

# CARPETS OF THE KHANS

## Part 1

By Ian Bennett

*Over the past few years, an increasing number of often large and always imposing late 19th and early 20th century carpets have appeared on the market bearing ornate inscriptions either in a strip at one end or in cartouches. In almost all cases these inscriptions indicate that the carpet was made by the Bakhtiari for a named khan. This two-part essay brings together a significant number of these splendid weavings for the first time, within the framework of a history of the Bakhtiari and of their Great Khans.*

The rugs which constitute the focus of this study represent an extremely interesting, perhaps unique, social and artistic record. They are usually classified as 'Bakhtiari' in the literature (with the obvious exception of those examples which clearly have different origins), but most modern writers are careful to distinguish between them and what could more accurately be described as 'tribal' weavings.

A. C. Edwards, for example, remarked that rugs woven in the Chahar Mahall Valley should not properly be described as Bakhtiari at all, although this rather discounts the particular circumstances under which they were made. It is necessary and useful to make such a distinction, but readers should be aware of certain nuances in the terms 'Bakhtiari' and 'tribal' which render the difference not quite so unequivocal as has been supposed.

The anthropologist Jean-Pierre Digard, whose elegant study of



2. Yusif Khan Amir Mujahed's house in Shahr Kord.

Bakhtiari nomadism should be read by anyone interested in tribal weaving,<sup>2</sup> seems to be unaware of any distinction. In his chapter 'Techniques de Fabrication', Digard notes the good quality of some Bakhtiari knotted pile carpets (*qali* – which he describes as '*tapis de couverture du sol*'). He illustrates a

detail of a typical 'garden tile' rug in the context of nomadic weaving and comments that it has '*un decor assez particulier*' and that '*motifs, conservés par la tradition, sont exécutés sans modèle préalablement dessiné.*' ('preserved by tradition, are executed without cartoons').

In reality, the rug Digard illustrates has little, if anything, to do with nomadic Bakhtiari weaving, nor is its design either peculiar to or, as far as I can judge, originally by the Bakhtiari. It is likely that many of the carpets made in the Chahar Mahall village workshops were woven from a numbered design sheet with colour notes, especially as some are very large and of complex design.<sup>3</sup>

We are aware of the environment in which the majority of so-called Bakhtiari carpets were made – the villages of the Chahar Mahall Valley west of Esfahan – and also that there are nomadic Bakhtiari weavings markedly different in design and structure, but our knowledge of the latter group is sketchy. As James Opie

### 1. Bakhtiari Carpet (left).

South Central Iran, Chahar Mahall.  
3.23 × 5.20 m (10' 7" × 17' 1").

*Inscription: Farmayesh Aqa-e Morteza Quli Khan Bakhtiari 1331 ('By Order of His Excellency Morteza Quli Khan [of the] Bakhtiari 1912/13').*

Morteza Quli Khan (1877 – ca. 1945) was the son of Najaf Quli Khan Samsam al-Saltaneh II and Bibi Saheb Jan. In 1912 he was created Ilbaigi (second-in-command) to Nasir Sadar Jang, who enjoyed, perhaps, the greatest power of any Bakhtiari Ilkhan. The titles Ilkhan and Ilbaigi were officially abolished by Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1933, but Morteza, also Ilbaigi at that time, was made Governor of Khuzistan. Ten years later, he was made Governor of a newly created Bakhtiari entity which included the Chahar Mahall. This, one of the most magnificent of the known 'Khan' carpets, may have been made to celebrate Morteza's elevation to Ilbaigi, although this title does not appear on inscriptions, for reasons which I will suggest in Part 2. Courtesy Robert E. Kruthoffer Jr, Lexington, Kentucky.





**3. Bakhtiari Carpet with Three Ladies and a Dog**  
South Central Persia, Chahar Mahall (Shamsabad).  
2.94 × 3.62 m (9'8" × 11'11").

*Inscription:* Farmayesh Aqa-ye Amir Mujahed amal-e Bakhtiari 1329 ('Order of His Excellency Amir Mujahed, the work of [the] Bakhtiari 1911/12').

This extraordinary carpet was woven in the same workshop and for the same khan as (20), although five years later. It is in archetypal Qajar style and is to be published in Parviz Tanavoli's forthcoming *Kings, Heroes and Lovers*. Mr Tanavoli suggests that it was woven in Shamsabad, a village south of Shahr Kord; this is probably correct since this village was owned by Amir Mujahed, whose grand villa, for which these carpets were woven, still exists (see 2). Private Collection, Tehran.

has pointed out, unquestionable Bakhtiari nomadic rugs of good age are rare.<sup>4</sup>

Much work remains to be done on the weaving of west Persian tribal groups – the Kurds, Shahsavan, Luri and Bakhtiari among others – and many attributions of weavings from this area are, at present, the result of guesswork. Given the physical proximity of the Luri and Bakhtiari and their close familial ties, it is possible that such differences as may have existed between their nomadic weavings are now all but indistinguishable.

