

History.

The area in which the Bakhtiari live, known as Bakhtiari territory has been inhabited by many different peoples for at least 9000 years. The pre-modern province of Khuzistan, previously called Arabistan, in which the Bakhtiari winter pastures are found, is filled with ancient ruins and archaeological excavations this century have uncovering more evidence of continuous settlement in the region going back to 4000 B.C. These early ^{neolithic} settlements were small, with the population apparently dependent on unirrigated rain watered cultivation and on animals. The plains area of Khuzistan was occupied at this time by a people called Khuz, from which the name of the region is believed to have been taken.

By the year 3000 B.C. this fertile region has supported towns with irrigation systems and a great increase in agricultural production and the population appears to have been split into principalities, known through their mutual fighting. With the increase in agriculture, the animals would have had to have been sent further away from the crops, and there is evidence from the Archaeological researches of Flannery and Braidwood, of early "herding" villages even prior to this period in the valleys and foothills of Luristan to the north where the herds were grazed during the summer, away from the summer heat of the plains.

This form of transhumance with permanent village basis but maintaining herds which move out in the summer months, is still dependent on fixed water and pastures, with the size of the herds limited to the carrying capacity of the land at the driest part of the year.

Long range nomadism, entails the movement and of people and animals moving between winter and summer pastures, able to maintain larger flocks through moving the flocks to progressively higher fertile pasture land.

After ^{came} The warring principalities and the rise of the ancient Elamite ~~After~~ empire culminating in the building of the elamite Ziggurat at Chuga Zambil just north of Susa about 1300 B.C. saw a time of prosperity and security in the area

The Elamite empire stretched deep into the Zagros mountains, which at the time appears to have been heavily settled. From 1200 -640 B.C. saw the fall of the Elamites and their final overthrow by the Assyrians. This period of conflict and destruction gave rise to the semi independent rule of the mountain peoples, partly as a result of the destruction of agricultural and irrigation works. It wasn't until the overthrow of the Median Empire by Cyrus the great about 550 B.C. that security was once more brought to the mountains, and the rule of the warlike mountain nomads brought to an end under the control of the Achaemenian rulers. The Achaemenids founded the ceremonial capital of Persepolis about 520 B.C. and his winter capital at Susa near the foothills of the Zagros. A network of roads and communications spanned the Zagros between the two capital cities between which the Achaemenids shifted seasonally.

The Achaemenids in turn were destroyed by the Greek armies of Alexander, who marched through the Zagros, capturing Izeh, a small town deep within the Zagros, ^{later} now known as Mal Amir to reach and destroy Persepolis. This defeat of the mountain people was only nominal, and present day local myths of Alexander being unable to subjugate the Bakhtiari are gross exaggerations. Alexander's aim was to destroy the capital city of Persepolis, and merely to pass through the Zagros.

The later Hellenization of southern Iran can still be seen from inscriptions found within the Bakhtiari mountains. The Greeks brought vines with them and traces of these wild vines are still to be found in Shimbar, one of the major valleys in the central part of today's Bakhtiari country. These vines are reputed to have been established by the Greeks who followed Alexander.

The next 500 years until the founding of the Sassanian empire in 224 A.D. saw the arrival of the Parthians. There are many signs of Parthian rule within the mountains, especially north of Izbh. During this 500 years there appears to have been a steady increase in the

population and an expansion of agriculture and settlement. But it was under the rule of the Sassanian Empire, which lasted till it was overthrown by the advancing Arab armies carrying Islam before them in 642, that security and along with it the rapid expansion of settlement and cultivation took place in the Zagros mountains.

There are extensive signs, ruins, of settlements and also of extensive terraced agriculture on all of the mountain valleys now given over to pastoralism. Ancient irrigation channels from this period are also found throughout the mountains. The bulk of the population seems to have lived in permanent settlements, farmers rather than nomadic pastoralists. Like the Achamenids before them, but more extensively, the Sassanians built a communications network criss crossing the mountain ranges, so that all the valleys of the region, which run in a North-west - South East direction were connected by roads over mountain passes and through the ravines which cut the mountains in this region. There are Sassanian reliefs still evident on passes which are today used by the migrating Bakhtiari. Today's major routes through the mountains appear to have been in use during the Sassanian period. The Sassanians also built bridges over the major river in the Zagros system - the Karun which arises in the Zardeh Kuh range.

