

# UC Riverside

## UCR Honors Capstones 2023-2024

### Title

AS THEY RECALL: A FAMILY HISTORY

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8jj2687j>

### Author

Ahmadi, Arian

### Publication Date

2024-07-24

AS THEY RECALL: A FAMILY HISTORY

By

Arian Ahmadi

A capstone project submitted for Graduation with University Honors

May 20, 2024

University Honors

University of California, Riverside

APPROVED

Dr. Muhamad Ali  
Department of Religious Studies

Dr. Jody Benjamin  
Department of History

Dr. Richard Cardullo, Howard H Hays Jr. Chair  
University Honors

## ABSTRACT

In this paper, I will tell the story of two of my ancestors. My paternal great-grandmother and great-great-grandfather. A story that is tied to the history of the world and the history of Iran. I will explore their lives and legacy, shaping many people, families, and towns. My Great-great grandfather, a wealthy Khan, controlled vast amounts of land and held great influence in the western regions of the province of Kurdistan in the Kingdom of Persia by the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The clan, however, would be nearly wiped out by bandits and outlaws, killing most of the family, burning the family manor, stealing their wealth, and later hanging the head of the family, my great-great-grandfather. My great-grandmother and her brother lived as they hid in the wine cellars. However, this is where the story of my great-grandmother begins with most of her young life surviving the First World War, nearly being killed, and watching Imperial Russian Forces slaughter her hometown. Her bravery and dedication to saving her family caused her to create an armed revolt against the occupying armies. With her leading the revolt and slaying almost a dozen soldiers by herself. Her dying wish was for the world to know the cruelties that fell upon her family, and I am honoring her wish by bringing her story and the story of her father to life.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my family, my mother and my father, for giving me the resources to understand the truly complicated and fascinating story of my ancestors, and I would like to thank my Mentors Dr. Benjamin and Dr. Ali. I would also like to thank Dr. Zarinebaf for helping me gather information and understand more regarding my home country. I would also like to thank Dr. Ghazal Allahiary for lending me her work, which included a great deal of research regarding our family history. This is not what is available to most people of my age, and having the ability to not only research it but also know that these individuals were related to you creates a strong feeling of satisfaction and pride. In this book, I will be telling the story of two of my recent ancestors and their tied lives to the global and local events of the early 20th century. The story of my great-grandmother and the story of her father, my great, great grandfather.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	2
Acknowledgments.....	3
Creative Process.....	5-15
Statement of Purpose.....	5-7
Background and History.....	7-10
The Qajar Dynasty.....	10-15
The Family History.....	15-28
Of my Great-Grandmother, Susa.....	15-21
Of my Great-Great Grandfather, Rostam.....	21-24
Of my Grandfather, Naghi.....	24-27
Conclusion.....	28
References.....	29

## CREATIVE PROCESS

### Statement of Purpose

Without further ado, I will provide a short background on myself and slowly travel back in time to tell a story worthy of being told, a story that impacted me so deeply I am sitting here writing it. I will accompany you throughout this journey as its humble narrator. Bear in mind, dear reader, this story does get rather disturbing and horrid; it explores the gruesome realities of war, famine, mass killings, raids, disease, and the destruction of many families. Now, let us begin traveling back in time, starting with the author and narrator, me. My name is Arian Ahmadi; I was born in the year two thousand two in the city of Hamadan, in the province of Hamadan, the old Imperial summer capital of multiple Persian Empires. I was raised in a middle-class family and enjoyed the luxuries of the modern world: the worldwide internet, television, SpongeBob, you get the deal. My parents and I immigrated to the United States in 2012 for a life in a country where anything is possible, or so my father said. Growing up, I did not know much about my family history, only that some of them were Persians, some Kurdish, and some Turkish. In fact, I avoided talking about my family as much as possible since I found them to be average and dull compared to the families of my close friends, whose stories always had me thinking of the past.

It was only when my late grandmother told me a little story about her family that I was but a young child. She spoke of my paternal grandfather's grandfather, I know, a bit of a mouthful. As you well know, my last name is Ahmadi, so is my father's and so is my grandfather's, but the story is not about the Ahmadi clan; it is of the Allahiary clan, the last name that my paternal grandmother has, and so does the mother of my paternal grandfather. A bit strange, yes, as according to my research, my paternal grandfather was half Ahmadi and half

Allahiary who married an Allahiary woman, making them 4th or 5th cousins, something that is very taboo in our modern world but rather normal in the Middle East during the middle of the 20th century. Anyhow, my late Grandmother, Monir Allahiary, spoke of my grandfather's family, Naghi Ahmadi. I will write the finer details of their birth years and years of passing later, but to keep things simple, as it appears to be getting complicated. His family was of Khan descent, the Allahiary part, of course; they owned vast amounts of farmland, properties, and wealth and wielded great influence in the Eastern regions of the province of Kurdistan, particularly in the county of Esfandabad.

