"Tribe, State and History in Southwest Asia: A Review"

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TRIBE, STATE, AND HISTORY IN SOUTHWEST ASIA:

A REVIEW

by Daniel Bradburd

The turn to historical considerations in the study of Southwest Asian pastoralists has given us a profusion of studies of the relationship between 'tribe' and 'state'. There is little question that this focus has, by turning our interest away from the 'tribe' as something in and of itself to something that develops through a complex dialectical relationship with the polities that border or surround it, enriched our understanding of pastoral societies[1]. Indeed, one can discern in the development pastoral studies from Barth's work in the early 1960s to the present both an ever increasing awareness of and an increasing sophistication in dealing with the complexity of the environmental factors that 'determine' particular pastoral social formations.

This increasing sophistication is clearly apparent in the works I will discuss here: Gene Garthwaite's Khans and Shahs; Lois Beck's The Qashqa'i of Iran; Martin Van Bruinessen's Agha, Shaikh, and State, and the essays collected in Richard Tapper's The Conflict of Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan (hereafter The Conflict). With regard to this last collection, due to constraints of focus and of space, I discuss only those essays dealing with peoples of Iran, namely Tapper's "Introduction" and "Nomads and Commissars in the Mughan Steppe: The Shahsevan Tribes in the Great Game"; Philip Salzman's "Why Tribes Have Chiefs: A Case from Baluchistan"; "Iran and the Qashqai Tribal Confederacy" by Beck; Van Bruinessen's "Kurdish Tribes and the State of Iran: The Case of Simko's Revolt"; and two pieces on the Bakhtiari, Garthwaite's "Tribe, Confederation, and the State: An Historical Overview of the Bakhtiari and Iran" and David Brooks' "The Enemy Within: Limitations on Leadership in the Bakhtiari."

In considering this body of work, I proceed as follows. First, I examine the works themselves to see what insights the shift to an historical perspective entails. Second, I draw back from the immediate studies to ask such questions as what problems and problematics arise from the attempt to understand people and their relations as historical subjects, and what kinds of insights can we, or should we, expect from historical studies of pastoralism? Finally, I use some of the answers to this second question to help evaluate the works we have before us.

The Key Issue: Tribe and State

Without question, the dominant theme of recent historical works on Southwest Asian pastoralists is the relationship between the various populations in question and the larger states that border or surround them. The centrality of this is revealed in the very titles of four recent works: The Conflict of Tribe and State In Iran and Afghanistan; Khans and Shahs; Nomads and Ottomans in Medieval

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[1] Tapper, in his cogent and informative introduction to The Conflict, suggests that there are at least two sides to the questions: first, how and why were (and are) tribes problematic for Persian and Afgan state from 1800 to the present; and second, what was "the role of states in creating, transforming, or destroying tribal institutions and structures" (1983:5). Those authors concerned with Iran (Tapper himself, Beck, Garthwaite and Van Bruinessen [both in The Conflict and their respective monographs]) dwell far more on the second issue than the first, and it is that concern about which I centre this essay.

Anatolia[2]; and Agha, Shaikh and State. This focus is not apparent in the title of Lois Beck's monograph, titled The Qashqa'i of Iran, but the centrality of this theme to her work is immediately apparent, viz. "This study...is an account of the connections between their tribal [the Qashqa'i] confederacy and the Iranian state during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries" (1986:6).

Thus, one may see these new historical studies of Southwest Asian pastoralists as a collection of works dealing with the problem of tribe and state. What then of that relationship? The clearest 'theoretical' statements about this relationship are from Garthwaite, who proposes the heuristic hypothesis: "the potential for tribal confederation is directly proportional to the strength of an external stimulus" (1983a:314, 1983b:4). It is clear, however, this view of the relationship between state pressure and 'tribal' structure is not only overly simple, it is wrong. Specifically, the relationship as Garthwaite posits is linear: complexity of tribal structure is directly proportional to the degree of external pressure. However, it seems more likely that the relationship is, at least, curvilinear. That is, while it may be true that as state pressure increases tribal structure becomes more elaborate, there is clearly a point beyond which the development of state bureaucracy leads to the devolution of 'tribal' structure. Evidence for the non-linearity of this relationship is implicit in Beck's discussion of the Qashqa'i during the later Pahlavi period and in Tapper's discussion of the Shahsevan (1983:430). Van Bruinessen explicitly argues this point for the Kurds. To me, his demonstration that there is a 'devolution' into 'tribalism' in Kurdistan is both convincing and, as I shall argue below, extremely significant for our understanding of tribe and state in the region (1978:246ff, 1983:373)[3].

Relationships as complex as that between tribe and state cannot be 'simply' explained. And, as a rule, the great strength of these recent works is that they both recognise and explicate that complexity (Salzman 1983:263). Virtually every article and book is a careful examination of the ways in which the relationships between tribe and state have varied over time, and how variation in that relationship has affected 'tribal' structure. Salzman thus ably shows how the changes in the nature of the external polities that bordered or surrounded the Yarahmadzai Baluch led to 1) variations in the relationship of the Baluch to those polities, and 2) concomitantly, to changes in the role of sardars among the Baluch. At the same time, Salzman very carefully sets out those aspects of the Yarahmadzai social and economic organization that both permit and limit the development of sardarship. We see the conjunction of both internal and external forces (Salzman 1983).

