The Record Heritage of Khurasani Kurdish Tribes
Mustafa Dehqan

The study of archival treasuries of the Kurdish tribes of northern Khurasan is a relatively young field of research, hence the large number of unexplored Kurdish and Persian sources. In view of the paucity of other sources for this region, so momentous in the history of the Caucasus and the Middle East, the record heritage of Khurasani Kurdish tribes take on a particular importance for both historians and sociologists.

Most local records on the Kurdish tribes of northern Khurasan, in north-east Iran, were written by semi-educated Kurds and Persians or were closely associated with elementary-level instruction in this subject. One’s expectations of them in terms of intellectual stimulation and entertainment value are therefore fairly low. And these low expectations turn out to be fully justified: for the most part, the records are plodding, simplistic and conspicuously lacking in originality. But it is precisely these qualities which make them useful to the researcher, because it shows that they reflect the realities of Kurdish community in northern Khurasan.

The threefold purpose of the present paper is to state briefly what is known about the personal record collections of Khurasani Kurdish tribes; to present an outline of the types of records; and, finally, to catalogue some very popular records of the Kurdish Milan family as an instance and important treasury in their collections.

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is a large subject, far larger than the space allotted to a short paper. It is a subject which requires thorough research that will investigate the many facets of this question in detail. Unfortunately, such a comprehensive research has never been done.

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I. Modern Study of Record Collections

The study of the northern Khurasan’s record collections is the youngest of the ancillary disciplines associated with Khurasani Kurds. The period in which Kurdish tribes migrated to the northern Khurasan (the 1600s) and the geographical location of their new habitat inevitably connect their life with Persia in its very late medieval history. The fact that the Kurdish tribes of Khurasan were among the Persian and Turkic communities in the Persian government, in which they served for about 400 years, seems to be well established. Therefore, one cannot think that the life of the Khurasani Kurdish tribes was spent on a Kurdish ghetto which preserved the Kurdish historical outlook intact. Their literature was, definitely, traditionally Kurdish, though they have been always living in a direct personal encounter with people outside this tradition, mostly with Persians. One of the clearest indications of this contact that shows the Persian cultural and political influence over the Kurdish tribes is the personal records of Kurdish families.

The various aspects of the Kurdish life in northern Khurasan, except the record collections, have been studied by scholars of various disciplines. Several quite successful studies have outlined the history, society, economy, folklore and the content of the encounter between the main communities of northern Khurasan: Kurds, Persians, Turkomans. The works of A. Houtum-Schindler, W. Ivanow, and K. Tawahudi could be mentioned here as representative examples. But when I tried to search for the personal record collections of the Kurds, I had some trouble finding any comprehensive work on the topic. Although the record history of the Kurdish tribes was a lost subject, I knew that there are some references to the record collections. These references have at least covered the first letter of several collections. With the scattered bibliographical preliminaries out of the way, I assumed that I would be able to concentrate on cataloguing the new data from the perspective of the Persian libraries and their own record collections. This proved to be a naive assumption as I tried to find the answer to a fundamental question: how many records of Kurdish tribes were catalogued? On the face of it, all I needed to do was to count the number of entries under Kurds in the Astan-e Quds-e Razavi Central library. After subtracting those records which are now thought to be lost or which have been wrongly catalogued as Kurdish,
I came up with the sum of 68. In the first place, not all records of Kurdish tribes are catalogued under the name ‘Kurdish’. This means that anyone who looks under ‘Kurdish’ as a heading in Astan-e Quds-e Razavi Central Library or Mashhad Guhar Shad Library, assuming—as many people do—that this represents a complete record of Kurdish collections, will get the false impression that there were no records of Kurdish problems.

It is possible to get around this difficulty by consulting those local collections that make use of new reference materials, although with varying degrees of thoroughness and consistency, but firstly here only a few introductory remarks can be made on the collections of the Khurasani Kurds.

