



## ĀQSŪ (RIVER)

---

ĀQSŪ, a river in the *Āmū Daryā* system. The upper course, called the *Morgāb* in the Soviet Union, finds its source in the Little Pamir, the eastern part of Afghanistan's *Waḵān-Pāmīr* mountains; the lower course, the *Bārtang*, flows into the *Āmū Daryā* at *Rōšān*. The following description refers only to the Afghan part of the *Āqsū*. The river's source is *Čaqmāqtīn Kōl* (Firestone lake) in the Little Pamir, at an altitude of approximately 4,000 m. The geomorphological structure of the area is mainly due to glacial activities, and quarternary deposits. The *Āqsū* meanders southwest to northeast through this high mountain basin. Its plain is gravelly and at some points has loess deposits. The river is fed by a considerable number of large and small mountain streams, most of them coming from the north side of the *Sarikōl* range rather than the more arid southern slopes of the Great Pamir. The easternmost tributary of the *Āqsū* still in Afghanistan is the *Mehmān-yōlī* river. The climate here is Central-Asian-continental, with cold winters, and cool summers. In contrast to the western part of the Pamir region and to the Great Pamir, which have their greatest precipitation in winter, the rainfall (approx. 150-200 mm) is divided more or less equally over the year; this feature allows the *Qirgiz* nomads in the area to graze their herds even in winter (see W. F. Reinig, *Beiträge zur Faunistik des Pamir-Gebietes*, 2 vols., Berlin, 1932; R. Dor and C. Naumann, *Die Kirghisen des afghanischen Pamir*, Graz, 1978).

Two main types of vegetation can be found at various altitudes (alpine, subnival, and nival) above 4,000 m. The limited number of sites with a steady



water supply have continuous Kobresia meadows; areas supplied only by the waters of melting snow are dominated by thorny bushes and tufts of *Acantholimon*, *Acanthophyllum*, and some *Astragalus*. In lower elevations *Artemisia* is also found (see S. W. Breckle, "Mikroklimatische Messungen und ökologische Beobachtungen in der alpinen Stufe des afghanischen Hindukusch," *Botanische Jahrbücher* 93/1, 1973, pp. 25-55). Larger animals in the region include the ibex, the Marco Polo sheep, and the snow leopard; except for the ibex, these species have become rather rare in recent times, though the Afghan government has now started a protection program (see C. Naumann and G. Nogge, "Die Grosssäuger Afghanistans," *Kölner Zoologische Zeitschrift* 16/3, 1973, pp. 79-93; C. Naumann and J. Niethammer, "Zur Säugetierfauna des afghanischen Pamir und des Wakhan," *Bonner Zoologische Beiträge* 24, 1973, pp. 237-84).

Since the 19th century the Qirgiz nomads have used the Āqsū area. After the closing of the political borders (USSR about 1930 and People's Republic of China 1950-55), the Qirgiz have been restricted to this small area all year round. Normally they changed their settlements three times a year to prevent overgrazing. Their customary housing was the yurt and the most important domestic animals, the fat-tailed sheep and the yak. Some bactrian camels were raised as pack animals for long distance treks to the next market places in the Wakhan (see Dor and Naumann, *Die Kirghisen*). After the communist take-over in Kabul the majority of the Qirgiz living in the so-called "Small Pamir" area fled to Pakistan, where they stayed in Gilgit until August 1982. Since then they have lived in the Lake Van area in eastern Turkey, where the government has provided houses, land, and farming facilities.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

See also R. Dor, *Contributions à l'étude des Kirghiz du Pamir Afghan, Cahiers Turcica* I, Paris, 1975.

C. Naumann, "Pamir und Wakhan. Kurzbericht zweier Expeditionen (1971 und 1972) nebst einigen allgemeinen Bemerkungen," *Afghanistan Journal* 1/4, 1974, pp. 91-104.



R. S. de Granfy and R. Kostka, eds., *Grosser Pamir: Österreichisches Forschungsunternehmen 1975 in den Wakhan-Pamir/Afghanistan*, Graz, 1978.

(C. Naumann)