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[2] Lindner's book, Nomads and Ottomans in Medieval Anatolia, stands a bit apart from the remaining works in both place and time. For those reasons, I will not discuss it in detail here. Lindner's work is, however, pre-eminently about tribe and state, and richly merits praise. Two points stand out: 1) Lindner's demonstration of how the exigencies of Ottoman rule were incompatible with the maintenance of a pastoral following; and 2) his attempt to show how the economics of pastoral production itself helped to shape the unfolding logic of Ottoman history. Thus, on the one hand, Lindner's work deals with the other side of the 'tribe'/state problem, namely what happens when a 'tribally' organized group succeeds in establishing itself as a dominant state. On the other hand, because he is concerned with the internal features of pastoral life, his book gives us a far better feel for the linkage of pastoral economy with political history than many works dealing with far more recent events.

[3] In this regard, I am not entirely certain how to interpret Beck's statement that, "[t]he degree of political development in a tribe [confederations] is correlated with the degree of competition and external pressure" (1986:15). If, as it appears in context, it too suggests a linear relationship, then it too is wrong. If, however, it is merely a statement that there is a relationship, it is probably true, though weak.

Tapper's essay presents a more detailed examination of changes in the relationship between Shahsevan chiefs and their followers. Briefly, Russian conquest of Persian territory in the early 19th century led to the Shahsevan loss of traditional pastures. Whatever the prior relations of production controlling access to pasture--and there appears to be good evidence for substantial differential access (1983:408)--loss of pasture institutionalized differential access to pasture. 'Chiefs' came to have clearer control over pastures which they leased to commoners at increasing rents (1983:409). Thus, what Tapper claims to have originally been a kind of 'moral' hegemony of chiefs over commoners, couched in terms of privileged descent, became a form of class differentiation. From the mid-19th century until the rise of Reza Shah, ownership of the means of production gave chiefs great power over their followers, and they used it. Tribal politics now became a struggle for territory. This lead to an increase of raiding and brigandage. Successful leaders expanded their followings, their holdings, and their power at the expense of weaker groups. Weaker groups sought to protect themselves by actively supporting the leader of a larger, more powerful group (1983:430). As the Iranian nation state 'modernized' under the Pahlavis, the Shahsevan came under ever greater state control, with the state dealing with ever smaller units of the tribe. In effect, we see among the Shahsevan the curvilinear relationship the Van Bruinessen described for the Kurds. Setting aside some reservations I have about Tapper's view of the tribe's earlier political economic structure, we have here an admirable demonstration of how the linkage of political, economic, ecological, and demographic forces shape the Shahsevan polity.

Beck's The Qashqa'i..., Garthwaite's Khans and Shahs, and Van Bruinessen's Agha, Shaikh... are richer, more extended case studies. The Qashqa'i... focuses on the question of "how and why a highly developed sociopolitical institution [the Qashqa'i confederacy] emerged...in southwest Iran" (1986:7). Amassing an impressive array of historical and ethnohistorical material, Beck shows that while Turkic language and cultural elements are important aspects of Qashqa'i identity, the confederacy's membership has varied over time, and it seems quite clear that members joined themselves to or separated themselves from the tribe in a process similar to that Tapper outlined for the Shahsevan. Beck also makes it clear that the confederacy's ruling family, the Shahilu, were not originally part of a Qashqa'i tribe, and she gives an excellent account of their role in the formation and maintenance of the confederacy. In a very real sense then, Beck is not simply describing how the Qashqa'i grew and prospered but how and why the confederacy was constructed through the interaction of tribesmen, the state, and the confederacy's ruling elite. Beck's arguments are worth examining carefully.

First, why does the confederacy exist?

> The Qashqa'i polity, emerging in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries under the authority of a wealthy ruling elite, was a centralized political system enabling the affiliated nomadic pastoralists and cultivators to maintain sustained use and control of a large portion of the region and to produce at maximum levels with relative freedom from predatory incursions. The system also facilitated the ability of elite and non-elite to extract surpluses contributed to the overall, long-term power of the Qashqa'i polity (Beck 1986:24-5, emphasis added).

Badly put, Beck says that, from the perspective of its members/affiliates, being Qashqa'i makes sense because it pays. From the perspective of the Shahilu and other elite Qashqa'i families, having the Qashqa'i confederacy exist makes sense because it really pays. A more thorny question is why the state allowed this alternative locus of power to exist? Beck's answer is that the state permitted the Qashqa'i confederacy to exist because it had to. In theory and in practice the state ruled indirectly. Polities like the Qashqa'i were the agencies of that indirect rule. That is, (1) given the nature of the forces available to the state during the 18th and 19th centuries; (2) given its decentralized, imperfectly integrated administration whose regional and national functionaries often worked at cross purposes; and (3) given the physical geography of Persia, the limits of transportation and communication, the state could not effectively project power throughout its whole (Beck 1986:59). This point is not trivial; from at least the mid-19th century on, the history of Qashqa'i relations with the state is a history of state

attempts to gain greater control over the Qashqa'i and groups like them, and of Qashqa'i resistance to those increased pressures. The origins of these confederations help explain their later problems.

