



KHORASAN I. ETHNIC GROUPS

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Ethnically speaking, the population of Khorasan is extremely varied. It consists principally of Persians, Arabs, Turks, Kurds, Mongols, Baluch, and smaller groups of Jews, Gypsies, and Lors.

Persians. The Persians appear to have been the first ethnic group to populate the province, but, in time, they mixed with an increasing number of foreign invaders and, as a result, their proportionate number was reduced. According to W. Ivanov, by the 1920s few Persians remained in the province. Some “comparatively old Persian populations” dwelt in villages on the northern slopes of the Jağatāy mountain range in the district of Jovayn, as well as in the hills and the vicinity of cities in the districts of Sabzavār, Nišāpur, Toršiz (Kāšmar) and Torbat-e Ḥaydari, on the other side of the Jağatāy range, and in the Mašhad region. There were also Persians who had emigrated from various provinces of the realm to Khorasan “after the Turkmen raids were stopped by the Russian occupation of Transcaspia.” These had settled down in the districts of Esfārāyen and Jājarm, and along the Russian frontier. Finally, there was “a very thin Persian population” on the arid hills and in the desert oases of the districts of Arišk and Bošruya (southwest of Ferdows, earlier Ṭus), the district of Bejestān (north of Ferdows), the district of Kākk (northeast of Ferdows), the districts of Bākārz and Jām (east of Torbat-e Ḥaydari), and the districts of K̄vāf and Tayebād (southeast of Torbat-e Ḥaydari) (pp. 146-47). According to the



Military Report on Persia, in 1929 Persians predominated only in the villages of the Mašhad plain and in the districts of Nišāpur and Qāyen (p. 48).

Arabs. The Arab influx into Khorasan started with the garrisoning of Arab troops in Nišāpur and Marv (and probably also in Herat and Balk) following the campaign of ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Āmer in 651, and continued throughout the Omayyad and Abbasid Caliphates. This process has been described *ad extensio* in [ARAB SETTLEMENTS IN IRAN](#) and [ARAB TRIBES OF IRAN](#).

Turks. The Turkic influx into the province started with the Saljuq invasions of the 11th century. The principal Turkic tribes in the province are the Afšār, the Karā’i, the Gerāyli, the Qarā Bayāt, the Jalāyer, the Qarāqoyunlu, and the Boḡāyri.

The Afšār dwell mostly in the Darra-gaz, Abivard and Kalāt-e Nāderi regions; the Karā’i in the Torbat-e Ḥaydari region; the [Gerāyli](#) in Širvān, as well as in the Jājarm, Jovayn (Jaḡatāy), and Sabzavār regions.

The Qarā Bayāt dwell in the Nišāpur area. When Shah Esmā’il I (r. 1501-24) conquered Khorasan in 1510-11, they acknowledged Safavid sovereignty (See [BAYĀT](#)). During the reign of Moḡammad Kōdābanda (1578-88), the Qarā Bayāt resisted the Uzbek incursions with such vigor that the whole tribe was absolved from payment of *divān* dues and tribal warriors were enrolled as regular soldiers in the Safavid army (Eskandar Beg, p. 1035). In 1582, their amir, Moḡammad Beg, became embroiled in an intrigue to seize control of Kandahar, in Afghanistan, in the course of which he lost his life (Yate, p. 74).

During the reign of Shah ‘Abbās I (1588-1629), the Qarā Bayāt amir, Moḡammad Sulṭān Bayāt (d. 1610), was successively governor of Esfarāyen, Sabzavār, and Nišāpur (Eskandar Beg, p. 1035). Thereafter, Qarā Bayāt amirs continued to rule Nišāpur until the fall of the Qajar dynasty.

When Malek Maḡmud, the ruler of Sistān, captured Nišāpur in 1722, during the reign of Shah Ṭahmāsp II (1722-32), the Qarā Bayāt amir, Faṭḥ ‘Ali Khan Bayāt, submitted to him. He later rebelled against the Sistāni ruler and was beheaded (Yate, pp. 84-86).

