

CARPETS OF THE KHANS

Part 2

By Ian Bennett

In which our author continues his brief history of the Great Khans of the Duraki and records the rise of Husain Quli Khan, first Ilkhan of all the Bakhtiari. It is illustrated by further inscribed carpets made for the Great Khans in the Chahar Mahall valley and elsewhere as well as by historic photographs of documentary interest, and embellished with contemporary eyewitness accounts of the lives of tribal nomads in 19th century Persia.

Before chronicling the rise of the Haft Lang khans, it would be as well to outline the territories over which they assumed control.¹⁴ In Part 1 (HALI 43), I discussed the division of the Bakhtiari into the Chahar Lang and Haft Lang, and the various groups which make up those moities.

BAKHTIARI TERRITORIES AND MIGRATIONS

The Bakhtiari khans exercised control over a territory some 29,000 square miles in area, of which some sixty percent is mountainous. It stretches from Esfahan in the west to the plains of Khuzestan ('Arabistan') in the east and from Golpayegan in the northeast to Ramhormoz in the southwest. The Zagros Mountains, over which the Bakhtiari still migrate twice a year, range diagonally through the centre of this vast area, from the northwest to the southeast. It is a formidable range, with several peaks over 3,500 metres, the highest being Zard Kuh (4,548m / 14,920ft), due west of Shahr Kord.

The northwestern boundary with Luristan is formed roughly by the Dez river and by the towns of Dezful, Gatvand and Shushtar. The area between these towns and the Zagros Mountains to the east constitutes the Bakhtiari's winter grazing lands, called *garmsir* ('hot country') in Farsi or *qishlaq* in Turkish, the words being used interchangeably. East of the Zagros lie fertile upland plains and valleys including the Chahar Mahall (literally 'Four Districts' – Lar, Kiyar, Gandoman and Mazdaj).



23. Husain Quli Khan Ilkhan, circa 1879.

Courtesy Gene Garthwaite, New Hampshire.

This is the summer pasture, called *sardsir* in Farsi ('cold country') or *yailaq* in Turkish. The *garmsir* and *sardsir* are also referred to as the Pish Kuh and Pusht Kuh respectively.¹⁵ The tribes occupy the *garmsir* from October until late March or early April and the *sardsir* from May until September. The journey between camps takes six to eight weeks.

The most dramatic picture of a Bakhtiari migration, indeed of any Near Eastern or Central Asian tribal migration, appears in Merian Cooper's book and film *Grass*, which describes the 46 day journey of the Baba Ahmadi *tayafah* of the Duraki bab on the vernal migration from Shushtar in Khuzestan to the Chahar

Mahall valley between mid April and late May, 1924:

'Camp of the Baba Ahmedi
April 15th

'Browner and browner grows the land about us. The grass is drying up, and soon we must be on the move.

'I am just beginning to realize the epic sweep of this migration before us. This is not an affair of Haidar and his tribe. It is the movement of an entire people. It is a battle of man against Nature, staged on a gigantic scale.

'I look up at Haidar's valley. A half mile away is another group of black tents. I look on to the point where the hills shadow away in the horizon, and I know that if I could see the thousand miles northwest from the Persian Gulf to the Black Sea I would view all along the western side of these giant mountain ranges identical little groups of black tents at almost regular intervals, many thousands of them, a whole people living the ancient life of our own Aryan forefathers.

'And in every one of these hundreds of thousands of black tents, men are waiting, preparing to strike camp, drive together their herds, and march across these giant ranges barring the way to Grass.

'For it is not only the Baktyari who must go, but all the other mountain tribes – the Lurs, Kurds, Kuhgelu and all – a million people at least.

'Yes, hundreds of thousands of tribesmen and vast herds, uncountable, will be astride. On horseback, afoot, women carrying cradles on their backs and driving



24. Bakhtiari Carpet (detail).

South Central Iran, Chahar Mahall, circa 1910.

3.72 x 5.24 m (12'2" x 17'2").

Inscription: Farmayesh Hazrat Ashraf Aqa-e Ghulam Husain Khan Sardar Muhtashem damat shokateh amal-e Bakhtiari ('Order of the Most Noble Greatness His Excellency Ghulam Husain Khan Sardar Muhtashem may he have good fortune the work of [the] Bakhtiari').

The later 'khan' carpets, made between 1910 and 1925, still use only vegetable dyes and are extremely robust and well made. This is hardly surprising, given that the workshops were working exclusively for individual khans. [see footnotes] *Courtesy Isfahan Trading Co., London.*

beasts loaded with all their possessions, men, children, animals, will struggle onward.

'Up over hill and mountain, on through desert and forest, beaten by storm and rain, sweating under burning sun, shivering in glacial snows – over thousands of miles of wilderness the migratory tribes of Persia will be on the move.

'Pressing on and on – on to Grass!'¹⁶

TRIBAL LIFE

Between October 1840 and August 1841, the great explorer and archaeologist Sir Henry Layard travelled to the country of the Bakhtiari. His time was spent with the greatest of the early 19th century tribal leaders, Muhammad Taqi Khan of the Kiyumursi *bab* of the Chahar Lang. Layard's *Early Adventures* is one of the most remarkable and historically important accounts of the tribal way of life and has influenced all subsequent histories of the Bakhtiari, including those written by the great khans themselves. Despite the tales of horror he had heard about the tribe's savage lawlessness, his own opinion, tempered with realism, was higher:

'They are a splendid race, far surpassing in moral, as well as in physical, qualities the inhabitants of the towns and plains of Persia – the



25. Bakhtiari Carpet.

South Central Iran, Chahar Mahall. 2.13 x 4.27 m (7'0" x 14'0").