What of the Bakhtiari? As does Beck, Garthwaite argues that, "Tribes then form confederations to defend and expand their interests vis-a-vis the state..." (1983b:5). Garthwaite believes the Bakhtiari confederation was built through a process of "designation and amalgamation" (1983b:15). That is, "the central government capitalized on a khan who was in the process of forming a confederation, and by assisting him with resources, and thus retaining a degree of control over him, turned a potential threat to its own advantage" (1983b:15). In this regard, it seems significant to note that as early as the Safavid period (1725), the Bakhtiari region was recognized as an important political unit within the empire (1983b:51). By the mid 18th century, although there is yet no unified Bakhtiari confederation, Bakhtiari tribal leaders were clearly involved in national politics, gaining some state recognition as leaders of tribal levies for which they received tuyuls, or 'feudal' assignments, and governorships (1983b:59ff.). It is clear then, that by the early 19th century, Bakhtiari tribesmen were becoming integrated into a developing confederation. It is also clear that this proto-confederation comprised two antipathetic moieties (though the sources of the antagonism are unclear), a factor that was to have profound effect on its future development.

During the 19th century, there were two major attempts to build a confederation, that of Muhammad Taqi Khan (of the Chahar Lang moitie), and Husain Kuli Khan (of the Haft Lang). Muhammad Taqi's was the first attempt, and it was frustrated by both Bakhtiari and state opposition. (Though, as the state clearly promoted and supported some of the Bakhtiari opposition, one might not wish to see these as two separate loci of opposition.) Husain Kuli, on the other hand, benefitted from some state support. Indeed, the stability of his position may well be attributed to his association with the relatively stable Persian state during the long reign of Nasire-din Shah. Mutually beneficial relationships among Husain Kuli, the Shah, and the region's governor led to a growth of Husain Kuli's power, and hence of the strength and integration of the confederation. Husain Kuli was appointed Ilkhani of the Bakhtiari in 1867, and continued to wax rich and powerful until, when it appeared that he might become a threat at the national level, he was executed in 1882.

As with the Qashqa'i, the benefits to both the state and the Bakhtiari confederacy's ruling elite of successful confederation seem clear; the one gains some revenue and some control at little cost, the other gains great wealth and power. It is less clear what the 'average' tribesman gained. Indeed, as both Brooks and Garthwaite (1983, 1983a) stress the exploitative nature of the Bakhtiari elite, this question is clearly an important one. Garthwaite is probably correct when he asserts that "ideology" was important in fostering tribal identity (1983b:41), but this hardly answers the question[4]. Certainly, we know that the potential leaders of the confederation or its moieties did not hesitate to use force as a means of consolidating their position.

The question of how confederations were constructed from the interactions of tribesmen, the elite and the state requires a detailed examination of those interactions in specific historical contexts. Thus,

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[4] It is clear that this problem of exploitation is not unique to the Bakhtiari. Tapper and Van Bruinessen's accounts of the Shahsevan and Kurd show much the same pattern. This does little to make me confident of Beck's assertion that "The extraction of surplus from the Qashqa'i people was not exploitative" (1986:37). We should, I suspect, look as carefully at accounts of the confederations that stress their value to the average number as we would at the ideology of any stratified system. I will return to this point below, but I should also add here, that neither Tapper's discussion of traditional Shahsevan khans' "moral hegemony" nor Van Bruinessen's of the sanctity of "Begzade" lineages among the Kurds seems to adequately deal with the problem of 'moral authority', ideology, and political legitimization that their data raises. Minimally, these ideological constructs seem examples of 'hegemonic structures', a kind of 'false consciousness' that does not explain but must, rather, be explained.

much of Beck's book is a chronologically ordered description of the relationships that held among the three groups enumerated above. She also shows how other factors--most notably the presence of the British--impinged on these relationships. A summary cannot do justice to the wealth of detail that Beck presents; however it is, I think, important to set out the main line of her analysis as it seems to reflect a general pattern within the region.

1. The weak Persian state found it useful to use members of the Turkic speaking Shahilu family--the family that forms the Qashqa'i ruling elite--as its administrators in some 'tribal' areas of southwest Iran.

2. Drawing support and revenue from their position as agents of the state, members of the Shahilu lineage were able to build relationships with Turkic tribesmen in the region that were mutualistic and were not exploitative.

The relationship benefitted the tribesmen because the Shahilu protected them from predatory taxation--shifting the tax burden to settled agriculturalists or to other pastoralists--and let them share in booty.

3. Having won the support of the tribesmen, the Shahilu were able to use their unique ability to control tribal unrest as a means of ensuring continuing state support for, and acquiescence in their continuing leadership roles. The Shahilu came to occupy a 'mediating' position.

