



ḲvĀNSĀR I. HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY

ḲvĀNSĀR

i. Historical Geography

Covering an area of 900 km² on the eastern foot (Piškuh) of the central Zagros, ḲvĀnsār is bordered longitudinally by the districts of [Golpāyagān](#) (north) and [Faridan](#) (south). Its center is 30 km south of Golpāyagān and 150 km northwest of [Isfahan](#). The district is home to around 40,000 inhabitants living in more than a score of settlements. Administratively, the district is divided into three sub-districts: ḲvĀnsār proper (Markazi), flanked on the northwest by Poštkuh (with the villages Vist, Ḳoškruđ, Arjanak, Kohart, Ḥājiābād, and others) and on the east by West Raḥmatābād, embracing Raḥmatābād, Ḳam-/ḲvĀn-pič, Tejera/Tajara, Mirābād/Mehrābād, Ḥājbolāg, and Ṣafādašt. Lori and Turkish are spoken in Poštkuh, and Persian in the rest of the district, with a moribund local dialect (see ii, below) in the valley of ḲvĀnsār.

ḲvĀnsār proper is a narrow gorge, with average width of scarcely one kilometer, straggling some 12 km. The valley has mild summers and snowy winters and enjoys many springs and streams, orchards, and impressive natural sights (Porter, II, p. 70; Jackson, p. 251), covered with plane and poplar trees, willows, and walnuts. The fauna includes the famous ḲvĀnsār bear, probably already extinct, and boars, deer, and rabbits (Mir-Moḥammadi, pp.



59 f.). The valley is home to a string of villages that have increasingly become contiguous. At the south end rests the township of ḲvĀnsār (lat 33°13' N, long 50°19' E) at an elevation of 2,250 m above sea level, overlooked by the mountain Sul (called also Sil, Sel). The village, originally restricted to the southernmost quarter of Morzun (formally Mowrizān or Murizān; currently covered by orchards), gradually expanded northward to include the hamlets of Eresil (formally Arasur), Vādašt, Rebāt, Sunaqān, Bi(d)and, and Sangšir, and the bigger villages of Horestāna (= Ahrestān?), and Bābā Solṭān (all integrated since 1982; idem, p. 125); further north lie Qudjān (Kutgun), and Ti(d)jān. Vānešān is an isolated oasis 5 km from the northern corner of ḲvĀnsār valley. (For a comparative list of the toponyms, quoted from various sources, see Eilers and Schapka, p. 2; see also Kiā, pp. l-li). According to Šādeq Kiā (pp. l-li) the town of ḲvĀnsār was perceived as having two parts: Žir, downstream into the valley, and Bālā, upslope toward Isfahan. Bālā consisted of Tižow (Tiz-āb), Golesku (Golestān kuh), Helluqat, Bāqkal, Vestegi (Wasaṭ-gāh), Bāldeyh (Bālā Deh), Morzun, Šeyrak (Šahrak), and Mahalla jidā (the Jewish quarter). Žir consisted of Poleguš, Demdorā (Dam-e do rāh), Čitgāh, Sahrā, Čārvāq (Čahār bāg), and Eresil.

Water is supplied by various means. The district is distinguished for its many spring sources, from which the toponym *Ḳān(i)sār* is derived (see below). Of more than 400 springs identified throughout the district, Marzangašt is the most famous for its recreational function (cf. Mir-Moḥammadi, pp. 40-42). Some of the springs contribute to the formation of the river ḲvĀnsār, which originates from Qebla and Golestān-kuh (euphemized for the local Goreskun or Gurešku[n]; 2,750 m) and traverses the valley of ḲvĀnsār, where it is known as the Qebla, up to the village of Vānešān, beyond which the stream opens onto the Golpāyagān plain; the lower reach of the river then flows northeasterly to unite with the Qomrud to form the Ḳargāb. The river discharges an average volume of 28 million m³ annually, only a third of which is consumed in ḲvĀnsār (idem, p. 39). The irrigation system consists of a network of canals, branching out of the river (idem, pp. 306-18), as well as subterranean canals (*kāriz*) and wells (idem, pp. 39-47, 319 f.).

