

Bakhtiari. Political Structure

Territory: approximately 25,000 square miles.

Population: 300,000 maximum : half of which are nomadic.

Residential units: varied - camp groups between 4 - 15 tents:
hamlets - 1 to 30 households (hundreds of them)
villages - up to 100 households (many)
market towns - mixed population with non tribal people.

Many Bakhtiari live in the towns and cities in Khuzistan and Isfahan Provinces.

Economy mixed agriculture and animal husbandry. Few are dependent on animals alone.

Many also have incomes from the Oil industry, working on the fields. An important source of family income comes from wages earned by young men who live for a number of years in Kuwait where wages were higher than in Iran. An unknown proportion of the Bakhtiaris have worked in Kuwait.

Crops Primarily wheat and barley. Rice is also grown in parts of the mountains. A wide variety of fruits and vegetables are cultivated by many Bakhtiaris where settlement either in winter or summer pastures has occurred.

Settlement Increased enormously during the sixties and seventies, primarily as a result of the Land Reform programme and the opening up of the region through improved roads and a concerted effort by the government to settle the nomads.

Administration Civil, through the two provinces of Isfahan (summer quarters) and Khuzistan (winter quarters). A hierarchy of sub districts divides the entire region into units controlled by administrative officials of each of these provinces. The more isolated regions of the mountains have gendarme posts for the maintenance of security. SAVAK, the secret police assume major responsibility for security.

These government agencies work with and through local tribal leaders - the Kalantars, and also appointed heads of village(s) councils.

The effect on local tribal leadership, of increasing government administration has not been uniform. In some areas the position of Kalantar has been radically undermined in others it has been reinforced. In all cases however, the effects of interaction with the apparatus of the State is a determining factor in the political structure and leadership of all the Bakhtiari groups. In this such variables as the location of territory, proximity to the encroaching State and the political role played by the tribe (Taifeh) in question, in the history of the Bakhtiari as a whole, require consideration.

Each of the dozens of Taifehs which make up the Bakhtiari have their own unique but interdependent histories. Not all of this information is available, but from the point of view of the individual Taifehs and their leaders, the Kalantars, they formed elements within a tribal system which became highly centralised in the middle of the 19th century and remained so until the present dynasty - the Pahlavis destroyed this centralised polity and with increasing success replaced the administration of the Bakhtiaris by their own Khans with the present day civil one.

Those taifehs who historically interacted least with their own centralised Bakhtiari leaders (Khans) - i.e. were most distant from the control of the Khans - have a more egalitarian, less hierarchical internal structure. Those who were most involved with the administration of the Khans exhibit a more developed hierarchy of leadership positions - a more stratified internal structure, with greater wealth differential.

One finds a range of involvement with tribal obligations from the most traditional type of Kalantar completely integrated still into the Taifeh structure to the Kalantars who are almost completely detached from tribal obligations and operate more within the formal framework of the state as Persian citizens of variable wealth, usually local entrepreneurs with varied interests in land and animals and for whom being a Bakhtiari is of minimal relevance. The social sphere of the former is strictly tribal, of the latter more varied and provincial.

The personal network - economic, social and political of the Kalantars therefore varies a great deal, comprising both tribal and non-tribal networks.

The potential for participation in the modern state also inevitably varies with different constraints and possibilities operating from taifeh to taifeh, from Kalantar to Kalantar. Some of these are of course determined by ecological factors.

For leadership roles, historical factors involving relationships with the dominating Khans have been crucial. Above all the emergence of the Duraki Khans to positions of paramount control and the effect of their internal differences on tribal leadership still shapes the potential and limitations on the present incumbents of Kalantar and Kadkhoda positions.

The history of the region is inextricably bound up with the populations and government of South West Iran, and has been for at least 11,000 years.

There is archaeological evidence of settlement and of transhumant mountain hamlets from 9,000 B.C.

By 3000 B.C. fertile Khuzistan region extensively settled, irrigation network; herding villages in the foothills.

1300 B.C. height of extensive Elamite Empire, with its sacred city at Shush and the Ziggurat now called Chuga Zanbil on the edge of the foothills.

1200 - 640 B.C. - fall of Elamites, rise of Assyrians. Insecurity, destruction of irrigation and agriculture and rise of semi independent mountain peoples, and warlike mountain pastoralists.

Achamenid Empire 550 - till 3rd century B.C. when Alexander destroyed the Achamaenids.

Time of control of the mountains. Network of roads built through the mountains. Next 500 years until founding of Sassanian Empire in 224 A.D. saw arrival of Parthians.

Period of expansion of population, of agriculture and settlement.

Sassanians 224 - 642 A.D. period of control of mountain region by this administration.