During much of the 19th century, then, the Shahilu were able to manipulate effectively the resources at their command to reach a position that gave them wealth and power; they were able to use the threat of military action/brigandage by their tribal clients as a means of projecting power vis-a-vis the state.

The book then details how transformations in the Persian state and the emergence of British and American interests in the region affected the Qashqa'i. Beck's effort is noteworthy for she is able to show not only why tribesmen reacted negatively to transformations in state and external presence, she is able to trace out the positive feedback loop that reveals how 'tribal' response and state (or British or American) counter-response led to intensification of conflict, as state pressure created Qashqa'i self-awareness, self-awareness led to exaltation of values inimical to a modernizing state, which led to increased state pressure...which ultimately led to continuing and damaging conflict with an ever more powerful state. Beck also shows how the Shahilu played a significant part in the creation and maintenance of this Qashqa'i consciousness.

Let us note at this juncture just what the conflict was over: with the Persian state, conflict raged over control of resources, of which taxes and tolls - and mutatis mutandis freedom from taxes and tolls - were among the most important[5]. With the British, conflict centered largely about the free movement of trade, which was generally seen as a problem of "security". A discussion of the political economy of the confederacy provides an interesting background against which these historical processes can be seen (but, see below).

In sum, we may say that Beck gives an effective picture of how the confederacy was constructed and, perhaps, deconstructed. Garthwaite's and Van Bruinessen's works, which trace the historical relationships of the Bakhtiari and various Kurdish polities to the states about them, seem to deal with

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[5] I am here speaking from the perspective of the state, and it seems, the tribal elite. From the perspective of the 'simple' tribesman, the issues appear to have been initially, the right to bear arms, the right to remain mobile, armed population are themselves hard to tax, and second because they were the tribal elite's base of power, the force which enabled them to collect taxes and deny the state its portion of taxes.

similar processes, and if we are to 'understand' the relationship of tribe and state more fully, it will be useful, I think, to compare some of these similarities and differences.

Problems in the Problematic

As I noted earlier, much of the recent historical work adds greatly to our understanding of Iran's tribal confederacies. At the same time we must recognise that much of this history is a kind of descriptive explanation: one describes the structure of the group in question, lists many of the circumstantial factors that occur within its environment and history, and asserts that these are causal[6]. It is true that the 'causes' and 'effects' are associated. When the studies are compared, however, the weakness of this atheoretical explanatory technique becomes apparent. For example, if we return to Beck's and Garthwaite's respective discussions of the Bakhtiari and the Qashqa'i, we find that their juxtaposition does little to help us understand the differences (if there are any) between the two confederacies. For, when we set aside non-points like compactness or the security of the territory (see below), the key variable that emerges is the one we have started with: relationship is only indirectly used as a basis for explaining differences in the nature of the confederacies. Clear sight of it is lost in a welter of other circumstantial factors. For example:

The Qashqa'i and the Bakhtiari are both confederacies. They are political units of roughly comparable size: Garthwaite reports various estimates of Bakhtiari population in the 19th and 20th centuries, but a figure of about 200,000 seems reasonable; population figures for the Qashqa'i are equally variable (and probably equally inaccurate), and indeed Beck gives no single figure or series of figures, but if we take Oberling's (1974:234-6) table showing various estimates of Qashqa'i population figures as a base, a total population of 350,000 (settled and migratory) seems reasonable.

The Kurds are not a confederacy but an ethnic group. Spread over (at least) five countries, Van Bruinessen estimated that, in 1975, there were perhaps 14.5 million Kurds (1978:22). The scale of Van Bruinessen's subject far exceeds that of the other two authors. However, Van Bruinessen has wisely chosen not to write of Kurds in general, but to examine particular Kurdish populations at particular times and places. Many of the groups and histories he considers are in fact Kurdish confederacies, comparable to the Bakhtiari or the Qashqa'i.

Looking at these relatively comparable units, we find the authors making interesting claims about various aspects of 'their' group(s). Beck notes that the Qashqa'i live wholly within the boundaries of Iran. Thus, unlike the Shahsevan or some of the Kurdish confederacies they neither live near or across a national boundary. Beck sees this as "conductive to Qashqa'i autonomy and prosperity in the long run" (1986:25). She also suggests that the absence of state competition "helped the Shahilu lineage to retain leadership for a long period" (1986:25). The Bakhtiari too do not straddle a national boundary, while many of the territories of Kurdish groups were contiguous with, or crossed over national boundaries. However, their not straddling national boundaries did not lead to an absence of competition among

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6. Consider for example, this passage:

The following factors are relevant in the development of political hierarchies and confederacies among nomadic pastoralists: ecological setting, geographical and strategic location, resource base, economic production and exchange, socio-economic stratification, trade (regional, national, international), trade routes, capitalist penetration, foreign involvement, proximity of cities, competing groups and classes, warfare, ties with institutionalized religion, and minority (or ethnic) status. They can change in importance through time,and each is dynamically connected with others (Beck 1983:285).