I was as confused as you are right now; with all of the last names, clans, and Khans, nine-year-old me struggled to keep up. But something that stuck, something that stayed in my head, pecking away at my thoughts, was how the family lost everything, how the great clan of the Allahiary collapsed in a single night, and we were never fully able to restore the former wealth and glory the family had. A night that my grandmother called the night of blood and screams, a night when most of my family was brutally butchered by outlaws, a clan of Kurdish origin who would roam the western countryside, killing, pillaging, stealing, and raping. The Sheikh Esmail gang, a powerful warlord who led thousands of outlaws that wanted nothing but blood, power, and riches, and one of the most powerful men in those regions was my ancestor, the maternal grandfather of my paternal grandfather, Rostam Allahiary, the last Khan, and his child, one of few who survived, Susa Allahiary, my great grandmother, a young child who would go on to live through the first world war, the famine of Iran, the brutal Russian occupation of Iran, and her story of leading a revolt against the Russians to save what was left of her family, a child born in hell and forged by constant war around her. This is the story of Rostam and Susa, a story passed down through many generations and researched by members of the family, all of whom gave me

their permission to write about our family, to finish something that so many in the family couldn't, as a way to remember their sacrifice and their unbreakable spirit to protect the clan.

Now, let us not get ahead of ourselves. To tell a story, one must understand the historical background and the geopolitical climate of the time. Something simply does not happen for the sake of it happening; everything has a cause and effect, and the causes that led to my family growing through generational horrors stemmed from national or international events. There will be two major conflicts that I will touch upon which directly impacted my family: the Iranian constitutional revolution and the first world war. The first section of the book will be about the historical context of the story, the major ones, as mentioned previously, and the minor ones that really only affected the western regions of Iran. As for the second section of the book, I will briefly touch upon the family history of the Ahmadi and Allahiary clans using the sources that I have gathered, all of which will be cited in the book, of course. Lastly, the third section of the book will be the story of Rostam and Susa and how I was able to uncover this story through the years.

### **Background and History**

World War I began on July 28, 1914, and ended on November 11, 1918. The war to end all wars, ironically enough, caused more wars to begin after its conclusion; small spoiler: the Second World War and the Cold War, respectively. Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the man who was supposed to succeed the Austro-Hungarian throne, was shot, and killed on the street of Sarajevo by nineteen-year-old Gavrilo Princip (Gilbert, 2014). This set a ripple effect throughout Europe, where the Empire demanded Serbia an explanation since they suspected them of being behind the assassination. The Serbian government denied any wrongdoings, and when the Empire sent them a list of demands, which were frankly outrageous, the small kingdom declined



the list, and consequently, the Empire declared war on Serbia and Montenegro, who supported the Serbians. This caused the Empire of Russia, the self-proclaimed protector of the Slavs, to intervene and declare war on the Austro-Hungarians (Stevenson, 2012). This then led the German Empire to declare war on the Russians since they had previously sent the Empire a blank check, giving full support should something like this happen. Now, since France was an ally of the Russian Empire and still bitter about the colossal loss, they were dealt in the Franco-Prussian war, 1870-71, immediately sided with the Russians, and declared war on Germany. Now, in order for the Germans to defeat the French and take off the Russians afterward, they had to rely on the Schlieffen plan, created by Field Marshal Alfred von Schlieffen in 1905. The plan was for the German army to split up into three army groups; the smallest one was to be placed at the French border, harassing the French and diverting attention (Majd, 2004). The second and medium-sized army group was to be sent to the east at the Prussian Border with Russia to keep them at bay so that they would not attack Eastern Prussia, while the largest army group was set to attack France through Belgium and Luxembourg. As you can already guess, the plan was for the Germans to bypass the French fortification at the main border by going through weak Belgium and Luxembourg. Then, after the German army navigated around the French defensive positions, they would reach Paris, capture it, and force the French to surrender; then amass the entire western army towards the east and beat back the Russians before they could mobilize a large, menacing army since they were so big, the German high command believed it would take them a while to mobilize for war.

Sounds like a great plan, right? No. You see, problems arose for the Germans when they violated Belgium's neutrality; this caused the United Kingdom and Ireland to declare war on the central powers, being Germany and Austria-Hungary. The Germans would go through the

country of Belgium, but it was not easy; the small kingdom's army gave the Germans a huge headache as their invasion would fall behind schedule. This would allow the British army to sail across the English Channel to support its French ally, a big problem for the German army. Nonetheless, the superior German armed forces got extremely close to the city of Paris, but at the battle of the Marne River, the German army was dealt a huge defeat, and they had to pull back and dig in to hold off the allied powers. While in the east, the Russian army had mobilized much quicker than the Germans had anticipated and attacked Germany in eastern Prussia, which forced the German high command to pull men from the west to the east to hold off the Russian army (Stevenson, 2012). Fortunately for the German Imperial army, they were able to score a huge victory against the Russians at the battle of Tannenberg with the brilliant planning of Hindenburg and Ludendorff. All the while, the Austro-Hungarian army was struggling to push against the Serbian army at the border regions. It would look like this war would last for a while, and no one would be home by Christmas.

The German imperial army tried to outflank the Allied forces in Belgium and northern France by trying to beat out the Allied forces and reach the English Channel as quickly as possible, a country that not many had thought would've joined the war and signed a treaty with the central powers and officially joined the war by late October of 1914, the sick man of Europe, the Ottoman Empire. This Islamic Empire sought to join the central powers as many of the leaders, politicians, and commanders believed in a German victory over Europe. However, it was rather divided since another camp in the Empire wanted to support the Allied powers since they knew it would be impossible for the Germans to hold on for much longer since their main offensive over France had recently failed (Stevenson, 2012). Nonetheless, the pro-German camp won when a couple of Ottoman battle cruisers, destroyers, and light cruisers shelled multiple

Russian seaports by the black sea. This attack was carried out by the ottoman minister of war, Enver Pasha. With this attack on Russian seaports, the Ottomans were now officially on the side of the central powers, and the Turkish high command immediately began to draw up plans to attack the British at the Sinai Peninsula, The Russians at the Caucasus, and most importantly for our case, the invasion of Western Persia by Turkish forces in December of 1914. It was in the same month in which the Russian Empire and the British Empire invaded Qajar, Iran, as well. However, as the war began a few months back, the Qajar government formally announced that Iran would be fully neutral during this war and would not pick any sides (Majd, 2013).

