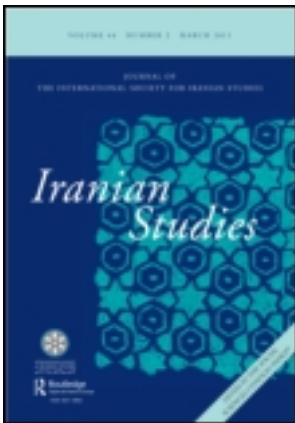


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Uzi Rabi and Nugzar Ter-Oganov

## The Military of Qajar Iran: The Features of an Irregular Army from the Eighteenth to the Early Twentieth Century

*The article examines the parameters of the irregular army in Qajar Iran, including its assembly, numbers, and provisions, as well as the army's organizational structure: its administration and the divisions of the ad hoc forces (provincial militia and tribal cavalry) and of the standing forces (the shah's bodyguard and artillery corps). Until the creation of the so-called regular army units in Iran at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the irregular army was regarded as the only military force in the service of the Qajar dynasty. Despite the existence of a "regular army," irregular forces, particularly tribal cavalry, continued to play a significant role in Iran's military system throughout the nineteenth century. By understanding the features of the irregular army—its role in Qajar society, its organizational and social structures, its ethnic composition, and other characteristics—we can better understand the character of the state itself.*

### *I. Introduction: Basic Features, Historical Background, Sources*

The military history of Qajar Iran from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century (1796–1925) is more diverse than the current historical literature suggests. A close examination of the social and political components of Qajar Iran's military during this period sheds light on its unique role within the monarchical apparatus and in shaping state–society relations. This article deals with the parameters of the irregular army in Qajar Iran, with a focus on the relationship between the branches of the military and on how the military was used to enforce a balance of power between the state and society and between competing elements within society. This examination of the socio-political diversity in the irregular military during the above-mentioned period is particularly important because it demonstrates the presence of both internal challenges to power and external threats that each shah and the Qajar state had to balance.

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The irregular army in Qajar Iran during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was composed of two elements: ad hoc forces, which were assembled when needed and which consisted largely of members of Iranian tribal groups formed into provincial militias and tribal cavalry; and standing forces, which consisted of the shah's personal bodyguard and the artillery corps.<sup>1</sup> Several aspects made this army "irregular." First, the army did not assemble on a regular basis. Instead, forces were called to order when they were needed, as in times of war or internal conflict. Second, troops were managed and provisioned in an irregular manner, which was largely due to the absence of military institutions. Troops often provided their own supplies and provisions, the availability of which varied according to differing local circumstances. Third, the army's organization was informal rather than institutionalized, in line with a Weberian state model, and a great deal of emphasis was placed on personal ties between the shah and the tribal leaders.

The irregular army remained the only fighting force in Iran until external circumstances seemed to indicate a need for a regular army: Russia's conquest of Georgia in 1801, which resulted in two Russian–Iranian wars (1804–13 and 1826–28). As part of the Franco-Iranian Agreement signed on 4 May 1807, French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte offered military assistance to Iran's leader, Fath Ali Shah (Agha Mohammad Khan's nephew, r. 1797–1833). A French mission led by General Claude-Mathieu Gardane trained regular army units in Iran from 1807 to 1808, as did English military missions thereafter. However, these efforts to reorganize the Iranian army and to introduce a regular standing force as the core of the Iranian military nearly all failed. Though Iranian society certainly experienced some changes throughout this period, pre-modern and tribal ways of life persisted, as did the primacy of the irregular army forces.

In order to understand how the structure of the armed forces reflected Iranian society during this time, the following aspects of the military will be examined: its basic features, including assembly, numbers, and provisions; its organization, including administration and divisions of the ad hoc forces (provincial armies and tribal cavalry) and of the standing forces (the shah's bodyguard and artillery corps); and its role within Iranian society.

This paper employs primary sources from the Qajar period in Russian, Persian, and Georgian. A variety of useful materials were found in the Russian State Military History Archive, including a collection of documents from the Caucasian Geographical Commission (1866, 1868) and a memorandum on the Persian army written in 1883 by Major-General Frankini, a Russian officer sent in 1877 to explore the military potential of Iran. Persian historiographers, including Abd ar Razzāq Beg Domboli, Jahāngir Mirzā, Reza Qoli Khān Hedāyat, and Mohammad Hasan Khān Sani' od Dowleh, also chronicled the features of the Iranian army. The writings of Georgian Prince Teimuraz Bagrationi, contained in *The History of Davit Bagrationi* and *The*

<sup>1</sup>See *Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennii Voенно-Istoricheskii Arkhiv* [Russian State Military History Archive], fond 76, opis I, delo 378: 23 (henceforth RGVIA).

*Persian Diaries or the Thoughts Written by Blood*, were particularly useful for their unique, detailed descriptions of the Qajar irregular army.

Additionally, the diplomatic records and travelogues written by western officials, primarily in English, contain valuable and vast information on the irregular army, and offer counter-perspectives to the Persian sources. Along with the Russian archival sources, these western documents contributed to determining the meanings of many of the Persian military terms used in the works of Persian historiographers. The western diplomatic and travel records include Alfred Gardane's *Mission du général Gardane en Perse sous le premier Empire. Documents historiques* (1865); John Malcolm's *The History of Persia* (1815); James Morier's *A Journey through Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor to Constantinople, in the Years 1808 and 1809* (1812) and *A Second Journey through Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor, to Constantinople, between the Years 1810 and 1816* (1818); and William Ouseley's *Travels in Various Countries of the East, more particularly Persia* (1819, 1823).

In the Persian-language sources, the irregular army is referred to by several names, including *Lashkar*, *Qashun*, *Sepāh*, and *Charik*. After examining the various Persian chronicles and documents related to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, we have determined that all four terms were used by the Persian historiographers to refer to the irregular army. The European sources also refer to the irregular army by various names.<sup>2</sup>

## II. Features

*Assembly.* The patterns of assembly demonstrate the Qajar army's irregular nature. The army usually assembled in the spring, when good weather and dry roads made transport conditions more suitable and the land afforded the cavalry the opportunity to pasture its horses.<sup>3</sup> During the colder seasons, the army generally ceased fighting. Abd ar Razzāq Beg Domboli, a Persian chronicler, noted this timing of assembly and the resultant insecurity of the state: "With the coming of the winter, when fighters for the fate [of the people] rested, [they] made His Majesty grievous."<sup>4</sup>

In March, as Iran's *Nouruz* (New Year) holiday celebration marked the transition from winter to spring, the shah sent heralds from the Qajar capital, Tehran, to the tribal chiefs with the purpose of informing them of the time and location of the military parade and inspection, *Sān Didan* (literally, to make an inspection).<sup>5</sup> The annual parade, attended by the shah, took place at a location with an abundance of water and

<sup>2</sup>For instance, sources termed forces from the Iranian province of Khorasan as *Eeljaree*. See, for example, Alexander Burnes, *Travels into Bokhara, Being an Account of a Journey from India to Cabool, Tartary and Persia. Also, Narrative of a Voyage on the Indus from the Sea to Lahore* (London, 1834), 2: 88. (Moscow, 1848), III: 128; A. Conolly, *A Journey to the North of India, overland from England, through Russia, Persia, and Afghanistan* (London, 1834), I: 219, 242.

<sup>3</sup>RGVIA, fond "Voenno-Uchenii Archiv," delo 4338: 17 rev.

<sup>4</sup>Abd ar Razzāq Beg Domboli, *Maaser-e Saltānie* (Tabriz, 1242), 260.

<sup>5</sup>Sometimes the inspection was carried out before *Nouruz*. *Akti, sobrannii kavkazskoi arkheograficheskoi komissiei, Pod redaktsiei Adolfa Berge* (Tiflis, 1868), II: 159 (henceforth AKAK).

open grass for the cavalry. According to Persian sources, the troops often gathered at the *Chaman-e Soltāni-ye*, the Meadow of *Soltāni-eh*. Amédée Jaubert, a French emissary sent by Napoleon to Iran in 1806 to establish a military alliance against Russia and Great Britain, vividly described the gathering space:

The meadow had an oval shape and its length from east to west constituted two to three *farsakhs*.<sup>6</sup> It was also surrounded by snow-covered mountains with water running into plentiful springs. Consequently, this location was an excellent pasture for the cavalry.<sup>7</sup>

The military parade was sometimes held in the central square of the capital. During the Safavid period (1501–1722), the principal square in the capital of Isfahan, *Meidān-e Naqsh-e Jahān* or *Meidān-e Shāh* (the Shah's Square), was often used as a military parade ground. According to a folk tale, Shah Abbas the Great stood in the pavilion of the *'Ali Qāpu* (superior door or gate), and observed the troops on parade.<sup>8</sup> In the Qajar capital of Tehran, *Meidān-e Tupkhāneh* (Artillery Square) served as the main military parade ground for the shah's annual inspection.