members of the Bakhtiari elite; at the very least the Persian government itself actively promulgated a divide and weaken (if not rule) policy among the Bakhtiari. Moreover, it is not clear that the presence of two or more competing states led to competition among the Kurdish groups described by Van Bruinessen. Rather, it seems that members of competing factions sought out alternative external patrons as means of continuing the struggles that had an apparently internal base (1978:71ff.). While it is perhaps true that the consistent support by the Persian state of one faction of a tribe might guarantee its continued dominance (rather as British and Russian support helped keep the Qajars themselves in power), there is little evidence for this kind of support. On the one hand, as Beck ably points out, the 19th century Persian state was hardly monolithic, with those of both the central administration and the leaders of neighboring administrative districts. Thus, where opposing factions existed, there were almost always potential sources of external 'patronage'. Moreover, vide the Bakhtiari, it was often in the state's interest to pursue a 'divide and rule' policy. 'Tribal' solidarity was rare.

Why then did the Shahilu stay in power?

Garthwaite suggests that

> What distinguishes the Bakhtiari from comparable groups in the Zagros is the nature of the Bakhtiari territory and its socio-political structure. Digard notes that not only do territorial size, range of resources, and relative completeness and compactness make Bakhtiari unique in the Zagros, but the social and political structures responding to ecological factors...reinforce Bakhtiari territorial integrity...The Qashqa'i...possess a more highly centralized political structure. Their summer and winter pasture areas are not contiguous and can only be reached by traversing a migration corridor that passes through a heavily populated agricultural and non-Qashqa'i region; consequently, more centralized control of migration is required (1983:19).

Beck (1986:27) concurs that the vulnerability of the Qashqa'i immigration helps promote centralization, but goes on to argue that the Ilkhans were not separated from tribal concerns because the Qashqa'i occupies lands so far from the nation's centre that their active participation in national politics was restricted. She further suggests that the fact that the Qashqa'i dwelt in several administrative districts fostered indirect rule, which promoted the persistance of the tribal hierarchy (though, as I have shown, it could also be used as a wedge to promote rivalry). In effect, a careful reading of Beck and Garthwaite reveals the following arguments for the distinctiveness of the Bakhtiari and the Qashqa'i: the Bakhtiari have a coherent territory near(er) to the national capital than the Qashqa'i; but the Bakhtiari are more secure in their compact territory than are the Qashqa'i who must pass by the regional capital during their migration. Because the Bakhtiari have a more compact territory, are more secure, and more tightly integrated into national politics, the Qashqa'i have a more coherent political structure. But, we know that the tribes of the Khamseh, whose annual round is very similar to that of the Qashqa'i do not develop a similarly coherent confederacy. Moreover, while it may be the case that the Shahilu maintained their position as Ilkhanis for a longer period than the Bakhtiari Duraki khans, and diffuse territory or no, the Qashqa'i confederacy never reached the level of political complexity, never came as close to becoming a 'real' state, as did the Bakhtiari. For at its peak, under Husain Kuli Khan, the organizational structure of the Bakhtiari confederation was more elaborate than that achieved at anytime by the Qashqa'i, and, at least during the Constitutional Revolution, the Bakhtiari came closer to usurping national power than did the Qashqa'i at any time. Finally, it is not at all clear to me that the variable which most distinguishes Qashqa'i and Bakhtiari history does not remain the power and coherence of the

state at the moment is seeks to exert control over the 'tribe' in question, this latter 'variable' itself being determined by the confederation's proximity to the emerging nation's political centre(s)[7].

Thus, I would argue that one of the first things that this study of tribe and state reveals is our need to deal with questions of complex, diachronic causality. Here, briefly, are some thoughts about working through these questions regarding tribe and state.

While a central theme in the books I have discussed is the relationship of tribe and state, the notion of 'state' seems to have been used as little more than a simple, opposing other. We see in these works only the most rudimentary description of the state, and we see no theoretically based discussions on the nature of the state, nor comparatively based understandings of the processes and problems confronted by states in formation. As a result, the actions of the state seem somewhat unmotivated. (At the worst they look like 'heavies' out to crush noble tribesmen, rather than polities that were themselves subject to extraordinarily complex and powerful pressures). No attempt has been made here to see Southwest Asian states themselves as part of a larger historical process, or indeed to see the actions of the 'tribal' leaders as part of that 'larger' process.

