



BEHBAHĀN I. THE CITY AND COUNTY

BEHBAHĀN (also pronounced Behbehān), Iranian city and county (*šahrestān*) in the province of Kūzestān.

The county of Behbehān was defined in 1330 Š./1951 (Razmārā, *Farhang VI*, p. 62) as bordering on the Mārūn river to the north, the county of Ahvāz and Korramšahr to the west, the Persian Gulf to the south, and the county of Shiraz to the east; as a result of subsequent administrative changes, the borders are now with the province of Kūhgīlūya and Boir Aḥmadī to the north and east, the county of Rām-Hormoz to the west, and the county of Rāmšīr (formerly Kālfābād) to the south. The principal mountains in Behbahān county are the Kūh-e Pas-šāna (3,320 m), Kūh-e Sardūk (3,025 m), and Kūh-e Safīd (2,770 m); the principal rivers are the Mārūn and the river of Qayrābād. The Mārūn, rises in the Kavīrkūh and the Kūh-e Laḳtdah, irrigates a large number of villages before passing close to Behbahān city and is joined by the river of Rām-Hormoz at Qal'a-ye Šayk (Rām-Hormoz), below which the combined stream waters Rāmšīr and finally reaches the Persian Gulf west of Bandar-e Māhšahr (formerly Bandar-e Ma'sūr). The river of Qayrābād rises in the Čelqor mountains and after watering Qayrābād and the Zeydūn subdistrict (*dehestān*) joins the Hendījān river, which then runs past Deh Mollā and Hendījān to the Persian Gulf. The prevailing winds are a dry north wind and a hot, often moisture-laden, south wind locally called the *šarjī* (Razmārā, *Farhang VI*, p. 63).



Three districts (*baḵš*) are comprised in the county of Behbahān: (a) Āḡā Jārī, Omīdiya, and Miānkūh, headquarters at Āḡā Jārī; (2) Zaydūn, headquarters at Sardašt; (3) Central District, headquarters at Dodānga. In medieval times Behbahān belonged to the province of Arrajān. Although this province (later renamed Kūhgīlūya) underwent several boundary changes in the centuries down to the Safavid period, its northern and northeastern limits throughout the middle ages were such that it must have included the present county of Behbahān. Its capital was the old city of Arrajān, the ruins of which stretch along the banks of the Mārūn 8-12 km north of Behbahān and cover approximately 4 km².

The most recent census, taken in 1365 Š./1986, gave the population of Behbahān county as 202,000 (84,000 in Behbahān city, 118,000 in the districts), including 40,000 temporarily resident evacuees from war zones; Āḡā Jārī district 75,944; Zeydūn district 14,318; Central district 3,072. Approximately 60 percent of the county's inhabitants depended on agriculture and animal husbandry, 40 percent on commerce and on employment as industrial, agricultural, and construction workers and civil servants. The county produced wheat, barley, rice, sesame, and dates; 15,000 ha were under irrigation, while 30,000 ha, situated in the central, northern, and western sectors and in part of the Zeydūn district, were under rain-fed (*deymī*) cultivation; the output in the year 1364 Š./1985 was wheat and barley 52,500 tons, rice 1,220 tons, sesame 250 tons, dates 28,000 tons. The oil and gas industry is important mainly in the Āḡā Jārī and Omīdiya districts. In addition to the oil and gas installations at Āḡā Jārī and gas purification plant at Bīd-e Boland, the Behbahān cement works and the flour mill and ice factory at Behbahān city deserve mention. The principal handicrafts are weaving top-quality *'abās* from fine-spun lamb's wool, which were exported in large quantities to Kuwait and the Arab Emirates; making cotton-and-leather shoes called *malekī* or *kālak* (the local name for those of the best grade); and making woolen felts and lamb's wool felt hats. The county's exports have in recent years been dispatched through Ahvāz, but before the construction of the asphalted Behbahān-Ahvāz highway they used to be shipped from Bandar-e Daylam and Būšeher.

The entire length of the Shiraz-Behbahān-Ahvāz highway is asphalted. The Behbahān-Ahvāz stretch, 200 km long, after crossing the Mārūn and passing through the western suburbs of Behbahān, leads to Rām-Hormoz and thence to Ahvāz. The Behbahān-Shiraz stretch, 360 km long, after passing through the



eastern suburbs of Behbahān and crossing the Kayrābād river, extends 72 km to Gačsārān (headquarters of the county of Do Gonbadān in the province of Kūhgīlūya and Boir Aḥmadī) and thence to Shiraz. The construction of this modern highway has had far-reaching effects on freight and passenger transportation, and therewith on economic and cultural life, in Fārs, Kūhgīlūya and Boir Aḥmadī, and Kūzestān. In medieval texts and in works on historical geography there are mentions of old routes between Arrajān/Behbahān and the Persian Gulf, Isfahan, Eṣṭaqr, Ahvāz, and Dehdašt; parts of these old routes are still in limited local use by villagers.

