

Gilan

History:

Gilan, known in antiquity as the region around the delta of the Sefid-rud, was the homeland of the Gel (Gelaë) people. According to folk tradition the name Gel, later Gil, and the present name Gilak, derives from the word "gil" or clay - an allusion to the marshes of the region.*¹

Gilan's physical position north of the Alborz mountain chain and south of the Caspian sea, as well as its climate and marshy terrain have protected it throughout history from overland invaders such as the Arabs, the Turks and the Mongols. However, Gilan was much more susceptible to sea-borne attack from the north. Viking attacks from Russia were recorded as early as 913-914 A.D. Gilan and her local rulers were independent from Achaemenian and Sassanian times. During the middle ages the first capital of Gilan was "Dulab", then later Fouman and Lahijan. The Zoroastrian faith and small Christian communities survived in Gilan well after the Islamic invasion of the rest of Iran. By the end of the sixteenth century Christianity and Zoroastrianism had faded away and Sunni Islam had generally been established.

In 1592 Shah Abbas I incorporated Gilan into the Safavid state, and in 1650 it was put under direct rule of the Persian central government; Rasht was made the provincial capital. During this same period Gilan was threatened by the Russians from the north. Rasht was attacked in 1638 and 1667 by the Cossacks who invaded from the Caspian sea coast.*² Gilan was ceded by treaty to the Russians in June of 1724 in exchange for Russian aid given to Shah Tahmasp in a war against the Afghans. When the Persians hesitated in hand-

*¹ B.Lewis, *ibid*, p.1111.

*² *ibid*.

ing over the province the Russians militarily annexed it with a force of between 6,00 and 10,000 men. Nadir Shah managed to take back Gilan in 1732. But the Russian threat remained.

During the reign of the Qajars, the influence of the central government on Gilan increased and a more stable economic situation was established. Silk was exported from Gilan in the eighteenth century and through the port of Enzeli (Bandar Pahlavi) trade with Russia flourished. In 1831 (1246 A.H.) a plague turned the city of Rasht into the "City of the Dead"¹ and in the same year the Rasht-Gazvin road was renewed and its trading importance was recognised. Although the influence of the central government to some extent reduced the oppression of the feudal lords, the corruption of the government agents introduced bribery and its associated vices into the province.

The contact with the west had increased the desires of feudal lords for luxury and extravagance, and they were exerting increasing pressures on the rural population. On the other hand shopkeepers, small merchants and craftsmen were traveling to Baku through the port of Enzeli (Bandar Pahlavi). At the time of the Russian Revolution in 1905, approximately 7000² workers, craftsmen and merchants from Gilan and Azarbaijan worked in Baku. This contact greatly influenced the struggle for the establishment of the constitution of 1906, in which the people of Gilan and Azarbaijan played a leading role. In 1908, about one year after the shelling of the Majlis (Parliament) by Mohammad Ali Shah, a revolution took place in Rasht during which the governor of Gilan was killed by the revolutionaries and the Regional Council of Gilan took the role of government in that province. The revolutionaries wanted the re-establishment of the constitution and the Majlis, and the abdication of Mohammad Ali Shah. In the same year the

¹ K.Keshavars, Gilan, p.51.
² ibid, p.54.

Gilan revolutionaries marched on Tehran, which resulted in the abdication of the Shah and re-establishment of the Majlis.

The economy of Gilan which had been flourishing due to increased trade with Russia, was severely hit by the first World War. The rural population who had received little benefit from the constitutional revolution along with the small shopkeepers and traders joined in a struggle against foreign intervention, and fought campaigns against the British who were on their way from Baghdad to occupy Baku. This group, which became known as the "struggle of the jungle" was led by one of the leaders of the constitutional revolution, Mirza Kuchik Khan.

After the occupation of Baku by the Russian Red Army in 1920, Denikin the Tzarist commander fled with several warships to the Port of Enzeli, chased by the Russian Revolutionary fleet, which occupied Enzeli in May 18th 1920, so Denikin with his British supporters retreated to Qarvin. Rasolinkof, the commander of the occupying Russian fleet contacted Mirza Kuchik Khan, and the latter became the leader of the Revolutionary Government of Gilan. However, due to external intrigue and internal disagreements, the revolutionary government of Gilan split up. Mirza Kuchik Khan left for the jungle and the opposition in his government ruled for seventeen months before their final defeat. Mirza Kuchik Khan was executed for the role he played in the Revolution. Despite the failure in achieving its objectives, the Revolution of Gilan played an important role in ending the occupation of Iran by both the British and the Russians.