#### Inscribed Village Workshop Rugs

All except one of the Bakhtiari carpets illustrated in this essay are the products of village workshops in the Chahar Mahall. This is the first link between them. The second is that all of them bear inscriptions stating that they were commissioned for individually named Bakhtiari khans. This indication of patronage, contained in the Farsi word *farmayesh* ('by order of') followed by the name of a khan, does not necessarily mean that the rug was woven for that khan's exclusive use; it may indicate only that the rug was



**4. Hajjiyah Bibi Nilufar,**  
(d. 1913), the favourite daughter of Husain Quli Khan Ilkhan and a full sister to Hajji 'Ali Quli Khan Sardar As'ad II and Khusrau Khan Bahadur al-Daulah Salar Arfa' Sardar Zafar. Like many of the Bibis, she was noted as a skilled weaver. Courtesy Gene Garthwaite, New Hampshire.

woven in a workshop owned or financed by him. However, the names, titles and honorifics of particular khans which appear over and over again on these rugs, and the period during which the large number of dated examples were made, suggest that they may well have been woven for the personal use of their named patrons.

Other specific groups of Persian rugs from the late Qajar period also bear inscriptions stating that they were ordered by a particular patron; the two groups studied by Annette Ittig, from Garrus (Bijar) in the northwest and from Kerman, are obvious examples.<sup>5</sup> But, in each case, these rugs were made for one individual patron, usually the powerful local governor, who owned several weaving factories but who was otherwise of no great historical significance.

By contrast, the inscribed Bakhtiari rugs were made for a number of different khans of one tribe and the various names and honorifics which appear on them add historical depth and richness to one of the most remarkable series of events in Iran's turbulent history during the past century and a half; the rise and fall of the Great Khans of the Bakhtiari.

In historical terms, these extraordinary events fall into a period of some 65 years, between 1865 and

#### 5. Bakhtiari Carpet with Vase Design.

South Central Iran, Chahar Mahall.  
4.27 × 6.70 m (14'0" × 22'0").

*Inscription (somewhat jumbled):* Hasb al-farmayesh Moqareb al-khaghan Aqa-e Najafqulikhan [sic] Samsam al-Saltaneh amal-e Bakhtiari al-seneh 1318 ('Made to the order of [lit. the Confidant of the Shah] His Excellency Najaf Quli Khan Samsam al-Saltaneh, the work of [the] Bakhtiari in the year 1900/01').

This is one of the most magnificent of the 'Khan' carpets and the third example illustrated here bearing the name of Najaf Quli Khan Samsam al-Saltaneh. Its brilliant yellow ground is decorated with offset rows of huge floral urns with small birds between them pointing in different directions from row to row. Bakhtiari carpets with yellow grounds are quite rare and seem to have been especially admired. This carpet is probably from the same workshop as the prayer rug (10) made the previous year for Samsam al-Saltaneh's cousin Sultan Muhammad Khan Mo'in Humayun – although for the first few years of this century they were bitter enemies. Courtesy Skinner's, Bolton, Massachusetts.



1930. All of the dated carpets were apparently made during these years, while most of the undated ones can also be convincingly placed in this period because of the particular names and honorifics which appear on them. In some instances, to be discussed later, a date appears which does not seem to agree with the year in which the named khan received the honorifics used, although both the date and the inscription appear to be original and unaltered.



**6. Yusif Khan I'tizad al-Sultan Amir Mujahed,**  
(b. 1871), photographed in about 1908 with one of his younger brothers and a nephew. On the left is Muhammad Reza Khan Sardar Fatih (d. 1934), father of Shahpour Bakhtiari, formerly Prime Minister of Iran. On the right is Muhammad Khan Sardar As'am, son of Hajji 'Ali Quli Khan Sardar As'ad II. Courtesy Chahreman Khan Bakhtiari, London.

#### Early History of the Bakhtiari

Anyone embarking on a brief history of the Great Khans of the Bakhtiari is indebted to Professor Gene Garthwaite, who has written a number of papers and one masterly book on the subject.<sup>6</sup> Much of what follows on Bakhtiari history is derived from his work, although I do not always agree with his strictures on the characters of the khans and their social significance.

There is some confusion over the origins of the Bakhtiari. They were supposed to be one of the thirty *tayafah* (tribes or tribal groups) which entered Iran from Syria in the 14th century. The Great Khans of the Duraki, with whom we are concerned

here, claim descent from Haydar Kur, who is thought to have lived during the reign of Shah Abbas I (1588–1629). Haydar was a Papi Lur, not a Bakhtiari, the son of a khan who, as a result of a family quarrel, fled from Luristan and became a shepherd in the service of a Duraki khan. When his ancestry was revealed, he was allowed to marry one of the khan's daughters and, in time, assumed the chieftainship of the Duraki.

