



## BAKTĪĀRĪS OF AFGHANISTAN

**BAKTĪĀRĪS** of **AFGHANISTAN**. Two small Paštō-speaking groups in the eastern part of the Irano-Afghan area bear the name BaktĪārī or BaktĪār. There is nothing in the scanty information about them to show that they have any connection with the BaktĪārī tribes of the Zagros region, whose eastward spread under the aegis of Nāder Shah Afšār appears to have ended with his death in 1160/1747.

1. A group BaktĪār(an), BaktĪārī, or BaktĪārīkēl (the first form being the commonest) lives in the southeast of Afghanistan. They were allied to the MĪānkēl, a Paštūn tribe, and finally were adopted into its genealogical structure (Šēr-Moḥammad Khan, *Tawārīk-e K̄voršīd e Jahān*, Lahore, 1311/1894, p. 227; J. A. Robinson, *Notes on Nomad Tribes of Eastern Afghanistan*, New Delhi, 1935, repr. Quetta, 1978, p. 175). In the nineteenth century they were nomads, migrating with MĪānkēl tribesmen between the middle Indus valley and the Afghan highlands and reputedly specializing in the horse trade (A. Hamilton, *Afghanistan*, London, 1906, p. 204). When they lost control of their winter grazing grounds as the result of a conflict with the Gandāpūr tribe (Šēr-Moḥammad Khan, loc. cit.), several lineages turned to sedentary life in their old summer quarters in southeastern Afghanistan (one hundred families in the estimate of J. A. Robinson, op. cit., p. 176). They have thus given their name to several localities between Ġaznī and Qandahār (L. W. Adamec, *Gazetteer of Afghanistan V: Kandahar and South-Central Afghanistan*, Graz, 1980, p. 78, s.v. Bakhtiar. M. H. Nāhež, ed., *Qāmūs-e joḡrāfiā'ī-e Afḡānestān* I, Kabul, 1335 Š./1956, p. 225, s.v. BaktĪār; *Aṭlas-e qaryahā-ye Afḡānestān*, A Provisional



*Gazetteer of Afghanistan*, Kabul, 1353 Š./1975, I, pp. 230, 239, 273, and III, p. 1320). It is unlikely, however, that there is any connection between this group and two places, named Qal‘a-ye Baktiār and Baktiārān, which lie close to Kabul, in the city’s southern and northeastern outskirts respectively; Baktiārān is known to have been settled by Ġelzī people at the end of the nineteenth century (*Gazetteer of Afghanistan VI: Kabul and Southeastern Afghanistan*, p. 57).

The origin of this tribal group is obscure. Although they are probably not indigenous, the theory of their transplantation from western Iran at the time of Nāder’s campaign (which still has supporters, e.g. V. V. Trubetskoĭ, *Bakhtiary*, Moscow, 1966, p. 15; D. Ehmann, *Baḥtiyaren. Persische Bergnomaden im Wandel der Zeit*, Wiesbaden, 1975, p. 50) stems from a rash identification made by M. Elphinstone (*An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul*, London, 1815, repr. Graz, 1969, p. 376) and amplified by H. Field, who did not hesitate to make them descendants of a Baktiārī garrison purportedly left at Peshawar by Nāder Shah (*An Anthropological Reconnaissance in the Near East*, 1950, Cambridge, Mass., 1956, p. 31); the theory must be rejected because there is evidence that Baktiār nomads were already living in the Solaymān mountains and foothills in the early years of the seventeenth century (Kvāja Ne‘mat-Allāh, *Maḳzan-e Afġānī*, tr. B. Dorn, *History of the Afghans*, pt. 2, London, 1836, repr. London, 1965, and Karachi, 1976, pp. 55-56). A local tradition makes them members of a saintly lineage (*stāna*) of the Šērānī tribe who acquired the apotropaic name Baktiār “fortunate,” and claims that their ultimate ancestor, Sayyed Eshāq, came from Iraq (Kvāja Ne‘mat-Allāh, tr. Dorn, loc. cit.; H. G. Raverty, *Notes on Afghanistan and Part of Baluchistan*, London, 1880-88, repr. Lahore, 1976, pp. 429, 525f.). The genealogical tree of the tribe presented by Moḥammad Ḥayāt Khan (*Afghanistan and Its Inhabitants*, tr. from the “Ḥayāt-i-Afghan” by H. Priestley, Lahore, 1874, repr. Lahore, 1981, p. 280), though far from complete, contains data which complement those given by Kvāja Ne‘mat-Allāh and Šēr-Moḥammad Khan (op. cit., p. 274).

2. There are also nomads and seminomads named Baktiārī who spend the winter in various places in the southern Bactrian plain and the summer in the central highlands of Afghanistan. Their total number in the 1970s exceeded eight hundred families. The most important group has winter campsites near Ḥaẓrat-e Solṭān in the Province of Samangān, where the village of Qarya-ye Baktiārī bears their name. Others are reported in the Āqča oasis (35 percent of the total) and in the Fāryāb province (5 percent). Also mentioned are some



forty sedentary families in the village of Ḥasan Bolāq, north of Maymana. Although the literature contains some scattered allusions, the first full proof of the existence of Baḳtīārī communities in northern Afghanistan was obtained by the Afghan Nomadic Survey of 1357 Š./1978 (D. Balland and A. de Benoist, *Nomades et semi-nomades d'Afghanistan*, forthcoming). It should be added that there may be some more settlements which escaped the notice of the survey teams. The real ethnic status and origin of these people can only be conjectured. Some describe themselves as Tājīk, Paštūn, or *sayyed*, but most say only that they are Baḳtīārī. This suggests that they were involved in the restructuring processes which have taken place throughout northern Afghanistan since the nineteenth century. They all speak Paštō, but in general are bilingual, using Persian for their second language as Paštō-speakers in the Bactrian region frequently do. Moreover, the only lineage name found among them, that of the 'Abd-Allāh-*kēl* near Āqča, is typically Paštūn. These characteristically Paštūn features suggest that they are late-comers in the region. The supposition that they stem from Baḳtīārān families displaced from southeastern Afghanistan seems highly probable.

A compact colony of Baḳtīārī Fārsīwān and Tājīk has been recorded in the southwestern part of the Herāt oasis. It was estimated at about 925 families in the 1880s (Mirza Muhammad Takki Khan, *Report on the City and Province of Herat*, tr. W. R. H. Merk, ca. 1886, India Office Records, London; see also L. W. Adamec, ed., *Gazetteer of Afghanistan III: Herat and Northwestern Afghanistan*, Graz, 1975, p. 53, s.v. Birinji) but seems never to have been mentioned again since then.

*Search terms:*

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