VOLUME LXXXIX NUMBER THREE

THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE

MARCH, 1946

PUBLISHED BY THE
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY
WASHINGTON, D.C.

$4.00 A YEAR 50c THE COPY

Mountain Tribes of Iran and Iraq

By Harold Lamb

IT WAS a drowsy day in Isfahan when the invitation came.

"The Governor will expect you in his house on Saturday," said the matter-of-fact voice of the British consul general over the telephone. "I suppose you can get there?"

"Certainly I'll get there," I assured the consul.

In this Iranian (Persian) city, men of affairs pedaled about on bicycles or jogged around in droshkies, automobiles being almost nonexistent because of the shortage of tires.

But, somehow, I would find transportation to reach the house of the governor of the Bakhtiari tribe, Murtesa Kuli Khan, in the mountains above and beyond Isfahan, the range which runs along the boundaries of Russia, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran (map, pp. 396-7).

This was my first formal bid to never-never land, one of the few remaining blind spots on our globe.

Geography of "Never-Never Land"

The blind spot is formed by a mountain chain which extends for about a thousand miles from the Black Sea to the Persian Gulf. These mountains jut often above cloud level and rise at times above 13,000 feet. They have escaped a name on many maps, although they are sometimes called the Zagros Mountains.

The inhabitants—the mountain folk of this no-one-man's land—have also generally escaped attention, for several reasons. Usually they are called, loosely enough, "the tribes," because they have followed the herder way of life, grazing their herds and planting their few crops on this mighty midriff above the workaday world. Actually they form at least four great tribal groups: the Kurds, Lurs, Bakhtiari, and Kashgais.

They have been given a bad name as raiders, a reputation that they seem to enjoy. We have known them chiefly through hearsay as perpetual wild men of the mountains. Within the memory of living men, the Kashgais' armed riders had raided Isfahan, and the Bakhtiari khans had marched to Tehran during the troubles of 1911.

Tribal commandos had the time-honored custom of gathering supplies of tea, sugar, manufactured lamps, and ammunition by holding up trucks on the highways below the mountains.

So, few travelers have made their way up into the heights of Kurdistan (the land of the Kurds) or Luristan.* I use these terms in the traditional sense, as applying to the historic areas occupied by these peoples. The roads thither were of the mule and horse-cart variety, usually under deep snow in winter (page 393). Police posts, if any, were apt to be of the blockhouse type, prepared to withstand a siege.

Also, within these mountains the inner frontiers of four countries meet—Soviet Russia, eastern Turkey, Iraq, and Iran. At least, these frontiers meet on the map. Actually, few frontier posts are to be encountered up along the cloud level.

I had paid one visit to the northern edge of the mountains, where Mount Ararat stands above the Armenian plateau.

This plateau today, while still keeping its fine churches and medieval libraries of the past, is being modernized with water-power development and regional planning of agriculture by the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (page 390).

I had also looked in on the southern tip, where the Kashgais, a vigorous, combative tribe of Turkish stock, herd their sheep in the gorges above Isfahan.

Now I wanted to visit the chiefs of the mountain folk, the *khans, ilkhans, begs,* and *agas,* who are probably the oldest landed aristocracy of the world.

They were certainly the oldest inhabitants of this mountain wall of the Middle East, having been there since Babylon was Babylon and before glory came to Greece—feudal lords in the flesh, served by retainers, entertained by troubadours.

Derebeys, Lords of the Valleys, the Turks had called them. Many still held court in medieval donjons, overlooking their villages and herds. Their family portraits were carved in rock on the face of the mountains.

Few Changes Since Marco Polo's Day

These feudal Lords of the Valleys had ruled over their domains when monkish mapmakers of medieval Europe had charted the mountains as the Earthly Paradise, next door to Heaven itself, or when travelers like Messer Marco Polo skirted this hinterland, looking for the Christian domain of Prester John of

* In 1924 an American, Merian C. Cooper (later a colonel in the Army Air Forces), with Ernest B. Schoedsack, cameraman, filmed the fine motion picture "Grass" when he accompanied the migratory portion of the Bakhtiari tribe on its 46-day journey over the snow passes of the Zardeh Kuh (Yellow Mountains) from winter pastures west of the range to summer grazing on the eastern slopes.

Asia. They had not changed much between that age and this.

The good townspeople of Isfahan shook their heads over the idea of making person-to-person calls on these upland khans, agas, and begs. Interpreters and drivers proved to have pressing and important business within Isfahan when the destination was disclosed to be the Bakhtiari city.

They said that the Bakhtiari held up and stripped unwanted visitors. Tales were told of sundry deaths and disappearances within the mountains. But I knew that, with an invitation to visit the house of Murtesa Khan, the drive thereto would be as safe—by day—as a trip down Fifth Avenue.

That Saturday, having obtained a car, up we turned from the Isfahan-Shiraz road. We climbed from the river bed and villages along a succession of trails marked on a map, heading between the jutting buttes that form this eastern gateway of the mountains.

Two riders came down a slope, looked the car over, and galloped on. They were big, blue-eyed Aryans in the blue homespun and gray-felt skullcap of the mountain folk.

Ahead, along the treeless slopes—the grazing and wheat land of the Haft Lang (the Seven Feet) tribe—lay Shahr Kurd (City of the Kurds).*

The City of the Khan

This metropolis of the southeastern mountains serves as supply center for the higher villages and the migratory tribes who stay persistently above the 9,000-foot level. And this city of some 10,000 souls, without benefit of paving, glass windows, newspapers, or radios, proved to be a prosperous community, supplying its own needs.

True, the open-front shops revealed a stock of "imported" cotton goods, apparently popular with women buyers. But all-wool garments were of the homespun type, spun by women in the gardens, dyed blue or purple, and woven into loose trousers and knee-length jackets for the mountain riders.

If you wanted meat in Shahr Kurd, you selected a live lamb at the butcher shop.

Shoes, boots, or slippers could be made to order from hides on the spot. Tools, and knives of the bowie type with horn handles, were pounded out by blacksmith families from scrap metal.

At sundown I watched the source of some of these strategic materials coming home to Shahr Kurd: the great herds descending from the upland pastures. Gray buffalo, black cattle (but few cows), donkeys, and goats came pushing through the dust cloud of their own raising past the poplar-lined irrigation ditches into the streets.

The only traffic control was by the small boys who trail a herd, picking up fresh dung to be dried out and used as fuel.

Entering the streets, the flood of cattle divided into alleys, the animals finding their way to their different stables. The sheep remain out in the higher pastures.

I noticed that the incoming herds revealed few horses and no riders with rifles. I did not learn the explanation of that till later.

Shahr Kurd had its up-to-date additions, such as the small dispensary where one university-trained physician treated the daily roster of the sick. A new hospital had been built, but it had no equipment as yet.

Before the reception palace of Murtesa Khan, a major-domo welcomed us with Old World ceremony. At the gate a single bodyguard watched all comers, armed with a well-worn 1916-model service rifle which he would not let out of his hands, even for inspection.

A dozen servitors with staffs paraded in our honor in the long passage that led through to a garden. There the Khan's lawyer and his general manager met us and escorted us into the room of state, which was furnished with fine rugs and elaborate European-type upholstered chairs and divan.

Murtesa Kuli Khan was massive as a bear, but diplomatic as any statesman. With easy informality he had discarded the necktie from his otherwise impeccable business suit. He protested that he was uneducated, but he answered questions with astuteness.