In the period after the first World War the situation of the agricultural sector in the country and especially in Gilan, worsened and under the pressures of the semi feudal relations

several minor peasant uprisings occurred in Gilan which were subdued. During this period attempts were made to industrialize the country and reduce the power of feudalism. However in Gilan, other than a sack (guni bag) making factory employing five hundred workers, which was formed by the efforts of local entrepreneurs, little share of the industrialization process was received.

The second World War caused the occupation of Gilan by Russian forces from 25th August 1941 until the end of the war. The price of rice, the main product of this province, increased substantially during the war and the incomes of the farmers appreciated, bringing about a new class of bourgeoisie who invested their capital in trade and property in the major towns of the province.

Population, Economy and Employment

Gilan is one of the most densely populated areas of Iran. Population is well distributed throughout the fertile areas, with densities of over 100 people per square kilometre in more productive rural areas. Seventy percent of the Gilan population is rural, compared to the national average of 53%.

Gilan Population Distribution (rural and urban):¹

	1966		1976		1982	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
urban	385,540	21.97	459,000	29.09	554,000	30.8
rural	1,369,110	78.02	1,119,000	70.91	1,244,000	69.2
total	1,754,650	100.	1,578,000	100.	1,798,000	100.

Land in Gilan is relatively fertile. Every hectare of farm land on average supports five persons plus five head of live-stock.²

Vital Statistics in pilot villages in Gilan Province:

	<u>Ashnik</u>	<u>Kenarsar</u>	<u>Shahrestan</u>
Population	1250	2600	2614
# of Farmers	135	310	280
Total Area in hec.	409	403	640
Cropped Area in hec.	437	423	723
Poultry Birds	2476	1572	784
Sheep and Goats	-	-	-
Cows	343	171	57
Tillers and Threshers	32	16	12
Orchards in hec.	45	16	18

Because of the high productivity of land and the distribution of population, agricultural production units tend to be small. Except for large estates, farms in Gilan average only 1.56 hectares in size.³

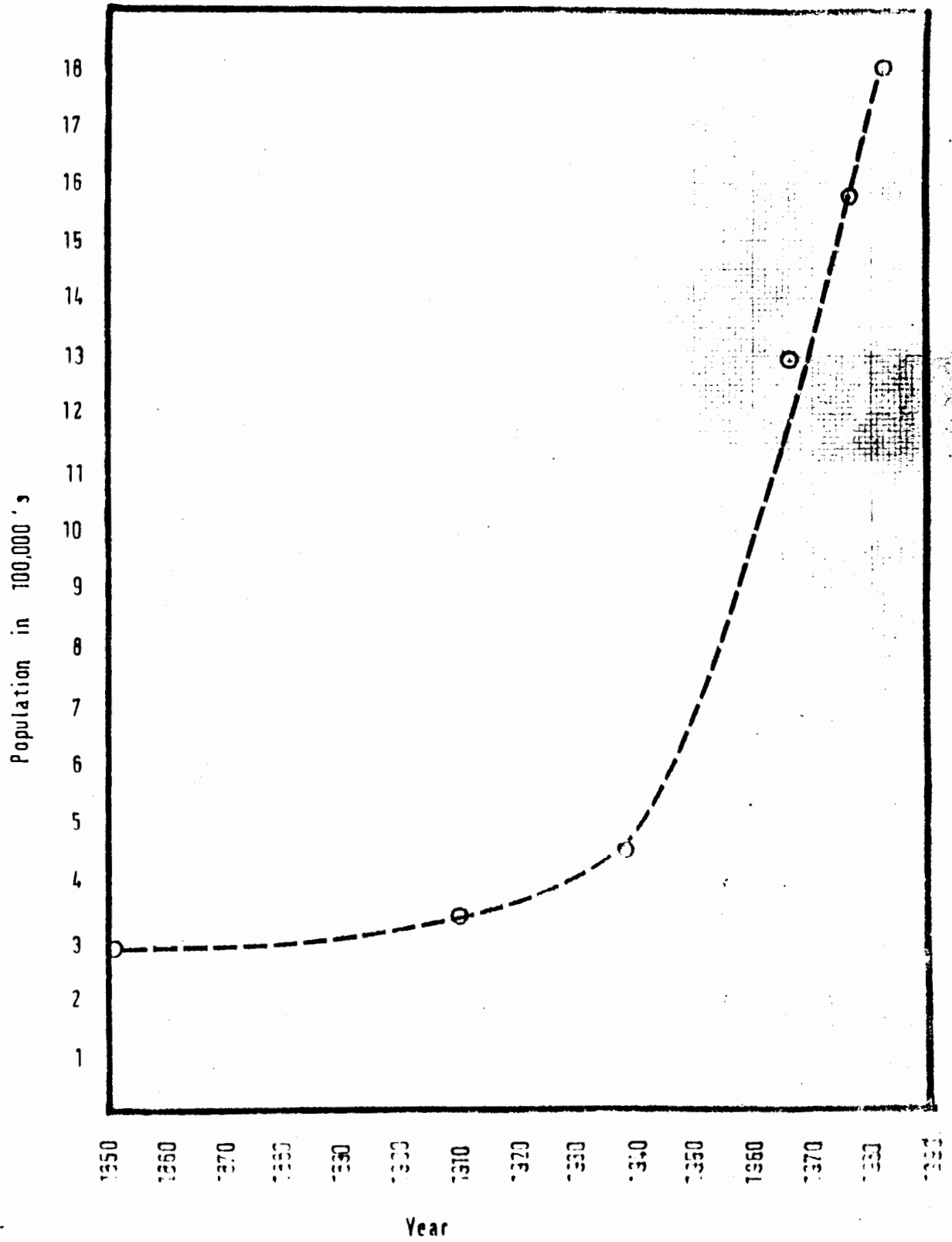
¹ H. Smith, etc., Area Handbook for Iran, 1971, p.80; and A. Rashid, etc., The Rice Economy of an Iranian Village..., 1977, annex 13 p.3 in 5.

