



LĀHIJĀN

LĀHIJĀN (لاهیجان), a city in the province of Gilān. It is located at 37°12' N, long 50°0' E, to the east of the lower reaches of [Safidrud](#) at an altitude of 4 m. With 71,871 inhabitants in 2006, it is the third most populous city in of Gilān (after Rašt and Anzali), although it was once the principal town and the administrative center (*dār-al-molk*) of the entire province (Mostawfi, p. 163; tr., p. 159; Rabino, 1916-17, p. 292; tr., p. 238).

According to an old legend, the city was founded by Lāhij b. Sām b. Nuḥ, but there are no references to this in early Arabic geographies. The earliest mention of the name is in the Persian geography *Ḥodud al-ālam*, where it is called Lāfjān and noted as one of the seven large districts located between the Safidrud and the Caspian Sea (*Ḥodud al-ālam*, p. 149; tr. p. 137; comm., pp. 384, 388, 410).

Until the 4th/10th century, Bia-piš (the land east of Safidrud that includes Lāhijān) was subject to the dynasties of Deylam, which at that time ruled the region (see [DEYLAMITES](#)). It was only in the beginning of the 4th/10th century that its center began to move from the mountain to the plain. Lāhijān then passed under the dominion of a family dynasty of Kutom (in the district of Rānekuh), whose founder, Nāṣer-al-Din Ḥasan b. 'Ali Oṭruš (d. 304/917), introduced Zaydi Shi'ism to Bia-piš (Bia-pas, west of Safidrud, remained Sunnite). Subsequently, it was a branch of a local family, the Nāṣervand, that ruled the city and made a fruitless stand against the troops of the Il-khanid Uljāyту in 706/1306-7. However, after its fall, the ruling family received in marriage the daughter of a Mongol officer and was invested with sovereignty



over the other princes of Gilān (Qāšāni, pp. 61 ff; Bosworth, p. 603). Lāhijān was then, with Fuman to the west, the principal city of Gilān. “It was then a fair-sized town; much silk was manufactured here and the district grew rice and corn, also oranges and shaddocks with other fruits of a hot region” (Le Strange, p. 174; tr., p. 187). Lāhijān experienced its first golden age in the 9th/15th century, following a period of internecine wars in Bia-piš during the course of the 8th/14th century. The rule of the Nāšervand family came to an end and was succeeded by the Kiā dynasty, which ruled from 1367-68 to 1592, when Gilān became incorporated under the crown of Persia. In the 15th century, the Kiā ruled not only Biapiš, but also Qazvin, Tārom, Solṭāniya, Sāva, Zanjān, Firuzkuh, Tehran, Ray, and Varāmin (Bosworth, p. 603).

Another significant episode in the history of the city at this time is the important, though indirect, role of the Kiā, who claimed descent from ‘Ali Zayn-al-‘Ābedin, the fourth imam of the Shi‘ites (Rabino, 1949, p. 322), in the rise of the Safavid empire. Mirzā ‘Ali Kiā (1478-1506) granted sanctuary to the young Esmā‘il, the future founder of the Safavid dynasty, who had fled Ardabil as a fugitive from the Āq Qoyunlu. He lived as a recluse near Lāhijān from 1493 to 1499, surrounded by “seven Sufis who were hidden for seven years in the forest ..., without women, children, or property and swearing martyrdom” (*Ālamārā-ye Šāh Esmā‘il*, quoted by Aubin, p. 3; *Ālamārā-ye Šafawi*, pp. 36-37, 39 ff.; Eskandar Beg, pp. 25-26; tr. Savory, I, pp. 40-42). The close connections between the Safavids and Lāhijān dated from the 13th century, when the mystic Shaykh Tāj-al-Din Zāhed Gilāni (1216-301) had been the spiritual master and father-in-law of Šafi-ad-Din Ardabili (1252-334), the eponymous ancestor of the Safavid dynasty (*Ālamārā-ye Šafawi*, pp. 10-16; *Jahāngošā-ye Kāqān*, pp. 14-15; Savory, pp. 5-8). The tomb of Shaykh Zāhed, sheltered within an elegant monument in the form of a pagoda, is just a few kilometers from Lāhijān, in the village of Šaykānavar (Sotuda, pp. 148-50, and pl.123).

