



KUHPĀYA I. THE DISTRICT

KUHPĀYA

i. The District

Kuhpāya is a large piedmont *boluk* (3,000 km²) separated from [Ardestān](#) on the north and Nā'in on the east respectively by the Fešārk and Kuhestān chains, extensions of the Karkas range. Its administrative center Ku(h)pā rests on a desolate landscape at 1,643 m above sea level, lat 32°43' N, long 52°26' E, halfway (65 km) along the road from Isfahan to Nā'in. Kupā served as the second caravan station on the Isfahan-Yazd route and was a medium of commerce between Isfahan and some hundred hamlets along several valleys to its north and east. Along the north-south axis, Kupā was an important junction between Ardestān and Rudašt (cf. Siroux, 1971, pp. 27-31).

Kuhpāya has little recorded past. Historically and locally known as Vir (Yāqut, IV, p. 944; Tatawi, II, p. 1470), the toponym still had some administrative currency under the Safavids (Golčīn-e Ma'āni, I, p. 404), although the name had largely been replaced by Kuhpāya (Afušta'i, pp. 515, 533), Qohpāya (Afušta'i, p. 573) or Qohpā, as the *nesba* Qohpā'i was borne by several men of letters (see Golčīn-e Ma'āni, I, p. 300; idem, II, pp. 1358, 1366; Mahdavi, pp. 99, 355, 451; cf. Rajā'i Zefra'i, 1979). Early modern sources document the center of the district as Vir (Afzal-al-Molk, fol. 88) and Qupā or Kupā (e.g., "Coopa" on the 18th-century maps of Delisle and Lotteri).

Old Kupā was surrounded by a mud wall and was divided into the quarters of



Meydān, Purān, and Oštorkān (lit. “camel caravansary”). Its fortification (*qalʿa*), ca. 60 × 60 m, now in ruins, shows architectural elements from various eras (Siroux, 1966; idem, 1971, pp. 54-56). Kupā’s relatively large Friday Mosque has a domed *čahārṭāq* construction (Figures 1 and 2) on a 36 m² cruciform ground plan seated on an isolated platform, surmised to be Sasanian or early Islamic, akin to those in nearby Qehi, Harand, and Yazdek^vāst; its *meḥrāb* is dated 710/1310 (Figure 3; see also Siroux, 1966; idem, 1973). The Safavid caravansary (*rebāṭ-e Šāh-ʿAbbāsī*), dated 999/1591, laid out around a four-*ayvān* courtyard (Figures 4 and 5), is also a splendid construction for Kupā’s modest location; the caravansary was relatively well preserved owing to its function as a local gendarmerie garrison (Siroux, 1949; idem, 1971, pp. 156-59; idem, 1974). Within the historic quarters of the town there are several cisterns, including the four-towered Bāḡčaḡān (Figure 6), presumably from the Safavid period.

Halfway on a secondary road from Kupā to Harand lies Qehi (locally Ki or Ji), 11 km south of Kupā, with dozens of caravansaries, cisterns, and bathhouses—relics of a prosperous past, when the village was at the crossroad of caravan routes. It had some thousand households, of which fewer than one hundred remained by the 1960s, with much of the village abandoned (Siroux, 1966; idem, 1971, p. 30; idem, 1973).

The importance suggested by the Safavid architecture might have continued under the Qajars, when Kuhpāya administered over neighboring Nāʿin, Ardestān, and Jarquya. In the late 19th century, when the province of Isfahan consisted of nine *boluks*, eight *maḥalls*, two *qaṣabas*, and five *nāḥias*, Kuhpāya was a *maḥall* stretching 1,600 square miles over the plain of the Zāyandarud and included the villages Kuhpā, Zefra, Fešārḡ, Mašgenān, and Harnad (Houtum-Schindler, pp. 125-29; cf. Afzal-al-Molk, folios 88-89; Arbāb, p. 22). The 17th-century head of the Capuchin convent in Isfahan, Raphael du Mans (II, p. 179), noted the nationwide reputation of the raisin production in “Koupa.” In the later 19th century, Kupā was praised for its horticulture and poppy plantations, the products of which was exported to Yazd (Stack, II, pp. 18-19). Kuhpāya was then populated by 1,334 households and was known for its mines of iron ore and collyrium (Janāb, pp. 172, 178, 198); the latter (*sang-e sorma*) was known throughout Persia for its therapeutic effects (Soudavar Farmanfarmanian, p. 304). Modern institutions were established in Kupā under the Pahlavis (Kāviāni).