In the event of war, the troops were assembled according to the demands of the shah's *firmān*, an imperial decree that instructed the provincial officials how many cavalry and infantry should be summoned and where they should be organized for battle.<sup>9</sup> For example, the shah's *firmān* of 11 March 1804, calling for a general armed mobilization in response to the Russian military advance in Transcaucasia, stated:

You have to be aware that because of the aggression committed by the Russian troops, we have declared war against Russia. Our battlefield will be in the Caucasus. The assembly of the forces should be arranged near the banks of the river of Aras. That is why I order you to come with your armed and equipped servants to the assembly place on 20 of *Zihajjah* 1218 2 April [1804]. You should be fully prepared to make your way to the battlefield. Come with your armed and equipped *mulāzims* [Arabic, inseparable companion, adjutant, or servant], having your arms, military equipment, dress, food and medicine. I order you to come to the assembly place through the shortest and principal roads; do not demand anything from the residents living along the roads, except fodder for the animals and water.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup>*Farsakh* or *Farsang* is an old Persian measure of length, and is approximately equal to seven kilometers.

<sup>7</sup>Amédée Jaubert, *Mosaferat be Armanestan va Iran* (Tehran, 1322), 183 (in Persian).

<sup>8</sup>A. Belozerskii, "Pisma iz Persii ot Baku do Ispagani 1885–1886 g.g.," *Sbornik geograficheskikh, topograficheskikh i statisticheskikh materialov po Azii*, (Saint Petersburg, 1887), XXIII: 29, 31 (henceforth, *Sbornik materialov po Azii*).

<sup>9</sup>RGVIA, fond 446, delo 5: 2

<sup>10</sup>See Jamil Qazanlu, *Tārikh-e nezāmi-ye Irān* (Tehran, 1315), 2: 695–96.

As it appears from the *firmān*, it was the provincial officer's responsibility not only to collect the military forces, but also to be sure that they were supplied with weapons, uniform, and military equipment as well as medicine. This passage indicates that the men had to provide themselves with food, since fodder for the animals and water were the only things that the men could demand from the residents. In practice, however, the soldiers usually seized everything for which they had a need.

According to the *firmān*, the men also had to be assembled and reviewed by the shah before the military campaign began. Georgian Prince Teimuraz Bagrationi, a political refugee in Crown Prince Abbas Mirza's military camp, recorded the assembly of the army before its campaign against Georgia during the first Russian–Iranian war (1804–13):

On the second day of March, the sovereign [shah] was in his palace. The well-armed cavalry, ready to undertake a campaign against Georgia, was assembled on the square. All the notables stood before the sovereign. The *lashkarnevis* [paymaster] was holding a troop roster, and the *mirzās* [secretaries] and *nasakchi-bāshi* [a high official who made arrangements for the punishment of people charged with a crime] stood beside him. The *lashkarnevis* first read the name of the *sarkyardeh* [commander], then the *jārchi-bāshi* [head of heralds] loudly repeated it. The *sarkyardeh*, accompanied by his retinue, rode his horse across the square, made a bow to the sovereign, and was then followed by his cavalry. When the *sarkyardeh* passed by, one of his *jārchi-bāshis* he cried out “*azir*” [“ready, I’m here”]. The *min-bāshi* [head of 1,000 men] passed in a similar manner. Finally, the *lashkarnevis* declared the *sarkyardeh*'s name, then one of the *jārchi-bāshis* repeated it loudly, while the clerks who stood nearby registered the *sarkyardeh*'s name, and then one of the *jārchis* announced his presence. The same method was used for the roll-call of the *yuz-bāshis* [head of one hundred men] and *dah-bāshis* [head of ten men], and after these officers, the cavalymen paraded out one by one, according to a pre-determined order. The roll-call of the infantry was similar to that of the cavalry.<sup>11</sup>

After the troops were assembled, the shahs themselves attended the review of irregular cavalry and infantry to determine how many men were supplied by the tribes. The roll-call ceremony was repeated each day until every detachment was reviewed.

After assembly, the army moved to the battlefield. The countless number of animals in the army ranks considerably limited its maneuverability, yet the army was still able to travel an average of six *farsangs* (about 40 kilometers) per day.<sup>12</sup> Usually the

<sup>11</sup>Teimuraz Bagrationi, “Sparsuli dghiurebi anu siskhlit natseri pikrebi” [The Persian diaries or the thoughts written by blood], in Guram Sharadze, ed., *Teimuraz Bagrationi. Tskhovrebis gza* [Teimuraz Bagrationi's lifetime] (Tbilisi, 1972), 199 (in Georgian).

<sup>12</sup>“O nineshnem persidskom shakhe, stolitse ego Tegerane i o voennoi sile,” *Aziatskii vestnik* (Moscow, 1825), 364. In some rare cases the army was able to travel approximately fifteen *farsangs*.

campaign started at daybreak, with a rest in the afternoon. In the hot summer days, the army moved only at night.<sup>13</sup> To preempt enemy ambush, the army dispatched a vanguard (*qarāvōl*), which consisted of a detachment (*dasteh*) ahead of the main body of the army.<sup>14</sup> To prepare a new camp and to make the necessary arrangements, a vanguard was dispatched a day before the departure of the main force.

*Numbers.* The fluctuating size of the army also attests to its irregularity, although the size of the forces is difficult to determine from the source material. Unfortunately, there are few available Persian sources regarding the size and strength of the irregular army. One must therefore assess the Persian narratives and documentary sources, including the *firmāns* (shah's orders) and *hokms* (shah's decrees), with great care, especially with regard to the number of soldiers, which may have been deliberately exaggerated.<sup>15</sup>

Western accounts also vary. According to a Russian archival source compiled after the end of the first Russian–Iranian war (1804–13), at the beginning of the nineteenth century the provincial militia numbered more than 150,000 men, and the shah was able to collect 80,000 cavalry recruited from the nomadic tribes alone.<sup>16</sup> According to Russian Colonel Enegolm, in the late 1820s the Qajar tribe, roaming from place to place in the area of Tehran, was able to call up 40,000 horsemen.<sup>17</sup> Yet in the early years of the nineteenth century, two western observers, John Malcolm and Moritz von Kotzebue, estimated that the irregular cavalry consisted of 80,000 men in total.<sup>18</sup> When describing the shah's military camp organized in 1813 in Ujan (near Tabriz), James Morier, who was traveling through the region, remarked that there were about 80–90,000 men, of whom the soldiers constituted only half. The rest consisted of the shah's bodyguard, state-administrative establishment, court, princes, *harem*, and servants, as well as craftsmen and traders.<sup>19</sup> During military campaigns, the size of the irregular army camp increased, especially when it was headed by the shah himself.

Irregular cavalry numbers apparently decreased in the 1830s, as indicated by a Russian staff officer, I. Blaramberg.<sup>20</sup> During the 1860s, according to the report of

<sup>13</sup>Gaspar Drouville, *Puteshestvie v Persiu v 1812–1813 godakh* (Moscow, 1826), 2: 146.

<sup>14</sup>Bagrationi, *Sparsuli dghiorebi anu siskhlit natseri pikrebi*, 202.

<sup>15</sup>The British diplomat and writer James Morier made light of this phenomenon in his well-known novel the *Haji-Baba* from Isfahan. See, for example his *Pokhozhdenia Haji-Babi iz Isfagana* (Moscow, 1970), 207–08.

<sup>16</sup>See RGVA, fond 446, delo 168: 7 rev.-8. General Frankini, "Zapiska o persidskoi armii (1877)," *Sbornik materialov po Azii* (1883), IV: 21–22.

<sup>17</sup>See RGVA, fond 446, delo 10: 27 rev.

<sup>18</sup>See N. K. Ter-Oganov, *Sozdanie i razvitie iranskoj reguliarnoi armii i deyatelnost inostrannikh voennikh missii v Irane v XLX veke* [Formation and development of the Iranian regular army and activities of the foreign military missions in Iran in the nineteenth century] (PhD diss., Tbilisi State University, 1984), 64 (in Russian)

<sup>19</sup>James Morier, *A Second Journey through Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor, to Constantinople, between the Years 1810 and 1816* (London, 1818), 279.

