



GĪLĀN VII. HISTORY IN THE 19TH CENTURY

GĪLĀN

vii. HISTORY IN THE 19TH CENTURY

During the 19th century, Persia underwent major political, economic, and social changes which were partly instigated by the Anglo-Russian colonial interests in the country and the beginnings of the incorporation of Persia into the emerging inter national economy. In Gīlān, which was within the Russian sphere of dominance, increasing contacts with Russia led to a number of major developments in the 19th and early part of the 20th century. These included the expansion of foreign trade and the rise of maritime transportation in the Caspian Sea and their concomitant impact on patterns of import and export, production, and consumption. They also encouraged the development of a transit route from Tehran to Anzalī via Qazvīn and Rašt that led to an increase in the flow of passengers to Europe via the Anzalī-Baku line.

Sealed off by mountains from the rest of the country, political and social life in Gīlān had always been highly influenced, if not determined, by its geographical position (Figure 5). The history of 19th-century Gīlān began with the continuation of the binary division of Bīa-pas and Bīa-pīš and the rule of local families. But this situation began to change gradually in the latter half of the century when the rise of foreign trade and the rapid development of



transportation in the Caspian and the flow of goods and passengers in the Tehran-Anzalī transit route removed most of the factors contributing to the province's isolation, bringing it within the orbit of the emerging world economy and the central authority. By becoming a focus of economic, cultural, and political contact with the West at the closing decades of the 19th century, Gilān also turned into a major arena for a number of significant radical rebellious movements in the period 1905-21.

Governors of Gilān. The Qajars succeeded in overcoming the chaos of the 18th century by establishing relative security and imposing overall control on the provinces. The provincial administration was arranged on two sets of temporary and permanent positions. The first set included the governor-general and the vizier who, representing the shah and central government, were appointed from Tehran and often served for a short term, ranging from several months to a few years. The second set comprised the local administrators whose positions were often hereditary and permanent, including tribal khans, county governors (*ḥākems*), and district deputy governors (*nāyeb al-ḥokūmas* or *kalāntars*; for a useful treatment of the local rulers of Gilān see Rabino, 1918; idem, 1920).

Āgā Moḥammad Khan and Fath-ʿAlī Shah (qq.v.) revived the Saljuq practice of assigning governorship of provinces to princes of royal blood, but the Qajars were wary of assigning prince governors to the sensitive frontier province of Gilān. As a result, Gilān was only assigned to prince governors during the 19th century for a total of thirty-seven years—in the latter half of the reign of Fath-ʿAlī Shah, in the first and last decades of Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah, and in the few years of the reign of Moḥammad-al-Dīn Shah. Overall, Gilān was ruled in the 19th century by some thirty governors and a number of viziers: five governors ruled about ten years, six governors about five years, and the remaining twenty governors from one to two years (estimated from the information provided by Rabino, 1917, pp. 476-87).

The main function of governors and their viziers, apart from the maintenance of law and order, was to collect the designated tax revenue from the subjects with the assistance of the khans and the *kalāntars* and transfer it to the royal treasury. It was in the personal interest of most governors to extract as much tax (*madākel*) as possible. The practice of the sale of offices, which began during the reign of Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah (1848-96), increased the burden on the subjects. Given that, on average, two-thirds of the appointed governors held their office for one to two years, and that many of them had to borrow from



merchants the sum needed to purchase their office, they had to impose excessive taxes and levies in order to repay their debts quickly. The resulting heavy taxation caused a number of riots in Gilān the 19th century.