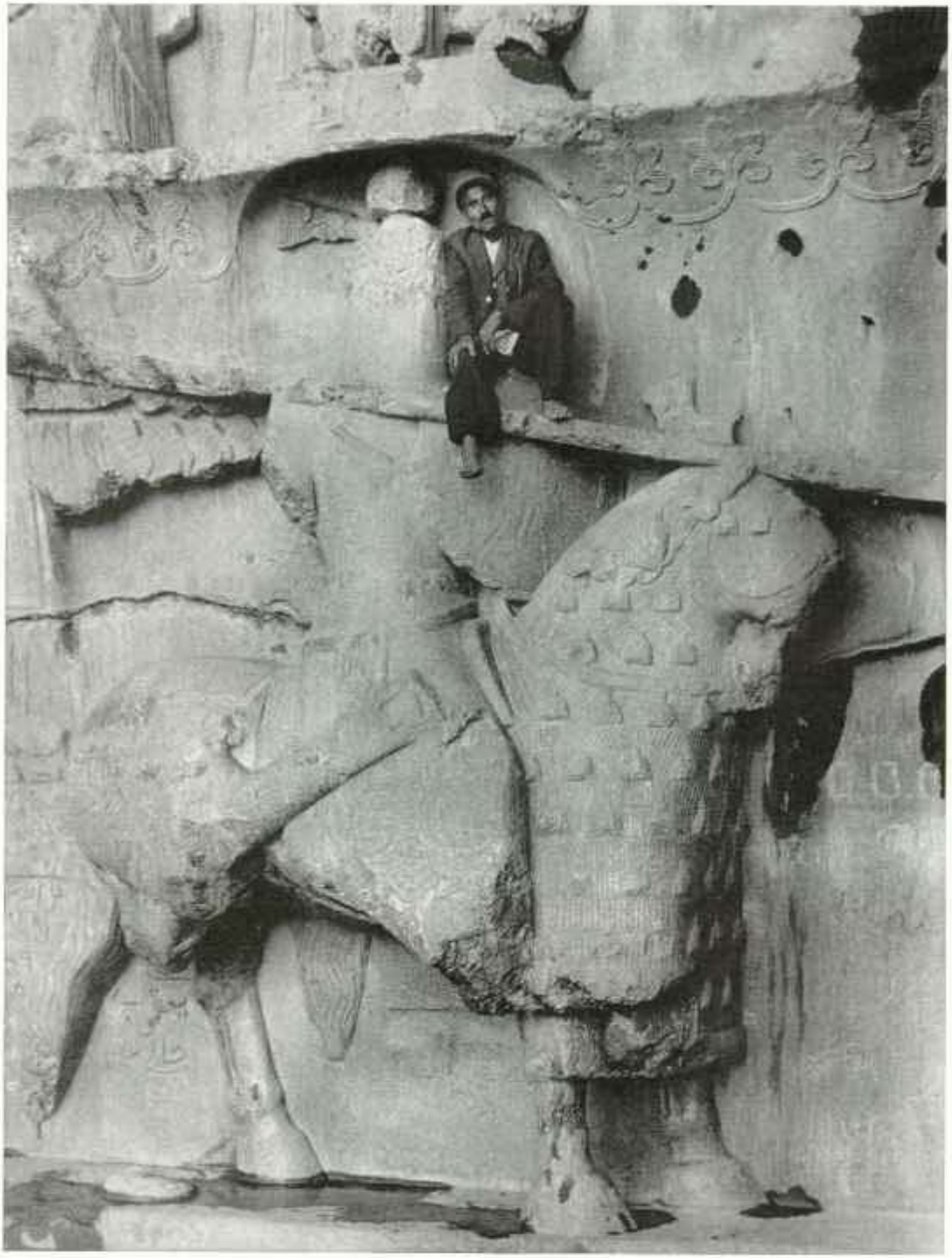
"Americans have always been friendly," he observed in Persian, "and we respect them accordingly. They come to do important work; they do it well, and they go."

During the war the United States Army had the job of running the heavy Russia-bound freight from the Persian Gulf up the railroad that cuts into the Bakhtiari country near Dizful before winding through the mountain gorges. Past centuries looked down upon the present as tribesmen in the process of sheep-moving watched the trains climbing grades hundreds of feet below.†

Murtesa Khan said his people were doing

* The name "Kurd" is applied several times to villages or sites within Bakhtiari ownership. *Kurd* is perhaps the most ancient name of these people. Kurds, Lurs, and Bakhtiari are all kin racially. The Bakhtiari claim to be descendants of what they call the "Great Lurs." The Kashgai, Armenian, and Arab elements are different racially.

† See "Iran in Wartime," by Brig. Gen. John N. Greely, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE, August, 1943, and "Lend-Lease and the Russian Victory," by Harvey Klemmer, October, 1945.



Staff Photographer Maynard Owen Williams

Mail-clad King Chosroes II and His Mount Show the Persian Origin of Knighthood

From Iranian warriors Byzantines borrowed the idea of armored horsemen and gave it to western Europe. Here the helmeted Iranian king, carrying a lance, rides his favorite, "Black as Night." Chosroes, conqueror of Jerusalem and Egypt, was one of the last of the Sassanian dynasts, who were overthrown by the Arabs A. D. 641. King and horse are carved on a mountain at Tak-i-Bostan (page 395).

Staff Photographer Maynard Owen Williams

A Yezidi Girl Wears Her Treasures on Head, Nose, and Breast

Coins are Russian and Turkish; buttons, mother of pearl; the golden nose rosette is for beauty. A century or so ago the Yezidis of Mesopotamia endured massacres rather than renounce their faith. Some took refuge in Russia. This girl lives near Pamp, Soviet Armenia (pages 399, 401).

pretty well. "We get good prices for our horses and meat now and for *ghee* [a semi-fluid butter], cheese, wool, and hides."

Inflation, it seemed, had no terrors for the mountain folk, who bought little from outside markets where prices soared.

"It is bad down there," observed the Khan, "where villages can't afford to buy food. We have plenty, and we need little money."

At the Khan's table, presently, I saw the proof of that. The Bakhtiari follow the old custom of placing all the dishes on the table before the company sits down, to enable the guests to select what they wish. I noted a great soup tureen and identified dishes of quail, *kebabs* (spitted mutton), fish, a mountain-like platter of rice with potatoes; spinach, milk, sour milk, cheese, a pudding, melons, grapes, and, later, good coffee.

I asked the sturdy old governor of more than a quarter of a million people what of all this hospitable outlay he had had to buy. He pointed out the melons and the coffee.

"That is all. The melons come from Isfahan. I don't know about the coffee."

At a guess, the well-fed tribesmen seemed an inch or so taller than the average American and perhaps twenty pounds heavier.

Bakhtiari Guided Alexander the Great

The Khan's young nephew, Manuchar Assad, pointed out that when Alexander the Great had arrived at the mountains, the Bakhtiari had supplied guides to that enterprising creator of a new world, who seemed to have lost his way!

"What is the most-favored reading matter of the Bakhtiari?" I asked, wondering if many of the tribesmen could read.

"Half of the men can read," the governor explained. "They like best the *Shah Namah*."

This was Firdausi's Book of the Kings, a legendary Arthurian-type chronicle of more than nine centuries ago.

The Bakhtiari were pleased when they learned that I had written books of medieval history, such as the story of Genghis Khan.

"When Genghis Khan came to the mountains," Manuchar said reflectively, "the Mongols could not conquer us. We paid them a tribute."

"A small one," put in Murtesa Khan. "Only a token."

Murtesa's chief worry was the younger generation, and education.

"The children here grow up in the dirt," he explained, "and by the time they are thirty their minds have hardened to instruction."

He paused to think about that.

"European civilization is built upon one thing—education."

"Then," I said, "European civilization needs a better education."

He chuckled, then laughed heartily. The sharing of food is the first gesture of friendship in the mountains; a good joke or story cements it.

That evening the Khan's manager brought me a dish of giant pears from Murtesa's private garden, and a glass of vodka.

