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# GILÂN FOLK CULTURE

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The Alborz range (map) forms a natural and cultural boundary between two worlds that are radically distinct because of their climate and landscape and the productions activities and ways of life of their inhabitants. To the north, the province of Gilân benefitsfrom a damp, subtropical climate and displays a richly carpeted lanscape of rice fields (photographs), citrus and mulberry orchards and tea plantations at the foot of the mountains, or else glaucous ponds by the Caspian sea. From the Iranian plateau, **Rashtis** (as the Caspian area people are called by the Tehranis), because of their different cultural features, **are the favorite butt of the ethnic jokes**. *Jok? begu: Rašti* ("For 'joke,' read 'Rašti'"); the association between an ethnic type and a favorite target has gained acceptance to the point where it is expressed as a proverb. Even today, a *jokestān* exists on the Internet where Rašti jokes occupy a premier position.

Some jokes make fun of eating habits of Rashti people, especially their fondness for eating fish. So they are nicknamed *kalle mâhi khor* (« fish head eaters »), while people of Gilân nickname the people of Tehran *dahân goshad* (« large mouth »), because they keep chewing bread, displaying their large teeth. Many of these *jok-e rashti* mock the naïveté and gullibility of the men from that province. But the majority of Rašti jokes focus on the sexual lassitude of their men and the wantonness of their women. To understand the meaning and the frequency of these jokes we have to consider body humors theories, which constitute the base of popular anthropology in Iran. According to principles regarding body humors individual and collective behavior is largely dependent on the type of food consumed. Hot foods regenerate the blood—a fundamental humor—and engender an expansive temperament that sustains one's strength, vigor and manliness. Cold foods, on the contrary, are associated with a phlegmatic temperament, and with weakness and sexual lethargy. According to the food classifications in Persia, the Gilānis are eaters of cold food. They consume rice, eggs, fish, vegetables, and fresh fruits in abundance, and they like sour foods, all products and tastes considered to be "cold". But if Gilān is a favorite subject of Tehrani jibes it is also because it provides a combination of the two main stimuli that create intercommunity mockery: proximity in space (one easily scoffs at a neighbor), and a high degree of cultural variation (strangeness and otherness). To the peopleof the Iranian plateau, the neighboring Caspian area is a topsy-turvy world, the reverse of their own identity. These are

these main differences I would like to present shortly. I will not linger on productive activities. I just would like to emphasize that the main productive activities : rice, silk, tea are or have been commercial activities. So Gilân peasantry is not inward looking, but outward looking, very early in connection with urban bazars and cities. Let's note too that, in this area, peasants have cows, not sheep donkeys, not dromedaries. The ox (*varzā*) was, until the onset of agricultural mechanization, the farmer's companion par excellence. It was looked after with great care and celebrated in folk songs and poetry. At the same time it was associated with hard masculine tasks including the plowing and the harrowing of the rice-fields (photographs).

**Habitat and rural housing** are highly specific features of the local culture. On the Gilān plain peasants' enclosures are scattered around the rice fields or loosely knitted together in hamlets (*maḥalle*) thus forming alongside the enclosures the major units of social and territorial affiliation. The *maḥalle* is structurally defined in opposition to the equivalent units surrounding it (other *maḥalle*s) and by its integration into the immediately superior unit, the *maḥal* "locality". A *maḥal* thus groups together several *maḥalle*s, each designated by its own name. Often the references to the names of the *maḥalle* are topographical in nature and in some cases distinguish, in the *maḥal*, between upper (*bālā maḥalle*), middle (*vasaṭ maḥalle*) and lower quarters (*pāʾin maḥalle*). The difference between "upper" and "lower" does not refer to altitude but rather the relative position of the hamlet in relation to the mountains and the sea: the lower quarters are those closest to the sea and the upper quarters those closest to the mountains, even though the locality itself may be situated tens of kilometers from either.

A *maḥalle* (quarter), which may include just a few dozen houses or as many as several hundred, is foremost an irrigation unit and is usually endowed with a *bāzārče* (small bazaar), has its own *emāmzāde* and often has its own *daste* (photographs). Relations between *maḥalle*s are frequently tense and marked by rivalry and antagonism.

