



QAŠQĀ'I TRIBAL CONFEDERACY I. HISTORY

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i. History

Like most present-day tribal confederacies in Persia, the Il-e Qašqā'i is a conglomeration of clans of different ethnic origins, Lori, Kurdish, Arab and Turkic. But most of the Qašqā'i are of Turkic origin, and almost all of them speak a Western Ghuz Turkic dialect which they call *Turki*. The Qašqā'i, in general, believe that their ancestors came to Persia from Turkestan in the vanguard of the armies of Hulāgu Khan or Timur Leng. However, it seems more probable that they arrived during the great tribal migrations of the 11th century. In all likelihood, they spent some time in Northwestern Persia before making their way to Fars. Until recently, there was a clan by the name of Moḡānlu among them, a name which is undoubtedly derived from that of the Moḡān steppe, north of Ardabil, in Persian Azarbaijan. The clan names of Āq Qoyunlu, Qarā Qoyunlu, Beygdeli and Musellu also suggest a past connection with Northwestern Persia. Moreover, the Qašqā'i often refer to Ardabil as their former home. A close relationship appears to have existed at one time between the Qašqā'i and the Ḳalaj, one branch of whom made its way to Azarbaijan and Anatolia, and another branch of whom settled down in the area known as Ḳalajestān in Central Persia, probably in Seljuqid times. Indeed, several authors, including Ḥasan Fasā'i, have gone so far as to argue that the Qašqā'i



are but an offshoot of the Ḵalaj tribe (Fars Nāma II, p. 312).

Vladimir Minorsky, however, believed that the migration of Ḵalaj nomads from Central Persia to Fars antedated that of the Qaşqā'i and that the two groups merged when already in their present tribal territories (Personal interview, 1956). In any case, there are considerable Ḵalaj remnants among the Qaşqā'i (see Garrod, p. 294), and there is also a large group of sedentary Ḵalaj on the Deh Bid plateau, north of Shiraz, who claim to have belonged, while still nomadic, to the Il-e Qaşqā'i. A list of Qaşqā'i clan names shows that, besides the Ḵalaj, some Afšār, Bayāt, Qājār, Qarāgozlu, Šāmlu and Igder also joined the tribal confederacy (Oberling, The Qaşqā'i Nomads of Fars, p. 30).

Precisely when the Turkic components of the Il-e Qaşqā'i established themselves in Southern Persia is still shrouded in mystery. Many Qaşqā'i believe that their ancestors were sent to Fars by Shah Esmā'il Šafavi (r. 1501-1524) to protect the province from the incursions of the Portuguese. But we know that their summer quarters were close to the present ones already at the beginning of the 15th century, for Ebn Šahāb Yazdi mentions a group of them who were summering at Gandomān, in northwestern Fars, in 1415 (Aubin, p. 504, n. 24).

Equally uncertain is the etymology of the name Qaşqā'i. The most plausible theory, and one which was first advanced by Wilhelm Barthold ("Kashkai," *EI* ¹ II, p. 790), is that it is derived from the Turkic word *qaşqā*, which means "a horse with a white spot on its forehead." According to another theory, which was first proposed by Ḥasan Fasā'i (Fars Nāma II, p. 312), the name comes from the Turkic verb *qāčmaq*, "to flee."

The Qaşqā'i chiefs have all belonged to the Šāhīlu clan of the 'Amala tribe. The earliest known leader of the tribe was Amir Ġāzi Šāhīlu, who lived in the 16th century and is buried in a village called Darviš, in the vicinity of Gandomān. He was apparently a holy man, for his grave is a center of pilgrimage. According to legend, he helped shah Esmā'il establish Shi'ism as the official faith of Persia. But it is only at the beginning of the 18th century that the Il-e Qaşqā'i began to play a significant role in the history of Fars province. At that time, the chief of the Qaşqā'i was Jān Moḥammad Āqā, popularly known as Jāni Āqā. According to Moḥammad Ḥāšem Āşaf (Rostam al-Tawāriḳ, p. 105), another Qaşqā'i leader, Ḥamid Beyg Qaşqā'i, was a prominent person during the reign of Shah Ḥosayn I Šafavi (r. 1694-1722).