<sup>20</sup>I. Blaramberg, "Statisticheskoe obozrenie Persii, sostavlennoe v 1841 g.," *Zapiski imperatorskogo russkogo geograficheskogo obschestva* (Saint Petersburg, 1853), VII: 57.

another Russian author, the irregular cavalry consisted of only 30,000 horsemen.<sup>21</sup> In the 1870s, Russian military officer Major General Frankini noted that the nomadic tribes were able to supply 150,000 men,<sup>22</sup> but that even in the most favorable conditions the Iranian government could collect only 70–80,000 “ineffective” nomad cavalry.<sup>23</sup> In his estimation, the nomad cavalry would not have been able to withstand a serious external force.

*Provisions.* There were no regular institutions or practices for supplying the shah’s irregular forces. The military authorities did not allocate any provisions for fodder, relying solely on local pastures.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, soldiers were paid inconsistently or not at all. In preparation for the military campaign, soldiers provided for themselves en route to the location where the army was mustering. When the irregular troops arrived at the military camp, local residents were expected to provide them with food and fodder for their animals.

According to Moritz von Kotzebue, a member of Russian General Yermolov’s 1817 mission to Tehran, supplying the troops was informally the duty of the *nāzers* (supervisors),<sup>25</sup> who provided the local governors—known as *kalāntars* and *ketkhodās* (mayors)—the list of necessary provisions, the most important of which was wheat. It was supposed that the local governors should take the resources for provisioning the troops from the provincial tax revenues. However, officials did not record the supplies plundered from local residents, and as a result the provinces were depleted by the army’s consumption.<sup>26</sup>

Supplies and provisions were acquired according to changing local circumstances. When local officials were unable or unwilling to provide for the army, either the central authorities supplied the troops or the soldiers seized local supplies by force. For instance, according to James Morier, Fath Ali Shah ordered the province of Khamse to recruit and supply 5,000 cavalymen. However, when the province was unable to meet this demand for supplies, the shah was compelled to use state revenues.<sup>27</sup>

While serving in a campaign or on garrison duty, the militiamen were to receive an annual salary of 5–7 *tomāns* (the golden monetary unit in Qajar Iran) and 2–3 sacks of the provisional wheat allowance from the shah’s government.<sup>28</sup> However, this salary was rarely paid. Occasionally, prior to the beginning of a military

<sup>21</sup>RGVIA, fond 446, bez opisi, delo 39: 12 rev.-13 rev.

<sup>22</sup>General Frankini, “Zapiska o persidskoi armii (1877),” *Sbornik materialov po Azii* (1883), IV: 21.

<sup>23</sup>See RGVIA, fond 446, delo 41: 59 rev.

<sup>24</sup>See AKAK, III: 434.

<sup>25</sup>Edward Waring, *A Tour to Shiraz by the Route of Kazeroon and Feerozabad with Various Remarks on the Manners, Customs, Laws, Language and Literature of the Persia* (London, 1807), 81, 85 (Waring calls them *Ambārdārs*).

<sup>26</sup>“O nineshnem persidskom shakhe,” 362.

<sup>27</sup>James Morier, *A Journey through Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor to Constantinople, in the Years 1808 and 1809* (London, 1812), 261–62.

<sup>28</sup>John Malcolm, *The History of Persia from the Most Early Period to the Present Time (Containing an Account of the Religion, Government, Usages, and Character of the Inhabitants of that Kingdom)* (London, 1815), 2: 498.



campaign, the soldiers received a token payment. Usually this was to ensure that the soldiers had money to buy a horse, arms, and proper equipment. Little remained from this initial payment to support the soldiers' families.<sup>29</sup> The informal understanding was that the soldiers were later to be paid a salary, but, according to Captain V. Bebutov, also a member of General Yermolov's 1817 mission to Tehran, the soldiers rarely received anything. In the event that they did receive a payment, a large portion was taken by the *mirzās* (secretaries), who administered the payroll for the army.<sup>30</sup> This practice of robbery of the irregular soldiers became widespread in the nascent Iranian regular army as well, which demonstrates that the regular army was heavily influenced by the military traditions inherited from the semi-tribal Qajar society.

When deprived of their livelihood, the militiamen often expressed their discontent by deserting the military camp and returning to their homes, or by sitting in the *bast* (sanctuary or asylum).<sup>31</sup> While traveling through Enzeli in the early 1840s, Englishman William Holmes witnessed the desertion of approximately 60 *tofangchis* (musketeers) of Astarabad to the *bast* because they had not been paid by the *sardār* (supreme military commander) of Gilan province.<sup>32</sup> However, at times, as noted by the traveler John Kinneir, the political assistant to the minister plenipotentiary to Iran John Malcolm, the militiamen chose to remain in the army solely for the opportunity to plunder.<sup>33</sup>

### III. Organization of the Army

One of the Iranian army's most important features was the centrality of the irregular forces despite attempts to train a regular army, which began during the first Russian–Iranian war (1804–13) and continued throughout the nineteenth century. Though their numbers and influence did decline somewhat over the course of the century, the irregular forces continued to play an important role in Iranian society and its military establishment, and the Iranian army continued to be essentially “irregular” in its administration and organization by western standards.

Western sources emphasize the persistent irregularity of the army's organization. For example, western traveler James Fraser noted in 1820–21 that even the shah's “regular” army remained irregular in nature: “In attempting to take a view of the

<sup>29</sup>Y. Borschevskii, “K kharakteristike rukopisnogo nasledia V. A. Zhukovskogo,” *Ocherki po istorii russkogo vostokovedeniia, Sbornik V, pamiati V. A. Zhukovskogo* (Moscow, 1960), 44.

<sup>30</sup>RGVIA, fond 446, delo 5: 5 rev.

<sup>31</sup>In Iran, individuals or groups of people who were oppressed by the authorities and sought justice, or had a demand, traditionally took refuge in a *bast*, an inviolable place of refuge, as a last resort. In Persian, “*bast neshastan*” meant to take refuge. Places of sanctuary, such as *Imām-zādeh* (the tomb of *Sayyid*), the residence of the crown prince (*Valiabad*), as well as foreign missions (during Qajar rule), were considered *bast*. The persons having entered the *bast* remained there indefinitely until the problem was resolved. Providing food and water to the refugees was viewed as pleasing to God. See, for instance, L. F. Tigranov, *Iz obschestvenno-ekonomicheskikh otoshnenii v Persii* (Tiflis, 1905), 63–64.

<sup>32</sup>William Holmes, *Sketches on the Shores of the Caspian* (London, 1845), 78.

<sup>33</sup>See John Kinneir, *Geographical Memoir of the Persian Empire* (London, 1813).

military resources of Persia, the reader must divest himself of every idea that can bring to his mind the existence and attributes of a regular army; the king possesses nothing of the sort.”<sup>34</sup> In general, European sources confirm that the organizational structure of the military in Iran did not change substantially during the Qajar period, and certainly did not conform to western European norms.

*Administration and divisions.* Though the shah was regarded as the supreme commander of the irregular army, the chain of command did not follow a set structure. During Agha Mohammad Khan’s reign (1794–97), military affairs were loosely organized. A paymaster-general, known as a *lashkarnevis-bāshi*, supervised and provisioned the military and was accountable to the shah. There were a number of military administrative positions under this titular command, including *mirzās* (secretaries) and *mostowfis* (accountants or financial clerks). In each province, the irregular forces were under the supervision of local *lashkarnevis*, who were in turn supervised by the chief *lashkarnevis*.

Agha Mohammad Khan’s successor, Fath Ali Shah (r. 1797–1834), implemented a more structured command. In 1806, Fath Ali Shah replaced the position of *lashkarnevis-bāshi* with a *vazir-e lashkar*, the approximate equivalent of a European minister of war. According to Iranian historian Rezā Qoli Khān Hedāyat, the *vazir-e lashkar* conducted most army financial transactions. His duties included assigning pensions, paying salaries, and supplying provisions for the soldiers. The *vazir-e lashkar* was also responsible for organizing an annual military parade and inspection for the shah, and maintaining an accurate register of soldiers in arms.<sup>35</sup>

When European military advisors set to work in Iran at the beginning of the nineteenth century, they reported that the irregular forces were grouped into several units. General Gardane, the head of the French military mission to Iran that formed and drilled the first battalions of the Iranian regular army at the very beginning of the nineteenth century, described the chain of command of the Iranian irregulars as follows: “The *khān* commands 8,000–10,000 soldiers, the *soltān* one hundred, the *eli-bāshi* fifty, and the *bāshi* ten soldiers.”<sup>36</sup> English travelers Robert Ker Porter and Edward Waring confirm General Gardane’s observations regarding the organization of the irregulars into units and sub-units of thousands, hundreds, and tens. A detachment, consisting of 1,000 soldiers, was commanded by a *min-bāshi*, a unit of one hundred by a *yuz-bāshi*, and a unit of ten by an *on-bāshi*. Each of these commanders was subordinate to the *khan*.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup>James B. Fraser, *Narrative of a Journey into Khorasan in the Years 1821 and 1822* (Oxford and New York, 1984), 223.