In spite of the high rate of emigration to major urban centers, the population of ḲvĀnsār still rose from 2,500 in the town and 12,000 in the district in the 1940s (Razmārā, p. 146) to, respectively, 22,000 and 37,000 in 1996 (Markaz-e āmār-e Irān, *Saršomāri*, 1997); the increase must be partly due to the expansion of the town and district administrative areas. True to the



abundance of water and scarcity of land, horticulture is prioritized (1,874 ha of orchards vs. 2,276 ha of farmland; Markaz-e āmār-e Irān, *Sālnāma*, 2001, p. 141), yielding apricots, walnuts, almonds, apples, peaches, and grapes (Mir-Moḥammadi, 305). The traditional cash crops of tobacco, opium, gum tragacanth (*katirā*), *gaz-angobin* (see [GAZ\[1\]](#)), and dried fruits (Razmārā, p. 146; Eilers and Schapka, p. 5) have largely given way to cereals (harvested on 1,900 ha), beans (190 ha), and potato and vegetables (460 ha; Markaz-e āmār-e Irān, *Sālnāma*, 1996, pp. 243 f.). In many farms stand the mud-brick *kaftarkāns* “pigeon houses” (Mir-Moḥammadi, pp. 320-22); these, which are used for collecting manure to fertilize melon fields, connect Ḳvānsār agriculturally with Isfahan (see [Isfahan xiv. Modern Economy and Industries \(1\) Modern Economy of the Province](#)). Ḳvānsār has been known for its honey, some 500 tons of which is produced annually, and apiculture is said to be virtually the only successful contemporary economic activity in the district (*idem*, pp. 130 f., 303 f.). The rural economy has shown a sharp decline, partly due to loss of agricultural land to the ever-expanding residential districts (*idem*, p. 125). With little economic motivation, younger generations are progressively absorbed into the services sector, and like many other secluded towns, Ḳvānsār has its share of the so-called higher educational institutions that have been created throughout the nation under the Islamic Republic. Little is left of the traditional crafts, such as vegetable oil extraction, textile, pottery, carpet weaving, and woodcrafts (see below). According to the decennial census of 1996, only 35 percent of the employed population in the district was engaged in agriculture, while 40, 13, and 11 percent were engaged in services, manufacturing, and construction, respectively (*Sāzmān-e barnāma*, 1997b, pp. 37-38). Certain socio-economic aspects of life in Ḳvānsār are narrated in some detail in Wilhelm Eilers’ extensive linguistic documentation (Eilers and Schapka, pp. 93 ff.)

‘*Arabestān*. Geographically isolated from Ḳvānsār proper, the present sub-district of West Raḥmatābād corresponds to the traditional *boluk* of Šaš Deh-e ‘Arabestān (cf. “Arabestān,” in Razmārā, p. 255), which lies on a long, arid plain that extends further southeast towards the plain of Isfahan, where it is known as Davāzdah Deh-e ‘Arabestān, with Dehaq as the chief village (cf. Tasbiḥi, 1997b, p. 15). Now mostly salt desert, ‘Arabestān seems to have been more verdant and prosperous; the corridor provided an alternative caravan route between Isfahan and Golpāyagān (Siroux, p. 16).