Inscription: Farmayesh Aqa-e Ghulam Husain Khan Shahab al-Saltaneh amal-e Bakhtiari 1302 ('Order of His Excellency Ghulam Husain Khan Shahab al-Saltaneh work of [the] Bakhtiari 1884/5').

This is the earliest inscribed 'khan' carpet I have found, woven when Ghulam Husain Khan was 19 or 20 years old, before he received the better-known title Sardar Muhtashem. [see footnotes] *Mr and Mrs William Ginsberg Collection.*



26. Bakhtiari Carpet.
South Central Iran, Chahar Mahall.
4.70 × 6.53 m (15'5" × 21'5").

Inscription: Farmayesh Jenab-e Jalalatmab Ajal-e Aqa-e Sorhab Khan Bakhtiari amal-e Bakhtiari 1307
(*'Order of the Honourable the Most Noble the Greatest Confidant His Excellency Sorhab Khan Bakhtiari the work of [the] Bakhtiari 1889/90'*).

This is one of the earliest 'khan' carpets. It is extremely interesting in historical terms, being the only example I know which bears the name of a khan of the Ilbaigi line. Sohrab Khan Hojabr Ilbaigi, seen standing on the right of the back row in (13), Part 1, would have been very young when it was woven, possibly as a gift from his father, Reza Quli Khan Ilbaigi, who was Ilkhan at that time. Some of the Ilbaigi family khans managed to retain wealth and a certain influence even after the 1894 agreement which removed them from any further part in Bakhtiari affairs. Sohrab Khan improved his standing by marrying the daughter of Lutf 'Ali Khan Shuja' al-Sultan Amir Mufakham, a son of Imam Quli Khan Hajji Ilkhan. Courtesy Christie's, New York.

men tall, finely featured, and well built; the women of singular beauty, of graceful form, and when young almost as fair as Englishwomen. If the men have, for the most part, a savage and somewhat forbidding expression, it arises from the mode of life they have led from time immemorial. They are constantly at war, either among themselves or with the Persian Government, against which they are in chronic rebellion. In addition they are arrant robbers and free-booters, living upon the plunder of their neighbours and caravans, or of the pusillanimous population of the plains, amongst which they are in the habit of carrying their forays with impunity. But not withstanding the fierce and truculent appearance of the men, I have never seen together

finer specimens of the human race than in a Bakhtiari encampment.¹⁷

While on his way to meet Muhammad Taqi Khan, Layard described an evening he spent in the company of Ali Gheda Khan, a minor chief of the Bakhtiari, and Shafi Khan, an Afshar by birth, who had assumed headship of the Sahuni *tayafah* of the Chahar Lang. In one memorable passage, Layard unwittingly summed up the romantic fascination which European and American visitors to the Bakhtiari tribal territories were to express in innumerable 19th and 20th century travel books:

'In the evening Ali-Geda Khan produced a splendidly illustrated manuscript of the 'Nizami', a present to his father, a well-known

Bakhtiari chief, from Feth-Ali Shah. Shafi'a Khan read portions of it aloud, and recited verses describing the loves of Khosrau and Shirin, to an admiring and excited group of wild-looking men who stood in a circle round him, leaning on their long matchlocks. They followed him with intense interest, expressing their sympathy for the lovers with deep-drawn sighs, and their admiration for the heroic deeds of Khosrau with violent gesticulations and cries of approval. I have often afterwards witnessed the effect thus produced by the recital of poetry upon these savage but impressionable mountaineers. The scene, lighted up by the bright fire round which we were sitting, in the midst of forests and mountains towering into the sky

above us, was a very strange and striking one.'¹⁸

THE DECLINE OF THE CHAHAR LANG

Muhammad Taqi Khan was the last Chahar Lang khan to exercise power in the Bakhtiari country. In the 18th century, as readers of Part 1 will recall, Karim Khan Zand was initially allied to the most powerful of the Chahar Lang khans, 'Ali Mardan. In the first part of the 19th century, an intense rivalry arose between 'Ali Mardan's descendants, 'Ali Khan enjoyed a temporary ascendancy, but was opposed by his brothers, Hasan Khan and Fath 'Ali Khan, and was eventually betrayed by Hasan Khan to Fath 'Ali Shah, who was uneasy about 'Ali Khan's growing power. 'Ali Khan was imprisoned and blinded and Hasan Khan, with central government support, assumed the headship of the Chahar Lang.

'Ali Khan's sons, among them Muhammad Taqi Khan, were raised in the safety of their father's villages in the Faridan district south of Golpayegan. When he was 18, Muhammad Taqi Khan avenged his father by killing his uncle, Hasan

27. First and Second Generation Great Khans, circa 1890.

Front row, left to right: *Hajji Morsheh, friend and advisor of the khans; Esfandiari Khan Samsam al-Saltaneh I Sardar As'ad I; Saheb Jam, a visitor from the Imperial Court; Imam Quli Khan Hajji Ilkhan; Reza Quli Khan Ilbaigi.*

Back row, left to right: *Imamallah Khan Sardar Hishmat; Lutf 'Ali Khan Shuja' al-Sultan Amir Mufakham; Ghulam Husain Khan Shahab al-Saltaneh Sardar Muhtashem; Hajji Khusrau Khan Bahadur al-Daulah Salar Arja' Sardar Zafar; Muhammad Husain Khan Sipahdar; Hajji 'Ali Quli Khan Sardar As'ad II.*



28. Bakhtiari 'Bid Majnun' Rug.
South Central Iran, Chahar Mahall.
1.40 × 2.22 m (4'7" × 7'4").

Inscription: Farmayesh Aqa-e 'Ali Akbar Khan Bakhtiari al-seneh 1314
(*'Order of His Excellency 'Ali Akbar Khan Bakhtiari in the year 1896/7'*).