Subjected under Shah ‘Abbās I (r. 1588-1629) to the Persian crown, the Kiā became the vassals of the Safavids and were required by them to introduce Twelver Shi‘ism in place of Zaydism (Eskandar Beg, I, pp. 448-51; tr., Savory, II, pp. 621-25). This integration into the empire signaled the decline of Lāhijān, with Rašt chosen as the seat of the governorship of the province. The Qazvin-Caspian route, via the Safidrud and Rašt Pass, replaced the Qazvin-Lāhijān itinerary with its mountain caravansaries (Tutaki and Sardāb) and its majestic Anbuh Bridge (Pol-e Anbuh) spanning the Šāhrud River (Bazin and Bromberger, pp. 87-88; Sotuda, pp. 5-9).

It was not until the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries that Lāhijān had a second golden age. The development of sericulture and the silk trade (Bromberger, 1989) and of tea cultivation contributed to the resurgence of the city. On this matter Rabino (1916-17, p. 298; tr. pp. 348-49) wrote at the beginning of the 20th century: “It is the center of the silk trade and several of those hideous iron-roofed buildings for drying cocoons have been erected there by French and Levantine concerns.” It was also at Lāhijān that, in 1902, the first tea plantations were established in Iran, on the initiative of Ḥāji Moḥammad Mirzā Kāšef-al-Saltāna, then Persian consul in India, who had smuggled back from that country some 3,000 seedlings of Assamese tea (see ČĀY). Thereafter, the hills overhanging Lāhijān were gradually covered with fields of tea (*bāḡ-e čāy*), and factories for processing tea were set up in the city and its environs (the first was created in 1932). Lāhijān tea, famed for its pungency and aroma, has become the favored beverage of the Iranians. Lāhijān became a center of political upheaval when the rebellion known as the Jangali Movement (q.v.) inflamed Gilān in the aftermath of the Constitutional Revolution. The rebellion in Bia-piš was organized by Dr. Ḥešmat (executed 1919), one of the Movement leaders, who had a canal dug, which bears his name to this day, as the Ḥešmatrud, serving the badly watered lands north of Lāhijān (‘Azimi Dobakšari, p. 72; Sotuda, p. 156).

In the seven traditional quarters (Ḳomeyr Kelāya [not Ḳormā Kelāya as written by Rabino], Ordu-bāzār, Meydān, also known as Čahār Pādšāh, Gābona, Ša’rbāf Maḥalla, Pordesar, and Kārvānsarā’ibar; see Rabino, 1916-17, pp. 293-98; tr., pp. 341-48), various monuments pay homage to the illustrious past of the city. With its carved wood gates and its mural paintings, the mausoleum of the Čahār Pādšāh (see Sotuda, pp. 98-113, and pls. 73-85), which dates from the end of the 14th century and shelters the tombs of Sayyed Ḳorram Kiā (d. 647/1249-50) and other rulers of the dynasty, forms, with the adjacent mosque, a remarkable ensemble. On the other side of the square is the Masjed-e Jāme’ (Sotuda, pp. 114-18), whose wall bears an inscription, carved in the marble, that reproduces an edict (*farmān*) of Shah Solṭān-Ḥosayn Šafawi, in Šawwāl 1106/May 1695, forbidding prostitution, gaming, the use of narcotics, and animal-fighting (see Rabino, 1928, section on inscriptions, Persian text, pp. 7-10; Sotuda, pp. 115-17, and pls. 85-87; see GĀVBĀZI). Ša’rbāf Maḥalla adjoins the tomb of Āqā Sayyed Moḥammad Yamani, who was originally from Yemen, as well as an uninscribed gravestone surrounded by six Siberian elms (*Zelkova crenata*, *derakṭ-e āzād*). Some believers gather there



on Thursdays and Fridays to pray and supplicate (Sotuda, pp. 91-92; on the cult of the trees in Gilān, see Bazin, 1978, and [GILĀN xvi. FOLKLORE](#)). On the heights of Lāhijān are found the mausoleum of Kāšef-al-Salṭana and a tea museum that commemorates his efforts in making Lāhijān as the capital of tea industry in Iran; it is also the home of the Tea Company of Iran (*Šerkat-e saḥāmi-e čāy-e Irān*), founded in 1958 (Ehlers, pp. 234-35).

