



BADAĶŠĀN I. GEOGRAPHY AND ETHNOGRAPHY

i. Geography and Ethnography

Geographical meaning and administrative divisions. The name BadaĶšān first occurs, in the form Po-to-chang-na, in a seventh-century Chinese source (journey of Hūan Tsang in 629 A.D.; see S. Beal, *Si-Yu-Ki, Buddhist Records of the Western World*, 2 vols., London, 1884, I, p. 42, and II, p. 291). The area described is small (200 *li* = approximately 75 miles or 120 km in circumference) and appears to have consisted of the lower basin of the Kokča river; if so, it must have lain entirely on the left bank of the upper Oxus, of which the Kokča is the principal left bank tributary. A distinction is made between the lower part and the upper part of the Kokča valley (Yamgān, above Jorm, probably the Chinese traveler's Im-po-kin); Korān, above Sar-e Sang, probably his Kiu-lang-na). No further information is to be found in more recent Chinese sources from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (E. Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches from Eastern Asiatic Sources*, 2 vols., Leiden, 1888, II, pp. 276-78). These describe the area as a land of passage but do not give any precise information about its limits.

For the Arabic geographers of the classical period, however, BadaĶšān has a considerably wider meaning. They often write vaguely about this area, of which they evidently had little knowledge, as the routes east of BalĶ which they mention generally end in ƦoĶārestān (the area then called Ʀālaqān,



Ṭāraqān, or Ṭāyagān and still known as Ṭaleqān [Tālaqān], corresponding to the modern province of Qaṭaḡān together with the districts of Ƙolm and Baḡlān) and in the Ƙottal area north of the Oxus. There are also some discrepancies and contradictions in the accounts of the successive authors. Nevertheless it is clear that in their estimation BadaĶšān meant the entire Kokča basin (for a rough summary of their statements, see Le Strange, *Lands*, pp. 432ff.; also V. Minorsky's notes on p. 349 of his tr. of the *Ḥodūd al-'ālam*). They describe BadaĶšān as a mountainous, mineral-rich country where lapis lazuli (see below), balas rubies, asbestos, rock crystal, and bezoar stones are found. The term "balas," applied to a sort of ruby (spinel), is derived from al-BalaĶš, an Arabic dialect-form of the area's name which was noted by Ebn Baṭṭūṭa (see P. Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo* I, Paris, 1959, p. 63). There are no grounds for the supposition of J. Markwart (*Ērānšahr*, p. 279) that, on the contrary, the precious stone's name might have been the source of the country's name (see badaĶšān iii, below). Marco Polo (I, p. 29; tr. H. Yule, ed. H. Cordier, 3rd ed., London, 1921, I, pp. 157-63) has a similar concept of BadaĶšān, except that he explicitly excludes from it the district of "Casem" (Kešm), i.e., the lower Kokča basin. Probably the name BadaĶšān was first applied to the less elevated areas, later extended gradually to the mountains upstream which supplied the mineral products for sale elsewhere after transportation through the Oxus valley and plain, and finally limited to the highland which was the source of the country's worldwide fame. In any case the political influence of BadaĶšān then reached into the Pamir and the Wākān (Wakhan, upper Oxus) valley, whose inhabitants, according to Marco Polo (tr. Yule, I, p. 217), paid tribute to the prince of BadaĶšān. It seems, however, that BadaĶšān was not then thought to include the lowland valleys downstream from the northward bend of the Oxus, still less those on the great river's right bank.

In later times the concept evolved in the opposite way, probably for historical and political reasons. Early in the sixteenth century Bābor (*Bābor-nama*, tr. A. S. Beveridge, London, 1922, p. 1) regarded BadaĶšān as adjoining Farḡāna on the south, separated by mountains which formed the border. Evidently the name was then extended to the lands on the right bank of the Oxus. This new usage probably resulted from the acquisition of lands and influence north of the Oxus by the local princes of BadaĶšān; it took root in the nomenclature of modern political geography as a result of the action of the Soviet government, which in 1925 created the Autonomous Region of Gorno-Badakshan (Mountain-BadaĶšān) within the Socialist Soviet Republic of Tajikistan.



Although the existence of this political unit is intended primarily to give recognition to the ethnic and religious distinctiveness of the Pamir and Wākān peoples, its name evokes a definite historical tradition with memories of the past expansion of the Özbek states and peoples of the north into more or less all the Oxus right bank lands. European and American geographers and historians often speak of “Badaqšān in the proper sense,” meaning the area south of the Oxus (e.g., W. Barthold in *EI*¹⁻²). Badaqšān’s limits to the south, unlike the north, have long been firmly fixed on the crestline of the Hindu Kush (*Bābor-nāma*, tr. Beveridge, pp. 46, 204), which separate it from the Kabul country and Nūrestān (Kāferestān). In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Özbek princes of Badaqšān achieved a considerable westward expansion and temporarily held sway over Qaṭaḡān and Kondūz. A relic of those days survived in the former administrative divisions of Afghanistan, Badaqšān being a “minor” province subordinate to the neighboring “major” province of Qaṭaḡān until the reorganization in 1964.

