied by “the veiled one” (*al-mobarqa*) leading the insurgents, and Ṭabarī (III, p. 1889) records under 261/874-75 that the Zanġ occupied the town, plundering, enslaving, and burning houses.

Of the 4th/10th century geographers, Maqdesī has the fullest description of Ahvāz. It was still the capital of the province in his time (ca. 370/980), but its prosperity had somewhat declined; a continuator of Ebn Ḥawqal in the 6th/12th century says that in his time, Ahvāz had become depopulated and ‘Askar Mokram had supplanted it as the premier town of Kūzestān. Maqdesī was unimpressed by the town, describing its streets as narrow and confused, dirty and stinking. The people included few notable scholars, theologians or lawyers, and there were no good Qur’ān readers (in fact, Sam‘ānī [Hyderabad], I, pp. 395-97, names quite a few scholars and traditionists from Ahvāz). The people all had yellow, jaundiced complexions, and fever and other diseases were endemic because of the stagnant pools and lagoons in the vicinity, a fact already noted by Jāḥeẓ.

Ahvāz was essentially a commercial center, and its provisions, such as rice flour and fruit, had to be imported. It was the entrepot for Fārs and Isfahan in the interior of Persia; their products were sent down to the coast via Ahvāz to



Bašra. The covered markets (*qayšārīyas*) were capacious, being situated, together with the Friday mosque, on the Persian, i.e., eastern bank of the Doḡayl. This was linked with the Iraqi or western bank by a bridge constructed of fired brick, the Qanṭara Hendovān on which there stood a mosque overlooking the river. The Buyid amir ‘Azod-al-dawla (r. 338-72/949-83) had pulled down an earlier bridge and replaced it by a new one, together with the mosque, planning to name it after himself; but the population had refused to abandon the old name. There were numerous water-mills and water-wheels (*dawlāb, nā’ūra*) along the river, whose waters were run off by *qanāts* to give the town a domestic water supply and to irrigate the fields. A notable feature was a large dam or weir (*šāḡorvān*) just below the town, constructed from rocks, in which water was stored for irrigation purposes; this had outlets for diverting water into three channels and sluice-gates to run off flood waters in the winter and spring, and it made so much noise that sleep was prevented. Navigation on the river was highly important at this time, as likewise in Iraq; both Ebn Ḥawqal and Maqdesī traveled on the Doḡayl; the former describes how he traveled downstream from ‘Askar Mokram to Ahvāz, a distance of ten *farsaks*, but after six *farsaks* had to leave the boat and walk along the dry bed of the river, since towards the end of the moon’s phase the tides in the Persian Gulf were too low to send up sufficient tidal waters. Of the manufactures of Ahvāz, silk textiles and especially brocades (*dībāḡ al-ḡazz*) are frequently mentioned, and its sugar was said to be the finest of all that produced from sugarcane in Kūzestān. See Eṣṭaḡrī, pp. 88; Ebn Ḥawqal, pp. 251-53, tr. Kramers, pp. 248-50; *Abū-Dulaf Mis’ar ibn Muḡalhil’s Travels in Iran (circa A.D. 950)*, ed. and tr. V. Minorsky, Cairo, 1955, p. 28, tr. p. 61; Maqdesī, pp. 406, 410-12, 414, 417; *Ḥodūd al-‘ālam*, p. 138; tr. Minorsky, p. 130. Ṭa’ālebī, *Laṭā’ef al-ma’āref*, ed. Abyārī and Ṣayrafī, Cairo, 1960, pp. 175-77, tr. Bosworth, *The Book of Curious and Entertaining Information*, pp. 126-27; Yāḡūt (Beirut), I, pp. 284-86; Schwarz, *Iran*, pp. 315-23; R. B. Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles, Material for a History up to the Mongol Conquest*, Beirut, 1972, p. 40.

After the decline of the Buyids Ahvāz tends to sink out of mention in the chronicles. The K̄vārazmšāh Jalāl-al-dīn conducted operations in Kūzestān in 622/1225 after his return from India, but his main effort was devoted to the besieging of Šūštar (Ebn al-Aṭīr, XII, pp. 425ff.). It may have been during the insecurity of the Mongol invasions that the great dam or weir was destroyed, though traces of it can still be seen today. In the post-Mongol period, Kūzestān passed eventually to the local line of the Āl-e Moša’ša’ and then to the Safavids, but by now trade had ceased to pass through Kūzestān in any great volume,



and Ahvāz sank to the status of a village. In the Anglo-Persian War of 1857, Ahvāz was occupied by a small Anglo-Indian force of General Outram's sent upstream from Moḥammara (the modern Kōrramšahr). Under the Qajars, the province was known, as in Safavid times, as 'Arabestān, and during the Qajar period was administratively a governor-generalate.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

See also Le Strange, *Lands*, pp. 233-34.

J. de Morgan, *Mission scientifique en Perse*. I. *Études géographiques*, Paris, 1894, pp. 275ff.

Aḥmad Kasravī, *Tārīḵ-epānšad sāla-ye Kūzestān*, Tehran, 1313 Š./1934.

Razmārā, *Farhang* VI, pp. 29-31.

S. A. Matheson, *Persia: an Archaeological Guide*, London, 1972, pp. 139-40.