

# The Kashkay People, Past and Present

Sohrab Dolatkhah\*

**Abstract:** The Kashkay, a Turkic-speaking people living in Iran, have been the subject of scholarly research since the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. This article aims at providing some general (e.g. geographical, socio-ethnological and historical) data on this people. To give an overview of the history of the Kashkay people, the author traces back its roots to the early times of Turkic presence in the south of Iran.

**Key Words:** Kashkay, Qashqa'i, Turkic-speaking people, Iran, history of the Kashkay.

## The name Kashkay

The Kashkay is a Turkic-speaking Shi'a Muslim people living in central-southern Iran. The name is written قشقاىى [qæʃqɑi] in Arabo-Persian script and in Persian is considered as consisting of 'qašqā' and 'ī', a derivational suffix originally Arabic. The Kashkay themselves pronounce it [qæʃgɑy]. Different transcriptions occur in Western literature, e.g. *Qašqā'ī*, *Qashqa'i*, *Qashqay*, *Kashgay* and *Kashkay*. In recent publications the form *Kashkay* is preferred, possibly after the transcription used in the *Encyclopédie de l'Islam*. It would be more practical to use only this form which is most in accord with the native pronunciation and Turcologic phonology.

According to available historical sources, the name "Kashkay" first appeared in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century in a Safavid official document deeding a land property to the Shahilu family<sup>1</sup> who later became the rulers of the Kashkay people (Beck 1986: 46-47). In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, one of the descendents of the Shahilu family unified most of the Turkic and some of the non-Turkic tribes of southern Iran within the *Il-e Kashkay* ("Kashkay tribal confederation"). However, it is from the mid-nineteenth century that references to the Kashkay tribal confederation became used in official documents and historical sources (Fasā'ī 1895-6 via Oberling 1974 and Beck 1986). Over time, the use of the name *kashkay* became more widespread as the confederation grew stronger politically.

There are currently several theories on the etymology of the name Kashkay. Some are based on legends popularized by Kashkay cultural and political figures in an attempt to give a 'noble' even flattering attribute to the Kashkay

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\* École Pratique des Hautes Études, Sorbonne / PARiS  
dolatkhah@hotmail.com

name, probably as a reaction against a dominant Persian society that, to some extent, tried to represent them with humiliating attributes.<sup>2</sup> These meanings have been derived from the denotations this word or its supposed components have had in Turkic; it is said, for example, that *Kashkay* means ‘those of pioneer tribe of Qār’<sup>3</sup> or ‘those who possess invincible place’.<sup>4</sup> On this, I agree with Lois Beck that ‘In short, such etymologies are more a part of the process of identity formation than they are its residue’ (Beck 1986: 44).

Other scholarly theories focus on the meaning of *Kashkay* in other Turkic languages. For example, a possible meaning of *Kashkay* is ‘the braves’, from *kashka* meaning ‘shining or brave’ in Chaghatay (F. Sümer, *Encyclopédie de l’Islam*). As well, in many Turkic languages, including *Kashkay kaška* (*qaşqa*) means ‘those of the animals (horses or sheep) with a white spot on their foreheads’; this has been accepted as the “most plausible” etymology by W. Barthold (Oberling 2004).<sup>5</sup> – the argument supporting this latter etymology is based on evidence indicating that taking names connected to animals was historically a common practice among Turcophone groups. However, a brief survey of the name of tribes and subtribes of the *Kashkay* tribal confederation shows that there are very few names with such animal connections. In fact, the majority of names appear to be derived from eponyms – mostly ancestral names – or to a lesser degree from occupations and functions or, in rare cases, from characteristics or customs specific to a tribal unit. In view of this, it is very likely that ‘*Kashkay*’, regardless of its meanings, was simply derived from an eponym (for example an ancestral name) which was given first to the ruling family or core group of the *Kashkay* tribes and later to the whole confederation.<sup>6</sup>

### **The territory of the *Kashkay***

Before sedentarization, the *Kashkay* used to practice seasonal migrations between their summer and winter zones throughout the province of Fars, from the northeast to the southeast. They also went beyond the limits of the Fars province, particularly to the north to Isfahan, to the east in Kohgiluyeh-va-Boir-Ahmad and to the south-east in the Khuzestan province, and further south and south-west to the coastal province of Bushehr on the Persian Gulf. Currently, the *Kashkay* are scattered in numerous urban and rural zones all over their former nomadic territory and along the routes of their seasonal migrations. They are predominantly established in the cities such as Shahreza and Semirom in the province of Isfahan, Abadeh, Eqdid, Shiraz, Kazerun, Ardakan, Firuzabad and Jahrom in the province of Fars, Gachsaran in the province of Kohgiluyeh-va-Boir-Ahmad and Haftgel in the province of Khuzestan.