Morphologically, the dwellings are distinguished by two main features:

(1) The buildings are raised above the ground to insulate the living space from the damp soil. There are several techniques for raising the building: it can rest on piles of four or five layers of beams, on a frame made of vertical posts or, more rarely, on a base of unbaked bricks. In the marshy plain of the Safidrud delta, the floor of the house is one or even two meters above the muddy soil. This space (*šikil* or *šigil*), under the house itself, forms an extra room used for various purposes, e.g. cooking on a tripod, hanging clothes to dry, and parking a car (photographs).

(2) The roof, hipped or pointed, has four sloping sides and rests mainly on rows of posts (*sotun*), delineating a veranda (*ayvān*) on the façade. Two other forms of veranda are often encountered in the architecture of the plain: the first

completely surrounding the house on the lower floor level and sometimes the upper, and the second forming a loggia (*tālār*) on the upper floor of the building or just along part of the façade and the adjoining sidewall. The main stylistic properties and aesthetic effects are due to the composition of the façade following a vertical or an oblique pattern (the latter when a loggia on the upper floor side is included), to the regular spacing between the posts of the veranda, and to the finely carved wooden elements, such as balusters and the capitals of the veranda posts (photographs).

**Conceptions of domestic space** are distinct from those usually prevailing in Persia and other parts of the Middle East. While the houses of central Persia are hidden behind blank walls, the traditional dwellings here offer their façades to the outside world (photograph). This is the expression of a fundamental feature of Gilān cultural values: the predominance of the "open" over the "closed", this feature being also visible if we consider women's clothing: women wear *čādor* only for trips to large cities and for religious ceremonies. The absence of the veil, which is even more marked among the Gāleš and Ṭāleš of the mountains than among the Gilānis and Māzandarānis of the plains, has struck travelers in all periods. Among other notable features of the local lifestyle, rooms are not differentiated according to gender and they are used differently according to the season. The passage from the cold to the hot season is the occasion of a migration of the household from below to above, and from the inside to the outside. If seasonal and everyday practices are combined with the rules governing the occupation of space according to the age group, it can be seen that the symbolic framework is ideally organized along three axes, the poles of each denoting opposed values. In this way, the bottom contrasts with the top just as the cold season contrasts with the hot, the older generation with the younger; when related families share a house, the younger family occupies the upper story. In short, the first floor contrasts with the second as a semi-public universe exposed to the eyes of all with a world of privacy and secrets of the young people. The left side of the façade shelters the reception space, while on the right side stands the winter kitchen, symbolizing the grouping of the family and domestic intimacy. Lastly, contrary to the back of the house which is reserved for the less attractive activities, the front is naturally the part that is offered to view and is used for production, e.g. weaving, as well as for consumption, such as eating in the summer. Thus, the morphology of the house summarizes the cycles of the seasons and those of life, e.g. the ascending pattern which leads the young generations from below to above is reversed in the winter (figure).

Recent developments have deeply affected building materials and techniques as well as the organization of space. Cinderblock construction (*boluk*) have replaced timber for wall construction, galvanized iron (*ḥalab*) has replaced straw and rush as a roof covering, and the saddle roof has replaced pointed and hipped roofs. Building operations are no longer in the hands of the traditional specialist: the through-stone builder or layer (*boluksāz*) has replaced the carpenter-joiner

(*najjār*), and the iron-roofer (*ḥalabsāz*) has replaced the thatcher (*gālisāz*). The spatial pattern of these new houses, with only one habitable level, is horizontal, no longer vertical or oblique. Cinderblock walls surround the garden and the construction in a such a way that nobody can see inside; the closed replaced the open. Rooms are more specialized; the seasonal shifts within the domestic space are now more limited, and the sense of privacy is emphasized.

These remarks about housing, about a less strict sexual division of space, invite to consider **gender relations** in Gilân. The division of activities and spaces between the sexes is quite distinct in the province of Gilān. On the Iranian plateau, and in the Middle East in general, feminine is opposed to masculine as the inside is to the outside, as private is to public, as gardening to field work, as domestic tasks to the craft industry. Not so in the Caspian world: here roles and tasks are distributed according to a more flexible pattern: to a large extent, women take an important part in agricultural work (photographs); in their homes, the line between male and female spaces is blurred; craftwork, industrial, and commercial activities are not the exclusive prerogative of men in this région (photographs).

