



ČAKĀVAK I. THE LARK

Of the nineteen species of lark (family Alaudidae, order Passeriformes) recorded by Hübner and Étchécopar for the Near and Middle East (pp. 465-93) twelve species are represented both in Iran and Afghanistan, with five more only in Iran (see also Scott et al., pp. 227-38, who have arbitrarily assigned the literary term *čakāvak* to all the nine genera in the family).

Persian sources usually equate *čakāvak* variants *čakāva*, *čakāv*, and *čakūk/čakok*; cf. Mid. Pers. *čakōk*) with Arabic *qobbara/qonbara* and/or *abu'l-maliḥ* (see, e.g., *Loḡat-e fors*, ed. Dabīrsiāqī, pp. 99, 102, 169; Zamaḡšarī, I, p. 470; and *Borhān-e qāte'*, ed. Mo'īn, II, p. 650); the Turkish equivalent is given as *qazlāq* (Tonokābonī, p. 694, s.v. *qonbara*); *ḡezlāq* (Schlimmer, p. 24, for the crested lark); etc. (see also Schapka, s.v. *ḡazlāḡ*). The earliest known definition of the *čakāv(ak)* in Persian sources is probably Asadī Ṭūsī's (d. 465/1072-73; *Loḡat-e fors*, p. 169): "A bird the size of a sparrow, having a crest on its head; it emits a sweet cry; called *qonbara* in Arabic." According to Qazvīnī (d. 682/1283; ed. Wüstenfeld, p. 422; Cairo ed., p. 283), the *qonbora* builds its nest on "three sticks on a tree" (in Wüstenfeld's ed.: "three twigs of the grapevine or the like with broad leaves") interwoven "with a kind of extremely delicate weed" into "an intricate small basket which is inimitable by man"; Qazvīnī, however, must be referring to a bird other than a lark, because, according to ornithologists, larks are land-dwelling birds, making their nests usually in a small hollow of the land or in a hole that they dig in the ground.

Other Persian names recorded for the lark include the obsolete *ūla* (*Borhān-e qāte'*, s.v.; cf. Gīlakī *čūli/čūlā* "skylark" in Maḡ'ašī, p. 173, and in Pāyanda, p.



190), *jal(ak)* (obsolete, but probably still in use in the Persian dialect of Mašhad; see Moʿin, *Farhang-e fārsī*, s.v. *jal*, in Afghanistan: “*jal*: a sweet-singing bird,” Afġānīnevīs, s.v.; in Qazvīnī, ed. Wüstenfeld, loc. cit.: *jalū*), *kūl* (in Maydānī, p. 360), and *kākolī* (lit. crested)—a current name that would logically refer to all the crested species of lark (see pls. xv and xvi in Hüe and Étchépar) but that seems to have designated only the species *Galerida cristata* L. termed *čakāvak-e kākolī* by Scott et al., p. 237) with the most conspicuous crest (cf. Manūčehrī, below).

All the indigenous species of lark are songbirds (ibid., p. 227). This is exactly the feature for which the *čakāvak* is noted in classical Persian poetry (cf., e.g., Manūčehrī, p. 19 v. 281, where the *čakāv* “plays” the melodies *Ganj-e gāv* and *Ganj-e bād[-āvard]* at dawn; for actual quotations, see Dehġodā, s.vv. *čakāv*, *čakāvak* and *čakāva*). Ornithologists remark that male larks generally deliver their courtship songs in flight or while hovering in the sky (cf. the Eng. name skylark for *Alauda arvensis* L.). This peculiarity is referred to by the 6th/12th century poet Sanāʿī Ġaznavī who, when exalting God on behalf of some birds, says: “Look at the lark up in the air [to see] what it says [in thy praise] . . .” (quoted by Eqbāl, p. 507). In addition to allusions to the *čakāvak*’s sweet, rich, and sustained songs, the tuft of feathers that characterizes particularly the *Galerida cristata* has been occasionally pointed out (cf. Manūčehrī, op. cit., p. 187 v. 2339).

On the whole, various species of larks are abundant in Iran (see Scott et al. for individual species), although they are not protected birds (see Sāzmān-e Ĥefāzat-e Moġīṭ-e Zīst, p. 6). The oldest reference to larks as a table delicacy in Iran is in the Pahlavi text about King Ķosrow and his page (ed. Unvala, pp. 18-19), where the lark (*čakōk*) is mentioned along with the pheasant, partridge, bustard, and a few others as “the finest and the most savoury” fowls. A much later reference to lark flesh is in Tonokābonī (fl. 1077-1105/1667-94; loc. cit.), who recommends the ingestion of roasted larks as “removing the colic, diuretic, and suitable for people having bladder ailments” (for this *kabāb* and other medicinal properties attributed to lark flesh, see also ʿĀqīlī Ķorāsānī, pp. 712-13, s.v. *qonbara*).



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