



ČĀH-BAHĀR

ČĀH-BAHĀR (in Western sources written Chahbar, Charbar, Chobar), name of a town and bay on the Makrān coast of Persian Baluchistan facing the coast of Oman. The bay is a shallow (6-9 fathoms) semicircular inlet eleven by ten miles in area and accessible only to moderate-sized vessels. It is surrounded by lowlands except at the mouth, about eight miles wide, which is formed by two rocky points, Ra's-e Čāh-bahār to the east and Ra's-e Kūhlab (called Rās Puzim [Ra's Pozem] in Lorimer, IIA, p. 351) to the west, from which walls of rock extend along the shores of the bay for about four miles on each side; on the east side a sandy beach about a mile and a half long separates the rocks from the bay. Since the Middle Ages the bay has provided safe anchorage for boats sailing between the Persian Gulf and India. At this point on the coast the summer monsoon is a strong south-southeasterly breeze, which creates a strong swell in the bay; it dies down at night and is not felt at all in the town of Čāh-bahār. During the frequent northerly winds of winter boats find safe haven at Ra's-e Kūhlab (Lorimer, IIA, pp. 351-52).

The town of Čāh-bahār is located at the northern end of the beach behind Ra's-e Čāh-bahār, at 37° 27' N and 49° 28' E. It is the administrative and economic center of Daštīārī district (*baḡš*) and the township (*šahrestān*) of Čāh-bahār. In a narrow valley about five miles north of the town lie the ruins of Tīz, a medieval trading center probably to be identified with classical Tesa (Barbier de Meynard, index, s.v. Tīz). In the 4th/10th century it was the port and largest town of the coastal region of Makrān, with many palm trees, fine hostels (*rebāṭs*), and a beautiful mosque (Moqaddasī, p. 478). It was officially governed



from Kermān, and most of its inhabitants were not Muslims. While possession of Kermān was continually disputed between semi-independent vassals of the Samanids and the Buyids throughout the century, Makrān was under the effective control of Baluch and Kūfečī tribal leaders until 360/971, when the Buyid general ‘Ābed b. ‘Alī captured Tīz and the surrounding territory and converted the population to Islam (Margoliouth and Amedroz, *Eclipse*, II, p. 299; cf. Bosworth). According to Abu’l-Fedā (7th/13th cent.; *Taqwīm*, pp. 22, 23) it was the administrative center (*qaṣaba*) of Makrān. In 989/1581 a Portuguese naval force destroyed the port (Lorimer, I/1A, p. 7). The name still survives in that of the small neighboring village of Tīz (or Tīs; Lorimer, IIB, p. 1155). The medieval town was protected from land attack by a massive wall on the south and by broken hills on the north and east. In the 13th/19th century a fort was built on a hilltop at the entrance to the valley to guard the approach from the bay (*Persia*, p. 141).

For the next two centuries the remoteness of Makrān and its relative inaccessibility from the land side contributed to an isolation from larger events in Iran and the Islamic heartlands; the region was again subject to various tribal leaders. In the late 18th and 19th centuries it experienced continual shifts in government and lacked clear-cut boundaries. Rulers from both Baluchistan and Oman levied taxes, as did local leaders and the Qajar rulers of Persia. In 1198/1784 the Brahui Naṣīr Khan I of Kalat (1162-1210/1749-95; see [baluchistan i. 7](#); [brahui](#)) granted the port of Gwadar, a short distance to the east of the bay of Čāh-bahār, to Sayyed Solṭān b. Aḥmad, uncle of the ruling imam of Oman (Lorimer, I/1A, pp. 601-03; Curzon, II, p. 432). When, in 1207/1792, Solṭān succeeded his nephew on the throne of Oman he sent one of his lieutenants, Sayf b. ‘Alī, to occupy Gwadar and build a fort there. From Gwadar Sayf made a surprise attack on Čāh-bahār and occupied it. Except for a brief interval in 1219/1804 the town remained an appanage of Oman until 1288/1872. Its revenues were sent directly to the sultan (Rs 5,000 in 1809). In 1260/1844 Sardār Khan, brother of [Āqā Khan](#), occupied Čāh-bahār and from there managed to take [Bampūr](#), but he was soon defeated and captured by Persian forces and sent to Tehran (Lorimer, I/1A, pp. 421, 602-04, 609).

During the 13th/19th century the British pursued their strategic interests in the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman with increasing energy. In 1277/1861 they began construction of the Indo-European Telegraph Line between Karachi and Constantinople via [Būšehr](#), Hangām, and Jāsk; it was completed in 1286/1869



(Lorimer, I/1A, p. 239). The line passed just south of Čāh-bahār, where the telegraph office remained in the charge of a British official responsible to the Indo-European Telegraph Department of the Indian government in Karachi until 1310 Š./1931 (Lorimer, IIA, p. 354; *Persia*, p. 583). In 1279/1863, as the installation of the line from Karachi was approaching Gwadar, the Persian governor of Bampūr, Ebrāhīm Khan, wrote to the ruler of Oman, the *wālī* (governor) of Gwadar, and the British official in charge of the telegraph-construction crew, demanding that the line be extended no farther into Persian territory without permission of the Persian government. To underscore his point, he conducted a raid in the neighborhood of Gwadar. The Persian government, under pressure from the British, repudiated Ebrāhīm Khan's activities, but it did not renounce its claim to Čāh-bahār and Gwadar, which was based on the submission of Makrān to Nāder Shah's forces in 1149/1736. On the contrary, it progressively increased its demands and in 1281/1864 officially claimed the entire territory of Makrān and Baluchistan as part of Iran. In 1288/1871 a boundary commission led by Colonel F. J. Goldsmid (see [boundaries, afghanistan](#)) demarcated the disputed territory in such a way that Gwadar was on the Kalat side of the border, though in 1872 the British government of India reaffirmed that it continued to regard the port as belonging to Oman. Čāh-bahār, though claimed by Persia, was still under the actual control of Oman (Lorimer, I/1A, pp. 605-06, 608-09); in 1864 the sultan's revenues from the town were still at the earlier level of Rs 5,000, and an additional Rs 1,000 were allotted to the local *wālī* for administrative expenses. In 1867 Goldsmid reported that the settlement was administered by an Arab *wālī* and that it consisted of a few huts (of reed, wood, and thatch) laid out around a mud fortress (pp. 270-72). The total population was 225 households, approximately 900 people. In the following decades British influence increased, as tea, textiles, and metalwork were imported into Čāh-bahār, which was also open to the Baluch of Kalat.

