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Hazara

ETHNONYMS: Berberis, Khawaris, Sayyeds, Hazara Sayyeds

Oriention

Identification and Location. Hazaras are also known in Iran as Berberis or Khawaris. There is a subtribe of the Cha’har Aimaq known as Hazara and it is Sunni, unlike most Hazaras who are Shi’ite. Other groups believed to be related to the Hazaras but identified by other names are Taimanis and Tatars. Taimanis were formerly clustered on the eastern and western peripheries of Hazara territories; those in the west have in the twentieth century been associated with the Aimaq. The Tatars (sometimes “Tajiks”) of Kahmard and Sayghan were formerly known as Hazara Tatars and retain phenotypic and cultural similarities with the Hazaras; they are now Sunni. The Moghuls of Ghor may also be related to the Hazaras. Among the Hazaras, and culturally indistinguishable from them, are “Sayyeds” (or “Hazara Sayyeds”) who claim descent from Muhammad.

Hazaras are a Mongoloid people historically associated with the Hazarajat of central Afghanistan, once known as Barbaristan and later as Gharjistan; they are now dispersed in neighboring countries. The Hazarajat has been shrinking over the last hundred years. Currently it includes all of Bamiyan Province and the western portions of Ghazni and Wardak provinces and the northern portion of Uruzgán.
Hazaras are also found in Baghlan, Samangan, Balkh, Jawzjan and Qala-y Naw; there are perhaps as many as four million Hazara refugees in the neighboring countries of Iran and Pakistan. Although their traditional homelands are rural there are large numbers of Hazaras in the Afghanistan cities of Kabul (200,000 to 300,000), Mazar-i-Sharif (200,000), and Pul-i Khumri (250,000), and also in Mashhad, Iran (400,000), and Quetta, Pakistan (500,000).

Demography. Early in the 1980s the number of Mousavi (the Hazaras of Afghanistan) was estimated to be less than a million; in 1998 Mousavi believed their number, including those in neighboring countries, to be four million, and in 2001 it may have reached 7.5 million. Details on their growth rate are vague, but it may exceed 3 percent. The average Hazara woman is said to give birth to seven children, two of whom are likely to die before the age of five.

Linguistic Affiliation. Hazaras speak a dialect of Persian known as Hazaragi, notable for its relatively high number of Mongol and Turkic words. Persian is in the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European language family.

History and Cultural Relations

The origins of the Hazaras are obscure. They seem to be an amalgam of mainly two types of peoples, the Indo-Iranian peoples long ensconced in this region (Tajiks, Persians) and the various Mongol-Turkic peoples who have entered this region for thousands of years. Mousavi argued on several grounds, including the images on the Bamiyan frescos, that a strongly Mongol-Turkic people scarcely different in appearance from the modern Hazaras was already present in this area more than two thousand years ago. Culturally these people have been Persianizing for several hundred years. The term hazar (“thousand”) seems to be a Persianized form of the Mongol word mingang (“thousand”), which could designate a fighting unit, or at least a “tribe” able to field a force of that size.

By the fifteenth century the term Hazar meant a “mountain tribe,” a shift in meaning corresponding to a retreat into the mountains of the Hazarajat owing to pressure from other groups: on the south and west by Pushuns (Afghan) tribes, and on the north by Turkmen, Uzbek, and Tajiks.

In the nineteenth century the Afghan rulers pushed their influence more firmly into the Hazarajat, although initially only in the form of minor tribute demands. When Abdul Rahman took power in Kabul in 1880 the Hazara Murs generally supported his struggle against his Afghan challengers, supposing that they would continue as before. But once the Amir was firmly established he began to increase his demands on them. Because some Sheikh Ali Hazaras had supported the rebellion of the Amir’s cousin Ishq Khan in 1888 the Amir required much larger payments, and in 1890 the Sheikh Alii rebelled. After the rebellion was crushed the Amir introduced oppressive measures in many parts of the Hazarajat, and his troops and officials abused their powers. An outraged group of Hazaras rebelled in the spring of 1892 and support came quickly from other Hazaras as well as from the Uzbeks of Maimana and Hazaras from Kabul. The Amir sought help from Sunni clergy who authorized an all-religious jihad against the “godless” Shi’a; the Amir himself promising land, wealth, and women as a reward to those who