Till the time of the Arab invasion of the 7th century A.D. it would seem that the population of the southern Zagros was primarily settled, with flocks of animals grazed on the higher pastures. A form of transhumance by tribal people organised people. There is no evidence of a primarily nomadic people dependent on animals and following long range pastoralism. A partially nomadic people then, with the stress on settled agriculture, irrigated and terraced where necessitated by the mountain terrain.

Not much is known about the effect of the Arab invasion of 640 A.D. but the ~~const~~ higher taxation, the spoiling of the soil through defective and neglected drainage, the lack of political control over the plains of Khuzistan radically disrupted the care of the extensive irrigation canals on which settlement and agriculture depended. This left the area vulnerable to attack by the territorially expanding mountain peoples from the north. The historical sources speak mostly about the Kurdish people, raiding the Khuzistan settlements and it is known that the Kurds had raided the area as early as the 10th century A.D. To the Arab Geographers writing at the time the mountain tribes appear to have been called Kurds regardless of their origin. Minorski, the Russian historian writes that the large part of the southern ~~Sagros~~ Zagros mountains was ruled by a people called the Shuls, and the area in the south called Shulistan. The northern area was called Luristan. Luristan was formed of two parts, Greater Lur and the Little Lur, each ruled by a family of Lur princes. ¹² in the 12th Century. Greater Lur, which is now where the Bakhtiari live, was invaded and the Lur princes overthrown by the Fadlawi Kurds who founded the Atabeg (Atabak) dynasty. These Fadlawi Kurds came from Syria and appear to have established themselves successfully in the area as a settled tribal principality, independent of the Saljuq dynasty to the north. about 1155 A.D.

At the beginning of the 13th century, there was a massive influx of tribal peoples into the Zagros from Syria, during the time of Salah ed Din (known popularly in the west as Saladin, who fought the Crusaders) These tribes joined the standard of the ruling Atabak of Greater Luristan Hazarasp. Although the exact origin of these mixed tribal peoples is unclear, as to whether they were Kurds or Lurs or Arabs, it appears likely that they were a combination of all three. It is from this period that the earliest known reference to the Bakhtiari comes. The names of about 30 tribal groups of these immigrant peoples are mentioned

in Hamdullah Mostaifi's Tarikh-e Gozida(1330), including the 'Ukaili, Gotwand, Osteraki, Mammasani and Bakhtiari. All of these groups are still to be found in the Zagors mountains.

With the help of these tribes the Atabaks consolidated the political unity of Greater Luristan, and its independence both from the Saljuq^{id} dynasty in Persia and from the Caliph of Baghdad. There were Atabak rulers until the middle of the 15th ~~enet~~ century in Greater Luristan, although some historians of the period suggest that the last of the effective Atabaks was Muzaffar-edDin Afrasiab 11. at the turn of the 14th century. The great Arab geographer Ibn Battutah, records his journey through the Bakhtiari mountains, staying at the court of of the Atabak Amāf Afrasi^{ab} or ruler in the city of Mal Amir (previously called Izadj) -

At this time, the area would appear to have been heavily settled permanently, and Ibn Battutah reports that throughout the mountains there were hospices for travellers, and schools in Mal Amir. Noweher does he discuss nomadic tribesmen or vast ruins reputedly caused by the Mongol invasions of the 13th century. After the Mongols, Hulagu Khan founded his dynasty in Azarbaijan in the norht of Iran, the Atabaks of Greater Luristan ruled as his vassals. The Atabak Shams ad Din Alp Argun was appointed governor of Greater Luristan by Hulagu and restored the disrputed province ruling wisely. He is believed to have brought with him, the experience of Mongol administration learned at the court of Hulagu Khan. As Lambton reports from the Persian sources, the Atabaks maintained the habit of moving their residence in th- summer up to the high valleys of the Zardeh Kuh range in the Zagros. But as we have seen the population of the mountains has always combined agriculture with pastoralism in varying degrees, and has always been tribally organised.

Undoubtedly the political administrarive superstructure established by the Atabaks enhanced the stability of the area and made possible

extensive cultivation. The balance between pastoralism and agriculture weighted towards agriculture with probably a transhumant type of pastoralism rather than the later long range movements which arose out of the subsequent political disruption in succeeding centuries.

The last of the weaker Atabaks was reputedly ~~murdered~~ killed by the Timurid rulers in 1433. With the disappearance of these provincial rulers, ~~leadership~~ rulers of the tribes of Greater Luristan, power passed into the hands of the chiefs of the tribes. The Bakhtiari began to emerge as the most powerful of these groups, and the area became known as the Bakhtiari.