This romantic tale may have been invented, or embroidered, by the Duraki khans in the 19th century to bolster their successful attempt to create a single Bakhtiari tribal unit with themselves at its head. The



Great Khans certainly always acknowledged their kinship to the Lurs, as their descendants do to this day. Garthwaite states that the Bakhtiari as a whole form part of one of the two Luri dialect groups, the *Lur Buzurg* (Greater Lurs) and the *Lur Kuchik* (Lesser Lurs), constituting the former moiety together with the Lurs of Kuhgiluyah, a province south of Bakhtiari, and the Mamasani, an independent tribe of Luri origin who inhabit the same area.

During the Safavid period, the word Bakhtiari was used to describe an administrative unit of Luristan, which later became the province of Esfahan, an area of some 29,000 square miles on either side of the Zagros Mountains. According to the unpublished *Tarikh Bakhtiari* ('History of the Bakhtiari'), written by Hajji Khusrau Khan Sardar Safar between 1911 and 1914 and himself one of the Great Khans, the Safavid period also saw the first interchangeable use of the word Bakhtiari for both the administrative region and its inhabitants. It seems that the wealthier khans of the Bakhtiari had established themselves as landlords in the Chahar Mahall Valley, between Bakhtiari and Esfahan, by the late Safavid period (late 17th/early 18th centuries), if not earlier.

Regardless of the true early history of the Bakhtiari – and some of it may have been fraudulently invented in the 18th century – they were certainly well established by the

**8. Nasir Khan Saram al-Molk Sardar Jang I,**  
in the uniform of the Governor of Esfahan, about 1916. Courtesy Bibi Manijeh Bakhtiar, London, daughter of Sardar Jang.



Photo: Amarda Bakhtiar



**9. One of a Pair of Bakhtiari Rugs with the *Bid Majnun* Design.**  
South Central Iran, Chahar Mahall.  
1.43 × 2.15 m (4'8" × 7'1").

*Inscription:* Hash al-farmayesh Motamed al-Sultan Aqa-e Sultan Muhammad Khan Mo'in Humayun amal-e Bakhtiari seneh 1316 ('Made to the order of Motamed al-Sultan His Excellency Sultan Muhammad Khan Mo'in Humayun the work of [the] Bakhtiari, the year 1898/99').

Few pairs of inscribed Bakhtiari carpets have survived, but this is one. The design – called *bid majnun* (Weeping Willow) according to A.C. Edwards – is found on many northwest and northeast Persian carpets. He considered it to be of Kurdish origin, stating that the earliest examples are from the Bijar area. However, at least one 17th century *jufi* knotted rug is known, probably from Khorasan. Sultan Muhammad Khan was one of the sons of Imam Quli Hajji Ilkhan, brother of Husain Quli Khan Ilkhan, and was himself the brother of Ghulam Husain Khan Sardar Muhtashem and 'Ali Akbar Khan Salar Ashraf, both of whose names have been found on carpets. The Ilkhan and Hajji Ilkhan families divided the wealth and power of the Bakhtiari between them but excluded the descendants of their rapacious younger brother Reza Quli Khan Ilbaigi. Sultan Muhammad Khan received the title Salar Ashraf in the early 20th century.

Courtesy Eberhart Herrmann, Munich and Gallery Zadah, London.



**7. Bakhtiari Rug with 'Garden Tile' Design.**  
South Central Iran, Chahar Mahall, possibly Qahfarukh.  
1.59 × 1.96 m (5'3" × 6'5").

*Inscription:* Hash al-farmayesh Jenab-e Jalalatmab ajale akram-e Aqa-e Nasir Khan Saram al-Molk dam-al-eqbal-alali amal-e Bakhtiari 1324 ('Made to the order of the Honourable, Most Noble [lit. the Greatest Confidant] His Excellency Nasir Khan Saram al-Molk may your fortune be great the work of [the] Bakhtiari 1906/07').

This superb 'garden tile' rug has the same distinctive cartouche main border and, as far as I can judge from the somewhat fuzzy black and white reproduction, the same minor border design as fig. 356 in A.C. Edwards' *The Persian Carpet*, which he attributes to Shalamzar. Despite their very different field designs, I would attribute both rugs to the same location. However, I now think that Edwards misattributed his rug and that, like fig. 364 in his book, it should have been attributed to Qahfarukh. [see footnotes] Courtesy Adil Besim, Vienna.





