



BĀMIĀN III. MODERN TOWN AND DISTRICT

iii. Modern Town and District

Bāmiān was destroyed by Jengiz Khan's troops and did not recover quickly. The place was still desolate forty years later when Jovaynī wrote his history. Nevertheless the importance of its geographical position ensured that it would be repopulated. From the Timurid period onward a town reappeared, and Bābor several times mentions it as an interesting place and the headquarters of a district; but the general decline of the transcontinental caravan trade prevented it from growing again to the size of the pre-Mongol city. The first foreign travelers who passed through Bāmiān (Moorcroft, 1823; Masson, Burnes, and Mohan Lal, 1832; Wood, 1837) describe it as a small town (Mohan Lal, p. 89: a village) enclosed within a wall and divided into several quarters, with two-story but low-built houses, lying in the bottom of the valley opposite the cliff of the Buddhas. The pre-Mongol dwelling sites on the top of cliff had not been reoccupied. The alluvial bottomlands were well tilled and dotted with fortified houses. There was also a considerable number of dwellers in caves dug out of the cliffs. While the revenue from the district was not large, taxes on goods in transit yielded 70,000 rupees annually. Trade was active, and the place depended on it. Then and later, Bāmiān appears to have been a stronghold of the Afghan monarchy in the central mountains. The district, however, was still claimed by the Uzbek amirs of the north, who continued to levy tribute, payable mainly in the form of slaves, on the Hazāra tribes of the



mountains (Wood, pp. 200-01, 206) and sometimes raided as far as Bāmīān. The town was raided by Morād Beg, the amir of Kondoz, in 1836 (C. T. Vigne, *A Personal Narrative of a Visit to Ghuzni, Kabul and Afghanistan*, London, 1843, p. 329) but in 1841 Morād Beg's domain only extended to the Āq Rebāṭ pass (Wood, p. 205). The Afghan grip evidently gave rise to the present ethnic and sectarian make-up of the town, which stands as a Sunnite Tajik and Pashtun island in the midst of mountains inhabited by Isma'ili and Twelver Shi'ite Hazāras. This ethnic transformation was already complete in the early 19th century (Mohan Lal, p. 89); there are no grounds for holding that Bāmīān was still Shi'ite at that time (as stated by Canfield, p. 98, who misunderstood the facts reported by Wood, p. 206). The submission of the Hazāras at the end of the 19th century confirmed this situation.

Since then, Bāmīān's principal role has been that of a regional center. This has clearly been the case since the town was raised to the rank of headquarters of a province in the administrative reorganization of 1964, which exactly coincided with the opening of the Sālang tunnel and road and the consequent ending of Bāmīān's activities in trans-Hindu Kush commerce. On the other hand, agriculture in the Bāmīān valley became strongly commercialized and outward-looking, and was distinctly more advanced than in the neighboring mountains. Wheat, eggs, potatoes, dried yogurt (*qorūt*), and also poplar wood were supplied to the Kabul market. The town had a busy *bāzār* of 300-400 shops and a much frequented twice-weekly market (on Mondays and Thursdays). Built along the line of the main street, Bāmīān was growing rapidly but suffering from the lack of a town plan. The preliminary returns of the 1979 census recorded 7,355 inhabitants in the town and 268,517 in the province, which comprises the whole western part of the Hazārajāt including the Yakāōlang basin, the upper valley of the Kondoz river, the Kūh-e Bābā, and the upper Helmand valley.

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