

SECTION II—BY THE COAST TO TĀHIRĪ

After protracted delays due largely to the difficulty experienced in securing camel transport such as might be expected to take us at least as far as the port of Lingeh, we were able at last to leave Bandar Abbās by December 16th. My intention was to follow the coast-line as close as practicable up to Tāhirī, the site of the old port of Sīrāf, which had played a very important part in the history of Persia's maritime trade during the early Islamic period. There remains of interest, as yet imperfectly surveyed, invited examination. It was easy to foresee that this long journey of more than 300 miles along a barren coast, devoid of local resources and uninviting climatically even at this the most favourable season, was likely to be attended by more difficulties than usual in consequence of the prevailing famine conditions. But against this was to be set the opportunity it might offer of looking for relics of a maritime intercourse down the Persian Gulf more ancient than that which had so far been attested by historical or archaeological evidence. From Tāhirī I proposed to turn north-eastwards into the hill tracts of Lāristān, through which important trade routes from inner Persia had passed in the Middle Ages and later, but which in modern times had become difficult of access and remained in various respects unexplored.

On the initial portion of our journey progress towards Lingeh was greatly delayed by the rain so long vainly hoped for. It set in on the very first march, which took us along the narrow coastal flat beyond Bandar Abbās. Renewed at intervals it made the soft alluvial soil along the foot of the low hills skirting the coast troublesome ground for the camels. More serious was the risk of the two considerable river-beds which descend to that coast from the higher valleys on the north, being rendered altogether unfordable where they debouch into the sea. Fortunately the rain-bursts did not last sufficiently long to fill the wide beds and to inundate their deltas. All the same it took us seven marches before the second of those rivers, both salt in their lower courses and hence useless for irrigation, was safely crossed. Beyond this the higher hill range of the Band-i-Lingeh runs down with steep spurs of sandstone close to the shore, and here easier going is afforded, except at certain points where the passage at the foot of precipitous cliffs is practicable only at low tide.

The series of villages encountered along this portion of the coast are all small with the exception of Khamīr, where mining and burning of gypsum along the foot of the hills provides some trade. The groves of date-palms and other scant cultivation depend on the chances of rainfall. Drinking-water is collected here, as everywhere else along this arid coast, in domed reservoirs (*birkeh*; Fig. 75). Fortunately the recent rain had filled these and thus protected us from the more