Something the allies and the central powers did not care about, and only saw the strategic position of Iran; its vast oil deposits alongside other natural resources which made it far too valuable if the nation fell to the hands of the central powers and vice versa. The Persian military was not even strong enough in manpower or firepower to even try and hold out against the invading armies, but in my opinion, I believe the lack of military and administrative command, alongside rampant corruption in the Qajar government, led to Iran being crushed by the three giants, ending in the deaths of more than two million civilians, named the *Famine of Iran*.

### **The Qajar Dynasty**

In order for us to understand the weak and rather pathetic state of the Qajar government, one must also examine the history of the Qajar dynasty and Iran in the late 19th century and early 20th century. The many Iranian dynasties that came into power in Persia go back thousands of years, starting with the city State of Susa, founded in 4400 BCE (Captivating History, 2018.). Span thousands of years forward, and we get to the Late 18th century with Persia being under the Zand dynasty. The situation of the country had turned into full-blown turmoil as a civil war had begun. In the south were the Imperial Zand forces, and in the north were the Qajar forces who

wanted to overthrow the rulers in Shiraz. Battles after battle left the last Shah of the Zand dynasty, Lotf Ali Khan, cornered in a fortress in Bam in 1794. A few years earlier, in 1789, Agha Muhammad Khan, the leader of the Qajar dynasty, declared war on the Zand forces as a means of revenge since he was tortured and castrated. Finally, in 1794, the Qajar forces were fully in power, and Persia was under their control, with the capturing of the last Zand holdout and the killing of Lotf Ali Khan (Atabaki, 2009). Shah Agha Mohammad Qajar would go on to be a great military leader, bringing back most of the regions lost by Nader Shah after his death in the collapse of the Afsharid dynasty decades back, particularly in the Caucasus with the annexation of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia. However, he would go on to reign until 1797, when he was assassinated at the age of 55. After the death of Mohammad Khan, Fat'H-Ali Shah Qajar, a member of the dynasty, rose to become King, reigning from 1797 to 1834 and absolutely destroying Iran by losing wars against the Expanding Russian Empire. As you will notice, previous Iranian dynasties like the Safavids and the Afsharids were able to keep the Russians in Check and defeat them in Wars; however, the pathetic nature of the Qajar government, its rampant corruption, weak military, which was not modernized to western standards, stood no chance against the Modern Russian Army (Atabaki, 2006). From 1804 to 1813, the Russian armed forces would invade the Iranian provinces in the caucuses. After the disastrous war with the Northern forces, Iran would go on to lose most of its northern realms to the Russians, and the treaty of Gulistan would be signed. However, this would not be the end, as, in 1826, the Russians would invade again and take even more states in the caucuses, finally finishing their conquest in 1828 with the treaty of Turkemnchay. Dagestan, Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan were all lost in these wars to the Russian Empire. Further displaying the weakness of the Qajar dynasty. From 1834 to 1896, during the rule of Mohammad Shah Qajar

and Naser Al-din Shah Qajar, Persia would go on to lose lands in the east and south to the expanding Russian and British forces, losing Herat, Balochistan, and other important areas in the east. Naser Al-Din Shah would go on to be assassinated in 1896 by Mirza Reza Kermani during a visit to the Shah Abdol-Azim shrine (Ansari, 2016). With him gone, Persia's new King had been named Mozaffar ad-Din Shah Qajar, the 5th Qajar king, ruling from 1896 to 1907. It was during his rule that the Iranian constitutional revolution would begin, a demand by the people of Iran to create a more democratic system of governing and the creation of a parliament or, in Faris, a *Majlis*, to represent the interest of the people as it had been clearly shown that the Kings didn't give a damn about the people of Iran and only wanted to support their Lavish lifestyle and expensive vacations to Europe, all paid by the common people. In fact, King Mozaffar would go on to sign concessions, giving monopolistic control to European countries over Iran's vast natural resources and market control. Finally, in 1905, the people of Iran had had enough and wanted change; they wanted something of resemblance to a constitution and representation in the government (Ansari, 2016). With mass protests from the Merchants and other revolutionaries, the Shah finally saw that his power was beginning to slip. All of his spending had finally caught up to him, and the people wanted him to face his actions. After months of mass protests and the killing of many as well, the Shah finally folded and, in 1906, allowed the Parliament to be established so that they could represent the people of Iran and make important decisions for the country. On December 31, 1906, the King signed the bill to allow the Parliament to exercise legal power and ratify the Iranian constitution. A few days later, in January of 1907, the weak and old King would die from a heart attack (Majd, 2004). For now, the people of Iran were victorious, and the constitutional system was in place, with its first successful elections taking place in the fall of '06.

