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ČĀPĀR

ČĀPĀR (or *čapar* < Turk. *čapmak* "to gallop"), post rider. Although the term *čāpār* was already used in this sense in the 7th/13th century (Ebn Bībī, 680/1281; cf. Köprülü, pp. 28-31), it was only in the 10th/16th century, under Safavid rule, that it became current in Persia, replacing the equivalent eastern Turkish term *īlčī* (Doerfer, III, p. 12).

Postal service in pre-Islamic Persia. In Persia the postal service appears to have originated in the Achaemenid period. Herodotus (8.98) described the system in the days of Xerxes: "Now there is nothing mortal that accomplishes a course more swiftly than do these messengers, by the Persians' skilful contrivance. It is said that as many days as there are in the whole journey, so many are the men and horses that stand along the road, each horse and man at the interval of a day's journey; and these are stayed neither by snow nor rain nor heat nor darkness from accomplishing their appointed course with all speed. The first rider delivers his charge to the second, the second to the third, and thence it passes on from hand to hanḍ . . . . This riding-post is called in Persia, *angareion*" (probably from Akkadian *egirtu*; Frye, pp. 98, 257 n. 74). There were way stations where the couriers could rest and where fresh horses could be obtained. The itinerary was measured in parasangs, or stages, along roads that seem not to have been paved or well maintained (cf. Olmstead, p. 299). Under the Sasanians a similar postal system appears to have been in operation; in a peace treaty concluded with Byzantium in a.d. 561 one clause stipulated that envoys should be supplied with mounts at the postal stations maintained by both empires (Blockley, p. 212, clause 3; *Camb. Hist. Iran* III/1, p.

574; cf. Christensen, p. 129).

Early Islamic period. The Muslim conquerors adopted many ancient institutions, including the postal system, which they called *barīd* (ultimately derived from Lat. *veredus*, Gk. *beredos* "[courier's] horse"). Although there is some controversy over whether it was primarily the Byzantine or Sasanian model that was followed (see, e.g. *EI*^{2}, s.v. Barīd; *Camb. Hist. Iran* III/1, p. 564), it is probable that elements of both were taken over (Mez, p. 466). In the eastern part of the empire at least, ancient Persian practices and terminology seem to have prevailed. For example, the post riders were known by several Arabicized Persian terms, *forāneq* (poss. < Pers. *parvāna(k)* "messenger"), *fayj* (< Pers. *peyk* "courier"), and *šākerī* (< Pers. *čākarī* "servant"). Furthermore, the routes east of the Euphrates were measured in *farsaḵ*s (from MPers. *frasang*), which suggests that the caliphs simply continued the already existing Sasanian postal system. Approximately every 2 *farsaḵ*s (ca. 12 km) there was a relay station (*sekka* or *rebāṭ*), where fresh riding animals could be obtained; the courier's arrival and departure time at each station were noted in an *askodār* (notebook; relay courier) that he carried with him (Abū ʿAbd-Allāh Ḵᵛārazmī, pp. 63-64, 78-79; Abū Bakr Ḵᵛārazmī, p. 53; Moqaddasī, p. 66; cf. Ebn Ḵordāḏbeh, p. 153; Mez, pp. 464-69; Sprenger, pp. 1-5; Spuler, *Iran*, 1952, pp. 333). Royal couriers seem to have had rings attached to them and/or their mounts to announce their arrival (Qazvīnī, IV, p. 31). In wartime a station might be established at every *farsaḵ* to expedite the relay of intelligence reports (e.g., Ṭabarī, III, p. 1229). The post animals were mainly mules and horses (Solaymān, p. 13; Abū ʿAbd-Allāh Ḵᵛārazmī, p. 63; Ṭabarī, II, p. 994).

As in pre-Islamic times, the post was a government service reaching from one end of the empire to the other, though occasionally disrupted by war, rebellion, or simply lack of security on the roads. In the Persian sections it was more heavily reliant on swift mounts than on good roads (Bosworth, p. 93; cf. camel ii). In addition to carrying official correspondence in sealed bags, postal riders played a particularly important role in gathering intelligence throughout the empire. Among their duties were escorting government officials to their posts and sometimes even carrying special delicacies for the ruler (see, e.g., Balāḏorī, *Fotūḥ*, p. 402; Rūḏrāwarī, p. 59; cf. Busse, p. 311; Bosworth, pp. 93-95). Only rarely were private individuals allowed to make use of the post (Bayhaqī, ed. Schwally, p. 429). Under the Buyids rapid and efficient service was established first between Baghdad and Ray, then between Baghdad and Shiraz, with couriers arriving in the capital daily (Ebn Jawzī, VI,

p. 341; Helāl Ṣābeʾ, p. 18; cf. Busse, p. 311). The Ghaznavids, too, maintained a highly developed postal service; a main function of the riders was to watch over the provincial tax collectors to ensure minimum losses to the sultans (Bosworth, *Ghaznavids*, pp. 72, 76, 93-95; *Camb. Hist. Iran* IV, pp. 182, 271). Little is known about the postal service in Persia under the Saljuqs, but Sultan Alp Arslan (455-65/465-1072) abolished at least the intelligence-gathering aspects of the courier service, preferring to rely on personally chosen emissaries (*Čahārmaqāla*, ed., Qazvīnī, p. 40; Neẓām-al-Molk, p. 95; cf. barǰd).