Upon the death of Nāder Shah in 1747, the Qarā Bayāt amir, ‘Abbās Qoli Khan, backed by some 10,000 families of his tribe, established a semi-independent state in the Nišāpur region. In 1751, Nišāpur was sacked by Aḡmad Shah Durrāni (r. 1747-72), who took ‘Abbās Qoli Khan to Kabul as his prisoner.



‘Abbās Qoli Khan succeeded in ingratiating himself with his captor to such an extent that a marriage was arranged between Aḥmad Shah and his sister, as well as between the daughter of the Afghan ruler and ‘Abbās Qoli Khan’s eldest son. ‘Abbās Qoli Khan was then allowed to return to Nišāpur, and devoted the remainder of his life to improving that town and the districts dependent upon it (Malcolm, II, pp. 149-41).

In 1793 the Qarā Bayāt submitted to Āqā Moḥammad Khan Qajar (Bellew, p. 374). Nevertheless, their amir, Ja‘far Khan, who had succeeded his father, ‘Abbās Qoli Khan, remained intractable. In spring 1799, the forces of Faṭḥ ‘Ali Shah Qajar (r. 1797-1834) besieged Nišāpur. Even though Ja‘far Khan’s second son, who had been held as a hostage in the shah’s camp, was put to death and the city was bombarded by artillery, the Qarā Bayāt leader fought on for forty days. When Ja‘far Khan finally surrendered, the shah forgave him, bestowed on him a robe of honor, and reinstated him as governor of Nišāpur. He assigned his own troops, however, to man the fort (Brydges, pp. 79-82; Ḥasan Fasā’i I, p. 247) and, later, he forced Ja‘far Khan to reside at his court in Tehran (Malcolm II, p. 331).

The Jalāyer (or Jala’er) dwell in Kalāt-e Nāderi. According to Sümer, they are of Chaghatay origin (*Oğuzlar*, p. 360). Mirniā includes them in his list of Afšār *tiras*, or clans (Vol. II, p. 20). Two Jalāyer leaders are included on Eskandar Beg’s list of the great amirs of the time of Shah ‘Abbās I: Šāhvali Sultan Jalāyer (who was governor of Pasākūh, a district in the vicinity of Kalāt) and Oğurlu Sultan Jalāyer (p. 1314). The Jalāyer were also faithful allies of Nāder Shah (r. 1736-47), and their leader, Ṭahmāsp Khan Vakil-al-Dowla, was one of that ruler’s most important generals (Marvi, pp. 356-60, 582-99, 605-9, 1009-11; Mirniā I, pp. 70-75).

For many years, the Jalāyer ruling family held sway over Kalāt and its fort. During the reign of Moḥammad Shah Qajar (1835-48), the tribe’s chief, Yalāntuš Khan, rebelled against the central government, as a result of which he was stripped of all his titles and possessions. Under his son and successor, who remained chief of the tribe until his death in 1883, the Jalāyer again flourished. This leader’s son and successor, however, another Yalāntuš Khan, “was a man of no ability, and was deprived of the chiefship two years later,” putting a permanent end to Jalāyer rule in Kalāt (Yate, p. 157). Lady Sheil, in 1856, estimated the number of Jalāyer at 1,500 houses (p. 400); Yate, in 1900, at 400 families (p. 157).



The Qarāqoyunlu dwell in the Darra-gaz region. They were probably moved there from Azarbaijan during Safavid times to help protect the northeastern frontier of Persia against Uzbek and Turkmen incursions. Today, most of them are to be found in Moḥammadābād, Nowḵandān and three villages southeast of Nowḵandān: Kāhu (also known as Kāhuhā), Saʿadābād and Qarāqoyunlu, and the summer pastures of those who are still sedentary are in the Hezār Masjed Mountains (Mirniā II, pp. 21-22).

The Boḡāyri dwell in a region southwest of Qučān. During the reign of Nāder Shah, two of their leaders participated in tribal rebellions, Maṣur Khan Beg and Moḥammad Taqī Khan (Marvi, pp. 1094-95, 1175-79). In the 1890s, one group of them, numbering some 800 families, was located in Bām, and another group, called Saraḵsi and numbering some 500 families, was located in Šafiābād (Yate, p. 370).

