



MANJIL

MANJIL, town in the [Rudbār district](#), [Gilān province](#). Located at lat 36°44' N, long 49°24' E, where the Qezel-owzan (Kızıl-uzun) and Šāhrud rivers unite into the Safidrud, Manjil lies on the right bank of the Šāhrud, at the entrance of the deep cut across the Alborz chain by the Safidrud. This position results in specific climatic features: the sea-breeze phenomenon, which creates in summer afternoons and evenings an airflow between the relatively cool surface of the Caspian Sea and the much warmer areas inland, is exaggerated here into a strong and steady wind from the north-northeast, called *bād-e Manjil* “the wind of Manjil,” as observed by numerous travelers (Monteith; Melgunof; Patenôtre; Schindler; O’Donovan; Orsolle) and described at a session of the Academy of Sciences in Paris by Tholozan in 1885. Melgunof (1868, pp. 264-65) noticed that all the olive trees around Manjil were bent toward the south (more exactly south-southwest), showing to the villagers the *qebla*, the direction of Mecca. These olive trees are the second specific character mentioned by many travelers (Father de la Maze; Stahl; in addition to the aforementioned authors). The rapid transition between the semi-arid climate of the interior and the humid climate of the Caspian lowlands results in the presence of pseudo-Mediterranean features, the predominance of cypresses (*Cupressus sempervirens* var. *horizontalis*) in very sparse forests on the hills, and the importance of irrigated orchards of olive trees around the villages.

Manjil has been an important stage along the road linking central Persia to Gilān through the valley of the Safidrud, which is generally described as the



gate to Gilān, although the first settlement belonging to Gilān was Lowšān, a few miles ahead on the road, with a bridge on the Šāhrud. Both Lowšān and Manjil had a mainly Turkish population from the ‘Ammārlu tribe, together with Tats and Kurds, and belonged to the ‘Ammārlu district (Melgunof, p. 265; Rabino, pp. 261-62). But the presence of another bridge in the immediate vicinity of Manjil, on the Safidrud just below the confluence of its two branches, reinforced the strategic position of that place. Variations in its description may imply that this bridge had to be rebuilt several times after a destructive flood: it was a stone bridge built by Shah Ṭahmāsp according to Olearius; a big and beautiful brick bridge built by Shah Ṣafi and repaired in 1698 under Shah Solṭān-Ḥosayn according to Father de la Maze; by 1837, central arches had been destroyed by the flow of the river and were replaced by a temporary wooden structure, which was unsafe to pass over (Aucher-Eloy, 1843, pp. 423-24). The bridge apparently was rebuilt by Ḥāji Mollā Rafi‘, the *mojtahed* of Rašt, in the 1860s (Melgunof, p. 264) and was finally replaced by a steel bridge in the early 20th century (Stahl, p. 5). The strategic role of Manjil was illustrated during the Jangali uprising: in March 1918 Mirzā Kuček Khan (q.v.) threatened to march up to Qazvin, which had been occupied by the Cossacks of (white) Russian Colonel Bicherekov; Kuček Khan settled his troops in Manjil in order to block the way to Gilān; he was finally defeated on 12 June 1918 by a mixed force of British hussars and Russian Cossacks (Dunsterville, pp. 159-60). The project of building a railway from Qazvin to Rašt was abandoned, but the highway was progressively modernized throughout the 20th century.

In the 1950s a large reservoir dam was constructed just below the confluence of Qezel-owzan and Šāhrud, where a deep gorge in granitic rock offered a favorable site. It might seem paradoxical to build a dam to gather precipitation from a vast catchment basin (57,800 km²) in the semi-arid interior of Iran and transfer it to the plain of Gilān, the wettest in the country; however, the mobilization of water resources of Gilān by traditional processes including derivations from the rivers and shallow reservoirs (Sahāmi, 1965, pp. 53-56) could not satisfy the considerable needs of rice cultivation, the main activity in Gilān. Thus, after preliminary studies in 1953-54, the French company Sogreah-Cotha was commissioned to build a reservoir dam. The construction was finished in February 1961; the dam was inaugurated in April 1962 by Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi and was dedicated to Empress Farah, whose statue was built on the bank of the new lake; it was removed after the Islamic Revolution. The Manjil dam, a gravity concrete structure with buttresses, 106

m high and 425 m long, created a lake with an area of 56 km² and a capacity of 1,700,000 cubic meters. The dam was completed by two derivation dams downstream: (1) the Tārik dam, 35 km from the main dam, built in 1969, feeds the Fumanāt canal through a 17 km long tunnel dug between Tārik and Čowbar; (2) the Sangar dam, 20 km farther to the north, built in 1965, feeds two derivation canals on the left bank and the right bank of the Safidrud (see Ministère de l'Énergie).

Together with this hydraulic function of fostering paddy cultivation in the Gilān plain, the dam has been equipped with a hydroelectric plant with an installed power of 87.5 megawatt. This electric production allowed development of industries other than the traditional olive oil and soap factories, in Manjil itself as well as in the neighboring town of Lowšān. Thanks to the construction of the dam and the subsequent industrial development and the commercial activity bound to the highway, Manjil, merely a big village with 1,100 inhabitants in 1949 (Razmarā, II, s.v. “Manjil”), showed a rapid demographic growth, from 3,332 inhabitants in 1966 to 7,164 in 1976, and 11,107 in 1986 (see Markaz).

The town was nearly destroyed by the Manjil-Rudbār earthquake on 21 June 1990, at half past midnight, with a magnitude of 7.4 on the Richter scale; it resulted in some 40,000 fatalities and 500,000 homeless (AFGP). The Manjil dam was damaged too, with a number of repairable splits; the dam was subsequently retrofitted. Reconstruction of the infrastructure and residential and commercial buildings, installation of windmills since 2003, and construction of a new Qazvin-Rašt highway allowed a quick revival of the town, whose population surpassed 16,000 in 2006.

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