"He is a good man," he said. "The Government in Iran, the Shah himself, favors him. God has spared him to be with us in this time of crisis."

When it came time to end the visit to Shahr Kurd, to push on higher toward Shalamzar, Murtesa spoke a word of warning.

"Please do not go higher than Shalamzar," he said. "You will be safe in my country. But," he added, "do not drive the Shiraz-Isfahan road, outside, at night!"

Not until a week later in Isfahan did I learn the reason for the absence of the younger men, rifles, and horses from the vicinity of Shahr Kurd. It appeared that Murtesa Khan had been indulging in an old-fashioned roundup that week.

The riders of his Haft Lang were campaigning beyond Shalamzar over on the Karun River, some fifty miles away and a couple of thousand feet higher, raiding the Boir Ahmadi and other tribes. The object was to collect taxes due Murtesa Khan.

No word had been said about this in Shahr Kurd. The mountains do not discuss private affairs.

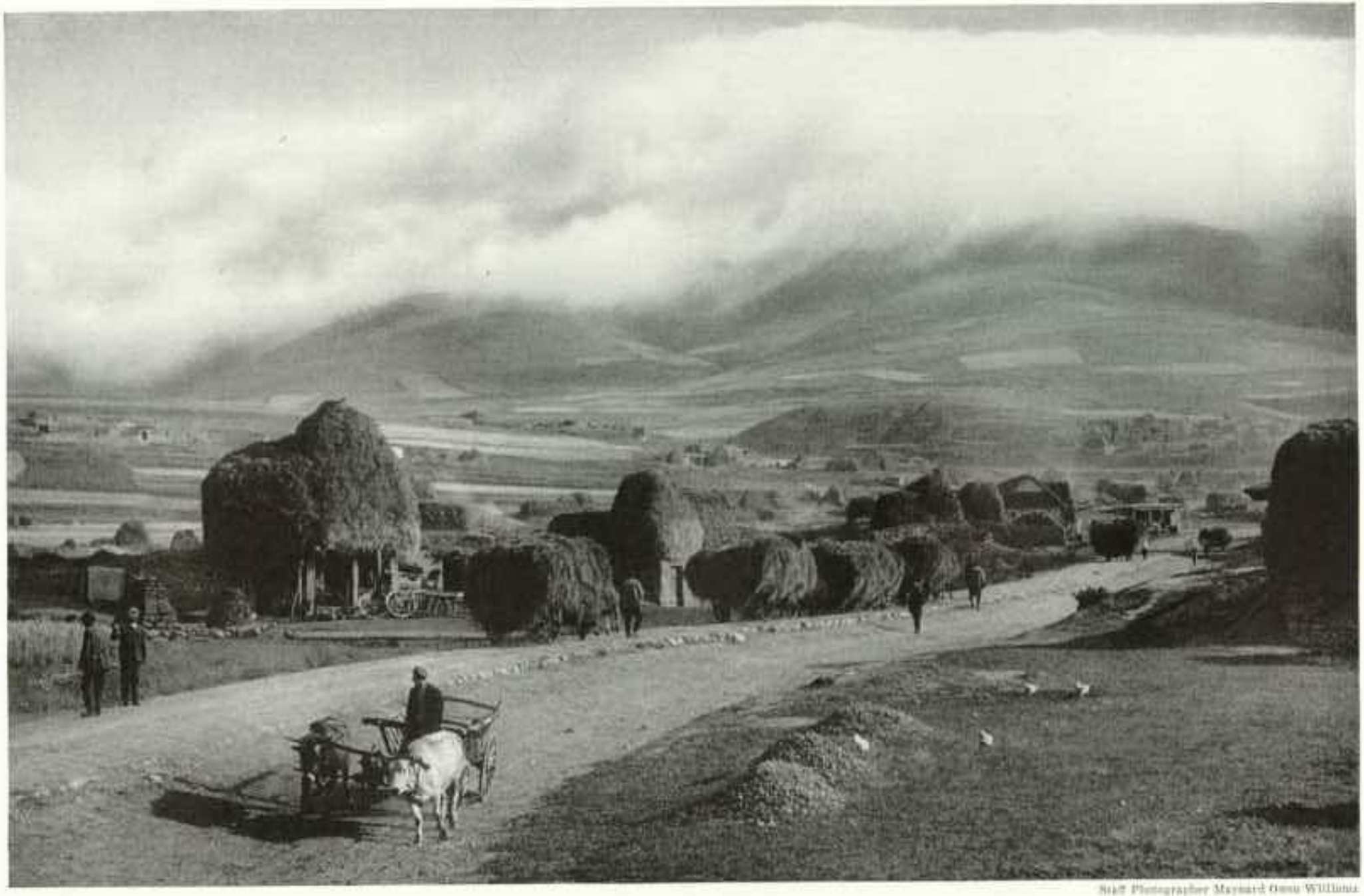
Paul from Three Lions

Is He a Son of Ancient Aryans, for Whom Iran Is Named?

Western clothes would fit this ragged patriarch, who wears his tribe's skullcap. He is a Lur. His people have no traditions to explain their beginnings. Some authorities regard them as relics of the Aryans, that Caucasian race of horsemen who swept into Persia some 3,500 years ago. This man eyes an automobile; his sons learned to drive trucks for the U. S. Army (page 392).

As might be expected, natural strongholds in the mountains have served as homesites through the centuries (page 398). Beyond Bakhtiari borders, the Mamassani, formerly one of the fiercest of the tribes, do not move far from an immense rock plateau at the 9,000-foot level. The impregnable summit is under snow in winter, but otherwise furnishes good grazing for the animals, as well as fig, almond, and olive groves to feed human beings in time of stress.

Two highways cut through the mountain chain. One winds through Khurramabad and



Staff Photographer Maynard Owen Williams

On a Misty August Morning Ox-drawn Hay Carts Creep into Chubukhli, a Prosperous Village in Soviet Armenia

At harvesttime golden mounds of hay and grain crown the roofs of roadside homes. Spring will sweep away the village's sawtooth skyline; rooftops will be eaten bare and flat. Slabs of dried manure for fuel are stacked pyramid-wise in yards (left). Fog covers Chubukhli Pass, "a sight for the gods," the photographer recalls.

Oriental Institute

Tabriz, Capital of Iran's Mutinous Azerbaijan "Republic," Uneasily Faces Russia, Whose Troops Occupy the City

Tabriz has long been a bridgehead between East and West. Here Marco Polo crossed into medieval Persia. Only recently the city transferred truck-borne American supplies to Russia-bound rails. Mongols made Tabriz a seat of empire. Broken fragments of their monuments remain (ruins, lower right). Truck gardens occupy bordered fields (center). "Grandfather" Mountain commands the scene. To the left, a small rectangle on the horizon is a shrine to Ali, Mohammed's son-in-law.

Boston Museum of Fine Arts, from Myron B. Smith

A Luristan Bridle Bit, Cast 30 Centuries Ago, Seems as Modern as a Pair of Book Ends

Similar bronze casts appeared in Paris art shops in 1929; they were traced to warriors' graves in Iran. Scythian tombs in faraway Siberia have yielded similar objects. These twin winged ibexes hold a horse's bit.

past Tuzlu Göl, the salt lake of the town of Iraq (formerly Sultanabad).

Daily the long convoys of American-made trucks, Russia-bound, climbed up this road heavily loaded, nose to tailboard, headed north. Many of the younger Lurs of this region attended the United States Army school for truck drivers at Hamadan (page 389).

Bronzes from Graves of Forgotten Ancestors

Only yesterday, as time goes in the mountains, these same Lurs, kinsmen of the Bakhtiari, provided a sensation among archeologists. Some twenty years ago a new kind of antique bronze began to appear along the highroad, graceful, finely wrought nomad fittings such as horse bits, belt clasps, daggers, and axes.

