



## BAĠLĀN III. MODERN TOWN

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### iii. Modern Town

Baġlān is a district and town of Afghanistan, in the upper valley of the Sorġāb (Qondūz) river on the northern slope of the Hindu Kush range. At the end of the nineteenth century, the district had a population estimated at 1,000 Paštūn and Tajik families with its own governor (*ḥākem*), who resided at the village of Qešlāq-e Qāzī (a little to the north of the present industrial town), but was subordinate to the governor of the adjacent (southward) district of Ġōrī. Some time in the first third of the nineteenth century, the administrative headquarters had been moved to another site five km to the north, i.e., the old town (Šahr-e Kohna), where a twice-weekly bazaar had long been held.

Urban growth in the district began in the 1930s when the opening of the motorable road from Kabul to Qondūz over the Šebar pass made the Sorġāb valley an important line of communication. Three main urban nuclei, each bearing the name Baġlān, came successively into being. (1) Old Baġlān, mentioned above, had a still mainly rural appearance and a bazaar which, in the early 1970s, comprised some seventy shops and teahouses (*čāy-kānas*) but only became really busy in the autumn when villagers from the surrounding plain came to sell their cotton. (2) New Baġlān (Šahr-e Jadīd), about four km to the south, was founded in 1937 as a new chief town for the province of Qaṭaġan and became the headquarters of the province of Baġlān under the territorial reorganization of 1964. Thanks to this administrative role, the town grew rapidly. In 1973 its bazaar comprised some six hundred shops, for the most part only open on market days (Mondays and Fridays). The shopkeepers



consist of a Tajik group, mainly from the Parvān district, of an immigrant Paštūn element from Qandahār and the Nangrahār district, and of some others from Mazār-e Šarīf and Tašqorġān. The town is split into two parts by the main road; the original nucleus with the grain and fruit markets lies in the western part, but the craftsmen's shops and the restaurants and *čāy-kānas*, frequented mainly on market days, are all in the eastern part. The town was spaciouly laid out and has kept a verdant appearance. It possesses some superior institutional buildings (secondary schools and a hospital) and comfortable residential sections. (3) The Industrial town (Baġlān-e Šaṇ'atī), eight km to the south, took shape around the sugar refinery built in 1938-40 by the Škoda company of Czechoslovakia. The refinery was owned by a private firm, though eighty-five percent of the capital belonged to the National Bank of Afghanistan. With a capacity to treat 60,000 tons of beet and produce 7,000-8,000 tons of sugar per annum, the refinery employed 140 permanent staff and 1,000-1,200 seasonal workers. In addition, a modern silk factory was established in the town in 1951. The sugar company owned roughly one sixth of the 340 shops in the bazaar and a large proportion of the dwellings, which it built to house its employees. The houses were more modern than those of the other agglomeration and had the benefits of water and electricity, which the company supplied to them as well as providing a special hospital and schools. The town is also the seat of the provincial Agriculture Department, whose installations and staff houses are located here. The fact that some of the bazaar shops were being used as dwellings indicates that the bazaar had been made too large and that the main commercial activities were still centered in the administrative town.

It may be asked whether the three agglomerations, which had a total population of 39,228 according to the preliminary report of the 1979 census, really form one town. The answer is certainly affirmative in the case of Old Baġlān and New Baġlān, as the old settlement depends on the new town for all modern-type services. The industrial town, however, seems on the whole to be an independent entity, and in fact has a separate municipal administration. At the same time the brisk traffic of two-wheeled cabs (*gādīs*) and motor vehicles on the road to the new town shows that contact between the two centers is very close.



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The Baġlān sugar refinery was the subject of several articles in the Kabul periodical *Eqteṣād* in 1318 Š./1939 and thereafter, particularly in a special issue, no. 225 of 1319 Š./1940.