However, all good things come to an end for the people and in the rise of Mohammad Ali Shah in 1907, he publicly denounced the revolution and sought to bring down the Majlis. As he abandoned the constitutionalists, the British and Russians used the turmoil and weakness in Iran to sign the Anglo-Russian convention, dividing Iran into two zones of influence for England and Russia; the center of the nation, however, would remain neutral (Atabaki, 2009). From 1908-1909 Iran would suffer a great tyranny, civil war and the complete collapse of law and order. It is here where local rulers and factions would take advantage of Iran's weakness to carve out their own territories in Balochistan, Kurdistan, and Azerbaijan. In fact, by 1909, Russian forces would invade Northern Iran and occupy the city of Tabriz until the end of World War I. It is here where the story of my family would begin, at least a portion of it when the country fell into lawlessness and a fight for survival. Imperial and constitutional forces would clash throughout the country as factions tried their best to take back control of the nation (Majd, 2004). However, things began to change in mid- 1909 with constitutionalist forces marching into Tehran and retaking control. The constitution was re-established, and the Shah fled to Odessa and later Sab Remo, Italy. Now, it was time for his young son, the last ruler of the Qajar dynasty to take power since it was favored by the Majlis. Finally, in 1911, the constitutional revolution had ended, and balance was somewhat returned back to Iran, the young king was still in regency and only a short moment during his coronation in 1914, the great war would begin (Salehi, 1999). As you've begun to notice, Iran simply did not catch a break ever since the Fourth Russo-Persian wars beginning in 1804.

Now that we understand the complete and utter failure of the Qajar government in Iran and its pathetic system of government, corruption, and weak military; we can understand its shortcomings during the great war and its inability to deal with the famines. Iran was a sitting

duck when the great war began. As we dive back into World War one, the Russian Empire had noticed that the Ottoman forces had a large army of around 40,000 men in the Caucasus regions led by Kerim Pasha, something the Russians could not allow. With that, the Tsar ordered Imperial General, Nikolai Nikolaevich Baratov to launch an attack on the Ottoman forces and push them back and on August 5<sup>th</sup>, 1915, during the battle of Kara Killisse, he crushed the Turkish army and was later tasked with invading Persia proper to crush any pro-central power movements in the region, especially German ones headed by George Von Kanitz (Stevenson, 2012). In late 1915, his forces arrived in northern Iran, in the port of Bander-e Anzali in the province of Gilan. He was to link up with the British forces coming from the South in Bushehr and fully take control of Iran and defeat an Ottoman army in the western Regions of Persia. Cities like Qom, Kermanshah, and my hometown of Hamadan all quickly fell to the hands of the Russian forces and Baratov crushed any forms of resistance, as the Turks were fully crushed in the Persian regions by 1916, Baratov was awarded the order of St. George, while under his watch, hundreds of thousands of civilians in Iran would perish (Atabaki, 2006). It is during this time from around late 1916 or early 1917 to mid-1919 that more than two million Iranians would die from disease, famine, and foreign invaders. Eventually, the Russian October revolution of 1917 would cause the Russian armed forces to quickly evacuate the northern part of the nation; however, many Russian divisions would stay in Iran and continue their illegal occupation of the country. By the time the treaty of Versailles had been signed in June of 1919, Iran had once again regained its occupied territories from the war. But, around a quarter of the population had died and the industrial sector, what little they had, had also been destroyed. It is really during the Ascension of Reza Pahlavi, a low born Cossack cavalry officer, to the king of the nation in 1925 that the nation began to recover (Captivating History, 2018). After marrying a Qajar princess, he

legitimized the Pahlavi dynasty and banished the Qajar dynasty, ending their rule which lasted centuries.

## THE FAMILY HISTORY

### Of my Great-Grandmother, Susa

I was never able to meet my great-grandmother; she passed away in 1988, fourteen years before I was born. However, my uncles, grandmother, and father would tell ample stories about her all the time. Even after a century of what had happened to her and her family, some of the elders still remembered as they were told by their elders who witnessed it themselves. She was born in the latter months of 1900; we do not exactly know the exact date for which she was born since before the Pahlavi regime, the Qajar dynasty did not keep records or produce birth certificates for their citizens, now known as the *Shenas Namé*, which is why it is very difficult to pinpoint when she was exactly born. However, from interviewing my family, particularly my uncles, great uncle, and other extended relatives such as Dr. Ghazal Allahiary, whose book, *Miraseh Farhangieh Shahre man, Ghorveh*, was of great importance in my quest of piecing together the story of Susa and the near destruction of our hometown. As you've read previously regarding the historical connotations of World War One, you can already understand how deadly the invasions were and how. Unfortunately, it is barely talked about.

The life of my great-grandmother was indeed a turbulent one, from her upbringing as a child of a wealthy Khan and landowner to a young girl who had witnessed her remaining family get killed in front of her and the rest of her life, trying to raise the young ones in the family being one of the sole care-takers of the clan, or what was left of it. In fact, my father is the youngest of six siblings: Keyumars, Homayoun, Shanaz, Parvaneh, and Parvin. So, as a young boy, he would spend a great deal of time living with his grandmother, Susa, and learning about her life in the



past, and as my father had always been a great listener, he sat down and digested everything, being the earpiece Susa had been looking for her entire life, someone to tell these stories to so it would not be forgotten since as my father would tell, was her biggest fear. Therefore, my father took a great deal of memorizing these oral stories and took them to heart, repeating them to me and my cousins as we grew up. My uncles, all of whom are older than my father by at least a decade, also took it upon themselves to document the stories of our clan so that such history would not be erased or forgotten.

