



ČĀLŪS

ČĀLŪS, a small town in western Māzandarān (*šahrestān* of Nowšahr, *baḵš* of Čālūs) located about 8 km from the Caspian coast at an elevation of 7 m. Its population was estimated at 29,000 in 1363 Š./1984 (Markaz-e Āmār-Īrān, p. 49). The name of the *baḵš* of Čālūs, **Kalārestāq**, was formerly applied to the entire land on the west bank of the Čālūs river, although the town was built in the district of Kojūr on the east bank (Sotūda, p. 100); it had four sections: Kūhestān, Kalārdašt, Bīrūnbašm, and Qešlāq (Nūšīn, p. 74).

Čālūs is built on the alluvial plain at the mouth of the valley of the Čālūs river, a powerful mountain stream that has its sources in the Kandovān mountains and on the southern slopes of Taḵt-e Solaymān. The warm, humid climate (1,419 mm of precipitation a year are recorded in the neighboring town of Nowšahr) was formerly considered unhealthy (Dehḵodā, s.v.), and the bulk of the population of Čālūs, as of all other towns in this region, used to migrate in summer to the *yeylāq* (summer pastures) on the slopes around Delīr (*dehestān* of Kūhestān) and in the Kalārdašt basin, one of the most popular and longest-settled districts in the Čālūs region. The eastern Gilakī dialect is spoken in the entire valley of the Čālūs river (Bazin and Bromberger, p. 13), though some Kurdish tribes were established in the *yeylāq* of Kojūr and Kalārdašt in the Qajar period (Planhol, p. 38).

The present town is quite new; it was only a small village when Reżā Shah decided in 1310 Š./1931 to develop it into a modern model town. Of the many travelers who crossed the Alborz in the 13th/19th century and at the beginning of the 14th/20th, following “Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah’s road” (constructed by the Aus-



trian Gasteiger Khan; Sotūda, p. 154) between Tehran and the Caspian and passing through Šahrestānak and the Čālūs river valley, none noted a town of Čālūs. In 1822 Fraser (p. 122) mentioned the coastal village of Nowdeh, at the junction of the shore and mountain roads, and in 1932 Bodek (p. 17) cited the example of Čālūs to make the point that towns do not always occur below valleys on the Caspian slopes of the Alborz.

The settlement of Čālūs does, however, go back to early times: According to Mas'ūdī (*Morūj*, ed. Pellat, sec. 3577), Šālūs (i.e., Čālūs) had a lofty castle with strong fortifications built by Persian kings, and Mas'ūdī (loc. cit.), Ebn Esfandiār (p. 269), and Ebn al-Aṭīr (VIII, p. 81) all say that it was destroyed in 301/914 by Ḥasan b. 'Alī b. Oṭrūš, who restored Zaydī rule in Ṭabarestān (see 'alids). Early geographers mention Čālūs (Sālūs, Šālūs) as a town (*madīna*) on the western limits of Ṭabarestān on the road to Deylam halfway between and at a day's journey from the towns of Kalār and Nātel. It had a Friday mosque and according to Moqaddasī (p. 359) a castle made of rocks. The town had a garrison of 500 Muslim warriors in about 143/760 (Ebn Esfandiār, pp. 178, 181) and under the Taherids paid a yearly tribute of 300,000 dirhams (ibid., pp. 74–75). In about 181/797 the people of Čālūs and Rūyān revolted against their Arab warlords, thereby bringing the Arab governor 'Abd-Allāh b. Kāzem b. Kozayma to Čālūs who had the inhabitants decapitated one by one in front of him as he was breaking his fast (Ebn Esfandiār, pp. 189–190). Čālūs suffered heavily during the invasion of Ṭabarestān in 260/973–74 by Ya'qūb b. Layṭ (Ebn Esfandiār, pp. 245–46), but one year later Ḥasan b. Zayd 'Alawī ordered the town burnt down as punishment for their alleged support of Ya'qūb (Ṭabarī, III, p. 1886; Ebn al-Aṭīr, VII, p. 288).