II. Types of the Records

Most of the surviving records of the Khurasani Kurdish community have been discovered in Isfārān, Daragaz, Bujnur, and Quchān, written on bayād or waraq. Murakkab (black ink) was frequently used for the writing of the records. Survival of Khurasani Kurdish collections is undoubtedly due in large part to the Kurdish women: the bughcha (bundle) and sanduqcha (chest) of tribal women itself makes possible the preservation of important letters and records. This fact also accounts for the survival pattern of local records in northern Khurasan. Some records have been recovered from the centres with large populations, such as Shīrwān, for the reason that these centres are located near the tribes’ territories or yaylāq (summer-quarters) and qashlāq (winter quarters).

Kurds kept their records in the various languages of the region, but the majority of the preserved texts were written in Persian. A few texts in Kurdish and the Turkic dialect of Khurasan have also been discovered. Punctuation and word divisions were generally lacking in the records. Marks might occasionally be added to indicate the abbreviations or significant breaks in the text.

Most of the surviving Khurasani Kurdish records date from the Qajar and Pahlawi dynasties. The records dating to the Safawī period which have survived are surprisingly few in number. The majority of these are preserved in the libraries of Mashhad.

The number of the records now preserved in the personal collections of the Kurdish families reaches somewhere between 10,000 and 15,000. All of the collections have not even catalogued their holdings. Only a fraction of these, about 200 units, has been published. The variety of these texts is rich, and the attempts to draw them together in conventional categories, while being useful and even necessary, have the effect of minimizing their range and idiosyncrasy. I distinguish between the private and public records—that is, texts concerning private individuals, as opposed to those sent from or addressed to individuals in official positions. The first group contains letters, memoranda, orders for payment, lists, accounts, invitations, receipts, wills, agreements, and disownments; the second group are: reports of meetings, official acts and inquiries, economic reports, judicial business,
declarations to officials, correspondence, contracts, and appointments. At the same time, the apparently simple categories disguise a mass of heterogeneous material. Under private documents, for example, the category Agreements includes marriage contracts, cases of divorce, adoption, contracts of hire, divisions of property, loans and sales.

III. Catalogue of Maylānlu Records: A Case Study

The present catalogue, being the first of its kind in English, contains data on 21 unpublished records and letters in Persian language. The general and the only criterion for the inclusion of records in this catalogue is that they are, totally, in the possession of Maylānlu family, a Kurdish family from Isfārā’īn. Each record of the Maylānlu family collection is written in the Perso-Arabic script. Some records consist of two, three, four, five or six folios. The sizes of the folios are: 7 × 13.5; 11 × 16; 12 × 14; 14 × 23; 17 × 9.5; and 21 × 13.5 centimetres; the text takes up usually one side of the record. The papers are normally of European manufacture.

Famous Persian names and words are provided here in their familiar forms: for example, Qāsim Ābād (not Xasim Āwāt). This catalogue includes all proper names in northern Khurasan mentioned in the titles of records, together with suggested identifications. The numbers in parentheses are used to include the date of the given record. Some records have no dateline. The Appendix offers photographic reproductions of some of the Khurasani Kurdish materials. Here is the catalogue:

(1) The list of the warriors of Ḥājīkānlu21 Kurdish tribe. This document deals primarily with the military power of Ḥājīkānlu tribe. The wars between Kurds and Turkomans are also covered (1855).

(2) A letter from Kurdish villagers to Persian officials regarding the situation of the Kurds in northern Khurasan (1897).

(3) A financial list dealing with the installment plan of Kurdish villagers: Ḥasan Quli’s family; Shāh Husayn’s family; Ḥājī Rajab ‘Alī’s family; Fardq ‘Alī’s family; Jān Ahmadī, Muskanlū; Sārkanlū, etc. (1899).

(4) A letter from Maylānlu peasants to Persian officials regarding the anti-Kurdish attitude of Turkomans (1904).

(5) A record of Persian government regarding the tax of Maylānlu Kurds (1905).

