



KANDAHAR V. IN THE 19TH CENTURY

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Timur Shah (r. 1772-93) transferred the Dorrāni capital from Kandahar to Kabul in 1774 (Wakili, 1967a, I, pp. 159, passim; cf. above, iv), but during the 19th century the former capital city retained its political gravity in the context of the Afghan polity and the British colonial designs for it. Tension between Dorrāni and Ghalzai (see [ĠILZĪ](#)) Pashtuns is a dynamic key of Afghan state politics, and Kandahar city and district have been primary arenas of this highly significant interaction. During the 1800s Dorrānis remained preponderant in and around Kandahar. For roughly the first quarter of the century, the city and its hinterland served as both staging ground for, and location of resistance to, a contested Sadduzai Dorrāni sovereignty that struggled to become anchored in Kabul. Moḥammadzai Bārakzais cultivated their connections to Kandahar as they assumed and consolidated authority in Kabul during the remainder of the century.

Kandahar was the base of Ghalzai resistance to Sadduzai rule at the beginning of the century, while the center of Ghalzai resistance to Bārakzai state authority moved to the eastern part of the country at the end of the century. By 1900 Kandahar and other cities in Afghanistan had been conspicuously



superseded by Kabul, where political and economic capital concentrated in increasingly exclusive ways under Amir ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān (r. 1880-1901), whose brutal rule was fueled by substantial external subsidization in the form of cash grants, military hardware gifts and sales, and industrial technology transfers from his British Indian patrons (Hanifi, 2008, chap. 4, *passim*).

Persian and Pashto sources about the city and province of Kandahar are far less numerous and voluminous than those in English (see below). The most important of the Persian texts is *Serāj al-tawāriḳ* of Mohammad Kāteb, volume three of which contains considerable commentary about Kandahar during ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān’s reign (Anṣāri, Wakili, 1967b, Ġobār, and Reštyā are other Persian sources containing additional information, however dispersed, about Kandahar in the 19th century). Similarly, there is no single Pashto text dedicated exclusively to 19th-century Kandahar. Using Pashto, one must distill information about the city and province during the 1800s from general historical treatments of Kandahar (Binawā, Hōtak, Rašād and Hōtak, Ruḥyāl) and broader thematic considerations of mosques (Zalmāi, 1996), poets (Šāḥebzāda), and Sufis, saints, and shrines. The two [Anglo-Afghan Wars](#) (1839-42 and 1878-80) generated substantial bodies of official records and private papers about Kandahar, and these English language sources are most thoroughly distilled in the *Gazetteer of Afghanistan* (Adamec, ed.). Of all colonial source materials the Kandahar newsletters (Great Britain, 1990) provide the most concentrated and sustained information about the city and province from 1883 through 1905.

The first colonial account of Kandahar comes from Mountstuart Elphinstone (II, pp. 129-34), who describes the city as having been laid out in 1753 or 1754 by Aḥmad Shah Abdāli/Dorrāni astride Hōtak, Šafavid, and Afsharid (Arne) urban antecedents. Elphinstone estimated the population to be broadly between 45,000 and 100,000 souls, among whom Afghans, particularly Dorrānis, preponderate. While making an important distinction between urban and rural Afghans, Elphinstone also clearly distinguished Afghans from the resident Arabs, Armenians, Baluchis, Fārsiwāns (e.g., Qezelbāš), Hindus, Jews, Persians, and Uzbeks. The second colonial estimate of the city’s population at 25,000-30,000 comes from Charles Masson (I, p. 280; Whitteridge), who resided in Kandahar during approximately the late summer and fall of 1828.

Together Elphinstone and Masson describe the city itself as planned along a rectangular design with six bastioned gates, as having an excellent supply of



water through numerous wells and canals from the [Argandāb](#) river, resulting in part in an abundance of high-quality local fruits, and as boasting four primary open-air bazaars converging on the covered *čārsuq* central marketplace, to the north of which was the *arg* citadel and palace. These authors leave readers with images of a lush and relatively populous city containing, and surrounded by, numerous orchards, gardens, mosques (especially that associated with Aḥmad Shah's tomb), and shrines (particularly the *Ḳerqa-ye Šarif Ziārat*, the shrine of the Prophet Moḥammad's cloak [*kerqa*] and hair); these were distributed around an active marketplace containing numerous caravanserais and a prominent community of resident Hindu merchants.

The October 1838 Simla Manifesto involving Shah Šojā' (q.v.), Ranjit Singh, and Lord George Eden Auckland was contrived in part to restore Šojā' to the Dorrāni emirate in Kabul and as such legitimized the November 1838 formation of the Army of the Indus at Feruzpur in the Punjab. After marching through Sind and [Baluchistan](#), it reached Kandahar in late April 1839. An approximately two-month re-supply period allowed the body of the Army of the Indus to attack [Ġazni](#) en route to Kabul, leaving a smaller occupation force behind in Kandahar. William Nott remained in command of colonial forces in and around Kandahar and Quetta for the duration of the British occupation. This lasted through the demise of the main force on retreat from Kabul in January 1842, the relief support that arrived in May under the command of Richard England, and the final evacuation of British forces from the city in August 1842 under the auspices of Fredrick Pollock's Army of Retribution that targeted Kabul.