In this regard it is important to note that we have also barely begun to scratch the surface of the interior political economy of these 'tribal' groups. That is, if we haven't attempted to understand the state in comparative, theoretical terms, neither have we done so for the "tribal" groups in question. Thus, as I noted above, both Garthwaite and Brooks see relations between the Bakhtiari elite and the 'tribesmen' as exploitative; Van Bruinessen gives ample evidence for similar relations among the Kurds. Further, in all of these cases, members of the tribal elite, at various levels, kept a retinue of armed retainers, "a praetorian guard, a wild bunch of tough men, rowdies recruited from all clans who...'would kill their brothers if he ordered them to do so'"(1978:92). Van Bruinessen notes that the use of these retainers is inimical to tribalism; how do we account for it? How ought we interpret Beck's statement that "The extraction of surplus from the Qashqa'i people by tribal leaders was not exploitative..." (1986:37), when we know that the khans and ilkhans had armed retainers and that, as she notes elsewhere,

> Gallehbegireh (taking flocks) was the main obligatory act owed the khans by tribespeople. Khans collected this animal tax once every several years from their subtribes and viewed it as just payment for services rendered in previous years and as income that helped defray the expenses of leadership. Tribespeople viewed the tax as an unwelcome obligatory act that increased the khans already large herds and allowed them to live in an extravagant fashion...
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> The tax, levied as percentage of animals owned by every independent household, was usually 3 percent; the range ran from 1 to 6 percent...The animals taken were sometimes rams, and fat ewes, which were household capital...[8] (1986:227-28).

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[7] That is, I am less certain that the Qashqa'i and Bakhtiari differ as much in structure or, indeed, in the logic of their history as much as they differ in the time span over which that history has unfolded. They look different at the same points in time, but it seems that they look less different if one compares the sequences of their history. As I point out below, this is a point for further examination. For a statement of the general nature of this problem in comparative history, see Perry Anderson, Lineages of the Absolutist State (1974:9ff.).

[8] To put these "large herds" into perspective: Beck (1986:222) writes: Khans owned many herds of sheep and goats (ten to twenty or more herds, three hundred animals per herd)." Thus, we may assume that khans, on average, owned between 3000 and 6000 animals. Seen against an average 1971 Qashqa'i herd of 160 head (Beck 1981:114), the enormity of the khans' animal holdings becomes apparent. One might note as well that the consistent alienation of 2 percent of a household's breeding stock represents no inconsiderable drain on their fortunes.

In short, the degree to which tribes or confederacies were 'tribal' in their relations of production is not at all clear to me. It is equally unclear to me how much tribalism was an ideology that masked forms of tributary extraction and how much it was a reality. It seems particularly unclear how well modern memories of a (perhaps romantic) tribal past reflect its actual political economy, and how much modern state pressure has helped promote this view[9]. At the very least, it seems that we would want to know about variation in these relationships from time to time and 'tribe' to 'tribe'.

While we are on the subject of the nature of these groups, it is worth noting that many of the authors whose works I have discussed seem compelled to define "tribe" and "state" before they discuss them. These definitional discussions range from Garthwaite's noting that they are "protean categories" that "resist agreed upon definitions" (echoed by Salzman's use of a "common sense" definition of tribe) to Tapper's and Beck's extended discussions of the issue. In general, I feel the use of common sense understandings has great merit. Here, I do find Tapper's argument that one must distinguish "tribes" from "tribal confederacies or confederations" both convincing and useful. Beck's work suffers from not clearly employing this distinction.

But one further 'definitional' problem stands out above all others. In most areas of the world, societies possessing the political economic characteristic of Southwest Asian tribal confederacies would almost certainly be considered state-like. Indeed, the definitions used in these works of "tribe" and "state" would require defining the confederations as states. On the whole, however, people who deal with Southwest Asian nomadic pastoralists seem loathe to address squarely the implications of the state-like nature of the groups they study. So, for the sake of future discussion, let me here propose an overly simple restatement of the issue of "tribe" and "state" in Iran.[10]

1. Under the rubric of 'the conflict of tribe and state' we are really examining the conflicts that arise in the construction of a nation state, thus the problem of "tribe" and "state" is not one tribe and state but one of state formation.

2. As the important tribal confederacies show very strong state-like characteristics, the particular processes of state formation examined in many of the works mentioned above are processes of contention between states, or more specifically of the struggles between localized, semi-autonomous states and the expanding, centralizing agency that is trying to create a larger, integrated whole.

3. As this process of state formation is not a problem peculiar to Iran or to pastoralists, we should expect to find analogous examples of this process among non-nomadic, non-pastoral peoples elsewhere in the world.

4. And we should expect the study of non-pastoral cases to be rewarding.

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[9] This is not to deny Beck's contention that the Qashqa'i Ilkhans treated Qashqa'i better than they treated other groups in the area, nor do I mean to suggest that they were not, on occasion, supportive of the tribes. I do suggest that her argument does not show that the Qashqa'i elite did not exploit their tribal followers.

[10] In particular, I simplify by not examining in detail the cases of the Baluch or the Turkmen, groups that are certainly more 'tribal' and less state-like than the confederations of western Persia. It is my subjective impression that while modernising Persian state certainly had problems with the Baluch and Turkmen, their very lack of a state-like political structure made them a different kind of problem than the more hierarchically organized groups were. That is, while they were considered a threat to the life, property, etc. of the citizens of the state--and therefore a force to be controlled--they were not seen as rival loci of political power and thus as threats to the existence of the state itself.

