



ČAĠČARĀN

ČAĠČARĀN, principal town and administrative capital of the province of Ġōr, in the mountains of central Afghanistan. Until the mid-14th/20th century the spellings Čaqčarān and Čakčarān were also current, but Čaġčarān is the prevailing usage today. The name has been attested since the 10th/16th century (Beveridge, p. 308). It originally designated an entire section of the upper Harīrūd basin. At the end of the 13th/19th century the district (*ḥokūmat*) of Čaġčarān extended from Dawlatyār, about 60 km upstream from the present town, to Āhangarān, about 20 km downstream.

The town of Čaġčarān itself has existed only since the provincial reorganization of 1343 Š./1964, in which the province of Ġōr was carved out of that of Herat. It is a typical administrative creation, an entirely new town constructed to replace Taywarā, which is too difficult to reach and too remote to serve as capital of the new province.

The site chosen is an alluvial terrace located on the left bank of the Harīrūd at an elevation of 2,250 m, 6-8 m above the confluence of the Harīrūd and the Rūd-e Kānsī. Originally there was nothing there but a caravansary (*rebāṭ-e serājīya*) built at the beginning of the 14th/20th century to serve as a staging point on the direct road from Kabul to Herat (see, e.g., Trinkler, pp. 74ff.). After the reorganization of the provinces an administrative complex was constructed on the site, along with a large *bāzār* (ca. 200 shops in 1971). As the center of provincial administration Čaġčarān attracted other institutions designed to serve the entire province: a small hotel, a boarding school, and a hospital the capacity of which was raised from ten to twenty beds in 1356



Š./1977.

Opposite the new town, on the right bank of the Harīrūd, stands the old Firūzkūhī village of Kāsī, which consisted of no more than eighty families in 1885 (Maitland, 1891, p. 122) and 120 in 1904 (*Gazetteer*, p. 257, s.v. Kausi). Until 1343 Š./1964 it was the residence of the deputy governor of the district of Čaġčarān, though accessible from the left bank only by a ford; today there is a bridge, and Kāsī has become largely a residential quarter, though retaining a small agricultural activity.

The functioning of Čaġčarān as center is somewhat hampered by its location in the middle of high mountains that can be crossed only with difficulty. The main access road is the direct route between Kabul and Herat, known in Afghanistan as the “central route.” Čaġčarān is located almost exactly at the halfway point on this road (492 km from Herat via Šīndand and 477 km from Kabul via Behsūd, but 575 km via Bāmīān). It is a difficult and dangerous track, however, impassable for months each year and at all times negotiable only by trucks and small field vehicles with four-wheel drive. For that reason there is no long-distance bus or taxi service to Čaġčarān. Even aerial communications are not reliable. The small airport, which was opened in 1346 Š./1967 on the right bank of the Harīrūd, is in operation only eight months of the year, and even then there are flights to Kabul or Herat only twice a week. Traffic is very light: Between 1357 Š./1978-79 and 1362 Š./1983-84 the number of air travelers dropped from 6,192 to 2,142, though cargo shipments increased from 7.2 to 28.4 tons.

These travel difficulties explain why activity in Čaġčarān has a marked seasonal character. The city comes alive only in summer, from May to September. At that time it is frequented simultaneously by the local *Aymāq* population and by a sizable number of nomads, mainly Pashtun, who summer in the region (more than 4,500 families within the district limits of Čaġčarān in 1357 Š./1978). A number of shops in the *bāzār* are operated by outside businessmen, especially from Kabul and Herat, who come only in the summer. In addition, because of the influx of nomadic herders in this season Čaġčarān is one of the country’s largest livestock markets: In the 1350s Š./1970s it attracted buyers from as far as Kabul. This summer commercial activity has in general greatly benefited from the recent disappearance of nomad *bāzārs* from the region (see *bāzār*).

In the census of 1358 Š./1979, which was carried out in the summer, the



population of the town was only 2,974; it is thus one of the smallest provincial capitals in Afghanistan. The district (*woloswālī*) includes 89,303 people (exclusive of nomads) in an area of 11,803 km², for a density of 8/km². In 1885, within boundaries that were narrower than the present ones, there are supposed to have been 2,650 families (Maitland, 1888, p. 604).

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