According to the *Military Report*, “The northern frontier [of Khorasan], especially the district of Kalat-i-Nadiri, is inhabited by Turks, who are found scattered all over the northern part of the province. Their centre may be said to be the Jam valley” (p. 48). The Turks of Khorasan are, for the most part, Shiʿite and speak a wide variety of Turkic dialects.

Kurds. Ivanov tells us that there may have been Kurds in Khorasan before the 16th century, for one encounters the surname of Kurt in the historical data of previous centuries, and there was a dynasty by that name south of Herat (1245-1389). If there were Kurds in the province at that time, however, they left no trace (p. 150). Most of the Kurds in Khorasan claim descent from tribes that were transferred to the province from western Persia by the Safavids for the purpose of protecting the northeastern frontier of the country from inroads by Uzbek and Turkmen tribes. According to Ivanov, some of these tribes were moved as early as the middle of the 16th century (p. 150). But by far the largest transfer was carried out by Shah ʿAbbās I at the very beginning of the 17th century (Ivanov, p. 150; Papoli-Yazdi, pp. 24-25). The principal Kurdish tribes of Khorasan are the Zaʿfarānlu, the Šādlu, the Keyvānlu and the ʿAmārlu.

The Zaʿfarānlu dwell in northern Khorasan, having been transplanted there from western Persia around 1600. According to Yate, they were first settled in an area to the north of the Atrak river, but during the reign of Shah Ḥosayn I (1694-1722) they moved into a mountainous region south of the Atrak that was less exposed to attack from tribes beyond the Persian border (p. 181). In their



new habitat they occupied a swath of territory that stretched from Režāābād, 15 kilometers northwest of Šīrvān, to Čenārān, 60 kilometers northwest of Mašhad, and included the towns of Šīrvān and Qučān, and they displaced the Gerāyli who had been living there (Ibid; also Napier, pp. 83-87, 97, 101-2; MacGregor II, pp. 86, 143).

From the time of Shah ‘Abbās I to the beginning of the reign of Režā Shah Pahlavi, the Za‘farānlu leaders were hereditary governors of Qučān and headed a principality that stretched about 90 miles from east to west and about forty miles from north to south (MacGregor II, p. 87; for a list of the Za‘farānlu chiefs, who, after 1735-36, bore the title of *ilḳāni*, see Afšār-Sistāni, pp. 985-87). According to the *Military Report*, in 1929 around 50,000 Za‘farānlu lived in the Qučān district and some 12,000 of them lived in the Šīrvān district, roughly 13,000 of them being still nomadic (p. 52). According to British Naval Intelligence, in 1945 some 10,000 families of them lived in the Qučān district and around 2,400 families lived in the Šīrvān district, 2,600 families of them being still nomadic (*Persia*, p. 388).

The Šādlu (or Šādilu) also dwell in northern Khorasan. Like the Za‘farānlu, they were transplanted from western Persia by Shah ‘Abbās I around 1600 and were first settled in an area to the north of the present border of Persia. When raids by Turkmen and other marauding tribes forced them to move into the Persian hinterland, they settled in and around Bojnurd. There, until the beginning of the reign of Režā Shah, they formed a principality that extended about 90 miles from east to west, and about 50 miles from north to south. This included the districts of Samalqān and Māna on the Atrak River in the north, and the towns of Jājarm and Esfarāyen in the south (MacGregor II, p. 142). Until 1832-33 the Za‘farānlu and Šādlu formed a unified tribal confederacy under the Za‘farānlu *ilḳāni*, but when during that year Režā Qoli Khan, the confederacy’s *ilḳāni*, rebelled and the Šādlu leader, Najaf Qoli Khan, did not come to his aid when requested to do so, the two tribes split. After that, the Šādlu had their own *ilḳāni* (Afšār-Sistāni, p. 1003). According to the *Military Report*, in 1929 the Šādlu of Bojnurd alone numbered some 75,000 individuals, all of whom were sedentary (p. 51). According to Mas‘ud Kayhān in 1932-33 they numbered some 18,000 households (Vol. II, p. 105). According to British Naval Intelligence, in 1945 they numbered around 15,000 families, all of which were sedentary (*Persia*, p. 388; for additional information, see Mirniā II, p. 38).