After a brief local coup in the town, in January 1872 Sayyed 'Abd-al-'Azīz, a member of the ruling family of Oman, recaptured it. In February Ebrāhīm Khan wrote to him, stating the Persian claim to the city and summoning him to Qaṣr-e Qand to apply for recognition as a Persian dependent. 'Abd-al-'Azīz consulted British authorities, but on 12 Ḍu'l-ḥejja/21 February before they could make an effective response, Ebrāhīm Khan's troops, led by Ḥosayn Khan of Gēh, reached Čāh-bahār and occupied it after a brief struggle (Lorimer, I/A, pp. 609-11; Curzon, II, pp. 432-33). Since that time the town and the surrounding territory have been part of Iran. Because of incessant disputes



and skirmishes among local rulers, however, British Indian forces moved into the town at the end of the 13th/19th century and established a garrison there (see [baluchistan i. 8](#)). It remained until 1300 Š./1921, and during that period a main street, lined with brick buildings, was constructed, and Čāh-bahār developed into one of the major ports of Makrān. According to Lorimer (II/A, p. 353) Čāh-bahār had a population of about 2,300 at the turn of this century, including sixty Hindus and 140 Khojas. Baluchi was the standard language, but Hindi was also generally understood. Few people knew Persian. The population was primarily engaged in fishing and trade. Exports, totaling about Rs 150,000, including barley, wheat, durra, raw cotton, pigeon peas, ghee, fish and fish products, hides, and a few dates; imports, valued at about Rs 100,000, consisted of cotton, silk, and woolen textiles; sugar; rice; flour; kerosene; coconut oil; and small quantities of spices, indigo, iron, copper, tobacco, alum, beads, and teak planks.

At the end of the 19th century the Russians, seeking an outlet to the sea, had begun to entertain the notion of a rail link across Persia to the Gulf. In 1900 they sent a mission to southern Iran, ostensibly to make a geographic survey but actually to explore the ports where such a link might have its terminus. One of two officers who reached Čāh-bahār on 27 June was Captain P. A. Rittich, a member of the Russian general staff and author of a tract on railways in Persia (Lorimer, I/A, pp. 330-31). During the first few years of the century increasing Russian maritime activity in the Gulf, as well as the dispatch of a gunboat to Bandar-e ‘Abbās, alarmed the British, but in 1905 the Russians’ defeat in the Russo-Japanese war put an end to their ambitions for a time (Lorimer, I/1A, pp. 325-31; Busch, pp. 128-32, 264-67, 348-49; McLean, pp. 16, 123; Curzon, II, pp. 258-65).

In 1307/1928 Rezā Shah (1304-20 Š./1925-41) sent troops to establish the authority of the central government in Daštīārī and Čāh-bahār. A dirt road from Zāhedān and Īrānšahr to Čāh-bahār was completed in the 1310s Š./1930s, and the town became the administrative center of Persian Makrān, which resulted in considerable urban expansion and the construction of a number of public buildings (schools, customs office, police station). Nevertheless, Čāh-bahār’s accessibility remained limited until 1350 Š./1971, when a new asphalt road was built to connect the town with the interior and to provide access to an improved gravel highway along the coast to the west.

Nevertheless, because of its remote location, extremely unfavorable climatic conditions (temp. 78-112° F, 25.5-44.5° C), and a serious shortage of water in



the arid Makrān range (annual rainfall 5-6 inches, 125-50 mm), Čāh-bahār and its hinterland remained largely undeveloped until the 1340s Š./1960s. At that time, however, strategic considerations and the potentially attractive harbor facilities led to large-scale expansion of the economic infrastructure. Between 1345 Š./1966 and 1356 Š./1977 the population of the town of Čāh-bahār increased from 1,800 to more than 2,828 (Pozdena); by 1988 there were approximately 10,000 inhabitants. This rapid growth was reflected in an impressive expansion of the urban area. By the early 1350s Š./1970s there were a *farmāndārī* (administrative building), from which the *šahrestān* was administered; a hotel; three banks; a court of justice; a police station; several schools; a hospital; a small city hall; a cinema; and similar amenities, concentrated along Sa'īdī Street, the main thoroughfare leading from the harbor. This urban center is surrounded by new residential areas. The special character of Čāh-bahār within the broader Persian context is still easily recognizable in the dominance of the Baluch and their language. The town is also characterized by a distinctive architecture, in which stylistic influences from the Indian subcontinent can be observed. Most notable are the two "old" mosques and the *zīārat* of Ġolām-Rasūl. In 1365 Š./1986 the *šahrestān* of Čāh-bahār had, according to the preliminary results of the census, a total population of 143,273 inhabitants, of whom approximately 100,000 were considered to be rural (Markaz-e Āmār-e Īrān, *Eṭṭelā'āt-e moqaddamātī-e saršomārī-e 1365*, Tehran, 1365 Š./1986).

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