According to legend, Jāni Āqā's two sons, Esmā'il Khan (who succeeded him as chief) and Ḥasan Khan took an active part in Nāder Shah's conquest of India in 1738-1739. But it is said that during the campaign they ran afoul of the Afšār ruler, with the result that Esmā'il Khan was blinded and Ḥasan Khan was so severely mutilated that he died shortly afterward. The Qašqā'i tribes were then forced to move to the districts of Darregāz, Kalāt-e Nāderi and Saraks in Korāsān.

While Karim Khan Zand ruled from Esfahan (1751-1765), Esmā'il Khan wrote him a letter asking him to allow his tribes to return to their former pastures in Fars. On the verso of this letter, Karim Khan answered in the affirmative. Thus, the Qašqā'i were able to return to Fars. Later, Esmā'il Khan became a confident of the Vakil (Rostam al-Tawāriḳ, pp. 337, 343), and one is tempted to believe that he is the blind man standing immediately to the left of Karim Khan and identified simply as "Esmā'il Khan" in the picture which is to be found on the cover of Add. 24,904 in the British Museum.

During the period of anarchy that followed the death of Karim Khan in 1779, Esmā'il Khan threw in his lot with Zaki Khan, claiming for himself the title of governor of Fars province, but when Zaki Khan was slain, Esmā'il Khan was executed by another contender for the crown, 'Ali Morād Khan. Esmā'il was succeeded as chief by his only son, Jān Moḥammad Khan, popularly known as Jāni Khan, who backed Ja'far Khan (whose father, Šādeq Khan, had likewise been murdered by 'Ali Morād Khan). In 1788, Āqā Moḥammad Khan Qājār launched a campaign against the Qašqā'i in the Gandomān region. But the Qašqā'i, having been forewarned of the impending attack, retreated to safety in the mountains. After the assassination of Ja'far Khan in 1789, Jāni Khan supported that ruler's son, Loṭf 'Ali Khan.

When Āqā Moḥammad Khan defeated Loṭf 'Ali Khan in 1794 and established the Qājār dynasty, Jāni Khan and his family withdrew into the Zagros mountains, where they remained in hiding until the murder of the Qājār ruler in 1797. Āqā Moḥammad Khan revenged himself upon the Il-e Qašqā'i by moving some of its component tribes (including the 'Abd al-Maleki) to Northern Persia. On the other hand, during this period a large number of Luri and Kurdish tribes, which had followed Karim Khan to Fars, joined the Il-e Qašqā'i, thus greatly enlarging it.

In 1818/19, Jāni Khan was given the title of *ilḳāni*, which, Fasā'i claims, was the first time that title had been used in Fars (Fars Nāma I, p. 267). Thereafter, all



the paramount chiefs of the Il-e Qašqā'i bore that title. When he died in 1823/24, Jāni Khan was succeeded by his eldest son, Moḥammad 'Ali Khan. Even though Moḥammad 'Ali Khan was of frail health and led his tribes mostly from his Bāḡ-e Aram garden palace in Shiraz, he acquired enormous power, his sway extending not only over the Qašqā'i tribes but also over such important tribes as the Bahārlu, the Aynāllu and the Nafar. He also forged useful marital alliances with the Qājār dynasty. He married a daughter of Ḥosayn 'Ali Mirzā Farmān-Farmā, a son of Faṭḥ 'Ali Shah who was governor-general of Fars province, and, later, he arranged for one of his sons to marry a sister of Moḥammad Shah Qājār (r. 1834-1848). But, in 1836, he was summoned to Tehran and then forced to reside at the Imperial Court for the rest of the shah's reign.