Like the Za‘farānlu and Šādlu, the Keyvānlu dwell in northern Khorasan and were sent to the province by Shah ‘Abbās I in around 1600. Yate, who lived in



the province from 1893 to 1898, wrote that at that time three sections of the tribe controlled the Rādkān district as far south as Čašma Gilās and spent the summers on the Hezār Masjed Mountains. Five other sections lived in the hills on the border of the Darra-gaz valley, and 300 or 400 more families were in the Jovayn district (p. 364). Rādkān is their chief center. Although the Keyvānlu were once led by an *ilkani*, by the 1890s they no longer had a ruling chief (Yate, p. 364). According to Henry Field, they numbered around 8,000 individuals in 1929 (p. 252; for additional information, see Mirniā II, pp. 32-33).

The ‘Amārlu dwell northwest of Nišāpur, in and around the village of Mārusk, having been moved to Khorasan by Nāder Shah (Ivanov, p. 150). According to the *Military Report*, they numbered some 500 families in 1924 (p. 51).

Other important Kurdish tribes in Khorasan are: Bāčevānlu, Bādalānlu, Bičarānlu, Pahlavānlu, Tupkānlu, Jalāli, Ḥamzakānlu, Rešvānlu, Ravatkānlu, Zeydānlu, Sil Saparānlu, Sivkānlu, Ša‘rānlu, Amirānlu, Šeyḳkānlu, Šufiānlu, Qāčakānlu, Qarā Čorlu, Qaramānlu, Kaviānlu, Guliānlu, Maždagānlu, Milānlu, Verānlu, Hizulānlu, and Heyvadānlu (Afšār-Sistāni, pp. 988-1001).

Most of the Kurds of Khorasan are Shi‘ite. According to Ivanov, the language of the Khorasani Kurds belongs to the “northern” or “real Kurdish” family, and resembles that of the Mokri, but the vocabulary “is either replete with Persian terms in the south, or with Turkish in the north” (p. 152).

Mongols. The Mongols of Khorasan are divided into two major groups: the [Hazāra](#) and the Timuri. Most of the Hazāra (or “Berberi” as they are called by their Persian neighbors) dwell in northeastern Khorasan. According to the *Military Report*, they emigrated from the Hazārajāt region in central Afghanistan when Amir ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān seized their grazing lands in 1891. We know, however, that there were already Hazāra in Khorasan several decades earlier. Colonel MacGregor, who visited the province in 1875, noted that at that time the population of Esfarāyen in northern Khorasan and Čahār Deh in eastern Khorasan were Hazāra who allegedly had been transplanted from the Herat mountains in 1857 after the occupation of that city by Persian forces during the war with Great Britain (Vol. II, pp. 142, 146). Whatever the case, during the relatively few years since their arrival in Persia, they have spread over a wide area, settling down in the Borujerd, Širvān, Darra-gaz, and Saraḳs regions and in the valleys of the Kāšaf and Jām rivers (p. 53). According to Ivanov, they “gradually ousted Persians and Turks from the eastern extremity of the Hezar Masjed range” (p. 155). Ivanov also writes that “the



districts of Meshed and Quchan have many villages with a Barbari population, especially in the lands belonging to the Shrine of Imam Riza at Meshed” (*loc. cit.*).

According to Ivanov, the most important Hazāra tribes in northeastern Khorasan are: Uruzgāni (near Čahār Deh and in the Hezār Masjed range), Jāguri (in the Hezār Masjed range and in Sar-e Jām), Bisud, Daizāngi, and Daikundi (east of Sar-e Jām), Laljāngi (east of Sar-e Jām and in Saraḵs). Ivanov claims that all of the Hazāra are “fanatical Shi’ites” and reports that their language is “a jargon of Persian” (p. 155; for the origin and early history of the Hazāra, see Jarring, pp. 79-81).

