



## BĀRAKZĪ

**BĀRAKZĪ** (singular Bārakzay), an ethnic name common in the entire eastern portion of Iran and Afghanistan, where it is found both among the Pashtun of Afghanistan and Pakistan and the Baluch of southeastern Iran (in the region of Bampūr). It is formed on a common classical model: the name of an eponymous ancestor, Bārak, plus the suffix *-zī* (the plural of Pashto *zay* “descendant”).

In the detailed Pashtun genealogies there are no fewer than seven instances of the ethnic name Bārakzī, at very different levels of tribal segmentation. Six of them designate simple lineages within six different tribes located in the Solaymān mountains or adjacent lands: the **Bar̄ēc** (Ḥayāt Khan, p. 81), the Jamand of Haštnagar (Šēr-Moḥammad Khan, p. 199), the Kākaṛ (q.v.; idem, p. 241), the Kaṭak (q.v.; idem, p. 183; Rose, II, p. 527), the Mūsākēl (q.v.; *Dictionary of the Pathan Tribes*, p. 34), and the Šērānī (q.v.; ibid.; Rose, III, p. 408). The seventh instance, on the other hand, designates one of the most important Pashtun tribes in numbers and historic role, part of the Zīrak branch of the **Dorrānay confederation**. The presence of Bārakzī of indeterminate ethnic identity has also been reported in the Panjšēr valley northeast of Kabul (Adamec, *Gazetteer* VI, p. 93, forty houses; Balland and Benoist, thirty seminomadic families).

Other ethnic names derived from Bārak also occur among the Tarakī (Bārakḳēl; Šēr-Moḥammad Khan, p. 216) and the Wazīr Otmānzī (Bārakḳēl; idem, p. 252), as well as in less clearly identifiable forms among the Kōgyānī (idem, p. 249), the Lōdī (idem, p. 224), and the Moḥmand (q.v.; Ḥayāt Khan, p.



132).

The homonymy of these different groups is naturally not sufficient to establish any relationship among them. Nevertheless, some Baluch authors use it as an argument for claiming a Pashtun origin for the Baluch Bārakzī of Bampūr (Sardar Khan Baluch, n.d., p. 82). In the absence of the slightest historical confirmation, it is preferable to interpret these homonyms as an instance of onomastic convergence linked to the wide diffusion of the personal name Bārak. In fact, other examples of such ethnonymic convergence abound among the Pashtun and the Baluch, though they generally involve tribal names derived from personal names of Arabic origin (Moḥammad, Aḥmad, ‘Alī, Ḥasan, and the like), the spread of which followed the path of Islamization. That is not the case with Bārak. Furthermore, as the word is not attested in Pashto except in ethnic names (and a modern borrowing of English “barrack”), its origin is puzzling. The theory of H. W. Bellew (p. 163), who attempted to derive it from Barakī/Bārki, the vernacular name of the Ōrmur (see [barakī barak](#)), is unacceptable for philological reasons. More convincing is the connection that can be established with Turkish *baraq/barak* (“very furry, hairy”; also the name of a breed of long-haired dog, an excellent courser and hunter), which is found both as a personal name, notably in the princely genealogies of the Jengizids (*EI*<sup>2</sup> I, p. 1031, Bosworth, pp. 146, 153), and as an ethnic name from the fifth century (name of a tribe of the Tabgāč confederation in northern China, according to Bazin, p. 272) down to our own time (among the Uzbeks on both banks of the Āmū Daryā; Jarring, pp. 23, 57; Karmysheva, pp. 90, 105; in Anatolia: Tanyol).

Of all the groups having a Bārak as eponymous ancestor, the Bārakzay tribe of the Dorrānay confederation is the only one about which there is ample, though not always precise, information. That is true, for example, of its numbers, for which the following estimates are available; at least 30,000 families at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Elphinstone, p. 398), 50,000 families a century later under the reign of Amān-Allāh (Ḥayāt-Allāh Khan, p. 122), 300,000 individuals in the middle of the twentieth century (Aslanov, p. 57; Aslanov et al., p. 14). There is thus agreement among the authors that the tribe is one of the two principal components of the Dorrānay confederation and apparently has been so since the formation of the latter.

Genealogical traditions, as reported in learned Afghan historiography, suggest that in this instance the eponymous ancestor Bārak could have lived in the eighth/fourteenth century and perhaps could have been a contemporary of



Tamerlane (according to Fōfalzāy, tables between pp. 9-10 and 242-43). The name of the tribe itself is attested only from the Safavid period, when one of its notables, Moḥammad Khan (not Aḥmad, as Malcolm, II, p. 410, erroneously reported), was sent on a mission to the court of Shah ‘Abbās I (Ferrier, 1858, p. 68). Moḥammad Khan is the eponymous ancestor of the Moḥammadzay section of the Bārakzay tribe, which has played a leading role in the modern history of Afghanistan. It was almost at the same period that the Ġelzay tribes took over the Abdālī (that is, the Dorrānāy) tribes’ control of the Qandahār region and obliged the latter to retreat westward into eastern Khorasan and the Herat region (Lockhart. p. 95). Only after the reconquest of Qandahār by Nāder Shah Afšār, with whom they were allied, in 1150/1738 were they able to regain a foothold in that part of Afghanistan (Boḳārī, p. 15). In the allotment of lands that ensued the Bārakzī were awarded extensive tracts in the lower Arġestān valley on the southern perimeter of the Qandahār oasis (Singh, p. 18; Rawlinson, p. 825).

