



ĀMOL

ĀMOL, a town on the Caspian shore, situated in 36° 25' north latitude and 52° 35' east longitude in the southwest of the modern province of Māzandarān, medieval Ṭabarestān. It lies on the left bank of the Harāz river, some twelve miles from the sea.

i. History.

ii. Islamic monuments.

iii. Modern Āmol.

i. History

In classical times, Āmol (Old Pers. *Āmrda) fell within the province of Hyrcania, and in Alexander the Great's time it was the home of the Mardoī or Amardoī, possibly a people of the pre-Iranian substratum, who were subjugated by the Parthian king Phraates I ca. 176 B.C. In the Sasanian period, Kavād's eldest son Kāvūs was made ruler of the Caspian marches to hold them against the Hephthalites and Turks, with the title Padaškvāršāh; his capital was at Āmol. The town had at this time a substantial Nestorian Christian population, and together with Gilān is mentioned in 553 A.D. as a Nestorian bishopric (I. Guidi, "Ostsyrische Bischöfe und Bischöfssitze im V., VI. und VII. Jahrhundert," *ZDMG* 43, 1889, pp. 403, 407). Later legends of the Islamic period attribute the foundation of Āmol to Āmola, daughter of a Daylamī chief and wife of King Fīrūz of Balk (Ebn Esfandiār, pp. 62-63, abridged tr. E. G. Browne,



London, 1905, pp. 25-27), or to King Tahmūrāt (*Nozhat al-qolūb*, p. 160; for the pre-Islamic period of the town's history, see F. C. Andreas, "Amardoi," in Pauly-Wissowa, I, col. 1733; W. Tomaschek, "Amarusa," *ibid.*, I, col. 1741; J. Markwart, *Ērānšahr*, pp. 125, 129ff., 135-36).

From the time of Sa'īd b. 'Āṣ's governorship in Kūfa (30/650-51), Ṭabarestān and Gorgān were penetrated by Muslim arms; but the indigenous Iranian princes and the ancient faith of Zoroastrianism remained strong in the mountains above the Caspian coastlands. The geographer Ebn al-Faḡīh (pp. 302, 304) mentions that the seat of government (*dār al-emāra*) of the Arabs was at Āmol, whilst the nearby town of Sārī or Sārīya was the seat of the native Espahbads of the Bavandid dynasty (see *Āl-e Bāvand*). It seems, however, that the governor of the Tahirid Caspian provinces had resided at Sārī, and only after the Tahirids did Āmol become the permanent center of government (Ebn Ḥawqal, p. 281; tr., pp. 370-71). According to Balāḡdorī (cited in Ebn al-Faḡīh, loc. cit.), Āmol was one of the eight districts (*kowar*) comprising Ṭabarestān. It now became a flourishing center of commerce and agriculture and was famed for its scholars (usually found with the nesba "Ṭabarī" rather than "Āmolī" in this earlier period). These included the great historian and theologian Abū Ja'far Moḥammad Ṭabarī (b. ca. 224/839) and the Shafe'ite jurist Abu'l-Ṭayyeb Ṭāher Ṭabarī (b. 348/959-60). The geographers of the 4th/10th century describe Āmol's great prosperity and populousness; in the latter respect, according to Ebn Ḥawqal, it surpassed Qazvīn. Its inner city (*šahrestān*) was protected by a moat, and the houses were constructed of wood and reeds rather than mud bricks on account of the heavy summer rainfall. Rice, fruits, and vegetables grew profusely, and the town was a center for the fabrication of wooden articles, textiles, and carpets, the silks being especially famous. Āmol's port on the Caspian was the little town of 'Ayn al-Homm or Ahlom (see Ebn Ḥawqal, loc. cit.; Maqdesī [Moqaddasī], p. 359; *Ḥodūd al-'ālam*, tr. Minorsky, pp. 134-35; Yāqūt, I, pp. 57-58, 284; *Nozhat*, loc. cit.; Le Strange, *Lands*, p. 370; R. B. Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles, Material for a History up to the Mongol Conquest*, Beirut, 1972, pp. 74-79).