Moḥammad 'Ali Khan returned to Shiraz in 1849, during the first year of Nāṣer al-Din Shah's reign (r. 1848-1896), and died three years later. He was succeeded by his brother, Moḥammad Qoli Khan, whose powers were limited by the presence in Tehran of a strong, stable central government that was determined to stamp out tribal unrest and banditry. The new *ilḡāni* was forced to reside in Shiraz as a hostage for the good behavior of his tribes. In 1861/62, Nāṣer al-Din Shah further curbed his authority by creating a rival tribal confederacy, the "Il-e Ḳamsa" ("Confederacy of Five"), consisting of the Bahārlu, Aynāllu, Nafar, Bāṣeri and Arab tribes, and headed by the rich and powerful Qawāmi family of Shiraz. When he died in 1867/68, Moḥammad Qoli Khan was succeeded by his weak, alcoholic son, Solṭān Moḥammad Khan. Under the latter's ineffectual leadership, the Qašqā'i tribes faced their greatest challenge, the terrible famine of the early 1870's. Although Solṭān Moḥammad Khan retired from active leadership in 1871/72, he retained his title. During this period, the Qašqā'i tribal confederacy stood on the brink of disintegration. George Nathaniel Curzon wrote: "the tribal affairs fell into the hands of smaller khans, which resulted in internal dissension. Owing to this, about 5,000 families went over to the Bakhtiaris, and an equal number to the Iliat Khamsah, and about 4,000 families dispersed themselves to different villages" (1892, II, p. 113).

It was only in 1904, when Esmā'il Khan Ṣowlat al-Dowla became *ilḡāni*, that the Qašqā'i once more regained their former cohesion and might. At that time, Persia was ruled by the ailing, corrupt Moẓaffar al-Din Shah (1896-1907), and the authority of the central government over the provinces was steadily eroding. In Fars, Ṣowlat al-Dowla gained control of most of the tribal



hinterland, while his arch-rival, Qawām al-Molk (the Qawāmi leader), established his power base in Shiraz.

During the Persian revolution of 1906-1911, Fars became the scene of unprecedented chaos as the two camps struggled for dominance. At first, probably because the Qawāmi favored the Royalists, the Qašqā'i supported the Constitutionalists. Later, when the Baḳtiāri leaders became dominant in Tehran and the Qawāmi sided with them, Šowlat al-Dowla formed an anti-Baḳtiāri and anti-Qawāmi alliance with the reactionary Sheikh Kaẓ'al of Moḥammadarāh and Sardār-e Ašraf, the *wāli* of the Pošt-e Kuh, called the "Etteḥād-e Jonub" ("League of the South").

The civil war in Fars grew even more intense as the British government became embroiled in it. The British, who established their oil concession in Kūzestān in 1908, felt threatened by the League of the South. They were also increasingly irritated by the high incidence of banditry and the extortionate demands of tribal toll collectors on the Bušehr-Shiraz road, which was the main artery of British trade with Persia. Because the road passed through Qašqā'i territory, British merchants blamed Šowlat al-Dowla for their losses. Thus the British Consulate in Shiraz became a focal point of pro-Qawāmi sentiment. The unrest in Fars reached its climax in July 1911, when a combined force of Qašqā'i warriors and troops belonging to the pro-Qašqā'i governor-general of Fars, Neẓām al-Saltana, repeatedly stormed Qawāmi positions throughout the city. But in September, British threats of intervention and defections from Šowlat al-Dowla's tribal army finally convinced the *ilḳāni* to withdraw from the scene. In World War I, Fars once more became a seething cauldron of conflict. After the proclamation of Jihad by Enver Pasha, it was optimistically believed by Turkish and German leaders that Muslims from French North Africa to British India would spontaneously revolt against their infidel masters, and that even such neutral states as Persia and Afghanistan would make common cause with the ottoman empire. To facilitate this task, the German government planned to dispatch a whole contingent of agents provocateurs to Persia and Afghanistan. But when no uprisings took place and the Persian and Afghan governments remained stubbornly neutral, the German plans were accordingly scaled back. In the end, only two small groups of agents were sent, one to Persia and the other to Afghanistan.