Despite its Persophonics inhabitants, the toponym “Arabestān” suggests some



kind of Arab settlement in history. The presence of the Arabic glottal fricative /ħ/ and stop /ʔ/ in the Persian variety of Šeš Deh-e ‘Arabestān (Tasbiḥi, 1997b, p. 11) may not be taken as solid evidence, however, because these consonants exist in the speech of many other Persian and Median villages and Jewish communities in central Persia, ḲvĀnsār proper included (see ii, below). There are various explanations as to when and why ḲvĀnsār’s ‘Arabestān came to be. (1) Maxim Siroux proposes the idea of an early Arab settlement on the grounds of archeological relics (Siroux, 1971, p. 10), most notably Qal’a-ye Atābaki which might have originated from a small fortification built by the Arab invading troops (idem, pp. 47-49). (2) Moḥammad-Ḥosayn Tasbiḥi, a native to Šeš Deh-e ‘Arabestān, proposes a recent migration of the “Arab” tribes from [Khorasan](#), owing to his field observation of some 17th-century gravestones carrying the provincial epithet Ḳorāsāni-e ‘Arab (personal communication), but also through the similarities he has noticed between his native district and Khorasan in terms of customs and the Persian accent (Tasbiḥi, 1997b, pp. 11, 17). Similarly, Chirikov (tr. p. 62) supposes that the Arabs of ḲvĀnsār’s ‘Arabestān were those forced to migrate by [Abbas I](#) from Khorasan. (3) In view of the absence in the pre-Safavid sources of a toponym “‘Arabestān” between ḲvĀnsār and Isfahan, one may infer the possibility that a sizeable Arab settlement in the ḲvĀnsār region could have taken place during the Safavid era, in consequence of the general Shi’i immigration from the Ottoman territories. This conjecture helps explain why ḲvĀnsār has ever been a center of religion zeal and piety in spite of its odd geographical location. (4) Another likely scenario would be that “‘Arabestān,” as an alternative name for Khuzestan province, might have been extended to its outermost constituent, the Šeš Deh, now West Raḥmatābād.

History. The conventional spelling of the toponym appears to be a pseudo-historical misspelling (*k* being realized as *k*^v) for *Ḳān(i)sār* “spring, source”—an explanation supported by the presence of numerous springs in this mountainous region, as well as by historical documentation (e.g., the name is rendered *Ḳānesār* by Yāqut [II, p. 392], *Ḳānisār* by Mostawfī [pp. 220-21, tr., p. 213] and *Ḳvāndmir* [III, p. 516, tr., p. 360], *Ḳānsār* by Afušta’i [p. 573]; for other localities with similar names, see Eilers and Schapka, p. 6). The river Qomrud rose from the mountain ḲvĀnsār and Lālestān (Mostawfī, loc. cit.). Referred to as a *qaria* “village” (Yāqut, loc. cit.), *qaṣaba* (Ḥāzin, p. 62; Razmārā, p. 146), *balada* “township” (Ḥāzin, p. 56), *ābādi* (Ḥākim, p. 796), and *boluk* “district” (Sayf-al-Dawla, p. 370), ḲvĀnsār has been associated with Golpāyagān/Jarbādaqān since the earliest citations (Yāqut, loc. cit.; Mostawfī,



loc. cit.; ḲvĀndmir, loc. cit.; Le Strange, p. 210; cf. Schwarz, V, p. 649). ḲvĀnsār was located on a major road that connected Isfahan to [Borujerd](#) and [Arāk](#). The road would pass through Tirān, Dāmān(a)/Dombnā (near Dārān), to reach ḲvĀnsār (Siroux, 1971, pp. 8-11; cf. Mostawfi, tr., pp. 166 f.). An alternative, shorter route from Isfahan to Golpāyagān would pass through Towr (northwest of the present Raḥmatābād), believed to have been the principal caravan and military artery from Isfahan to the northwest in medieval times (Siroux, op. cit.).

ḲvĀnsār's numerous religious authorities and remnants of a major mosque bear witness to the fact that it prospered under the Safavids to become, by the beginning of the 18th century, a religious center supplementing the nearby capital city. ḲvĀnsār is mentioned, together with Jorpādaqān, [Ardestān](#), Naṭanz, Nā'in, and Qohpāya, as one of the places in central Persia (*Dār al-molk-e 'Arāq*) that supplied guards to the administration of Shah Abbas I (Afušta'i, p. 573). Soon after the capture of Isfahan in 1722, the Afghan ruler Maḥmud sent his troops to seize Golpāyagān, ḲvĀnsār, and [Kashan](#), but these towns repulsed the Afghan invaders, (Moḥammad Mehdi, pp. 207 ff., cf. p. 217). [Moḥammad b. Abi Ṭāleb Ḥazin Lāhiji](#), who stayed for a while in ḲvĀnsār in the winter of 1135/1722 during his flight from Isfahan to Ḳorramābād (Ḥazin, p. 56), notes that the people of ḲvĀnsār surrounded the Afghan army and killed 3,000 of them, including a general and the governor (Ḥazin, p. 62; cf. Ḥakim, pp. 796-97). Local tradition holds that, while thousands of Afghan troops set upon ḲvĀnsār as a stage for the invasion of Isfahan, the locals ambushed and devastated them overnight in the plain of Jan(g)gāh to the east of the town, near which the hill called Sangar-e Bābā 'Azim was named after the leader of the uprising (Tasbiḥi, 1997a, pp. 217-21).