Specimens of a new art they seemed, as fine as Greek craftsmanship but not the work of Greeks.

The Lurs had discovered the bronzes in a series of hill graves and were selling them to bazaar dealers. These beautiful bronzes were fabricated some 3,000 years ago by a nomadic people who drifted into the mountains from the northern steppes. So the modern Lurs had been opening up the graves of their forgotten ancestors!

Farther north, the Arab-intermixed Lurs are replaced by the more numerous Kurds, the most spirited and intelligent of the mountain folk. The Kurds come of Aryan stock and speak a language close to early Iranian.

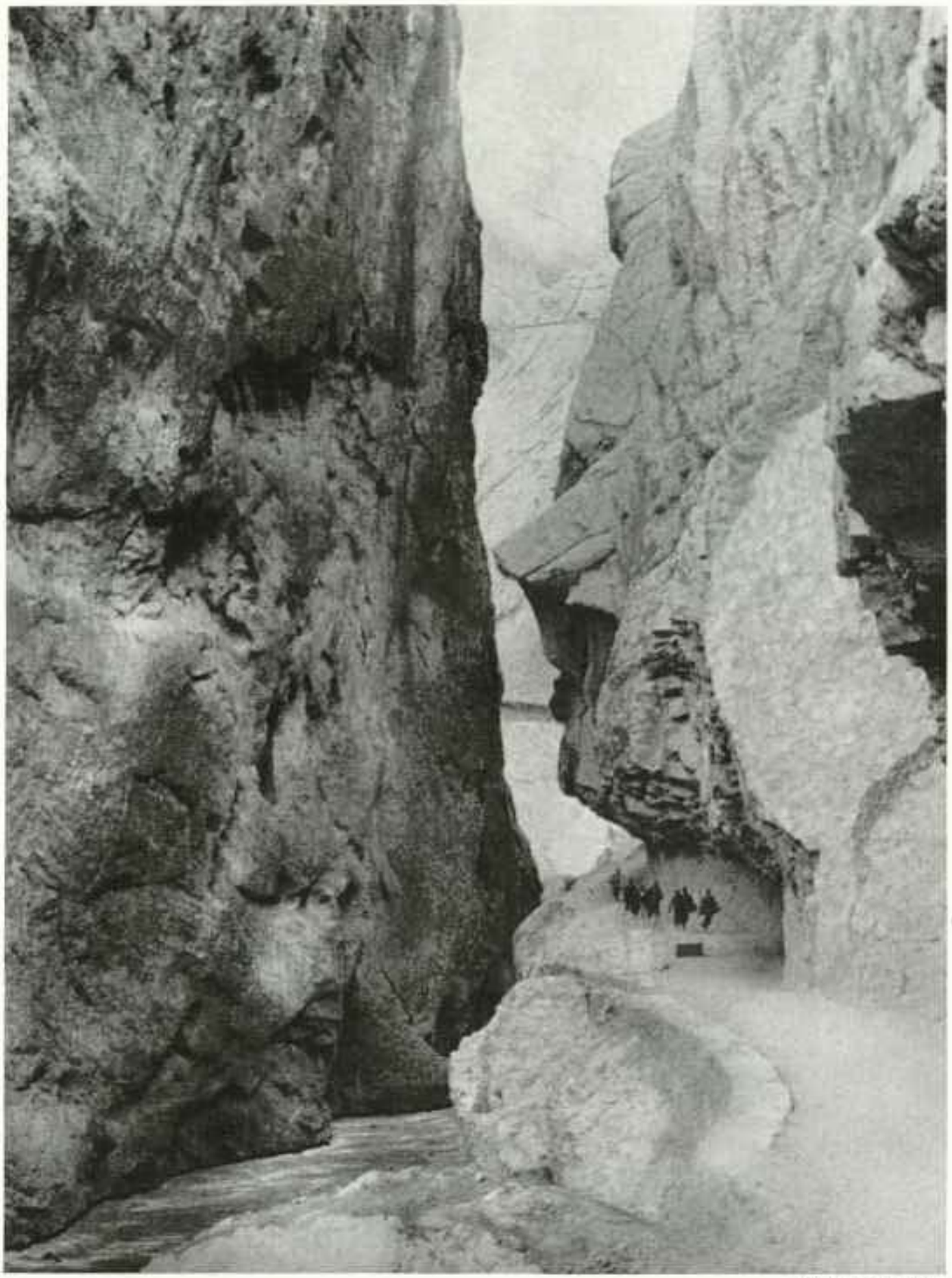
No census has numbered the tribes, which still count themselves vaguely by families, or tents. One aga said that a family of five would admit to only two in a tent, because of fear of a head tax on humans and cattle.

At a guess, the tribes would total about 6,000,000, as follows, from north to south: 4,500,000 Kurds, interspersed with Armenians; 600,000 Lurs, with sprinklings of Turkomans; 300,000 Bakhtiari; 200,000 Kashgais, with many Arab elements added.

Russian Girl MP's Brook No Argument

Up in the north, beyond Kazvin, we met newcomers to the mountains, the outposts of the Red Army. This was during the war, and husky Soviet infantrymen with automatic rifles slung from their shoulders flagged down the car to inspect my visa.

In the pass between Kazvin and the Caspian, Russian girls acted as traffic cops. One, with a white arm band and an old rifle slung across her back, yelled after us like a colonel on parade when we tried to pass a convoy.



Paul from Three Lions

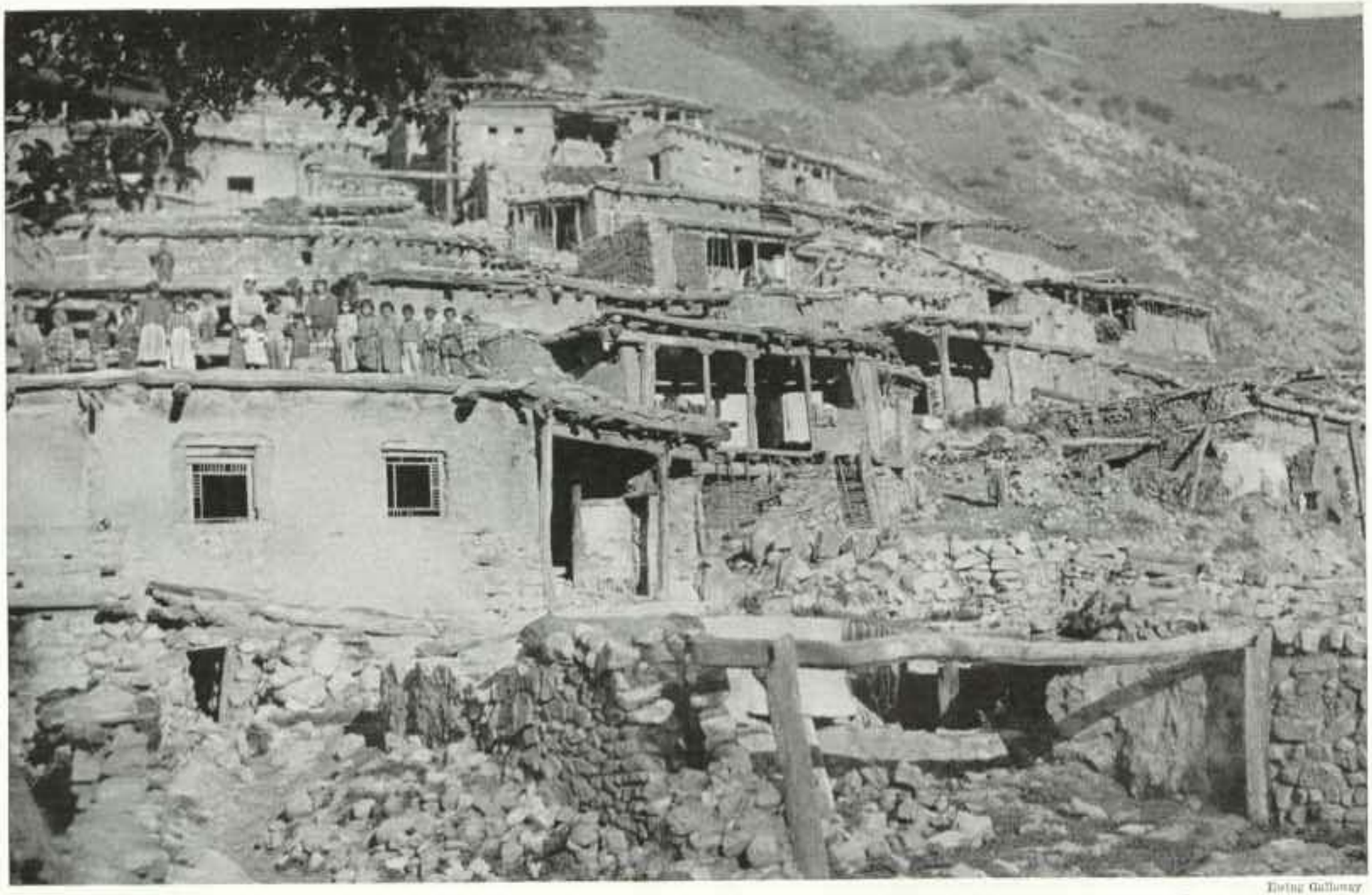
River and Man Carve Their Paths Side by Side Through the Heights of Luristan