Kuhpāya has been subjected to several administrative changes. In the early



Pahlavi era, Kuhpāya *boluk* had 36 villages and a population of 3,135 households; Rudašt was counted a separate *boluk* (Keyhān, II, pp. 423-26). In more recent times the district of Kuhpāya embraced Rudašt and Jarquya to its south (Edāra, p. 254; Razmārā, p. 162), both of which are now independent administrative divisions. At present, the *baḵš* of Kuhpāya, within Isfahan *šahrestān*, consists of Tudešk, Jabal, Zefra, and Sagzi subdivisions. Notwithstanding the vague usage of the toponym, Kuhpāya proper should be understood as mountainous (*jabal*; or Kuki in the local usage), which rests on the southern slopes of Fešārک and Šuraġestān mountains, with the peak Mār(e)šnān. It has some forty settlements, including Kupā, K^vāja, Pāza, Keriči, Jaza, Mandābād, Daḵrābād, Kerdābād, and ‘Olunābād (Eilers, p. 220). The eastern district of Tudešk is divided into the village districts of Tudešk, Ješuqān/Gašgun, and Mašgenān (cf. Razmārā, pp. 56, 183); the village Mesr Yazdi had Zoroastrian residents until late times (Siroux, 1971, p. 29; cf. Rajā’i Zefra’i, 1975). By the early 1990s, an Armenian community was reported to live in the village Varṭun (Janāb, p. 178).

The present district is home to 30,000 people. Irrigated by subterranean aqueducts (*kāriz*), it has some 3,000 ha of farmland producing cereals, beans, and cotton; an additional 600 ha of orchards exports nuts, pomegranates, apricots, jujube (*‘annāb*), and other horticultural products that are suited to the cool climate (*sardsir*; Razmārā, p. 162; MAI, village Gazetteer, pp. 12-14, 19; Maddāhi Kupāyi). The traditional economy was supported by a textile industry chiefly connected with that of Nā’in; there are still more than 3,000 carpet looms scattered throughout the district and some 60 *‘abā*-weaving factories, employing 600 workers. Construction of an Isfahan-Yazd railroad in the 1970s played a role in the development of the region. More recently, industrial townships (*šahrak-e šan’ati*) have been established near Kupā, Sagzi, and Mazra’a-šur. Major industries of Kuhpāya are stone mining, bricks, textiles, and food processing. The four short subterranean aqueducts that supplied water to the six public cisterns of Kupā, no longer meet the needs of the expanding township; water is planned to be pumped up 25 km from the Zāyandarud River (Maddāhi Kupāyi; *Keyhān, viža-ye ostān-e Esfahān*, 29 Mehr 1375 Š./1996, pp. 1-4).



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Mirzā Ġolām-Ĥosayn Afzal-al-Molk Kermani, *Safar-nāma-ye Eṣfahān*, Ms. 7976, Majles Library, Tehran (the printed version of this book, Tehran, 2000, is in error).

Maḥmud b. Hedāyatallāh Afušta'i Naṭanzi, *Noqāwat al-āṭār fī dekr al-aḵbār*, ed. E. Eṣrāqi as *Noqāwat al-āṭār fī dekr al-akyār*, Tehran, 1971.

M. M. Arbāb Eṣfahāni, *Neṣf jehān fī ta'rif al-Eṣfahān*, ed. M. Sotuda, Tehran, 1961.

G. Delisle, *Carte de Perse*, Paris, 1724; facsimile edition by the Sahab Geographic and Drafting Institute, Tehran, 1970.

Edāra-ye āmār o saršomāri (Vezārat-e kešvar, Edāra-ye koll-e āmār o ṭabt-e aḥwāl), *Ketāb-e asāmi-e dehāt-e kešvar* I, Tehran, 1950.

W. Eilers, "Kūhpāye, das alte Vīr, und seine Mundart," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, N.S. 4, 1990, pp. 217-29.

