



## KALĀNTAR

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**KALĀNTAR**, comparative of *kalān* (big, great), the term used to denote a chief or leader; synonyms are *pišvā* and *moqaddam*.

As of the late 14th century, the word *kalāntar* was used to denote the chief of a tribal, military, geographical, or professional unit. From the late 15th century onwards, the term was particularly utilized for designating the local official (mayor) in charge of the administration of a town, and in this meaning it replaced the older term *ra'īs* for this official (Roemer, p. 90; Tauer, p. 7; Lambton, 1963, pp. 208-9; Aubin, 1956b, pp. 123-47). The *Jāme' al-tawāriḡ-e Ḥasani* (written in 1453) refers to *kalāntarān* (plur. of *kalāntar*) as chiefs of military and geographical units (*sāyer-e kalāntarān-e boluk-e aqtā'*; see Yazdi, p. 110; Aubin, 1956a, pp. 65, 66, 71). In late Timurid times, *kalāntarān-e mawāze'* (chiefs of localities) are mentioned. These were classed on the same footing as tribal chiefs, who were also often referred to as *kalāntar*. There is an early use of the term for a village chief appointed by Timur, and *kalāntars* of Isfahan are mentioned in the Āq Qoyunlu and early Safavid periods. The term was not used to denote the chief of a guild, although the chief of the court musicians and singers (*kalāntar-e nowbatiān*), or of the royal library, was sometimes referred to as *kalāntar* in Timurid and early Safavid times (Roemer, pp. 90, 100; Navā'i, p. 322; Qā'em-Maqāmi, p. 44; Aubin, 1967, p. 212; Naṭanzi, p. 238; Naḡčevāni, pp. 246-47; Qazvini and Bouvat, pp. 146-61).

Already in the 15th century, if not earlier, the *kalāntars* were appointed by the ruler. In all cases, the *kalāntar* was the representative of his community towards the ruler, and towards his community he acted as the government's



agent, thus playing the role of the middleman. The office of the *kalāntar* was an important one; its holders were always chosen from among the notables (*a'yān*), and care was taken that the person to be appointed would have support among the local population. In Safavid Persia, the candidate was formally expected to have the support of 75 percent of the community. Nevertheless, the function tended to be hereditary. If the population was not satisfied with the *kalāntar*'s activities, this could result in investigation and dismissal. Being a royal appointee, the *kalāntar* also received a payment for his services, variously known as *kalāntari* and *rosūmāt* (Qā'em-Maqāmi, pp. 54-56 and 61, documents 24 and 26; Nāder Mirzā, pp. 291-92; Mirzā Rafi'a, pp. 93-94, 121; Dābeḥi and Sotuda, VI, p. 33, document 20; Qomi, II, p. 1083; Floor, 2000, p. 46; Lambton, pp. 215-16).

The *kalāntar*'s main task was “constantly to strive to improve the condition of the subjects in order to secure their prayers for the sacred person [of the king]” (Minorsky, p. 82). The *kalāntar* was also called *wakil al-ra'ayā* (the spokesman of the subjects), because “it is his business to defend the People against the Tyrannies of Governours, and to take up their little differences. He has considerable incomes; for they who have any business to do, make him great presents, that he may stand friend with the Chan; the King alone places the Kelontar in all Towns” (Thevenot, II, p. 103; Chardin, VI, p. 78; Hotz, p. 53; Floor, 1998, pp. 209-10, 278 [*šahryār* or *kalāntar* of Mināb]; Boxer, pp. 199, 257; Perry, pp. 203-15). Representing the interests of the local population also meant that the *kalāntar* had a role in fixing the monthly price-list of food supplies and had to see that goods were abundant and cheap. Failure to do so could lead to his execution, as happened in 1861 in Tehran (Floor, 1971, p. 263). The *kalāntar* was supposed to play his role of the tribune of the people in particular when taxes were increased or when a tax reduction was asked for after a natural calamity, because his first task was to ensure the collection of government taxes. He also had a say in urban expenditures, and the vizier and the *mostowfi* (comptroller) of the town could not write a payment order (*towjih*) without the *kalāntar*'s approval. The importance of his fiscal and administrative function is clear from the fact that the *kalāntar* appointed the *kadkodās* (the heads of city quarters, the elders of the guilds) and the *naqib* (head of the *sayyeds*, or descendants of the Prophet). In Safavid Persia, the vizier of Isfahan and the *kalāntar* had the right to appoint the chiefs of the rural districts around the city, who were required to have the support of 75 percent of their respective populations (Kämpfer, pp. 131-32; de Bruyn, I, p. 206; Richard, II, p. 27; Mirzā Rafi'a, p. 94; Qā'em-Maqāmi, pp. 54-56, document