Here the Ab-i-Diz, flowing to meet the Karun River, digs ever deeper gorges. Wherever it can, the road follows the natural bed. At times it wanders across cliffs or tunnels rock. The Zagros Mountains are crossed by the Trans-Iranian Railway, operated in wartime by the United States Army (page 389).

World Trouble Spot: the Oil-rich Middle East

Russians hint they'd like a slice of Turkey's Black Sea coast. Iran fumes over a revolt in Soviet-occupied Azerbaijan. Over the Zagros Mountains Persian tribesmen migrate twice a year. Nature, playing tricks with snow and drought, compels them to follow their grass-hungry herds.


U. S. S. R.
KAZAKH S.S.R.
CASPIAN SEA
Caucasus Mountains
GEORGIAN S. S. R.
ARMENIAN S. S. R.
AZERBAIJAN S. S. R.
AZERBAIJAN
KURDISTAN
I R A N
(PERSIA)
I R A Q
MESOPOTAMIA
ZAGROS MOUNTAINS
LURISTAN
Elburz Mountains
KUWAIT
NEUTRAL TERRITORY
NEUTRAL TERRITORY
PERSIAN GULF
ARABIA
Grozny
Makhachkala
Ordzhonikidze
Batumi
Oni
Derbent
Chagala
Telavi
Kutaisi
Gori
Tbilisi
Zaliv Kara Bogaz Gol
Kara Bogaz Gol
Akhaltsikhe
Ashotsk
Takhali
Kuba
Nukha
Leninakan
Kars
Chubukhli
Kirovabad
Baku
Kraanovodsk
Pamp
Ozero Sevan
Yerevan
Alyaty
Agdam
Stepanakert
Salyany
TURKMEN S.S.R.
Cheleken
Nebit Dag
Karakhse
Ararat
Nakhichevan
Çaldiran
Malazgirt
Dzhulfa
Lenkoran
Van Gölü
Van
Khoi
Astara
Bitlis
Sharifkhaneh
Tabriz
Ardebil
Hasan Kuli
Pahlevi
Rizaiyeh
Miandi
Bandar Shah
Gurgan
Lake Urmia
Maragheh
Resht
Lahijan
Shahsawar
Chalus
Babul
Sari
Damghan
Rabban Hormizd
Shaqlawa
Mehabad
Sain Qaleh
Zenjan
Manjil
Amul
Kazvin
Takht-i-Sulaiman
Demavend
Mosul
Hassuna
Erbil
Tehran
Firuzkuh
Semnan
Bijar
Sulaimaniya
Sharqat
Kirkuk
Sinneh
Tuz Khurmatli
Hamadan
Qum
Tikrit
Tiaruq
Kangavar
Bisitun
Kermanshah
Khanaqin
Kashan
Samarra
Naft Khaneh
Naft-i-Shah
Iraq (Sultanabad)
Burujird
Ardistan
Hit
Khurramabad
Ramadi
Lake Habbuniya
Baghdad
Nain
Isfahan
Kuhpayeh
Ardakan
Andimishk
Dizful
Zardeh Kuh
Shahr Kurd
Karbala
Babylon
Hilla
Kut al Imara
Shushtar
Shalamzar
Shahriza
An Najaf
Amara
Maidan-i-Naftun
Yezd-i-Khast
Haft Kel
Shatra
Ahwaz
Abadeh
Euphrates
Samawa
Al Qurna
Khurramshahr
An Nasiriya
Bandar Shahpur
Abadan
Basra
Persepolis
Bandar Dilam
Kazerun
Shiraz
Buhiyan
Bandar Rig
Borazjan
Al Kuwait
Bushire
Khurmuj
Nakhilu
Naband
Highways
Oil pipelines
Railroads
projected



Ewing Galloway

Tier on Tier, Like a Cliff Dwellers' Pueblo in Arizona, a Mountaineers' Village Soars in Northwestern Iran

This eagle's nest of timber and stone occupies a commanding position against surprise. It quarries the hillside for building material, saving valley soil for crops. Flat roofs serve as storage bins, workshops, and observation platforms. The lofty range, Qara Dagh, rises in Azerbaijan, where Iran meets Russia (map, pages 396-7).

Edwin W. Gordon

Yezidis Chant and Shuffle as Flute and Drums Sound in Iraq. They Reverence Christ and Mohammed, but Conciliate the Devil

Yezidis believe the Supreme Being delegated worldly power to Satan for 10,000 years. They never pronounce the name Shaitan (Satan) or any word beginning with *sh*, a taboo which retards their education. Yezidis baptize and circumcise; they drink wine but refuse pork. At feasts they sacrifice a bull to the sun (page 401).

The frontier bazaar, under the arches of once-sleepy Khanaqin, has assumed the proportions (and the tumult) of the old-time New York curb market, with paper currencies changing hands, coins bid against paper, and "gold goods" like fine carpets and silverware bought against depreciating currencies.

Even the Herki migrants add to their income by toting muleloads of salt across the border in defiance of a salt tax.

I lunched with one stout Aga of the Dizai folk, where the northern wheat fields skirt the dark *tells* (mounds) that still hide Assyrian city sites. He was a connoisseur of rifles. His body servant carried the inevitable long Kurdish knife, but the Aga had a small automatic tucked in his girdle. He also had a clear idea how the war was going to end.

"You and the English and the Russians," said he, "have more rifles and more men who can shoot them. So what can Germans do?"

Axis propaganda, the Aga admitted, broadcast talk about the coming supremacy of the Teutonic Wehrmacht. But there were practically no radios among the Kurds.

Several German parachutists had been dropped among the tribes, with small radios and large wads of cash. The parachutists spoke Kurdish fluently, but they did not succeed in selling Hitler—even as a descendant of Mohammed—to the mountain folk.

"They had no rifles," the Aga explained. "And so the British caught them quickly."

English, he thought, would soon be the most important language to know. He had taught himself English by hiring an interpreter for six months to accompany him everywhere and speak nothing else.