The Il-khanid period. Čengīz (Genghis) Khan (603-24/1206-27) ordered that relay stations (*yām* > Tk. *yam* "post station") be built along the main road arteries of the Mongol empire and that they be well stocked with provisions. Each station was to be run by a station master and to keep twenty horses for the government couriers (*īlčī*; Jovaynī, ed. Qazvīnī, I, pp. 24-25; cf. Spuler, *Mongolen*[3], p. 422 and nn. 2-3). These stations were in the charge of the *ṣāḥeb-e dīvān*, who had *nāʾeb*s in the provinces. Although the Mongol postal service was a government operation, merchants and others also made use of it. Möngke (Mangū; 649-58/1251-60) forbade this practice, however, and gave clear orders that the couriers had to stay on their prescribed routes and execute their orders exactly (Rašīd-al-Dīn, ed. Blochet, p. 312; cf. Spuler, *Mongolen*[3], p. 423). Hülegü (Hūlāgū; 654-63/1254-65) granted a tax exemption to each locality in his domain that had a postal station, in exchange for maintenance of the station and supplying the needs of official travelers (Jovaynī, ed. Qazvīnī, III, p. 30; Rašīd-al-Dīn, ed. Blochet, II, pp. 310-11; cf. Spuler, *Mongolen*[3], p. 423). Despite these and other precautions, however, the system was misused. Often there were only two horses (*olāḡ*) at a given station, and provisions were lacking entirely. Couriers were thus forced to requisition what they needed, which led to further abuses. In addition, many lower-ranking officials dispatched couriers of their own, many of whom claimed the same privileges as those of the Il-khanid couriers; corruption spread, and sometimes robbers even masqueraded as official couriers, plundering villages and caravans and even hanging people (Rašīd-al-Dīn, *Jāmeʿ al-tawārīḵ*, Baku, pp. 479-83; idem, *Tārīḵ-eḡāzānī*, pp. 270-72; cf. Spuler, *Mongolen*[3], pp. 423-24). Ḡāzān Khan put an end to this situation by establishing special *yām*s exclusively for official couriers (*īlčī* or *yārāltū*; cf. Doerfer, III, p. 12 and I, pp. 551-53) and making each one the responsibility of a grand amir. Stations were built along main arteries at a distance of three *farsaḵ*s from one another and were required to have on hand fifteen well-nourished (*farbeh*) horses at all times. Two special couriers (*peyk*) were stationed at each *yām*;

their function was to carry to the capital important reports about the provinces; such reports bore a special seal called *tamḡā-ye peykī* (seal of the messenger). A single courier could travel 30 *farsaḵ*s in twenty-four hours, changing mounts frequently; the distance could be doubled if relays were used. Theoretically an urgent message could reach Tabrīz from Khorasan in four days (Rašīd-al-Dīn, *Jāmeʿ al-tawārīḵ*, Baku, pp. 483-84; idem, *Tārīḵ-eḡāzānī*, pp. 274-75; cf. Spuler, *Mongolen*[3], pp. 424-25). Although the postal system was improved by these measures, it did not achieve the efficiency that Ḡāzān had decreed; it still took twelve days for the news of his death to reach Khorasan (Spuler, *Mongolen*[4], p. 352). This system of *īlčī*s and the provision of *ūlāḡ*s by the peasants was basically continued by the Timurids and other dynasties that succeeded the Il-khanids (Roemer, p. 103).

The Safavid, Afsharid, and Zand periods. The Safavid government maintained a postal system, mainly to relay messages and government orders. The couriers gradually came to be known as *čāpār*. The system of relay stations no longer existed, however. The *čāpār*s took riding animals wherever they could find them. They even had the right to make people dismount and give up their animals or, alternatively, make a cash payment (Chardin, II, pp. 199-200). These alternatives, which amounted to service fees of a kind, were generally known as *ūlāḡ*, occasionally as *kerāya-ye ūlāḡ* and *yābū-ye čāpār* (Schimkoreit, see index; Bāstānī Pārīzī, p. 160; Ḏabīḥī and Sotūda, VI, doc. 35; Fūmanī, p. 231). Riding animals actually came mostly from villagers, who would send somebody with the *čāpār* to retrieve the animal. The *čāpār*s, of course, did not dare to demand riding animals from important personages or Europeans. They wore a special uniform and carried a sword and a stick, with which they enforced their demands on unwilling peasants, who generally fled at the sight of them. *Čāpār*s usually traveled in pairs (Chardin, II, pp. 200-01).

