



## ĠILZĪ

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**ĠILZĪ** or ĠALZĪ (Pashtu/Paxtu plural of sg. masc. Ġilzāy and sg. fem. Ġilzey), one of three major Pashtun/Paxtun tribal confederations in Afghanistan. The other two are the Dorrānī, formerly the Abdālī (qq.v.), in western Afghanistan and the Karlānrī, who straddle the border between Afghanistan and the Northwest Frontier Province. Although the name of this confederation is often transcribed in Western literature as Ġilzī (or Ghilzai, etc.), the present author holds that the correct transliteration for this Pashtu term is Ġalzī, which will be used throughout this article.

Historical reference is first made to the Ġalzī in the early 16th century chronicles (e.g., *Bābor-nāma*, tr. Beveridge, p. 323) as a culturally distinct people in Afghanistan. They constitute about two fifths of the estimated total population of eight million Pashtuns in Afghanistan. They are concentrated in the area between the Durand Line (q.v.) in the southeast and a line stretching from Qandahār via Ġaznī (q.v.) to Kabul, and eastwards to Jalālābād in the northeast. Large numbers of Ġalzī were forced to settle in northern Afghanistan by the Dorrānī government after the Ġalzī rebellion of the 1880s. In Afghanistan they are known for their orthodox adherence to *paštūnwaley*, i.e., the Pashtun charter for appropriate social behavior, and their insistence on the edicts of having Pashtu, doing Pashtu, and speaking Pashtu (*Paxtū larel*, *Paxtū kawel*, and *Paxtū wayel*), emphasizing the importance of internalizing Pashtun tribal cultural values, social behavior based on these values, and competence in speaking Pashtu in the construction of Pashtun ethnic identity.

Some historians have speculated about the Turkish origin of the Ġalzī. A few



consider them the descendants of the pre-Islamic Hephtalites (e.g., Caroe, pp. 81-83, 132); others suggest a historical relationship with the Ƙalaj (Frazer-Tytler, pp. 11-12; Minorsky), a people who speak an identifiable Turkish language. Chronicles locate the Ƙalaj near Qandahār and Ġaznī in the 10th century C.E. (see Minorsky; Caroe, p. 132). Indeed, Ƙalaj is the name of a small modern (non-Ġalzī) Pashtu-speaking market town near the city of Laškargāh and the ruins of the 11th-12th centuries royal city of Laškarī Bāzār in southwestern Afghanistan. Linguistic data about a number of small Ƙalaj-speaking communities in Central Persia is available (Doerfer; Minorsky; Bosworth). Some Indian and Western historians and several nationalistically inspired Afghan writers have proposed that the Turkish Ƙaljī and the Lodī dynasties that ruled northern India during 689-720/1290-1320 and 855-932/1451-1526 respectively were Ġalzī Pashtuns. However, the Ġalzī Pashtuns speak Pashtu, a member of the Iranian branch of Indo-European languages, and exhibit specific socio-cultural and linguistic features that do not resemble those of the Ƙalaj or any other Turkish groups (see Morgenstierne, in *EIr.* I, pp. 516-22; Doerfer; Minorsky). There is no known systematic and conclusive ethnological body of evidence to support important Ġalzī and Hephtalite/Ƙalaj/Ƙaljī/Lodī cultural, historical, and/or socio-structural relationships.

Ġalzī tribal genealogies in general trace their early descent from the union of either Shah Ḥosayn, a Ghurid (q.v.) prince, and Bībī Mātō, a granddaughter of Qays ‘Abd al-Rašīd, the putative ancestor of all Pashtuns, or Mokarram Shah, a Pashtun prince from Ġūr, and the daughter of a Persian notable (Burton, pp. 1-6). In both versions a son named Ġalzoy, son of Ġal (Pashtu *ġal* “thief,” *zoy* “son”), ancestor of the Ġalzī, descendants of *ġal*, is conceived before marriage. With some variation, most genealogical accounts indicate that Ġalzoy had two sons, Borhān, also known as Ebrāhīm, and Tūrān. The descendants of Turān are the Western Ġalzī while Borhān is considered the progenitor of the Eastern Ġalzī (*Gazetteer of Afghanistan* VI, pp. 203-4). The main tribes of the Western Ġalzī are the Hōtak, Tōkī, and Ƙarōṭī. The Solaymān Ƙēl, ‘Alī Ƙēl, and the Tarākī are the prominent tribes of the Eastern Ġalzī. Several segments of mostly Eastern Ġalzī are pastoral nomads who traverse between the central highlands of Afghanistan in the summer and the Indus plains beyond the border of Afghanistan in winter.