**10. Bakhtiari Prayer Rug.**  
South Central Iran, Chahar Mahall.  
1.59 × 2.37 m (5'3" × 7'9").

*Inscription:* Katabah Say'ed Ahmad Hasb al-Farmayesh Motamed al-Sultan Aqa-ye Muhammad Khan Mo'in Humayun amal-e Bakhtiari 1317 ('Written by Say'ed Ahmad, made to the order of Motamed al-Sultan Agha Muhammad Khan Mo'in Humayun, the work of [the] Bakhtiari 1899/1900').

Made for the same khan as the rug in (9), but the following year, this is one of the most beautiful of the smaller 'Khan' rugs. Stylistically it is extremely close to the wonderful yellow-ground carpet in (5). The border design and the drawing of the vases in the field should also be compared to the inscribed 'Mohtashem' Kashan silk prayer rug illustrated in HALI 35, p. 44. This design, a tree flanked by two distinctively drawn vases, seems to have been based originally on a European textile design and was used extensively in the Saruk region. This is the only inscribed Bakhtiari carpet known to me which is signed by the calligrapher. Courtesy Rippon Boswell, Wiesbaden.

beginning of the 16th century. We owe the theory that the Bakhtiari entered Iran from Syria in 1330 to the *Tarikh Guzidah* of Hamdallah Mustaufi Qazvini.<sup>7</sup> A later work, the *Sharafnameh Tarikh Mufasil Kurdistan* ('The Complete History of Kurdistan') of Amir Sharaf Khan Bidlisi, which seems, in its remarks on the Bakhtiari, to be based on Hamdallah Mustaufi, states that

Shah Tahmasp I (1524-1576) made Taj Amir Khan Ustiraki head of the *Lur Buzurg*. The Ustiraki were one of the *tafayah* which entered Iran with the Bakhtiari in the 14th century and they reappear in the 19th century as one of the many component parts of the Haft Lang Bakhtiari.

This absorption of the Ustiraki into the Haft Lang may also have taken place during the first half of the 16th

century. Amir Sharaf records that Taj Amir Khan was subsequently executed by the Shah for non-payment of taxes and was replaced by Jahangir Khan Bakhtiari who, according to Bakhtiari tradition, was related through his mother to the Safavids. In return for an annual payment of 10,000 mules, Jahangir was allowed to collect taxes in Khuzistan, Dizful and Shustar, formerly the fiefdoms of Arab Shaykhs, while Jahangir's son Khalil Khan was appointed Governor of the Bakhtiari territory of Luristan.

**The Bakhtiari in the 18th Century**  
Little is then heard of the Bakhtiari until the end of the Safavid Dynasty two hundred years later. The future greatness of the Bakhtiari khans arose from the decades of political instability which began in the early 18th century. The last autonomous Safavid Shah, Tahmasp II (1722-1732), came to the throne in the year in which Mahmud, the son of Mir Ways, the Safavid-appointed governor of Afghanistan who had declared Afghan independence at the beginning of the century, invaded Iran with devastating consequences. Shah Tahmasp appointed an ambitious Afshari soldier, Tahmasp Quli (literally 'Slave of Tahmasp') to repel the Afghan invaders. Success came in 1727, by which time Tahmasp Quli himself aspired to kingship. Proving equally successful in his campaigns against the Ottomans in the northwest, Tahmasp Quli dethroned his master in 1732, made another Safavid, Abbas III, a puppet Shah and finally ascended the throne himself, as Nadir Shah, in 1736.

Muhammad Kazim, in his *Namah 'Alam Ara Nadiri*, written in about 1740 (the earliest Iranian source for the division of the Bakhtiari into the Haft Lang and Chahar Lang),<sup>9</sup> noted that in 1732 these two moities were briefly united in opposition to Tahmasp Quli and his manipulation of the Safavids. As a result, Tahmasp Quli imprisoned thirty of the Bakhtiari leaders.

However, a *farman* of Shah Abbas III dated 1732, which if it is genuine (and there are doubts), was presumably issued on the instructions of Tahmasp Quli, names the Duraki khan 'Abd al-Khalil, the great grandson of Haydar Kur, as *Kakem* and *Farmanfarma* (governor) of 'Arabistan, Bakhtiari, Chahar Mahall (Arba'ah) and Faridan. Thus if an internal Bakhtiari alliance existed, as suggested by Muhammad Kazim,



**11. Bakhtiari Prayer Rug.**  
South Central Iran, Chahar Mahall.  
1.35 × 1.98 m (4'5" × 6'6").

*Inscription:* Farmayesh Jenab-e Jalalatmab Ajale Aqa-ye Najaf Quli Khan Samsam al-Saltaneh Ilkhani amal-e Bakhtiari fe-shahr rab'i al-awall [or volud?] seneh 1305 ('Order of the Honourable, Most Noble, His August Presence Najaf Quli Khan Samsam al-Saltaneh [of the] Ilkhani, the work of [the] Bakhtiari in the month of... 1887/88').