In These Hills Blood Feuds Abound

When we gave the stalwart Aga a lift to the next town, he asked to be set down at the gate. He did not want to go to the house of the local sheik, whither we were bound.

When we asked why, he explained, "I do not want to eat bullets." It was a matter of a personal feud.

In fact, the Kurdish section of the mountains cherishes many personal feuds to the square mile. Many of the horsemen carried rifles. When a rider spoke to a stranger, he would show his good manners by dismounting first, leaving his rifle in the saddle sheath.

Politics is a personal matter here. The great tribal seigneurs, the agas and begs, may be landowners in chief, but they are responsible for the bread and butter of the individual families. They also have to listen to the opinion of the community *majlis*, or gathering of the chief heads of families.

As with economy and politics, justice is reduced to its simplest terms. The supreme court of the hill folk sits in the person of the local aga or the *kadi* (judge, in Koranic law).

Naturally, most of the mountain folk now have their representatives in the various national governments. The Kurds of Iraq, for instance, seat some 17 members in the great Majlis at Baghdad. But the mountains are still inclined to put local affairs ahead of any Federal issue, and they disapprove heartily of both taxation and army conscription.

Sheik Mahmud's War with the RAF

Rarely has a leader formed the nucleus of a nation among the tribes by sheer strength of personality, as did Sheik Mahmud in the free-for-all of the last postwar period.

No one might have objected to the imperium of Sheik Mahmud had not his riflemen come into collision with the police force of the lowlands, which for the moment happened to be the British Royal Air Force.

The Kurds were willing to decide the issue by a test of arms in the ancient and honorable fashion, with sharpshooters defending their ravines and commandos raiding the enemy for supplies.

Such combat, however, did not prove to be the idea of the modern-minded RAF flyers.

The aviators devised a technique new to the Kurds, which was to fly over a belligerent mountain village and drop bombs.

The Kurds would hastily leave their stone and thatch huts, taking their animals and possessions up into hillside retreats. There they would watch with amazement the bombing of their empty village. Then they would return to rehabilitate themselves.

This process went on for months. The Kurds could accomplish little against the planes except to waste valuable cartridges. No RAF soldiery appeared afoot in the hills for an honest set-to. Also, the women became weary of housekeeping in caves.

Legend has it that at last a chit was received at RAF headquarters complaining, "If you do not come down and fight, we will be forced to make surrender."

After years of campaigning, the RAF bestowed a title on Sheik Mahmud. He became honorary Trainer in Chief to the RAF. The Kurds granted supremacy to the RAF—in the air. So today there is mutual respect.

An unwritten truce holds good between the Kurds and British, although the mountaineers are still defending their lofty valleys, rifle in hand, against other adversaries. I had the good fortune to meet Sheik Mahmud riding

with a mounted bodyguard over his pasture-lands near Sulaimaniya (page 407).

The gray-eyed veteran of a former war did not look older than fifty as he swung down easily from his horse to greet me. He could still bring down a running gazelle at two hundred yards with a single shot.

His good health he attributed to his peace of mind. He had given away his lands except the pastures to his three sons. And he chose to remain a spectator of World War II.

Once, half a dozen years ago, Sheik Mahmud had been persuaded to make his home in the lowland metropolis of Baghdad. For three days he had tried city life. "I found no place to ride my horse," he explained. "How could I ride out on paved streets or the flat clay plain from which no hills could be seen?"

So he went back promptly to his hunting and cattle raising in these hills that had been his battlefield twenty years before.

Transplanting of Tribes Failed to Work

About the time the RAF was trying conclusions with the Kurds, the Turkish leader Mustafa Kemal Pasha (later Atatürk) was fashioning his modern State around Anatolia; in Iran, Reza Shah Pahlevi was doing the same. These two dynamic planners found the feudal-minded, combative tribes along the frontiers a very solid obstacle to their nation-making.

Atatürk outlawed the Kurdish language and started forcible transplanting of the mountain communities around Lake Van (Van Gölü), in the east, to towns in western Turkey.

Reza Shah undertook to liquidate leadership among the Bakhtiari by quartering the top men in jails. Murtesa Kuli Khan was the only Bakhtiari leader with whom I talked who had not spent some years behind bars.

An experienced soldier, Reza Shah pushed his roads and army posts far up into the mountains among the Lurs and Kurds, ordered the customary migrations to cease, and followed Atatürk's example in transplanting some tribes, exchanging Bakhtiari groups for Turkomans from near the Caspian.

This forcible grafting did not work out too happily.

"When the animals could not be taken over to the winter pastures," said a Bakhtiari, "a large number of them died. Of the sheep, only one in five survived."

As to the interchange of tribal groups, the older men shook their heads. "We did not know the Turkoman land, and the Turkomans did not know how to cultivate our land."

Some of the Lurs were brought down from the heights and settled in huts near Khurramabad, on the warm western slopes. But the Lurs, dispirited, took to sitting inside the huts, losing vitality. Malaria exacted a heavy toll. They had been accustomed to migrating north and east at the end of winter, thus escaping the spring heat with its crop of mosquitoes.

Over in Iraq, the Kurds assert that conditions have been better for them under King Feisal and the British during the mandate test period than in either Turkey or Iran.

Today in Iran, Mohammed Reza Pahlevi, the Swiss-educated son of the former Shah, is meeting the leaders of the hinterland tribes in person-to-person talks to heal the age-old feud. Tomorrow may see an entente established between highlanders and lowlanders.

Religious Tolerance Amid the Mountains

The mountains have grown tolerant, during 2,500 years and longer, of a man's religion. The cold winds and the vast slopes seem to make one congregation of all human beings.

In the snow passes I saw wanderers put stones or tie rags about the open-air shrines.

Farther down, the tree-grown courtyards of small mosques serve as community centers where women especially sit to talk things over.

In the northern foothills monasteries and shrines preserve the liturgy of early Christianity. I heard one Gregorian chant in Arabic!

These are farmland monasteries. The priests sustain themselves by working the fields. Such an establishment is Al Qosh, near Mosul, which we reached by a two-hour drive from Mosul followed by a climb on foot to the base of a cliff where the hermits had once hewn caves in the same rock.

