



GORGĀN VI. HISTORY FROM THE RISE OF ISLAM TO THE BEGINNING OF THE SAFAVID PERIOD

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Gorgān, OP Varkāna-, classical Hyrcania, Arabized form Jorjān (see Markwart, *Erānšahr*, p. 72), formed in Sasanian and pre-modern Islamic times a transitional zone, a corridor, between the subtropical habitat and climate of Māzandarān to its west, and the arid steppes of Dehestān (q.v.) and, beyond them, the Qara Qum Desert to its northwest. Watered by the Gorgān and the Atrak rivers (q.v.), Gorgān was, on the evidence of the Islamic geographers, a fertile agricultural region in early Islamic times. Moqaddasi (p. 357) describes its rich crops of fruits of all kinds. Raw silk was a major product throughout medieval Islamic times; the same author (p. 367) says that the silken veils of Gorgān were exported as far as Yemen, while the *Ḥodud al-ālam* (tr. Minorsky, p. 133) attributes to it black silk textiles and brocades. This manufacture continued up to and beyond the Mongol invasions (Serjeant, pp. 80-81). According to Ebn Ḥawqal, the port of Abaskun (q.v.), the most important one



on the Caspian shores, formed the outlet for Gorgān's exports and also for communications with Transcaucasia and the Khazar lands along the Volga (Ebn Ḥawqal, ed. Kramers, pp. 383, 397, tr. Kramers and Wiet, II, pp. 373, 388).

The two main cities at this time were (Šahr-e) Gorgān itself, the administrative capital of the province, founded by the Omayyad general Yazid b. Mohallab b. Abi Šofra in the late 1st/early 8th century, and Astarābād (q.v.), in the western part adjoining Māzandarān. (Šahr-e) Gorgān was a flourishing urban center, despite the fact that it lay in a region of fierce heat and humidity and was liable to flooding when the snows of the Alborz melted and swelled the river of Gorgān. It lay on both sides of the river, with the town proper, comprising the *šahrastān* with the *dār al-emāra* or government headquarters, on the right bank, and the industrial suburb of Bakrābād, where silk manufacturing was concentrated, on the left; the two halves were linked by a bridge of boats. The dominant building material was sun-dried clay bricks (see Ebn Ḥawqal, ed. Kramers, p. 382, tr. Kramers and Wiet, pp. 372-73).

Arab invaders appeared in Gorgān under Sa'īd b. 'Āṣ as early as 30/650-51, when the *malek* of Gorgān (the Sasanian *marzbān*?) agreed to pay a tribute of 200,000 dirhams (Balāḍori, *Fotuḥ*, pp. 334-35), but Arab rule was not made reasonably firm till the time of Yazid b. Mohallab (see above). Following the Sasanians, who had constructed defences in this region against nomadic pressure from inner Asia, the Arabs regarded Gorgān and Dehestān as *toḡur*, frontier regions against the Turks, and above all the Ġozz (q.v.), of the Transcaspien steppes. Zaydi Shi'ite missionary activity affected Gorgān, as it did Gilān (q.v.) and Ṭabarestān further to the west, and the 'Alid Moḥammad b. Zayd was combatted in Gorgān by the Saffarids in the later 3rd/9th century (see Bosworth, 1994, pp. 211, 217-18). In the next century, Gorgān became the center of the Ziyarid principality carved out by the Daylamite adventurer Mardāvij b. Ziār (murdered 323/935) and held by his descendants until the end of the 5th/11th century.

The Ziyarids' hold on their territories was not, however, uncontested. Under Vošmgir ibn Ziār (323-57/935-67) and his successor Bisotun (357-66/967-77), they acknowledged the suzerainty now of the Samanids, now of the latter's rivals the Buyids; but in the reign of Qābus ibn Vošmgir (366-403/977-1012) they lost Ṭabarestān and Gorgān to the Buyids, who remained in control of the region until 388/998. The Ziyarids' situation under the Ghaznavids was also precarious (not least because of internal struggles); the low point of this period was perhaps Mas'ūd I's invasion of Gorgān and Ṭabarestān in 426/1035 and his



sack of Āmol (q.v.), described in detail by Bayhaqi (ed. Fayyāz, pp. 587-608; see in general Madelung; Bosworth 1965).

The last Ziyarid ruler, Gilānšāh, was put to flight in 483/1090, in the reign of the Saljuq sultan Malekšāh, by the Isma'ilis of Alamut (Bosworth, 1965, p. 33). From Saljuq times onwards, there may have been a trend towards pastoralization in Gorgān, for there existed extensive grazing grounds there for the still-nomadic Turkmens of the Saljuq empire, and we know of a *šeḥna* or military administrator appointed over them by the sultan (Lambton, p. 282). In the latter half of the 6th/12th century, Astarābād passed to the control of the local Bāvandid ruler, Šāh-Ġāzi Rostam (534-58/1140-63; see Āl-e Bāvand).

The Mongols devastated the province, ending the prosperity described by Yāqut (*Boldān*, ed. Beirut, II, pp. 119-23) at the beginning of the 7th/13th century and massacring the population. It was on one of the islands of Abaskun that the K̄vārazmšāh 'Alā-al-Din Moḥammad, fleeing from the Mongols, took refuge, and died shortly after (Jovayni, tr. Boyle, II, pp. 385-86). A century later, Mostawfi described the city of Gorgān as being still ruinous and sparsely populated (*Nozhat al-qolub*, p. 159, tr., p. 156); and it suffered further from Timur's ravages. Astarābād developed as the main urban center of the province. Various Turkmen tribes established themselves in Gorgān during the Safavid period as vassals of the Shahs (Röhrborn, p. 18); in the late 17th and the 18th century it became the power base for the Qajar Turkmens. The region remained vulnerable to Turkmen incursions from the steppes until the later 19th century.

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