



AFGHANISTAN IV. ETHNOGRAPHY

AFGHANISTAN

iv. Ethnography

In their ethnolinguistic and physical variety the people of Afghanistan are as diverse as their country is in topography (see [Figure 17](#)). Basically, however, they may be described as of Muslim religion, speakers of Indo-European languages, and of the Mediterranean sub-stock of the great Caucasoid human stock (see bibliog. under physical anthropology). Most groups north of the Hindu Kush mountains exhibit varying degrees of Mongoloid physical characteristics. Except in rural areas off the main lines of communications, few peoples maintain racial homogeneity. Many groups have practiced intermarriage for centuries; and composite communities exist in broad bands of ethnic gray zones (see the map of ethnic groups). Where long contact has existed between Caucasoid and Mongoloid peoples, particularly in the north among the Fārsī- (or Darī-) speaking Tajik and the Turkic Uzbek, there occur combinations of red or blond hair and blue or mixed-color eyes in association with epicanthic eyefolds and high cheekbones. In the south many darker-skinned Balūč and Brāhūī also have blue-green, or mixed eyes. Blondism occurs with comparatively high frequency among the more remote Nūrestānī; and blue and mixed eyes occur in combination with blond or red hair. The research on the fringes of Nūrestān by the Soviet anthropologist G. Debets



indicates a great mixture of “Mediterranean-Indian” types; but more blondism exists in the center of the region.

Afghanistan is not a self-contained ethnic unit, nor is its national culture uniform. Few of its ethnic groups are totally indigenous: The number of Paštūn who live in Pakistan’s tribal agencies and North-West Frontier Province is almost equal to the number of those who are Afghan citizens. The Tajik, Turkman, Uzbek, and Qirgiz have their own soviet republics in Central Asia. Most inhabitants of far western Afghanistan (which is geographically and culturally an extension of the Iranian plateau) are Persian-speaking Fārsīwān. And the Balūč in the southwestern corner of Afghanistan extend into western Pakistan and southeast Iran; also several groups of Balūč live in the Turkmen SSR. In the same general area as the Balūč are found the Brāhūī—speakers of a Dravidian language, who are occasionally Australoid in appearance. The Nūrestānī, Kūhestānī, Gujur, and other small groups of mountaineer sheep—and goat-herders, dairymen, and farmers occupy the rugged mountain zones of eastern Afghanistan and continue into Chitral (Pakistan). The Wākī-Pamiri groups likewise extend into the mountains of Pakistan. The Barbarī of eastern Iran probably derive their origin from the Aymāq or Hazāra, the principal peoples of the central mountains of Afghanistan. These groups present many local and ethnolinguistic variations in their forms of Afghan peasant-tribal society. This society may be described generally as patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal, but imbued with many strong matri-aspects.

In December, 1979, the armed forces of the USSR invaded Afghanistan; subsequently the patterns described in this section have been altered to some degree. The situation remains unclear as of this writing (July, 1982), and the war continues to escalate.

Ethnic groups in Afghanistan. In the following list, the form of religion is, except where noted or as qualified, Hanafite Sunni.

Paštūn. Language: Paštō dialects. They are of the Mediterranean subgroup of the Caucasoid human stock. About 4,800,000 live in Afghanistan as agriculturists, nomads, and semi-nomads. The Tūrī are Shi‘ites. Bibliog.: L. Dupree, “The Changing Character of South-central Afghanistan Villages,” *Human Organization* 14, 1956, pp. 26-29. K. Ferdinand, “Nomad Expansion and Commerce in Central Afghanistan,” *Folk* 4, 1962, pp. 123-59. Idem, “Nomadism in Afghanistan,” in *Viehwirtschaft und Hirtenkultur*, ed. L. Földes and B. Gunda, Budapest, 1969, pp. 127-60. O. Caroe, *The Pathans*, London, 1965. H. -J.