The agents who were sent to Persia were headed by Wilhelm Wassmuss, who had previously been German consul in Bušehr, where he had befriended tribal



leaders who resented British interference in their arms smuggling operations. In spring 1915, Wassmuss was sent to Shiraz as German consul. On his way through Southern Fars, his two German aides were arrested by the British and all his equipment, as well as his secret codes, seized. Nevertheless, during the following three years, he was able to cause such widespread mayhem in the province that he became known as the “German Lawrence.” Anticipating the rapid destruction of British forces in Mesopotamia, he decided to open a corridor from the southeastern reaches of the Ottoman empire to India to be used as a prospective route for an invasion of the Raj. In November, 1915, he led a coup in Shiraz together with pro-German officers of the newly-created Gendarmerie, in the course of which the British Consul and eleven other British subjects were apprehended. The women were later released, but the men were incarcerated in the fortress of Ahram, near the Persian Gulf, which belonged to a pro-German sheikh.

However, Wassmuss's triumph was ephemeral, for his support came mostly from the coastal tribes of Daštastān and Tangestān, which were too far from Shiraz to be of much help. In February, 1916, Qawām al-Molk, the pro-British governor-general of Fars, who had fled to British-occupied Bušehr during Wassmuss's coup, set out for Shiraz with his British-supplied private army. Although he was killed in a hunting accident on the way, his son, who inherited the title, completed the journey, and, together with pro-British officers of the Gendarmerie, recaptured the provincial capital. A new, British-officered Persian force, the South Persia Rifles, was then organized to prevent any further pro-German coups.

After that, Wassmuss directed most of his energies to forming new tribal alliances, especially with the *kalāntar* of Kāzerun and the Qaşqā'i *ilḳāni*. Šowlat al-Dowla was particularly susceptible to his appeal, for he still bore a grudge against the British for their support of the Qawāmi in 1911 and viewed the formation of the South Persia Rifles as a British plot to further increase their power. Moreover, he was easily convinced by Wassmuss that Turkish forces which were then invading Western Persia would soon oust the British from Persia. Therefore, he finally decided to take action against the British. But he quickly learned that he had overestimated the strength of his tribal army. In May 1918, a large Qaşqā'i force attacked a detachment of the South Persia Rifles at Kāna Zenyān, on the Bušehr-Shiraz road. As British troops rushed to the rescue, a major battle took place between the Qaşqā'i and the relief column. In this engagement, Qaşqā'i forces far outnumbered those of



Great Britain, but they were nonetheless decisively defeated. As the war was winding down in Europe, Wassmuss fled to Qom, where he was finally captured by the British in 1919. During the reign of Reżā Shah (1925-1941), the Qašqā'i suffered great hardship. In 1926, Şowlat al-Dowla and his eldest son, Nāşer Khan, were summoned to Tehran as deputies in the new Majles, but they quickly realized that they were virtual prisoners of the Shah. They were forced to cooperate with the central government in its efforts to disarm the Qašqā'i tribes. Then they were stripped of their parliamentary immunity and thrown into jail. Meanwhile, military governors were assigned to the various Qašqā'i tribes, the tribesmen were subjected to the Shah's highly unpopular military conscription law and a new taxation system was established which was often abused by corrupt government tax collectors.

In the spring of 1929, the nomads' resentment, which had been further exacerbated by the barbarity of some of the military governors, led to a widespread uprising in Southern Persia in which the Qašqā'i played the leading role. After several months of fighting, the central government signed a truce according to which Şowlat al-Dowla and Nāşer Khan were reinstated as members of the Majles, the military governors were withdrawn from tribal territories and a general amnesty was declared. However, Reżā Shah was determined to put an end to the tribal system in Persia, and, just as he crushed the Lors, the Kurds and the Arabs, he finally crushed the Qašqā'i. In 1932, the Qašqā'i once more rebelled, but in vain. In 1933, Şowlat al-Dowla was put to death in one of the Shah's prisons, and, shortly thereafter, the Shah, having decided to force the nomads to settle down upon the land, cut off their migration routes with his modern, mechanized army. This shortsighted policy did not produce agriculturists, but only starving nomads, and William O. Douglas was probably right when he wrote that "they would have been wiped out in a few decades had the conditions persisted" (p. 139).

