



DARRA-YE ŞŪF

DARRA-YEŞŪF, name of a valley in northern Afghanistan, drained by a tributary of the right bank of the **Balkāb**, and of the adjoining mountain district and its administrative center in Samangān province. The direct caravan route from **Bāmīān** to Mazār-e Šarīf passed through the valley, which has sometimes been erroneously transcribed (e.g., in most Afghan Boundary Commission reports) as Darra Yūsūf/Yūsof.

The Şūf river rises on Kōh-e Bandak in the westernmost Hindu Kush, at 3,600 m above sea level, flows 142 km, and joins the Balkāb at an altitude of 642 m, thus having an average slope of 2.08 m/100 m (Ministry, 1978, p. 16). It alternately flows through uninhabited narrow gorges and widens in small intramontane basins, where its waters are used intensively for irrigation (56 percent of the total flow, according to Garbovskii, p. 100). The river is known under a variety of names along its course: successively Darra-ye Bēd, Darra-ye Dāy Mirdād (or Walīšān), Darra-ye Şūf (properly only the middle tract, between Tang-e Ḥasanī and the Kešenda basin), and Āb-e Kešenda (*Gazetteer of Afghanistan* IV, pp. 184-85). It is fed by both rainfall and snowmelt from the mountains. At Kešenda-ye Pāyān, 7 km above the junction with the Balkāb, the crest occurs in April and May (2.21 and 2.40 m³/sec respectively, with a record of 66.8 m³/sec recorded on 19 April 1976), and low water in July and August (0.15 and 0.40 m³/sec respectively, being entirely dry an average of fifty-three days a year). The mean annual discharge is 1.49 m³/sec (record: 1358-67 Š./1969-78).

The district (*woloswālī*) of Darra-ye Şūf covers 3,432 km², broadly



encompassing the drainage area of the river, except for the lower section, which falls within the Kešenda district of Balk province. According to preliminary returns of the [census](#) of 1368 Š./1979, the sedentary population of Darra-ye Şūf was 82,535. The average density of 24 inhabitants/km² was the highest in Samangān province. The population is mainly Hazāra (53 percent, concentrated in the southern and central parts of the district), and there are substantial minorities of Uzbeks (9 percent), Aymāq (9 percent), and Persianized Turkmen (25 percent) in the north, as well as smaller communities of Baluch, Arabs, and Pashtun (*Gazetteer of Afghanistan* IV, pp. 181 ff.). The district, with its numerous caves, some of them still inhabited (Griesbach, pp. 204-05; repr. in *Gazetteer of Afghanistan* IV, p. 186), and ruins (e.g., the “ruined city” of Šahr-e Čangīz in lower Wališān; Amīr Khān, pp. 163-64; *Gazetteer of Afghanistan* IV, p. 552, s.v. Tah-i-Shahr), offers promise of archeological discoveries.

The district center is more precisely known as Qal’a-ye Sarkārī-e Darra-ye Şūf, commonly abridged as Qal’a on modern topographical maps. In 1886 it consisted of only twenty peasant families clustered around a large mud fort containing the governor’s residence and quarters for 100 Hazāra soldiers (Maitland, p. 470; repr. in *Gazetteer of Afghanistan* IV, p. 188; Amīr Khan, p. 161; Sahibdād Khān, p. 142). The population has not increased much since that time; with only 800 inhabitants in 1352 Š./1973, it still can hardly be considered a town (Centlivres, table facing p. 132). Its economic importance was greatly enhanced, however, with the beginning of exploitation of Jurassic coal deposits in the district, the largest reserves in Afghanistan, amounting to 102 million tons (82 percent of national reserves so far recorded; Chmyrov and Muzyka, p. 107). Mining operations began only in 1339 Š./1960 at Dahān-e Tōr, 25 km south of Qal’a-ye Sarkārī, though coal had been discovered there in 1886 (Griesbach, p. 207; Dupree, p. 26). The mine is, however, still too isolated to contribute more than 10 percent, usually less, of the small national output (Grötzbach, pp. 124, 309). As a result of the opening of the mine, the Ministry of the interior elevated Qal’a-ye Sarkārī to the status of a municipality. Its *bāzār* also boomed, expanding to 297 permanent shops in 1352 Š./1973, with at least 40 additional shops on market days, formerly Thursdays but now Mondays and Fridays, the latter having been chosen to coincide with the weekly closing of the mine (Centlivres, pp. 133-37; *Gazetteer of Afghanistan* IV, p. 180; Dupree, pp. 21-22). In the 1970s a new town (Darra-ye Şūf-e Naw) was being built 6 km north of Qal’a-ye Sarkārī (Grötzbach, p. 309).



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(DANIEL BALLAND)