F. Soudavar Farmanfarmaian, "Haft Qalam Ārāyish: Cosmetics in the Iranian World," *Iranian Studies* 33/3-4, 2000, pp. 285-326.

A. Golčīn-e Ma'āni, *Kārvān-e Hend*, 2 vols. Mašhad, 1990.

Albert Houtum-Schindler, *Eastern Persian Irak*, London, 1896.

S. A. Janāb, *al-Eṣfahān*, ed. 'A. Naṣr, Isfahan, 1992.

M. Kāviāni, "Kuhpāya: Morvārid-i daraḵšān dar ḥāšia-ye kavir," *Farhang-e Eṣfahān*, ser. no. 16, 2000, pp. 124-31; ser. nos. 17-18, 2001, pp. 136-43.

M. Keyhān, *Joḡrāfiā-ye mofaṣṣal-e Irān*, 3 vols., Tehran, 1921-22.

Tobias Conradi Lotteri, *Opulentissimi Regni Persiae*, ca. 1769; facsimile edition by Sahab Geographic and Drafting Institute, Tehran, 2005.

R. Maddāḥi Kupāyi, "Āšnāyi bā šahr-e Kuhpāya," *Navid* 5, no. 215, 13 Ābān 1371 Š./1992, p. 2.



S. M. Mahdavi, *Tadkerat al-qobur yā dānešmandān o bozorgān-e Eṣfahān*, Isfahan, 1969.

MAI = Markaz-e āmār-e Irān (Sāzmān-e barnāma wa budja), *Saršomāri-e 'omumi-e nofus o maskan 1375, Šenāsnāma-ye ābādiḥā-ye kešvar, Ostān-e Eṣfahān, Šahrestān-e Eṣfahān*, publicaiton no. 6-34, Tehran, 1997.

Idem, *Farhang-e ābādiḥā-ye kešvar VII. Ostān-e Eṣfahān*, Tehran, 1969.

Raphael du Mans, *L'Etat de la Perse en 1660*, ed. F. Richard as *Raphael du Mans, missionnaire en Perse au XVIIème siècle*, 2 vols., Paris, 1995.

M. H. Rajā'i Zefra'i, "Kuhpāya-ye Eṣfahān," *Vaḥid* 13/7, serial no. 184, 1354 Š./1975, pp. 687-90.

Idem, "Kuhpāya wa Rudaštayn," *Vaḥid*, ser. no. 214, 1356 Š./1977, pp. 40-42.

Idem, "Ātār-e tāriḳi o mazḥabi-e baḳš-e Kuhpāya-ye Eṣfahān," *Vaḥid*, ser. no. 218, 1356 Š./1977, pp. 46-49.

Idem, "Rejāl-e Kuhpāya o Rudaštayn," *Vaḥid*, ser. nos. 246 and 247, 1357 Š./1979, pp. 34, 99-104.

H. 'A. Razmārā, ed., *Farhang-e joḡrāfiā'i-e Irān (ābādiḥā)* X, Tehran, 1950.

Maxime Siroux, *Caravansérails d'Iran et petites constructions routières*, Cairo, 1949.

Idem, "Kouh-Payeh: La mosquée djum'a et quelques monuments du bourg et de ses environs," *Annales islamologiques de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 6, 1966, pp. 137-70.

Idem, *Anciennes voies et monuments routiers de la région d'Isfahan*, Cairo, 1971.

Idem, "L'évolution des antiques mosquées rurales de la région d'Ispahan," *Arts asiatiques* 26, 1973, pp. 65-112; esp. pp. 98-99, figures 6-8; p. 107, plate 2.

Idem, "Les caravansérais routiers safavides," *Iranian Studies* 7/1-2, 1974, pp. 348-79.

Edward Stack, *Six Months in Persia*, 2 vols., London, 1882.

Rašid-al-Din b. 'Abd-al-Ġafur Tatawī, *Farhang-e rašidi*, 2 vols., ed. M. 'Abbāsi,



Tehran, n.d. (ca. 1958).

Šehāb-al-Din Abu ‘Abdallāh Yāqut Ḥamawī, *Moʿjam al-boldān*, 6 vols., Leipzig, 1866-70.

V. A. Zhukovskiĭ, *Materiali dlya izucheniya persidskikh narechiĭ* I, St. Petersburg, 1888.