Extensive signs of settlement, irrigation works and much terraced agriculture in the mountains, now given over to pastoralism. Bulk of population appear to have lived in permanent settlements. Like the Achamenids before them the Sassanians built a dense network of roads through the mountains. The migration routes of the Bakhtiari today appear to have been used during Sassanian times.

642 - Arab invasion, conversion of the population to Islam. Not much is known of the early period, except that settlement and irrigation appear to have been disrupted by lack of political control.

10 - 13 Century - massive influx into the region of tribal peoples of mixed Kurdish and Lur origin - include Bakhtiari. Southern Zagros ruled by semi independent principality of Fadlawi Kurds called Atabak. This local dynasty ruled, until emergence of the Safavids, 1491 - 1722, over Persia.

The influx of mixed tribes who came under the local Atabak rule helped the Atabaks to maintain independence from the Seljuq dynasty of Persia and from the Caliphate of Baghdad. At this time Arab sources suggest the region was heavily settled. The Mongol invasion of Iran in 13th century did not apparently radically destroy the settlements in the present Bakhtiari region.

The Atabak dynasty moved their residence in the summer up to the high valleys of Zardeh Kuh range. The political administrative superstructure established by the Atabaks brought stability to the region, which in turn produced greater settlement and extensive cultivation.

The Atabaks were finally killed off by the Timurid dynasty which came to power in Iran in 15th century, by which time the control of the Atabaks over the disparate tribal population of the mountains had diminished, power passing into the hands of the chiefs of these groups. It is at this time the Bakhtiari begin to appear as the dominating tribal group.

Safavid Dynasty 1491-1722 Established Shi'ism as State religion.

Policy, which was replicated by all subsequent dynasties in Iran was to divide and rule the myriad tribal groups in Persia. Ruled through the tribal chiefs, or Khans as they were called after Mongol period of rule. Tribal groups were also moved to different parts of the country as a means of dominating the tribes. The Safavids demanded revenues and cavalry as tribute to the State, and they appointed "Governors" to the tribal regions from the local chiefs, the position of governorship dependent on the ability of the appointee to deliver the tax revenues and cavalry.

Bakhtiari emerge during this period as one of the most important tribal groups, with sporadic mention in the historical sources of various Bakhtiari chiefs from different sections. The capital of Persia was Isfahan, and the Bakhtiaris supplied the State treasury with animals and taxes. It appears to be from this period that the division of the various Bakhtiari groups into Haft Lang and Chahar Lang, based on tax assessments, was established. Each with separate Khans. Under the authority of Shah Abbas the Great (1587-1628) in particular the secure administration brought security, increase in agriculture and settlement.

With death of Shah Abbas, steady decline of effective rule of Safavids, with consequent political infighting within the various Bakhtiari groups. Strained relations with the State and with non tribal neighbours typical of 17th Century.

18th Century - saw the overthrow of the Safavids by Afghan invasion, years of chaos followed the destruction of Isfahan and much of the Bakhtiari summer area and massive destruction of settlement. The emergence of Nadir Shah as ruler

and his political adventures both within Persia and his invasion of Afghanistan and India, until his murder in 1747. His rule was a violent one, particularly with the Bakhtiari, who rebelled against Nadir Shah. Thousands of Bakhtiari, both Chahr Lang and Haft Lang were moved to the North East of Persia as punishment.

As well as rebelling against the Shah, there was a sizeable contingent of Bakhtiari in Nadir's army, who fought with distinction, being responsible for the taking of Qandahar in Afghanistan. As a reward for this one of the Bakhtiari leaders - Ali Saleh Khan was awarded the title of Sardar (commander) and given rights to land in the Bakhtiari mountains. This marks the beginning of the emergence of the Duraki Khans who 100 years later came to dominate the entire Bakhtiari.

On the death of Nadir Shah, a Chahr Lang chief took over the disintegrating State, and set up a member of the previous Safavids as a puppet Shah. He fell foul of his major supporter, who ousted him and established the Zand dynasty, with its capital based in Shiraz. in th 1750s. Their dominance did not extend to the north of Iran which was controlled by the Qajar - Turkish speaking tribal based rulers. These two sets of rulers dueled for power, with the Qajars finally victorious in 1796. They then ruled from Tehran. In this fight for power the Bakhtiaris on the whole supported the Zands, thereby earning the enmity of the emergent victors the Qajars - who ruled until 1925.

The 18th. centruy then was a period of almost continual unrest. The Bakhtiaris were moved to the North East in large numbers, fought for years in the armies of Nadir Shah, had their settlements plundered by Afghans, Nadir's army and also by the Ottomans in the west who took advantage of the political chaos in Iran to invade the Zagros region. The capital shifted first to Shiraz and then to Tehran.