Among the noted governor generals of Gilān in this period was Mīrzā Mūsā Khan Monajjem-bāšī, who ruled the province from 1219-30/1804-15. He successfully deterred a contingent of Russian troops from advancing toward Rašt on 1 Rabī' I 1220/30 May 1805. He was followed by Ƙosrow Khan Gorjī, a prominent Qajar statesman, and a powerful and popular figure who developed the provincial roads and the *bāzār* of Rašt and brought peasants and artisans under his protection. But the notables and landowners whose vested interests were threatened by Ƙosrow Khan's style of government instigated a riot against him that led to his dismissal from office in Ramaẓmūān 1234/July 1819 (Rabino, 1917, pp. 477-78; Bāmdād, *Rejāl* I, pp. 479-80). At this time Fath-'Alī Shah appointed his son Moḥammad-Rezā Mīrzā as governor with Āqā Bozorg Monajjem-bāšī as his vizier. He was succeeded in 1246/1830 by another prince governor, Yaḥyā Mīrzā, with Manūčehr Khan Mo'tamed-al-Dawla as his vizier. The beginning of their rule coincided with the outbreak of a severe plague resulting in the loss of over one-half of the population of Rašt, estimated at 40,000 at the time (Rabino, 1917, pp. 478-79; Bāmdād, *Rejāl* IV, pp. 159-61).

The aforementioned excessive taxes imposed by the Qajar governors provoked several popular uprisings, e.g., in 1267/1851, 1278/1861, 1286/1869, and 1291/1874, which were put down by government forces. In 1267/1851 the rioters sacked the house of the governor, 'Isā Khan Wālī (later E'temād-al-Dawla), the shah's uncle (Rabino, 1917, pp. 479-80; for a different date see Bāmdād, *Rejāl* II, pp. 510-11). He was succeeded in 1272/1853 by his brother, Amīr Aṣlān Khan 'Amīd-al-Molk (later Majd-al-Dawla), who ruled the province until 1276/1857, when he was replaced by Ardašīr Mīrzā Rokn-al-Dawla, the son of Crown Prince 'Abbās Mīrzā (Rabino, 1917, pp. 479-80; for a different version see Bāmdād, *Rejāl* I, pp. 106-7; 167-69).

In Moḥarram 1278/July 1861, a violent riot broke out in Rašt, resulting in over four hundred casualties. The riot had begun with the annual Ḥaydarī-Ne'matī (q.v.) fighting in the town during the commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Ḥosayn. Many houses were pillaged and set on fire and a number of women were raped. In August, Maḥmūd Khan Qaragūzlū Nāṣer-al-Molk was appointed governor of Gilān. After a year he was succeeded by Qāṣem Khan Wālī, who ruled Gilān until 1283/1866, when he was replaced by 'A mīd-al-



Molk. The avarice manifested by him in office and the excessive taxation caused a severe riot in Ṭāleš in 1286/1869 (Rabino, 1917, pp. 479-80; for a different version see Bāmdād, *Rejāl* I, pp. 167-69, III, pp. 126-29, IV, pp. 54-59).

In Du'l-qa'da 1286/February 1870, Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah paid a visit to Gīlān and attempted to ameliorate the situation by reducing the assigned taxes of the province. He also entrusted the affairs of Gīlān to Mīrzā Sa'īd Khan, the minister of foreign affairs, who in turn sent his two aides to the province as his deputy governors. They served for only two years. In 1872, another severe riot broke out in Ṭāleš-e Dūlāb and, in Moḥarram 1289/March 1872, another one occurred in Anzalī (Rabino, 1917, pp. 480-81; Bāmdād, *Rejāl* IV, pp. 54-59).

On his way to Europe in 1873, Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah entrusted Gīlān to Yaḥyā Khan Mo'tamed-al-Molk. He appointed 'Abd-al-Rasūl Khan as his deputy governor. In 1874 there were further disturbances in the province and the governor appointed Mīrzā Mahdī Khan Monajjem-bāšī Langarūdī as his new deputy governor and incarcerated a large number of tribal chiefs from Ṭāleš (Rabino, 1917, pp. 479-80).

In 1292/1875, Nāṣer-al-Molk was once again appointed governor of Gīlān and held office until the summer of 1877, when another plague struck the province. This was relatively moderate in intensity and led to about four thousand casualties. Meanwhile there were fresh disturbances and riots in Ṭāleš and Lāhījān. In 1878, the shah himself came to Gīlān and imprisoned a number of rebellious chieftains from Ṭāleš and dispatched them to Tehran (Rabino, 1917, p. 483; Bāmdād, *Rejāl* IV, pp. 54-59).