The Ġalzī have been prominent in the modern history of Afghanistan, the Hōtak in western Afghanistan, and the Solaymān Ƙēl in eastern Afghanistan.



The Solaymān K̄el of the Eastern Ġalzī, especially the Aḥmadzī (q.v.) and Jabar K̄el, have played important roles in the political developments of Afghanistan. During the first Anglo-Afghan War (1839-1842, q.v.), it was the Jabar K̄el who inflicted the heaviest casualties on the retreating British army between Kabul and Jalālābād in winter 1842. Some Aḥmadzī chiefs were noticeable in the British military operations in southeastern Afghanistan during the second Anglo-Afghan War (1879-80, q.v.). The Aḥmadzī supported Moḥammad-Nāder in capturing Kabul and declaring himself king in 1929. Likewise, during the first and second Anglo-Afghan wars the Western Ġalzī provided widespread military and political opposition to the occupying British forces in their attempts to create or restore various Dorrānī rulers in Afghanistan. The Ġalzī in general have been the source of regular opposition to the Dorrānī dominated government of Afghanistan.

During the period of Persian control of western Afghanistan in the 16th-17th centuries, the Abdālī, also called Dorrānī, were the chief local supporters of the Persians, while the Ġalzī provided organized military and political opposition to Persian rule. The struggle for domination in Afghanistan between the Ġalzī and Abdālī dates back to this period when the Mughal and Persian empires competed for the control of the province of Qandahār. After Shah ‘Abbās I (997-1039/1587-1629) relocated the Abdālī vassals from Qandahār to Herāt, the Ġalzī, especially the Hōtaks, became dominant in the former city. In 1121/1709, Mīr Ways, a Hōtak chief, overthrew Persian rule in Qandahār and declared independence (Krusinski, I, pp. 183-87; Lockhart, 1958, pp. 86-92). After his death in 1128/1715, he was succeeded in Qandahār by his brother, ‘Abd-al-‘Azīz, but he was killed by Mīr Ways’s son, Maḥmūd Hōtak, who succeeded him in 1130/1717. Maḥmūd invaded Persia and captured Isfahan, the Persian capital, in 1135/1722. He was, however, overthrown by his cousin, Ašraf, the son of ‘Abd-al-‘Azīz in 1137/1725. The Ottomans recognized Ašraf as the king of Persia after suffering a defeat at his hand. His reign in Persia soon came to an end in 1142/1729, when he was defeated in battle and driven out by the future Nāder Shah Afšār. Assisted by the Abdālīs, Nāder Shah also defeated the last independent Ġalzay ruler of Qandahār, Shah Ḥosayn Hotak, Shah Maḥmūd’s brother in 1150/1738. Shah Ḥosayn and large numbers of the Ġalzī were deported to Mazandarān (Marvī, pp. 543-52; Lockhart, 1938, pp. 115-20). The remnants of this once sizable exiled community, although assimilated, continue to claim Ġalzī Pashtun descent.

With the fall of Shah Ḥosayn the Ġalzī political domination of Afghanistan



declined. From the death of Nāder Shah Afšār in 1747 up to 1978 the central government of Afghanistan was in the hands of various Persianized Dorrānī figures. The Ġalzī opposition to their rule continued, flaring up in large-scale organized armed uprisings in 1801, 1803, 1839-42, and 1886 (Caroe; Elphinstone; Ghobar). These episodes invariably resulted in setbacks for the Ġalzī, including their mass forced deportation, especially in 1880s, to northern Afghanistan. The 1978 Kālq-sponsored revolution in Afghanistan brought an end to the Dorrānī government and inaugurated what appeared to be a Ġalzī resurgence. Three out of four presidents of post-1978 revolutionary Afghanistan, namely Nūr-Moḥammad Tarakī, Ḥafīz-Allāh Amīn, and Najīb-Allāh, were from the Tarākī, Kārōṭī, and Aḥmadzī tribes respectively. The Ġalzī are also prominent in the leadership of the Ṭāleb movement that has controlled much of Afghanistan since 1996.

See also [AFGHANISTAN iv, vi, x](#)

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