This inscribed Bakhtiari rug causes some problems. The inscription and the date are original and unaltered, but Najaf Quli Khan Samsam al-Saltaneh (1853 - ca. 1930) was not created Ilkhan until 1905, some 18 years after this rug was made. This is not an isolated instance and the only reasonable explanation seems to be that Ilkhani is used here in the sense of 'of the Ilkhan line' to emphasise Najaf Quli's position as a son of Husain Quli Khan Ilkhan, who was murdered in 1882, on the Shah's orders, by the latter's brother, the notorious Zell al-Sultan, Governor of Esfahan. Najaf Quli was Ilkhan's second son by his first wife Bibi Khanum, and was thus the half brother of 'Ali Quli Khan Sardar As'ad II, whose name appears on the rug in (21).  
Courtesy Sotheby's, New York.

it could not have lasted long or did not include the Duraki *bab* of the Haft Lang.

Certainly Chahar Lang opposition to Nadir Shah was overcome by his alliance with the Duraki khans 'Ali Salih and Abdal, the son and grandson of 'Abd al-Khalil. As a result, Nadir's chief opponent amongst the Bakhtiari, 'Ali Murad of

the Mamivand *bab* of the Chahar Lang, was defeated and 10,000 Bakhtiari families were transported to Khorasan. 'Ali Salih was given the titles *Sardar* (colonel) and *rish safid* (literally 'white beard' = eldest or chief) in 1745. Whether these titles applied to all the Bakhtiari or just to the Haft Lang is not clear, but one suspects the latter. He was also given various governorships and rents in both Khorasan and Bakhtiari.

Following Nadir Shah's assassination in 1747, most of the Bakhtiari in Khorasan returned to their homelands. At the same time, Muhammad Karim Khan Zand, a Lur, allied himself with 'Ali Mardan Khan of the aristocratic Kiyanursi *bab* of the Chahar Lang, who had captured Esfahan and placed yet another puppet Safavid, Ismail III, on the throne. 'Ali Mardan was probably the most powerful tribal leader of his day but, unlike Husain Quli Khan almost exactly a century later, was unable to unite the Bakhtiari into one force. Had he been able to do so, there is little doubt that he himself would have ascended the throne or at least have imposed his will on the central government, as the Great Khans of



**12. Ghulam Husain Khan Sardar Muhtashem,**  
in about 1890. Courtesy Ghahreman Khan Bakhtiar, London, son of Sardar Muhtashem.

the Bakhtiari Confederation were able to do during the Constitutional Crisis of 1909-13.

'Ali Mardan made an unsuccessful attempt to cement an alliance with the Haft Lang against Karim Khan

### 13. The Great Khans of the Second and Third Generations, in about 1911.

Front row, left to right: Yusif Khan Amir Mujahed; Ghulam Husain Khan Sardar Muhtashem; Hajji Khusrau Khan Sardar Zafar; Hajji 'Ali Quli Khan Sardar As'ad II; Najaf Quli Khan Samsam al-Saltaneh II; Lutfi 'Ali Khan Amir Mufakkam; Nasir Khan Sardar Jang I.  
Second row, left to right: Bahram Khan; Muhammad Taqi Khan Amir Jang; Morteza Quli Khan; Ja'far Quli Khan Sardar As'ad III; Fath 'Ali Khan Sardar Mu'azam; Sultan 'Ali Khan Hajji Shab al-Saltaneh; Abdul Husain Khan Sardar Mukkaram.

Back row, left to right: Asadallah Khan; Muhammad Khan Salar Aqam; Darab Khan; Sohrab Khan Hodjbar Ilbaigi.  
Courtesy Gene Garthwaite, New Hampshire.







**14. Bakhtiari Carpet.**

South Central Iran, Chahar Mahall. First third 20th century.  
4.45 × 5.97 m (14' 7" × 19' 7").

*Inscription:* Farmayesh Ghulam Husain Khan Sardar Muhtashem Ilkhani amal-e Bakhtiari ('Made to the order of Ghulam Husain Khan Sardar Muhtashem Ilkhan, the work of [the] Bakhtiari').

This large carpet is stylistically very distinct, comparable to a small prayer rug with trees illustrated in David Black's *World Rugs and Carpets*, p. 146. Here, the word *Ilkhani* in the inscription definitely indicates the title, since Sardar Muhtashem was not of the Ilkhan line but of the Hajji Ilkhan. This is one of the few undated 'Khan' carpets, but it was probably made in ca. 1915/16 when Sardar Muhtashem became Ilkhan of the Bakhtiari. However, he also held this title in the early 1920s when he was photographed for the film and book *Grass* with his Ilbaigi, Muhammad Taqi Khan Amir Jang, whose name also appears on carpets (see Part 2). Courtesy Sotheby's, New York.