Persia

The Safavids came to power in 1491 and ruled until 1722. Their policy, one which was to be repeated by all subsequent dynasties in Iran was to divide and rule the myriad tribal peoples in Persia. They ruled through the tribal chiefs, or Khans as they were called after the Mongol period of rule, but pitting each against the other. Tribal groups were moved to different parts of the country on other policy continued under later dynasties.

There are many Farmans - royal decrees issued by various Safavid monarch to different Bakhtiari chiefs reported for different Bakhtiari groups and these are used as claims of past glory by several of the present Bakhtiari Tawahef or tribes. In return for the payment of taxes to the Shah, -Am Taj Amir, Khan of the Osteraki section of the Bakhtiari, was appointed governor of the Bakhtiari in greater Luristan by Shah Tahmasp who ruled Persia between 1524-1575. He failed to raise the taxes and was killed by the Shah and replaced by Jahangir-e Bakhtiyari, who was pledged to raise the monetary equivalent of 10,000 mules to the State treasury. In return Jahangir was given the right to collect taxes in some of the districts of Khuzistan, and the cities there of Shushtar and Dizful, which formerly had been granted to the Arab leaders of this region. This Jahangir was of the Babadi.

Berissan sources of the time of Shah Abbas,, who ruled 1587-1628, from his capital of Isfahn mention that, Jahangir Khan of the Bakhtiari and his men acuitted themselves successfully against the Qizilbash, of Rūm, Turkish tribes who had earlier been supporters of the Safavids. Jahangir was appointed to ehlp supervise the building of a tunnel to divert the head waters of the Karun river rising in Zardeh Kuh and flowing west to Khuzistan, to the Zayendehrud which flwos down into Isfahan province. Reference is made in the histories , in the lists of provincial governors to Jahangir's son Khalil, as the governor of Bakhtiari. The increasing importance of the Bakhtiari, which included supplying the treasury in Isfahan with animals for meat, and with extensive taxes is revealed in them being placed as one of the most important governors in Persia.

It was during the period of Safavid rule and administration, that the major division within the Bakhtiari tribes was created. For tax purposes the separate tribes were split into two groups called Chahar Lang and Haft Lang., for tax purposes. While a number of different explanations have been put forward as to the precise meaning of this division, it is generally supposed that . these two groups paid different rates of taxation . Chahr Lang means 4 feet, haft lang means 7 feet. Lang means leg, and also haiff of a pair. Animals are counted in pairs or "joft" in the Bakhtiari dialect. The nomads were taxed in kind, and the taxes were assessed in kind. For example the Shahsavan, turkish tribes in the north of Iran were assessed in camels, the Qashqa'i tribes to the south of the Bakhtiari in sheep, and the Bakhtiari in mules. This mode of taxation lends credence to the fact that in Fars in south Iran a much higher degree of long range nomadism was practised, unlike amongst the Bakhtiari at this time, who were not taxed in sheep but in mules - transport animals. It suggests that the Bakhtiari were primarily a settled people practisiing trānshumance with fewer animals. The Chahr Lang were assessed at a higher rate of taxation 1; 4 while the haft lang 1:7.

J. Babush

This division of the groups of ~~tribes~~ Bakhtiari tribes continues today and relations between the two groups has rarely been cordial. Each had their own Khans and appear to have had on the whole good and peaceful realtions with the great Safavid Ruler Shah Abbas.

Under the authority of the Shah, there was an increase in agriculture and settlement. This can be seen particularly in the region of Bazuft valley in the central part of the Bakhtiari mountains, which was heavily deforested during Shah Abbas's reign, This region was later destroyed by the Afghans in 1722, when there was a reported 300 odd settlements in this valley raised to the ground.

1628

On the death of Shah Abbas the order established by him soon disintegrated.

The Bakhtiari who were not united under any single leader, became chronically disunited with the various chiefs of the many groups vying with each other for power. There had been in the 16th. century an influx of Arab tribes into Khuzistan, which created pressures on the Bakhtiari groups in the Khuzistan foothills. From this time onwards, the Bakhtiari have an increasingly strained relationship with their neighbours and with the gradually decaying Safavid State.

