

## VANISHING VARIANTS OF THE PASSING SCENE?

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Nomadic peoples have from time immemorial been moving across the Middle East and North Africa. Often, they have been purveyors of goods, disease, and ideas. Until recently they have been totally oblivious to the boundaries of nation states. They have fostered the spread of two of the world's great faiths, Islam and Christianity. Their diffusion of ideas, ideals, and concepts have given them a significance out of all proportion to their numbers. They have been, in a very real sense, the unknowing messengers and delivery boys of the Middle East and North Africa.

Nomadic peoples in Fars Ostan, Iran are still an important factor in that ancient cradle of Persian civilization. Several nomadic groups, notably the Qashqai Kuchek, Qashqai Bozorg, and Qashqli, are still following nomadic practices only superficially modified in thousands of years. What are the characteristics and ways of life of these people? What are their migration routes? What triggers migration? What are their relationships with their more sedentary neighbors? What is their future in this period prior to the beginning of the 21st century?

A complete answer to all these questions is impractical in a study of this kind; indeed, several volumes might not tell the complete story. Enough data have been collected, however, to give some logical insights as to directions and trends.

These tribal people are of Turkmen strains, and many still do not speak Farsi. In physical appearance, they are medium statured (5'6" - 5'8" for males and 5'0" - 5'4" for females) with swarthy complexions, black, straight hair, dark brown to black eyes, and distinctly dolichocephalic heads. They have a wiry physique and tough leathery skin.

They carry all essentials of life with them. Clothing and tents are manufactured from the wool of sheep or goats, with certain items of cotton being acquired in cities

and towns. Their black tents are made of goat hair, and the tent poles, cut usually from plane trees (*Platanus orientalis*), are carried along. Most clay pots have been replaced by aluminum utensils acquired in the cities. Women still wear native dress, generally manufactured using home methods, although most women have a fancy dress made from silk purchased in nearby cities or towns. Unlike Muslim women in villages or towns, these tribal ladies do not cover their face. Men usually wear an interesting combination of baggy native trousers, a distinctive felt brimless hat, and a store bought shirt and western style suit coat. Both men and women may be barefoot or wear canvas shoes with rubber-tired soles, which are purchased from any of a score of villages where they are manufactured.

Camels and horses are ridden, donkeys are used to carry supplies (although they are occasionally ridden), and dogs are used to herd large herds of goats and fat-tailed sheep. These same animals provide the principal food. Meat, milk products, notably mast (a kind of yoghurt), and rice are the principal items of diet. Rice and tea are obtained in the routeway cities and towns.

Life is hard. Diseases take a high toll, particularly of the young. Survivors are tough, being able to subsist in a hostile environment. Respiratory diseases, diseases of the eyes, and dysentery are feared maladies.

Their routes vary, but, in general, they move from near Isfahan to near Lar and return each year, a distance, as the camel walks, of about 1,000 miles. The ground surface is rough, often strewn with angular colluvial materials. The Zagros Mountains are rugged. Overgrazing and constant gathering in the area have made fuel scarce. A merciless sun beats down on the travelers. Herds cause choking clouds of dust to rise.

Migrations are triggered by rains. Temperate winters are spent near Lar where a warm sun and modest rains provide some

browse for animals and a mild climate for people. Summers are spent near Isfahan where perennial streams provide ample water, and elevation provides some relief from the blistering heat which prevails along the Persian Gulf. The movement to the Lar area is possible only because winter cyclonic cells moving through the Mediterranean trough supply the moisture essential for the growth of spring plants.

Tribal people are looked upon with great suspicion by their sedentary neighbors. Nomads are accused of banditry, and some are bandits. They are accused of destroying crops, and some sheep, goats, and camels do 'stray' into farmers' fields. In the main, however, they are a simple, hospitable people who will share their food and their tent with a passing stranger.

In spite of their suspicion, citizens of the town are pleased to trade food, clothing, and utensils for tribal sheep, wool, and carpets. Bartering in the bazaar takes on new di-

mensions when representative tribespeople are sent to the city to trade.

Except for the fact that tribal peoples encounter the accouterments of civilization more frequently today, they are doing many things just as they have always done them. Yet there are signs which suggest that nomadism in Iran is on the way out. Their anti-government attitude, culminating in several revolts against authority, has caused the Iranian government to undertake a conscious policy of settling the tribes. Land grants are made available and assistance is given to make nomads into farmers. Tighter restrictions on the use of traditional migratory routes have been placed on the tribespeople by the gendarmarie. And, perhaps most of all, it is difficult to convince the younger generation that following goats, sheep, and camels is the good life. Logic tells us that the nomad of Fars Ostan is indeed a vanishing variant of the passing scene. With his passing the world will be a poorer place.