

He mentions the abundant oversea imports which made Sīrāf the chief emporium for them, and refers to its merchants as the richest in the whole of Persia.

When Muqaddasī wrote his account of Sīrāf towards the close of the tenth century, its decline as a great emporium had already begun; still he praises the splendour of its houses. But a severe earthquake about A.D. 977 had caused great damage to the buildings. Already many of its inhabitants had left Sīrāf for other ports. 'In consequence of the great heat Sīrāf is a gate of hell. Water has to be brought from a great distance; only a small conduit supplies fresh water. Also fruit-trees are rare. The town is situated between the hills and the sea, the surroundings are not cultivated and only a few date-palm groves are found near by.' When Yāqūt visited Sīrāf early in the thirteenth century it had already lost its trade to the new emporium established on the island of Qais, and had fallen into ruin. He notes its being known to traders by the name of *Shīlāw*, and mentions having found 'there only some very poor families whom solely the love of their native soil retained there'. He saw there 'the remains of remarkable edifices as well as of a fine mosque with columns of teak wood. The town lies at the foot of a high mountain. . . . The inhabitants get their drinking water brought by a conduit from a spring of fresh water.' The town lay closely confined between the mountain and the sea, the distance from the sea being at all points less than an arrowshot. Yāqūt notes quite correctly that ships did not find at Sīrāf a proper harbour, but in the case of stormy weather had to seek a safe anchorage in the bay of Naiband.

The accuracy of all topographical details recorded by these Arab geographers was fully borne out by the observations made in the course of a careful survey of the ruined site, as shown by Plan 17 and the photographs reproduced.⁴ But their descriptions of the great wealth of Sīrāf and the opulence displayed in the mansions of its merchants made the contrast presented by the picture of utter desolation now prevailing at the site all the more impressive. For a distance of fully a mile the sea-shore is adjoined by terraces rising, at first gently and then steeply, all overlaid by shapeless debris heaps from stone-built houses, right up to the narrow crest of a rugged limestone ridge which to the east attains a height of more than 300 feet. It would have been difficult for me to realize how this town could have held within the narrow space available so large a population as those accounts indicate, had memory not recalled the narrow lanes closely packed with tiered high houses I had seen at similarly situated old ports on the Genoese Riviera.

⁴ A brief account of the ruins of Sīrāf, somewhat speculative in certain details, is contained in a paper by Captain Stiffe, 'Ancient Trading Centres of the Persian Gulf', *Geogr. Journal*, 1895, Aug., pp. 166-73.