Since the emergence of Afghanistan as an independent state (1160/1747), the Bārakzī have played a major political role. At first they entered the service of the young Sadōzay dynasty, which their *sardārs* had helped to place on the throne and to whose army they furnished a contingent of 907 cavalry in Aḥmad Shah’s time (Elphinstone, p. 398; Rawlinson, p. 826). But this alliance did not survive the test of time. Superior in numbers, led by ambitious chiefs, and encouraged by the internal decay of Sadōzay power, the Bārakzī were not slow to aspire to political primacy within the Dorrānāy confederation and thus within Afghanistan. After 1235/1819 the real power passed to their most influential section the Moḥammadzī. For the details of this development see [afghanistan x. political history](#). Here it must be noted that the new Bārakzay dynasty was in its turn rapidly weakened by internal rivalries. Two Moḥammadzay lineages thus succeeded each other on the throne at Kabul. Following the usage of English authors of the nineteenth century, they are commonly designated by the respective names of the cities where they had risen to power. The lineage of the *sardārs* of Kabul, descended from the first Bārakzay amir, **Dōst-Moḥammad Khan**, reigned from 1235/1819 to 1307 Š./1929, with a brief interruption during the Sadōzay restoration in 1255-59/1839-43. The rival *sardārs* of Peshawar, descended from Sultan Moḥammad “Ṭelā’ī,” half brother of Dōst-Moḥammad, were known also by the neologism Moṣāḥebān because of the favored position (*moṣāḥeb-e kāṣṣ*) that its chiefs occupied at the court of the amir Ḥabīb-Allāh; it succeeded the Kabul branch in 1308 Š./1929, lasting until 1352 Š./1973, and managed to keep control



of power after the fall of the monarchy throughout the span of the first Afghan republic (1352-57 Š./1973-78).

The political hegemony of the Bārakzī thus lasted a total of a century and a half. In this period, characterized from beginning to end by the practice of systematic tribal nepotism, the entire tribe, and more particularly its Moḥammadzay section, occupied a privileged position in the high civil and military administration of the Afghan state (examples are given in Kakar, pp. 24, 113, and Schinasi, pp. 111ff.; cf. Adamec, *Who's Who*). As a result, important modifications occurred in the geographical distribution of the Bārakzī, notably the establishment of important colonies at Kabul and in the principal provincial seats of power.

The present geographical distribution of the Bārakzī is not well known in detail, being characterized by broad diffusion. Following the pattern of most Dorrānāy tribes, they can be divided schematically into three major settlement areas.

1. The oldest is situated in western Afghanistan between Herat and the approaches to the Helmand valley. It was there that the tribe retreated in the Safavid period, but some elements may have been established there several centuries earlier (Stack, pp. 51ff.). Today the Bārakzay population there is residual and very scattered. Any attempt at sketching the whole must be based on the punctilious observations made at the end of the nineteenth century, which, though very precise, are filled with gaps (see *Records of Intelligence Party* I, preferable to the much more summary information in Adamec, *Gazetteer* II, pp. 35, 237, 300, and III, p. 49). In 1885 the number of Bārakzī in the province of Herat alone was put at 1,264 families, of which 845 were in the nine *bolūks* into which the Herat oasis itself was divided and 150 (probably an underestimate) were nomadic (Moḥammad Takkī Khan). Nomadism was still common among this population in 1978. The Afghan Nomad Survey counted 696 Bārakzay nomad families, scattered among fourteen different winter camps dotted along the Harīrūd valley between Ōbē and Ġōrīān, around Adraskān, and along the middle Farāhrūd. The majority of these nomads summered in the mountains of southern Ġōr. Those on the Harīrūd nevertheless stood somewhat apart because of their extreme poverty, which severely limited their mobility, and because of their general shift from the Pashto to the Persian language.