Wald, *Landnutzung und Siedlung der Pashtunen im Becken von Khost*, Opladen, 1969. C. Jentsch, *Das Nomadentum in Afghanistan* (Afghanische Studien 9), Meisenheim, 1973. N. Tapper, "The Advent of Pashtun *maldars* in North-western Afghanistan," *BSOAS* 36, 1973, pp. 55-79. R. Tapper, "Nomadism in Modern Afghanistan," *Afghanistan in the 1970s*, ed. L. Dupree and L. Albert, New York, 1974, pp. 126-43. A. Janata, "Ghairatman—Der gute Pashtune," *Afghanistan Journal* 2/3, 1975, pp. 83-97. B. Glatzer, *Nomaden von Gharjistan*, Wiesbaden, 1977. G. Kuhnert, *Falknerei in Afghanistan*, Bonn, 1980. A. Christensen, "The Pashtuns of Kunar," *Afghanistan Journal* 7/3, 1980, pp. 79-92. W. Steul, *Paschtunwali*, Wiesbaden, 1981. G. Pedersen, "Socio-economic Change among a Group of East Afghan Nomads," *Afghanistan Journal* 8, 1981, pp. 115-22. Relevant, though particularly concerned with the Paštūn of Pakistan, are: F. Barth, *Indus and Swat Kohistan: An Ethnographic Survey*, Oslo, 1956. Idem, *Political Leadership among the Swat Pathans*, London, 1959. For the various Paštūn tribes, see also *A Dictionary of the Pathan Tribes of the North-West Frontier of India*, Calcutta (General Staff, Army HQ India), 1910. *Afghanistan: Field Notes of General Staff; India*, 2nd ed., Calcutta, 1915. R. Ridgway, *Pathans*, Calcutta, 1918. C. Davies, *The North-West Frontier, 1890-1908*, Cambridge, 1932. *Afghanistan: British Intelligence Survey*, London, 1948. A. Ahmed, *Millennium and Charisma Among Pathans*, London, 1976. Idem, *Social and Economic Changes in the Tribal Areas*, Karachi, 1977. L. Dupree, "On two Views of the Swat Pushtun," *Current Anthropology* 18, 1977, pp. 514-17. J. Robertson, *Notes on the Nomad Tribes in Eastern Afghanistan*, Quetta, 1978 (repr. of the 1934 classic). E. Howell, *Mizh: A Monograph on the Government's Relations with the Masud Tribe*, Karachi, 1979; foreword by A. Ahmed. A. Ahmed, *Pukhtun Economy and Society*, London, 1980. F. Barth, *Selected Essays: Features of Person and Society in Swat. Collected Essays on Pathans*, vol. 2, London, 1981. A. Singer, *Guardians of the North-West Frontier: The Pathans*, Amsterdam, 1982. See Balland under Tajik.

Tajik. Language: Darī; Tajiki dialects. Of the basic Mediterranean sub-stock, they show Mongoloid attributes increasingly from south to north. About 3,500,000 live in northern Afghanistan, primarily as agriculturists. They are concentrated in the northeast, where they usually refer to themselves by the valley or region in which they live. Those living in areas dominated by other ethnic groups refer to themselves simply as "Tajik." (For the history of the term, see Tajik.) Some are Isma'ili. Bibliog.: M. Andreev, *Po etnografii Afganistana*, Tashkent, 1927. Idem, *Po etnologii Afganistana*, Tashkent, 1932. P. Snoy, "Nuristan und Munğan," *Tribus* 14, 1965, pp. 101-49. F. Kussmaul,



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Fārsīwān. Language: Darī. Of the basic Mediterranean sub-stock, about 600,000 live near the Afghan-Iranian border or in the districts of Herat, Qandahār, Ġaznī, and other southern and western towns. The term *Fārsīwān* also has the regional forms *Pārsīwān* and *Pārsībān*. In religion they are Imamite Shi‘ite. In the literature they are often mistakenly referred to as Tajik. Bibliog: P. English, “The Pre-industrial City of Herat,” *Cities in the Middle East*, ed. L. Brown, Princeton, 1973. H. Baghban, *The Content and Concept of Humor in Magadi Theater*, PhD thesis, Indiana University (University Microfilms 77-10-977).

Qizilbāš. Language : Darī. Of the Mediterranean sub-stock, they are scattered throughout Afghanistan and are primarily urban. They are descendants of the military and administrative personnel stationed in Afghanistan by Nāder Shah Afšār (1148-60/1736-47). Many hold important bureaucratic and professional appointments, and they form one of the more literate groups in Afghanistan. They practice Imamite Shi‘ism but may also, to avoid discrimination, resort to dissimulation (*taqīya*). Bibliog.: H. Hahn, *Die Stadt Kabul (Afghanistan) und ihr Umland* (Bonner Geographische Abhandlungen 34, 35), 1964, 1965. D. Wiebe, “Struktur und Funktion eines Serais in der Altstadt von Kabul,” *Schriften der Geographischen Instituts der Universität Kiel* 38, 1973, pp. 213-33. L. Dupree, “Further Notes on Taqiyya: Afghanistan,” *JAOS* 99, 1979, pp. 680-82.

