



# GARDĪZ I. GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY

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## i. GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY

Gardīz is the capital of the province of Paktiā and serves as the summer residence of the provincial governor, who resides in Kōst during the winter. This practice of alternating headquarters is one of the last vestiges in Afghanistan of the once common seasonal migration of administrative authorities, directly moulded on nomadic traditions.

The city is situated at 2,300 m above sea-level, in a large intramountainous depression watered by the upper course of the Rūd-e Gardīz, which ends in the Āb-e Īstāda lake (q.v.). It commands the junction between two roads, the old but difficult and tortuous one linking India to Ġaznī via the Korram valley and Paywār pass and another one linking Kabul to Kōst via the Lōgar valley and Altamūr pass (2,694 m). The surface of the depression is broken by several hills which constitute natural fortified positions as the ones on which the town was initially located and on which still stands an important military fortress (Bālā Heṣār). At its foot spreads the old town, divided into four quarters (Bāzār-e Kohna, Qarya-ye Āhangarān, Qarya-ye Arjalḳēl, Nawābād), and the extensive geometrical new town with a *bāzār*, an administrative center, and residential quarters (Nāhez, p. 417; Wiebe, 1979, p. 211).

The population of the city was put at 9,550 inhabitants in the 1358 Š./1979



census. They were mainly Fārsīwān Tājīks, Gardīz belonging to a network of old isolated Tājīk settlements sparsely distributed in southeastern Afghanistan that are remnants of a time when Pashto had not yet reached the area. There was also a significant community of Hindu and Sikh shopkeepers who altogether ran 9% of the shops in the *bāzār*, mostly specializing in jewellery and cloth (Wiebe, 1982, p. 76).

During the 1970s, Gardīz experienced an economic boom as a result of the German-funded Paktiā Development Authority, established in 1344 Š./1965, and of the asphaltting of the road to Kabul. While the number of shops in the *bāzār* increased greatly from 117 in 1344 Š./1965 to more than 600 in 1356 Š./1977 (Wiebe, 1979, p. 213), a complex of small industries was burgeoning in the framework of a Handicraft Promotion Center that opened in 1350 Š./1971 (machinery repair, carpentry and concrete products). Social services included a sixty-bed hospital, four schools (three for boys with 1,950 students, and one for girls with 650 students in 1355 Š./1976), one teacher training institute (324 students), one *madrassa* (Madrassa-ye Rōšānī, 139 students), two hotels, forty mosques, two Hindu temples (*daramsāl*; Radojicic; Nāhež, p. 417). Not much must have remained of these as the province of Paktiā has lost almost all its population in the 1980s owing to the civil war.

The history of Gardīz is poorly documented, although it is undoubtedly an old settlement that has retained its name since its appearance in the sources. Various archeological remains have been discovered in its vicinity, including Indo-Greek, Hephthalite and Turki Shahi coins, and several Hindu marble statues dating back to the 1st-2nd/7th-8th centuries (Ball, no. 337). In this connection, the mention in the *Tārīk-e Sīstān* (p. 24) of the foundation of the city by the Kharijite rebel Ḥamza b. ‘Abd-Allāh (or Āḍarak/Atrak) Šārī (d. 213/828) probably emphasizes nothing more than the first implantation of Islam in the area. In any case, Gardīz became for one and a half centuries the center of a Kharijite petty principality under the local dynasty of the Aflahids, more or less connected with the Lawīks of Ġaznī. It suffered several attacks by anti-Kharijite military chiefs pursuing a personal career in this distant eastern corner of the ‘Abbasid empire. As early as 256/870, its ruler, Abū Maṣṣūr Aflaḥ b. Moḥammad Kāqān, surrendered to the first Saffarid ruler, Ya‘qūb b. Layṭ, and agreed to become his vassal (Gardīzī, ed. Ḥabībī, p. 139). One century later, in 364/974-75, Bilgetigin (q.v.), the Turkish slave governor of Ġaznī, was killed under the walls of the town he was besieging. Gardīz was soon incorporated into the Ghaznavid empire, probably during Sebūktigin’s rule,



while the converted Aflahids entered the Ghaznavid nobility (*Ḥodūd al-‘ālam*, ed. Sotūda, p. 71, tr. Minorsky, p. 91; Bivar; Bosworth, 1965, pp. 17 ff.) It is in this new context that Kharijism was eventually eradicated from the area. In 570/1162 Mo‘ezz-al-Dīn Moḥammad Ġūrī took Gardīz for the Ghurids (Bosworth, 1977, pp. 125, 145).

In the 10th/16th century Gardīz was the headquarter of a Mughal *tūmān* and renowned for its multi-storied houses (probably *qal‘a*; *Bābor-nāma*, tr. Beveridge, p. 220; *Āīn-e akbarī*, tr. Blochmann, II, p. 411). Nothing is known of the town during the subsequent centuries and no building remains.

Gardīz is also the administrative center of a district of the Paktiā province, which covers 650 km<sup>2</sup> and had a total population of 44,000 inhabitants in 1358 Š./1979. It was a rich agricultural district with a great deal of wheat and maize cultivation, but it was almost totally depopulated during the Russo-Afghan war.

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