Made for the same khan as the incomplete carpet (28). The field and border designs suggest that it is from the same workshop as the pair of bid majnun rugs made two years later for 'Ali Akbar Khan's brother, Sultan Muhammad Khan Mo'in Humayun (9), Part 1. A fourth closely related example was illustrated in HALI 4/2 (1981), ad. p. 52. It bears the inscription Hasb al-Farmayesh Sarkar Moqareb al-Khaghan Motamed al-Sultan Amir Quli Khan al-seneh 1310 ('Made to the Order of the Great Leader the Confidant of the Shah Motamed al-Sultan Amir Quli Khan in the year 1892/3'*). In 1876, Amir Quli Khan, Ilkhan's youngest son, married the daughter of Rustam Khan of the Janiki, a Haft Lang bab of settled agriculturalists. Private Collection, Austria.*



29. Bakhtiari Carpet Fragment.
South Central Iran, Chahar Mahall, circa 1900.
3.09 × 4.29 m (10'2" × 14'1").

Inscription: Farmayesh Jenab-e 'Ali Akbar Khan amal-e Bakhtiari ('Order of the Honourable 'Ali Akbar Khan the work of [the] Bakhtiari').

This pieced fragment of a much larger carpet and (38) are clearly related. The latter was probably woven some 20 years later and has a border design seen on a number of Bakhtiari carpets, both large and small. The field and border designs of this carpet are much freer, with a greater variety of motifs. 'Ali Akbar Khan Salar Ashraf (ca. 1883-1925) was a son of Imam Quli Khan Hajji Ilkhan.

Khan. Then, as Layard put it:

'Mehemet Taki Khan subsequently married the daughter of Hassan Khan, and adopted his three infant sons, with a view to putting an end to the blood feud and consequent dissensions which had led to a war between the two branches of the tribe.'¹⁹

In fact, Muhammad Taqi Khan failed to end this strangely Sophoclean vendetta, as we shall see.

By all accounts he was a wise and far-sighted leader, who sought to consolidate his power through

alliances not only with other Chahar Lang leaders but also with Haft Lang *bab* such as the settled agriculturalists, the Janiki, and other tribes such as the Ka'b Arabs, the Kuhgiluyahis and the Buir Ahmadi. However, in his attempt to form such alliances, he alienated far more powerful groups than those he attracted.

Muhammad Taqi Khan Chahar Lang's inability to form alliances with the leading khans of other Bakhtiari groups led to his downfall. This inability was partly due to a number of related facts: he came to

power when he was only 18, he had only two wives, neither his sons nor his brothers were old enough to be married when he most needed to extend his influence, and his only sister married outside the Bakhtiari, to a Buir Ahmadi khan.

A carefully planned conspiracy, involving large tax arrears, which Muhammad Taqi Khan could not possibly collect without alienating even his closest supporters, as well as a trumped-up treason charge based on a supposed correspondence between the Khan and 'Ali Reza Mirza Zill al-Sultan, the exiled uncle of Muhammad Shah Qajar, were enough to ensure Muhammad Taqi Khan's downfall. At the Khan's urging, Layard had vainly attempted to enlist British support, but he was finally captured in late 1841.

Following Muhammad Taqi Khan's capture, Mu'tamid al-Daulah, the Georgian eunuch who was Governor of Esfahan, Khuzestan and Luristan, appointed 'Ali Reza Khan of the Kiyunursi *bab* leader of the Chahar Lang. He was Muhammad Taqi Khan's cousin (and

30. The Khans, the Shah and their Nemesis.

A remarkable photograph, redolent with irony, taken in the early 1920s. In the centre, holding a cane, is the last Qajar ruler, Ahmad Shah, surrounded by some of the Bakhtiari great Khans who had placed him on the throne in 1909. On the far left is Lutf 'Ali Khan Amir Mufakham. Standing next to him with his hands clasped is Hajji Khusrau Khan Zardar Zafar. Next to him, looming tall and menacing, is General Reza Khan Sipahdar and between him and the Shah is Imamallah Khan Sardar Hishmat. On the far right is the striking figure of Nasir Khan Sardar Jang I. Not long after this was taken, Reza Khan forced the abdication of Ahmad Shah, ascended the throne as Reza Shah Pahlavi and began his campaign against the great khans. Courtesy Ghahreman Khan Bakhtiar, London.



31. Some of the Great Khans and their Retainers, circa 1910.

Left to right: Imamallah Khan Sardar Hishmat, a son of Reza Quli Khan Ilbaigi; Yusif Khan 'Itizad al-Sultan Amir Mujahed; unidentified; Nasir Khan Sardar Jang I; unidentified; Najaf Quli Khan Samsam al-Saltaneh II; unidentified; Ghulam Husain Khan Sardar Muhtashem; 'Ali Akbar Khan Salar Ashraf; Morteza Quli Khan; unidentified; Sultan Muhammad Khan Mo'in Humayun Salar Ashraf Sardar Ashja'; Ja'far Quli Khan Sardar As'ad III (d. 1934).

adopted son) and son of the same Hasan Khan whom Muhammad Taqi Khan had killed some years earlier to avenge his father's betrayal.

