



BĀBOLSAR

BĀBOLSAR, town on the Caspian coast in the province of Māzandarān. It acquired its present name in 1306 Š./1927 [see attached Comment – eds.], at the same time that Bārforūš, the important inland town 20 km to the south-southeast, was renamed Bābol. Its former name was Mašhad-(e) Sar. Initially a village arose at this site around the shrine of an *emāmzāda*, Ebrāhīm Abū Jawāb, which contains several inscriptions from the 9th/15th century. From the mid-18th century onward, Mašhad-e Sar became a busy commercial port, thanks to its position near the mouth of the small Bābol river and access by boat to Bārforūš (to which the river was brought nearer by a short westward diversion ca. 1850). We also know from Hanway's account that Mašhad-e Sar was the base for Nāder Shah's Caspian fleet. Its commercial importance culminated in the early years of the twentieth century. In 1909 its customs post, together with the subsidiary posts at smaller ports in Māzandarān, yielded 12 percent of the total customs revenue of Iran (H. Grothe, *Zur Natur und Wirtschaft von Vorderasien I: Persien*, Frankfurt, 1911, p. 115). This activity, however, was already exposed to competition from ports in Gilān which had been connected to Tehran by a good road since 1895.

In Reżā Shah's reign, Bābolsar lost much of its remaining trade to the new port of Bandar-e Šāh at the terminus of the trans-Iranian railroad. The cargo handled at Bābolsar in 1314 Š./1935-36 was only 25,000 tons. On the other hand, a modern quarter and a big hotel were built at that time.

After World War II, Bābolsar gained a new vitality as a seaside resort (in the summer months) for people from Tehran. The tourism business gave rise to a



new phase of rapid expansion. Bābolsar's population increased from about 3,500 in 1324 Š./1945 to 11,781 in 1345 Š./1966 and 18,810 in 1355 Š./1976.

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