It was in the later Qajar period that, for the first time in history, some social facts emerged on ḲvĀnsār, thanks to European travelers and the efforts of the Persian government to procure information from throughout the nation. To the European eye, the valley of ḲvĀnsār was similar to a European village in its greenness, picturesque scenery, and fine architecture (Kinneir, pp. 127-28; Brugsch, II, p. 29). The valley's population of some 2,500 families (Kinneir, p. 128) or 12,000 souls (Brugsch, II, p. 29), having dwindled in the drought of 1879 (Stack, II, pp. 112-13), recovered within a couple of decades (Jackson, p. 251). Nevertheless, the toll exerted by the famine must have been heavy, so that ḲvĀnsār was reported as having no bazaar; there were only a few shops dispersed throughout the village in the 1880s (Ḥakim, p. 796). Visitors also



praised the township for its industries. Its carpets, particularly the style known as *visti*, that of the village Vist northwest of ḲvĀnsār, were exported to Europe. There were large shops for dyeing textiles and extracting seed oil, and the region's finely made wooden kitchenware was known throughout Persia. Its better-known farm produce consisted of apples, honey, and *gaz*; opium was a major crop, and tobacco was exported to Dezful and Šuštar (Brugsch, loc. cit.; Ḥakim, loc. cit.; Jamālzāda, pp. 30, 35, 80). ḲvĀnsār thrived in the business of cotton goods, and its taxes, combined with those of Golpāyagān, yielded considerable revenue to the government (Jackson, p. 251). ḲvĀnsār was not exempt from the long-lasting tradition of constant feuding (*do-hawā'i*) between its two halves (Stack, II, p. 113; see [ḤAYDARI AND NE'MATI](#)).

Ever since the Qajar period, ḲvĀnsāris have distinguished themselves in the business of printing and selling books across the nation, particularly in the capital (Ḥakim, p. 796; Moḥammad-Ḥasan Mirzā Mohandes and 'Ali Khan Mohandes, p. 134), where they still hold a monopoly on book publishing and selling (idem, pp. 157-59). Many renowned calligraphers of the town (idem, pp. 148-52) were engaged in the copying of the Qur'an for export to other towns (Sayf-al-Dawla, p. 380), which may be regarded as a manifestation of the religious culture ḲvĀnsār has boasted for centuries. Carrying the epithet *Dār al-Mo'menin* "abode of the pious," ḲvĀnsār has been the birthplace of several Shi'i clergy of repute (Mir-Moḥammadi, pp. 189-232; Tasbiḥi, 1997a, pp. 200-203).

There was a sizeable Jewish community in ḲvĀnsār. It was subjected to coercive conversion measures during 1067/1656 to 1073/1662 carried out under [Abbas II](#), as related in verse by the contemporary Jewish poet [Bābā'i ben Lotf](#) of Kashan (apud Levi, pp. 326-29, 348-53). According to another source, a history of the Iranian Armenians by the Armenian priest [Aṛak'el of Tabriz](#) (1590s-1670), the Jews of ḲvĀnsār and Golpāyagān, among those of some other towns, could escape conversion by bribing the officials, fleeing, or resistance (for suffering under the Afghans, see Bābā'i ben Farhād, pp. 73-74). The Jews of ḲvĀnsār lived in the quarter *Jidā* ("Jews") at the south of the town (*maḥalla-ye bālā*), and had three cemeteries (*gur jidun*) and two synagogues in the district. The Jewish school in Bidhand was confiscated after the Islamic Revolution. The Jews played an important role in the economy (banking, goldsmithery, commerce) and were acclaimed for their expertise in medicine and pharmacy; the Pir Musā (lit. "Moses' son") were a respected family of physicians (Tasbiḥi, 1997a, pp. 167-74; cf. Yerousalmi, p. 98). The Jewish population of the district,



documented in the late nineteenth century as 270 souls (*Anglo-Jewish Association Annual Report* 18, 1888-89, p. 44, apud Yeroushalmi, p. 84) had dropped to a couple of hundred in 1961 and to just two individuals in 1986 (Mir-Moḥammadi, 291-96; cf. Levi, pp. 1007-09; Yarshater, 1974; see also Sahim).