On the whole, an asymmetrical complementarity emerges in the division of labor and space between men and women. Considering the important female participation in the tasks of production outside the house and the parity of wages between men and women in the agricultural sector, the egalitarian trends in Gilaki society must be underscored. At the same time, however, considering the difficulty and the time devoted to their activities, the overexploitation of female labor is a constant threat. Actually, the inequality of posture, stooped for females versus erect for men, and upper versus lower in the execution of technical activities is significant. The men use tools (spades, ards, harrows, and nowadays motorized cultivators…) erect, while women as they transplant rice and weed the paddy-field, are barefoot in the mud, bending down under a blazing sun especially during weeding and without any tool. It is a particularly arduous and backbreaking work. The lack of women's technical equipment is obvious. The paradoxical status of women is reflected in everyday behavior. Gilaki men are less inclined to show their manliness (*mardānagi*) than men of the Iranian plateau. Women can be forthright and participate in men's conversations. Men, however, are the ones who give orders. This gap is also found in death: the burial pits for women are dug slightly deeper (by approximately 15 cm) than those for men.

If, in social life, responsibilities and authority are men's prerogatives, women's participation is not negligible and emphasizes, once again, the uniqueness of the situation in Gilān. During the Constitutional Revolution, women's societies (*anjoman*s) were formed in the province. After World War I, *Peyk-e saʿādat-e nesvān* ("The harbinger of women's happiness"), an association of educated

women, worked at improving women's conditions through various projects, as well as publishing a review once every two months. More recently, in villages, co-operatives run by women (*šerkat-e ta ʿāvoni-ye zanān*), created in 1994, have been very active and prosperous. This strong social consciousness goes hand in hand with the high rate of female education and patterns of behavior not common elsewhere at the time but which later become the norm in the country as a whole at the demographic level: according to recent data, the average age (23) of women getting married is higher than anywhere else in Persia, the age difference between newlyweds is minimal (less than 2.5 years), and fertility is particularly low compared to the rest of the country (a little more than two children per woman in 2003).

The unusual status of women in the district comes at the cost of a reputation for frivolousness. This reputation of frivolousness is fueled by a great number of jokes on Raštis that are widespread in Persian society, as we mentioned it. As we have already noted, such mischievous stories stigmatize, in a disproportionate and fantastical manner, the unique dynamics of male-female relations in the Caspian region of Iran.

The uniqueness of Gilân is also obvious through its **cooking**. Actually, eating habits and culinary preparations in Gilān have several distinct characteristics. In this rice-producing region, the consumption of rice is much higher than elsewhere in Persia. Garden vegetables and kitchen herbs (*sabzi*) generally appear in the makeup of most dishes and give the regional cuisine the green touch that is its hallmark. These preparations are usually associated with eggs, consumed in great quantities in a society where each rural family raises hens, ducks, geese, and turkeys; as the saying goes: *Bāqāla qātoq / bi morḡāne / haft-tā olāḡ / ti mehmān-e* ("a broad bean stew without eggs, seven donkeys must be your guests!"). Poultry and wildfowl, fish, along with olives, are also sought-after items and contribute to the uniqueness of the local recipes. As elsewhere in Persia, cooking is a long and complex operation, since the constituent ingredients of most dishes often require individual preparation of their own. Finally, the regional style of cooking is characterized by generous helpings of fat and oil and by a preference for a sour (*torš*) flavor: especially appreciated are condiments with a vinegar base and fruit juices made from unripe fruit, which are used to enhance the flavor of dishes (photographs). The most typical dishes of the region symbolize, each in its own way, a facet of this cooking style: *kate* is a simple rice preparation (photograph); the recipe for *mirzā qāsemi* includes the pulp of an eggplant, garlic, tomato, and egg; *bāqāla qātoq* is a broad bean stew; *ašbol polo* is a rice dish eaten with "white fish" (*māhi sefid*) roe; *sir-e torši* is pickled garlic, and *haft-e bijār* ("seven paddy-fields"), is a mixture of vinegar marinated chopped plants and vegetables. Exploiting the diversity of local resources, and characterized by the importance of vegetables, sour flavors, and oil, Gilān has a highly original cuisine which is a source of pride for the people of the region who are given to criticizing less sophisticated diets (dismissed as

*ḵalḵāli ḡazā* "Ḵalḵāli food") and who remain resolutely faithful to their gastronomical traditions, even at times of migration or exile.

