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FARĀH

FARĀH (Farah in early Islamic sources), a town and province in southwestern Afghanistan.

City. The city is located at 730 m above sea-level on both banks of the Farāhrūd river (q.v.). The old town, now in ruins, stood on the right bank at a strategic point commanding the northern entrance into Sīstān, and used to be a major stage and tollhouse mid-way on the caravan road from Qandahār to Herat (Hamilton, pp. 181, 290). The modern town, built on the opposite (eastern) bank, is now the center of all activities and population.

Farāh has retained practically the same name since the first millennium B.C.E. Phrada, the Achaemenid capital of Drangiana (q.v.) satrapy (Jacobs, p. 234), was conquered by Alexander, who renamed it Prophthasia (Markwart, p. 22). At the end of the first century B.C.E, the "very great city" of Phra in Aria was reckoned as a major stage on the overland route between the Levant and India (Isidore of Charax, pp. 9, 32). The identification of Phrada-Prophthasia-Phra with Farāh, exemplifying a remarkable toponymic continuity, has been convincingly proven by Daffinà (p. 91), although their precise sites may have differed slightly from the present one (Ferrier, p. 392). Later F(a)rāh was an important stronghold on the eastern frontier of the Sasanian empire (Markwart, *Provincial Capitals*, p. 17, 88-89), possibly rebuilt by Pērōz (457-84) since the province was once named *Frāxkar-Pērōz* (Gyselen, pp. 48, 86). It was still prosperous in early Islamic times. It was described at the end of the 10th century as a great town, commanding a rural district of some sixty villages, with mixed population of Sunni Muslims (*ahl al-jamāʿa*), Kharijites, and

Christians (Eṣṭaḵrī, p. 247, tr. p. 261; Ebn Ḥawqal, p. 420, tr. Kramers, p. 408; Moqaddasī, p. 306). Under the name of Aprah, it was a Nestorian see from the 8th to 12th century C.E. (Fiey, pp. 101-2). The Mongol invasions, which devastated Sīstān (13-14th centuries), opened a long period of crisis and decline in the city life. The city's strategic location made the area a bone of contention between the Uzbeks, the Timurids, and the Safavids (sacked by the Uzbeks in 957/1550; Szuppe, p. 112), then between the Safavids and the Mughals, Persians and Afghans, and finally, in the 19th century, between the rival Afghan rulers of Herat and Qandahār (Champagne, pp. 315-16). The city was repeatedly "taken, retaken, and pillaged," resulting in its ruin (Ferrier, pp. 394, 396).

By the early 19th century Farāh was reported to be "a large walled town,. . . as large as Nishapore," with a "good bazar" (Fraser, App. p. 29). However, the first travelers to enter it actually found a still imposing but ruined city. In 1248/1832, one of its three gates was blocked up by mud and its houses were "very poor and dirty. The people looked harassed, and were vagabonds. Great part of the town was in ruins, and abounded with large tanks of dirty water"; it remained nevertheless an important center for exporting wheat and saltpeter (used for manufacturing gunpowder) to Herat "and other places" (Mohan Lal, pp. 290-91; Conolly, p. 325). Its capture by the Persians in 1253/1837-38 resulted in the flight of most of its six thousand (?) inhabitants (Ferrier, p. 394), after which the city was laid waste, containing only "twenty houses with domed roofs built of mud," and "no Hindoos, no shops" (Conolly, p. 326). In 1261/1845 there were no "more than sixty houses in the interior of the place, which would easily contain four thousand five hundred" and "the bazaars that cross the town from one gate to the other [might only] be traced by the foundations of the shops" (Ferrier, pp. 394 f.).