The Timuri dwell in eastern Khorasan. According to Yate, Moḥammad Shah Qajar (r. 1834-48) moved some 8,000 families of them to the province from the Herat region in 1838, following the siege of that city by Persian forces. They settled in the districts of Torbat-e Jām, Bāḳarḳ, K̄vāf, and Zurābād and their chief, Qilič Khan, was made governor of Torbat-e Jām, Bāḳarḳ, and K̄vāf, bearing the title *amir* (p. 38). In 1867, Nāṣer-al-Din Shah gave their leader, Mir ‘Ali Mardān Shah Noṣrat-al-Molk, the rank of *amir-e tumān* (division commander) for his zeal in combating the Turkmen. Subsequently, he was appointed deputy to the governor-general and commander-in-chief of Persian forces in Khorasan, but, in 1895, he was abruptly dismissed and exiled to Tehran (Yate, pp. 45-47). Mir Asadollāh Khan Šowkat-al-Dowla, who was the leader of a group of 300 families of Timuri who had moved into Persia from the Herat region in 1858, had been given the rank of *amir-e tuman* in 1893, and then made governor of Torbat-e Jām and Zurābād (Yate, p. 46). In 1900, Yate estimated the Timuri population at 6,000 families (p. 38; for a list of the 70 Timuri tribes in Khorasan, see Adamec, pp. 329-31). Most of the Timuri are Sunni; they speak Persian and intermarry only with the Baluch (Ivanov, p. 153; for the connection between the Timuri and Timur Leng, see Yate, p. 38).

Baluch. The Baluch dwell mostly in northeastern Khorasan. An analysis of Ḥosayn ‘Ali Razmārā’ s *Farhang-e joḡrāfia-ye Irān* IX shows that the vast majority of Baluch villages are located in the districts of Fadiša (near Nišāpur), Saraḵs (on the Russian border), and Jannatābād (on the Afghan border). According to the *Military Report*, the principal Baluch tribes in northeastern Khorasan are: Sālār K̄āni, Ebrāhim K̄āni, Zardād K̄āni, Jān Begi, and Morād K̄āni (pp. 55-56). There are also Baluch, namely the Bahluli, who live in the Birjand region in southern Khorasan (Razmārā, pp. 363, 370, 371, 419). In 1936, their number was estimated at some 5,400 families (Afšār-Sistāni, p. 1016). In



the 1920s the Baluch of northeastern Khorasan had already lost their original language. Only those in the south still used their traditional Makrāni dialect (Ivanov, p. 152). The Baluch are Sunni and intermarry only with the Timuri (Ivanov, p. 153).

Jews. There are very few Jews in Khorasan, and, according to Ivanov, nothing remains of the large Jewish communities that once inhabited the cities in the province (p. 156). The few Jews remaining in the 1920s dwelt in Mašhad and some of them were “Jadids,” i.e., descendents of Jews who were forced to convert to Islam in 1839 but continued, in secret, to observe their traditional rituals (Ivanov, p. 156).

Gypsies. The Gypsies of Khorasan are mostly itinerant craftsmen, employed by peasants as blacksmiths, carpenters, sieve-weavers, etc. According to Ivanov, in the 1920s there were also Gypsy quarters in Nišāpur and Sabzavār in the north of the province. In the south of the province, Gypsies tended to congregate in the large village of Sarbiša, south of Birjand, during the winter months (p. 157). Ivanov published several studies of the Gypsies of Khorasan and their language (see Ivanov, p. 157n). For more information, see [GYPSIES OF PERSIA](#) and [GYPSY DIALECTS](#).

Lors. According to British Naval Intelligence, Režā Shah Pahlavi (r. 1925-41) moved a large number of Lors to Khorasan (*Persia*, pp. 370, 387). These were nomads belonging to the Bālā Gariva group of tribes in the Piš-e Kuh region of Luristan who had revolted against the central government in the late 1920s. Most of them probably returned to western Persia after World War II, for there is no trace of them in Khorasan today.

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