Without going into great detail, I can perhaps illustrate the need for this kind of 'larger view' by introducing here a few brief discussions of non-Persian, non-pastoral cases, whose parallels to elements of the preceding discussion are obvious. These points--selected from a single brief article--describe aspects of the relation of 'tribe' to state in Persia as well as they do the history of late feudal Europe, and it seems clear that we will not understand what happened in Persia if we do not treat it as part of a larger historical process. In short, we will never really understand it if we consider it simply a problem of tribe and state.

> But the sovereign state suffered a severe structural weakness in the feudal period: it lacked direct access to surpluses generated through agrarian production, and with few exceptions could tax the peasantry directly only insofar as its judicial and administrative power supplanted that of feudal suzerains. The latter, moreover, could be taxed in general only with their consent, and for purposes subject to their will (Gintis and Bowles 1984:33).

Or

> Once the state gained power at the expense of its constituents it was free to pursue its own interests, subject, as always, to existing constraints. At first the modern state enacted policies on behalf of the landed aristocracy...But gradually thereafter, modern western European history tells the story of how the state slowly deprived the landed aristocracy of its prerogatives (Brustein and Hechter [in Gintis and Bowles] 1984:40).

And finally,

> The state makers only imposed their will on the populace through centuries of effort...In all these efforts...the state-makers frequently found the traditional authorities allied with the people against them. Thus it became a game of shifting coalition, kings rallying popular support by offering guarantees against cruel and arbitrary local magnates or by challenging their claims to goods, money, or services...magnates parading as defenders of local liberties against royal oppression...Ultimately the people paid (Tilly [in Gintis and Bowles] 1984:42).

The preceding quotes all refer to state formation, but one can find parallels in other areas as well. Compare Cregeen's views of Highland Scots (1968) with both the descriptions of Southwest Asian "tribes" above and with the quotes from Van Bruinessen to which I have juxtaposed them.

> Until land came to be commercialized in the Highlands, its function was purely to support the chief, his clan, and dependents. A chief reckoned his wealth not in sheep, cattle, or acres, but in the size of his following.
>
> His following was made up of his clan and 'dependers'. The inner core of the clan consisted of the chief's immediate kinsmen, the gentry of the clan or daoine uaisle...[who were] the chieftains of the clan, responsible for organizing the clan as a fighting force. They were essentially a military castle, for whom prowess and courage were the ultimate values, and war and cattle raids a way of life...The work of their farms was performed by servants and sub-tenants...(Cregeen 1968:161).

And

> Tribesmen are warriors and do not toil, non-tribals are thought unfit to fight and it is only natural that their lords exploit their labour (Van Bruinessen 1978:117).

Or

> A clan however was never simply a group of kinsmen dwelling together and tracing descent from a common ancestor...The chief of a clan might include among his followers the representatives of ancient local families too weak to stand alone in the ruthless conditions of the sixteenth century. The struggles of the great clans induced the weak to seek protection from the strong and give 'bonds of manrent', promising to follow and obey the chief and to bring presents at stated times in return for the chief's favour and protection. Fugitives and broken clans, and their descendants, went to swell a chief's following (Cregeen 1968:164)...

And

> Actual political allegiance to a lineage becomes more important than real kinship...Some clans or lineages (even entire tribes) have arisen around a powerful family that, because of its military or political success, was joined by numerous adherents, individuals as well as entire lineages (Van Bruinessen 1978:41).

Or, writing of a later period:

> The disintegration of the traditional social structure was accompanied by the growth of a new system of relationships based on commercial values. The chief became the landlord, treating land no longer as a means of supporting a warlike following but as a source of revenue and as a commodity to be bought and sold. The clansmen, released from their military services and labour dues, became simply rent-paying tenants, or losing their state in the lands, turned to wage earning employment or emigration...
>
> With this new attitudes developed. For the chief, now frequently a non-resident landlord, with a son at Eton...the claims of vassals and clansmen became irksome and irrelevant. They, for their part gradually lost their affection and loyalty...(Cregeen 1968:166).

And

> The nature of leadership has changed considerably in the past 50 years however. As long as the Duriki were nomadic the agha had not been much more than a primus inter pares, whose authority was based on his military capacities, justice, and wisdom (at least that is what they say themselves). Although all his fellow-tribesmen gave him gifts of sheep annually, his economic position was not much better than theirs...But here in the Cezire, as agriculture increased in importance while animal husbandry relatively and absolutely decreased, the agha's position evolved into a predominantly economical one (Van Bruinessen 1978:108).

And

The effects of the execution of the land code may thus be summarized:

1. Reduction of the communal features of the tribal economy; individualization;

2. Increased economic stratification within the tribe. Many aghas became landlords, their followers became sharecroppers. In the course of time this was to give some aghas inordinate power over commoners;

3. A new class with a new lifestyle emerged: the urban based landlords...;

4. In many cases the actual cultivators lost some of their traditional rights and became share-croppers or even hired laborers. The landlords could evict them if they wished...(Van Bruinessen 1978:234-5).