The population increase of Lāhijān (71,871 inhabitants according to the 2006 census) was slower than that of Rašt, but the same as Anzali's. From 1956 to 2006, Lāhijān and Anzali populations multiplied by only 3.5, while that of Rašt quintupled. This slow growth is due to the weakness of the city's industrial fabric and to stagnation or even decline in rural activities (sericulture, tea production) in which Lāhijān had been a major outlet and linchpin. The city has only 60 industrial businesses (the vast majority of them small), which employ 1,758 people (Markaz-e āmār, 2006). The range of local specialties is limited. Lāhijān, which was already famous for making rosewater and orange blossom candy, is today especially well known for its filled biscuits (*kolučē*).

Since the 1960s and 1970s, the authorities have attempted to improve the appearance of Lāhijān, which is considered the most attractive and tourist-friendly city in Gilān. Thus the vast reservoir (*estakr, sal*) east of the city, which was used for irrigation (*ābyāri*), has been improved for leisure activities and strolling. On holidays many residents of the city and region flock there. A cablecar gives access to the hillock that overlooks the city and provides a spectacular panorama over the plain and the Caspian Sea. The creation in 1988 of the Islamic Āzād University of Lāhijān has reinforced the attractiveness and potential of the city.

The district of Lāhijān has shrunk considerably thanks to the various administrative reshapings that Gilān has undergone since the beginning of the 20th century. Under the redistricting carried out in 1937, Lāhijān was a sub-provincial unit (*šahrestān*) that included all of Gilān east of Safidrud. In 1961, two other sub-provincial units were created in this territory, namely Langarud and Rudsar. [Āstāna](#), Ašrafiya (in 1971), and [Siāhkal](#) (in 1998), which were formerly dependent districts (*baḳš*) of Lāhijān, became *šahrestān*. Lāhijān since that time has included only seven subdistricts (*dehestān*), with a total area of 410 km² and a total population of 161,819 in the general census of population and habitat of 2006, including a rural population of 86,354 (53.4 percent of the total), representing a rural density of 210 per km². To the south, on the slopes of the hills that overhang the city (districts of Āhandān and Leyl),

tea-growing prevails, with the hollows and the edge of the plain occupied by rice paddies irrigated from springs or reservoirs (*sal* in Gilaki). The tea plantations covered 7,959 hectares in 1971 (data from the Organization of Tea in Lāhijān) and supplied with tea a large number of processing plants in Lāhijān and environs; but the liberalization of the tea business at the beginning of the 2000s created a severe crisis in this major activity of the district (Allaverdian). Cattle, not long ago, were used for plowing and transport, but since the 1970s and 1980s cattle raising has been devoted to the production of milk and secondarily of meat. It is only in the villages on the edges of the forests of the foothills of the Alborz (such as Kuhbona in the county of Āhandān, Atirud or Gomol in Leyl) that *gāleš* families practice cattle- and sheep-raising, pasturing their herds and flocks in autumn and winter in the wooded hills of the area, and in spring and summer migrating to distant mountain pastures (*yeylāq*), such as Čarākuh above Kelišom. Conversely, villages of the mid-size mountain around Deylamān send their animals in the winter to the hills above Lāhijān (Pourfickoui and Bazin, pp. 52-55).

In the counties of the plain that are north of the *šahrestān* (namely, districts of Liālestān, Rudbona, and Širjupošt), rice cultivation, which became an important activity here only during the 20th century, has become virtually a monoculture, benefiting from the modern irrigation network developed on the right bank of the Safidrud. Wheat-, flax-, and hemp-farming, still important in the first decades of the last century, have totally disappeared. Silkworm-raising, which had been a dominant activity at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century and was still important down to the beginning of the 21st, has considerably retreated. For instance, 3,592 tons of cocoons were still produced in Gilān in 1996, but in 2006 the total product of the province was only 1,252 tons (222 tons from the *šahrestān* of Lāhijān). The number of boxes of grain acquired by the silk-growers went from 14,000 in 1973 (see ABRIŠAM) to less than 9,000 in 2006 (Markaz-e āmār, p. 211). Since 2006, production has decreased still further. Poplar groves (which supply a heavy demand for woodwork) and pisciculture are supplementary businesses.

It is also worth noting that Lāhijān, the historic capital of Bia-piš, has given its name to the variety of the Gilaki language spoken east of Safidrud, Lāhijāni Gilaki.



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