Natural environment. The heart of Badaqšān is the upper valley of the Amu Darya (Oxus), known here as the Panj and in its highest reach in Afghan territory as the Wākān. In the frontier demarcation at the end of the nineteenth-century, a long corridor adjoining the Wākān river and extending to the Chinese frontier was left in Afghanistan so that the British Indian empire and the Russian-controlled Central Asian territories might be kept apart. The deep valleys of the Oxus and its tributaries, on the left bank (the Kokča) and on the right bank (the Pamir river which forms the Soviet-Afghan frontier in the east of the Wākān corridor, the Gunt [Ghund] which is named ‘Alīšūr in its upper course, and the Bārtang which is named Morḡāb further upstream and Oksu in its highest reach), lie embedded between blocks of the Pamir plateau, the great orographic node where the Hindu Kush, Karakoram, and Kunlun Shan converge. In structure the Pamir node is complex, the orogenesis being Hercynian in the north, Cimmerian and Alpine in the south where the Gondwanan and Asiatic plates come into contact. Fragments of pre-Cambrian basement rock and granite masses of various ages are interspersed among overlying Mesozoic formations. The whole surface has been raised to altitudes averaging between 3,000 and 4,000 m, above which tower lofty ice-covered blocks averaging between 5,000 and 6,000 m. Some peaks in the north exceed 7,000 m. (Communism Peak 7,495 m, in the Academy of Science range; Lenin Peak 7,134 m, in the Trans-Alai range). The Hindu Kush also exceeds 7,000 m on the Pakistani-Afghan frontier (Kūh-e Nawšāk 7,485 m). Access from the Kokča basin to Nūrestān and the Panjšīr valley is only possible over very



steep passes (Anjoman pass to Panjšīr, 4,400 m; several passes to Nūrestān, ca. 4,500 m).

This highland has an extremely harsh climate. On the Pamir plateaus average temperatures are estimated at -20° C in January and 10° to 12° C in July, while the winter minima can fall to about -50° C. The annual rainfall, which can be as much as 800 to 1,500 mm on west-facing and northwest-facing massifs, falls to less than 200 mm on sheltered plateaus in the Pamir and less than 100 mm in the Oksu basin, with the result that these areas are highland deserts. In the bottom of the Oxus valley at altitudes of 300 to 400 m, and likewise in the tributary valleys, warm semi-desert or steppe conditions prevail. Moderate temperatures combined with relatively ample rainfall are found in the middle stretches of the valleys; at Fayzābād, the chief town of Afghan BadaĶšān, average temperatures are 0.1° in January and 26.4° in July and annual rainfall is 521 mm. Between the warm steppe of the valley bottoms and the cold desert of the high ground, there is a belt of natural forest, consisting mainly of junipers (*Juniperus seravschanica*, *Juniperus polycarpus*); its breadth in the west is around 1,000 m, and its floor is 1,500 m in the Kokča valley and progressively higher to the east; in the upper Wākān valley and the Pamir it disappears on account of the aridity. The primitive forest, however, has almost everywhere been cut down. In this environment, agricultural activity is concentrated in the valleys where glacier-fed streams provide means of irrigation, while pastoral activity can be pursued on high ground in the Pamir up to 3,000-3,500m.

Population groups and lifestyles. As a highland region, generally remote from centers of urban civilization and only traversed by the very arduous Oxus valley route of the trans-Asiatic “silk road,” BadaĶšān has served as a refuge for peoples of ancient stock who still live there side by side with descendants of peoples who have arrived more recently. Seen as a whole, it is a veritable ethno-linguistic museum.

1. The highland peasants. The great majority of the population consists of Persian-speaking Tajiks, who predominate in the Kokča basin, the Darvāz (or Nesay) area on the Afghan side of the northward bend of the Oxus, and in general throughout Afghan BadaĶšān. Also present are remnants of more ancient peoples known to the Russians as “Mountain (Gornye) Tajiks” or “Pamir (Pamirskie or Pripamirskie) Tajiks” and to their Tajik neighbors as “ĠaĶča.” They speak East Iranian languages and are split into several groups: The Šoġnī people in the Gunt basin and at Khorog (Khoruk), the Rūšānī people



in the Rūšān district adjoining the Oxus, and the Bārtang people in the Bārtang valley speak closely interrelated dialects and together constitute the largest group, perhaps three quarters of the total of the Ġaļčas, in the Soviet territory. The Wākī people of the Wākān valley amount to about one-fifth of the total, roughly half of them being domiciled in Afghanistan. The Yāzġolāmī people, numbering a few thousand, live in thirteen villages in the valley of the same name north of Rūšān in the Soviet territory. The Eškāšemī people, who together with the related Zēbākī and Sanglēčī groups also number a few thousand, live for the most part in Afghanistan near the Oxus bend at the entrance to the Wākān corridor. The Wāņčī people, who live in the Wāņč valley in the far north of the Soviet territory, ceased to speak their own language about a century ago and are now assimilated to their Tajik neighbors, the Monjī people live in the Monjān (upper Kokča) valley in Afghanistan.

