

Letters To The Editor

ANOTHER INSTANCE OF FORCED MIGRATION

I was interested to see the article by Professor John Perry on "Forced Migration in Iran during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries" in the Autumn 1975 issue of Iranian Studies. I would like to call attention to another instance of forced migration, not mentioned by Perry, which was ordered by Shah Abbas to strengthen the eastern border of his empire. This example suggests that the Shah's interests were not restricted to securing Khorasan in the East, but extended to establishing a strong Iranian presence in the South as well. The case in point is that of the Kurds in Baluchistan, among whom I am currently doing anthropological fieldwork supported by McGill University. My source for the following ethnohistorical account is Hadji Amir Khan, hakem of the Kurds.

Hadji Amir relates that the founding ancestor of this group was Hussain Kurd, of the Yelhani tiape, in Kurdistan. Hussain went to India and fought against the Emperor Akbar for seven years, returning a hero to the court of Shah Abbas in Isfahan. However, he subsequently provoked the Sha's fear and anger by killing a man in a dispute over a chair at court. Instead of having Hussain killed, Shah Abbas was persuaded to exile him, his brother Otalan and other members of the Yelhani tiape with their wives and children to Baluchistan. The group was accompanied by a Sayyad to serve as scribe and families of ghulam to work for the Kurds. The Kurds were to secure

Baluchistan for Iran and serve as a frontier guard for the empire.

At the time the Kurds arrived, Baluchistan was independent of the Shah's rule. The Sarhad was controlled by a badshah of the Mir tribe, who collected tribute in his own name from the surrounding Baluch tribes. Hussain Kurd killed the men of the ruling family and became hakem of the Sarhad, establishing his center in Khash. For a time the Kurds maintained close ties with Iran, sending tribute to the Shah and in turn receiving assistance during lean years. Gradually they established hakems from Zabol to Saravan. Despite the fact that the Kurds eventually stopped sending the rayat, a theme of support and friendship for the Iranian government runs throughout their history. During the time of Nadir Shah, the hakem Mirza recruited a Baluch and Kurdish force to accompany the Shah on his adventures in India and Afganistan. Documents in the possession of Hadji Amir attest that Abdul Karim Khan, Kurdish hakem, was a nokair of the Iranian government eighty years ago and recruited soldiers for the Iranian army in Iranshahr. In more recent times, the Kurds strongly supported Reza Shah's fight against the Baluch separatist movement and favored the annexation of Baluchistan to Iran.

The number of Kurds who were exiled to Baluchistan is unknown, but today their descendants number about thirty thousand families in all. They have remained in the original region of settlement to the present, providing an example of one of the most successful of Shah Abbas' transplants. Yet they continue to maintain their identity as descendants of Hussain Kurd and former rulers of the Sarhad in opposition to the Baluch tribes. It is to be hoped that further ethnohistorical evidence will be uncovered to expand our knowledge of the use of forced migration as a political mechanism in the formation of the Iranian State.

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