(6) The list of monetary and non-monetary Kurdish tax gathered by Mīrzā Abu al-Qāsim Khān22 (1905).

(7) A telegram from Persian Interior Ministry to Mr. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Khān23 regarding his complaint against Ri’īs al-Tujjār.24 It is a short telegram (four lines long) which also reiterates their struggle for the Village Qāsim Ābād25 (1906).

(8) A letter from Shaykh Āqāzāda, son of Akhound Khurāsāmī,26 to Kurdish priests of Qūchān27 regarding the landed properties of Qāsim Ābād (1906).
(9) A report on the military power of Turkomans (1907).
(10) A record of the Maylānlū tribe on the tax and financial struggle between Kurds and Persians (1908).
(11) A record of the Persian government regarding the tax of Sīvdānlū Kurds (1908).
(12) A letter of Kurdish priests of Qūchān regarding the ownership of Farhād Khān Tūpkānlū over the Village Dahanashur (1916).
(13) Some telegrams from the Persian government to the chiefs of Kurdish tribes (1917).
(14) The reply from Persian War Ministry regarding Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Khān’s complaint against Rī’s al-Tujjār (1923).
(15) A report on the Muẓaffar al-Saltāna, who was the chief of the Za’farānlū Kurdish tribe (1924).
(16) A three-folio document regarding the local wars between Kurds and Turkomans (1924).
(17) An economic report on the Kurdish tribes of Isfarā’īn (1926).
(18) A letter from Urdūghān Kurdish peasants to Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Khān regarding their complaint against Muḥammad Ṣādiq Bag Urdūghān (no date).
(19) Memorandum by the Secretary of State, Abu al-Qāsim Khān Mustūfi, for the tax of the Maylānlū tribe (no date).
(20) The list of receipts of the tax of Isfarā’īn (no date).
(21) An economic report on the Shaykh Amīrlū Kurdish tribe. The record contains the complete list of Kurdish villagers who gave compulsorily money to Mullā Muḥammad, Muḥabbat Khān, and Dulatyār (no date).

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Notes

[2] For elementary-level instruction or madrasa education in Khurasan, see Fraser, *Narrative of Journey into Khorasan*, 456ff.
Generally on Quchan, these terms were exclusively used in the Kurdish oral literature of northern Khurasan for
These terms were exclusively used in the Kurdish oral literature of northern Khurasan for
On the geography and historical place of Shahriskan, there are many introductory textbooks.
Reliable starting points include: Shākiri, Tarikh-i Jami’-i Quchan; Jābāni, Sarzamin wa Marām-i Quchan; Arjī, Afsana-hā-ye Quchan.
Bayad is a kind of paper which was very popular in the Islamic lands.
On the geography and historical place of Shirwan, see Muqīmi, Jughrāfiyyā-ye Tarikhī-ye Shirwān.
These terms were exclusively used in the Kurdish oral literature of northern Khurasan for expressing the idea of ‘spiritual travel’.
For the numbers of Khurasani Turks, their distribution, their culture, and their literature, see Fraser, Narrative of Journey into Khurasan, 330ff.; Yate, Khurasan and Sistan, 212–281; Doerfer and Hesche, Türkische Folklore-Texte aus Chorasan.
Generally on Qajar dynasty, see Algar, Religion and State in Iran.
On the Pahlavi dynasty, see notably Lenczowski, Iran under the Pahlavis.
For the history of Safavid dynasty, see the classic book by Röhrborn, Provinzen und Zentral gewalt Persiens im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert.
For the earliest Safavid records, see Tawahdū, Harakat-i Tarikhī, op.cit., 119 and 227: the record of Pari Khamun’s marriage, dated 1708, and later, the record of Biglar Baygi, dated 1727.
The number is not entirely clear and, because of the different oral information, other numbers are also possible.
The similar titles, such as Ḥājlū and Ḥājlār, occur in both Kurdish and Turkish Khurasani literature, but this is unfounded.
According to the records, he is the envoy of the central government.
Historical sources present Muhammad İbrahīm Khān, son of Muḥammad Riḍā Khān, as the chief of Kivanlū Kurdish tribe and the governor of Rādkān. See Khādīmiyān, Farhang-i Jughrāfiyyā’-i-ye Īrān: Khurāsān, 487; 865.
For Rī’s al-Tujjār or Ḥāji Rī’s al-Tujjār and his business, see Khādīmiyān, Farhang-i Jughrāfiyyā’-i-ye Īrān: Khurāsān, 218.
There are five different Qasim Abād villages in Khurasan, but the reference here is to Quchan’s Qasim Abād which situated between Naṣr Abād and Mayān Abād, the central village of Isfārān. See Khādīmiyān, Farhang-i Jughrāfiyyā’-i-ye Īrān: Khurāsān, 698.
 Ağāzāda himself is not famous but his father, Mullā Muḥammad Kāzīm Ākhund Khurāsānī (1839–1911), son of Mullā Ḥusayn Wā’ iz Harāti, is the most well-known priest and author of Shi’ite texts under Qajarid Khurasan. On the life and works of Ākhund Khurāsānī, such as Ta’liqa ‘alā al-Makāsib, al-Fawā’id al-Fiqhīyya wa al-Uṣūliyya, al-Iṣṭiḥād wa al-Taqlīd, Kitāb fi al-Waqf etc., see Kafārī, Margi dar Nūr, Zindagānī-ye Ākhund-i Khurāsānī.
For a readable general history of the Kurdish priests of Quchan, see Ḥiyyarī, Rījāl wa Mashāhīr-ī Quchān.
The tribe Sīvānlū is not attested, to my knowledge, elsewhere. This word seems to be attested in the meaning of ‘family’, not ‘tribe’.