2. The second area of Bārakzay population encompasses the two large oases of



Qandahār and the middle Helmand, on either side of its confluence with the Arġandāb. This was the great tribal resettlement area in the eighteenth century, and it is still today the principal Bārakzay center. Estimated at 21 percent of the sedentary population, between 70,000 and 100,000 people, the Bārakzī were thus the most important tribal group in Helmand province at the end of the 1970s. They predominated in extensive areas around Gerešk and Laškargāh, as well as in the modern irrigation area of Šamalān, on the right bank of the Helmand, accounting for almost half the population of each of these three districts, whereas their relative importance did not surpass 11 percent in the Nowzād district north of Gerešk and they were very lightly represented in the rest of the province (according to a 1975 census based on a random sample of 4 per cent of families, U.S.A.I.D., pp. 18ff.; see also Scott, 1980, pp. 4ff., which, though based on the same data, gives slightly different estimates). The importance of the tribe in the composition of the Qandahāri population, though apparent in the fact that a central quarter of the old city bears its name (Wiebe, p. 142), cannot be established exactly, except by returning to nineteenth-century estimates, according to which it constituted between 10 and 25 percent of the total population of the city (according to Bellew, cited in MacGregor, p. 493, and Ferrier, 1857, p. 321, respectively). The Bārakzī of the Qandahār oasis, especially numerous in the southern part, are today entirely settled, though it seems they were still largely nomadic at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Elphinstone, p. 398). On the other hand, a small nucleus of Bārakzay nomads (eighty-five families in 1978) still exists in Helmand province.

3. The third area of Bārakzay diffusion encompasses all of northern Afghanistan. The tribe entered this region at the end of the nineteenth century as a result of the transfer of nomadic groups from the south, which was intended to populate the territory along the northern frontier. The Bārakzī who were thus established in the Golrān region in 1886 (Tapper, p. 65; repr., p. 243) seem to have left. On the contrary, those who arrived in Bādġīs during the summer of the same year and encountered there the hostility of the Fīrōzkōhī (Kakar, p. 132) gave rise to the most important Bārakzay colony in all of Afghan Turkestan. The principal settlements at present are located north of Bālā Morġāb, as well as to the west and north of Maymana, around Qaysār and Jalāyer (see Adamec, *Gazetteer IV*, pp. 289ff., for the Bārakzī of the Qaysār *woloswālī*). Many of these newcomers have preserved a pastoral way of life: 330 nomadic families and 840 seminomadic families were counted there in 1978, but, of this total of 1,170 families, a quarter (30 and 260 families



respectively) no longer made more than a short migration in spring and were mainly engaged in agriculture. The majority (880 families in all) still passed the summers in the mountain pastures of the Safēdkōh and Band-e Torkestān; ten families from Jalāyer even summered on the distant pastures of western Hazārajāt. A secondary center of Bārakzay population exists in the Qaṭaḡan, where in 1978 fourteen seminomadic families were counted east of Kondož (Nawābād), whereas ten nomadic and eighty seminomadic families were recorded northeast of Baḡlān (Dašt-e Bāy Saqāl). The summer pastures of the first group are located in the Dašt-e Šēwa (Badaḡšān); the second group migrates to the mountain pastures of the upper Andarāb and Fereng (central Hindu Kush). Finally, one more northern center, consisting of only twenty seminomadic families, is located in the region of the middle Balḡāb. There was thus a total of 1,294 Bārakzay families, both nomadic and seminomadic, living in northern Afghanistan in 1978, that is, a number larger than that of their nomadic fellow tribesmen living in the southwestern part of the country. An indeterminate number of settled families must undoubtedly be added.

According to Šēr-Moḡammad Khan (p. 183), the genealogical structure of the Bārakzī is articulated in five major subtribes: the ‘Abd-Allāhzī, the Bā’īzī, the Naṣratzī (Nāṣerzī), the Nūr-al-Dīnzī, and the Rokn-al-Dīnzī. The Nūr-al-Dīnzī seem to be the most important of them, for it is from their midst that both the Moḡammadzay clan—thus the most recent of the reigning Afghan dynasties—and the Acəkzay tribe (q.v.) sprang; all the historical traditions of the latter point to its being an old Bārakzay section that was elevated to the status of an independent tribe by Aḡmad Shah in the eighteenth century (Elphinstone, p. 398). A total of seventeen names of living lineages was collected by R. B. Scott (1971, p. 8 bis) and the 1978 Afghan Nomad Survey. The fact that several of them (Kānōzay, Šakarzay) are common to other Dorrānay tribes, especially the Alēkōzī, is an argument supporting the thesis of the instability of tribal configurations within a confederation of this type.

In Iranian Baluchistan the name Bārakzay is borne by one of the numerous *ḡakomzāt* lineages, which shared in political power within traditional Baluch society (Spooner). It controlled the Bampūr oasis and the region around it. Virtually independent of the central government during the Qajar period, it gradually extended its political influence over a great part of southeastern Persia and the neighboring regions of Indian Baluchistan, seeking to establish there a true Baluch confederation. It was in order to break this burgeoning regional power that Reżā Shah Pahlavī launched a two-pronged military



offensive on land and in the air in 1307 Š./1928, followed by savage repression, the principal victim of which was Dōst-Moḥammad Khan, the Bārakzay *ḥākom* (i.e., *ḥākem*, governor) of Bampūr, who was hanged at Tehran and is regarded today as a martyr in the cause of Baluch nationalism (Jahānbānī; Sardar Khan Baluch, 1977, pp. 260ff., where the name of the lineage has unfortunately been distorted). This episode ended with the effective incorporation of the region into the territory of Iran; nevertheless a Baluch nationalist movement still exists, and the Bārakzay lineage continues to play an important role within it (Harrison, pp. 17, 118f.).

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