## **The history of the Kashkay and the continuity of Turkic presence in southern Iran**

Available historical evidence show that the first Turks arrived in southern Persia between the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> century when they accompanied the Abbasid emir of Shiraz to serve as *ghulams* or mercenaries under the Caliph of Baghdad. In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, they were forced to leave Shiraz, when Ya'qub-e Lays, the first Saffarid ruler, 'liberated' parts of Persia e.g. Fars from the Abbasid Caliph; yet certain groups chose to remain and adopt the Persian culture. The Turkic presence was maintained as Turks kept arriving in Fars over the next centuries. In the 10<sup>th</sup> and early 11<sup>th</sup> century the army of the Buyids (933–1062), a Persian dynastic confederation, included large Turkic elements. In the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century, the Seljuks finally captured Shiraz, establishing a large Turkic presence in south Persia. The reign of the Salghurid Atabegs (1148-1270) again saw mass Turkic migration into the region. At the time of the Injuids and the Muzaffarids, themselves non-Turkic rulers, the Turkic presence was again important enough for Hāfez-e Shirazi (1326-1389) to reflect it in his poetry.<sup>7</sup> In the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, Shiraz was captured by Shah Ismail, the founder of the Safavid dynasty. One of Shah Ismail's Kizilbaş commanders was Amir Ghazi Shahilu, reportedly a descendent of the famous Aqqoyunlu ruler, Uzun Hassan (d. 1478). Members of the Kashkay ruling family claimed to be descended from Amir Ghazi Shahilu and that he had first been given the title of *il-khani* ("the head of tribal confederacies") by the Safavid Shah (Lois Beck 1986: 45). In the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Shah ordered Allah-verdi khan and his son Imamqoli khan, originally from Azerbaijan, to rule Fars and Shiraz in order to protect the southern frontiers of the Safavid empire. To do this task, they drew support from local and immigrant Turkic-speaking tribal allies. For the next two centuries, the Turkic presence expanded through the lush highlands of the southern Zagros in the form of pastoralist tribes. These tribes were sometimes used as warrior providers by the local and national authorities of a time when the 'army' essentially used to be established on intertribal allies. It is possible that the heads of certain tribes, including Turkic-speaking ones, had fought against Nader Shah Afshar (reigned 1736-1747) who captured Shiraz in 1744. He then added Fars tribal warriors and commanders to his army (some of them from Shahilu family later took part in the conquest of India). The Kashkay commanders were later disfavored: one was executed and another blinded by Nader Shah and among others was exiled from Fars to Khorasan. After the death of Nader Shah, the Turks of Fars allied with the Bakhtiyari and the Kurdish tribes to help Karim Khan Zand onto the throne of Persia. As a reward, they were allowed to return from their exile in Khorāsān back to their territories in southern Iran. The Zand (1750-1794)

was in some way the early stage of the development of the Kashkay tribal confederation: in this peaceful and prosperous time, one member of the Shahilu family was 'assigned by Zand ruler the authority over the tribes of Fars' (Beck 1986: 28). Also, thanks to their influence at court, the Kashkay khans were able to incorporate immigrant tribes such as the Kurdish, the Lak, the Lur, etc. into their own. The Zand rule ended after a series of fierce battles against the rising Qajar tribe led by Aqa Mohammad Khan who sent a large number of the Turkic *Ilāt* ("the tribal allies") of Fars into exile in central Iran<sup>8</sup> as a punishment for their loyalty to the Zand. He reunified Iran and established the capital in Tehran, which became more important than Shiraz. As a result the political weight of the *Ilāt* of the Fars province diminished although it maintained its geopolitical importance, especially due to the growing activity of external powers such as the British empire. The reign of Fath Ali Shah Qajar, in the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was a relatively quiet period in Fars. This gave Jani Khan of the Shahilu family, the opportunity to reunify and reorganize the tribes which by then were almost all Turkic-speaking. The Shah of Qajar pursued the tradition established by the Zand of giving the authority over the *velāyat-e Kashkay* ("the Kashkay territory") to a member of the Shahilu, in this instance Jani Khan. From then on, Kashkay leaders and warriors were part in the Qajar army, fighting against the British in the Anglo-Persian war of 1856-57. In the 1860s, Naser ed-Din Shah decided to counterbalance the growing power of the Kashkay by creating a rival tribal confederation, the *Ī-e Khamsa*<sup>9</sup> ("The tribal confederation of the five"). This event entered the Kashkay in a long period of rivalry and conflict, which, in addition to other factors – most importantly the 1906 Iranian Constitutional Revolution – shaped the picture of the Kashkay tribal confederation for the next hundred years. The confederation became a major player in the complex interrelationship of local, national and foreign powers in southern Iran throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly during the two World Wars. In the first chaotic decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Ismail Khan Soulat ed-Doula (in office 1904-33), the most prominent of Kashkay *ilkhans*, gave the Kashkay the main institutions of sovereignty, i.e. an army, an economy and a foreign policy (Oberling 1974 : 195). As his most important enterprises in this regard, he created the *Amaleh* ("staff or agents") – previously a small tribe compared with other Kashkay tribes – by unifying many small and independent tribes, subtribes and isolated groups, some originally non-Turkic. The *Amaleh* held its key place in the sociopolitical organization of the Kashkay tribal confederation throughout the decades *à venir*; in the 1940s, Naser Khan<sup>10</sup>, after returning from exile, maintained Ismail Khan's legacy (d. 1933) by bringing together scattered subtribes of *Amaleh* and other isolated groups. From the end of World War II