As it began, my great-grandmother does not remember too much of her father's death, though she would recall the decline of the clan's power in the region since his death also caused the seizure of the wealth and the destruction of the family manor. She was only seven years old when it all took place, but her older brother, Habib, remembered everything and, as she would recall, changed him forever, seeing his own father being hanged by an apple tree not too far from the family manor. Only the cellar of the house was unharmed as the rest of the mansion was torched by the Sheikh Ismail Gang, Kurdish outlaws who, during the Iranian constitutional revolution, took to the countryside of Kurdistan to murder anyone they saw and steal whatever they came upon. Susa would go on to travel with her older brother to live with relatives in the nearby village of Esfandabad; one of the founders of the village, which is now a small city, was my ancestors of the Turkic Qashqai tribe in the province of Fars near the city of Shiraz. After witnessing the near destruction of her family, Susa had to once again witness death, but now on a much larger scale since by the year 1916, Russian Imperial forces would take over the village and kill anyone who resisted, creating a mass famine in the region with law and order fully breaking down. Susa was only a fifteen-year-old girl when the Imperial forces rushed to Esfandabad, which had ample sources of food to feed the armies; this included livestock such as

goats, sheep, cows, and chicken, alongside agricultural products like wheat and orchards full of fruits. Unfortunately for the residents of Esfandabad, the Imperial forces would go on to take virtually everything from the people. All of the livestock and emptying out the granaries. They would even target the horses and take them away since it would be of great value for the army as they could use it as a form of transport. After months of sacking the village, the people were left with nothing, and starvation began to set in.

In April 1916, almost half of the population of the village had died of starvation or sickness, usually from infections like Cholera or Tuberculosis (Allahiary, 2018). As Susa would recall, the situation had gotten so desperate that people would eat the cats in the village, and when they were all eaten off, they would eat their dead. This is something that my father and uncles would recall as a haunting memory for Susa, as every time she would mention those months, her body would physically start to shake, and her face would sweat. There would be days that Susa could not even walk due to how weak she had gotten, and the rare times Russian soldiers would come into the village to throw scraps of food, Susa would see with her own eyes as Soldiers would pick the healthiest looking girl in the Bazaar and take her, raping her and dumping her body somewhere in the ditches outside the village. In fact, one of the bathhouses that Rostam, Susa's father, had built for the village became a common area for the Soldiers to hang, often getting drunk and, in turn, violent, later coming to the village to beat anyone they saw. Most of the elders had already died from famine and disease, while the young were targeted by the soldiers. In one instance, as Susa recalled, telling her story to my oldest uncle, she had to kill three cats in order to feed the youngest cousin, who was only five years old; she could see his rib cage and other bones popping out from his skin, while his stomach had bloated due to the starvation they were experiencing. Something that she felt great pain, even in those days, was

that she grabbed a club and a piece of wood and killed the cats outside in the garden. She would go on to skin them and roast them on an open fire by spending a whole day in the forests, gathering sticks and firewood to cook the small animals. She had no choice, either that or watch what remained of her family wither away. Her brother, Habib, smuggled food by making deals with outsiders in the region, particularly outlaw gangs who were willing to supply food to the village, though in very low amounts. The Sheikh Esmaili gang would take advantage of the turmoil in the western regions of Iran once again and continue their war path of destruction. As she would recall, the gangs would enter Esfandabad in the latter months of 1916 and burnt down many buildings and killed even more civilians; by then, eighty percent or so of the village had been killed (Allahiary, 2018). From May to November of 1916, Ottoman forces would invade western Iran and, for some time, kick the Russians out of Kurdistan. As Susa recalled, life was easier, and order was established for some time, with gangs being driven out and the Ottoman forces helping out the village by providing food and water. As my uncle would say, Susa would recall fond memories of the Ottoman occupation since they did not abuse the locals but instead helped them. Though, later, they had learned of their crimes in the north as Turkish divisions would massacre many Christian Assyrians in Urmia and other parts of western Iran alongside many Armenians. However, by March 1917, Russian forces would take back the region and expel the Ottomans, and their troubles would once again return to haunt them.

By September 1917, my Great-grandmother committed a gruesome act to defend her village and family. In the early hours of a certain day, Russian Imperial troops once again entered the village square; it was discovered that resistance was growing in western Iran, that the Russian armies had greatly weakened, and that supplies were running low. They had to make sure that major settlements would not rebel and also keep order on the roads. A few weeks

earlier, Susa had discovered two repeater rifles in a chest hidden away in the Friday Mosque of Esfandabad. Arming herself and her brother, they waited to get revenge on the Russians who had brutalized their home. They both climbed the tallest olive tree on the outskirts of the village, waiting for the garrison to leave the region. After hours of waiting, the pair finally saw a few Russians, six or seven soldiers marching in formation away from the village, all with their rifles on their shoulders. Susa and Habib would open fire, and even though they were running low on ammunition, they were able to kill most of the soldiers. One of them, however, was not shot as they ran out of ammunition, and he began to run away. It is here where Susa climbed down from the Tree, as Habib would plead with her not to go after him. Holding a butcher's knife, Susa ran towards him and tackled the soldier, slashing him and screaming at him, eventually cutting the man's head off. Habib would, after the day, be forever afraid of his sister for the brutality she showed. He understood, though, that years of resentment had been building up in her, and it finally came out when she ambushed those men, killing them for all the things they had done. With such an act, more people rose up against the Russian armies in the region and caused more havoc for them, which in turn caused the Russians to eventually pull out of the region since their supplies were cut off, and the Bolsheviks denouncing the 1907 plan of partitioning Persia, by December of 1917, all Imperial forces would leave Kurdistan, and it would return back to local tribal and Gendarmerie forces.

