

emporium, the site of which we were bound for. Thither our baggage had moved ahead, while the examination of the remains just described detained me. Following it in the dark, we passed the hamlet of Parak. Finally, after having covered a total distance of 28 miles, we arrived at the wretched fishing village of Tāhirī, and, passing it, were able to pitch our camp on an old walled-up terrace below the fortified mansion of Shaikh Hāṭim, the local chief (Fig. 60).

### SECTION III—THE SITE OF SĪRĀF

Immediately to the west of Tāhirī village there stretch for a distance of fully a mile and a half (see Plan 17) the remains of the town of Sīrāf. From the accounts of Arab geographers Sīrāf has long been known to have been the chief centre during the early Muhammadan period for the maritime trade of the regions adjacent to the Persian Gulf with India and the Far East. The location of Sīrāf at the ruined site of Tāhirī was first recognized by Captain Kempthorne of the Indian Navy.<sup>1</sup> It is fully borne out by the descriptions, more or less detailed, to be found in the works of writers who knew the town from the time of its great prosperity down to that of its rapid decay after the destruction caused by a great earthquake about A.D. 977. As a full and lucid synopsis of these accounts is readily accessible in Sir Arnold Wilson's *Persian Gulf*, and as accurate modern translations of the essential ones have been given in Professor P. Schwarz's work often quoted before,<sup>2</sup> it may suffice here to reproduce those details which have a direct antiquarian or topographical bearing.

Sulaimān the Merchant (about the middle of the ninth century A.D.) already knew Sīrāf as the port where the Chinese ships trading to the Gulf took in their cargo.<sup>3</sup> Iṣṭakhrī describes Sīrāf as a town 'almost as large as Shīrāz. For the building of houses teak wood and wood from Zanj (Zanzibar) is used; they have several stories. The town lies on the sea coast, is very closely built and very populous.' He refers to the extravagant sums spent by merchants on their houses. 'There are neither gardens nor woods in the vicinity. The fruit and the best drinking water is brought to the town from the mountain of Jamm which lies above the town and is the highest point in the neighbourhood and like the hills of the cold region. But Sīrāf is the hottest town in the country.' Elsewhere he describes 'Sīrāf as the chief port of Persia. It is a big town in which only houses are to be seen until one gets over the hill overlooking the town. There is no iced water, no cornfield, no milk, and yet it is the richest town of Persia.'

<sup>1</sup> Captain G. B. Kempthorne visited Tāhirī in 1835; see his paper in the *Transactions of the Bombay Geographical Society*, 1856-7, vol. xiii (March), pp. 125-9.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Wilson, *Persian Gulf*, pp. 94 sqq.; Schwarz, *Iran im Mittelalter*, pp. 59 sqq.

<sup>3</sup> For an early record of trade from Sīrāf to India, by Ibn al-Faḳīh, cf. Schwarz, *loc. cit.*, p. 61.