24; Afšār, p. 398; Floor, 2000, p. 46; Lambton, pp. 211-15).

Because the *kalāntar* was in charge of a community (e.g., town, rural district, tribe) he was responsible for public order. In the 17th century, the Dutch therefore translated the term as sheriff (*schout*), and in the 19th century other Europeans called him “police magistrate” or “chief of police.” His executive arm included the *kadkodā*, the *dāruḡa-ye bāzār* (overseer of the bazaar), the *moḡtaseb* (market inspector), and their staff. The *kalāntar* also had to keep a kind of population register to be used for fiscal purposes, quartering of troops, and public health measures (Floor, 1971, pp. 258-60; idem, 2000, pp. 46-47; Lambton, pp. 214-15).

Every town had a *kalāntar*, sometimes two (each one in charge of a *nima-kalāntari*, that is, half of the city) or more. In Herat in the 1530s, sometimes several *kalāntars* were responsible for the entire town and the surrounding districts at the same time (*kalāntar-e Herāt wa bolukāt*; Qomi, p. 138), while in other times there was a single *kalāntar* only (Qomi, p. 257). In Shiraz in the 1880s, a *kalāntar* presided over the suburbs (*kalāntar-e ḡowma-ye šahr*). Similarly, in Isfahan, one *kalāntar* was the head of the Armenian community of Julfa, and another one was responsible for the ‘Abbāsābād quarter. In southern Persia, heads of market towns were also known as *kalāntar* or *šahryār*. In some cases, *kalāntars* of provincial capitals were seemingly *kalāntars* of the entire province as well; there were *kalāntars* of Gilān-e Bia-pas, Māzandarān, Fārs, and Āḡarbāyjān, but this was just an honorific title. In Seystān and Kič-Makrān, the hereditary governor was called *kalāntar*. In Qajar Persia, *kalāntars* of important cities (Shiraz, Tabriz, Mašhad) often had the personal title *beglerbegi* (Qomi, I, pp. 138, 257; Mollā Jalāl, pp. 118, 191, 219, 375; Puturidze, 1961, pp. 48, 68, documents 21 and 27; Puturidze, 1965, p. 48, document 20; Floor, 1971, p. 256; idem, 1998, p. 89).

There also existed rural district *kalāntars*. Outside Fārs and Kermān, they were most frequently called *boluk-koḡdā* or *boluk-bāši* (Floor, 1971, p. 267). They were in charge of appointing the *kadkodās* in their district and were responsible for collecting taxes, supplying troops, workers, and food, and they represented their district in all matters. Tribal *kalāntars* had similar duties.

By the end of the 19th century, the role of the *kalāntar* was being superseded by other officials representing new administrative structures (Floor, 1973, p. 307). The Municipality Law of 20 June 1907 (*Qānun-e baladiya*, article 93) stated that the title of the head of the municipal council (*ra’is-e anjoman*) was



*kalāntar*, but this was later changed to *šahrdār*. The same happened with the title of the district *kalāntar*, which became *baḳšdār* during the Pahlavi period. The term lives on in the designation of the urban police office as *kalāntari* as of the 1920s until early 21st century. It is also still employed among the *Baḳtiāri* and *Qašqā'i* tribes to denote chiefs of tribal sub-units.

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