When Reżā Shah abdicated in September 1941, Nāşer Khan and his brother Kōsrow Khan escaped from Tehran, where they had been forced to reside, and hastened back to Fars. Proclaiming himself *ilḡāni*, Nāşer Khan reconstituted the Il-e Qašqā'i, repossessed all the tribal territories and ordered the resumption of the tribal migrations. But he had inherited his father's Anglophobia and propensity for fishing in troubled waters. Certain that the German thrust toward the Caucasus was a mere preamble to a German invasion of Persia and its liberation from the hated British, he, like his father before him, decided to back Germany in a world conflict. Having heard that the



German agent, Berthold Schulze-Holthus (of the Abwehr), was hiding in Tehran, he urged him to come to Fars in the late spring of 1942. Thereupon, Schulze-Holthus set out for Qaşqā'i headquarters in Firuzābād and became Nāşer Khan's military advisor. Later, several more German agents were dropped by parachute in Qaşqā'i territory. But few of the weapons that the Germans had promised to send to the Qaşqā'i ever materialized.

Instead of sending a British force into Fars to subdue the Qaşqā'i, the British prevailed upon the Persian government to do so. In the spring of 1943, Persian troops were duly dispatched to the South and a series of clashes occurred with the Qaşqā'i, the Boyr Aḥmadi and other refractory tribes. In this campaign, the Persian army suffered several major defeats.

Especially devastating was the mass slaughter of the Persian garrison at Samirom by the Qaşqā'i and their Boyr Aḥmadi allies, in which the Persian army lost 200 men and three colonels. A treaty was finally signed between the central government and Nāşer Khan according to which the Qaşqā'i were allowed to retain their autonomy, as well as their weapons, in exchange for accepting the establishment of Persian military garrisons in Firuzābād, Farraşband and Qal'a Pariān. In 1943, Nāşer Khan's two other brothers, Malek Maşur Khan and Moḥammad Ḥosayn Khan returned to Persia from exile in Germany. They were arrested by the British and, in the spring of 1944, they were exchanged for Schulze-Holthus and the other German agents, whose presence among the Qaşqā'i had, by that time, become a liability for Nāşer Khan.

In 1946, there was yet another major tribal uprising in Southern Persia. This time, it was actually encouraged by the central government. The prime minister, Aḥmad Qawām, who was under great pressure by the Soviet Union to accept a Soviet oil concession in Northern Persia, had already been coerced into accepting three Communist Tudeh Party members in his cabinet. He felt that a widespread anti-Soviet uprising in Southern Persia would act as a counterweight to that pressure. Nāşer Khan needed little prompting, for he detested the Soviets as much as he abhorred the British, and he calculated that if, for some reason, the Qawām government should falter, he himself might provide alternate leadership as the head of a grand anti-Communist coalition.

But Nāşer Khan also wanted to improve living conditions in Fars. Therefore, in September 1946, he called a conference of the major tribal and religious leaders of the province at Čenār Rāhdār and a "national" movement called



“Sa’dun” (“The Happy Ones”) was created which demanded, among other things, the resignation of the entire cabinet, except for Premier Qawām, the allocation of two-thirds of Fars’s taxes to the province, the immediate formation of provincial councils and more representatives from Fars in the Majles.

When these demands were rejected, tribes from Kūzestān to Kermān rose en masse. The Qašqā’i seized the towns of Kazerun and Ābāda, and broke through the outer defenses of Shiraz. Premier Qawām’s scheme worked to perfection, for, in October, he was able to form a new cabinet without any Tudeh Party members.

Meanwhile, he had signed an agreement which accepted most of Sa’dun’s demands. Moreover, a few months later, Kōsrow Khan was elected as a member of Qawām’s Demokrāt-e Iran party to represent the Qašqā’i in the Fifteenth Majles, which rejected the Soviet concession.

During the years 1945-1953, Il-e Qašqā’i thrived as never before. It enjoyed almost complete autonomy, and, under the enlightened leadership of the “Four Brothers,” as Šowlat al-Dowla’s sons were called, the tribesmen prospered. Nāšer Khan and Malek Maṣṣūr Khan functioned as tribal leaders in Fars, while Moḥammad Ḥosayn Khan and Kōsrow Khan represented the interests of the confederacy in the Persian capital.