With the invasion of the Afghans and the downfall of the Safavids early in the 18th century, the Bakhtiari again make an appearance. Approximately 12,000 Bakhtiari under the leadership of two Khans, took part in the abortive defence of the capital Isfahan in 1722. Parts of the northern area of the Bakhtiari were laid waste by the Afghans and disastrously plundered. Nader

Nader Shah, eventually won sufficient support, defeating the Afghans and establishing himself on the vacant throne. This famous but violent tribal ruler, an Afshar, was faced by rebellious tribes, particularly the Bakhtiari. Taking advantage of the political chaos in Persia, the Ottomans had invaded the west and had reached as far as the Bakhtiari mountains who engaged them in the guerilla type warfare suitable to the mountains.

Simultaneously the Haft Lanf and the Chahr Lang were united in rebellion against Nadir Shah. Many of their Khans and local leaders had been captured and imprisoned by Nader. One of these, Ali Sa' Saleh Khan, of the Duraki Haft Lang, said that the tribes would continue in revolt without their leaders. If he were released he would reduce the trouble and produce the 12,000 men Nader had demanded. Some of the Khans were kept as hostages, the rest released, and the Bakhtiari under Ali Saleh helped to fight off the encroaching Afgh- forces of the Ottoman empire. One of

One of the Chahr Lang Khans, Ali Morad, continued to rebel, threatening to overthrow Nader and restore the Safavid rulers. He was defeated by a force of Nader's army sent through the Bakhtiari mountains and was executed. As a punishment for their constant rebellions, Nader Shah on two occasions transported forcibly several thousand Bakhtiari to his north east borders in Khurasan. Further massively disrupting the agricultural basis of the mountains.

Haft Lang

The Bakhtiari continued in Nadir's army under Ali Saleh, and distinguished themselves in the siege of Qandahar, being responsible for the success of this siege. As a reward, Ali Saleh Khan was awarded the title of Sardar, the first time a Persian monarch had so ordered honoured a Bakhtiari leader. This marks the beginning of the emergence of the Duraki Khans, to what was to become within 100 years, a position of total dominance for the first time ever of any one Khan over the Bakhtiari as a whole.

On the death of Nader in 1747, the thousands of displaced Bakhtiari families returned to the mountains from Khorasan. Political anarchy prevailed for several years marked inevitably by a further decline in cultivated areas, disrupted trade and almost total insecurity.

One of the Chahr Lang Bakhtiari Khans, Ali Merdun attempted and succeeded from a brief period till 1750 in establishing his suzerainty over much of Southwestern Iran. He ruled as through the Safavid puppet

Isma'il III and had coins struck in his name, where Ali Merdun refers to himself as the "Slave" of Ismail.

~~J-Maleom~~ His principal supporter was Karim Khan of the Zand tribe in the north of Luristan. Ali Merdun became jealous of Karim Khan's growing popularity. He had killed the governor of Isfahan, and Karim Khan considering himself ~~next-on-Ali-Merdun's-~~ to be next in turn attacked Ali Merdun and after a number of battles in the Bakhtiari mountains Ali Merdun was killed, leaving Karim Khan Zand in control.

The Zands ruled southern Iran from Shiraz, and dueled for power with the dominant Turkish speaking group of the Qajars in the north for overall control of Iran, until finally being ousted in 1796 by the Qajars, who ~~then-~~ established their capital city in Tehran in the north.

In the disputes throughout the latter half of the 18th century, the Bakhtiari sided mainly with the Zands, which earned them the enmity of the Qajars, who finally established their own dynasty, which ruled until they were deposed on 1925, by the present rulers, the Pahlavis.

It was not until 1813 that the Qajars managed to at least partially subdue the Bakhtiari tribes in their mountain fastnesses.

The eighteenth century thus was a period of almost continuous unrest, with the Afghan invasion, the rise and fall of Nadir Shah, the disruptive chaos by Ali Merdun and the struggle between the Zands and the Qajars. The Bakhtiari tribes were moved, their settlements plundered in places, embroiled increasingly in National politics, which while the capital was in Isfahan allowed for the emergence of Ali Merdun, but with the removal of the capital to Shiraz and then to Tehran, the Bakhtiari fortunes changed. There was increasing lawlessness in the mountains, with typically a severely dislocated and internally fighting tribal groups. No one group able to dominate any other. Agriculture and cultivation could not help but suffer considerable, and the pattern of reliance on animals more than crops intensified, with long range nomadism becoming

the norm. Internal tribal struggles first between the Haft Lang and Chahr Lang, and then with internal struggles for power between the various Haft Lang tribes characterised the first half of the 19th century.