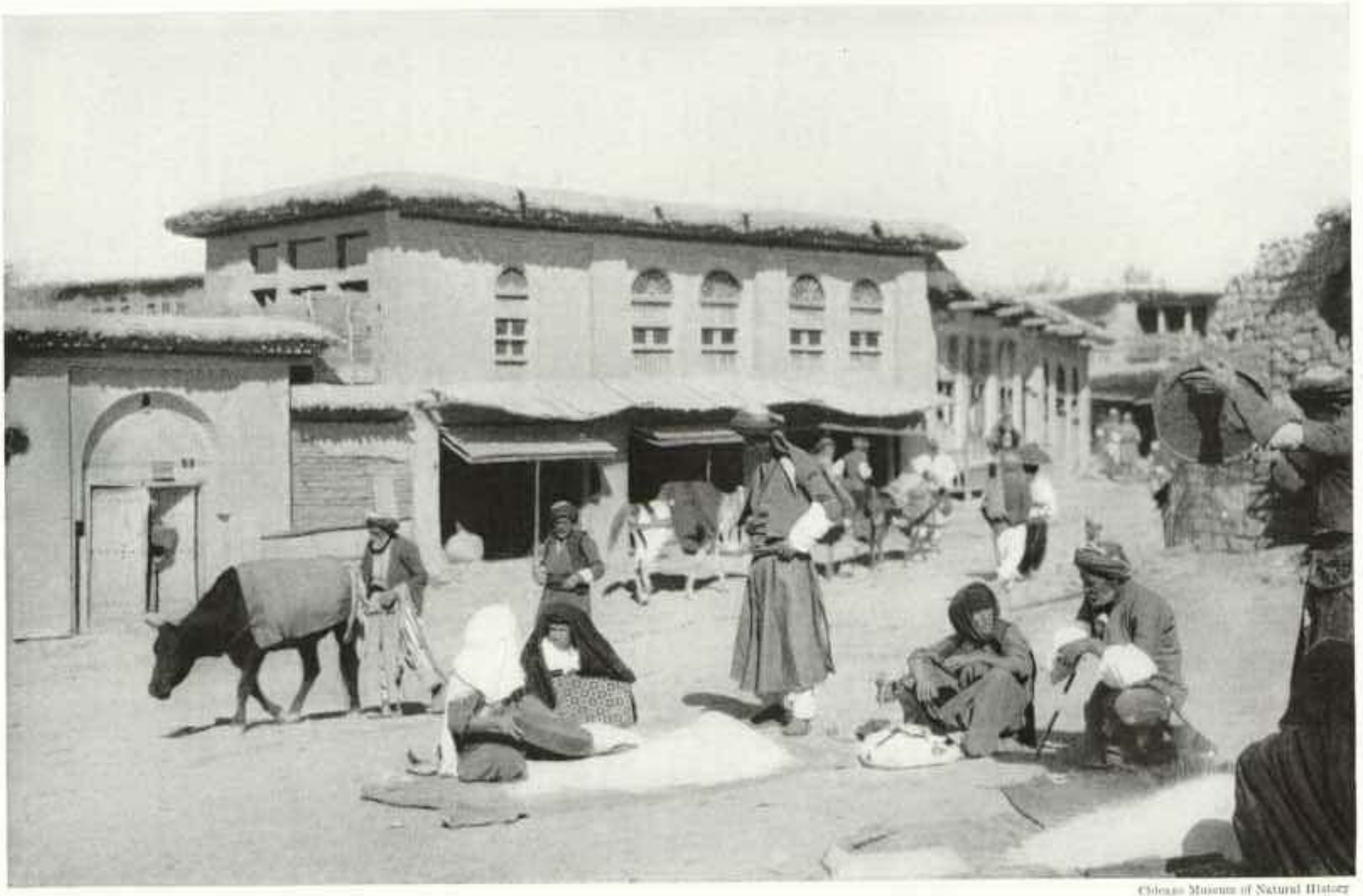
Reaching the vineyards and wheat fields of the monastery, we passed flocks tended by silent Yezidis in their high-shouldered capes made of whole sheepskins.

My companion, an Assyrian, said that the Yezidis were the shyest of all the mountain folk. They have a horror of doing the things we think necessary, such as speaking to strangers or learning to read.

Far off in the mists along the mountain wall we could make out the pinnacle height of Shaikh Adi, the shrine of the Yezidis.

This shepherd folk has collected a secret pantheon of the oldest deities of human beings, including the Zoroastrian worship of the sun at rising and setting, reverence for a snake, fear of Satan, and devotion to the emblem of Malik Taos, a brass peacock. Gentlest of all the backward mountain people, they are also the most stubborn in clinging to their peculiar credo (pages 388, 399).

The existing monastery of Al Qosh is much more modern than the hermit caverns of the



Chicago Museum of Natural History

Farmers Sift the Grain and Animals Carry the Commerce of Sulaimaniya, Headquarters of the Kurds in Iraq

This age-old scene is changing; a new generation arises in Sulaimaniya. The author heard school children reading English and reported an interest in democracy. He was entertained by Kurds in European dress. This town is a market for wheat, barley, and rice. Most of its 3,000 homes are of mud brick (page 407).

International News

In Iraq Nomadic Man Settled Down an Estimated 8,000 Years Ago and Created the First-known Civilization

Hassuna, this newest "Garden of Eden," moves the dawn of agriculture back some 20 centuries. The men were farmers, builders, and craftsmen. They left a sickle blade—still sharp!—made of flint chips glued together. They erected mud-brick homes (left). Hassuna skeletons show little variance from modern man's.

Ernest B. Schoedsack

Nomadic Bakhtiari Have No Bridges or Boats; They Cross the Swiftest Rivers on Goatskin Rafts

Carrying the tribe's princes, the royal barge sets out on a ceremonial voyage down the Karun River. Rich rugs cover 100 inflated skins; posts sustain a silk and velvet canopy. By using a pair of skins as water wings, the Bakhtiari herdsman guides terror-stricken beasts across icy mountain streams. Men, horses, donkeys, and sheep swim; women, children, and goats ride rafts (pages 385, 395, 407).

Oriental Institute

"Solomon's Throne," a Deserted Fortress, Occupies a Conical Hilltop Encircled with a Crumbling Wall

At Takht-i-Sulaiman, as maps call it, a local tradition says that Solomon entertained the Queen of Sheba. Here Marc Antony lost 70,000 men to the Parthians. At this abode of the ancient Iranian gods, the Zoroastrians kept their sacred fire. Their temple ruins remain. The lake, small but deep, is fed by a subterranean reservoir. Farmers channel off its water (note ditch). Its calcium deposits built the hill.

cliff, known as Rabban Hormizd. The Nestorians in the gray stone monastery explained that it was no longer necessary to cling to the security of the cliff.

The president, Yussuf Dadisov, apologized for the poor quality of the bread offered us. The monastery, he said, had to feed so many transients during this war that they had been compelled to mix barley with the wheat.

Seated on the carpet-covered wall divans of the reception room, the bearded priests of Al Qosh asked eagerly how the Allied campaign in Italy was progressing. The older ones, Assyrians as well as Arabs, smoked slender three-foot pipes as they listened.

It was an event for the monastery when visitors arrived with news of happenings in Europe, and they reciprocated by showing me manuscripts from the library in Estrangelo (from archaic Greek), Syriac, and Chaldean.

Nestorians Have Paper Shortage, Too

Dadisov explained in fluent French that the priests kept up the age-old task of illuminating texts by hand. He himself had done so until a few years ago.

"That means you are not doing it now?" I asked.

"No, because of the war—the paper shortage."

When we passed through the monastery chapel, I noticed a shrine to St. George, that favored patron of the East. Near the door an inscription in Koranic Arabic reminded the visitor that prayer was good. And, almost invisible on its pedestal, I saw a small brass peacock, sacred to those of the Yezidi faith.

The Nestorian Christian church of Al Qosh was prepared to minister to all who entered its portals, including the Yezidis!

No matter how far I penetrated the mountains, I heard this question echoed: What is America going to do at the end of this war? Not that these folk of an Asiatic blind spot expect America to have any foothold in their region. It is simply that in their minds America has become a symbol of a force for the right, like the St. George of medieval tradition. Being so far away, they have idealized us. But the ideal means much to them.

What is the outlook for the mountain folk, the tribes of yesterday, as they attempt to change over from medieval life to modern, in the wake of World War II?

On the debit side, more than 90 percent of them are still oxen plowers, or artisans working by hand with the tools of their grandfathers' day. Barely 10 percent can read, even the *Shah Namah* (page 388).

To the modern-minded, Tehran-educated wife of Ahmad Kuli Khan Bakhtiari, I suggested that loud-speakers might be installed in the Bakhtiari villages to provide radio edification for those who could not read.

"Goodness, no!" She laughed. "It would only scare them. Everybody would run away!"

You can't draw up a blueprint to change overnight the Old World method by which the animals live on grass, the people on the animals.

On the credit side, the tribes have high physical vitality and quick natural intelligence; also, ideals unspoiled as yet. This sturdy hillman stock, bred in a cold climate, has been giving better blood infusions to the heat-ridden lowlanders for centuries.