After several successive sieges, Farāh was conquered by Dōst Moḥammad Khan (q.v.) and definitely annexed to the Afghan kingdom on 8 Moḥarram 1279/6 July 1862 (Champagne, p. 441). During the following decades the city hardly recovered. In 1289/1872 it was reported to be the third of Herat in size but possessing no more than "twenty huts, and those all in ruins"; the governor himself lived in a "wretched abode," and his guest-house was "a miserable hut, in the midst of heaps of ruins…, not fit to keep dogs in" (Marsh, pp. 157-58). In 1301/1884 it merely contained the quarters of a strong garrison, the residence of the governor, and a few shops, with a small Persian-speaking population of Tajiks, who tilled fields *intra muros* (Peacocke, p. 39; Imam

Sharif, p. 214; Amir Khan and Shahzada Taimus, p. 131). In 1325/1907 it was still "in a miserable condition," although the number of houses was reported to have increased to one thousand (probably too high a figure) and that of shops to twenty-eight; the soldiers, who had been garrisoned there for thirty-five years, had married and settled down, thus playing a major role in the increase of the population (Iftikhar-ud-Din, p. 31). By 1304 Š./1925, the situation had not improved much and the *bāzār* still possessed no more than 20-30 shops (Vavilov and Bukinich, p. 530).

The following decade was a major turning point in the evolution of the city, which became a municipality (*šarwālī*) in 1312 Š./1933 (Habib, p. 465) and where a new town was being erected on the left bank of the river. The latter is said to have included 6,000 inhabitants as early as 1313 Š./1934 (Ziemke, p. 185), out of a total population of 8,000 (Ahmad and Abdul Aziz, p. 39). These figures, however, seem to be grossly inflated since a few years later an eye-witness described Farāh as a "dreary little town of low mud rooms with domed roofs" (Fox, p. 133). The path of demographic growth, therefore, remains unascertainable, although the population culminated at 18,800 during the census of 1358 Š./1979, all inhabitants then living in the modern open town (*šahr-e now*), while the old fortified city (*šahr-e kohna*) was only an imposing ghost town (Caspani and Cagnacci, fig. 248).

Besides its modern administrative functions as provincial headquarters (see below), which were temporarily lost between 1972 and 1974, and the usual associated medical and educational infrastructures, the major activity of Farāh is trade. Its *bāzār* has expanded to include 550-600 shops, one of the biggest between Herat and Qandahār, but it has been steadily declining since the 1970s; in 1352Š./1973, one in every four shops was described as closed or empty (Grötzbach, p. 134) due to the severe drought of 1970-71 and a major shift in the overall situation of the city, now lying 70 km southwest off the paved road built in the 1960s between Herat and Qandahār. All transits between these two towns now bypass Farāh, which, however, controls the main motor road to Afghan Sīstān. The city has thus lost its most traditional role as a stage on one of the main trans-Asian commercial routes and has entered a new phase of decline, due to purely economical rather than political reasons.

Modern province. Farāh is a province (*welāyat*) of southwestern Afghanistan named after its major town. In the 19th-early 20th centuries the area was generally incorporated into the Herat province, sometimes into the Kabul

province, e.g., under ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān Khan (1297-319/1881-1901). It gained an administrative individuality in 1300 Š./1921, when it became a "high governorate" (*ḥokūmat-e aʿlā*, a kind of second rank-province), which included the whole Afghan Sīstān. It finally became a full province after the territorial reform of 1344 Š./1965, but without Afghan Sīstān, which was then carved out as the province of Nīmrōz (Grevemeyer, p. 387). Since the recent loss of the Šendand district (*woloswālī*) and Fārsī subdistrict (*ʿalāqa-dārī*), which were transferred back to Herat province, and the adjunction of the Lāš-o-Jowayn *woloswālī* (northern Sīstān), previously attached to Nīmrōz province, the province of Farāh covers 47,778 km2 and is divided into seven districts and one sub subdistrict. The only locality with urban status is the center of the province, Farāh.

During the 1980s the province suffered a massive depopulation, mainly through emigration to neighboring Persia (see DIASPORA x). In 1990 the resident population was estimated at only 129,000, a loss of 45% from pre-war level, and the refugee population originating from the province at 249,000 (UNOCA, p. 117; for population and land use in the province before the war according to present limits, see Tables 1-2).

Table 1

Table 2

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