<sup>35</sup>Rezā Qoli Khān Hedāyat, *Tārikh-e rouzāt os-safā-ie Nāseri*, ed. Abbas Parviz (Tehran, 1339), 9: 416–17 (in Persian).

<sup>36</sup>A.A. Batorskii, “Proekt ekspeditsii v Indiu, predlozhennii Napoleonom Bonaparte imperatoram Pavlu I Aleksandru I v 1800 i 1807–1808 gg.,” *Sbornik materialov po Azii* Saint-Petersburg 1886), XXIII: 80.

<sup>37</sup>Waring, *A Tour to Sheeraz*, 82.

The largest military unit in the irregular army was referred to as a *dasteh* (a group) or *jamā'at* (community or crowd),<sup>38</sup> equal to a detachment, which as a rule was under a commander, known as the *sarkyardeh*.<sup>39</sup> The tribal elites usually filled that position. When it was time for the detachments to move to a new location, a special vanguard transport unit, *pishkhāneh*, was dispatched to prepare the new camp before the main force arrived.<sup>40</sup> The *pishkhāneh* was responsible for supplying the camp with water, building fortifications, and setting up the accommodation (tents).<sup>41</sup>

An experienced *khān* was usually appointed to command a large unit of the irregular forces during a military campaign, and would be awarded the supreme military rank of *sardār* for the purpose of leading his forces into battle. The rank of *sardār* was considered a high honor, and during the Qajar period it was often granted to princes. Thus the title of *sardār* was regarded as the highest military rank in Qajar Iran. During the reign of Agha Mohammad Khan, Crown Prince Fath Ali Khan (afterwards the Shah of Iran—1797–1834) “was appointed the *sardār* of Iraq [that is, *Iraqi-Ajam*], and he was ordered to guard the borders of Isfahan and Fars.”<sup>42</sup> In addition to princes, high-ranking officials such as *beglarbegi* (provincial governor), *qullar-āqāsi* (head of the shah’s cavalry bodyguard), *nasaqchi-bāshi* (head of the executors of punishment), the commander-in-chief of the provincial irregular forces, and other notables of the shah’s court would be given the title of *sardār*, which was often bestowed at the shah’s whim.<sup>43</sup> The title of *sepahsalār* (commander-in-chief) was considered as the highest honorary military rank and granted only in rare circumstances.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>38</sup>RGVIA, fond 446, delo 5: 2 rev.

<sup>39</sup>It is worth mentioning that the military rank of *Sarkyardeh*, as was true of other Iranian military ranks that were influenced by the military organization of the Safavid and Afshar states, also existed in the eastern Georgian feudal army, as evidenced in the document composed in Russian, “Tabel chinam, bivshim v Gruzii pri tsariakh, 1801 goda” [The list of the clerks, being in Georgia, in the service of the king, 1801], AKAK, Pod redaktsiei Adolfa Berge (Tiflis, 1866), 1. All military ranks mentioned in the document: *Sardali*, *Sarkardari*, *Min-bashi*, *Punsad-bashi*, *Yuz-bashi* and *Dab-bashi*—are of Iranian (Perso-Turkish) origin.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>41</sup>Teimuraz Bagrationi, *Davit Bagrationis Istorია* [The history of Davit Bagrationi] (Tbilisi, 1972), 33 (in Georgian). Sometimes the *Pishkhāneh* also added bastions and dug trenches to avoid a sneak attack by the enemy.

<sup>42</sup>Joseph P. Ferrier, *Caravan Journeys and Wanderings in Persia, Afghanistan, Turkistan and Beloochistan* (London, 1856), 39.

<sup>43</sup>Mohammad Hasan Khān Sani’ od Dowleh, *Al-māsir ua al-asār* (Tehran, 1306), 224, 269, 319.

<sup>44</sup>During the Safavid period, the feudal army of the provinces was subordinate to the *Beglarbegi* (a provincial governor), who exercised civil and military duties in the province. However, later on, particularly in the period of Nader Shah Afshar, it appears that civil matters were delegated to the supervision of the *Beglarbegi* while the provincial army was under the command of a *Sardār* (a commander of the provincial irregular army). This division of the civil and military power indicates that Nader Shah wanted to avoid the concentration of power in the hands of the *Beglarbegi*. This division of power between the civil and military authorities was maintained through the beginning of the nineteenth century. However, there were some exceptions to the rule: certain powerful *Beglarbegi* could perform both civil and military duties. For example, the *Beglarbegi* of Erivan, Hossein Khan, was at the same time *sardār*. However, it should be stressed that during this period, as a rule, *Beglarbegi* did not command the armed forces of the province. Iranian historian Abd ar Razzāq Beg Domboli confirms this assertion, particularly in his description of Hossein Khan as *Beglarbegi* and *sardār*.

Though the sources concur on the organizational rank and structure, it is likely that the number of soldiers in each sub-unit varied according to available manpower. During the reign of Karim Khan Zand (1760–79), one observer noted that a *Pansad* (literally, 500) *bāshi*, who would normally command 500 soldiers, was commanding only fifty.<sup>45</sup> The division of the irregulars into units of 1,000, 500, a hundred, fifty, and ten was most likely an optimal scenario that was rarely realized.

*Provincial militias.* The provincial militia was an irregular force consisting mainly of city or town dwellers, as well as some semi-nomads, and at times nomads. The force maintained order within Iran and joined external campaigns in times of war. The provincial militia included cavalry (*savāreh*) and infantry (*pyādeh*) units, and also served as garrison forces (*sākblu*) at the fortresses and principal strategic locations in Iran.<sup>46</sup> The militiamen could be stationed in outlying provinces to carry out garrison duties, if needed. Thus, according to Qajar Prince Jahangir Mirza, on the eve of the second Russian–Iranian war (1826–28) a provincial militia detachment consisting of 1,000 infantrymen recruited from Demavand (north of the capital) was sent to protect the distant Assadabad fortress.<sup>47</sup>

During the nineteenth century the provincial militias decreased in numbers and importance. The change came after the formation of the regular army, which began during the reign of Fath Ali Shah in 1808, a year after the arrival of the French military mission headed by General Gardane. The addition of a regular army caused the provincial militias to lose some of their influence on the country's social and political life and resulted in a significant reduction in their strength.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the provincial cavalry was no longer a prestigious military assignment. This was best reflected by the actions of experienced cavalymen, who did not want to serve in the provincial militia, and who would send their inexperienced sons, nephews, or other relatives in their place. The commanders were satisfied with this arrangement because they were primarily interested in the number of recruits; quality and experience were secondary considerations.<sup>48</sup> As a result, during this period the provincial infantry was not known for its high standard of military skill. Rather, as might be expected of a provincial militia, it was characterized by a rudimentary structure, lack of regular salary payments, insufficient training and discipline, and inexperienced command.

However, the infantry and cavalry militias managed to maintain basic levels of manpower. In the 1880s a substantial provincial militia still existed in Azerbaijan,

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“Mostafa Āqā Qazāq rā ham ta’in nemud ke ba Hossein Khān Beglarbegi va Sardār-e Erivān banā-ie amr eltiām gozārad —[The shah] appointed Mostafa Āqā Qazāq to lay down the foundations of obedience with Hossein Khān Beglarbegi and Sardār of Yerevan”—See Domboli, *Maaser-e Saltānie*, 269.

<sup>45</sup>See Parviz Rajabi, “Ārtesh-e Irān dar doure-ie Zandie,” *Majale-ie barrasiha-ie tārikhi, Sāl-e sheshom, shomāre-ie sevvom* (Tehran, 1350), 4.

<sup>46</sup>Quzānlu, *Tārikh-e nezāmi-ie Irān*, 2: 708.

<sup>47</sup>Jahāngir Mirzā Qājār, *Tārikh-e nou. Shāmel-e havādes-e doure-ie Qājāri-ie az sāl-e 1240 ta 1267 kamari* (Tehran, 1327), 10.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 107.

Khorasan, and Iraqi-Ajam. Despite the regular army's existence, the provinces of Astarabad, Mazanderan, Kerman, Nardin, Gudarzi, and Bastam also maintained provincial militias, but on a smaller scale. The persistence of provincial militias in these areas suggests the disorganization and unreliability of the so-called "regular" army at this time.