Due to its central location on the Iranian Plateau, ḲvĀnsār has been subjected to various administrative rearrangements within the provinces of Khuzestan (‘Arabestān), Arāk (‘Erāq-e ‘Ajam[i] or *Ayālat-e Markazi*), and Isfahan. Notable has also been ḲvĀnsār’s association with its immediate western neighbor Lorestān (see, *inter alia*, Homann). Since early modern times, the name of ḲvĀnsār has often appeared together with that of Golpāyagān. Notwithstanding the unstable nature of Persian administrative divisions under the Qajars, these two regions usually formed a district or small province (Curzon, I, p. 437), which would be tenured to princes and nobles who would rule over larger provinces. The district’s governor was changed at least ten times between 1851 and 1878 (‘Etemād-al-Saltāna, pp. 1053, 1132, 1250, 1323, 1465, 1584, 1515, 1587, 1654, 1740, 1786, 1807). Golpāyagān and ḲvĀnsār constituted one of the 38 national fiscal units in 1888-89 (Jamālzāda, p. 123; Curzon, II, pp. 480-82). They were finally consolidated into Isfahan Province (Razmārā, the attached map “Šahrestān-e Borujerd o Golpāyagān”).

Contrary to the easy road to Golpāyagān, passable by wheeled vehicles (Brugsch, II, p. 29), ḲvĀnsār’s connection with its immediate southern neighbor, Faridan, was only passable through the treacherous Gardangāh pass (Stack, II, pp. 110-11; Tasbiḥi, 1997a, pp. 206-11). Nonetheless, ḲvĀnsār’s economic ties with the prosperous district of Faridan and the Baḳtiāri tribe were strong. Caravans using pack animals were seen on the dirt road connecting the two districts as late as 1970 (*idem*, pp. 23, 149-53). The settlement of the Baḳtiāri herdsmen under Reza Shah, therefore, may have contributed to the economic decline of ḲvĀnsār. The district was further isolated when the paved Isfahan-Qom highway caused the old Isfahan-Arāk road to fall into oblivion. Since the mid-20th century, there has been a steady trend of economic shift from the central plateau districts such as ḲvĀnsār, not only to Tehran, but also to the series of large agglomerations along the Zāyandarud valley, centered at Isfahan.

For some decades the inhabitants of ḲvĀnsār petitioned for independence from Golpāyagān (Tasbiḥi, 1997a, p. 205), until the district finally gained in its own rights the status of *šahrestān* in 1980 (Wezārat-e kešvar). In recent years



the local pundits have published on their hometown lavishly, particularly on their eminent fellow townsmen, mostly clerics (see Bibliography).

Historical monuments of the district have been poorly documented. These include the shrine of Bābā Pir, also known as the *emānzāda* Abu'l-Fotuḥ, in Vānešān, and distinguished by its lofty polygonal dome, dates from 17th century (Sāzmān-e melli, p. 46). The Maryam Begom *madrassa*, attributed to the Safavid Shah Ṣafi's daughter, was in ruins and had lost its endowments by 1970 (Tasbiḥi, 1997a, pp. 189-99). In Tidjān there are remnants of a fort (*qal'a*), likely to be from the period between the Saljuqs and Il-Khanids; the local conviction of the existence of a fire temple in the area is groundless (Siroux, 1971, pp. 208 f.). There are also relics of stone inscriptions in the region (see Siroux, 1964). Well built and decorated historical houses of Ḳvānsār (Tasbiḥi, 1997a, pp., 50-62, 74-89, 171) speak of a more celebrated past.

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