**Folklore and games** also contribute to Gilân specificity. The folklore of Gilān is a striking example of the intricate ties between pre-Islamic practices and Islamic rituals. This syncretism is particularly striking in the location of the sanctuaries (*emāmzāde* and *boqʿe* for the Shiites, and *torbe* for the Sunnite minorities of Ṭāleš), and the significance of natural elements in the performance of devotions. In this vegetable world, trees can, by themselves, be objects of worship; they are sometimes identified as descendants of Imams and, more often, they flank sanctuaries. Such sacred trees display remarkable characteristics: large trunks (older oaks, elms, maples), erect postures and smooth barks (Siberian elms, *Zelkova crenata,* Pers. *deraḵt-e āzād*), evergreen foliage (yews and especially boxwood, locally called *kiš*), and murmur-like sounds (the wind rustling through an ashes' leaves). Among these trees, boxwood and Siberian elm are the most prized; the sap of the latter is reddish in color, and thus Gilānis identify it with the blood of the Imams.. Some of these practices do not meet with the approval of Islamic authorities, especially when they depart from references to Imami Shiism. It is for this reason that the rites performed around the Jān-e 'Ali *āzād* in Ḡāziān, next to the tomb of two children, were publicly condemned in June 1999 during a television program, but to no avail. The faithful come here to give water to two snakes nested in the tree, snakes which they believe to be reincarnations of the dead boys. Forest vegetation is also associated with important Shiite ceremonies or rites of passage. During the '*āšurā*'processions, large metal banners called '*alam*s, traditionally carried by penitent groups, are decorated with boxwood branches. Boxwood is also used to cover tombs during mourning ceremonies. The importance of trees and plants in worship, beliefs and the collective imagination is undoubtedly a major characteristic of Gilāni folklore, an area known for retaining pre-Islamic myths and rites. According to a long-lived legend, the White Div's cave (*ḡār*), accessible only through a deep woodland, is located in the heart of a forest, above Dāniāl, at the border of Māzandarān.

This wild world of forests and mountains is also where supernatural protectors appear and intervene, such as Siāh Gāleš ("the black herdsman"), who punishes ill-behaved animals, rewards deserving herdsmen, and achieves miracles. This stockbreeders' guardian (*ḥāfeẓ*) is a supernatural character common to all pastoral populations in the area, and may have roots in Indo-Iranian mythology. Theriomorphic figures on Amlash and Marlik ceramics (1000-800 BCE) (photograph) testify to the importance of oxen in ancient representations, while today the range of folk practices that include bovines remains a characteristic element of the Caspian populations' culture. While cattle are essential in Gilāni culture (beef is a traditional food, oxen are familiar as draft animals and they have a specific status in local folklore, eggs are also important and, in fact, even