Hazāra. Language: Hazāragī dialect of Darī. They are physically Mongoloid, but admixture is common in the ethnic gray zones. The Hazāra number about 1,000,000, primarily highland agriculturalists; many work seasonally in Kabul and other urban centers. Their ancestors may have arrived in Afghanistan from Chinese Turkistan within the period 626-850/1229-1447. In religion they are divided into Imamite Shi‘ite, Isma‘ili, and Hanafite Sunni groups. Bibliog.: E. Bacon, *Obok* (Wenner-Gren Foundation Monograph 25), New York, 1951.



Idem, "An Inquiry into the History of the Hazara Mongols of Afghanistan," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 7, 1951, pp. 230-47. K. Ferdinand, *Preliminary Notes on Hazara Culture*, Copenhagen, 1951. Idem, "Ethnographical Notes on the Chahar Aimaq, Hazara and Moghol," *Acta Orientalia* 28, 1964, pp. 175-203. H. Dianous, "Hazaras et Mongols en Afghanistan," *Orient* 5, 1961, pp. 71-113. H. Schurmann, *The Mongols of Afghanistan*, The Hague, 1962. Dupree, "The Green and the Black," AUFS, *Fieldstaff Reports*, South Asia Series, 7/7, 1963. R. Canfield, "Hazara Integration into the Afghan Nation," The Asia Society, Afghanistan Council, *Occasional Paper* 3, New York, 1972. Idem, "Faction and Conversion in a Plural Society: Religious Alignments in the Hindu Kush," Museum of Anthropology, University of Michigan, *Anthropological Paper* 50, Ann Arbor, 1973.

Aymāq. Language: Darī dialects, incorporating much Turkic vocabulary. They are Mongoloid in basic physical type, but less notably so in appearance than the Hazāra. Numbering about 500,000, they are agriculturalists and transhumants. They refer to themselves by tribal names (see map) and not by the expression "Čahār Aymāq;" the first of these two terms is used only when people are prompted. Bibliog.: G. Mandersloot and J. Powell, *Firozkohi een Afghanistan Reisjournal*, Rotterdam, 1971. See also Ferdinand, "Ethnographical Notes," under Hazāra.

Moğol. Language: Darī, incorporating much Mongol vocabulary; some southern Moğol speak Paštō. They are basically Mongoloid, but occasional Mediterranean admixture occurs. Several thousand are scattered throughout central and north Afghanistan as highland agriculturalists and transhumants. They were originally concentrated in Ġōr province, their dispersion occurring at least 125 years ago; they may be descended from troops that accompanied Genghis Khan. Bibliog.: A. Mariq, "Arwitsch, un village mongole," *Le minaret du Djam*, Paris, 1959, pp. 77-78. S. Homam, "Afghan Moghols," *Afghanistan* 33/1-2, 1980, pp. 87-99, 33-39. See also bibliog. under Hazāra.

Uzbek. Language: Čağatāy (central Turkic) dialects. Basically Mongoloid, these people show much Mediterranean admixture in the ethnic gray zones. About 1,000,000 live in northern Afghanistan, chiefly sedentary farmers or transhumants. They refer to themselves by old tribal names—Harakī, Kamakī, Mangīt, Ming, Šēš Qara, Taymūs. Bibliog.: G. Jarring, *On the Distribution of Turk Tribes in Afghanistan: An Attempt at a Preliminary Classification* (Lunds Universitets Arsskritt, N.F., avd. 1, bd. 35, no. 4, 1939). P. Centlivres, "Les Uzbeks du Qattaghan," *Afghanistan Journal* 2, 1976, pp. 28-36. See also Dupree,



“Aq Kupruk,” under Tajik.

Turkman. Language: Oğuz dialects. In physical type they are acquiline Mongoloid; about 400,000 live as semi-sedentary and semi-nomadic farmer-herdsmen in north Afghanistan (concentrated in the northwest). After the failure of the 1920s *basmači* resistance to the Bolsheviks in Central Asia, Turkman groups brought with them into Afghanistan the karakul lamb and rug-weaving industries; others had arrived earlier. Major groups include: Tekke, Yomūd, Tariq, Lakai in the Herat region; Tekke and Ersarī in Aqča; Sāroq and Čakra in Andkūy; Salōr in Maymana and in Marūčak; Ersarī and Mawrī in Dawlatābād. Bibliog.: Jarring, *On the Distribution of Turk Tribes*. W. Irons, “The Torkoman Nomads,” *Natural History* 77, 1968, pp. 44-51. Idem, “Variation in Political Stratification among the Yomut Turkmen,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 44, 1971, pp. 143-56 (both on the Iranian Yomūd, but relevant). E. Franz, “Zur gegenwertigen Verbreitung und Gruppierung der Turkmenen in Afghanistan,” *Baessler-Archiv* 20, 1972, pp. 191-238. Idem, “Ethnographische Skizzen zur Frage der Turkmenen in Afghanistan,” *Orient* 4, 1972, pp. 175-84. X. de Planhol, “Sur la frontière turkmène de l’Afghanistan,” *Revue géographique de l’Est* 13/1-2, 1973, pp. 1-16. A. Stucki, “Unter Turkmenen,” *Tages Anzeiger Magazin* 44, 1978, pp. 6-13.