From 1296/1879 to 1305/1888, Gīlān was entrusted to Kāmṛān Mīrzā Nāyeb-al-Salṭana (the shah's favorite son, governor of Tehran, and minister of war). He appointed 'Abd-Allāh Khan Wālī as the governor from 1296/1879 to 1301/1884. The imposition of excessive taxation by this governor led to new riots and his brother, Fażl-Allāh Khan, the governor of Lāhījān, was murdered by an angry mob. At this point Aḥmad Khan Mošīr-al-Salṭana was appointed as the governor of Gīlān in 1884. He returned to Tehran a year later when a disastrous fire destroyed a large section of the city of Rašt (Farāhānī, pp. 45-47, tr. pp. 43-46; Rabino, 1917, pp. 484; Bāmdād, *Rejāl* V, pp. 149-51).

In the remaining years of the 19th century, Gīlān was ruled by some ten governors who, with the exception of Abu'l-Faṭḥ Mīrzā Mo'ayyad-al-Dawla (who served for six years), remained in office for no more than one or two



years. This period witnessed an outbreak of a cholera epidemic in the summer of 1309/1892 which left 12,000 dead; the commencement of construction of the Rašt-Qazvīn road by Russians in 1313/1895; and the riot of peasants against a road contractor who had prevented the populace from using the roads without paying tolls (Rabino, 1917, pp. 484-85; Bāmdād, *Rejāl* I, pp. 51-53).

Russian influence and the expansion of foreign trade. Russian influence in Gilān, which began in the early 18th century with the occupation of the province and the establishment of direct relations with the local rulers, intensified after the Russo-Persian wars of the early 19th century and further developed through economic penetration, with a rise in the number of steamships in the latter half of the century when foreign trade through the Caspian Sea increased rapidly. This rapid increase in foreign trade was the main impetus for social, economic, and political change in the major provinces of Persia in the 19th century. The trade of various regions of Persia, including the Caspian provinces, which had declined drastically during the chaotic period in the 18th century, underwent a marked recovery in the first half of the 19th century. Total trade (imports and exports) saw a twelve-fold increase in real terms in the period 1800-1914, increasing from 1.7 million in 1800 to £20 million in 1914. In this period a drastic shift took place in the direction of expanding trade from the neighboring countries to the Anglo-Russian destination. The increase in the volume of trade with Russia, from one-tenth of Persia's total foreign trade (import and export combined) in 1800 to over two-thirds in 1914, may be considered an indication of the increased Russian involvement in Persian affairs as a whole (Jamālzāda, pp. 9-11; Issawi, in *Camb. Hist Iran* VII, p. 597). This increasing Russian involvement in trade, agriculture, and industry was particularly significant in Gilān. The rapidly developing maritime transportation in the Caspian Sea, facilitated the expansion of Russian activities in the province and stimulated the rise in production and exports of silk, fish, and rice as well as other goods, including olives, jute, and timber.

The Caspian route. Russian maritime transportation, which began in the Caspian in the 18th century underwent rapid growth in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries when steamships made their increasing appearance in the ports of Gilān and Māzandarān. "The total number of Russian steamers rose from 10, aggregating 2,600 tons, in 1867 to 139, aggregating 74,000 tons, in 1893 and 265, with a tonnage of 118,000, in 1907. The total traffic entering Iranian ports on the Caspian in 1907-8 consisted of



2,171 steamers, with a tonnage of 800,000, and 584 sailing-ships of 15,000 tons” (Issawi, in *Camb. Hist. Iran VII*, p. 592). An early impact of the rise of Russian shipping was the demise of Persian shipping in the Caspian.

The improvement of transport in the Tehran-Anzalī route and the extension of the Russian railways to Baku in 1884 and to Astrakhan in 1909 were instrumental in the rise of the Caspian maritime transport. Also important was the improvement of port facilities in the period from 1905-13 when Russia invested some 1.3 million rubles in projects at Anzalī (Issawi, 1971, p.163; idem, in *Camb. Hist. Iran VII*, p. 592). As a result of these developments the customs at Anzalī accounted for over two-fifths of total foreign trade of the country in 1910 (Jamālzāda, p. 39).