It is from the early part of the 19th century that the relations between the Bakhtiari and the Qajar state became increasingly strained, with brigand chiefs raiding out of the mountains, looting their non tribal neighbours in Isfahan and Khuzistan provinces. The Qajars were unable to control their tribal population with much success, and the history of the period is of the emergence of the two major tribal confederation, the Bakhtiari, in conflict with the Provincial rulers of Isfahan and Khuzistan, and the Turkish speaking Qashqa'i in the province of Fars. The Bakhtiari and the Qashqa'i became intense and hostile competitors for positions of power with the central government. On many occasions, each would intrigue at the Qajar court, trying to turn the Shah against ~~thei~~ each other, suggesting that one or the other was attempting to spread their influence to overthrow the Qajar dynasty. Such suspicions were on many occasions acted upon, with the Qashqa'i and Bakhtiari leaders accusing each other of betrayal. This brought the Bakhtiari and Qashqa'i tribal populations into conflict with each other in the south of the Bakhtiari territory which borders of the Qashqa. Constant raids between the two tribal confederations took place, which made settled cultivation difficult if not often impossible. The theme of insecurity leading to a further reliance on pastoral movement with larger herds continues.

It is obvious than then that nomadic movement with animals is not merely constrained by the ecological and climatic conditions of the mountains. Under conditions of peace and security, controlled by a stable and firm administration, permanent settlement with some animal husbandry is not only possible but would appear to have prevailed at various times for the past several thousands of years. The Achaemenids,

the Sassanians, the Fadlawi Atabaks and at the height of Safavid power were all periods marked by permanent settlement and an agricultural regime predominant. The tax assessment in mules rather than in sheep by the Safavids would seem to confirm this impression.

As a result of prevailing political insecurity both inside and in particularly outside the mountains, with the periodic destruction of crops, fields, settlements and irrigation works, appears to have been enough to swing the balance towards animals and the development of a more pastoral regime, with larger flocks and less cultivation becoming the norm.

What is clear is that the situation oscillates over time. The tribes are organised for a dual economy. Gross shifts by large sectors of the population towards nomadic movement and reliance on animals comes about largely through political considerations. Only seldom have the Bakhtiari been an isolated group living in the mountains. There always has been considerable interaction with their non tribal neighbours. As has been seen, the Achamenids and the Sassanians built routes through the mountains which facilitated trade, integrating the mountains into the economy of the state.

It is basically since the 18th century that the Bakhtiari have become increasingly isolated, and more nomadic, with a characteristically antagonistic relationship to the changing dynasties,

Not until the autocratic rule of Reza Shah who was determined to crush the potential threat to his dream of establishing a stable Modern Nation from his rise to power in 1925 till today has this isolation changed. The Bakhtiari can not avoid the encroachment of a determined state, which in the 1930s enforced settlement on the tribes rigorously by sending in the first non tribal army in the history of Persia. In the 1960s and 70s the benefits of modern education, sanitation, and political security are now inducing more and more tribesmen to settle more or less permanently.

Areas of the mountains which hundreds of years ago sustained a settled population, such as the Bazuft valley, are now seeing the resettlement of these areas after 300 years of almost constant unrest and in many areas an exclusive reliance on animals.

A careful examination of contemporary ecological exploitation, reveals the pattern of millenia, that of a dual economy, variably balanced between animal husbandary, long range shifting of people and pastures and agriculture practiced in varying degrees. Some are exclusively farmers, others are exclusively herders, many combine both in different ways and to different degrees.

The traditions of 300 years of movement, of nomadism are engrained in the Bakhtiari. They carry the triumphs and failures of their past in their internal tribal organisation.

We have dealt briefly with the political decay and tribal disunity of the 18th century. The 19th century and up till the emergence of Reza Shah Pahlavi in the third decade of this century saw the emergence of two dominating Bakhtiari Khans, each cut down by the central government one from the Chahr Lang in the first half of the 19th century and one, a Haft Lang Kahn in the second half. Under this latter, who became the Ilkhan, the Paramount leader of all the Bakhtiari, the Bakhtiari emerge as a powerful national force, an apparently united confederation which played a vital role in the national political life of Persia just after the turn of the century. It is this most recent career that dominates and has helped create the Bakhtiari of today, the nomad, free and proud of his constantly threatened independence.