Qirgiz. Language: Qıpčaq dialects. Two groups of the Mongoloid Qirgiz, comprising several thousand transhumants, tend sheep, goats, and yaks in the Little Pamir and Great Pamir. Bibliog.: Jarring, *On the Distribution of Turk Tribes*. R. Dor, *Contribution à l’étude des Kirghiz du Pamir Afghan* (Cahiers Turcica 1), Paris, 1975. R. de Grancy and R. Kostka, ed., *Grosser Pamir*, Graz, 1975. R. Dor and C. Naumann, *Die Kirghisen des afghanischen Pamir*, Graz, 1978. M. Shahrani, *The Kirghiz and Wakhi of Afghanistan*, Seattle, 1979. L. Dupree, “The Kirghiz and Wakhi of Afghanistan,” *Asian Affairs* 11, 1980, pp. 322-25.

Brāhūī. Language: Brāhūī (Dravidian); most also speak Paštō or Balūčī. A modified Mediterranean sub-stock with moderate Australoid admixture, the Brāhūīs in southwest Afghanistan number about 10,000. They are usually tenant farmers or hired herders for Paštūn or Balūč khans. Principal groups include: Aydozī, Lāwarzī, Yāgīzī, Zirkandī, Maḥmasānī. See the literature on the Brāhūī in Pakistan: D. Bray, *The Life-History of a Brahui*, London, 1913. N. Swidler, “The Political Context of Brahui Sedentarization,” *Ethnology* 12, 1973, pp. 299-314.



Nūrestānī. Language: Nūrestānī dialects. They are of the Mediterranean sub-stock with about one-third recessive blondism. About 70,000 are settled in eastern Afghanistan. Formerly termed “Kafirs,” they were converted forcibly to Islam in the late 19th century by Amir ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān. (About 2-3,000 Chitrali Kafirs still practice the old religion, according to the unpublished research of P. Parkes.) The Nūrestānīs designate themselves by local geographical names, e.g., Bašgalī, Waygalī, Pārūnī, Aškūn, Wamā’ī. They practice both agriculture (using elaborate terracing on the mountain slopes) and herding of sheep, goats, and cattle. Particularly noticeable in their culture is the proliferation of wood artifacts. Bibliog.: G. S. Robertson, *Kafirs of the Hindu Kush*, London, 1896, new ed., 1900; repr., Karachi, with foreword by L. Dupree, 1975. A. Scheibe, ed., *Deutsche im Hindukusch*, Berlin, 1937. P. Snoy, “Nuristan und Mungan,” *Tribus* 14, 1965, pp. 101-49. S. Jones, *An Annotated Bibliography of Nuristan (Kafiristan) and the Kalash Kafirs of Chitral*, 2 parts, Copenhagen, 1966-69. Idem, *The Political Organization of the Kom Kafirs*, Copenhagen, 1967. A. R. Palwal, “History of Former Kafiristan,” *Afghanistan* 21/3, 1968, pp. 48-66; 21/4, pp. 61-88; 22/1, 1969, pp. 6-27; 22/2, pp. 20-43. L. Dupree, “Nuristan: The Land of Light Seen Darkly,” *AUFS Fieldstaff Reports*, South Asia Series, 15/6, 1971. K. Jettmar, ed., *Cultures of the Hindu Kush*, Heidelberg, 1974. Idem, *Die Religionen des Hindu Kusch*, Stuttgart, 1975; English tr., Warminster, 1980. R. Strand, “The Changing Economy of the Kom Nuristani,” *Afghanistan Journal* 2, 1975, pp. 123-34. M. Melabar, “A Native Account of the Folk History of the Kalashum,” *Afghanistan* 30/3, 1977; 30/4, 1978. L. Edelberg and S. Jones, *Nuristan*, Graz, 1979. B. Kingsley, “The Cap that Survived Alexander,” *JAOS* 85, 1981, pp. 39-46.