In February 1918, British expeditionary forces would enter the region and occupy it for the remainder of the war (Salehi, 2005). While such forces would not exercise the same brutalities of the Russians, they also did not provide much aid for the locals, with famine and disease still running rampant all through 1919. However, Susa would recall to my father that life was far easier under British rule than under Russian with how many deaths she had witnessed.

However, the British would go on to put down any resistance in the region, and Susa would not attempt any ambushes or open rebellions with them. Instead, they would work in secret to smuggle food into the village. Finally, by August of 1919, the Anglo-Persian deal was signed, and most of the occupation would end. With it, most of the effects from the famine and the locals finally began to return to a more normal life before the war. It was really after 1925, with the overthrow of the Qajar dynasty by Reza Pahlavi, that Susa and my family would truly get the sense of a good and safe life without much war, famine, or disease with the security that the Pahlavi dynasty would provide as they saw what the Qajars did as complete betrayal to the Iranian people.

With that, the story of my Great-Grandmother comes to an end, her tribulations with the Occupation of Iran and near destruction of her family. She was hailed a hero by the village, and her bravery, alongside her brother's, would be remembered for decades as the one to inspire the people to fight back. Even when all seemed lost, Susa did not lose hope or even her faith in her religion. In fact, it kept her strong to fight for what was hers. Seeing her family gave her hope and the determination to keep them alive, and after the wars, she would go on to marry the love of her life, my great-grandfather, Ja'afar, from the Kurdish clan of the Amir-Ahmadi'. In the 1930s, she gave birth to my grandfather, Naghi Ahmadi, and he went on to rebuild the family's wealth over the years and reclaim what was lost by Rostam during the great raid. Susa would go on to have many children and grandchildren since she always wanted a large family after losing hers, and in that, she took comfort and provided great love and affection to them. My father greatly loved her and would spend many days with her; when she passed away in 1988 in her sleep, it broke my father's heart, and the family was devastated; she had lived through three

wars, two revolutions, and a cold war; however, as she would always tell my father, those events just built her character to be stronger for her family.

### **Of my Great-Great Grandfather, Rostam**

The life of Rostam was one of mystery; he was born into an important family; as mentioned before, the Allahiary clan was of Turkic descent, and from decades of research, it was found that the Tribe originally hailed from the Province of Fars from the Qashqai people; though, a blood feud would lead some tribes, including my family's to be exiled from the land and move north towards the plains of Kurdistan where it was the perfect climate for animal herding, especially sheep. When the tribes arrived, they quickly began to build a small settlement for themselves, with my clan being one of the founders as well. It is believed that the tribes left Fars around the late 16th or early 17th centuries during the Safavid era when many migrations occurred. By the Qajar era, the Allahiary family had become the most important family in the county, investing a fortune in building a city. By the time Rosam was in his prime, perhaps sometime between 1897 and 1905. He, too, would invest in building many bathhouses, roads, bridges, mosques, schools, and houses for the tribes and the poor (Hooshang, 2022). The family manor was just outside the village, with orchards all around it, making him the Khan of the region. His forefathers, Dash Damer, Bai Tamer, and Khan Tamer were also Khans of the region.

Even Though most of the family's wealth would mostly disappear with his death, their influence would still linger for many more years, with Reza Shah of the Pahlavi dynasty visiting my Great-Grandfather, the father of my maternal grandmother, Monir Allahiary, spending a day or two at the family's residence during his visits of the western lands on horseback with only a few trusted companions. My grandmother would still talk about those days, even though she was

a small child; she could not believe the King of Persia would visit them as he traveled through Kurdistan. Now, one could only imagine the power of the clan during their height when Rostam was still alive. As mentioned before, it is impossible to exactly pinpoint the birth year of Rostam since the Qajar dynasty did not issue or keep birth certificates, except for Qajar royalty. It is estimated that he was born sometime in the late 1860s or early 1870s, bringing him to about his mid-thirties when Susa was born. However, Habib claimed that their father was older.

By the time of the Persian constitutional revolution, chaos had spread to the western lands as well, with the family noticing their farms being torched and farmers being killed. Their caravans to Sanandaj and Hamadan are being raided, and their hired guns are being harassed (Allahiary, 2018). Rostam had private militia under his control, coming from the various towns in the county, all under his command, and they were ordered to protect the assets and workers of the clan. By 1907, the situation had proved extremely volatile and dangerous for business, and the family was rapidly losing control over the county (Allahiary, 2018). Many Kurdish gangs roamed the countryside, killing and looting anything, causing havoc within the region. It is here where things take a turn for the worse. One of the commanders of Rostam's militia had been captured by the Sheikh Ismaili gang and was tortured for days; they were looking for information regarding Rostam and how to take down his operation. Although not much usefulness came out of torturing his soldiers, that said commander would tell of treasure being hidden in the family manor, mountains of gold. Hoping to be spared by telling this information, his words did not save him, for the Sheikh Ismaili gang was ruthless. All that was said were rumors told by Habib as a way to rationalize why they came for the family's wealth, with absolutely no evidence proving that a commander was captured and tortured for information. We will never know how they found out about the treasure.