Zand. In the event, the Duraki khans supported Karim Khan and he was able to defeat and kill 'Ali Mardan at Kermanshah in 1754. Abdal Khan of the Duraki then transferred his allegiance to Azad Khan Afghan, one of Nadir's generals, who was challenging Karim Khan from his base in Azerbaijan. Abdal was awarded lands and governorships by Azad but, after the latter's defeat by Karim Khan in 1757, Abdal was

received back in favour by his former ally.

In 1759, Karim Khan confirmed Abdal in his ownership of sixteen villages in the Chahar Mahall, although their relationship seems to have been an uneasy one from then on. Nevertheless, it was Abdal's great grandson, Husain Quli Khan, who was to unite all the Bakhtiari a century later and to usher in the period of the Great Khans.

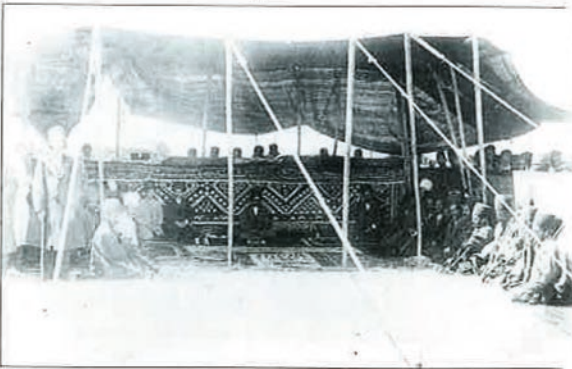
### Social Structure

If the brief history of the Bakhtiari given above seems complex – and it is greatly simplified – then the social structure of the tribe is no simpler and can only be touched upon here. The basic unit, the single family, is called the *khanivadeh* (sometimes *vargah* = tent). These single families form themselves into larger groups, based on common ancestry, called *tash* or *aulad*, which in turn coalesce with other *tash* into *mal* (encampments) for the purposes of nomadism and defence. Several *mal* then form *tirah*, a unit probably based on shared territorial interests. Several *tirah* make up the *tayafah* or large tribal grouping.

The *tayafah* might be described as an umbrella organisation representing the interests of its members to the central administration – either the Government or, more likely, the Great Khans – with regard to grazing rights, ownership disputes, taxes and so on. Each *tayafah* is headed by a *kalantar*, appointed by the Great or lesser Khans, whilst individual *mal* and *tirah* are represented by their own spokesmen, called *kadkhuda*. All the *tayafah* are then organised into one of nine *bab* (literally divisions), with the khan of each *bab* chosen from the dominant families within its constituent *tayafah*. The *bab* are then divided into two great moieties, the Haft Lang and the Chahar Lang, with five *bab* belonging to the former and four to the latter. The five *bab* of the Haft Lang are the Duraki, Babadi, Bakhtiarvand, Dinarani and Janiki; those of the Chahar Lang are the

### 15. Hajji 'Ali Quli Khan Sardar As'ad II,

(1856-1917), seated in the centre of a Bakhtiari reception tent in about 1893. Despite their involvement in affairs of state, the Great Khans, especially the Ilkhan and Ilbaigi, always spent time with the Bakhtiari tribespeople, especially during the migrations. Courtesy Gene Garthwaite, New Hampshire.



**16. Sardar Muhtashem (centre), Governor of Esfahan,**  
in about 1920. On the throne is a mirror reflecting light, the symbol of the Shah. Courtesy Chahrem Khan Bakhtiar, London.

Mamivand, Mamsalah, Mugu'i and Kiyanursi.

The division of the Bakhtiari into the moieties of the Haft Lang and Chahar Lang may have been a development of the Safavid period. Its existence was certainly known to European writers in the 18th century. The Jesuit Judasz Krusinski hinted at it in 1728 when he referred to the 'Bachtliarians' being divided into 'two factions',<sup>10</sup> and in 1754 Jonas Hanway specifically mentions the rivalry between the 'Cahar Ling' and the 'Eft Ling'.<sup>11</sup>

The origin of the moiety names has been the subject of some speculation; Haft Lang means 'seven legs' and Chahar Lang 'four legs'. One interpretation given by Digard is that according to 'une tradition (invérifiable évidemment)', on his death, the founder of the Bakhtiari left two families from two wives, one of seven sons and the other of four.<sup>12</sup> A more likely explanation, given by Hajji Khusrau Khan in his *Tarikh*, is that the distinction is based on tax obligations. This interpretation was further elaborated by Hajji Khusrau Khan's brother, Hajji 'Ali Quli Khan Sardar As'ad II, in his *Tarikh Bakhtiari*.<sup>13</sup>

According to Sardar As'ad II, the Bakhtiari, like other tribal confederations, paid their taxes in animals, in their case mules (the Qashqa'i paid in sheep and the Shabsavan in camels). Thus out of every three mules given in lieu of taxes, one and three quarter animals (seven legs) were paid by the Haft Lang, one animal (four legs) was paid by the Chahar Lang and the remaining quarter (one leg) was paid by those *tayafah* who were only recently affiliated to either moiety.