² M. Abdullah, Report on Evaluation of Pilot Village in Fars & Gilan Prov., 1974, p.3.

³ H. Abdullah, ibid, appendix 1b.

⁴ M. Dofizad, etc., Rice Growing & Research in Iran, 1977, p.4.

Population Growth and Trend
Gilan 1850 - 1982



Traditionally there were two categories of population: the sedentary plains dwellers growing rice, wheat, fishing and involved in silk production; and the foothills and mountain people who lived in the foothills in cold seasons and in the mountains in the hot seasons, migrating up and down with herds of livestock according to the weather.*¹

Since medieval times Gilan's agriculture consisted chiefly or rice growing and silk worm breeding, which was said to have been introduced from Europe. As early as the fourteenth century Gilan's products were exported through the Black Sea to the Mediterranean*². Silk production reached a peak in the seventeenth century, but declined in the later part of the nineteenth century due to disease - although more disease resistant strains of silk worm were imported from Turkey and Europe in the 1890's*³. Today silk plays less of an important economic role than it did in the past, although there has been recent official interest and proposed new investments.*⁴

Rice is presently Gilan's major agricultural product. In 1972 Gilan had 161,800 hectares under rice cultivation, producing 455,000 tons*⁵ or 75% of Iran's total production*⁶. One crop of rice is produced per year*⁷. Fields are dry ploughed in early spring, then flooded at the end of April. In May the rice is sown; in September the crop is harvested and then threshed later in the autumn. Land is left fallow in late autumn and winter. Apart from ploughing, women provided much of the labour in rice production*⁸. One or two small rice mills cater for rice processing needs of each village.

Although rice is Gilan's principal crop, the favourable climate and soil conditions support a variety of agricultural products. Citrus fruits, particularly oranges are a speciality