The town seems still to have had some importance in the Buyid period. According to Sotūda (p. 111) vestiges of the fortifications still remain near the municipal building constructed by Režā Shah. At the order of Shah 'Abbās the coastal route from the Caspian was made to detour through the *yeylāq* of Kalārdašt, which has always been the richest and most populated part of Kalārestāq, the Čālūs valley, where, later, Qajar sovereigns stayed and Režā Shah built a palace and a small airport (Planhol, p. 41). During these last centuries Čālūs was only mentioned as a village or a *bakš* located in the *qešlāq*, at the mouth of the valley (Dehḵodā, s.v.).

The rise of the modern town of Čālūs was directly linked to the construction, between 1310 Š./1931 and 1312 Š./1933, of the Tehran-Karaj-Čālūs highway (202 km) through the Kandovān pass; since 1317 Š./1938 the pass has been



negotiable through a tunnel 1,884 m long at an altitude of 2,700 m, which permits traffic even in winter. Before the construction of this highway two roads connected Čālūs to Tehran, one of four stages through the mountains which was used in summer, the other of seven stages (Nūšīn, pp. 38-39). A large modern hotel was built at the same time as that of Gačsar on the southern slope of the gorge. A small harbor was also begun at Sar-e Čālūs (Wenzel, p. 265), in order to develop traditional commercial relations with Baku (a Russian fishery was mentioned by Rabino, 1913, p. 444), but it remained unfinished, as after 1320 Š./1941 the Allies preferred to develop the port of Nowšahr. Within a short period of time a new industrial, commercial, and tourist center was thus constructed on both sides of the Čālūs river, connected by a large modern steel bridge. Several new buildings were built: a hospital, a school, a modern bath, a Friday mosque, and a hotel (Nūšīn, pp. 90-97). The heart of this new town was a factory for weaving natural silk (*kār-kāna-ye ḥarīrbāft*), constructed in 1312 Š./1933 and in operation from 1315 Š./1936 to 1337 Š./1958. This factory, relying on silk from Gilān (cf. abrjšam), employed numerous French workmen and technicians from Lyons, as well as some Poles. The production (1,500 tons a year) had a very high reputation throughout Iran and was partly exported. Thanks to this factory, the town of Čālūs was one of the first in Iran to enjoy the benefits of electricity, piped water, and modern education and sanitation facilities. It was also the first in the province to have multistoried apartment houses. These dwellings were intended for factory workers who had migrated from neighboring regions, particularly the Kalārdašt mountains and Ṭālaqān (Nūšīn, p. 93). Villas for managers and notables were constructed near the southern approach to the town.

World War II, with the Soviet occupation and the exile of Reżā Shah, abruptly ended the expansion of the community, for the majority of the population was not really settled there. In 1335 Š./1956 (Čālūs had only 9,758 inhabitants, and the decline continued: The silk factory was transferred to Rašt in 1337 Š./1958 and its buildings occupied by a furniture factory; at the same time many towns and villages of the neighborhood (e.g., Nowšahr) were developing rapidly, thanks to seaside tourism. There were only 14,837 people in 1345 Š./1966 and 25,783 in 1355 Š./1976. The growth of Čālūs is at present one of the slowest among the towns of Māzandarān (1.6 percent a year), despite its seasonal activity (Markaz-e Āmār-e Īrān, p. 49). Thanks to its position at a crossroads and its good facilities, this former industrial town has become the center of one of the foremost tourist regions on the Caspian coast. At present it contains



four major hotels, totaling 400 rooms (Ritter, p. 43); a campsite; and a small street of *bāzārs*, with many souvenir shops catering to tourists, who come in large numbers from Tehran, especially on weekends (Ehlers, p. 125). Čālūs has neither the attractions of a seaside town nor the advantages of a harbor like that at Nowšahr; it retains an unfinished look without a strong identity.

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