[6] For some scattered references to records found in houses of Kurdish families or the reuse of archives in cartonnage, see Tawahūdī, Isfārān, Dirūz, Imrūz, p.237ff., where some photographs of records are given.
[9] On the Daragaz, the standard source is Fraser, Narrative of Journey into Khurasan, Appendix B, 53ff.
[10] On Bujnurd generally, including geography and culture, useful resources include Yate, Khurasan and Sistan, 192–211; Abbāsiyān, Dānānwarān-i Bujnurd; Sādiqī, Jughrāfiyyā-ye Shahrīstān-ī Bujnurd.
[11] For the traditional history and geography of Quchan, there are many introductory textbooks.
For a readable general history of the Kurdish priests of Quchan, see Hiyyarī, Rījāl wa Mashāhīr-ī Quchān.

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[29]The reference here is probably to the chief of Tupkanlûtribe in northern Khurasan.
[31]Muzaffar al-Saltana is the well-known epithet of Khân Bâbâ Khân, son of Sâm Khân. He was the chief of Za’faranlûtribe. See Khâdimiyan, Farhang-i Jughrafiya’i-i Irân: Khurâsân, 758.
[33]Village Urdughân is in Valley Maylanlû and 34 kilometers north-east of New Isfarâ’in. See Tawâbûdî, Isfarâ’in, Dirûz, Imrûz, 7.
[34]He was probably the chief of Urdughân great family.
[35]Both the complete reading of his name and his official position, as secretary of state, are doubtful.
[36]Shaykh Amûrlû title seems to belong to the Turkish families of northern Khurasan too, although I do not know of further references.
[37]I can find no explanation for these men.

References

Fraser, J. B. Narrative of Journey into Khurasan, in the Years 1821 and 1822, Including some Account of the Countries to the North-East of Persia. London: Longmans and Greens, 1825.
Appendix

Figure 1 A letter on several Kurdish personalities and issues.
Figure 2 A letter on the estates of Kurds.
Figure 3 A letter on Muhammad Ibrāhim Khān, a Kurdish personality of northern Khurasan.
Figure 4 A list of the guns and horses of Kurdish families.

Figure 5 A telegram on the village Qāsim Ābād.