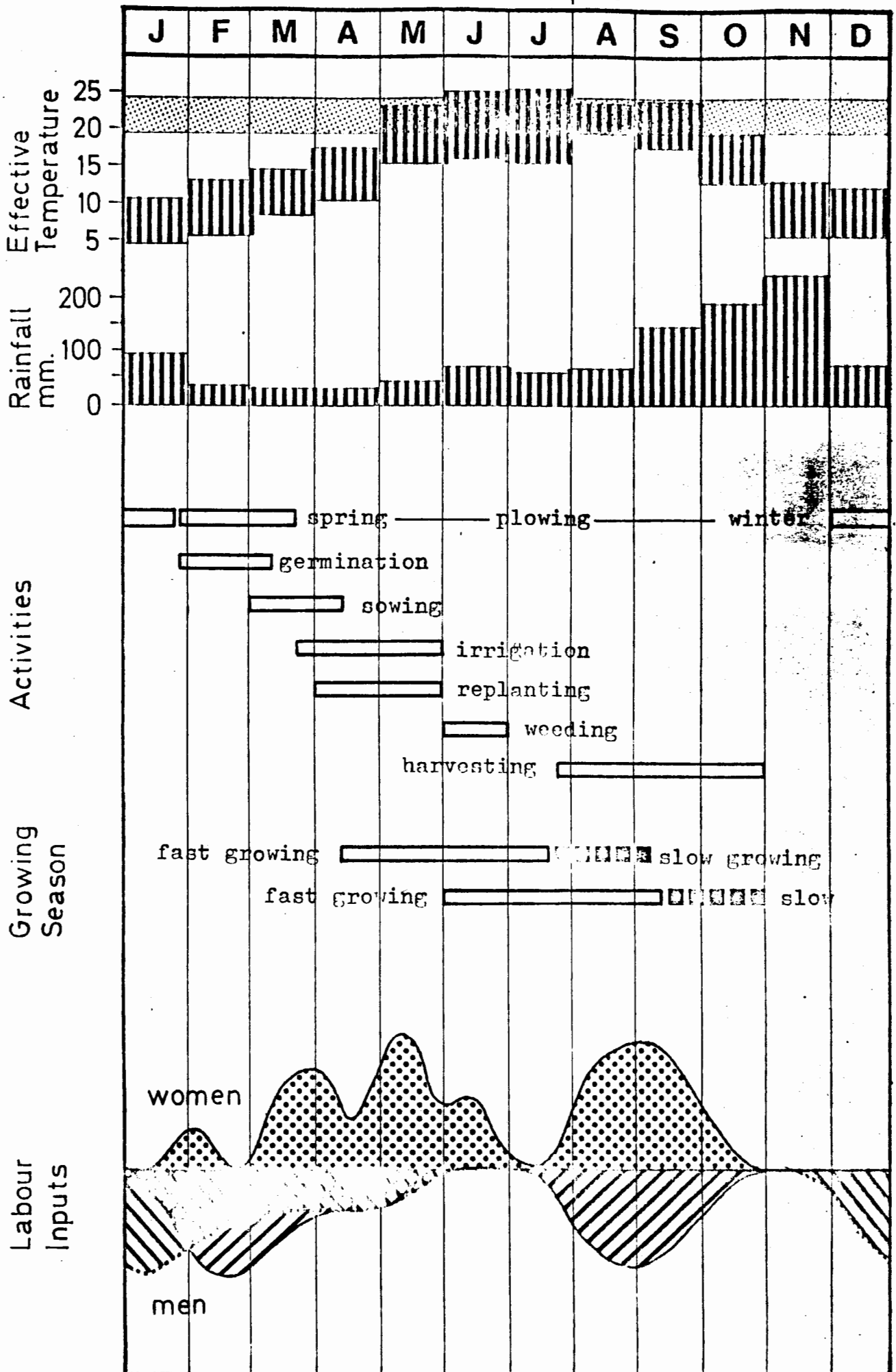
- *¹ H.Rabino, Les Provinces Casp., p.23
*² B.Lewis, etc., The Ency.of Islam, 1965, p.1111
*³ Rabino, ibid, p.50 and L.Adamac, op.cit., p.197.
*⁴ H.Smith, op.cit., p.201.
*⁵ N.Noafizad, op.cit., p.21.
*⁶ H.Smith, ibid, p.384
*⁷ A.Rashid, op.cit., p.5.
*⁸ Rabino, ibid, p.26.

of the Lahijan-Shahsavari area. Olives are grown in the Rudbar and Rahmetabad valleys and are made locally into oil and soaps¹. Tobacco was introduced to Gilan in 1875 and sugar cane in 1870. Tea has become a major crop since its introduction in 1904 and is grown principally on well drained hillside sites. Wheat and barley are the staples grown on lands higher and somewhat drier, outside the rice production regions.

