



SIĀHKAL

SIĀHKAL, small town and sub-provincial district (*šahrestān*) in the southeastern part of Gilān province. The town is located at lat 37°09' N, long 49°52' E. Siāhkal was a subdistrict (*dehestān*) and then a district (*baḡš*) within the sub-province (*šahrestān*) of **Lāhijān** until 1998, when it became a sub-province. It had an area of 976 km² and a population of 47,210 in 2006 (Markaz, 2006). It is divided into two districts: (1) Markazi, with the subdistricts of Malfajān, Tutaki, and **Ḳarārud**, and (2) Deylamān, with the subdistricts of Deylamān and Pirkuh.

The subdistrict of Deylamān corresponds to the heart of medieval **Deylam**, but, according to Rabino (pp. 280-82), the descendants of ancient Deylamites were to be found in very few places, such as Kalārdeh and Čowsal in the lower hills and Kalātaḳāni in summer pastureland. The local Gāleš, mentioned by Rabino as belonging to eleven different groups, must be mainly autochthonous as well; actually their Gilaki Gāleši dialect (see **Gilān x. Languages**) is often referred to as Deylami.

Important parts of the population have come from outside. According to Rabino (pp. 280-82), four clans were brought in as prisoners by Moḡammad Reżā Khan of Deylamān in the early 19th century: (1) Ṭāleš from Ṭālešdulāb; they were still mentioned to the authors in 1976 as being the bulk of the population in villages south of Siāhkal, such as Kešal, Tuši, Kolāh Gavāber, Kolāhdān, and Lātkiārud, but they had abandoned their Ṭāleši language for Gilaki Gāleši and their Sunni faith for Shi'ism; (2) Gaskari, the former neighbors of the Ṭāleš in western Gilān; (3) "Jangiri" (probably Jahāngiri); and



(4) Eškevari.

The Rišvand Kurds from the adjoining district of ‘Ammārlu settled in mountain villages such as Diārejān, Golak, Tangrud, Zardrud, Tokām, and ‘Ayn-e šayk. Many had continuously come from Qazvin via Qazvin-Lāhijān road, which was functional under the Safavids (cf. Rabino, p. 56), as testified by the remains of two caravansaries in Tutaki and Sardap (Siroux, pp. 35-43). The road went up the valley of Siāhkal to Deylamān and thence to Āsyābar, Čarākuh, Kelišom, and Anbuh, where it crossed the Šāhrud by a monumental bridge; the road went on as far as Alulak and Qazvin (Bazin and Bromberger, p. 87 and map 41).

The lower part of the sub-province, corresponding to the Siāhkal district, includes a narrow fringe of plain (Malafjān subdistrict, which is devoted to rice cultivation) and a broad hilly area where the Gāleš inhabitants combine the resources of limited paddy fields, sericulture, and tea gardens (the latter two activities have been on the decline) and a still active pastoral life (Pourfickoui and Bazin, pp. 57-60). Shepherds (*čupān*) leave early in spring forest pastureland to one or two levels of intermediate pastures where local shepherds join them to go to upper summer pastures such as Čarākuh, south of Deylamān.

The middle-elevation mountains around Deylamān have also a permanent population living on rain-fed cultivation of wheat and barley and pastoral life, which includes inverse (downward) migrations of cattle and sheep to forest *qešlāq* in lower hills in winter and direct (upward) migrations to high pastures, limited to sheep, in summer; cattle-raising peasants stay in the villages for harvesting cereals (*idem*, pp. 52-55). A large part of the population of the subdistrict of Deylamān migrates to the Gilān plain during winter, and some families divide again in summer: one part stays in Deylamān for harvesting wheat, barley, lentils, and chickpeas, whereas another goes to the lowland to harvest paddy and to pick the leaves of tea. Wool-processing crafts, mentioned as important by Rabino (p. 279), are still present in the south of the district: itinerant felt fellers from villages such as Āsyābarak and Kalak, close to Deylamān, or Kelišom and Kārepu, farther to the south, travel around to press felt at their customers’ homes (Bazin and Bromberger, p. 64 and map 32). *Šāl*, the characteristic fabric of shepherds’ clothes, is woven by women, either on a simple horizontal loom set outside or on a loom with pedals (*pāčāl*) installed in houses, and pressed with soapy warm water in order to make it relatively waterproof (*idem*, pp. 68-72 and map 34). Knitting socks is



also an important domestic activity.

This area of Deylamān constitutes an interesting transition zone between the humid Caspian lowlands and the arid interior plateau (idem, p. 41). Thus different features of rural architecture coexist: houses with adobe wall and flat roofs, together with others having a four-slope roof covered with shingles and with stables called *kulom* built completely of wood. Outbuildings are either scattered within a compound enclosed with hedges or are regularly disposed on the sides of a yard; drinking water is obtained either from a well or a source. Deylamān, with a population as low as only 1,237 inhabitants in 2006, has kept its commercial role, especially in summer when surrounding *yeylāq* are densely occupied. Deylamān had a bazaar of 30 shops in Rabino's time (Rabino, p. 279).

This mountainous and wooded region stands as a conservatory of customs and traditions—for instance, the belief in a supernatural tutelary being, the *siāh gāleš* (“black cowherd”), who is believed to be in charge of punishing undisciplined domestic animals, granting rewards to meritorious husbandmen, and accomplishing miracles. At the threshold of the new year, parodic rites announcing the arrival of spring, such as *arusguley* or *ahu čāra*, were represented by strolling players (see [Gilān xvi. Folklore](#)). This area keeps as well the remembrance of the old Gāleš calendar (see Purhadi).

The town of Siāhkal itself is the commercial center for the surrounding hilly area, with a biweekly market on Mondays and Thursdays and two tea-processing factories. It had several administrative buildings and a population of 15,275 in 2006.

For a generation of Iranians, the name of Siāhkal evokes the renowned insurrection in Siāhkal on 8 February 1971, when members of the Fadā'i guerrillas (see [COMMUNISM iii](#)) attacked the gendarmerie post of the town—the bloody onslaught that marked the beginning of a guerrilla movement that lasted until the 1979 Islamic Revolution (Abrahamian, p. 159).

The accession of Siāhkal to the rank of sub-provincial district takes into account the strong identity of the region, which is defended by a local association producing a number of publications such as the *Ketāb-e Deylamān*.



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