'Ali Reza Khan led the Chahar Lang until his death in 1879. He was succeeded by his son, Mirza Aqa Jan, who had married a daughter of Husain Quli Khan Ilkhan. He thus acknowledged Husain Quli Khan's position as Ilkhan of all the Bakhtiari and at the same time allied himself to Ilkhan by ties of blood. Husain Quli Khan married a sister of 'Ali Reza Quli Khan, Muhammad Taqi Khan's brother and uncle of 'Ali Reza Khan. By this marriage, Ilkhan had a daughter, one of his favourites, the famous Bibi Maryam. Ten years after succeeding his father as senior khan of the Chahar Lang, Mirza Aqa Jan was murdered by his brothers, but by then the Chahar Lang were largely sedentary and had ceased to play a significant role in Bakhtiari affairs.

Historians have pointed out that Muhammad Taqi Khan's position among all the Bakhtiari was not as powerful as Layard implied. He had little Haft Lang support and important groups within the Chahar Lang were either independent of, or actively opposed to, him. Nevertheless, he came closer than any other early Bakhtiari khan to achieving a position of pre-eminence amongst all the tribes and moities of his people and his fall from power left a great void in the Bakhtiari hierarchy.

THE GREAT KHANS OF THE DURAKI

The 20 years following Muhammad Taqi Khan's fall in 1841 saw the gradual rise to supreme power among the Bakhtiari of Husain Quli Khan of the Duraki. He was the most brilliant of all Iranian tribal leaders in the recent past and one of the most remarkable and charismatic figures in Iranian history during the past two centuries. He was ideally placed to succeed to the leadership of the Duraki and through them, to that of the Haft Lang.

Husain Quli Khan was the eldest son of Ja'far Quli Khan, senior khan of the Zarasvand *tayafah* of the Duraki *bab*, and Bibi Shahpasand of the Bakhtiari *vand bab*; he was also the great grandson of Abdal Khan, one of the two Haft Lang leaders who had given allegiance to Muhammad Karim Khan Zand a century earlier. It was this lineage, allied to his considerable wealth as head of the Duraki, which enabled Husain Quli Khan to assert his supremacy. He was also fortunate that, during the period in which he sought to consolidate his power, from the early 1840s onwards, he had the support of his three brothers, Imam Quli Khan Hajji

Ilkhan (d. 1896), Reza Quli Khan Ilbaigi and Mustafa Quli Khan (d. ca. 1855).

Husain Quli Khan's path to supreme authority was not untroubled. One of the most important factors in the Duraki khans' position of strength amongst the Haft Lang was their control of the Pusht Kuh, the eastern or summer pastures. This area, or *tuyul*, was vested in the Duraki, specifically in the Zarasvand *tayafah*, and passed from father to son. However, Husain Quli Khan's grandfather, Habiballah Khan, and the latter's three sons, Ja'far Quli Khan (father of Ilkhan), Chiragh 'Ali Khan and Kaly 'Ali Khan, had sided against the Qajars in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, with the result that title to the Pusht Kuh passed to Habiballah's younger brother, Farajallah Khan, then by descent his son Ilyas Khan. This is recorded in a *farman* of 1815, which confirms Ilyas Khan as landlord of Chagha Khur, a village in the heart of the Pusht Kuh a few miles south of Shahr Kord and Shalamzar. Another document, of 1825, suggests that Ilyas Khan's closest allies at that time were not other members of the Duraki but two khans of the Babadi,

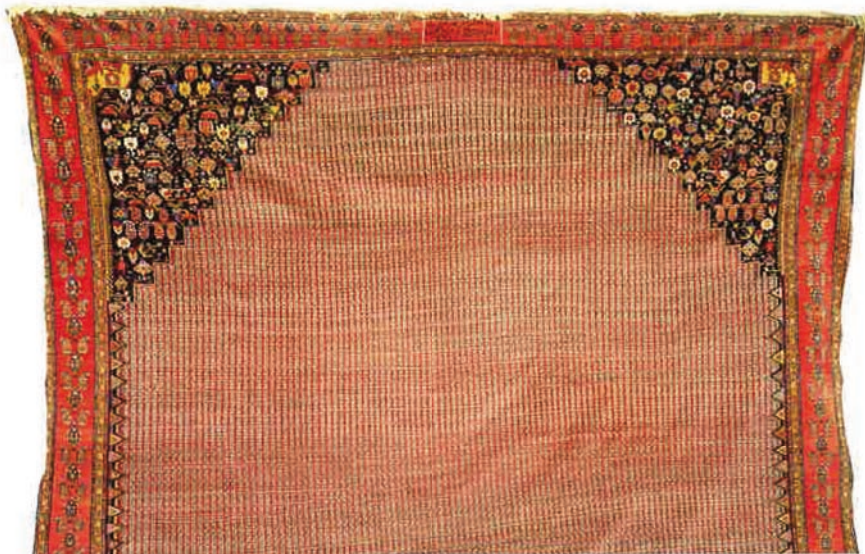
32. Bakhtiari Carpet (detail).