But, in 1953, the Four Brothers once more displayed their anti-Pahlavi sentiments by supporting Moḥammad Mošaddeq in his attempt to overthrow the Shah. Kōsrow Khan severely criticized the Shah in the Majles, and, when Mošaddeq was arrested, Qašqā’i forces briefly threatened to seize Shiraz in a futile attempt to convince the pro-shah Zāhedī government to free him. As a result, in 1954, the Four Brothers were exiled and all their properties were confiscated by the Persian government.

During the 25 years that followed the expatriation of the Four Brothers, new efforts were undertaken by the central government to make the nomads adopt a sedentary way of life. According to Lois Beck, “Because of far-reaching disruptions brought about by scarcity of pastures, government restrictions, undermined tribal institutions, and capitalist expansion, most Qashqa’i found it exceedingly difficult to continue nomadic pastoralism” (1974, p. 251). As a result, thousands of tribesmen moved to cities, such as Shiraz, Bušehr, Ahwāz and Ābādān, seeking work as laborers in factories and in the oil industry. With



the loss of their traditional way of life, the tribesmen gradually lost the cohesion which had once made them strong, and they were unable to prevent the government from establishing direct control over them. In 1963, the government officially declared tribes to be non-existent, and all the remaining khans were stripped of their titles and prerogatives. So confident was the Shah that the tribal problem had at last been solved that he allowed Malek Maṣṣur Khan and Moḥammad Ḥosayn Khan to return to Persia, provided they stayed out of Fars province. Many Qaşqā'i participated in the demonstrations which led to the fall of the Shah in 1979, and, during the revolution, Nāṣer Khan and Kōsrow Khan made their way back to Persia. At first, relations between the Qaşqā'i and the Khomeini regime were harmonious. Nāṣer Khan visited Khomeini shortly after the Ayatollah's arrival in Tehran, and, later, Khomeini publicly praised the Qaşqā'i leaders for their assistance in maintaining order in Fars. Although Nāṣer Khan was warmly welcomed by the Qaşqā'i, he made no attempt to restore tribal autonomy or even to resume his functions as paramount chief of the confederacy. But Khomeini's determination to establish a highly centralized theocratic state soon alienated the tribal population of Persia, and relations with the Four Brothers became increasingly strained. Accusations against Kōsrow Khan to the effect that he had been a CIA agent and an attempt by the Revolutionary Guards to arrest him in Tehran in June 1980 finally led to a complete breakdown in the relationship between the Qaşqā'i and the new regime.

Eluding his captors, Kōsrow Khan sought refuge in the Qaşqā'i capital of Firuzābād in Eastern Fars, where he was joined by Nāṣer Khan and several other tribal chiefs. When Revolutionary Guards converged upon the town, the Qaşqā'i leaders and some 600 tribal warriors set up an armed camp in the nearby mountains. For two years, the Qaşqā'i insurgents defied the central government and repelled repeated attacks by the Revolutionary Guards. In July 1980, Rudāba Kānom, Nāṣer Khan's wife, died of diphtheria in Firuzābād. In April 1982, a surprise night attack by Revolutionary Guards who had been transported by helicopters finally compelled the Qaşqā'i to abandon their camp and move to higher ground, leaving behind all their equipment and medical supplies. A few days later, 'Abdollah Khan, Nāṣer Khan's eldest son, who was the insurgents' only doctor, died of a heart attack. This loss so devastated Nāṣer Khan that he decided to give up the struggle, and, in May 1982 he fled Persia by way of Kurdistan with the help of the Jāf Kurds.

In July, Kōsrow Khan negotiated a settlement with the central government,



which put an end to the tribal rebellion. But, in September 1982, the Islamic Revolutionary Court in Shiraz condemned him to death and he was hung in one of the city's major squares on October 8. Several other Qašqā'i leaders, including Malek Maṣṣur Khan, were also arrested.

When Nāṣer Khan died in January 1984, the history of the Il-e Qašqā'i truly ended, for he was the last *ilḳāni*.

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