more central to Gilāni culture, if only for their extensive use in cooking, games and propitiatory practices. Actually, the egg is very often used to avert the dangers of daily life and bring in happiness. For instance, it is heated in a pot without water until it bursts, thus destroying the evil eye. To determine the culprit, one black line is traced on the shell for each suspect; each part of the egg is pressed above a bowl or a tray until the first breaking point reveals the culprit; the bubbles in the egg white are then isolated and burst, thus blinding the evil eye. To complete the process of warding off the curse, the victim must bind the eggshell to his arm and wear it for three days. Eggs are broken when new cycles begin, to guard against misfortune and to bring good luck: they are crushed under the wheels of a newly acquired car or a car that has just been repaired; as well as on the ox's forehead before plowing and, in the old days, on the bull's forehead before the bull fight, *varzā jang*. Eggshells are placed on branches in the gardensand in the silkworms nurseries (photograph).
Together with the popular Gilāni combat sports (*košti gilamardi*) (photograph), it is bullfights and "egg wars" (*morgāne jang*) that are, symptomatically, the two most widespread performances and games in the area. *Morgāne jang* consists in knocking together two eggs—hen, duck, or goose, raw or cooked, depending on the players' choice. The player whose egg breaks the opponent's egg wins. Meticulous preparation is necessary for a "battle" in which sight, touch, and hearing are important factors.This game, practised in the period of *No ruz* can also be an occasion for money bets (*šarṭbandi*) which are forbidden by Islamic authorities. Actually, the status of games is highly controversial in the Islamic Republic of Iran. For instance, the Emām-e Jomʿe of Rašt has for some years now condemned the practice of *varzā jang* as illicit (*ḥarām*) on grounds of cruelty and the fact that it involves gambling. A great deal of care is therefore taken by the organizers of the fights in order to evade official surveillance.

I will not deal with **religious ceremonies and festivals** because, except what we mentioned above, they are broadly similar to those celebrated in other parts of Iran : two calendars govern the annual cycle: a solar calendar marks the dates of the main holiday activities and celebrations (*No ruz, sizdah bedar* – photographs - …) and a lunar calendar regulates the religious year (*'âshurâ'*-photographs-, ramadan...).
Finally, I would like to focus on another image attached to Gilân, as **a land of refuge and dissidence**. Which episodes of Gilān's complex history do popular memory and history prefer to retain? Which images make up the regional consciousness of the past?
Several intellectuals from the region evoke a powerful image of Gilān as a land attached to its independence, inclined to rebellion and insubordination, and as a custodian of specific Iranian traditions. It is indeed worth noting that for two millennia, up to its annexation by Shah Abbas I (1588-1629), the province had been spared from the lasting influence of highly organized states that had

extended their dominion to its very doorstep. This tradition of resistance to invaders is a leitmotif in the works of both regionalist and nationalist historians and writers (such as Sadegh Hedayat, Aḥmad Kasravi, Moḥsen Azizi, Ḡolām-Ḥosayn Ṣadiqi), who describe Gilān through the ages as "a standard-bearer of Iranism," to use Minorsky's phrase.

In the memory of the regional and national past, "the fierce resistance" which, according to tradition, the populations of Gilān displayed against the Arab invaders is emphasized. Let's quote a local historian: "The Daylamites fueled a merciless hatred towards Arabs and used any and all occasions to attack them, which explains the existence of an important military base, established in the fortress of Qazvin called 'door of paradise'" (Faḵrāʾi, p. 23). "Any Moslem who spent at least 24 hours in this city with the intention of taking part in the holy war against infidels was guaranteed a place in paradise" (idem, p. 222). To several historians of Persia, this resistance represents a part of a national epic: "The Moslems had already invaded France, all the way to the Loire river, and this handful of men still resisted!" (Kasravi, p. 6). The facts are undoubtedly more complex. However, the image of an irredentist Gilān, serving as a refuge for Iranism, was further reinforced through a series of major episodes, during the Middle Ages, which highlighted the relentless singularity of the area. One of the most outstanding figures asserting this continuity was that of Mardāvij b. Ziār, founder of the Ziarid dynasty, who controlled various areas in northern Persia in the 10th and 11th centuries. A native of the plain of Gilān, Mardāvij professed violently anti-Moslem ideas; to show the deep roots of his dynasty in the Iranian tradition, he "had a gold throne made and a miter decorated with invaluable stones to the same design as that of Sasanian King Chosroes Anurshivān" (Minorsky, p. 18). In this context, one should also mention the extraordinary exploits of the Buyids of Deylamite origin, who were Twelver Shiʿites and adopted the title of *šāhanšāh*, claiming a genealogy which made them descendants of the Sasanian kings.

The tradition of an insubordinate Gilān was reinforced by several episodes of modern and contemporary history. Above all, during the Constitutional period, protests and rebellions were exceptionally intense in the province. Many associations and societies (*anjoman*s) were created in both cities and villages, fishermen went on strike, and peasants, demanding better conditions, refused to pay their land rents. This rebellion was supported and led by intellectuals and city craftsmen linked to Caucasian Social and Democratic movements. In 1909, the revolutionaries seized Rašt and marched on Tehran where they joined Baḵtiāri rebels and contributed to the fall of Moḥammad-ʿAli Shah.