to the fall of Iranian nationalist Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq (in office 1951-53), the Kashkay tribal confederation lived its heyday. The loose control of central government over the Kashkay and later a relationship of mutual support between Mosaddeq and the Kashkay enabled them to flourish both socio-politically and territorially. But the days of the Kashkay tribal confederation as an important political unit were short: in 1953, Pahlavi Shah toppled Mosaddeq's government in a coup backed by the CIA, abolished the title of *ilkhani* and sent the main Kashkay leaders into exile. He pursued his father's policy of *eskān-e 'ašāyer* ("settlement of nomads") or *takhte-qāpū kardan*<sup>11</sup> ("forced sedentarization") using new tactics, such as the replacement of the traditional Kashkay khans by Iranian Army officers. Later, he completed the process by imposing the *Edare-ye Amuzesh-e 'Ašāyer* ("the office of tribal education"), a Persian-based schooling system. This system educated tribeschildren in white tents which were set to make transhumance accompanying the pastoralist tribes. It was led by Mohammad Bahmanbeigi, a highly-educated native Kashkay, who was a loyal agent of the Pahlavi national ideology and an active promoter of Persian language and literature.<sup>12</sup> By officially declaring tribes to be 'non-existent' in 1963, Mohammad Reza Shah expanded his authority over the Kashkay tribal confederation and the other tribes of Fars. This official anti-tribal policy finally dismantled the confederacy leaving behind numerous isolated subtribes scattered between the summer and winter pastures of the Kashkay tribal confederation and along its seasonal migration routes. By the end of the Pahlavi dynasty in 1979, most of these tribes and subtribes had given up the nomadic way of life and settled mostly in the poor urban areas. In the early days of the Islamic Revolution (1979-1982), the main Kashkay leaders returned from exile but their efforts to revitalize the confederacy were regarded by the new Islamic regime as a threat. They were finally defeated in Firuzabad, at the end of a two-year partisan war in their mountainous summer territory. The Kashkay tribal confederation, the last Turkic-speaking well-organized tribal confederacy in Iran, has become the subject of scholarly research in various disciplines such as history, ethnology and linguistics.

### **The Kashkay socio-political organization**

Until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Kashkay tribal confederation consisted of around twelve *tayfe* ("tribe"). Due to sociopolitical changes throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it evolved into a more centralized confederation consisting of a smaller number of larger tribes. With the last phase of sedentarization over the last 50 years, the Kashkay have given up their nomadic way of life, and therefore lost the characteristics which then gave them the concrete identity of tribespeople. Thus, referring to tribal identity today rather means

talking of ‘imagined’ entities. The same is true for the confederative system. Today, the Kashkay identity is determined by the features and constraints of modern urban life. But, in order to familiarize the reader with what was in past, I shall briefly describe the complex structure of the confederation. The *Il-e Kashkay* is composed of five major *tâyfe* (“tribe”). Each tribe comprises many *tire* (“subtribes”), themselves subdivided into several *bonku*. Each *bonku* subdivides into *beyle*, being composed of tents (houses) of a *soy* (“lineage”) or *oĵāq* (“fire”). The five main Kashkay tribes are:<sup>13</sup> the *Dāre-şorlu* (*Dareh-şūrī*) (“those of the salty valley”), the *Şiş-bâyli* (*Şiş-bolūkī*) (“those of six heads” in Kashkay or “those of the six districts” in Persian), the *Āmāle* (*Amaleh*) (“the staff or agents” [of the ilkhani])—the largest one in the core of which the headquarters of the *ilkhani*, the *Keşkollu* (*Kashkālī*) (“those of the lake *Kash*”) and the *Eymur*<sup>14</sup> (*Fārsī-Madān*) (“those who cannot speak Persian”). There were also some smaller tribes such as the *Qaraçây* (*Qaraçe’i*) (“those of the big or deep river”), the *Sāfi-xanlı* (*Safi-khāni*) (“those of Sefi han as ancestor or head”), the *Nāmādi* (“those whose occupation is to make felt”). These smaller tribes have either been absorbed by the main Kashky tribes or assimilated into Iranian society.