South Central Iran, Chahar Mahall.
4.41 × 6.22 m (14'6" × 20'5").

Inscription: Farmayesh Aqa-e Khuda Rahm Khan 1323 ('Order of His Excellency Khuda Rahm Khan 1905/6').

A spectacular example of one of the best known Chahar Mahall designs. A rug with an identical field (Edwards, *The Persian Carpet*, fig. 359), is attributed to the village of Chahar Shotur. I have also seen a Chahar Mahall *vagireh* with this design. Khuda Rahm Khan was the son of Mam Reza Khan, a wealthy Chahar Mahall landowner who, although not a Bakhtiari, married Bibi Khadijeh, a sister of Nasir Khan Sardar Jang I. Courtesy Sotheby's, London.





33. Bakhtiari Carpet.
South Central Iran, Chahar Mahall.
4.24 × 5.49 m (13' 11" × 18' 0").

Inscription: Farmayesh Sarkar Moqareb al-Khaghan Ghulam Husain Khan Bakhtiari 1312 ('Order of the Great Leader the Confidant of the Shah Ghulam Husain Khan Bakhtiari 1894/5').

This carpet was made ten years after (25) for the same khan. Judging by the main border, the guards and the overall colour, it is probably from the same workshop as (17), Part 1, which was made eight years later for either Habiballah Khan, Asadallah Khan or Imamallah Khan Sardar Hishmat, son of Reza Quli Khan Ilbaigi. Note the northwest Persian, specifically Bijar, influence. Courtesy Christie's, London

another Haft Lang bab.

In the 1840s, following the fall of Muhammad Taqi Khan Chahar Lang, a Babadi insurrection against the authority of Ilyas Khan and the Duraki was defeated by an alliance of Duraki khans. During this same period, Husain Quli Khan married Ilyas Khan's daughter, his cousin Bibi Mihrijan. By these means, he regained control of the Pusht Kuh, but was not without other problems.

Husain Quli Khan's father, Ja'far Quli Khan Duraki, was killed by Ja'far Quli Khan Bakhtiarvand in 1836. Leadership of the Duraki was assumed by Ja'far Quli Khan Duraki's younger brother, Kalb 'Ali Khan, who was also made guardian of his brother's four minor sons. A serious quarrel soon broke out between these sons and their uncle over ownership of villages and lands. Husain Quli Khan avoided a direct confrontation but entered the service of Mu'tamid al-Daulah, despite the eunuch's alliance with his father's Bakhtiarvand slayers. In 1841, Husain Quli Khan took part in the defeat of Muhammad Taqi Khan. Still in his early 20s, his support for Mu'tamid al-Daulah resulted in the award of a Bakhtiari governorship and, more importantly, in winning the confidence of the central government, which greatly

strengthened him in his continuing struggle with his uncle.

With government support and the aid of other Haft Lang khans, including his brothers, he defeated and killed Kalb 'Ali Khan in 1846. This, together with his marriage to Ilyas Khan's daughter, ensured that he had no serious rivals among the Haft Lang. At the same time, he put down an insurrection of the Babadi bab, and his brother, Reza Quli Khan Ilbaigi, who at this time recognised his elder brother's authority, subdued minor revolts amongst the Chahar Lang.

By the beginning of the 1850s, Husain Quli Khan was chief of the entire Bakhtiari nation in all but name. Official recognition came in two stages; in 1862 he was named 'Nazim' and in 1867 he was finally confirmed as Ilkhan of the Il – supreme khan of all the Bakhtiari.

Following his elevation, Husain Quli Khan sought to entrench the position of his lineage by dynastic marriage-broking. Many writers have commented upon the adverse effects of polygamy upon the attempts of the Ilkhans of the various tribal confederations to effect lasting alliances and to consolidate their own family in power. Lois Beck, in a masterly study of the Qashqa'i,²⁰ has pointed to the contrast between the

comparatively peaceful transition of power within the Shahilu lineage of the monogamous Qashqa'i ilkhans, and the bloodshed and internecine warfare which characterised the change of power in other confederations, including the Bakhtiari.²¹

THE FALL OF HUSAIN QULI KHAN

The recognition of Husain Quli Khan as Ilkhan of all the Bakhtiari by Nasir al-Din Shah and central government ensured that, despite many problems, his family and descendants had a period of some 50 years in which to consolidate their power and to

34. Bakhtiari Prayer Rug.
South Central Iran, Chahar Mahall.
1.35 × 2.11 m (4' 5" × 6' 11").

Inscription: Farmayest Jenab-e Jalalatmab ajal-e akram-e Aqa-e Morteza Quli Khan amal-e Bakhtiari 1330 ('Order the Honourable, most Noble (lit. the Greatest Confidant) Morteza Quli Khan the work of [the] Bakhtiari 1911/12').

The design within the mihrab of this delightful rug is the same as that on the rug woven for Sultan Muhammad Khan Mo'in Humayun in (10), Part 1. Both can be related to the yellow-ground carpet (5), Part 1. However, the Mo'in Humayun rug has a very similar border design to (1), Part 1. I am tempted to ascribe both rugs to Shalamzar, but the Phillips prayer rug, although made for the same khan as (1) has a different palette and handle and may be from Qarfarukh. Courtesy Phillips, New York.



35. Bakhtiari Small Medallion Rug (below).

South Central Iran, Chahar Mahall.
1.43 × 1.88 m (4' 8" × 6' 2").

