

As no other old remains were known to exist in the vicinity, it was a relief when, after protracted efforts, sufficient transport could be collected to allow us to resume our journey by December 29th. In order to make up for lost time I decided to move to Chārak, the next small port up the coast, by the somewhat shorter route which passes to the north of the rugged hills intervening between the Mihrakān swamp and the sea, instead of following the track along the winding coast-line. Though it took us three days to cover the distance of 50 miles to Chārak, yet the choice of route proved fortunate. For progress was much hampered by constant break-downs and desertions among our transport, now mainly donkeys, and had we proceeded by the barren coast, where cultivation is almost entirely absent, we might have been brought again and again to a complete standstill. As it was, help requisitioned from the small hamlets passed on the way made it possible to avoid this. In the end I had reason to feel thankful when, after five trying hours spent over crossing the last 6 miles of swampy ground and salt creeks before Chārak, the night of the New Year saw us and our baggage safely arrived at the little port.

Experience of the difficulties already encountered and with good reason to be foreseen ahead induced me, after a day's halt under the walls of the local Shaikh's castle (Fig. 66), to make our way to Bandar Muqām, the nearest small place on the coast with any resources, through the valley of Gulshān, which runs parallel to the coast and was believed to be less affected by famine conditions. The vicinity of the higher coastal range, the foot of which this hitherto imperfectly known route skirts, enabled useful survey work to be done on the next three marches; but opportunities for antiquarian work did not present themselves.

Bandar Muqām, which was reached on January 5th, is a small port serving the western valleys of Lāristān. There was again evidence of medieval maritime intercourse with India and the Far East to be seen in the shape of fragments of Chinese porcelain found among the debris of low mounds extending along the shore to the west of the local Shaikh's castle. Fortunately the young Arab chief still retained some authority. He was thus able to show his goodwill by providing such transport and efficient guidance, under the control of a trusted negro slave retainer, as enabled us to follow the route along the rocky coast to Shīū. It proved the most desolate ground so far encountered along the barren shores of the Gulf, and its difficulty and insecurity explained why this stretch of the coast had apparently never been surveyed. For the most part the track skirted the foot of steep and fantastically eroded sandstone cliffs, while in places it led across small inlets of the sea lined by slippery boulders, or over narrow rock ledges falling off steeply into the sea. Even here, however, in the small cliff-bound bay of Thehahīl, now frequented only by smuggling hillmen from the tract of