The Safavid system continued under the Afsharids and Zands. According to J. Hanway, in the 12th/18th centuries the *čāpār*s "were armed with musquets, though in general they only wear sabres. These couriers wear a white sash girded from their shoulders to their waist many times round their bodies, by which means they are enabled to ride for many days without great fatigue: they take horses wherever they can find them, which frequently are not returned to the owners: they even dismount travellers, and often leave them with their bagage" (Hanway, I, p. 262). People were obliged to obey the *čāpār*s, for they were on the shah's business. The expense of supplying animals and provisions for the *čāpār*s was called *eḵrājāt-e motaraddedīn wa čāpārān*

(Dāwūdī, doc. 10). Couriers on special business for the shah were sometimes called *čāpār-e īlčīgar* (Puturidze, I, p. 4, doc. 3), and royal couriers were also sometimes used as *moḥaṣṣelīn* ("tax collectors"; Puturidze, I, p. 4, doc. 11.10). There were relay stations with postmasters, each supplied with thirty to fifty horses. As the demand for horses was often greater, however, and the postmasters' pay was small, "they often are obliged to abscond, which is a great cause of the barbarity of the couriers" (Hanway, I, p. 262; Moḥammad Kalāntar, p. 42).

The Qajar period. In the early part of the 13th/19th century British travelers described the *čāpār* system in Persia favorably (Ker Porter, I, p. 195; Ouseley, III, p. 440). There seems not to have been a centralized system, for in the Īravān (Yerevan) khanate there was a *čāpār-bāšī* appointed directly by the governing khan (Bournoutian, p. 95). There were relay stations, or *čāpār-ḵāna*s, every 25-30 miles on the main arteries. Each station was managed by a *čāpāṛčī* (postmaster) appointed and paid by the government; he was responsible for supplying horses, lodging, and food to the *čāpār*s, who rode "heavily armed and with great speed" (Perkins, p. 340). The government sent messages and orders by the *čāpār*s and provincial governors reports to the central government. Private individuals could also use the system, provided that they had licenses from the government. They paid two *šāhī*s per mile for each horse in the Īravān khanate before the conclusion of the treaty of Torkamāṇčāy in 1243/1828 (Bournoutian, p. 96) and a few cents in the 1240s/1830s (Perkins, p. 340). The *čāpār* system should not be mistaken for a regular mail system, however. When Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan Khan Īlčī suggested to Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shah that he should institute a postal system on the European model the shah thought that he was being ridiculed and almost had Abu'l-Ḥasan Khan executed. But when Ouseley explained to him the merits of the system, he ordered his grand vizier, Mīrzā Safīʿ, to initiate a regular postal service in Persia. Nothing significant was achieved, however (Ādamīyat, 1354, p. 337; Maḥbūbī, II, p. 244).

The credit for establishing a regular postal service between Tehran and the main provincial towns belongs to Mīrzā Taqī Khan Amīr Kabīr (Ādamīyat, 1354, p. 338; Eʿtemād-al-Salṭana, *Montaẓam-e nāṣerī* III, pp. 207, 213, 215). The reform was announced in 1266/1849-50, and the new service started on 1 Ṣafar 1267/6 December 1850. Anyone, including foreigners, could thenceforth use the service, which left Tehran on the first and fifteenth of each month and returned on the fourteenth and twenty-ninth. Service to Kermān was only

once a month, owing to the great distance. New *čāpār-ḵāna*s were built at intervals of three to six *farsaḵ*s. To send a letter cost 5 *šāhī*s, and an envelope containing five letters was 1 rial. The rate for hiring a postboy (*šāgerd*[*-e*] *čāpār*) or renting a post horse was 10 *šāhī*s per *farsaḵ*. A postmaster general (*čāpāṛčī-bāšī*) was appointed to take charge of the new service (Ādamīyat, 1354, pp. 338-40; Maḥbūbī, II, pp. 244-46). The system deteriorated after the fall of Amīr Kabīr in 1268/1851, however (Ādamīyat, 1354, p. 339). It was still possible to travel from Trabzon to Tehran in ten days, but the number of horses kept at the *čāpār-ḵāna*s was often insufficient, or the animals were of poor quality. *Čāpār*s often had to walk part of the way to spare their horses, which could not manage a daily run of 6-12 miles. Polak observed that, in view of the relatively high cost of hiring such a horse (0.075 Dutch ducats per *farsaḵ*), the government should have been able to provide more and better horses. Despite many suggestions along those lines, however, no immediate improvement was noticeable (Polak, II, pp. 61-62).