The city of Behbahān (30° 35' N, 50° 16' E) lies in a plain 400 m above sea level and has a climate typical of Iran's warm regions (*garmsīr*), with 50° C maximum and 0° C minimum temperature (Razmārā, *Farhang* VI, p. 62). The old town is divided into *maḥallas* (sections) named Masjed-e Bardī, Pahlavānān, Kārvānsarā, Gačpazān, Šāh Faẓl, Sādāt, Lab-e Āb, Darvīš, Sabz-pūšān, Taḳṭkašān, Moḥsenihā, Me'mārḥā, Mallāḥān, Gowd-e Čahak, Gowd-e Baqqāl, Meydān, Korāsānihā, Āqā Pīr Ḥaydar, Bāzār-e Now, Maḥall-e Pīr, Āhangarhā, Bū 'Alīhā, and Darvišhā. The modern sections are named Čamanak, Šahr-e Now, Du'l-feqārī, Falaka-ye Bīd-e Boland, and Pol-e Qā'em. The city has some sixty mosques; its people and those of the country are Twelver Shi'ites. There is a public library. The *bāzār* is roofed in traditional style. Local customs, folklore, proverbs, etc. are generally similar to those current in southwestern Iran and some parts of Kūzestān. The inhabitants of the city claim descent from the people of Arrajān, from the nobility (*ro'asā*) from *sayyeds*, and from the Lors. The inhabitants of the districts are generally of Lor origin and Lori-speaking; they retain many links with the tribes of Kūhgīlūya. The city dwellers know Lori as well as Persian and still use words that may be of old Kūzī (Hūzī) origin. In 1365 Š./1986 Behbahān city had seven high schools, two technical schools, one teacher training junior college, seventeen intermediate schools, thirty-one primary schools, one special school for handicapped children, and six kindergartens.

The first *qanāt* and canal to provide the city with drinking water were cut in the reign of Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah Qājār at the instance of the governor Eḥtešām-al-Dawla Solṭān Oways Mīrzā. The Behbahān Irrigation Company, established in 1328 Š./1949, cut a tunnel from the Mārūn which provides both drinking water for the city and irrigation water for certain previously rain-fed lands. Today the city has a piped water supply system. Attention is now turned to sinking semi-deep wells in the city's outskirts and the construction of a major



dam on the Mārūn.

Behbahān is not mentioned in any text from before the time of Tīmūr. Evidently it came into being as a village near the medieval city of Arrajān and gradually expanded after Arrajān's fall into ruin in the 8th/14th century. Its ancient and medieval past therefore belongs to the history of Arrajān. The archeological sites and historical remains in the present county of Behbahān are listed below: remains of the ancient town of Beh az Āmed-e Kavād and Arrajān north of Behbahān city; remains at the entrance to the Takāv pass; Islamic remains (mosques and shrines of saints) in Behbahān city; remains of an ancient bridge and fire-temple and of a *madrasa* of the Safavid period in the village of Ḳayrābād; remains of a castle called Qaḷ'a-ye Doḳtar on the bank of the Šīrīn river; ruins at Zeydūn, Sardašt, Dez-e Kalāt, and Dez-e Golāb. (For descriptions and photographs, see A. Eqtedārī, *Ḳūzestān o Kūhgīlūya o Mamasanī*, chap. 4). The ruins at [Tang-e Sarvak](#) (locally Sawlek), 50 km northwest of Behbahān city in a belt of villages occupied by sedentary members of the Bahma'ī-e Garmsīr tribe, lie within the limits of the present province of Kūhgīlūya o Boir Aḥmadī but may be included in the archeological inventory of Behbahān. During road construction work in 1360 Š./1981 important finds were made at the Arrajān site near a ruined bath-house and a shrine on the bank of the Mārūn: a gilded metal coffin, some gold buttons, various weapons, a large candlestick, pieces of pottery and metalwork, figurines, and a very ornate gold object bearing a representation of two fierce, winged lions and a short inscription in a cuneiform script. These finds, which have been removed to the Īrān-e Bāstān Museum at Tehran, are under study by Iranian archeologists, who consider them to be from the later part of the last period of Elam.

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