### **The Kashkay population**

A mid-20<sup>th</sup> century report to the Iranian government established the population of the Kashkay tribal confederation at about 400,000, most of them nomads (Magee 1948: 15, cited in Lois Beck: 1986). From then on, different factors, particularly political and economic ones, have forced them to give up their nomadic lifestyle and be scattered among many rural and urban locations. Since Iranian governments, under the Pahlavi as well as the Islamic Republic, have been reluctant to include questions on ethnic affiliation in national censi, no reliable data is available on the Kashkay population. Nevertheless, demographic evidence suggests that it might be 1.5–2.0 million, although some would argue that these figures are overestimated.

### **The Kashkay identity**

In the past, Kashkay tribespeople viewed their identity in terms of a connection to a tribal group in the sociopolitical hierarchy which was almost always determined by the group’s interests and/or the will of tribal power-owners. Affiliation was essential for tribal people living a nomadic way of life with seasonal migrations within a pasture-based territorial organization. It gave them a strong sense of community and structured their everyday life. That almost all members of the confederation spoke the same language, ‘*Turki*’, was as important as tribal affiliation. Kashkay tribespeople

introduced themselves as ‘*Turks*’, to distinguish themselves from non-Turkic speakers whom were referred to as *tât* (*tājik*) (“non-Turk”) <sup>15</sup>. Kashkay addressed each other as x from subtribe x from tribe x, the latter being one of component tribes of the confederacy. The name ‘Kashkay’ rather served as an identification to people outside the confederation.

Currently, despite the disappearance of the confederative tribal system, the Kashkay still define themselves by their affiliation to subtribe and tribe x, irrespective of one’s place of residence, occupation or the number of fellow Kashkays with whom one is in contact. He could be a high-ranking military officer, a lawyer, a doctor in his elaborately furnished office or a university student. The majority of the Kashkay people, however, belong to a socio-economically low-class and live in slums populated by a mixture of habitants from different ethnolinguistic groups of southern Iran.

## Notes

1. The *Shahilu* (“those of Shah or related to Shah”), is the name of a lineage whose members ruled the Kashkay since this latter has been established as a confederation of tribes. However, the official name of members of this family, at least in recent times, has been *Qashqâ’i* or in few cases *Soulat-e Qashqâ’i*. Currently, this family is practically absent from the life of Kashkay people for its main political figures, now almost all died, were eliminated from the political scene by Pahlavi and later by Islamic regime. As for its younger generation, they are not active in politics and most of them live in abroad.
2. See especially *Fârs-nâme Nâserî* (“Gazetteer of Persia”) by Hassan-e Fasâ’î, a 19<sup>th</sup> century chronicler who thought that the name *Kashkay* meant ‘those who fled’. His wrong speculation has unfortunately entered into whole Persian literature even Dehkhodâ’s *Loghat-nâme*. Whereas, in Kashkay, for ‘those who fled’ we have the word *qačqinti* which is still in use and cannot be, by no means, substituted or mistaken with the word *qashqay*.
3. In a personal interview in May 2008 in Shiraz, Asadollah Rahimi Mardani said that *qaš* means ‘pioneer’ and that *qa’i* is supposed to be one of the 24 legendary Oghuz tribes. Asadollah Rahimi Mardani is a retired high-school teacher of Persian literature who has collected Kashkay folk poetries and proverbs and recently published the first comprehensive Kashkay-Persian dictionary.
4. Malek Mansur Khan, a member of the Kashkay ruling family, was interviewed by Lois Beck in 1979. This speculation is based on the fact that in Kashkay *qaš* means ‘a herd pen in an encampment’, i.e. a fenced area where a herd is kept at night, and *qa’i* means ‘invincible’.
5. In *Dīvānū Lugât al-Türk*, *qašga* means: “1. *Qaşga qoyun*: vücudu siyah kafası beyaz bir qoyun. 2. *Qaşga at*: gözlerinin çevresindeki siyahlık dışında parlak beyaz renkte olan at. 3. Kafasında beyaz bir iz bulunan deve de bu şekilde adlandırılır”. In classical Persian literature *qašqa* refers to the beauty spot, which *kāferān* (“infi-