**17. Bakhtiari Carpet with Lattice Design.**

South Central Iran, Chahar Mahall.  
3.10 × 5.00 m (10' 2" × 16' 5"), reduced.

*Inscription:* Hasb al-farmayesh Habibollah[?] Khan Bakhtiari Aziz Nojaba seneh 1320 ('Made to the order of Habibollah Khan [of the] Bakhtiari [lit. Loved by the Nobles] in the year 1902/03').

This inscription is not clear. '....allah' can be read, giving only two possibilities, 'Habibollah' or 'Asadallah'. Habibollah was a third generation khan, the son of Esfandiar Khan Samsam al-Saltaneh I Sardar As'ad I, the eldest son of Husain Quli Khan Ilkhan. I have yet to find a carpet with Esfandiar's name on it although examples must exist. This very beautiful and interesting carpet, reduced in length and width, has a dark blue ground with a serrated leaf lattice containing stylised palmettes. The design and drawing are familiar from a number of Luri-Bakhtiari tribal khorjin and other bags. This is the only instance in which I have found a direct stylistic relationship between the Chahar Mahall 'Khan' rugs and Bakhtiari tribal weaving. The wide red-ground border with elegant repeated boteh is unusual and very attractive and is found on another carpet to be illustrated in Part 2. Courtesy Sotheby's, London.





**18. Bakhtiari Prayer Rug.**  
South Central Iran, Chahar Mahall.  
1.42 × 1.98 m (4'8" × 6'6").

*Inscription (reversed, read from the back):* Farmayesh Jenab-e Jalalatmab Aqa-ye Najaf Quli Khan Samsam al-Saltaneh Ilkhani amal-e Bakhtiari 1326 ('Order of the Honourable, Most Noble, His Excellency Najaf Quli Khan Samsam al-Saltaneh [of the] Ilkhani [?], the work of [the] Bakhtiari 1908/09').

The word Ilkhan in the inscription is not clear and may read Ilkhani. Since Samsam al-Saltaneh was Ilkhan when the rug was made, it may be the former, but see the comments to (11). Najaf Quli Khan Samsam al-Saltaneh was one of the most powerful of the Great Khans. He was a brother of Hajji 'Ali Quli Khan Sardar As'ad II and Yusif Khan Amir Mujahed, whose names appear on the rugs illustrated in (21), (3) and (20). [see footnotes] Samsam al-Saltaneh was one of the leading figures in the Constitutional Crisis of 1909-13, which forced the abdication of Muhammad 'Ali Shah Qajar and placed his twelve year old son, Ahmad Shah, on the throne. In 1910, Samsam al-Saltaneh designated temporary Ilkhan and Ilbaigi while he and the other senior khans were active in the affairs of state, becoming Minister of War and then Prime Minister in the Crisis Cabinet of 1911-13, known as the 'Period of Bakhtiari Domination'. He was succeeded as Ilkhan in 1912 by Nasir Khan Sardar Jang I and became Governor of Esfahan. Another rug of almost identical design, but bearing the name of Samsam al-Saltaneh's younger brother Khusrau Khan Bahadur al-Daulah Salar Arfa' Sadar Zafar, will be illustrated in Part 2. Courtesy The Richard R. Markarian Foundation, Cincinnati, Ohio.



**19. The Inscription on a Bakhtiari Carpet (detail).**  
South Central Iran, Chahar Mahall, Qarfarukh.

*Inscription (right cartouche first):* Farmayesh Hazrat Sardar Zafar / amal-e Bakhtiari Karkhaneh Qarfarukh 1338 ('Order of Sardar Zafar / the work of [the] Bakhtiari [in the] workshop of Qarfarukh 1919-20').

I regret that I have not been able to find a better picture of this very important carpet. I am extremely grateful to Joseph Lavian for finding this one. It is the only carpet I know (although I am sure there are others) with both a khane inscription and the name of the weaving village. It allows us to make a confident attribution for the rug illustrated in (7) and the other shown by Edwards (fig. 356). A charming 'garden tile' rug in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (Inv.no. T 127-1928), reproduced in David Black's *World Rugs and Carpets*, p. 147, shares the distinctive cartouche main border. The rug was woven for Khusrau Khan Bahadur al-Daulah Salar Arfa' Sardar Zafar (1863-1933), son of Husain Quli Khan Ilkhan. Courtesy Joseph Lavian, London.

