



DARVĀZ

DARVĀZ, until partition between czarist Russia and the Afghan kingdom in the last quarter of the 19th century a largely autonomous principality with territory on both sides of the upper course of the *Āmū Daryā*, known as the Panj. Today the portion of the former territory of Darvāz that lies north of the river has been incorporated into Tajikistan, whereas the former southern portion has been designated a district within the Afghan province of *Badakṣān*.

Before partition Darvāz was bordered on the south by *Badakṣān*, on the east by the semiautonomous states of *Šeġnān* and *Rōšān*, which were generally subject to *Badakṣān*; and on the north and west by the nearly impassable Darvāz chain, a western extension of the Pamirs (see *CENTRAL ASIA i*; *Figure 3*), which separated it from the khanate of *Bukhara*. This area is characterized by steep, narrow gorges and small sheltered hollows where fruit trees are grown. The larger valleys are also narrow, with steeply sloping sides. The amount of land available for cultivation is inadequate, and farmers must struggle in order to subsist (Holzwarth, p. 180). The population consists primarily of Tajiks, who adhere to the Sunnite branch of Islam, though in a few areas (e.g., the Wanj valley) the inhabitants are Ismaʿīli Shiʿites. The language spoken is Persian.

The history of the region has been determined by its geographically central but politically peripheral position: On one hand, Darvāz has been the target of repeated incursions by foreign empire builders, but, on the other, its relative isolation, lack of mineral resources, and low agrarian yields have contributed



to its continued marginal importance. The combination of these factors has ensured that throughout history foreign conquerors would be able to control the region only for short periods and that power would inevitably revert to native dynasties. This generally unbroken autonomy was apparent very early in the refusal of the local rulers to accept Alexander the Great as their overlord (Moḥammad-Nāder Khan, ed. Kūškeki, pp. 354-68). At the beginning of the 16th century Darvāz was caught up in the fierce struggle between the Uzbeks and the Timurids for control of Central Asia. Sovereignty over the region, as well as over the neighboring region of Badaḳšān, changed hands several times before the final victory of the Uzbeks in 913/1507 (Grevemeyer, pp. 28 ff.; Akhmedov, pp. 61, 73, 108-09). Nevertheless, it seems that such external control was only nominal and that the northern part of Darvāz remained completely independent (Kislyakov, pp. 88-89).

Around the middle of the 17th century the Uzbeks were driven out, and an independent dynasty, with the title *shah-e Darvāz*, was established, at the same time that the indigenous Yarid rulers took control of Badaḳšān, in 1067/1657; thereafter the rulers of Badaḳšān, with their capital in Fayzābād, were the primary rivals of the Darvāz shahs. Several times hostilities broke out between Darvāz and Badaḳšān over the region of Rāḡ, which lay between them (Grevemeyer, pp. 122-23), and Darvāz also laid claim to Šeḡnān (Semenov, pp. 6-7). The main cities of Darvāz were Ḳam and, farther north, the capital, Kalai Khumb (Qal'a-ye Ḳomb), both on the banks of the Panj. The power of the rulers of Darvāz was based on a kind of patronage system organized within a framework of kinship and client relations. The ruler's privileged followers were entitled to shares in the booty captured in successful raids and in revenues from the land and its population, as well as to exemption from taxes (Holzwarth, pp. 205-06). It was typical of the social milieu during these traditional periods that there was no institutionalized economic structure; nevertheless, the existence of large extended families did lead to an internal division of labor (Holzwarth, pp. 184-85). At the time of the conquest by czarist Russia in 1290/1873 Darvāz was annexed to the Russian vassal state of Bukhara. A number of subsequent boundary agreements among Russia, British India, and Afghanistan delineated zones of influence, which ultimately led to the partition of Darvāz in 1310/1893 and again in 1313/1895 (see [BOUNDARIES iii](#)). The portion of the region that lay south of the Panj was annexed to Afghanistan in compensation for the loss of Šeḡnān and Rōšān to Russia and its vassal Bukhara.



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Figure 3. Map of Badaḳšān in the mid-19th century, showing boundaries of Darvāz. After Grevemeyer, 1982, p.