Silk production and trade. Since the medieval period, Gīlān was well known for its silk production. As early as the 13th century, it attracted the Genoese merchants (see genoa) from the Crimea, across the Caspian, to Gīlān (Marco Polo, I, chap. 4). Silk output increased substantially during the Safavid period when, in the estimate of Jean Chardin (q.v.), it was well over 1.7 million pounds and according to Adam Olearius over 2.1 million. The chaotic conditions which afflicted Persia in the 18th century led to a sharp decline in the output of silk, when Hanway estimated it at about 360,000 pounds (for a table of various estimates of silk produce of Gīlān from Adam Olearius and Jean Chardin in the Safavid period to Jonas Hanway in mid-18th century and those in the 19th century, see Curzon, *Persian Question I*, p. 367).

This period of decline was followed by a steady rapid growth in the first half of the 19th century as in the 1840s “most estimates put the Gilan crop, which accounted for about five-sixths of total output, at over 1,000,000 pounds and its value at around 500,000; and a peak of 2,190,000 pounds, worth 1,000,000 was reached in 1864” (Issawi, 1971, p. 231). The rapid expansion of silk production was made possible by improvement in security of the country and the activity of various foreign firms which advanced the necessary funds to growers. The muscardine disease reached Persia from Europe by 1864, and the crop was reduced by about four-fifths in the 1870s. Then the introduction of silkworm eggs from Japan and Bursa by foreign firms succeeded in improving the crops, and by the early 20th century output had reached the previous peaks. However, competition from Japanese silk producers and others kept prices down, and the value of exports did not exceed 400,000 (for various estimates and collection of reports, see Issawi, 1971, pp. 231-38; see also Jamālzāda, pp. 24-29).



Caspian fisheries. Although fishing in the Persian part of the Caspian had been carried on for many centuries, the latter half of the 19th century saw a rapid increase in the fisheries. The world famous, high quality Persian caviar comes from sturgeon caught in the Persian rivers flowing into the southern part of the Caspian. But considering many kinds of fish, with the exception of salmon and white fish, as unclean or of doubtful state in religious terms, Muslims were cautious in touching and eating fish. Therefore, the industry was developed mainly by Russians and Armenians. As early as 1837-40 Russian subjects were involved in the Caspian fisheries with small amounts being exported to Astrakhan. Around 1868, Stepan M. Lianozov, an Armenian merchant of Russian nationality, obtained the first of several licenses to develop fisheries, which eventually extended along the entire Persian Caspian coast (Jamālzāda, pp. 102-3). By 1873, the concession had become a relatively large scale operation (Entner, pp. 76-77). William George Abbot, the British consul, wrote in his 1875 report that “the produce of these fisheries exceeds 200,000 tumans a year,” and in his 1876 report, Abbot pointed out that during the fishing season of December to March Lianozov employed about 1,100 men, mostly Russian subjects from Baku and Lankaran. At Anzalī, Abbot notes that “the establishment looks quite a Russian settlement, with its shipwrights and blacksmiths, its glove and boot makers, its huts for the men to sleep in, and its comfortable wooden house, constructed in Astrakhan and brought out in pieces for the manager” (apud Issawi, 1971, p. 256).

Lianozov’s concession was renewed, with slight increases in the annual rent from 400,000 francs in 1888 to 480,000 francs in 1919. The value of the catch increased from about 600,000 rubles in the early 1890s to around 2,250,000 rubles by 1913. “A British estimate for 1908/9 put the amount of fish exported to Russia at 10,911,000 pounds worth 40,000 £. Lianozov’s net profits in 1913 were estimated at 510,000 rubles” (Issawi, 1971, pp. 256; see also fisheries).

Rice production and trade. Although rice was produced in most provinces of Persia, Gīlān was particularly noted for its rice production and export. The rice produce of Gīlān increased from 150 million pounds in 1865 to 392 million in 1872. However, until the 1880s, only a small portion of the output was exported and the bulk of the crop was consumed in Persia. In the closing decade of the century the commercialization of agriculture in Central Asia led to the rapid increase in production of cotton and transformed much of the rice fields to the cultivation of cotton and made the cotton producing regions dependent on the foreign grain. The completion of the Transcaspian railway



enabled Persia to supply the increasing demand of Central Asia. As a result, the average annual export of rice to Russia from Gilān rose from £25,000 in the 1870s to £314,000 in the closing decade of the century (Issawi, 1971, p. 243; Entner, p. 75; Jamālzāda, pp. 21-22; Curzon, *Persian Question* II, p. 496).