In addition to the cavalry, the provincial militia contained infantry (*pyādeh*). The infantry was not a homogenous force, as it consisted of *tofāngchi*, *jazāirchi*, and *sham-khālchi* detachments. The Persian sources mention these units, but do not explain the differences between them. Having made a comparative analysis of the primary sources, we conclude that these detachments differed in the type of rifles they used.<sup>49</sup> Variety of firearms shows the lack of military standards in the Qajar army.

In contrast to the provincial cavalry, which came from the mountain and tribal areas of Iran, the provincial infantry units were largely drawn from the provinces near the Caspian Sea. In the 1830s, according to Captain I. Blaramberg, a Russian officer, the provincial militia of Gilan consisted only of an infantry force of *tofāngchis* (musketeers), which numbered 6,800 men.<sup>50</sup> The provincial militia of Mazandaran and Astarabad, numbering 14,000 men, included both foot soldiers and mounted *tofāngchi*,<sup>51</sup> while the militia of the Talish district, which had to be assembled by the local *khans* by order of Gilan's authorities, consisted of only 600 foot soldiers.<sup>52</sup> Though at the beginning of the nineteenth century some *tofāngchis* were armed with matchlocks, by the 1840s the *tofāngchis* recruited from the Talish and Mazanderan provinces were armed mainly with flintlocks, possibly due to their proximity to Russia; thus, they were better armed than the *tofāngchis* of the Astarabad province.<sup>53</sup>

The history of the origin of the *jazāirchis* (infantry armed with *jazāir*)<sup>54</sup> in Iran is closely linked to Nader Shah (r. 1736–47). During the formation of the standing army, he organized the *jazāirchi* infantry corps into a 12,000-man unit. According

<sup>49</sup>It should be noted that at the beginning of nineteenth century the irregular infantry was armed by the matchlocks. See "O voennoi sile Persii," 176–77.

<sup>50</sup>Blaramberg, "Statisticheskoe obozrenie Persii," 141.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>52</sup>See William Holmes, *Sketches on the Shores of the Caspian* (London, 1845), 75.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 75, 186, 289.

<sup>54</sup>The Persian narrative sources of the seventeenth century indicate that *Jazāir* was used long before Nader Shah Afshar. This is mentioned, for example, in the work of the court historian of Shah Abbas the Great, Iskander Munshi. See Iskander Beg Torkaman, *Tārikh-e 'ālamārā-ye abbāsi* (Tehran, 1350), 2: 1052. Although the information about the *Jazāirchis* was provided by many authors, during our research we have not come across a detailed description of the *Jazāir*. For example, according to the evidence of Captain Vasilii Bebutov, *Jazāir* was a matchlock—see RGVIA, fond 446, delo 5: 4. But as we know, at the beginning of nineteenth century all irregular foot soldiers were armed with various types of matchlocks. The explanatory dictionary of the Georgian language describes *Jazāir* as "an old, long bell-mouthed rifle." See *Kartuli enis ganmartebiti lexikoni* [The explanatory lexicon of the Georgian language] (Tbilisi, 1964), VIII: 1551 (in Georgian). In the opinion of George Stone, considered one of the leading American specialists in arms, *Jazāir* or *Jazāil* is of Afghan origin. He writes that the word originally referred to a matchlock, which was later transformed to a flintlock by mounting European locks on it. See George C. Stone, *A Glossary of the Construction, Decoration and Use of Arms and Armor in all Countries and in all Times* (New York, 1961), 332.

to historical sources of the period, the *jazāirchis* were armed with heavy muskets, the weight of which sometimes reached 18 kilograms.<sup>55</sup>

The *shamkhālchis* (infantry armed with *shamkhāl*)<sup>56</sup> detachment constituted a significant part of the provincial militia of Khorasan. Referring to a description by Russian military official A. Rzhevuski, the *shamkhālchi* wore a high hat on his head, a long rifle behind his back, a saber on his side, and two pistols on his belt.<sup>57</sup> According to Prince Jahangir Mirza, author of the “New History,” there were 700 *shamkhālchis* under the command of Khorasani Prince Hasan Ali Mirza.<sup>58</sup> Mohammad Hasan Khan Sani’ od-Dowleh, the well-known Iranian historiographer, notes that during the rebellion of Salar in the late 1840s, the detachments of the *shamkhālchis*, divided into mounted and foot units, took part in the defense of Meshed against the governmental forces.<sup>59</sup>

Though at the beginning of nineteenth century the *pyādeh* (infantry) existed in almost all provinces of Iran, by the last quarter of the century, according to the *Sāl-Nāma* (yearbook or almanac) of 1882, the infantry detachments were preserved in only four regions: Khorasan (*shamkhālchis* and *jazāirchis* of *Sarakhs*), Gilan (*dasteh* recruited from Salian, Anzan, and Sheft), Mazanderan (*jamā’at* recruited from Golbad and Ashraf), and Astarabad (*dasteh* recruited from the districts of Fendereski, Kotul, Maksudlu, Astarabadrustaki, Balashahkui, Painshahkui, Sadanrustaki, Anzana, Temeskin, Saveri, Livan, Silsepar, and from Baluchi tribes).<sup>60</sup> Thus, though the irregular army was losing its military efficiency, irregular militias continued to operate in Iran at the end of the century.

*Tribes.* Tribes—their ways, leaders, bonds, and divisions—played a central role in structuring the Iranian irregular army. A great deal of emphasis was placed on the personal ties between the shah and the tribal leaders. Tribal elites usually commanded the largest units (*dasteh* or *jamā’at*), and the strength of these units was entirely dependent on the influence of the tribes that commanded them.<sup>61</sup> Some of the most powerful

<sup>55</sup>See M. R. Arunova and K. Z. Ashrafiān, *Gosudarstvo Nadir-shakha Afshara* (Moscow, 1958), 132.

<sup>56</sup>There is scant information on the *Shamkhāl* in the Persian and European sources. According to Persian scholar Ali Akbar Dehkhodā, *Shamkhāl* is “an old, crude and heavy rifle like a rifle having a rifled barrel.” See Ali Akbar Dehkhodā, *Loqhat-Nāma*, Shomāre-ie masalsal 169 (Tehran, 1350), 572. Mohammad Moin’s (the author of the Persian explanatory dictionary) interpretation on the *Shamkhāl* seems less substantial. See M. Moin, *Farhang-e farsi* (Tehran, 1342), 2: 2075. Dehkhoda’s description of the weight of the *Shamkhal* is confirmed by British officer A. Conolly, who describes the *Shamkhāl* as a big rifle that was put on a rest during shooting. See A. Conolly, *A Journey to the North of India, overland from England, through Russia, Persia, and Afghanistan* (London, 1834), I: 242. Similarly, the Russian newspaper *Kavkaz* reported: “In Khorasan Prince Hussam os Saltaneh assembled the troops known as *Samkhanchis*, armed with the long rifles from which they fire using the rests, and is engaged in their management.” See *Kavkaz*, no. 17 (Tiflis, 1853).

<sup>57</sup>A. Rzhevuski, “Poездka v Meshkhed,” *Voennii sbornik*, no. 5–6 (1890): 208.

<sup>58</sup>Qājār, *Tarikh-e nou*, 102.

<sup>59</sup>Mohammad Hasan Khān Sani’ od Dowleh, *Mirāt al-buldān-e nāseri* (Tehran, 1294), 2: 16–17, 147.

<sup>60</sup>Mohammad Hasan Khān Sani’ od Dowleh, *Tārikh-e montazam-e nāseri* (Tehran, 1299), 2: 17–18.

<sup>61</sup>RGVIA, fond 446, delo 5: 2 rev.

tribes, such as the Afshars, Shahsevens, Atabais, and others, often supplied the army with several *dasteh* or *jama'at* cavalry units. Those units made up a substantial portion of the irregular army cavalry, and were some of the strongest and leading units of the force. Georgian Prince Teimuraz Bagrationi, while observing the irregular cavalry during the first Russian–Iranian war (1804–13), remarked, “this day I saw the splendid cavalry from the nomad tribes coming from Kazvin ... We were shocked by their artful riding, using a lance, rifle and *javid* [a type of spear or lance].”<sup>62</sup>

James Morier, during his second journey to Iran, noted that some of the tribes who served in the shah’s army, such as the Bakhtiars, Afshars, and Shahpasands, were organized within the camp according to tribal groupings.<sup>63</sup> The purpose of grouping the tribes according to their traditional units was to preserve the unique tribal framework, which served to prevent inter-tribal frictions from igniting before a military campaign. The shah also employed this tactic of encapsulating the tribes as whole units so as not to disturb their primordial bonds, which was a way of harnessing the organizational strengths of these units for the benefit of the state. The tribes, for their part, preferred this arrangement, because it did not threaten their unity or the status quo of their individual groupings. This accommodation further allowed the tribes to acquire material benefits from the state, such as ammunition and salaries, without sacrificing their autonomy.

