



ĀQČA

ĀQČA (or AQČA), a small market town in north Afghanistan, situated on the western edge of the great piedmont oasis of the [Balkāb river](#). It is the center of an administrative district (*woloswālī*) of 62,000 inhabitants (1358 Š./1979) in the province of Jowzjān.

Āqča is first mentioned in the 11th/17th century as a small fortified town with a citadel (B. A. Akhmedov, *Istoriya Balkha [XVI—pervaya polovina XVIII v.]*, Tashkent, 1983, p. 32). The seat of a petty Uzbek khanate under Bokharan suzerainty until its annexation to Afghanistan in the 13th/19th century under Dōst Moḥammad Khan (see [Afghanistan](#), X), its population was estimated in 1261/1845 as between 7,000 and 8,000, probably a high figure (J. P. Ferrier, *Caravan Journeys and Wanderings in Persia, Afghanistan, Turkistan, and Beloochistan*, London, 1857, repr. Westmead, 1971, Karachi, 1976, p. 205). Later in the century the town suffered from successive revolts and military campaigns, particularly from Eshāq Khan's raid of Rabi'a II, 1286/July, 1869 and a famine that followed. In 1303/1886 the town was in ruins and almost deserted (L. W. Adamec, ed., *Gazetteer of Afghanistan* IV, Graz, 1979, p. 47), and by 1325/1907 the number of inhabited houses in the town and adjacent villages did not exceed 300 (Fakir Saiyid Iftikhar-ud-Din, *Report on the Tour in Afghanistan of His Majesty Amir Habib-ulla Khan*, Simla, 1908, p. 68).

Prosperity returned to Āqča with the arrival of Uzbek and Turkman settlers from Soviet Central Asia between 1916 and 1936. Population rose from 2,500 in 1322 Š./1943 to 9,000 in 1358 Š./1979. Starting in 1355 Š./1956 a new geometrically planned town was built south of the Āqča canal (which diverts



water from the Balkāb) where now all economic and service functions are concentrated. Situated at a crossroad of caravan routes, and a meeting place for the cultivators of the oasis and the stockbreeders of the surrounding plain, the town has always attracted traders from long distances. Its grain, sheep, and horse markets were well known, and the business done in them was still substantial in the late 1970s. A century ago there were between 100 and 120 permanent shops around the citadel, with double that number of booths on market days (*Gazetteer*, p. 47). This number rose to about 750 permanent shops in 1322 Š./1943 (R. Stuckert, *Afghanistan. Erinnerungen*, Frauenfeld [published privately], n.d. [1983], p. 89) and more than 1,000 in 1356 Š./1977. The old town no longer has its covered bazaar; business is now concentrated in a traditionally-structured new bazaar whose charm and high-quality traditional crafts (carpets, jewelry, etc.) attracted streams of tourists until 1359 Š./1980.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The few early historical mentions of Āqča are put together in B. A. Akhmedov, *Istoriya Balkha*, op. cit. On Āqča in the 19th century see references in the text. Modern Āqča is one of Afghanistan's best documented towns. A comprehensive description together with a sketch-map is to be found in E. Grötzbach, *Städte und Basare in Afghanistan: Eine stadtgeographische Untersuchung*, Wiesbaden, 1979, p. 108.

Detailed studies of Āqča's bazaar and comparisons illustrating its distinctiveness have been contributed by P. Centlivres, "Structure et évolution des bazars du Nord afghan," in E. Grötzbach, ed., *Aktuelle Probleme der Regionalentwicklung und Stadtgeographie Afghanistans*, Meisenheim and Glan, 1976 (Afghanische Studien 14), pp. 119-45, and by D. Wiebe, "Probleme stadtgeographischer Forschung in Afghanistan: Wandel und Beharrung aghanischer Provinzstädte," in C. Rathjens, ed. *Neue Forschungen in Afghanistan*, Opladen, 1981, pp. 149-62 (including a very detailed map of the bazaar).

Some complements and a first insight into the regional influence of the town



are provided by A. Jebens, *Wirtschafts- und sozialgeographische Untersuchung über das Heimgewerbe in Nordafghanistan unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Mittelstadt Sar-e-Pul*, Tübingen, 1983, pp. 211-17.

For the craft industries of Āqča and the district see B. Dupaigne, “Aperçus sur quelques techniques afghanes,” *Objets et Mondes* 8/1, 1968, pp. 41-84; idem, “Un artisan d’Afghanistan,” *ibid.*, 14/3, 1974, pp. 143-70; idem, “Les Ikats d’Usbekistan et d’Afghanistan,” in M.-L. Nabholz-Kartaschoff and P. Bucherer-Dietschi, eds., *Textilhandwerk in Afghanistan*, Schriftenreihe der Bibliotheca Afghanica 3, Liesta, 1983, pp. 77-92.

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