



ĀŠŪRĀDA

ĀŠŪRĀDA (or Āšūr'āda, 'Ašūr'āda), formerly (until ca. 1308-09 Š./1930) three adjacent islands, now part of the end of the Miānkāla peninsula of Māzandarān, at the southeast corner of the Caspian Sea. Āšūrāda lies at 36° 45' north latitude and 53° 35' east longitude. The village there is part of the *bakš* of Bandar-e Šāh (renamed Bandar-e Torkaman under the Islamic Republic), *šahrestān* of Gorgān; its permanent population consists largely of fishermen; and a contingent of border-guards is stationed there. Three km to the east, on the mainland coast, is Bandar-e Šāh; about 17 km south, across the Sea of Māzandarān, lies Bandar-e Gaz.

The name is probably Turkish: "Island (*āda*) of Āšūr/Āšūr." (For the latter form, see, e.g., F. Ādamīyat, *Amīr-e Kabīr o Īrān*, Tehran, 1347 Š./1968, pp. 475-76; Mīrzā Moḥammad Taqī Khan Lesān-al-molk, *Nāsek al-tawāriḵ: Ketāb-e Qājārīya*, ed. J. Qā'em-maqāmī, Tehran, 1337 Š./1958, II, p. 76). This name is not mentioned before the Qajar period; Mostawfī's *Nīm-mardān* (*Nozhat al-qolūb*, p. 160) should not be identified with it as Le Strange suggests (*Lands*, p. 375). *Nīm-mardān* is described as an island three *farsangs* (18 km) from Astarābād (modern Āšūrāda is 39 km from Gorgān) and is termed populous and a port for ships from Russia, Gilān, and Māzandarān. All these details hardly suit modern Āšūrāda. Identification of Āšūrāda with Abaskūn (*EI*², p. 4) also seems unlikely; the latter is called the only inhabited island in the Sea of Māzandarān in the early 2nd/8th century (Šams-al-dīn Abū 'Abdallāh Moḥammad Shaikh Rabbūh, *Noḵbat al-dahr fī 'ajā'eb al-barr wa'l-baḥr*, Leipzig, 1924, p. 147), a description that fits the island *Nīm-mardān* rather than Āšūrāda, which, as a



result of the drop of the sea level in the Caspian had turned into a port at the mouth of the Gorgān river in the early 9th/15th century (Ḥāfeẓ Abrū, *Joḡrāfiā*, photographic copy of the ms. at the University of Tehran, p. 51). Today that area must lie well inland. Āšūrāda existed as an island group as late as the early nineteenth century, when the water of the Caspian was at its highest level; but by 1308-09/1891-92 this had declined to under two meters (M. Ḥ. Ganjī, “Taḡyīr-e saṭḥ-e daryā-ye Kazar,” *Dāneš* 3/9), and the islands had rejoined the Miānkāla peninsula.

Because of its strategic interest, guarding entry to harbor in the [Astarābād Bay](#) and so access to Māzandarān, Āšūrāda has attracted Russian interest since the early nineteenth century. In 1195/1781 the Russian commander Voynovich arrived in Gorgān with several ships and asked permission from [Āqā Moḥammad Khan](#) to establish a commercial enterprise in the islands; in fact he built a fort with eighteen cannons. However, Āqā Moḥammad Khan managed to take the Russian officers prisoner during an entertainment arranged for them, and then forced them to dismantle the fort and leave (J. McNeil, *Progress and the Present Position of Russia in the East*, London, 1828, pp. 27-28; G. Foster, *A Journey from Bengal to England*, London, 1798, II, pp. 201-02; Moḥammad-Ḥasan Khan Ṣanī'-al-dawla, *Montaẓam-e Nāṣerī*, Tehran, 1299/1882, III, pp. 38-39). In 1254/1838 a Turkman named Qīāt was raiding the Gorgān area, pillaging and abducting its inhabitants to be sold. He evaded government troops by taking to the sea (Lesān-al-molk, op. cit., II, p. 76). The Iranian government, lacking suitable pursuit vessels, requested the Russian government to send two ships to Gorgān and assist in suppressing Qīāt. The Russians agreed. On the pretext of needing a supply base, they began to build barracks, and facilities on Āšūrāda, and stationing five warships there. (Ādamīyat, op. cit., p. 477). A commercial warehouse at Bandar-e Gaz and a sailors' hospital on the Gulf coast followed (ibid., letter of Amīr-e Kabīr, pp. 473-74). Dispute between the two governments over the issue of evacuating the area continued until 1299 Š./1921; it was at its height during the vizierate of Amīr-e Kabīr, 1264-68/1848-51, when much correspondence on the subject was exchanged (ibid., pp. 488-507; see also the private letters of Amīr-e Kabīr to Nāṣer-al-dīn Shah in the Majlis library, Tehran). The Russians recognized Iran's sovereignty over the area but refused to evacuate. They requested the dismissal of the governor of Gorgān, who was trying to repossess the islands at the vizier's order and threatened retaliation if Iran demurred. The British ambassador in Tehran urged acquiescence, and the governor was finally recalled. Russian occupation continued until ratification of a treaty between



Iran and the Soviet Socialist Republic on Bahman, 1299 Š./February, 13, 1921, when Russians returned Āšūrāda.

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See also Kayhān, *Joğrāfiā* I, pp. 116, 129.

K. Maḥmūdżāda, *Daryā-ye Māzandarān wa pīrāmūn-e ān*, Tehran, 1350 Š./1971, pp. 8-9, 20, 105.

Razmārā, *Farhang* III, p. 16.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Maǰmū'a-ye mo'āhadāt wa qarārdādhā wa moqāwala-nāmahā-ye moṇ'aqeda bayn-e dawlat-e šāhanšāhī-e Īrān wa dowl-e Kāreǰa* I, Tehran, 1311 Š./1933, p. 342.

H. Rawlinson, *England und Russia in the East*, London, 1875, pp. 70, 137-38.

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