Kōhestanī. Language: Dardic (Indo-Aryan) dialects. The term Kōhestanī is applied to the distinct linguistic groups, numbering about 60,000 individuals, on the southern fringe of Nūrestān—e.g., speakers of Pašaī, Gawar-bātī, Sāwajī, Daḡnaī, and Kuwār. They are of Mediterranean physical type. Bibliog.: R. L. Keiser, “Social Structure in the Southeastern Hindu Kush: Some Implications for Pashai Ethno-history,” *Anthropos* 69, 1974, pp. 445-56. Idem, “Genealogical Beliefs and Social Structure among the Sum of Afghanistan,” *Afghanistan Council, Asia Society, Occasional Paper* 5, 1975. P. Snoy, *Bagrot, Eine dardische Talschaft im Karakorum*, Graz, 1975. K. Wutt, *Pashai*, Graz, 1981.

Gaḷča (or Mountain Tajik). Language: in addition to Darī, various Pamir (Eastern Iranian) languages: Eškāšmī, Munjī, Ōrmuḡī, Parāčī, Rōšānī, Sanglēčī, Šuḡnī, Wākī, Yaḡnōbī. They are of the Mediterranean sub-stock with



Mongoloid admixture; several thousand live as farmers, mainly in Badaḡšān and the Wākān. In religion some are Hanafite Sunni, others Ismaʿīli. Bibliog.: K. Gratzl, ed., *Hindukusch*, Graz, 1974. See also Shahrani under Qirḡiz, Kusmaul under Tajik, and bibliog. under v. Languages.

Balūč. Language: Balūčī. Of the Mediterranean sub-stock with brachycephalic tendencies, about 200,000 live in Afghanistan. They are now semi-sedentary and semi-nomadic, having traditionally been nomads and caravaneers (and slavers until the late 19th century). Some live in the northwest; others travel from Sīstān to Herat in summer and return in winter. Most Afghan Balūč are Roḡšānī; main sub-groups include: Sanḡarānī, Nahūrī, Yamarzay, Sumarzay, Gumša-zay, Sarbandī, Mīāngol, Harūt, Sālārzay. In the Sīstān swamps lives a specialized hunter-fisherman group, the Ṣayyād. Bibliog.: See under Balūč. R. Pehrson and F. Barth, *The Social Organization of the Marri Baluch*, Chicago, 1966. B. Spooner, "Politics, Kinship and Ecology in Southeast Persia," *Ethnology* 7, 1969, pp. 139-52. E. Gafferberg, *Perezhitki religioznykh predstavleniĭ u Beludzheĭ*, Moscow, 1975. See also Embree under Other.

Gujūr. Language: of the Indo-Aryan group; most also speak Paṣṭō. Of Mediterranean type, they are cattle-herders and farmers on the eastern fringe of Nūrestān. See Dupree and Strand under Nūrestānī and Rao under Jat.

Jat (or Guḡī, called Guḡur in the north). Language: Indo-Aryan; most also speak Darī or Paṣṭō. Of Mediterranean type, they form gypsy-like bands of tradesmen, tinkers, musicians, and fortune-tellers. Many claim Arab descent, e.g., the Shaikh Moḡammadī, who are traders only. Other groups include the Čangār, Musalī, and Čalū. Bibliog.: A. Rao, "Note préliminaire sur les Jat d'Afghanistan," *Studia Iranica* 8, 1979, pp. 141-49. Idem, "Qui sont les Jat d'Afghanistan?" *Afghanistan Journal* 8, 1981, pp. 55-64.

Arab. Language: Primarily Darī or Paṣṭō; some speak an Arabized Persian, and a few speak Arabic. Various small, semi-sedentary villages and semi-nomadic bands claim Arab (Sayyed) descent; their physical types are Mediterranean, Mongoloid, and mixed. Bibliog.: R. Farhadi, "Die Sprachen von Afghanistan," *Zentralasiatische Studien* 3, 1969, pp. 409-16. T. Barfield, *The Central Asian Arabs of Afghanistan*, Austin, 1981.

Hindu. Language: Hindi, Panjabi, or Lahndā; they also speak either Darī or Paṣṭō. About 20,000 people, basically of north Indian physical type and Hindu in religion, are found mainly in urban centers; they are merchants and



moneylenders. Bibliog.: L. Dupree, "The Indian Merchants in Kabul," AUFS *Fieldstaff Reports*, South Asia Series 6/3, 1962.

Sikh. Language: see under Hindu. About 10,000 are scattered throughout the cities and towns of Afghanistan as merchants and moneylenders. Like the Hindus, they are mostly Afghan citizens and practice their religion without undue interference. Their basic physical type is Mediterranean, with extreme hirsuteness. See Dupree under Hindu.

Jew. Language: Hebrew; all speak Darī or Paštō or both. Several hundred live in Kabul, Qandahār, and Herat as merchants and moneylenders. Many went to Israel, but most subsequently either returned or emigrated to the United States. Their physical type is Mediterranean.

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