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Kahak

By Farhad Daftary

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Kahak is a village located about 35 km northeast of Anjudan and northwest of Mahallat in central Iran, with the ruins of a fairly large caravanserai. Kahak was an important locality in the late medieval period for the Qasemshahi Nizari Ismaili community in Iran, but now it is a small and isolated village with a Twelver Shi'i population of about 500 persons.

Kahak evidently enjoyed greater importance in Safavid times as a stage between Qum and Arak (former Sultanabad), as attested by the ruins of a fairly large caravanserai there. By the end of the Anjudan revival in Nizari Ismailism, which lasted some two centuries from the middle of the 15th century, the Nizari imams had established deep roots in central Persia around Qum, especially in Anjudan and Kahak.

Khalil-Allah II, the 39th Qasemshahi Nizari imam, was the last imam of his line to reside in Anjudan; he died in 1680 CE and was buried there. His son and successor, Shah Nizar, for unknown reasons transferred his residence and the headquarters of the Nizari *da'wa* to Kahak during the earliest decades of his imamat. Anjudan, separated from Kahak by a number of shallow ranges, was then abandoned permanently by the Nizari imams.

Shah Nizar died in September 1722, according to the inscription of his tombstone, shortly before the Afghan invasion of Persia that extended to Kahak. He was buried in one of the chambers of the building that served as his residence and which is still *in situ* in Kahak. Shah Nizar's son and successor, Sayyid 'Ali (d. 1754), also lived in Kahak. His grave is located in Shah Nizar's mausoleum.

Preserved at the western end of Kahak, this mausoleum has several chambers, each one containing a few graves. In the compound and its adjacent garden there are also several tombstones with inscriptions in Khojki Sindhi characters, attesting to the pilgrimage of the Nizari Khojas who regularly embarked on the long and dangerous journey from India to see their imam in Kahak. In fact, Kahak is mentioned in several *ginans*, the indigenous devotional poems of the Khoja Ismailis, as the place of residence of the imams (see Hooda, pp. 75, 109-10).

Shah Nizar's mausoleum, first described in modern times by Wladimir Ivanow (pp. 56-59), was restored in 1966 without any attention to restoration principles, resulting in the destruction of its original carved wooden doors and other fixtures. A stone platform discovered by Ivanow (p. 59) in 1937, in the gardens of Shah Nizar's former residence, and on which the imam used to sit when receiving his followers, was no longer *in situ* when the present author visited Kahak in



1976.

By the middle of the 18th century, the Nizari imams had transferred their residence and headquarters to Shahr-e Babak and Kerman, in the province of Kerman, probably to be nearer to the pilgrimage route of their Indian followers, but they continued to maintain their roots in Kahak at least until the early decades of the 19th century. Shah Khalil-Allah III, who succeeded to the Nizari imamat in 1792 after his father Abu'l-Hasan 'Ali, known as Sayyid Kahaki who governed Kerman under the Zands for almost half a century, re-established himself in Kahak soon after his accession.

In 1794, Agha Muhammad Khan Qajar, who had by then gained possession of Kerman, permitted a number of Nizari Sayyids, relatives of the imams, to move from Shahr-e Babak to Kahak, also giving the Nizari imam new landed properties in Kahak in compensation for what had been left behind in Kerman. Shah Khalil-Allah III remained in Kahak until 1815 when he moved to Yazd, where he was murdered two years later (Daftary, p. 504). Jean Baptiste L. J. Rousseau (1780-1831), a member of a French mission sent in 1807 to the court of Fath-'Ali shah Qajar, is the earliest European to supply information on Shah Khalil-Allah III and his place of residence in Kahak (Rousseau, pp. 279-80; see also de Sacy, p. 84; tr., p. 182). It was also at Kahak that Shah Khalil-Allah III's son and future successor as the 46th Nizari imam, Hasan-'Alishah Aga Khan I, was born in 1804. The Nizari imams maintained some landed interests in Kahak for a while longer until they next established themselves firmly in Mahallat.

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