As deeply rooted as they are, these images of a rebellious and unruly Gilān are eclipsed by those of Mirzā Kuček Khan, leader of the Jangali movement (1915-21) (photograph), who became the area's emblematic hero. The symbolic space occupied today by the so-called "Commander of the Forest" (*sardār-e jangal*) is considerable. Boulevards, a natural park, cinemas, and a ferryboat (connecting

Anzali to Baku) all bear his name or one of his epithets. Posters, a stamp (photograph) and murals (photograph) commemorate his memory. A television series, broadcast on several occasions in the late 1980s and early 1990s, recounts the principal events of the *Jangal*. Songs, poems, articles in local magazines, paintings (Ḥājizāde's, in particular) (photograph), mention this charismatic character; his tomb, now restored, is topped by a mausoleum built in 1982. As a supreme dedication, his statue has been standing since 1999 on the square in front of the City Hall in Rašt(photograph).

But this hero, his actions, the movement he led, the ephemeral republic he presided over in 1920-21, are all subject to contrasting interpretations, a "contentious historiography," even to those who claim to be his followers.

In popular representations, Mirzā Kuček Khan appears as a sort of Robin Hood, a symbol of regional identity in appearance and manner. Songs celebrate the purity of his light blue eyes. Mirzā spoke Gilaki and dressed in the manner of the Ṭāleš or Gāleš, wearing trousers and a jacket, both made of *šāl*, a coarse-looking fabric woven locally, and wearing *pātave* (puttees) and *čumuš* (cowhide shoes) typical of regional dress. Popular memory also recalls his role as a redresser of wrongs, who solved even the most sensitive problems (disputes with landowners, irrigation-related conflicts, etc.) directly on the spot, or his role in the modernization of the region (construction of roads, schools, etc.). Mirzā Kuček and his movement are also closely associated with the forest, and with all it represents in the Caspian world. The forest is a place of refuge and freedom to which one withdraws to escape injustice; on several occasions, Mirzā Kuček withdrew to the forest from fights and conflicts, especially with the Bolsheviks. The character of Mirzā Kuček incarnates this local forest imagery associating freedom with rebellion. This association is particularly strong in Ḥājizāde's paintings, two of which show Mirzā Kuček in the trunk of a tree (photograph).

However, beyond the standard image of a local hero, there are also polemical and contradictory representations of this uncommon character. He is a guerrilla hero, sporting wild hair and a beard, a portrayer of socialist-oriented anti-imperialistic ideas such as those glorified by the revolutionary movements of the extreme left in the 1960s. Partially in memory of the *Jangali* movement and its leader, a Marxist group well established in northern Persia called the *Fedāʾiyān-e ḵalq* ("the people's fighters") chose a site in the Gilān forest to start a sporadic guerrilla war which lasted eight years. The attack on Siāhkal's military police headquarters took place on 8 February 1971, and marked the beginning of an armed adventure which was to have important repercussions. Another movement of the revolutionary left, the Islamic movement of the *Mojāhedin-e ḵalq*, who named their newspaper *Jangal* (published between 1972 and 1975), arrogated Mirzā Kuček's image as anti-imperialistic hero. The guerrilla and opposition movements in Gilān in the early 1980s likewise appropriated the symbol.