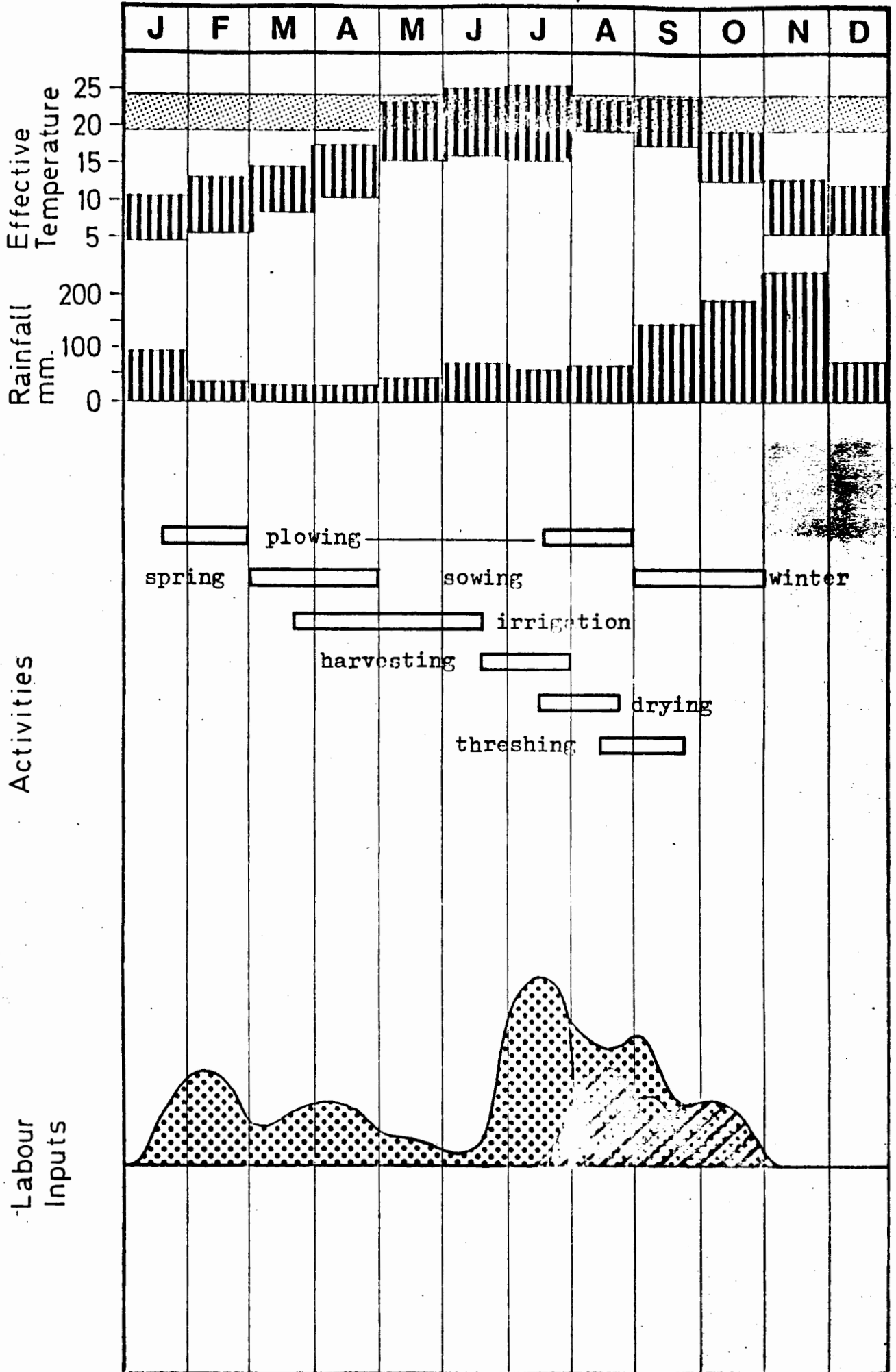
The late nineteenth century saw the rapid exploitation of timber in the Caspian region. This period corresponds to the depletion of timber reserves further north in Russian Caucasia. Timber was exported from the Caspian for shipbuilding and to meet demands of European industrialization. Hardwoods were cut for timber veneers and whole areas were ruthlessly denuded of trees². Forestry became a seasonal source of employment for the inhabitants of the hill areas. In autumn and winter they would come down to cut timber for lumber and charcoal production.