European observers, who were unfamiliar with the relationships between tribes and between tribe and state, interpreted these arrangements as disorder. For example, Gaspar Drouville, a former French officer and traveler, observed that “the camp of the irregular forces represents a strange mixture of the people, tents, horses, mules, camels [and so forth].”<sup>64</sup> Bartelemi Semino, another former French military officer in the Iranian service, described the irregular army in a similar way. In his letter dated 9 July 1827, addressed to his friend Luisa de la Marinier, he wrote:

The Shah’s army, robbing each other in his Majesty’s camp, made even more disorder in the villages and surrounding settlements ... Deprived of the provisional allowance and salary, one could compare it with a cloud of locusts, annihilating instantly with frenzy all the country through which it passes by. But the locusts eat only the corn, while these privileged robbers, having taken all with them that fell into their hands, were engaged in digging of land in all the villages in hope of finding something hidden by the peasants. Having finally destroyed a certain village, having taken from the peasants everything, even the last piece of the bread, they took the wooden beams of the roof, to use as fuel for preparing the pilau [the Iranian national food, prepared from rice]. When I asked the people to provide me with an explanation, they assured me that it is only a simple habit, so characteristic for the Persian army engaged in the campaign to plunder its own country.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>62</sup>Bagrationi, *Sparsuli dgbiurebi anu siskhlit natseri pikrebi*, 200.

<sup>63</sup>Morier, *A Second Journey through Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor*, 278.

<sup>64</sup>Drouville, *Puteshestvie v Persiu v 1812–1813 godakh*, 2: 152.

<sup>65</sup>Borschevskii, “K kharakteristike rukopisnogo nasledya V. A. Zhukovskogo,” 42–43.

Western observers who viewed this looting through their own cultural norms failed to consider the tribal roots of Iranian martial culture. For example, Moritz von Kotzebue, a member of Russian General Yermolov's mission to Tehran in 1817, noted that "the Persians' main objective in the fight is not to occupy the territory, but to obtain the big loot."<sup>66</sup> "These defenders of the motherland," Russian Captain Vasilii Bebutov cynically commented, "are engaged in the awful pillage of those villages which they are to defend."<sup>67</sup> In contrast to these western descriptions, the military camp was not total anarchy, but represented the integration of traditional tribal practice into the armed forces. In fact, for the irregular soldiers, the attraction of the military campaign was the ability to plunder. When there was no opportunity to plunder, the soldiers fought without enthusiasm. Looting was a natural extension of nomadic warrior culture, and was not viewed as socially deviant behavior. Rather, it was the primary motivation for the shah's irregular fighters who were not paid, equipped, or maintained like a professional western army.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the socio-ethnic composition of the provincial militias reflected the tribal mosaic of Iranian society. Azerbaijan, for example, consisted of twenty-two *dastebs* (units) recruited from the tribes of Afshar (Sain-kala, Urumi), Chahardovali, Chelbianlu, Shakaki, Inanlu, Karapapakh, Hajjalilu, Mokaddam, Mokri, Khujebiglu, and Mohajers. The Khorasan provincial militia consisted of thirty-two *dastebs*, which included the tribes of Hazare, Teimuri, Afshars, Arabs, and the sedentary tribesmen from Meshed and Sabzevar. The Iraqi-Ajam provincial militia consisted of thirty-one *dastebs* and was formed by the Shasevens (Afshar, Inanlu, Bagdadi, Duviren, Kurtbiglu), Afshars (Asadabadi, Soujbulak, Bekeshlu), Bakhtiars, Arabs (Ardestani), Arabobaseri, Khamse, Bairanavend, Kordbache, Asanlu, Kharachurlui-ie Khar, Sanjabi, Feili, and Ilatkazvini.<sup>68</sup>

When regular army units began to gain significance, tribal considerations were important as well. In the 1890s, according to Russian Staff Captain Tumanskii, certain standing cavalry units, *savāre-ie divāni*, were comprised of nomads and sons of leading tribal elders, who were conscripted as hostages in order to assure the shah of the loyalty of their fathers' tribes.<sup>69</sup> This tactic was not uncommon in tribal societies and was also employed by rulers in Yemen and other areas in the region. In the case of Iran, the state used this method to curtail or limit tribal unrest and hostility and to maintain stability in the tribal areas. Their formation reflected the evolving relationship between the tribes and the state.

The *savāre-ie divāni* was subordinate to the *divān*, which was part of the Ministry of Finance. According to the *Sāl-Nāme* of 1888/89 (the yearbook of the shah's court historiographer, Mohammad Hasan Khan Sani' od Dowleh), the *savāre-ie divāni* guarded the high roads and was divided into several detachments: the Duveiren,

<sup>66</sup>"O nineshnm persidskom shakhe," 365.

<sup>67</sup>RGVIA, fond 446, delo 5: 3.

<sup>68</sup>See Dowleh, *Tārikh-e montazam-e nāseri*, 2: 14–17.

<sup>69</sup>A.G. Tumanskii, "Ot Kaspiiskogo moria k Khormuzskomu prolivu i obratno. 1894 g.," *Sbornik materialov po Azii* (Saint-Petersburg 1896) XV: 20.



Afshar, and Hajevend, each with 500 men; the Asanlu with 200; the Hadavend with 150; the *karāsūrāns* of the Kazvin with 170. The entire force consisted of approximately 2,020 troops.<sup>70</sup> Each detachment of the *savāre-ie divāni* was headed by a *sarkyardeh* in the rank of *sarhang* (colonel) or *sartip* (general).

*The shah's standing forces: bodyguard, artillery, arsenals.*

Besides the irregular provincial militias and tribal cavalry, there was a standing bodyguard of *gholāms* (servants) in the shah's service. The intermittent struggle between the shah and the nomadic tribes compelled the Qajar rulers to recruit this special armed detachment to protect themselves. *Gholāms* enjoyed privileges so broad that they did as they pleased without respect for others. Accordingly, the *gholāms* were feared by Iranian villagers and countrymen: as soon as villagers learned of the arrival of the *gholāms*, they fled their homes and took shelter in the neighboring mountains and forests.<sup>71</sup>

The *gholāms*, consisting of 2,000 to 4,000 cavalymen, were under the command of the *qullarāqāsi* (head of the *gholāms*), as a rule of Caucasian origin, who enjoyed considerable influence in the shah's court.<sup>72</sup> This corps was divided into two groups or detachments: the first, comparatively large, known as *gholām-shāh* (the shah's servants), used the carbine, pistol, and saber in the battlefield; the second group, the *gholām-tofangchis*, were also mounted, but, like the European dragoons, also fought on foot. They used long rifles, with the barrels supported on high rests.<sup>73</sup>

*Gholām-Shāh* represented the most privileged branch of the Iranian army. It was the best paid detachment, which was evident in its more professional uniforms and equipment.<sup>74</sup> In times of war, a recruited militiaman received a salary of 5–7 *tomāns* per year, while a *gholām-shāh* received 12–20, and sometimes up to 60 *tomāns* per year. Besides the salary and provisional allowance, the *gholāms* had other sources of income, particularly rewards, which they received for collecting state revenues.<sup>75</sup> The salary of a *gholām-tofangchi* was also better than that of a militiaman but less than that of a *gholām-shāh*: according to the English traveler Robert Ker Porter, it amounted to 15 *tomāns* per year. In addition to a salary, the *gholām-tofangchi* received a certain provisional allowance, usually wheat fodder.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>70</sup>Mohammad Hasan Khān Sani' od Dowleh, *Al-maasir ua al-asār* (Tehran, 1306), 37.

<sup>71</sup>James Fraser, *Travels and Adventures in the Persian Provinces on the Southern Banks of the Caspian Sea* (London, 1826), 256.

<sup>72</sup>Malcolm, *The History of Persia*, 2: 497; Holmes, *Sketches on the Shores of the Caspian*, 585.

<sup>73</sup>Drouville, *Puteshestvie v Persiu v 1812–1813 godakh*, 2: 105–06. Information on the division of the *gholāms* into two categories, and on their participation in the military operations, is available in the works of Gaspar Drouville and Robert Ker Porter, as well as in Persian narrative sources. See Domboli, *Maaser-e Saltānie*, 209, 216; Qājār, *Tārikh-e Nou*, 19.