Agricuilture and cultivation suffered severe dislocation, the Bakhtiari region typified by lawlessness and rebellion, with no dominating Khan, increasingly involved in the National political conflict. Apparently a major shift to increasing reliance on animals, at the expense of cultivation with a pattern of long range nomadic movement maintaining larger flocks of sheep becoming the dominant pattern -- constrained laregly by the political insecurity of the region.

19th century Emergence of 2 dominant Khans in the first half of the century.

Generally relations with the Qajars increasingly strained as various brigand tribal chiefs raided out of the mountains looting in the provinces of Isfahan and Khusistan. The period is marked by struggles between the Haft Lang groups and the Chahr Lang. Mohammad Taqi Khan emerged as dominating leader of the Chahr Lang - incurred the suspicion of the Qajar monarch, and with the help of several Haft Lang chiefs, the Mohammed Taqi Khan was captured and killed by the central government. in 1841. Chahr Lang leaders never again played an important part in Bakhtiari politics.

Husain Quli Khan and his brothers were instrumental in capturing Mohammed Taqi. After considerable fighting between the Haft Lang Khans - the Bakhtiarwand Khans were defeated by the Duraki Khans - Husain Quli Khan and his brothers. Husain emerged as the dominating Khan and in 1846 was conferred with the title of ILKHAN - ruler of all the Bakhtiari by the Qajar monarch. Before he did so, Husain and his immediate relatives had to face the combined forces of the other Haft Lang and Chahr Lang groups in what is called the "fight of the 9000". They did so successfully and wiped out the leaders of these other groups.

No rival to the Ilkhan's position emerged in the following 36 years rule and centralisation of the Ilkhan. He assiduously paid the State the assessed taxes and provided cavalry for the army. Collecting taxes was of course a lucrative position with much room for extortion. The Ilkhan was given the right to collect taxes in the regions adjacent to Bakhtiari territory proper, as well as huge land grants in Isfahan provinces, where he thus became one of the major landlords of the Province. The Ilkhan and his family could therefore acquire and amass wealth far greater than any previous Khan had been able to do. The Khawanin (family of Duraki Khans) also bought or coerced large tracts of land in Khuzistan province where they could expand more freely than in the heavily settled province of Isfahan,.

As they emerged out of their mountain territory they came into increasing conflict with their tribal neighbours and with the Governor of Isfahan, the Zill ex-Sultan, the Shah's eldest son (not crown prince because had a low status mother). It was the Zill who murdered the Ilkhan in 1882, when he came with his eldest son to deliver the annual taxes to Isfahan. With this murder, the Khans were plunged into the bitter internal conflict - Ilkhani and Haji Ilkhani factions described in lectures.

20th Century At the turn of the century the British move into the scene, opening up a trade route along one of the migration routes. The Khans obtained wealth from tolls of all mules passing along, which amounted to thousands of pounds annually.

The discovery of oil, the constitutional revolution and the emergence of the Bakhtiari on to the national scene has been covered in lectures.

Dual leadership emerged and lasted till the abolition of the Khans rule in the 1930's by Reza Shah. The Ilkhan and his second in command Ilbeg being chosen from each faction, so that both were represented.

The political history of the Khans and therefore of the Bakhtiari becomes inextricably bound up in national politics and with the British interests in the south.

During and after the first world war the British tried desperately to rationalise the Bakhtiari administration with singular lack of success. They cajoled the Khans into accepting for a period of 5 years 1912-17 the rule of one man from the Haji Ilkhani section with the Ilbeg from the Ilkhan section. This scheme failed after a couple of years.

The last major Ilkhan was a member of the Ilkhani faction, and he was appointed as Governor of the Bakhtiari by Reza Shah after the position of Ilkhan was abolished in 1934. From 1938 a civil (military governor) was appointed, lasting till Reza Shah was forced to abdicate in 1941. The British during the second world war were instrumental in reappointing this leader as Governor in 1942 - 1947 roughly, when a civil administration was again established. This civil administration continues to the present.

The days of tribal power are now over, with the last serious tribal uprising occurring in the early sixties.

The emergence of the dominating and ruthlessly autocratic Duraki Khans embroiled the tribes in their many conflicts with the Persian State, conflict with the tribesmen have paid dearly for. The internal conflict within the Khans profoundly affected the leadership system within the Bakhtiari, giving it a force and articulation it never had prior to this period. It is significant that on the whole the Bakhtiari heartily loathed their Khans this century, indicative of the detachment of these rulers from their tribal origins. On a much more restricted scale a similar process can be seen at the level of local Kalantars at the present, as they become increasingly detached from a decaying tribal organisation, increasingly depoliticised and integrated into the State administrative structure.