The Islamic regime emphasizes the combat carried out by Mirzā Kuček "for the

sacred values of Islam and the independence of Iran." There is no shortage of arguments to support this representation: Mirzā Kuček studied Islamic theology (photograph), and he broke with the radicals and the Bolsheviks who, at the time of their arrival in 1920, damaged mosques, conducted a campaign against religion, and questioned the status of private property. In a letter to Lenin, the Jangali leader condemns the Bolshevik propagandists "who are ignorant of the manners and customs of the Iranian people." His death, whose many different versions are transmitted by "oral tradition," fits the mold of martyrdom and links him to the "saints" of Shiʿism. A recent textbook (*Tārik̲-e moʿāṣer-e Irān. Sāl-e sevvom-e āmuzeš-e motavasseṭe-ye ʿomumi*) emphasizes that Mirzā Kuček sacrificed himself as a martyr (*šahid*) for sacred values (*ārmānhā-ye moqaddas*), and describes the last days of his life. Abandoned by all (many of his followers either betrayed him or returned to Russia), Mirzā Kuček bid farewell to his wife, an honest country woman, and offered to divorce her to give her the possibility of remarrying; a paragon of honor, she refused. Mirzā gave her the only valuable item he possessed, a gold alarm clock: "Each time it rings, you will think of me," he said. Husband and wife parted, their eyes full of tears. Mirzā Kuček reached the mountains with his most faithful companion, a German known as Hušang. Surprised by a snowstorm, he died of cold; his head was cut off and brought to Tehran; in Tehran, Mirzā Kuček's severed head was presented to Reżā Khan, who ordered that it be displayed on Parliament Square. Tradition has it that Mirzā Kuček's head was surreptitiously unearthed, carried to Gilān, and reattached to his body. Mirzā Kuček was finally buried (photograph) in the Solaymān Dārāb cemetery on the outskirts of Rašt, by the road that leads in the direction of the forest. These episodes are in many respects reminiscent of the great tradition of Shiʿite martyrdom: betrayal, a desperate struggle with the oppressor, and even the replacement of the head, *sar-tan* (lit. "head-body"), following the example of Imam Ḥosayn, the "prince of martyrs."

Thus, the Islamic Republic portrays Mirzā Kuček as a defender of Islam, an enemy of foreign powers and Bolshevism, and an ancestor of sorts to the 1979 Revolution. Nevertheless, the image of the guerrilla, heralding that of Third World resistance fighters, with their socialist-oriented ideas, was perceived as a threat, especially since armed movements hostile to the regime (*Fedaʾiyān*, *Mojāhedin*; see above) tended to appropriate the legendary figure for their own purposes. To thwart this image, officials insisted on the religious dimensions of Mirzā Kuček's battle, and often portrayed him as a mulla. A painting on display at the Rašt Museum in 1982 (photograph), showing the hero in religious garb, was accompanied by the caption: "Mirzā Kuček Khan, a great revolutionary man, a victim of the complicity between East and West". But such a portrayal is too far from the tough and deeply rooted image of the disheveled guerrilla hero to be credible. In the end, Islamic authorities accommodated themselves to this disturbing image by emphasizing the deeply religious character of the Jangali movement. And so the caption on a poster published by the *pāsdārān*

(Revolutionary Guards) recalls Mirzā Kuček's words: "We will resist to the last ditch and will sacrifice ourselves for the defense of Islamic powers" (photograph).

"The Forest General" thus expresses, in various proportions, a symbol of the regional identity, a champion of the fight for national freedom, a herald of the religious struggle. His mausoleum has become a place of pilgrimage (*ziāratgāh*), particularly on 11 Āḏar (2 December), the anniversary of his burial. Honored today by opposing currents of public opinion, the memory of Mirzā Kuček was obscured during the Pahlavi regime and degraded by the Iranian Communists, who criticized his "regionalism," his "obscurantism," his break with the Bolsheviks, and especially the killing of their leader, Ḥaydar Khan ʿAmu-oḡli. The proliferation of material devoted to the Jangali movement and its charismatic leader is a testament to both the originality of this episode in the history of Persia, and to the diversity of the related images. These events have become a contested field of symbolic interpretation in Persia and Gilān today.

Thus, the image of Gilān is a mix of contradictory representations: that of a land of people with strange ways of life, that of a standard-bearer of Iranism, and finally that of an endemic hotbed of rebellion where a modest people resist an overbearing stranger. In popular tales, the symbol of this rebellious and cunning resistance is *bāqāle qātoq*, a lima bean stew (so named after a typical dish of Gilān), who defeats *ḡul,* the giant who is parching the land. Finally, another image of Gilān appears throughout popular and literary discourse: that of an area which is often at the forefront of political and social changes, and hence one that anticipates historical movements.