Other products. The production and export of olives, jute, and timber also developed in the closing decade of the 19th century. In 1890, olive production came under the control of a Greek company called Koussis and Theophilaktos, which was under Russian protection (Issaw, 1971, p. 211). In 1902, the Yuzhno-Russkoe Company undertook the production of jute in Gilān, exporting the products to Russia (Afary, pp. 148-49; Issawi, 1971, pp. 210).

The impact of contacts with the West. The rise of foreign trade and the development of cash crops increased the prosperity of the province in the 19th century. Gilān was one of the richest provinces in the country and its revenues, though fluctuating, were considerable and often ranked among the four top provinces (Jamālzāda, p. 123; Curzon, *Persian Question* II, p. 480; Issawi, 1971, pp. 361-62). Furthermore, the revenues of Gilān from customs increased rapidly from 1897, when the new customs administration was established under the Belgians (see Destrée). In 1912 the customs revenues accounted for 9.6 million *qerāns* or well over two-fifths of the total revenues of the country from the customs. Furthermore, the peasants in Gilān were distinctly better off than in most provinces of Persia. It must also be borne in mind that the very extensive presence of foreign merchants and workers (Russians, Greeks, Armenians) in Gilān and a greater awareness of social developments in the West were contributory factors in producing several pioneering labor protest movements in Gilān and the active participation of the province in the revolutionary movements of 1906-21.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

F. Ādamīyat, *Īdeoloژی-e nahzat- mašrūṭiyat-e Īrān*, Tehran, 1355 Š./1976.

J. Afary, "Peasant Rebellions of the Caspian Region During the Iranian



Constitutional Revolution, 1906-1909,” *IJMES* 23, 1991, pp. 137-61.

Soltān Aḥmad Mīrzā ‘Azod-al-Dawla, *Tārīk-e ‘azodī*, ed. ‘A.-Ḥ. Navā’ī, Tehran, 1355 Š./1976.

A. Destrée, *Les fonctionnaires belges au service de la Perse, 1898-1915*, Acta Iranica 13, Leiden, 1976.

‘Abd-al-Razzāq Maftūn Donbolī, *Ma’āter-e soltānīya*, ed. Ğ.-Ḥ. Šadrī Afšār, Tehran, 1337 Š./1958.

M. Entner, *Russo-Persian Commercial Relations, 1828-1914*, Gainesville, Fla., 1965.

Moḥammad-Ḥosayn Farāhānī, *Safar-nāma*, ed. Ḥ. Farmān-farmā’īān, Tehran, 1342 Š./1963; tr. H. Farmayan and E. Daniel as *A Shi’ite Pilgrimage to Mecca*, Austin, Tex., 1990.

M. Fateh, *The Economic Position of Persia*, London, 1926.

Jonas Hanway, *An Historical Account of the British Trade over the Caspian Sea*, 4 vols., London, 1754.

Rezāqolī Khan Hedāyat, *Rawzat al-ṣafā-ye nāserī*, Tehran, 1339 Š./1960.

Ch. Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran: 1800-1914*, Chicago, 1971.

Idem, “European Economic Penetration, 1872-1921,” in *Camb. Hist. Iran* VII, pp. 590-607.

M.-‘A. Jamālzāda, *Ganj-e šāyegān*, Berlin, 1335/1916.

H. L. Rabino di Borgomale, *Les Provinces caspiennes de la Perse: le Guīlān*, RMM 32 (1916-17), Paris, 1917.

Idem, “Rulers of Lahijan and Fuman in Gilan, Persia,” *JRAS* 34, 1918, pp. 85-100.

Idem, “Rulers of Gilan,” *JRAS* 35, 1920, pp. 277-96.

Idem, *Mašrūṭa-ye Gilān*, ed. M. Rowšan, Rašt 1368 Š./1989.

Moḥammad-Taqī Lesān-al-Molk Sepehr, *Nāseḵ al-tawārīkò*, ed. M. Behbūdī,



Tehran, 1385/1965.