Inscription: Farmayesh Chiragh 'Ali Khan amal-e Bakhtiari ustad Hassan J[a]M[adi] 2[al-sani] 1318 ('Order of Chiragh 'Ali Khan the work of [the] Bakhtiari [by] the masterweaver Hassan in the month... 1900/1').

The odd inscription before the date, 'JM2', is the usual way of expressing the Arabic month Jamadi al-sani, the second month of Jamadi. Chiragh 'Ali Khan was a son of Najaf Quli Khan Samsam al-Saltaneh II and brother of Morteza Quli Khan. His name also appears on (39). This is one of the few 'khan' rugs I know bearing the name of a masterweaver. Its style suggests that it may be from the same workshop as the prayer rug in (18), Part 1. Courtesy Sotheby's, London.



increase their wealth and influence. Ironically, Ilkhan's unquestioned power in his own territories and his apparently unassailable position were the factors which finally sealed his death-warrant. He became, in the eyes of the Shah and the Imperial family, the epitome of 'the overmighty subject'.

The loyalty of Ilkhan's full brother Imam Quli Khan Hajji Ilkhan was crucial to his position, but it led to resentment on the part of Imam Quli Khan's eldest son, Muhammad Husain Khan, who saw his position as subservient to that of Ilkhan's eldest son, Esfandiar Khan. Muhammad Husain Khan found a willing ally in his uncle, Reza Quli Khan Ilbaigi, Ilkhan's half-brother, who, by the end of the 1870s, realised that his role and that of his family in Bakhtiari affairs was likely to be an increasingly minor one. His fear was no doubt exacerbated by the knowledge



36. Bakhtiari Carpet.
South Central Iran, Chahar Mahall.
4.32 × 5.49 m (14' 2" × 18' 0").

Inscription: Farmayesh Sultan Morad 1332 ('Order of Sultan Morad 1913/14').

Drawing and colour relate this carpet to (32). I associate the main border design with Qarfarukh, although here the motifs are somewhat crudely drawn. Sultan Morad Khan was a son of Esfandiar Khan Sardar As'ad I and married Bibi Sanam, daughter of Nasir Khan Sardar Jang. He died in about 1975. Courtesy Butterfield's, San Francisco.

that his support had been an important factor in Ilkhan's attainment of power.

By an unfortunate coincidence for Ilkhan, the Qajars themselves were experiencing family difficulties. Nasir al-Din Shah had named a younger son, Muzaffar al-Din Mirza, as Vali'ahd (Crown Prince), passing over his eldest son, Mas'ud Mirza Zill al-Sultan, who was Governor of Esfahan for much of the second half of the 19th century and thus intimately connected with Bakhtiari affairs. Zill al-Sultan suspected that Ilkhan supported the Vali'ahd and also resented Ilkhan's enormous wealth, prestige and power among all the Bakhtiari, which he saw as a

direct challenge to his own authority. Other members of the Qajar family, however, perceived Ilkhan as an ally of Zill al-Sultan against the interests of the Vali'ahd.

Ilkhan was thus hedged about by enemies, some of whom might have had good reason to oppose him and others who were simply mistaken in their assessment of his motives. In 1882, the Governor of Esfahan, Zill al-Sultan, had him strangled while paying taxes, or, according to Bakhtiari tradition, strangled him with his own hands. Later, Zill al-Sultan claimed that he was merely carrying out the Shah's orders. Whatever the truth, it is because of Ilkhan's murder that the descendants



37. Bakhtiari Prayer Rug.
South Central Iran, Chahar Mahall.
1.58 × 1.96 m (5'3" × 6'5").

Inscription: Farmayesh Jenab-e Jalalatmab Aqa-e Hajji Bahadur al-Daulah amal-e Bakhtiari al-seneh 1320 ('Order of the Honourable, Most Noble His Excellency Bahadur al-Daulah the work of the Bakhtiari in the year 1902/3').

This rug is almost identical in design to the Markarian prayer rug, (18), Part 1, but the weave, colour, borders and style of inscription are markedly different. The 'chain' design in its white-ground guards is found on many nomadic Bakhtiari weavings but not so often on workshop pieces. This may be a non-workshop rug, perhaps woven by a Bibi. Hajji Khusrau Khan Bahadur al-Daulah Salar Arfa' Sardar Zafar (a cousin of Sardar Muhtashem for whom the Markarian rug was made six years later), was one of the most influential second generation khans. Courtesy Gallery Sun Road, Tokyo.

of the Bakhtiari great khans still speak of the Qajars in tones of undisguised contempt.

Ilkhan had initiated a programme of agriculture, irrigation, road and bridge building, and placed the marketing of produce within his lands on a commercial basis, all of which greatly increased his own wealth as well as that of the other khans and their dependents. At the time of his death, the size and wealth of the Bakhtiari has been estimated at about 30,000 families or between 150,000 and 180,000 individuals, while their flocks and herds totalled some 3 million beasts. The khans

paid a total annual tax of 36,000 *tumans*, and there were 200 Bakhtiari cavalry in Imperial service.