<sup>74</sup>Waring, *A Tour to Sheeraz*, 84.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Robert Ker Porter, *Travels in Georgia, Persia, Armenia, Ancient Babylonia during the years 1817, 1818, 1819, and 1820* (London, 1822), 2: 585.

The *gholām-shāh* maintained its special status as one of the most efficient and faithful forces until the formation of the Persian Cossack Brigade in 1879, which signaled the transition of Iran's military to a more modern organizational structure. At the end of the nineteenth century the number of *gholām-shāh* was reduced to 1,000 men.<sup>77</sup>

Another unit of the shah's bodyguard was the cavalry corps of *joushan-pushān* ("dressed in armor"),<sup>78</sup> known in European terms as cuirassiers. The author of the chronicle *Maaser-e Saltāniie*, in a description of Fath Ali Shah's military campaign in Khorasan in 1801, observed that the shah sent a force of 10,000 mounted *joushan-pushān* ahead of the army with his cousin Ebrahim Khan.<sup>79</sup> At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Gaspar Drouville, a western author, noted that the shah was accompanied by 4,000 cavalry cuirassiers (he refers to them as *kizilbāshs*, apparently because of their Turkish origin). Drouville estimated that this force numbered 20,000 men scattered throughout Iran. According to Drouville, they were mounted on high Turcoman horses and their arms and dress appeared traditional. They were armed with sabers as well as with light lances, 13–14 feet (approximately 3–4 meters) long, with a pikestaff made of bamboo. This force did not use firearms. The head of *joushan-pushān* wore a helmet made of iron rings and his body was armored in chain mail. The typical cuirassier held a round buckler (shield) in his left hand while the right arm was also protected with a kind of iron armband.<sup>80</sup>

Military service for the *joushan-pushān* was often hereditary.<sup>81</sup> The government gave members of this force a one-time allotment of horse and arms. If the horse or arms became worthless, the shah compensated them with money. It appears that a cuirassier received 24 *tomāns* in salary and 3–4 *kharvār* (*kharvār* literally means donkey's burden; one *kharvār* is equivalent to 300 kilograms) of fodder as a provisional allowance.<sup>82</sup>

Though the shah employed the *joushan-pushān* at the very beginning of the nineteenth century, he soon deployed them less often as a result of their inferior strength against the growing number of forces using firearms in Iran, especially by European armies. Consequently, by the 1820s, the number of mounted cuirassiers diminished from 20,000 to less than 10,000.<sup>83</sup> During the reign of Mohammad Shah (1834–48), the *joushan-pushān* corps disappeared from Iran's military force.

According to European authors, the shah's security was also guarded by a 12–14,000-man corps of *tofāngchis* recruited only from the province of Mazanderan. James Morier noted that they were divided into detachments of 3,000 men, referred to as *keshikchis* (watchmen), who were assigned to protect the shah's palace. A detachment of *keshikchis* was under the command of a *sarkeshikchi* (a head or watchman).<sup>84</sup>

<sup>77</sup>Dowleh, *Al-maasir ua al-asār*, 36.

<sup>78</sup>*Joushan* is a chain mail, and *push* is a suffix that means dressed; that is chain mail-dressed

<sup>79</sup>Domboli, *Maaser-e Saltāniie*, 65.

<sup>80</sup>Drouville, *Putesbestvie v Persiu v 1812–1813 godakh*, 2: 103–04.

<sup>81</sup>Morier, *A Journey through Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor to Constantinople*, 585.

<sup>82</sup>Drouville, *Putesbestvie v Persiu v 1812–1813 godakh*, 2: 105.

<sup>83</sup>Porter, *Travels in Georgia, Persia, Armenia, Ancient Babylonia*, 2: 585.

<sup>84</sup>Morier, *A Journey through Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor to Constantinople*, 242.

The corps of *kesbikchis* was not a new innovation in the Iranian army, as they had served in the standing army of Nader Shah, where they performed the functions of the king's bodyguard and were known as *hamasha-kesbikchis* (constant watchmen).<sup>85</sup> They were charged with protecting the shah's life, both in the palace and in the citadel.<sup>86</sup> According to William Ouseley, secretary to the British ambassador to Tehran in 1810, *kesbikchis* resided inside the shah's citadel.<sup>87</sup> A Persian source, the *Tārikh-e rouzāt os safāi-ie nāseri*, noted that the main role of the *kesbikchis*, armed with flintlock firearms, was to protect the shah's tent on the battlefield.<sup>88</sup>

The Persian sources provide further information regarding the ethnic origin of the *kesbikchis*. According to historiographer Rezā Qoli Khān Hedāyat, the majority of the shah's *kesbikchis* were from Mazandaran, which confirms James Morier's observations. The majority of the *kesbikchis* were recruited from the Qajar tribe itself. However, Afghans and Baluchis residing in Mazandaran, as well as Georgians residing near Ashref, and others, provided a certain number of *kesbikchis*.<sup>89</sup>

In addition to the shah's bodyguard, an artillery corps was eventually incorporated into the Iranian military force alongside the irregular fighters. Shah Abbas I (1587–1629) was the first Iranian ruler who not only understood the usefulness of artillery in war but also used it in practice. However, artillery, or *tupkhāneh*,<sup>90</sup> was not widely adopted in the Iranian army until the Qajar period and, as a result, at the end of the Safavid period the artillery corps collapsed.<sup>91</sup> Nader Shah made a second serious attempt to restore the artillery, but after his death in 1747 the project was once again abandoned. William Franklin, who visited Iran in 1786–87, wrote that the artillery guns (of Spanish or Portuguese origin, among others) were poorly maintained, and became rusty and useless.<sup>92</sup>

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the artillery was one of the most vulnerable branches of the Iranian army. It consisted of old and worthless guns of various calibers. The guns were forged in the foundries of Isfahan, Shiraz, Tabriz, and Meshed.<sup>93</sup> The *tupkhāneh* was guarded by a *tupchi-bāshi*, or head gunner, who, according to the anonymous chronicle *Tadhkirāt al-Muluk* (Memorandum for

<sup>85</sup>See Arunova and Ashrafiān, *Gosudarstvo Nadir-shakha Afshara*, 132.

<sup>86</sup>Morier, *A Journey through Persia, Armenia, And Asia Minor to Constantinople*, 242.

<sup>87</sup>William Ouseley, *Travels in Various Countries of the East, more particularly Persia* (London, 1819), 2: 118.

<sup>88</sup>Reza Qoli Khān Hedāyat, *Tārikh-e rouzāt os-safāi-ie nāseri* (Tehran, 1339), 9: 2451.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

<sup>90</sup>It should be mentioned that the term *Tupkhāneh* at the same time meant the arsenal, where the guns were preserved.

<sup>91</sup>Sarlashgyar Abutarāb Sardādar, *Tārikh-e nezāmi va siāsi-ie dourān-e Nāder Shāh-e Afshār* (Tehran, 1354), 79.

<sup>92</sup>William Franklin, *Observation made on a Tour from Bengal to Persia in the Years 1786–7* (London, 1790), 53, 57.

<sup>93</sup>Alfred Gardane, *Mission du général Gardane en Perse sous le premier Empire. Documents historiques* (Paris, 1865), 124.

kings), “was the *rishsefid* [head] of the following units: *jārchis* [heralds], *tupchis* [gunners], *minbāshis* and *yuzbāshis* of the *tupkhāneh*.”<sup>94</sup> General Gardane noted that at this time the artillery corps numbered 2,500 men.<sup>95</sup> The Iranian artillery performed only an auxiliary function and was not able to carry out independent missions. It was often used in defense of the shah’s forts. According to the information reported by French officer Favie, the guns were usually hung on the walls without gun-carriages.<sup>96</sup>

In the period under discussion, the Iranian army made wide use of a type of small gun, known as *zamburak* or falconet, which was usually mounted on the back of a camel. In order to fire this gun, the gunner would command the camel to lie down on the ground and would take aim from the ground towards his target.<sup>97</sup> The falconet was usually ineffective because of its small caliber and inaccuracy.