- dels”) used to put on their forehead by using saffron or *sandal* (“a tree with nice perfume”) pigments. (*Farhang-e Mo’in*). In Persian the verb *qašqa kešidan* means ‘to brand an animal in order to make it distinct from others’ (*Farhang-e Mo’in* and *Logat-nāme-ye Dehkhudā*).
6. Some geographical and tribal names have been mentioned as possible origins of the name Kashkay. But this etymology is subject to strong skepticism, because in the Kashkay tribal confederation, there have been many other place and tribal names which could have been able to substitute the Kashkay.
  7. For example, in the first distich of third *ghazal* of his *Divān*, he says: *agar ān Turke Shirazi be dast ārad del-e mā rā/ be khâl-e hendu-yaš bakhšam Samarqand u Bukhara rā* “Would that Shirazi Turk behold our heart; then/ I’ll gift to her Indian mole, both Samarqand and Bukhara.” (Translation by Reza Ordoubadian in: *The Poems of Hafez*, Ibex Press, 2006).
  8. They were mostly from the *Bayat* tribe whose descendents are established in the *Markazī* (“central”) province of Iran.
  9. The word *Khamsa* (“five” in Arabic) refers to the five ethnolinguistically distinct tribes making up this confederation. These tribes were *Arab*, *Bāserī*, *Barhārlu*, *Aynālu* and *Nafar*.
  10. Naser Khan was the eldest son of Ismail Khan Soulat ed-Doula. He succeeded to the office of *Il-Khani* in 1940s, when still in his late teens. Over the next decades, he was involved in local and national politics and was exiled for a long period which ended by Islamic Revolution (1979). Upon his return to the Kashkay, the interest conflicts between his ruling clan and the Islamic regime led him into a two-year war against the regime. This latter finally defeated his small partisan army which was not actually supported by all Kashkay people. Naser Khan died in the USA in 1984.
  11. A term commonly used by the opponents of this policy of forced sedentarization.
  12. However, M. Bahmanbeigi, in his literary works published under the Islamic Republic, denies this loyalty and states in any occasion that he worked only for the sake of Kashkay people who was suffering from a harsh poverty and socio-cultural inferiority rooting in its historical undeveloped way of life compared with surrounding Iranian society. In his fictional-documentary-autobiographical short narratives, he also depicts the injustice and cruelty Pahlavi dynasty did against Kashkay people. (cf. *Bukhārā-ye man, il-e man* (“My Bukhara, my tribe”) and his other works published in Persian).
  13. The list gives first the transcription of the Kashkay pronunciation, then in brackets the transliteration of the Persian pronunciation which is also used in official documents.
  14. The Fārsimadān claim that one of their ancestors named Eymur founded this tribe centuries ago. However, the name Eymur is not recorded in official documents nor is it used by non-Fārsimadān.
  15. On the etymology, meanings and historical and geographical usage of the word *tāt* see V. Minorsky’s article in *Encyclopédie de l’Islam*.



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# Geçmişten Günümüze Kaşkaylar

Sohrab Dolatkhah\*

**Özet:** İran'da Türkçe konuşan bir halk olan Kaşkaylar, 20. yy.ın başından beri önemli bir araştırma konusu olmuştur. Bu makale, bu topluluk hakkında bazı genel bilgiler (örn. coğrafi, sosyo-etnik ve tarihi) vermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Kaşkayların tarihi hakkında bilgi vermek için yazar, bu topluluğun İran'ın güneyindeki Türk topluluklara kadar giden kökleri üzerinde durmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kaşkay, Türkçe konuşan topluluklar, İran, Kaşkayların tarihi.

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\* École Pratique des Hautes Études, Sorbonne / PARIS  
dolatkhah@hotmail.com

## Кашкайцы: от прошлого к настоящему

Сохраб Долатхah\*

**Резюме:** Кашкайцы, являющиеся тюркоязычным народом, проживающим в Иране, с начала XX века стали важной темой исследования. В данной статье приведены некоторые общие сведения о народе (например, географические, социально-этнические и исторические). Для предоставления информации об истории кашкайцев, автор исследовал исторические корни тюркской общины южного Ирана.

**Ключевые Слова:** Кашкай, тюркоязычные народы, Иран, история кашкайцев.

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\* École Pratique des Hautes Études, Sorbonne / PARIS  
dolatkah@hotmai.com