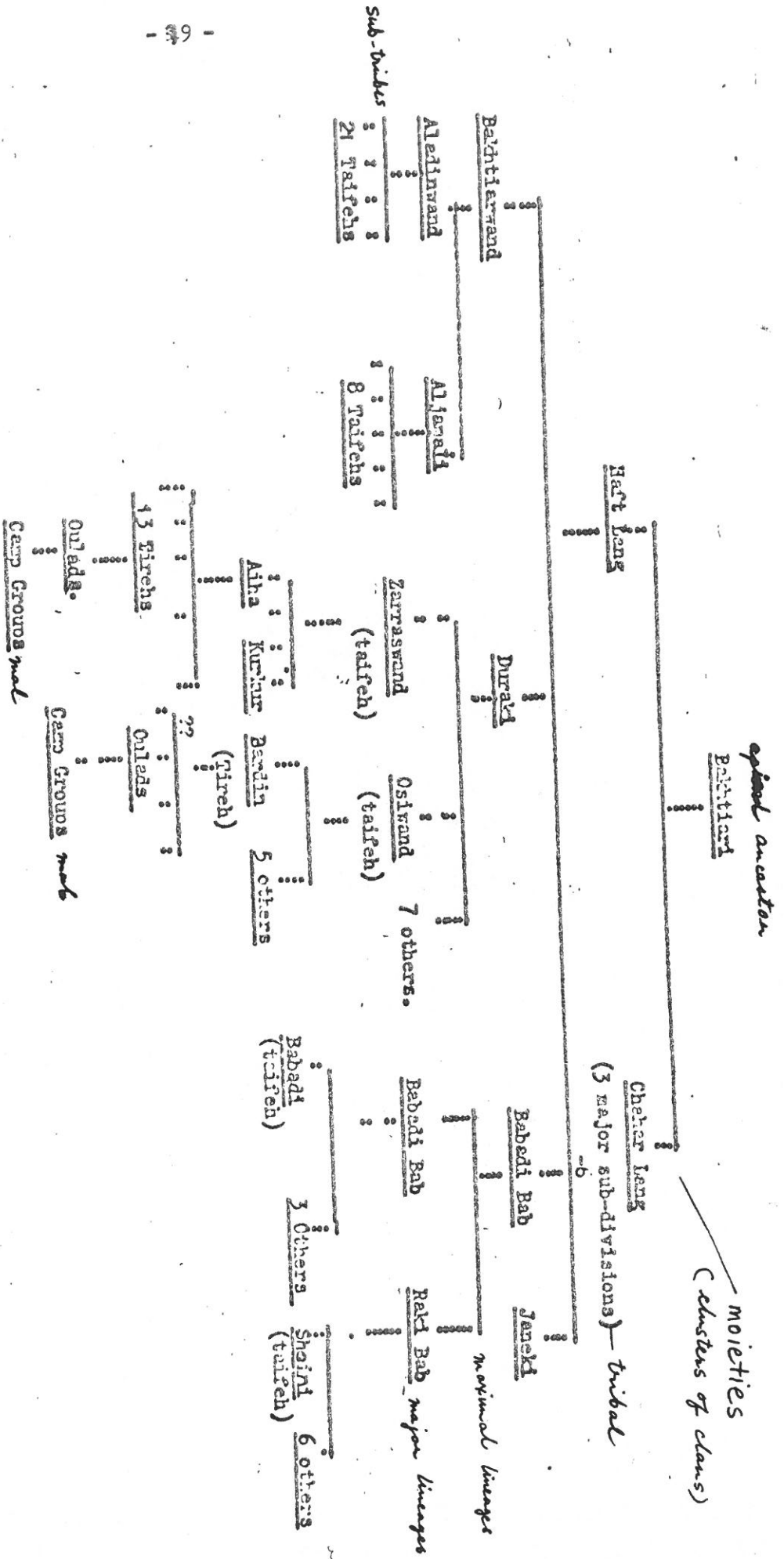
Iranian Tribes

<u>Tribal group</u>	<u>Language</u>
Shahsavari	Turkish dialect
Kurds	Kurdish
Lurs	Luri, a Persian dialect
Bakhtiari	"
Kuhgelu	"
Mamasani	"
Qashqa'i	Turkish dialect
Khamseh (Bassori and 4 others)	Arabic, Turkish and Persian dialects
Arab	Arabic
Baluch	Baluchi
Turkoman	Turcoman

With the exception of the Kurds, Arabs and Turkomen, all these groups adhere to Shia Islam.

<u>Tribal political divisions</u>	<u>Leadership</u>
II - tribe, or confederation of tribes	Ilkhan- paramount chief Khawanin- dynastic families Khan - chief of tribe
Taifeh - tribe or sub-tribe	Khan, Kalantar
Tireh - tribal section	Katkhoda
Tash - maximal lineage	Katkhoda, Rish sefid
Oulad - lineage	Rish sefid
Korboh - minimal lineage	"
Mal - tent, camp group	Eldest male

The terms for political divisions and for leaders are fluid.



This is a severely truncated diagram but it should illustrate the sorts of divisions.