¹H. Rabino, Les Prov. Casp., p. 51.
²ibid, p. 49

Rice Growing Seasonal Labour Inputs

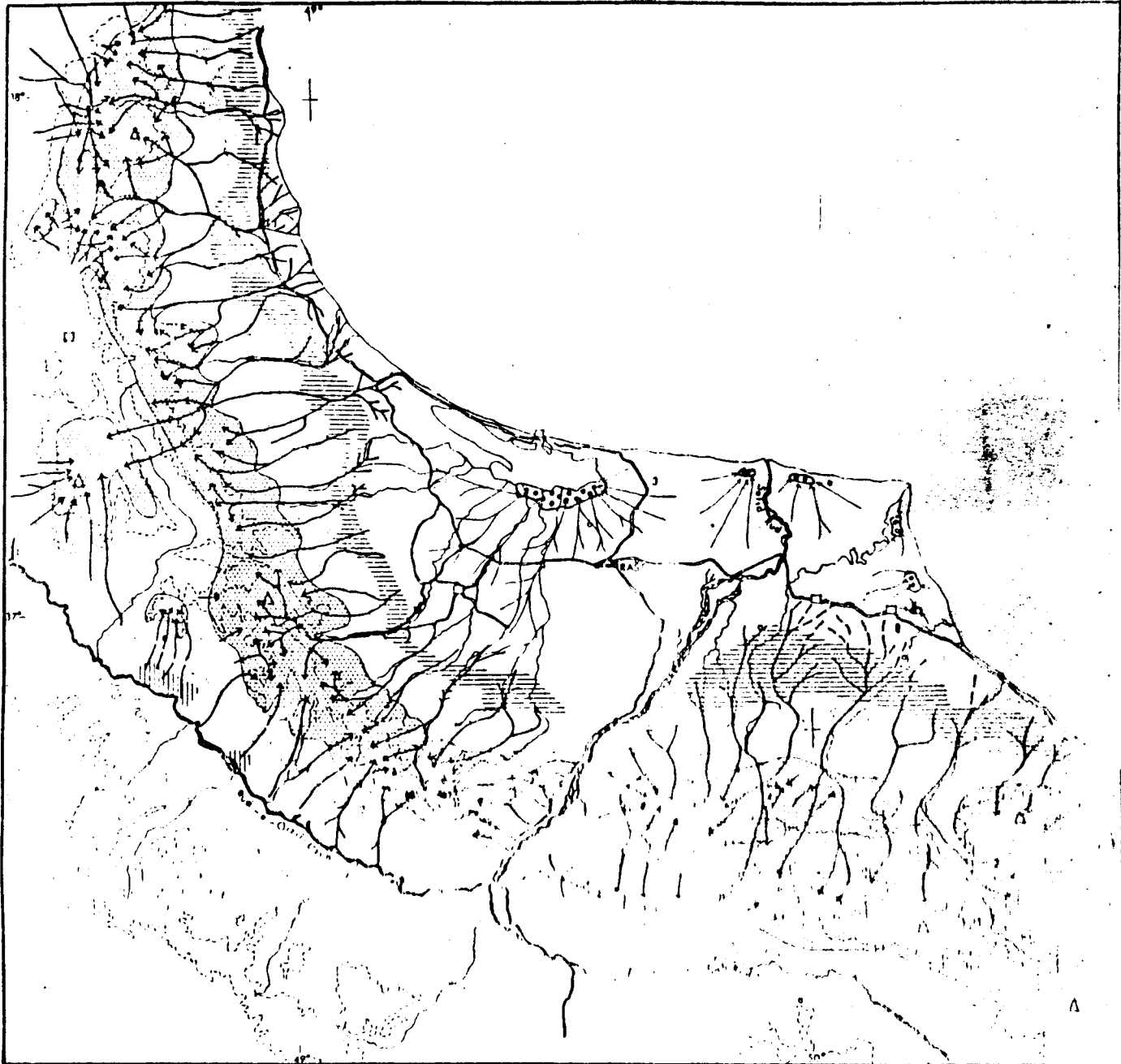


Wheat and Cereals Seasonal Labour Inputs



Annual Pattern
of Migration for
Animal Husbandry

from Bromberger, Ethnologie et
Traditions Populaires de l'Iran
#2, p.59.



- vertical migration
- ▨ summer pasture
- ▤ winter forest pasture
- ▥ winter plains pasture
- ▧ pasture near marshes
- horizontal migration

Feudal Relationships:

Although most of Gilan's agriculturalists today appear to be small peasant landholders, there still remain a number of large estates and some vestiges of the feudal tradition. Many large holders have become mechanized and employ extra labour principally during cultivating, planting and harvesting.

Settlement distribution, even after land reform, still reflects feudal ownership patterns. Agricultural plots, as in the feudal estates, tend to be clustered in one area, although each may be now owned individually while housing is grouped separately.

In the past as in most parts of Iran, land ownership had to some extent been an urban phenomena with many landowners living for at least part of the year in towns. Large estates developed partly out of a basically bureaucratic system of land grants issued from the central authority. The landholder in turn carried out most of the functions of government to the virtual expulsion of the central government. "The strong landowner gave his peasants "protection" from outside interference, whether from the government officials or raiding groups, or simply encroachments of neighbours; but in return for his "protection" the peasant was for the most part kept in a position of subjection and ignorance."*

The relation between landlord and peasant was often based on a crop-sharing agreement, where the payment to the landlord was in kind; however in some cases the peasant had a tenancy agreement, where payment could be in cash or kind.

In cropsharing agreements five elements - land, water, seed, draught animals, and labour - were taken into consideration in fixing the shares of the two parties. In addition to this,

* A.S.Lambton, The Persian Land Reform 1962-1966, 1969, pp.20-2

the peasant was subject to certain extra "labour services" such as transporting the landlords share of the crop to the granary or the local town.*¹

Feudal relationships could be broken down into two basic systems, according to Rabino*² : one a more typical feudal pattern and the other similar to a tenant-farmer relationship. Whether the land was bought or inherited, officially only the landowners were responsible for the tax to the government. In the first instance, for mulberry plantations, the landowner buys the seed and plants. After a few years when the silk is being gathered, the peasant who tilled the soil gets less than one third of the produce while the owner retains two thirds*³ to three quarters*⁴ . The second system called "edjareh" allowed the peasant to rent the mulberry plantations or rice fields from the owner. The peasant in this case is responsible for planting and seed. The owner receives a percentage of the produce as rent for the land and the peasant retains the rest. The owners share, for example, would be about one third*⁵ of the silk production and can be assumed the same for rice.