After his death in 1882, the title of Ilkhan passed to his brother Imam Quli Khan Hajji Ilkhan, but a peaceful, orderly transfer of power could not be expected. Muhammad Husain Khan and Reza Quli Khan Ilbaigi had plotted against Ilkhan and they ensured that factional infighting continued for the following twelve years. During this time, Reza Quli Khan Ilbaigi managed to have himself appointed Ilkhan and proceeded to appropriate as much of his various cousins' property as he

could, causing much damage and bloodshed in the process. He alienated his only ally among the Duraki great khans (*khavanin buzurg*), Muhammad Husain Khan, who made his peace with his father and the other khans and, in 1894, was one of the principals behind the move by the Ilkhan and Hajji Ilkhan families to remove Reza Quli Khan and his family from all authority in Bakhtiari affairs and from a share in any future Bakhtiari wealth. They succeeded in doing this with the support of Nasir al-Din Shah. Reza Quli Khan had paid a high price for his treachery and rapaciousness.

WEALTH AND POWER

The years between 1894, when some order was restored to Bakhtiari affairs, and the early 1930s, when Reza Shah Pahlavi systematically set about to destroy the autonomy and wealth of all the tribal khans, witnessed an extraordinary change in

38. Bakhtiari Carpet (detail).
South Central Iran, Chahar Mahall.
4.19 × 5.67 m (13'9" × 18'7").

Inscription: Hasb al-Farmayesh Moqareb al-Khaghan Aqa-e Najaf Quli Khan Samsam al-Saltaneh amal-e Bakhtiari al-seneh 1342(?) ('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 1923/4[?]').

This marvellous carpet was almost certainly made in the same workshop as (29) and (5), Part 1. The latter is slightly larger, with a virtually identical inscription and a similarly sophisticated repeat pattern on a rich yellow ground. Such carpets seem to have been particularly valued by the khans. Courtesy Christie's, London.



the fortunes, both figuratively and literally, of the Bakhtiari great khans. Their wealth was greatly augmented, firstly by increased trading revenues created by the construction of the Bakhtiari-Lynch road, not to mention the tolls they received from its users. Secondly, oil was discovered on their lands. The enormous revenues which then accrued enabled the great khans to move beyond the sphere of mere tribal affairs into national and international politics.

The agreement with the British for the construction of the road from Esfahan in the east to Ahvaz in Khuzestan in the southwest was signed with Messrs Lynch in 1898. Esfandiar Khan Sardar As'ad I, eldest son of Ilkhan, and his cousin Muhammad Husain Khan Sardar Mufakham Sipahdar, eldest son of Imam Quli Khan Hajji Ilkhan, signed on behalf of the Bakhtiari khans. Four years later, on 29 May 1901, William Knox D'Arcy was given the concession to search for oil by the Iranian government. Almost exactly seven years later, on 26 May 1908, G.B. Reynolds struck oil at Meydan-e Naftun, east of Shushtar in the heart of the Bakhtiari *garmsir*.

During this period, however, internal disputes again arose among the great khans. By 1905, when the British began negotiating with the khans about oil exploration on their land, Najaf Quli Khan Samsam al-Saltaneh II was the Ilkhan and Ghulam Husain Khan Shaheb al-Saltaneh (later Sardar Muhtashem), the Ilbaigi. But the negotiations over the Bakhtiari share of future oil revenues were jeopardised by competing claims from different khans, in particular Samsam al-Saltaneh's younger half-brother, Hajji 'Ali Quli Khan Sardar As'ad II, who seems to have been motivated by national rather than tribal ambitions and who saw more clearly than either his brother or cousin the importance of oil to the Bakhtiari's future.

The agreement with the British was signed on 15 November 1905 by the new Ilkhan and Ilbaigi, Sardar As'ad II and Nasir Khan Saram al-Molk (later Sardar Jang I).²² It gave them an annual income of £3,000, one third of which was in payment for their guarantee of safety for the pipelines. But even before oil was found, both the British and the khans were dissatisfied. The khans claimed that their share was insufficient and the British, justifiably, felt that continuing family squabbles among the Bakhtiari khans compromised the safety of the pipelines.



39. Bakhtiari 'Garden Tile' Carpet.
South Central Iran, Chahar Mahall.
2.13 × 3.81 m (7'0" × 12'6").

Inscription: Farmayesh Chiragh 'Ali Khan amal-e Bakhtiari fi-shahr rabi al-sani al-seneh 1333 ('Order of Chiragh 'Ali Khan the work of [the] Bakhtiari in the month ... in the year 1914/5'). [see footnotes]
Courtesy Marvin Kagan Inc., New York.



40. Northwest Persian Carpet.
Probably Saruk, circa 1920.
5.22 x 7.41 m (17'2" x 24'4").

Inscription: Farmayesh Aqa-e Amir Jang ('Order of His Excellency Amir Jang').

This remarkable carpet is one of two illustrated here with 'Khanate' inscriptions but which were not made in the Chahar Mahall. [see footnotes] Courtesy Rippon Boswell, London.

