



## RASHT II. THE DISTRICT

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### RASHT

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The district (*šahrestān*) of Rasht, 1,224 km<sup>2</sup>, is the largest in the plain of Gilān and the most populated in the whole province. Its population was 857,519, constituting 35.8 percent of the province, according to the 2006 census (see Markaz), and included, besides the 557,366 inhabitants of the capital city of Rasht itself, 45,989 persons in five sub-district centers (*markaz-e baḳš*) and 254,164 persons in 296 rural settlements. Rasht District encompassed the two historical sub-districts of Mavāzi and Leštenešā (described by Rabino, pp. 215-58). Mavāzi consisted of the former sub-districts of Rasht and Kohdom to the south, Ḳošk-bijār to the north, and Kučešfahān to the east. The western part of the former sub-district of Ḳošk-bijār has become a new district around the active marketplace of Ḳomām. The center of Kohdom has shifted from Kohdom to Sangar.

The district covers the central part of the plain of Gilān on the left bank of the Safidrud, from Safidrud's outlet from the Alborz chain at Sarāvān to the Caspian coast. This alluvial plain is very flat, descending gently from the elevation zero (mean altitude of the open seas) at Sangar to 22 meters below the level of open seas at the Caspian shoreline. Rasht district is the heartland of rice cultivation in Gilān; the activity of the Gilak peasantry is almost exclusively devoted to this main crop of the province (Sahami, pp. 56-57). Rice cultivation is supplemented by sericulture to the east toward Kučešfahān and



market gardening around Rasht city. Paddies were traditionally irrigated by three derivation canals, namely Gilerud, Komāmrud, and Nowrud, which were driven from the Safidrud (Rabino, pp. 217-23). These have been replaced by the modern system organized in the 1960s thanks to the Safidrud reservoir-dam in Manjil and the derivation dam in Sangar (SOGREAH-COTHA). Thanks to modernization of its irrigation system, the district ranks first by far in Gilān in terms of the cultivation of rice, with 52,755 ha of cultivated land and a production of 143,155 tons (30.4 and 30.5 percent of the province, respectively) in 1986 (Balai, p. 172).

Along the Caspian shore, two cooperative fishing enterprises (*šerkat-e ta'āwoni-e māhigiri*) are located in Amirbekandeh and Yusofābād (Bazin, II, pp. 137-39). The majority of fishermen are peasants from the district of Kalkāl in Azarbaijan, who come during the cold season to catch scaly fish such as *māhi-e safid* (kutum, *Rutilus friskii kutum*) or *kefāl* (mullet) with a seine (Vieille and Nabavi).

Animal husbandry was traditionally limited to poultry, horses to carry sheaves of paddy and other products and materials, and cattle, which were used in plowing (with *kāvol*-type plow [see GILĀN xviii] driven by one ox; Bazin and Bromberger, pp. 19, 23 and map 6) and which provided the household's dairy products. The cattle and horses were fed with the weeds of uncultivated areas, including strips along the roads, with the stalks of paddy remaining in the fields after the harvest (where the animals would be tied to a post), and with the straw collected after threshing the paddy sheaves. Farmers from a number of villages used to send their oxen and horses in spring and summer to rich, humid pastures on the marshy eastern banks of the Anzali lagoon (Torābkāla, Bāqlākeš, and Maḥmudābād, covering 2,200 ha) or to the west of the active part of the Safidrud delta (Bujāq, covering 1,000 ha). The pastures were called *qoroq*, and their guardians, *qoroqbān* (Pourfickoui and Bazin, pp. 16-19). The raising of oxen and horses has significantly declined with the spread of mechanization among rice growers.

Large stock-raising companies have succeeded local peasantry in using the *qoroq*s of Torābkāla, Bāqlākeš, and Maḥmudābād. The first two initiatives were taken in the late 1960s, in the immediate vicinity of Rasht, in the framework of bilateral cooperation projects (idem, pp. 97-103). The Industrial Stock-Raising Station of Rasht (ISRSR) was created in 1966 as a joint project between the Iranian Ministry of Agriculture and the Danish government; 200 ha of land along the Tehran-Rasht highway were cleared and devoted to fodder crops,



and two bovine breeds, Roudnich and Holstein, were selected for their capacity to provide both milk and meat. The Industrial Rearing Station of the Safidrud dam was created in 1968 as a joint project between the Iranian Ministry of War and two Romanian companies. An estate of about 10,000 ha south of Rasht was acquired and turned into fodder-plant fields and pastures; additionally, some 900 ha of *qoroq* land were reclaimed. Besides its gigantic dimension, the originality of the project was to introduce on the plain of Gilân, parallel to poultry and cattle breeding, the breeding of sheep for milk and meat; however, this experimentation bore no positive results. Such industrial stock-rearing plants must have multiplied to satisfy the growing demand of the city of Rasht, and the capacity of the pasteurization factory of Rasht, opened in 1960, must have increased.

More generally, the immediate outskirts of Rasht have endured a strong process of suburbanization, which combines the spread of residential areas and the multiplication of commercial and industrial plants. The centers of the five peripheral sub-districts of Rasht, i.e., Kōmām (with a population of 12,901), Kōšk-bijār (7,478), Leštenešā (10,871), Kučēšfahān (8,351), and Sangar (6,388; 2006 data; see Markaz), have developed into small but active market towns, each with a weekly market and a fair number of permanent shops and stores and administrative, educational, and healthcare institutions.

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