Āmol was plundered by Mas'ūd of Ġazna in 426/1035 when he led an expedition into Gorgān and Ṭabarestān to collect arrears of tribute from the local ruler Bā Kālījār (Bayhaqī, 2nd ed., pp. 589-91, 597-601; Bosworth, "On the Chronology of the Ziyārīds in Gurgān and Ṭabaristān," *Der Islam* 40, 1964, pp. 28ff.). In the 6th/12th century, Āmol slipped out of the Saljuqs' control into that of the Bavandid princes, and on his accession in 635/1238 Ḥosām al-dawla



Ardašīr of the Kīnḵvārīya line of Bavandids transferred his capital from the ancestral seat of Sārī to Āmol (Ebn Esfandiār, op. cit., abridged tr., p. 257). Āmol and Sārī both suffered badly from raids by Tīmūr in 787/1387 and 794/1391-92 (Neẓām-al-dīn Šāmī, *Ẓafar-nāma*, ed. F. Tauer, I, Beirut, 1937, pp. 97-98, 127-28; Ẓahīr-al-dīn Maṛʿašī, *Tārīḵ-e Ṭabarestān*, pp. 240ff.). Āmol recovered a certain measure of prosperity while ruled by the Maṛʿašī Sayyeds and the Safavids; under the latter it was a center of the province of Māzandarān. Sir Thomas Herbert, who visited Āmol in 1628, praised its fruitfulness and described it as having 3,000 houses (*A Relation of a Journey Begun in 1610*, London, 1632, pp. 106-07). Since then, it has never played a leading part in Persian national affairs, being surpassed in population by Bārforūs (modern Bābol) and by the administrative capital of the province, Sārī; it has also suffered at various times from earthquakes.

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See also Ebn Esfandiār, pp. 62-63 and passim.

Ẓahīr-al-dīn Maṛʿašī, *Tārīḵ-e Ṭabarestān o Rūyān o Māzandarān*, ed.

M. Tasbīḥī, Tehran, 1345 Š./1966, passim.

Ḥabīb al-sīar (Tehran) III, pp. 344ff.

G. N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, London, 1892, I, pp. 381-83.

H. L. Rabino, *Māzandarān and Astarābād*, London, 1928, pp. 33-40 (includes information on the surviving monuments).

(C. E. Bosworth)

ii. Islamic Monuments

No buildings survive from the early medieval period. Moqaddasī (p. 359) mentions that Āmol had a hospital (*bīmārestān*) and two congregational mosques (*jāmeʿ*) with arcades, the old one on a river, among trees leading to

the markets, the other near the city wall. Nothing remains of these mosques today; however, the Imam ‘Askarī mosque, although smaller and more modern, may exemplify the same type: Its central court is surrounded by arcades with wooden roofs, and the form of its minaret—a high, square base, an octagonal shaft, and a wooden roof—can be traced back to Saljuq prototypes such as the one in Astarābād (A. Hutt and L. Harrow, *Iran II*, London, 1978, pl. 103). Ebn Esfandīār (passim) mentions many other religious buildings in Āmol, including small mosques, *madrasas*, and a *moṣallā*, but nothing remains of them. As elsewhere in Māzandarān the most characteristic type of religious architecture is the tomb tower: a small, round or polygonal building with a *moqarnas* cornice supporting a pyramidal roof. Extant examples include the round tomb of Šams Ṭabresī, well-known jurisconsult from Āmol, and the nearby tomb of Nāṣer al-Ḥaqq (d. 304/917), both attributed to the 9th/15th century (Iranian National Monument 60); the square tomb (now with an attached prayer hall) of Emāmzāda Ebrāhīm, a descendant of Imam Mūsā Kāẓem, with doors dated 925/1519 and a cenotaph dated 1187/1773 (Iranian National Monument 63); and the octagonal tomb known as Se Sayyed, Se Tan, or Mīr Ḥaydar, with a tombstone dated 514/1120, but rebuilt in the late 9th/15th century and recently restored (Iranian National Monument 61; inscriptions recorded in H. L. Rabino, *Māzandarān and Astarābād*, GMS, N.S. 7, London, 1928, Persian text, pp. 12-14; Hutt and Harrow, pl. 100). A more elaborate shrine complex is the Mašhad-e Mīr Bozorg, a centrally domed mausoleum with side chambers and prayer halls (Iranian National Monument 59; Hutt and Harrow, pl. 102). Built under Shah ‘Abbās I (r. 996-1038/1588-1629), the tomb has a wooden cenotaph dated 1033/1623 and many fine, painted tiles covering the interior. Shah ‘Abbās’s constructions in Māzandarān included many bridges; rivers were spanned with a single high arch (as in the example near Āmol, illustrated in *Survey of Persian Art*, pl. 496B) or with a series of arches (as in the twelve-span example connecting Āmol with a suburb to the east, *ibid.*, pl. 496D). A traveler to the Safavid court, Sir Thomas Herbert, speaks of the fine houses in Āmol (*A Relation of a Journey Begun in 1610*, London, 1632, pp. 106-07), and extant examples built in baked brick with tile roofs are probably descendants of the same type.