For the most part, crop-sharing peasants had no permanent right to the land which they cultivated. But under both contractual relationships the worker does not pay rent on his thatched cottage and retains certain grazing rights for his cattle. He also may maintain a small garden around the house to grow vegetables for sale if desired, and cut wood from the jungle to sell or for the production of charcoal.*⁶ Present day peasants complain about the Department of Environment's restriction on public cutting of timber in the forest and the loss of their previous supplementary income.

The peasants' position under feudalism was further weakened

*¹ A.Lambton, *ibid*, p.25.

*² Rabino, Les Prov.Casp., p.24.

*³ *ibid*.

*⁴ *ibid*, p.195.

*⁵ *ibid*, p.24 and L.Adamec, *ibid*, p.195; 5.895 kg. of fresh cocoons per djerib, or about 440 kg. per hectare; similar for rice 29.5 kg. per djerib, or 2200 kg. per hectare.

*⁶ *ibid*, p.24.

by heavy debt to their landlords, and money lenders. Adamec in The Historical Gazetteer of Iran claims that the lowest interest rate on loans was set between 25 and 40 percent. Taxes were unfairly passed on to the peasant, furthering the unequal distribution of financial burdens. "The landlord took the lion's share of the produce, instead of abiding by the terms of his contract, and the peasant is left to shift for himself."¹ A succession of bad crops could plunge the labourer deeply into debt from which he was unable to escape, thus tying him more strongly to the feudal system. Such exploitation and heavy debt led many agricultural workers to leave to find employment outside the region, and may have led to the employment of the hill or mountain inhabitants as seasonal labourers on the large estates. Rabino talks of 15,000 to 20,000 workers from the mountains and the south, particularly from around Khalkhal, who come down to work in Gilan seasonably and then return to their homes for the summer.²

The Jangali movement led by Mirza Kuchik Khan, which was active for five or six years after 1915, represented in part a revolt against the oppression of the landlords. Dues and labour service were abolished and the crop-sharing system was modified in favour of the peasant. In general since this period, peasants in Gilan have become better educated and more aware than peasants of other parts of Iran, and are consequently less amenable to pressure by the landlords.³ Partly for these reasons, Lambton suggests that the 1962 "Land Reform" was more successful in Gilan than many other parts of the country. She states that in "Gilan there had been an increase in productivity in the areas which had been transferred to the peasants; in general the standard of cultivation had improved, and in some cases the area cultivated by the peasants had increased."⁴

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- * Adamec, op.cit., p.195.
 - * Rabino, Les Prov.Casp., p.28.
 - * Lambton, ibid, p.127.
 - * ibid, p.110.

Mazandaran

General History:

The coastal strip and the northern ranges of the Alborz mountains from the Sefidrud delta to the south-east corner of the Caspian coast, now known as Mazandaran, was formerly a part of Tabarestan (which included Semnan, Damghan, Firoozkuh, and Farim). In the thirteenth century during the Mongol conquest, the name of Tabaristan fell into disuse and this region became known by its present name of Mazandaran.

Until the reign of Shah Abbas (the Safavids) this region was ruled by many independent dynasties and was conquered by the Arabs, the Seljuks and the Mongols, who ruled over it at different periods. The dynasties of Sadat-e-Alavi, Sadat-e-Huseyny and Sadat-e-Marashy also managed to govern parts of this province. Shah Abbas in 1005 A.H. (1627 A.D.) absorbed Mazandaran as a part of his central government, and due to his connections with Ghavam-Al-Din Marashy, the founder of the Sadat-e-Marash dynasty, claimed sovereignty over this area. He built many palaces and resided here when not in Isfahan. Shah Abbas rebuilt Mabarakabad in the Asterabad district and stationed a strong contingent of Qajars there. He also brought 30,000 Christian families to the area from the Turkish border but their numbers rapidly decreased to 4,000 families by 1630. In 1668 the Cossacks descended on Mazandaran and sacked Farahabad, but were immediately repulsed by the Persians. In 1722 Peter the Great attacked while Mamud the Afghan usurper was on the throne in Isfahan. By 1723 Peter had signed a treaty with Shah Tahmasp to drive out the Afghans and put Tahmasp on the throne; in return, Peter would receive Gilan, Mazandaran, Asterabad and the towns of Baku and Derbend. In 1725 Peter the Great died and the Russians took over Lahijan. In 1732 a treaty restored Asterabad and Mazandaran to Iran.*¹ After Nadir Shah's death, Agha Mohammed Khan, a Qajar, took undisputed possession of the Persian crown. Mazandaran was the Qajars' native province, so it benefited from this. Also, due to the close relationship of the Qajars to the Turkomen,

*¹ Rustam Kharegat, A Tourist Guide to Iran, 1935. p.68.