When oil was struck, the situation changed dramatically, although it had already been eased by the relative stability which had returned to the khans' affairs. On 13 April 1909, the Bakhtiari Oil Company was incorporated, with the khans owning 3% of its issued shares, capitalised at £300,000. The following day, the Anglo-Persian Oil Company was formed with a capital of £2 million, divided equally into ordinary and 8% preference shares. 'On April 15 the ordinary shares were transferred together with a cash payment of £380,250, to the three shareholders in the original companies...' ²³ Four years later, the

British Navy began to change from coal- to oil-fired ships, a move rapidly followed by other navies, and the number of shares in the Anglo-Persian Oil Company was doubled. The Bakhtiari khans ceased to be rich by tribal standards; they became tycoons! It is difficult to assess their individual wealth but, in *Grass*, Merian Cooper reported a conversation with Rahim Khan, son of Najaf Quli Khan Samsam al-Saltaneh II, in which '...he explained that each Baktyari ruler, in addition to the three hundred mile stretch of mountain valley over which the whole princely family rules as a unit, has his own villages, from which he

receives private rents, taxing his people one-third of their crops. He also said his father received from the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, whose great field is located in the Baktyari country, \$25,000 annually as his thirteenth share of the dividend. Thus he had \$65,000 a year.' ²⁴

THE PERIOD OF BAKHTIARI DOMINATION

The individual and joint wealth of the great khans and their involvement in international affairs, through their negotiations and treaties with the British, enabled them to play an increasingly important role in Iranian politics. It assumed its greatest significance during the Constitutional Crisis of 1905-11, which reached its most dramatic moment in 1909 when the Bakhtiari captured Tehran. This resulted in the deposition of Muhammad 'Ali Shah Qajar and the placing on the throne of his twelve year old son Sultan Ahmad Mirza, called Ahmad Shah.

During this period, Bakhtiari khans held many important government posts. In the first Cabinet of 1909-11, Hajji 'Ali Quli Khan Sardar As'ad II was Minister of the Interior and later Minister of War. In the coalition cabinet of 1911, Samsam al-Saltaneh II was Minister of War and in the third cabinet of 1911-13, which also included his cousin Chulam Husain Khan Sardar Muhtashem, he was both Prime Minister and Minister of War. Other Bakhtiari khans were appointed to important posts, including the governorships of Kerman, Esfahan, Yazd, Kashan, Baluchestan and Arak (Sultanabad). However, it is generally agreed that during the whole period of 'Bakhtiari Domination', the real power was wielded by Hajji 'Ali Quli Khan

41. Muhammad Taqi Khan Amir Jang watches eagerly as an attendant lights up the opium pipe. Photographed by Ernest B. Schoedsack in 1924 for Grass.



Sardar As'ad II.

This short-lived era came to an end in 1914, with the dissolution of the Majlis (Parliament), although no Bakhtiari had held a cabinet post since January 1913.

The Bakhtiari khans rose to national power because of their military resources and because the traditional leaders – first the Qajars themselves and then the elite, such as Sipahdar [Sipahdar A'zam, the Rasht nationalist leader] – became discredited as a result of their ineffectiveness. The Bakhtiari lost power in the same way – they became discredited and their military strength was counterbalanced by the new gendarmerie. ²⁵

THE DECLINE OF TRIBAL POWER

The growing involvement of the Great Powers, particularly Britain and Russia, followed by the outbreak of the First World War, meant that the great khans, especially Nasir Khan Sardar Jang I, who had been made Ilkhan for a five year period in 1912, were unable to control the events and forces around them.

After the war, the rise of Reza Khan and his Western style army spelled the end of any real Bakhtiari power at the centre of Iranian affairs, although some of the khans continued to hold high government office up to the Revolution of 1979, and one of Ilkhan's great grand-daughters, Soraya, became Empress of Iran.

Reza Shah's policy of centralisation and his dislike of tribal power (plus a large measure of personal greed) meant that, throughout the 1930s, he pursued a policy of suppression against the Bakhtiari khans and the leaders of other tribal groups. In 1933 the titles of Ilkhan and Ilbaigi were abolished and a number of Bakhtiari great khans were imprisoned and executed. Suppression by the state culminated in 1938 with the appropriation of much of their land (some of which was returned to them after the Second World War by Muhammad Reza Shah) and the forced sale of their shares in the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. The autonomy of the tribes and their khans had gone.

THE PRESENT

This is a sad time for the descendants of the great khans of the Bakhtiari. Their names and lineage have made them unwelcome in their own land and they live in exile around the world. Many of the fourth and fifth generations have little or no memory



42. Kerman Carpet.
Central Iran, circa 1925.
4.88 x 6.61 m (16'0" x 21'8").

Inscription: Farmayesh Chulam Husain Khan Sardar Muhtashem Hokmran Kerman va Baluchestan ('Order of Ghulam Husain Khan Sardar Muhtashem Governor of Kerman and Baluchestan').

A superbly made Kerman carpet with a well-known workshop design. As well as being Ilkhan on two occasions, Sardar Muhtashem was Governor of Kerman and Baluchestan, one of a series of governorships he held at various times from 1913 onwards. According to members of his family, he once owned a considerable number of inscribed Kerman carpets. Courtesy Sotheby's, New York.

of Iran. Others remember it well, and it is in them that I have occasionally sensed a great longing – not so much a desire to live in Iran as a deep regret that they are the first of their line never to have been on the great migrations.

It is difficult for outsiders to understand the nature of the migration and the effect it has on the Bakhtiari, even those far removed from the nomadic life. It could be said to have taken on the aspects of a journey almost as mystical as is the Hajj to the devout Muslim. Gene Garthwaite sums it up well:

'The migration is central to Bakhtiari social and economic life and serves to define what it means to be Bakhtiari (even for those members who do not themselves participate in it); it is virtually a ritualistic act.' ²⁶

I can only hope that one day the youngest descendants of the great khans will be able to return to their ancestral homeland and, walking across the snow covered slopes of Zard Kuh, discover for themselves 'what it means to be Bakhtiari.' ²⁷ Footnotes, Technical Analysis & Acknowledgements see Appendix