And, again mutatis mutandis, how alike the historical processes sound. For, where pressure from a consolidating state, in one case Scots and the other Ottoman Turk, leads to the destruction of smaller, 'traditional' polities, we find, before state power can be effectively projected, the same kinds of results:

> With the forfeiture of the last Lord of the Isles, his empire had begun to crack. The subject chiefs and various branches of the clan Donald, once the authority of the Lordship had gone, lost all cohesion and plunged into savage feuds with one another...The utter barbarity of the highlands from roughly 1475 to 1625 was largely the result of the 'daunting of the Isles' and the destruction of the Macdonald lordship (Cregeen 1968:156).

> Nearly immediately [after the disappearance of the mir of Botan] the emigrate fell apart into a hodge-podge of mutually inimical tribes. Without the mir it was not possible to keep rivalries in check. The Ottoman governors were despised and distrusted by all...The security that had prevailed in central Kurdistan...turned into its opposite. Travel became extremely dangerous. Mutual distrust prevailed. Feuds and other conflicts, not timely ended, broke up most tribal units. New subtribes, not existing until then, broke away (Van Bruinessen 1978:227).

The processes described here are not, of course, accidentally parallel. Marx long ago recognised the economization of relationships between traditional leaders and their followers as a characteristic feature of the transition to capitalism. We lose little and gain much by recognising this. Examination of studies of the rise of European state (e.g. Perry Anderson's Lineages of the Absolute State) will vastly clarify our understanding of the relationship of 'tribe' to state in Southwest Asia.

This lack of seeing events in a larger context is apparent elsewhere as well. Beck, Garthwaite, and Van Bruinessen all rightly introduce the British and its 'imperial' concerns into the history of their particular society. I feel, however, that we see them only on the largest scale, acting as purely political agents: another state to help solidify or crack the tribal structure. We are given little insight into how the particulars of British presence--beyond the South Persia Rifles, oil subsidies, or political officers in Kirkuk--was part of a larger process which encompassed the British, the emerging nation states of Southwest Asia, and all the peoples within them. A careful reading of Wolf or Wallerstein--let alone their sources--would sharpen our understanding of how western expansion affected Persia, and thus its 'tribal' populations.

In essence, we have only a very limited and non-integrated view of the larger context in which the confederations and tribes exist. The works here refer to varieties of factors but they tend not to see them as systematically integrated. Garthwaite, for example, notes that "In the nineteenth century demographic factors were probably of greater significance in terms of pastures than khan-tayafah relationships; the famine of 1869-72 reduced both human and animal populations, and pastures and agricultural land may have been opened up. In the nineteenth century as a whole, there may even have been surplus pastures..." (1983b:83). If this is true (and the work of Issawi and Gilbar suggests that it is), then the notion of confederacies as political structures, formed from competition over resources (see Beck above) becomes questionable. We perhaps move further ahead when we look at the possible causes of the world market (Gilbar), the potential consequences of depopulation, the relationship of both state needs for revenue, and the like.

Implicit in the preceding is a further problematic. Not only must we set out the histories of the confederations in question, but we must compare those histories. The works we have in front of us show that the degree of exploitation, the amount of force, and the degree of consensuality of rulers and

ruled are variable. Beck has indeed argued that a deliberately fostered commonality of the Ilkhans and the tribespeople and a lack of exploitation of the latter by the former was a distinctive feature of Qashqa'i life. This may be, but we should consider how the differences in the confederations' political economies vary with the kinds of historically contingent processes and relationships I have outlined above. It is important to see what is happening to the different confederations at the same time, and it is also important to see if the same long-term pattern unfolds in the different confederations (at either the same points in time or not). Equally, as I have suggested above, one wants, if possible, to see how these Persian patterns match those of other regions at other times.

Finally, it should be clear that, at this point, our understanding of 'tribal' history and tribal structure stands on an inverted base. That is, we know a good deal about the political relations of 'tribe' and state, but, as Tapper (1983:7) so correctly notes, we know little about the lives of the actual tribespeople. This is not surprising. Those who left accounts of tribespeople in the 18th or 19th centuries were more concerned with them as part of a political force than they were as a subject for ethnographic description. Nonetheless, the result is that we have political rather than social histories of the groups in question. Indeed, many presumptions about earlier 'tribal' life seem to be projections back from the 20th century. While I feel that this is both a useful and legitimate technique, there is a risk of creating a strongly teleological history. We need tribal social history, and though data on tribal life in the 19th century is harder to find than information on political conflict, it is there.

Current Histories in Context

By its very nature, a discussion of problems and problematics raised by a set of works seems critical, for it points to issues that have not been completely resolved, or indeed to problems that may not be apparent in the context of a single case study. What then of these works?

The kinds of questions raised above only emerge from a context which is rich enough to raise them. We have, as I noted at the outset, barely begun the study of nomadic peoples in an historical perspective. The works in question show us the potential of the field. As works in a new area, they dramatically move forward our understanding of Southwest Asian pastoral communities. Equally importantly, the wealth of material that these works contain provides a very real base for further work, for clarification of the processes that gave us the 'nomadic peoples' we have come to know from ethnography or from personal experience. These works are a tremendous addition to the literature on nomadic peoples and are of great value to everyone who works in these areas.

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