The primary sources indicate that the *ghurkhāneh*, or arsenal, produced ammunition for the artillery, including gunpowder, cannon-balls, and shells. The *ghuryūsāulbāshi*, a high Qajar official mentioned in the Persian narrative and documentary sources of the nineteenth century, was evidently connected to the *ghurkhāneh* and occupied a significant position in Qajar society. For example, according to the Iranian chronicle *Maaser-e Saltāniie*, “Naib os Saltaneh appointed Fath Ali Khan Nuri *ghuryūsāulbāshi*, who was a grand, respected and experienced man, on the post of the *mehmāndār*”<sup>98</sup> of the ambassadors.”<sup>99</sup>

The cold steel arms and firearms, such as sabers, lances, and rifles, as well as the soldiers’ equipment, were manufactured at the *jabakhāneh*, or arms factory.<sup>100</sup> According to Gaspar Drouville, “there were made all necessary things for the irregular forces in the *jabakhāneh*.”<sup>101</sup> William Ouseley wrote that the *jabakhāneh* produced not only military equipment, but also repaired, cleaned, and maintained the arms and equipment.<sup>102</sup> In the 1840s, apart from military products such as sabers, rifles, flints, bayonets, horns, and ammunition belts, the *jabakhāneh* also produced civilian products such as carriages.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>94</sup>*Tadbkirāt al-Muluk* (Tehran, 1332), 13.

<sup>95</sup>Gardane, *Mission*, 121.

<sup>96</sup>Said Nāfisi, *Tārikh-e ejtemāi va siāsi-ie Irān dar doure-ie moāser* (Tehran, 1335), 1: 211.

<sup>97</sup>Drouville, *Putesbestvie v Persiu v 1812–1813 godakh*, 2: 134.

<sup>98</sup>*Mehmāndār* (host) was an official who was usually appointed by the authorities to accompany guests of high rank, including ambassadors.

<sup>99</sup>The author is referring to the members of General Gardane’s mission. See Domboli, *Maaser-e Saltānie*, 197.

<sup>100</sup>In the Safavid period, referring to the “*Tadhkirāt al-Muluk*,” *Jabakhāneh* was guided by the *Jabadār-bāshi*, who was considered “one of the highest *muqarrabs* and dignitaries of the court.” See V. Minorsky, trans. and ed., *Tadbkirāt al-Muluk: a Manual of Safavid Administration (circa 1137/1725)* (Cambridge, 1980), 65.

<sup>101</sup>Drouville, *Putesbestvie v Persiu v 1812–1813 godakh*, 2: 144.

<sup>102</sup>William Ouseley, *Travels in Various Countries of the East, more particularly Persia* (London, 1823), 3: 119.

<sup>103</sup>Dowleh, *Mirāt al-buldān-e nāseri*, 2: 67, 105.

*IV. Role of the Army*

The armed forces in Qajar Iran played an important role in the state and society. Though part of that role related to military missions, the armed forces also served an important role in state–society relations, and are a significant tool in understanding that relationship. First, the shah used the armed forces in order to foster the loyalty and obedience of the members of society to the state. This is why Agha Mohammad Khan (1785–97), the founder of the Qajar dynasty, treated his army generously.<sup>104</sup> According to John Malcolm, Agha Mohammad Khan paid his soldiers a regular salary (and the cavalry received fodder for their horses in addition to a salary), but also permitted his forces to loot the country's towns and villages in the course of their duties, a pattern of behavior that was common among tribal groups in the region.<sup>105</sup> In return for this privilege, the shah demanded unconditional obedience and loyalty. This practice represented a case of the state accommodating traditional tribal rituals for its own gain. The arrangement exemplifies Joel Migdal's concept of the state as "an arena of accommodations."<sup>106</sup>

Qajar shahs also used more traditional means of patronage to maintain the loyalty of society through the army. For example, the shah filled the ranks of the *Gholām-Shāh*, the most privileged and respected branch of the Iranian army, with representatives of powerful families. In return, the shah demanded and received absolute loyalty from these men: the unit became the shah's most trusted and reliable military unit. In the 1820s, western traveler James Fraser described these men as loyal soldiers who executed the will of their sovereign, and enjoyed almost unlimited rights. Their authority was rarely challenged.<sup>107</sup>

Second, the shah used the armed forces to balance rival groups within the state. For example, the shah used his 6,000-strong Turcoman cavalry irregulars to enforce obedience during battle and other missions. One of their tasks was to prevent the shah's soldiers from fleeing the field of battle. During the battle of Tbilisi, Georgia in May 1795, the shah placed this cavalry corps behind the infantry on the battlefield in order to reinforce the foot soldiers and ensure that they performed their duty in battle.<sup>108</sup> This unique dynamic of using the military irregulars to protect against both internal challenges to state authority and external enemies reveals the competing forces within the Qajar state and the tools the shah used to balance them.

Third, the various branches of the armed forces served an important internal function by maintaining order in the country. This was true of the provincial militia, whose role was to keep order in times of peace and to join the army, as needed, during times of war. They were designed to serve locally, in their respective provinces.

<sup>104</sup>Malcolm, *The History of Persia*, 2: 309.

<sup>105</sup>*Ibid.*, 310.

<sup>106</sup>J. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton, NJ, 1988), 11.

<sup>107</sup>Fraser, *Travels and Adventures in the Persian Provinces*, 256.

<sup>108</sup>Bagrationi, *Davit Bagrationis Istorია*, 34–35.

As noted, every province possessed a militia consisting of the residents of the cities and villages and some nomads.<sup>109</sup>

This police role was also essentially a task of controlling competing interests within society. Provincial militias were used to balance the overall strength of the tribal components of the military. This tactic of creating a balance of power between tribal forces and provincial militias was not new. It had been employed by Shah Abbas (1587–1629) as early as the sixteenth century. During the nineteenth century this process began to be institutionalized, possibly attesting to a more sophisticated understanding of ways to maintain internal order among the diverse elements of Iranian society. The same need—the intermittent struggle between the shah and the tribes and villages—compelled the Qajar rulers to recruit a bodyguard to protect themselves. Indeed, a western traveler reported that the *gholāms* were feared by Persian villagers and peasants.<sup>110</sup>

As a result of its role in balancing the diverse factions of Iranian society, the armed forces served to preserve the traditional organizational structure inherited from the Safavid and Afshar periods. By conforming to the patterns of tribal organization and behavior, the irregular forces perpetuated the tribal nature of Iranian society. At the same time, the state could not allow the tribes to gain too much strength, as they had long constituted a primary threat to the shah's authority due to their organizational flexibility, strength, and mobility. Therefore, the shah later used military conscription and the formation of specialized regular army units as mechanisms through which to rule Iran by weakening and balancing competing centers of power. Similarly, Iranian peasants, known as *rayats*, were enlisted in the army in order to balance the tribal nomadic components, and the provincial militias were meant to balance the overall strength of the tribal components of the military.

### V. Conclusion

By understanding the features of the army—its role and place in the Qajar society, organizational and social structures, ethnic composition, and other parameters—we can better understand the character of the state itself. The accession to power of the Qajar dynasty at the end of the eighteenth century did not cause qualitative changes in the military. Under the Qajars, in the appropriate words of John Malcolm, Iran remained under “military and despotic” rule.<sup>111</sup> The irregular army was an essential element of the Qajar absolutist regime employed against domestic and foreign enemies, and used to perform administrative functions, such as collecting revenues.

It is noteworthy that even after the formation of regular army units in Iran at the beginning of the nineteenth century, a process that was not caused by the economic development of the country but by a chain of military and political

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<sup>109</sup>Malcolm, *The History of Persia*, 2: 498.

<sup>110</sup>Fraser, *Travels and Adventures in the Persian Provinces*, 256.

<sup>111</sup>Malcolm, *The History of Persia*, 2: 482.

factors (particularly the Russian–Iranian wars of 1804–13 and 1826–28), the Qajar irregular army continued to play its traditional role in the life of the country. The irregular tribal cavalry continued to be a fierce and mobile fighting force. Its continued significance was demonstrated when the cavalry of Bakhtiari tribes played an important role in overthrowing the despotic regime of Mohammad Ali Shah Qajar in July 1909.

The central authorities continued to use the provincial militias to keep order in the provinces and to balance the power of the tribes. They further ensured a balanced and loyal administration by dividing civil and military power between the *beglarbegi* (high provincial governor) and *sardār* (high military commander in the province). Finally, to check the irregular militias and cavalry, Qajar shahs, like their Safavid and Afshar predecessors, had in their service a standing and most loyal force—the shah’s bodyguard. Thus, despite changes in Qajar society in the second half of the nineteenth century, all three components of the irregular army—the provincial militia, the tribal forces, and the shah’s bodyguard—continued to operate at the turn of the twentieth century. Qajar Iran remained a feudal state. The analysis shows that in their policy towards the irregular army, the Qajar shahs were guided by the principle of *divide et impera* to balance the forces of the different vectors of the irregular army and the society it represented. The continuance of the irregular army in Qajar Iran, even after the introduction of regular army units, is evidence of the persistence of social and military traditions in this period of transition.