See also N. Meškātī, *Fehrest-e benāhā-ye tārikī o amāken-e bāstānī-e Īrān*, Tehran, 1349 Š./1970, pp. 178-80; tr.

H. A. S. Pessyan, *List of the Historical Sites and Ancient Monuments of Iran*, Tehran, n.d., pp. 167-69.



Rabino, *Māzandarān and Astarābād*, pp. 33-39.

M. Sotūda, *Az Āstārā tā Estābād* III, Tehran, 2535 (1355 Š.)/1976.

(S. Blair)

iii. Modern Āmol

Modern Āmol is a typical Caspian city and thus atypical of many other Iranian cities, especially with regard to its urban structures and architecture. Nineteenth-century travelers describe it like many other towns of the Caspian lowlands, as “so overgrown with jungle and orchards as to be collectively invisible” (G. N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question* I, London, 1892, p. 382). At the same time, the natural protection of surrounding forests (as well as the absence of nomads in recent times) meant that these towns had no need for the surrounding walls, gates, and other fortifications characteristic of most traditional cities of central Iran. The abundance of forests also accounts for a third peculiarity: frequent use of wood as a building material, a practice that led to destructive fires again and again. In addition, devastating epidemics, mainly due to the unhealthy climate and bad hygienic conditions caused heavy population losses in Āmol and other Caspian cities. Toward the beginning of the 19th century J. B. Fraser described Āmol as almost depopulated because of epidemics and Turkmen raids (*A Winter's Journey from Constantinople to Tehran with Travels through Various Parts of Persia* II, London, 1838, pp. 453-54). By the end of the century, the population of the town was estimated at 8,000 (Curzon, op. cit.). At the beginning of this century, H. L. Rabino described Āmol as an open town with four gates, nine quarters, and approximately 2000 houses. A large bazaar contained about 400 shops with many traditional crafts and trades (“A Journey in Mazanderan from Resht to Sari,” *Geographical Journal* 42, 1913, pp. 446-47).

Although today Āmol has expanded greatly on both sides of the Harāz river, its functions are still the same as they were seventy or eighty years ago. Besides being one of the *šahrestān* centers of the province of Māzandarān, it is a busy commercial center; its location at the end of the Harāz road, one of the main connections between the Caspian lowland and Tehran, gives it important traffic functions. Since it is one of the urban centers of the rich rice-growing region of central Māzandarān, the marketing, processing, purchase, and sale of rice is of special importance to the urban economy; many of the urban notables have always been in this business. Industrially Āmol is awaiting



development. The once famous ironworks of the region, with their charcoal-fired foundries along the Harāz river, no longer exist (cf. M. Trezel, “Notice géographique et statistique sur le Ghilan et le Mazanderan, provinces de l’Empire de Perse,” *Journal des sciences militaires des armées de terre et de mer* 2, 1826, pp. 110-23, 512-26). In the 19th century, Āmol iron and iron goods were traded all over Iran and as far abroad as Baghdad and Damascus. Today, the main industries are small food-processing factories (rice), minor woodworking shops, and a few brickworks, almost none of which employ more than two or three people. The population has recently grown from approximately 22,000 (1956) to 40,076 (1966) and 68,782 (1976). The present size of the city, which is comparable to that of Bābol, Sārī, and Šāhī, places the urban structure of Māzandarān in striking contrast to that of neighboring Gīlān, where Rašt is the only and undisputed center.

See also Razmārā, *Farhang* II, pp. 24-25.

Kayhān, *Joḡrāfiā* III, pp. 293-98.

E. Ehlers, “Die Städte des südkaspischen Kustentieflandes,” *Die Erde* 102, 1971, pp. 6-33.

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