The discovery of oil along the western slopes has confronted the tribes with one of the biggest industrial giants of today. Anglo-Iranian Oil Company wells have been producing for more than 30 years in what was the feudal domain of the Bakhtiari.

In the early stages of the development an annual payment of three percent of net profits was made to the top Bakhtiari families, who in turn guarded the pipelines stretching down to the Abadan refinery.

In the 1930's the Khans sold their shares to the Iranian Government, which now maintains law and order in this area.

Some 10 pipelines now connect the fields with the Abadan refinery.

Similarly, farther north, wells of the Iraq Petroleum Company have been sunk in ancient Kurdish terrain, where once everlasting fire burned from escaping natural gas, through which Abednego and his companions walked, trusting in the Lord (Daniel 3). That particular flame was put out when the region was blacked out in 1941-42, at the time when the Luftwaffe was winging that way.

Here oil is paying the way for irrigation. According to a 1943 survey made by an American mission headed by Dr. E. L. DeGolyer, formerly Assistant Deputy Petroleum Administrator, a large part of the world's oil reserves may be found under or near these mountains.

These royalties finance the chaining of rivers. Not far above Al Qosh monastery the swift gray waters of the Great Zab are to be stored by a dam. Above Murtesa Khan's city, an American engineer was completing a survey of the upper Karun, which may be diverted eastward to irrigate the plain around Isfahan. Work on this project began, by the way, at command of Darius, King of Kings, more than 24 centuries ago!

As in Oklahoma, California, and elsewhere, dividends from oil are building new hospitals

E. R. Leven

Kurdish Tribesmen Spread a Carpet as Tablecloth and Eat with Their Hands

A fringed turban, effective armor against flies, adorns the chief (left). A visiting mullah (right) wears a thick felt vest resembling a life jacket; it keeps out icy winds. These Rowanduz tribesmen live in Iraq east of Mosul.

and schools in this hinterland.* But what sort of academies can be built for the mountain folk who migrate over 13,000-foot ranges?

Murtesa Khan has a simple answer to that: "If the people cannot stay with the schools, the schools must follow the people."

That means mobile classrooms, towed in trailers, complete with libraries, and agricultural implements for demonstration. The British already operate several mobile dispensaries along the heights—one driven by a woman nurse—to combat malaria, typhus, and venereal disease that creep up from the lowlands.

Young Ahmad Kuli Khan Bakhtiari has worked out a solution of the tougher problem of settling the migratory tribes. Since they live on the animals, he explains, the only thing to do is to find a good homesite for the herds.

He is experimenting with such a settlement near Shalamzar, at about the 8,000-foot level. Being above the winter snow line, it has water and fertile soil. Annual crops can be planted; fodder can be grown to feed cattle and horses in winter when the herds cannot graze.

This settlement forms a vast dispersal area made up of small communities of no more than 100 families apiece. Each village has its grazing and cultivation area of many square miles.

"The families," the Bakhtiari explained, "will be near enough to their acreage to attend to the herds. The herds will have land enough for their needs. But the sheep will have to stay higher up somewhere."

Can these mountain people, still depending on sheep, adapt themselves to modern life? The community of Sulaimaniya, in northeastern Iraq, gives the answer, and—if it can be believed—the answer is yes.

Bed Sheets Are Outside in Sulaimaniya

This progressive city of some 20,000 (page 402), whose name is hardly known in the West, is a pattern of the progress that may come, the remaking of the mountain world. It is almost entirely Kurdish, from the mule caravans that drop down the hillsides with their loads of wood and wool, to the clean gray stones of its hospital and girls' school.

* See "Bahrein: Port of Pearls and Petroleum," by Maynard Owen Williams, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE, February, 1946.

If you are a guest of Sulaimaniya, you learn the meaning of real hospitality. You sleep in its best house, whoever the owner may be.

I slept curled upon a soft mattress on the floor between black felt robes and embroidered quilts, with nice clean sheets *outside*. This setup kept me warm in spite of winds icy from the breath of the snow summits above.

No one called me, because it would be rudeness unthinkable to wake a sleeping guest. I woke when a rooster crowed outside the barred (and closed) windows.

When I stirred, reaching for cigarettes, two menservants built like wrestlers carried in a big brazier with coals already glowing. They put down the heat on a Persian carpet that would be a museum piece in the West.

A valet in European dress, but knowing no language that I knew, took his stand by the door to wait for orders.

"*Chai*," I requested, expecting only the inevitable breakfast tea. But the Kurdish idea of breakfast runs to more than tea. True, an oversize brass-and-silver-inlay tray appeared with the makings of tea on it.

The valet, however, presented after this a bowl of grapes and oranges, a platter of assorted strips of bread with strong cheese on the side, a dish of half a dozen eggs fried together on barley cakes, with a final course of sweetbreads, honey, and dates.

Shaved, dressed, and fed, I wondered how to talk with the people of the house. The valet ushered in a stranger in European dress who explained in English that he was a schoolteacher, come to interpret my commands.

"He is sick," the interpreter explained to me. "The gentleman, your host. This is his house, and he is grieved because he cannot get out of bed. So he begs that you will command anything."

Hearing radio music, I found my way out to the room of state. There sat a dozen men in European clothes, waiting to greet the first American writer to visit Sulaimaniya. Among them were the director of education, physicians, scholars, university graduates, speaking English, French, Arabic, as well as Kurdish.

"What do Americans think," they asked eagerly, "of the Kurds?"

"Americans," I parried, "know almost nothing about the Kurds."

"But what do they think?"

"They think," I admitted truthfully, "that you are a few wild tribes somewhere in Asia, who massacre people."

My hosts looked at each other and laughed.

They showed me a copy of *Zhin*, the newspaper published in Sulaimaniya (religion and politics barred from its columns). They took me to classrooms where 11-year-old Kurdish and Arab boys read aloud in English.

A graduate of the American University of Beirut (Beyrouth)* brought out a chart, in the hospital, showing field stations organized to fight malaria. They produced volumes of proverbs, folklore, textbooks, and essays on the setup of modern democracies.

Last to come in was a fine two-volume history of the Kurds.

"A present," they explained, "from the son of Sheik Mahmud" (page 400).

At the end of the day I felt like a Connecticut Yankee who had found himself an ignoramus at the court of King Arthur and his peers!

In taking leave, I noticed a very tall haggard man in a dressing gown leaning on the arm of a servant by the door. I had not met him before and asked who he was.

"The owner of this house," they explained.

My host had got out of a sickbed to tell a guest good-bye at the door.

"He says," they interpreted, "that he hopes you will not forget the Kurds."

No one mentioned it at Sulaimaniya. Only several days later in Mosul did I learn that a small war was going on at the time in an adjoining valley some 80 miles from Sulaimaniya as the eagle flies!

Breeding Ground of a New Society?

I was sorry to turn my back on the heights after months of visiting with the hill chieftains. In the corridor of the sleeper pulling out of Mosul, strangers pushed by me without a word. There was no heat in the car. A sign beneath the window said in four languages, including Turkish, that it was dangerous to lean out of the window.

The mountains had become only a blur on the skyline. And with them I was leaving the tie of simple human fellowship.

It can't happen tomorrow. It may take a generation. But this never-never land, one of the finest alpine regions in the world, will cease to be a lockup.

Already the roads are better. Airfields are taking shape in the foothills. With cheap gasoline, and a fresh stock of autos available after the war, this upland from Ararat to Abadan may become a rest center above the heat-ridden Middle East lowlands and the breeding ground of a sturdy new society.†

* See "American Alma Maters in the Near East," by Maynard Owen Williams, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE, August, 1945.

† For additional articles in the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE on Iran and Iraq, see the "Cumulative Index to the National Geographic Magazine, 1899-1945."