By late early 1908, the gang stormed the family residence, and a battle ensued. The militia, armed with rifles and pistols, stood against the poorly trained gang and were able to withstand their attacks for days. However, problems would arise when ammunition would begin to run low on supplies, and the entire manor was surrounded. Knowing the worst was coming, Rostam and his wife decided to hide their children in the hidden wine cellar of the manor, hoping that they would not be captured and killed. Locking them away and giving the one and only key that opened up the secret trap door to Habib, he, too, would grab a rifle to defend his house, his men, and his wife. After a few grueling hours of fighting, everything fell silent. The men were killed, the women, including the wife of the manor, Susa's mother, were taken and never to be seen again, and Rostam was hung from one of the apple trees in his orchard, right outside the family manor. Smoke had entered the cellar, and that is when Habib made the judgment call to escape the manor, finding nothing but bodies. Habib was already a teenager by this point, and he did everything in his power to defend his little sister from harm. He would eventually return to the manor alone and bury what was left of the inhabitants of the manor in the orchards. Bringing his own father down from the noose destroyed his psyche and sent him into a deep depression. The treasure was real as well. Rostam had hidden them underground in the gardens of the manor in clay pots; many gold coins and pieces of jewelry were taken, and all was lost for the now orphans.

As Habib and Susa would recall, Rostam was a gentle giant. He cared deeply for his family and would go out of his way to help the poor, pay for weddings, aid the sick, and house the homeless. Something that my paternal Grandfather, Naghi Ahmadi, would continue to do as well. As it turns out, such things run in the family. Rostam's forefathers were also known for their kindness and acts of generosity, which were encouraged in their religion of Islam. In one



instance, Habib built a bathhouse, one that still stands to this day in 1899, to better aid in the hygiene of the general public and build the infrastructure of the growing village. His good deeds earned him a reputation of great respect, causing many men to join his militia in safeguarding the county during the anarchy years. Thankfully, the Sheikh Ismaili gang would go on to be destroyed by the Pahlavi dynasty in the 1920s with mass modernization, and finally, it is during this time that Habib and Susa would give their father a proper burial, burying him in the Esfandabad, now Qorveh cemetery. This cemetery is the eternal resting place for all of the family members on my father's side, all in their own private quarters of the cemetery.

As of very recently, I did not know much about Rostam's life and his tribulations. While so much more will remain hidden from me, since he passed away so long ago and the only people to have known him personally have also passed, it is important to immortalize such a man due to his deeds and actions in his lifetime. Spending most of his life and fortune trying to aid people, including his own family. While this Turkic Khan may have died more than a century ago, his accomplishments in the shape of his building projects and infrastructure continue to withstand the test of time, still being there in the City of Qorveh, with my father and I visiting it once in 2010. However, his most important legacy, and I believe he would agree with me on this as well, is his family and clan, for we have survived the decades and are still alive, his living accomplishments in the world, and for that, he shall never be forgotten in our family.

### **Of my Grandfather, Naghi**

A quick section will be dedicated to the modern family history regarding my grandfather and a quick synopsis of his life. Born in 1931, my grandfather Naghi Ahmadi was born into the Kurdish clan of the Amir-Ahmadi in Esfandabad. His mother, Susa, and father, Ja'far. First of his line, being born in the new Pahlavi dynasty, he enjoyed the relative peace, stability, and

modernization that the new regime brought about. He knew of his background, and from the age of fifteen, he began to rebuild what was lost in the family's wealth. Though his brother Allah Karam would trick him into giving him most of the wealth in a botched contract regarding a farm. Devastated that his own brother would steal from him and leave him with nothing, only a small jewelry store in the town square, Naghi planned his comeback and began to invest in tractors, machinery that was beginning to enter Iran en masse due to the industrial implementations of the shah. The first man in the county of Esfandabad to own tractors was my grandfather, and he took full advantage of that. Buying a small farm, he implemented machinery and tripled his agricultural output, outselling his own brother in profit. By the time he was in his 30s, Iran was entering a golden age of prosperity, which he had taken further advantage of. This was the time when Esfandabad was renamed Qorveh, and it reached small city status and had tens of thousands of inhabitants. His wife, Monir Allahiary, gave birth to my father in 1974, making him the youngest child in the family, not knowing or spending much time with his father. He and Naghi had a strained relationship from the beginning, as his father was in his forties by the time my father was born.

My father would go on to recall that my grandfather's generosity would put the family in financial strain. While he did own a great deal of property and held a great deal of wealth, with land, farms, orchards, fields, a jewelry store, a pharmacy, a chain of fabric stores, warehouses, the family mansion, and an import/export business, he was an extremely wealthy man. He would tell my father, "All of your problems can be fixed with money as long as you have it." However, by the time he was on his deathbed in 1992, he had completely changed his mind. Furthermore, recalling back to the financial strains, Naghi would go on to spend millions in the name of charity, almost bankrupting the family business in his goal of helping the unfortunate, though, in

his crusade of battling poverty, he would forget about his own family. With the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s, Naghi would go on to further spend money to aid in the war effort and import the grain, carrot, and potato production of his farms to feed the men on the front lines. He would go on to be remembered as a hero in the town, and Imam Jomeh would call him "a savor of the people."