#### Tribal Confederation

The confederation of both moities of the Bakhtiari into one great tribal unit, *Il Bakhtiari*, did not occur until 1867 and was part of the process of tribal confederation practised by the Qajar shahs for administrative purposes. Other well-known confederations created during the 19th century included the Qashqa'i (the earliest such organisation, formed in 1818), the Khamseh, the Shahsavan and the Kurds of Khorasan.

The Ilkhan or Great Khan (paramount chief) of each confederation was initially chosen by the Shah. His successors continued to be confirmed in or removed from office by central government authority. The Khamseh was a confederation of five independent tribes in Fars brought together by Nasir al-Din Shah in order to offset growing Qashqa'i power. It was a political creation without the strong ties of blood and



**20. Bakhtiari Pictorial Rug.**  
South Central Iran, Chahar Mahall.  
1.58 × 1.93 m (5'2" × 6'4").

*Inscription:* Farmayesh Hazrat Amir Mujahed amal-e Bakhtiari seneh 1324 ('Order of Hazrat Amir Mujahed work of [the] Bakhtiari in the year 1906/07').

I have not attempted to translate all the various titles and honorifics – hereditary or otherwise – awarded to the Great Khans, simply because they sound somewhat bizarre in English: for example, Hazrat Amir Mujahed means, literally, 'Blessed Fighting Lord'. The composition of this rug and the calligraphic style of its inscription suggest that it, together with the rug in (3), which has an almost identical inscription, represents a distinct sub-group within Chahar Mahall weavings. Amir Mujahed (b. 1871) was a title of Yusif Khan (a son of Husain Quli Khan Ilkhan), who had an earlier title of P'izad al-Sultan. He was Ilbaigi in 1916 and was one of the Great Khans who signed a pact with the British guaranteeing the safety of their oil pipelines. Private Collection, Tehran.

lineage which characterised the other groupings, despite their tendency towards internecine strife. It is perhaps for this reason that the head of the leading Khamseh family, the Qavams, was not given the official title of Ilkhan.

The system of tribal confederations organised by central government authority was first practised in Turkey under the Seljuks in the 10th century and was known as *iqta'* or *tuyul*. It was a feudal system by which the central government sought to ensure the flow of taxes and of military forces by creating semi-autonomous territories with tribal khans being made responsible for

carrying out the government's wishes in return for personal benefits – land, grazing rights, the right to levy duty on certain goods and so on. The system was effective where central government had insufficient strength to impose its will by force, since it ensured the loyalty of its appointees, who were aware that there were always plenty of rivals waiting in the wings. Despite its emphasis on individual tribal confederation, the *tuyul* system is a good example of the 'divide and rule' philosophy.

The system had one major flaw; it relied on the fact that tribal societies are insufficiently stable within themselves ever to constitute a serious threat. But when the Bakhtiari khans, starting with Husain Quli Khan Ilkhan, showed that they were able to act in concert and challenge central government, as they did in 1909/10, they moved beyond the point where the central government could be confident of the efficiency of the confederation system and of the loyalty of its members. Thus the system which enabled the Duraki khans to grow powerful enough to impose their will on the Shah in the second half of the 19th century also carried the seeds of the Great Khans' fall from power. It is with this fascinating historical contradiction that I shall be concerned in the second part of this study. ♪

Footnotes & Bibliography  
see Appendix

Acknowledgments at the end of Part 2

**22. Chulam Husain Shahab al-Saltaneh Sardar Muhtashem Ilkhan,** (b. 1865) photographed in 1924 by Ernest Beaumont Schoedsack for Merian C. Cooper's film and book *Grass* (1925). On the right is Muhammad Taqi Khan, the Ilbaigi.



**21. Bakhtiari Carpet of 'Salor' Gül Design (detail).**  
South Central Iran, Chahar Mahall.  
Size unknown.

*Inscription (reading from the bottom up):* Farmayesh Motamed al-Sultan Hajji 'Ali Quli Khan Bakhtiari 1310 [or 1315] ('Order of [lit. Trusted Servant of the King] Hajji 'Ali Quli Khan [of the] Bakhtiari 1892/93 [or 1897/98]').

I have only found two colour details of this carpet, which is in a design seen on a number of Kurdish carpets from northwest Iran. A close-up of the back shows clearly that it is a Chahar Mahall product. 'Ali Quli Khan (d. 1917) who, as Sardar As'ad II, became one of the most famous and influential of the Great Khans, was the fourth son of Husain Quli Khan Ilkhan – the first by his second wife Bibi Miharjan. She was considered Ilkhan's paramount wife as she was the daughter of a Duraki khan and Ilkhan's parallel cousin. Only daughters and wives of khans were addressed by the title Bibi. Present location unknown.