Agha Mohammed Khan allowed the Turkomen to move from the barren banks*of the Atrak to the fertile plains of Gorgan. In 1881 The Russian-Persian border was defined by the Atrak River. The Yomut Turkomen in Russia were subdued, but those Yomut on the Persian side were not (i.e. the Ata Bai and Jafir Bai clans in Iran). They were in open rebellion during 1888-9. The Goklan Turkomen further east were more submissive. The Persian army finally won out through treachery and by turning clans against each other and killing the Ata Bai chieftain. The Russian Yomuts, for their part, crossed into Persia to escape heavy taxes.*¹

Physical Geography:

Mazandaran has a narrow lowland that only widens to about 32 kilometres in the east where it merges into the Gorgan plain. The province is divided into the districts of Shahsavar, Nowshahr, Nur, Amol, Babol, Shahi, Sari, Behshahr, Gorgan and Dasht-e-Gorgan.

Western Mazandaran consists of a number of enclaves originally enlarged from the forest; the largest of these is the lowlands of Tunekabon with Shahsavar as its centre; another smaller area is the lower Chalus valley.

In the Shahsavar lowlands and Chalus valley rice and other cereals, citrus fruits and vegetables are cultivated on a relatively intensive scale. Rice is grown as far east as Galugat. There are tea plantations on the undulating land above the Caspian plains. Gorgan and Gunbad-e-Kabus plain is an extremely fertile area and grows large quantities of cotton and grains.

The climate of Mazandaran*² is capricious and similar to that of Gilan, but with slightly (1 to 2°C.) higher temperatures and somewhat lower rainfall. October, November and December are months of heaviest rainfall. There is also considerable snow in winter, but it doesn't settle for long.

*¹ George N. Curzon, Persia and the Persian Question, vol.1. 1892. p.183.

*² see section on climatic and environmental factors.

Climate in 1340-1352 (1961-73)*1

	Temp. C°				Rainfall (mm)		
	Max. Av.	Min. Av.	Absolute Max.	Absolute Min.	Annual Av.	Annual Rainfall	Max. Daily Rainfall
Ramsar	19.2	12.3	34.	-10.	15.8	1,217	252
Babolsar	20.7	12.9	42.2	-6.6	16.7	830	200
Gorgan	22.8	12.6	43.6	-9.6	17.7	637	200
	Relative Humidity				Elevation		
	6.30am	12.30pm			m.a.s.l.		
Ramsar	90	77			-2		
Babolsar	93	71			-21		
Gorgan	77	57			105		

Human Geography:

Mazandaran population in 1966 census	in 1976 census
total = 1,843,388	2,384,226
urban = 437,900	776,761
rural (incl.nomadic)= 1,607,465	1,607,465

In 1500 B.C. the people that descended from Caucasia occupied all the coast of the Caspian (Mazandaran, Gilan, Talesh and especially the mountains). In the 7th century B.C. when the Medes were fighting the Assyrians, there were nomadic tribes in the mountains of the Caspian. Greek authors have cited Tapurians in the extreme east and then Mardes, Gils, Amardians, Caducians and Caspians.*2

When Imam Reza died, his descendants took refuge in Daylam and Tabaristan; they were still present in Mazandaran in great numbers during Rabino's time. Other seyyids had migrated from Hijaz, Syria and Iraq to Tabaristan.

In the 7th century A.D. Turkish tribes infiltrated the grasslands and desert borders in the east of the Caspian and by the 10th century they were in firm possession of present Turkoman country. At this time, under the influence of Muslims, the tribes converted to Sunni Islam.*3

*1 J. Behrouz (ed.), Iran Almanac & Book of Facts 1975. p.80

*2 Issa Behnam, "La Region Meridionale de la Mer Caspienne". Objets et Mondes, vol.XI, no.1, spring 1971. p.38.

*3 Carleton S. Coon, Caravan: The Story of the Middle East, 1951. p.144.

The Khwajavands, originally from Luristan, together with the Abdul Malekis were brought to western Mazandaran by Agha Mohamed Khan Qajar to protect the capital, Tehran, against any uprising of the inhabitants of this region. The Giraylis and Osanlus, both of Turkish origin, were also imported to Mazandaran by the same monarch. The Laks, according to Rabino, inhabit Kalardasht. The Kurdish tribes of Jahanbayglu and Mudoulu inhabited the villages of Shirkhvast, Miyanrud and Farahabad. Another important Turkish tribe is that of Imranlu who settled at Galugah.

Many other tribes were brought in to Mazandaran at different periods by various monarchs, but they have become mingled with the indigenous population.

The inhabitants of Mazandaran generally speak Mazandarani, an old Persian dialect, with the exception of Tunekabom (Shahsavari) where Gilaki is the main language. Only the Kurdish tribes and some of the Turks have preserved their original languages.