His life would be cut short; however, in 1990, he traveled with his son, my uncle, Kyomars, to Kurdistan after returning from a business meeting in Sanandaj. Though, he would be involved in a car crash severe enough to fully cripple him. A large grain truck would strike the vehicle, causing the car to crash and flip over multiple times. The six-foot-seven-inch, 250-pound behemoth of a man held the roof of the flipped-over car for hours so that his son would not be crushed. After hours, they would be rescued and put in the hospital, but the doctors would make a critical mistake and misdiagnose him. He suffered from a terrible blood clot in his spine, which fully incapacitated him for the remainder of his short life, being fully bedridden and giving control of the family business to his eldest son until his death. My father, before his father's car crash, would spend a great deal with his grandmother, Susa, since he would beat my father regularly. In fact, my father is partially blind in his left eye due to the abuse he would face from his own father. "He was so blinded by his own public generosity that he forgot about me. I felt as if he hated me since he would put his hands on me for the smallest reasons. One day, he would be as kind as a saint, and the other, he would be the devil," my father told me. This is the reason why my father knows Susa's story since he has sought refuge in her house from his own father for many years. In 1992, Naghi would call for my father, who had just graduated from high school and was recently accepted into the University of Tehran. He wanted to see his youngest son. My father would sit beside him on his bed and just wanted to leave as quickly as

possible. Turning his neck, since he was disabled from the neck down, he began to cry and stare at his son. Not saying a word, my father grabbed his hand and comforted him, knowing that his father did not long for this world. He would open his mouth for the last time and utter the words, "Forgive me, child, I have been so cruel to you; please forgive me. I have failed you as a father, but I have always loved you the most." He would then take a deep yet weak breath and exhale slowly, making a scruffy noise, finally passing away next to my father.

His funeral would be a grand one with hundreds upon hundreds of people coming from the nearby towns and cities to pay their respects. The Imam Jomeh of Kurdistan also arrived to give the prayer as many mourned. His tombstone, which I visited many times as a child, was of beautiful marble and fine stone with a verse from the *Shah Name* engraved on the tombstone. His pharmacy and family mansion would be passed down to my father while the other businesses would be passed down to his other children. However, the vast majority of his wealth would be given to various charities in the province of Kurdistan.

My father would go on to attend college for four years and achieve his bachelor's degree, leaving home and meeting my mother through his best friend. My father never wanted to talk about his father or his family; it was really only when we arrived in the United States in 2012, and shortly after his mother's death, that he opened up to me about his past. Although I knew some stories from grandma and my uncles, my father taught me a great deal about the family. Keikhosro, the role model and the sole man I look up to, is the reason I write and tell the story of the family since not only Susa, but my grandmother told my father, "Don't forget about us." This is a testament to such a wish.

## CONCLUSION

In honor of Naghi, Rostam, and Susa, I decided to dedicate two years of my life to write a short piece on a chapter on their lives. It was extremely difficult to gather all of the sources and evidence of their lives with the vast majority of my sources coming from oral stories and interviews from my family. Interviewing many of my family members, be it uncles, aunts, great uncles, cousins, second cousins and even extended family took a whole year. It was truly an amazing experience to write about my family since I have been thinking about immortalizing the story of Susa for many years ever since I learned about her as a child. I would not have been able to write this story without the University honors program with their resources which they provided in order for me to create this piece of work. From the bottom of my heart, I would like to thank everyone who aided me in writing this short history of my family and to dear Susa, I wish I would have met you one day to hear your amazing stories from my own ears. I hope you are satisfied with this work, and do not fret, you will never be forgotten.

## REFERENCES

- Pordeli, Mohammad Reza, et al. "A Study of the Causes of Famine in Iran during World War I." *Review of European Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2017, p. 296., <https://doi.org/10.5539/res.v9n2p296>.
- Foundation, Iran Heritage, and Touraj Atabaki. *Iran in the 20th Century: Historiography and Political Culture (International Library of Iranian Studies ; 20)*. I.B. Tauris, 2009.
- Majd, Mohammad Gholi. *Great Famine & Genocide in Iran*. University Press of America, 2013.
- Majd, Mohammad Gholi. *Persia in World War I and Its Conquest by Great Britain*. University Press of America, 2004.
- Atabaki, Touraj. *Iran and the First World War: Battleground of the Great Powers*. I. B. Tauris, 2006.
- Salehi, Mohsen. *Mention of Injuries: The Situation of Qorve City during the First World War, according to the Late Mullah Ali Mamqi*. University of Kurdistan, 2005.
- Salehi, Mohsen. *Esfandabad Block: An Introduction to the Knowledge of the History and Culture of the People of Qorve*. Vol. 1, University of Kurdistan, 1999.
- Ansari, Ali M. *Iran's Constitutional Revolution of 1906: Narratives of the Enlightenment*. Gingko Library, 2016.
- The Persian Empire: A Captivating Guide to the History of Persia, Starting from the Ancient Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sasanian Empires to the Safavid, Afsharid, and Qajar Dynasties*. Captivating History, 2018.
- Allahiary, Ghazal. *Miraseh Farhangi, Shahre Man Qorve*. Vol. 1, Barkat Kausar, 2018.
- Hooshang, Malek. "Qayler Neighborhood in Kurdistan, Qorveh." *تازان* قروه كردستان، 17 May 2022, [1malekihooshangd.niloblog.com/p/22](http://1malekihooshangd.niloblog.com/p/22).
- Stevenson, D., and D. Stevenson. *1914-1918: The History of the First World War*. Penguin, 2012.
- Gilbert, Martin. *The First World War: A Complete History*. Rosetta Books, 2014.