A *čāpār* could travel 70-100 miles a day. He was accompanied on each stage by a *šuṛčī* or *šāgerd-čāpār*, whose duty it was to return the horse to its home (*čāpār-ḵāna*) after each change. The *čāpāṛčī* had to be paid for his horse before departure from each *čāpār-ḵāna*, and occasionally the postboy received a tip at the end of the stage as well (Curzon, *Persian Question* I, p. 31; Perkins, pp. 340-41). At the *čāpār-ḵāna*, which was often adjacent to or in a caravansary, the traveler could obtain water and firewood and sometimes milk and eggs as well. Depending on the degree of service provided, the postmaster received a few *qerān*s in the morning (Curzon, I, p. 32).

The shah farmed out the postal system to the *čāpāṛčī-bāšī*, who parceled out the various routes to *nāʾeb*s; the *nāʾeb*s in turn sold sections of the routes to sub-*nāʾeb*s, and the latter sold the *čāpār-ḵāna*s to then post masters. This system had, of course, consequences for the efficiency of the system. None of the money that the government made available for horses and provisions (40,000 tomans a year around 1297/ 1880) reached the smaller relay stations, where both men and animals suffered from hunger as a result (Slaby, pp. 131-32; Riederer, pp. 18-19). The government couriers, also called *ḡolām*, where all employees of the *čāpāṛčī-bāšī*, who formed a mighty group in Tehran. On the Tehran-Tabrīz road, for example, the *čāpāṛčī-bāšī* had farmed out the dispatch of the private mail separately from that of the government mail. On the other routes *ḡolām*s also took care of the private mail. They had to pay both an annual consideration (100 tomans on the Tehran-Kermān route) to the

čāpāṛčī-bāšī and the fees to the postmasters en route out of their own pockets. The addressee thus received his letters only after he had paid an *eṇʿām*, or "tip." Because in this period government couriers were seldom attacked by robbers, they were often asked to transport money, even though they themselves could not always be trusted (Riederer, pp. 18-19; Stolze and Andreas, pp. 30-31).

Mīrzā ʿAlī Khan Amīn-al-Dawla became minister of postal affairs in 1292/1875 and instituted some important reforms. Amīn-al-Dawla had previous experience in this field. While serving as royal secretary (*monšī-e ḥożūr*) in 1288/1871, he had managed the *čāpār-ḵānas*; in 1292/1875 he still owned all the horses in the *čāpār-ḵānas* along the Azarbaijan road. When Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah made his first trip to Europe in 1290/1873, he hired an Austrian, Gustav Riederer, to run the postal service. Riederer arrived in Tehran in 1292/1875 and within a few months began work under Amīn-al-Dawla, establishing a class to train staff in modern methods (Amīn-al-Dawla, pp. 58-60; Maḥbūbī, II, pp. 247-50; Eʿtemād-al-Salṭana, *Maʾāṯer*, p. 95). With his help Amīn-al-Dawla was able to reduce the operating cost of the postal (*čāpār*) system and to make an annual net profit of 9,000 tomans, of which 1,500 tomans were paid into the royal treasury and 7,500 tomans spent on fodder for the post horses. Riederer also arranged for the issue of postage stamps in 1293/1876 and for the opening of regular service to Russia (via Jolfā) and the British in Bombay and Baghdad (via Būšehr). Internal mail distribution was also improved through the establishment of regular deliveries to Kermānšāh, Moḥammara (Ḵorramšahr), Mašhad, Kermān, and Astarābād. All postal officials wore an official uniform. As a result of all these changes mail delivery was speeded up, though the level of service gradually declined again over the years. While Amīn-al-Dawla was minister of postal affairs a letter sent from Kermān reached Tehran in seven or eight days, but it took twenty or more days in later times (*Tārīḵ-ebīdārī*, ed. Saʿīdī-Sīrjānī, I, p. 155).

With the advent of new technologies, like the telegraph (in 1282/1865; Eʿtemād-al-Salṭana, *Maʾāṯer*, p. 93) and the automobile, the *čāpār* system gradually faded away. Lord Curzon (I, pp. 53-55, 247-55) provided a detailed description of its operation in about 1308/1890, with illustrations. At around the turn of the 20th century public coaches began to carry the mail, though *čāpār*s also continued to carry letters in their saddlebags. In 1335/1916 automotive mail service was introduced in limited fashion; it became more common after 1307 Š./1928. In 1306 Š./April 1927 the Junkers Company began to provide air-mail

service within Persia (Maḥbūbī, II, pp. 269-75; Mahrad, p. 144).

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