The separateness of the Pamir peoples as regards language is coupled with religious nonconformity. Most of them remain faithful to Isma'īlite Shi'ism, to which their ancestors were converted by the great Isma'īlite poet Nāšer(-e) Ķosrow (1004-72), and to the Nezārī sect; but the Wāņčī and Yāzġolāmī peoples reverted to Sunnism at the end of the nineteenth century and are now rapidly fusing with the Tajiks. A small minority of the Bārtang is also Sunnite. None of the Pamir languages is fixed in writing. An attempt by the Soviet authorities to make Šoġnī a literary language failed to gain acceptance. The language of civilization is Tajik, i.e., Persian (written in Cyrillic script in the Soviet territory). Among the Pamir languages, Wākī seems the most resistant.

No real differences exist between the Pamir Tajiks (Ġaļča) and the Tajiks proper in fields such as life-style, material culture, and social organization (Kusmaul, pp. 97-99). Basically they are all sedentary peasants, dependent for their livelihood on irrigated and usually terraced fields in the valley bottoms. Arboriculture (nuts, apples, mulberries, etc.) is one of their main activities. They also practice rain-fed cultivation on suitable slopes and breed flocks which they take to nearby mountain pastures on short-distance migrations.

2. The immigrant groups. Side by side with this long-established peasantry live the descendants of successive immigrant groups. From the sixteenth century onward, bands of Özbeks moved across the Oxus and established themselves in low-lying areas of the present Afghan BadaĶšān (the western and northwestern sectors adjoining Qaṭaġān and the Oxus plain). Ġelzay Paštūns have come to the same areas in small numbers since the start of the



nineteenth century. The Özbeks and the Paštūns appear to be still mostly nomadic or semi-nomadic, migrating over much longer distances than do the Tajiks. The summer pastures in the basin of Lake Šēva (altitude 3,400 m) attract nomads and semi-nomads from far afield, apparently quite often from regions south of the Hindu Kush.

The high plateaus of the Pamir, which until the seventeenth century were uninhabited and only penetrated by hunting parties, have since then been occupied, at first seasonally, later permanently, by Kirghiz shepherds belonging to a Turkic people with a long tradition of nomadism. Today those living in the Soviet territory are more or less settled as workers in large pastoral establishments, within whose boundaries regular transhumance is still practiced; those living in Afghanistan are still pure nomads with widely separate seasonal abodes. The latter, who had found refuge in Afghanistan from the Russian revolution, were somewhat over 3,000 strong before most of them moved to Pakistan after the installation of the communist regime at Kabul in 1979, now also to Turkey. All the Kirghiz are Hanafite Sunnis.

3. Population. According to the first returns of the Afghan census of 1979, the province of BadaĶšān had 497,758 inhabitants. It is very difficult to appraise the exact proportions of the different ethnic groups in this total. The population of the Autonomous Region of Gorno-Badakhshan at that time was 127,000 including 115,000 Tajiks and Pamir Tajiks (not distinguished since the census of 1959), 8,500 Kirghiz, and 1,780 Russians. Since 38,000 Pamir Tajiks and 42,000 persons able to speak the various Pamir languages were recorded in the census of 1939, their present number may be reckoned at anything between 60,000 and 100,000 (see also badaĶšān ii, below).

4. Modern economy. This mountainous country has not yet been opened to modern economic development of any importance. In Afghan BadaĶšān the motorable road goes no further than Fayzābād. In the Soviet territory an "East Pamir highway" (Vostochnopamirskiĭ trakt) from Khorog via Morġāb and Karaart to Osh in Farġāna has been constructed for strategic reasons; it is joined at Tuzkul' by a frontier road which ascends the Oxus valley above Khorog and then runs along the Pamir river. Nevertheless the economy of Soviet Badakhshan remains purely agricultural and pastoral, aside from some small food-processing and building material industries at Khorog. The only outward-oriented economic activity worthy of note in Afghan BadaĶšān is the working of the lapis lazuli mines. BadaĶšān is the sole supplier of this semiprecious stone to world markets. (Lapis lazuli is known to have been used



in ancient Mesopotamia as early as the third millennium B.C. and to have been exported as far as Mauritania; its importance in the middle ages is attested by Marco Polo.) The deposits lie in a synclinal trough of marble embedded in gneiss at an altitude of 2,500-2,600 m on the left side of the Kokča valley, above the village of Sar-e Sang 70 km from Jorm. The annual output, produced by some thirty miners, was on the order of two to four tons, and the price in 1971 was 265 U.S. dollars per kg. Only two settlements in BadaĶšān deserve to be ranked as towns: Fayzābād in the Afghan territory and Khorog in the Soviet territory.

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