



ZEFRA I. THE DISTRICT

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Located 70 km northeast of Isfahan (lat 32°54' N, long 52°7' E) at an elevation of 2,070 m above sea level, Zefra is the administrative center of Zefra sub-district (*dehestān*) in Kuhpāya district (*bakš*), Isfahan sub-province (*šahrestān*), Isfahan Province (*ostān*). (There is another village by the name of Zefra/Jefra on the Zāyandarud River in Lenjān district.) The district of Zefra lies in a meander valley on the southern foothills of the Karkas/Kargas range, which separates Zefra from Ardestān. The district has some thirty hamlets, including Lušun Darra, Čāh Sorḡ, Randavān, Bāḡ-e Gol, Lāvāni, Kiči, Surča, Pesāb/Pisāb-e Bālā, Pesāb-e Pā'in, Ussāči, Vādār, Šastpā, Alakči, Ābegarm, Dizi, Lādura, Ḥini, Qal'a Kohna, Āb Gonješk, and Fešārḡ-e Kohna. The levelness of Zefra's population over three decades (1,848 in 1966 and 1,747 in 1996; Markaz-e āmār-e Irān, 1966; idem, 1996) indicates that massive emigration counteracted high natural population growth. In 2013, Zefra had a permanent population of roughly 2,000 individuals, with an influx of about 1,000 over the weekends by the younger people, who drove from Isfahan to visit their families (author's field notes).

Located in a mountainous setting with Nečaft or Māršnān as the highest peak, Zefra belongs to the cold climate (*sardsir*) and has rich pastureland (Figure 1). A stream cuts across the village, and there are four natural hot springs in the district. Its flora includes *čubak* (used as laundry detergent), wild rue, broom



(*jāz*), barberry (*zerešk*), and thorny shrubs (*kār*) (Rajā'i Zefra'i, 1995). Zefra was famous for its tragacanth (*katirā*), a natural gum obtained from the dried sap of tragantgummi (*buta-ye katirā, gavan*), a species of Middle Eastern legumes (idem, 1994e). Wild animals of the district are wolf, fox, jackal, rabbit, sable (*musula*), porcupine (*taši*), and hedgehog (*jujatiği*), but leopards have vanished since the 1970s. The birds include sparrow, partridge (*kabk*), see-see partridge (*teyhu*), pigeon, ringdove (*puktār*; Pers. *fākta*), *kākoli*, *sangkvāarak*, *domsanja*, crow, magpie (*lašgarak*), owl, falcon (*bāz*), hawk (*šāhin*), vulture (*karkas*), hoopoe (*hodhod*), and woodpecker (see also Rajā'i Zefra'i, 1974b; idem, 1974c).

Historical documents have little mention of Zefra. Nevertheless the village is embellished with a fine congregational mosque from the Saljuq era with subsequent renovations; the mosque's antique gate and pulpit are dated 790/1388 and 791/1389, respectively (Figure 3, Figure 4). The façade of the mosque looks entirely modern (Figure 2); the inside is rustic plain, with thick walls, vaults, and columns (Figure 5). Within the mosque's structure, Maxime Siroux distinguished a core construction, roughly square in shape, supplemented by later additions (Siroux, 1971, tr., p. 42; idem, 1973). The gravestones of the village's cemetery bear some old dates, but none earlier than ca. 1000/1591. An early reference to Zefra might be the "Govra" on the 1747 map drawn by Emanuel Bowen. Valentine Zhukovskiĭ describes Zefra as a large, picturesque village administered by Kupā (see KUHPĀYA). He states that the villagers were very poor and utilized the most rudimentary agricultural tools, household utensils, and arms. The great famine of 1870-72 (see FAMINES IN PERSIA) resulted in a notable drop in Zefra's population of 400 households (Zhukovskiĭ, p. vii).

The traditional economy of Zefra and its hamlets was based on the system of small holders (*ḳorda mālek*), in which the villagers were peasant proprietors. The chief economic infrastructure was four chains of subterranean channels (*kāriz*)—called Nečaft, Mazra'a Qāder, Mazra'a Tāza, and Zefra—which were linearly configured (Rajā'i Zefra'i, 1999a). The irrigation water, divided into 24 *tāqs*, each consisting of 35 *habbas*, was allocated until World War II by means of *runa* (Pers. *tās o taštak*), a simple water clock (see CLOCKS). Each *tāq* was administrated by a water distributor (*abwāb-jam'* or *šāheb tāq*), who was rewarded with one *habba* of the water (*sarek*; Rajā'i Zefra'i, 1983b; idem, 1984). The native measure of land is also called *habba*, equivalent to 366.4 square meters; a *habba* is divided into 20 *gerā*, measuring 18.32 square meters.



Weight was measured by a local maund called *man-e kohna* (4.8 kg), which was also used in the rest of Kuhpāya district with slight variation in the magnitude (Rajā'i Zefra'i, 2009). However, Zefra'i peasants would use the royal maund (*man-e šāh* = 6 kg) to sell their goods in Isfahan; these included tragacanth and almonds, as well as wool, soft wool (*kork*), and ghee, which constituted the major products of Zefra animal husbandry (idem, 1996) that were exported to Isfahan by local muleteers (idem, 1985a; idem, 1997c; idem, 1998).

Chief agricultural products are wheat, almonds, mulberries, and especially a local species of corn (*dorrat-e safid-e kuša-ašā'i*), the cultivation of which had a sharp decline in the late 20th century (Rajā'i Zefra'i, 1983e). Also important are alfalfa, barley, walnuts, and fruits. The village used to have five water mills (Bālā, Miāna, Pā'in, Sarčašma, Gelčāla), which were replaced by modern mills during the period 1960s-1980s. Most of the population is engaged in farming, animal husbandry, and gardening and horticulture (*bāg-dāri*). A good number of village men go to the wastelands in the summer to collect tragacanth (idem, 1994d). Weaving carpets, carrying the Nā'in (q.v.) design, was particular to women (idem, 2006), who were also engaged in other cottage industries (idem, 2003). A distinguished local industry during the 1930s-1950s was making cotton shoes (see *GIVA*), the sole of which was crafted by men and the top by women (idem, 1997a).

Zefra began to be equipped with modern administrative and educational infrastructure under Rezā Shah Pahlavi (r. 1924-41). The number of shops of Zefra dwindled from about thirty-five in the 1940s (Razmārā, p. 104) to fifteen in the first decade of the 21st century (field notes). A modern source of employment for the villagers has been Isfahan Steel Mill (see *ISFAHAN xiv. Modern Economy And Industries (1) Modern Economy of the Province*). In spite of its administrative affiliation with Kuhpāya, Zefra has been economically and communicationally connected primarily to the city of Isfahan, where Zefra'is have built a *ḥosayniya* of their own (Ḥosayniya-ye Zefra'ihā).



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