Henry Rawlinson (Adkins; Rawlinson) was the political agent in Kandahar for most of the occupation period, and an important aspect of his position was to manage local inter-currency exchanges that were determined by local Hendki bankers and financiers and that at times frustrated his own troops to the point of insurrection (Hanifi, 2008, Chap. 3; National Archives of India). Malcolm Yapp (1963, 1964, and 1980) provides considerable additional information about British economic reforms and military reorganization in Kandahar and the importance of Persian activities in and near [Herat](#) on colonial strategizing about the city during the First Anglo-Afghan War.

The conclusion of the First Anglo-Afghan War in 1842 left Kandahar with limited attention from colonial officials until 1857, when Persian advances on Herat prompted the British to grant [Dōst Moḥammad Khan](#)—who was deposed



during the First Anglo-Afghan War and then restored to the Dorrāni emirate at the conflict's end—a subsidy of one lakh or 100,000 British rupees per month in order to repel the Qajar threat (see [HERAT vi. THE HERAT QUESTION](#)). To confirm that the subsidy was being spent on the defense of Herat as intended, the British sent a mission under the direction of Henry Burnett Lumsden to Dōst Moḥammad, but it was unexpectedly sequestered in Kandahar from 25 April 1857 to 15 May 1858 due to the Great Mutiny in India (Bellew; Lumsden).

From 1850 until the 1890s Henry George Raverty published extensively on the geography and history of areas where Pashto is a primary language (Raverty, 1860; idem, 1878). Raverty's career reveals important features of the production of British colonial knowledge about Pashto and Pashtuns (Hanifi, 2009), and his oeuvre contains considerable valuable, albeit dispersed, information that situates Kandahar in medieval Islamic and Mughal texts, describes the routes and passes leading to and from the city, and provides detailed attention to the local dialect of Pashto. Raverty's writings demonstrate continuing British intellectual engagement with Kandahar and Afghanistan after the First Anglo-Afghan War debacle. The ongoing exposure of the city to colonial influences after the war is further exemplified by new forms of global labor migrations that, from the 1860s until the early 20th century, brought camels and camel handlers from Kandahar (and Kabul, Peshawar, Baluchistan, and Sind, at least) to Australia. Their primary purposes was to help explore, settle, and construct railway and telegraph lines across the desolate outback (Schinasi; Stevens).

During the Second Anglo-Afghan War the British occupied Kandahar from 8 January 1879 to 21 April 1881 (Macgregor and Cardew, pp. 164, 630; Ashe). For the British in the context of this conflict, Kandahar is associated with their disastrous defeat at the Battle of Maiwand on 27 July 1880 and an astounding twenty-three day march (8-31 August) over more than 300 miles from Kabul in relief of the besieged remnants of occupation forces in Kandahar by (later Lord) Fredrick Sleigh Roberts (MacGregor and Cardew, p. 526; Hannah; Jerrold; Robertson). Fortunately, a large number of government and private publications about the Second Anglo-Afghan War generally, Kandahar more specifically, and Maiwand and Roberts' relief march in particular are available (Brooke; Great Britain, 1880 and 1881; Green; Lewes; Martin; Punjab Government; Ripon; Shelby; Temple; see also Ewing for additional bibliographical resources).

The Second Anglo-Afghan War resulted in the British appointment of 'Abd-al-



Raḥmān to the Kabul emirate, and under his reign Afghanistan assumed its modern impoverished position on the margins of global capitalism (Hanifi, 2004). The Kandahar newsletters are an important element in the British colonial archive, and Fayz Moḥammad Kāteb's *Serāj al-tawāriḳ* is the key Dorrāni state-produced document pertaining to the city and district. Together these sources provide the most information about Kandahar during 'Abd-al-Raḥmān's reign. The latter source devotes considerable attention to the commercial activities of the Hindu community in the city and the political and military activities of the Shi'ite Qezilbāš and Hazāra communities in the city and larger district. *Serāj al-tawāriḳ* also conveys information about the recurring presence of cholera and 'Abd-al-Raḥmān's ongoing targeted fiscal audits of local and central government officials in the city. The Kandahar newsletters are exclusively devoted to the city and as such contain much more information that confirms and expands upon issues addressed by *Serāj al-tawāriḳ*, while also providing a great deal of detail about a number of other subjects.

The Kandahar newsletters indicate 31,514 as the city's population in 1891 (Great Britain, 1990, V, p. 41). The newsletters document increasing ethnic and sectarian tensions (between Dorrāni and Ghalzai Pashtuns, between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims, and between Muslims and Hindus), criminal activities (thefts, kidnappings, murders), and state coercion (public executions, property seizures, imprisonments, torture, populations transfers) in the city and its surroundings during 'Abd-al-Raḥmān's aggressive rule. A dramatic trend towards total state control of the local economy through commercial monopolies, unrelenting taxation and fiscal interventions, the constancy of domestic military actions and related resource mobilizations, and the increasing presence and power of printed state texts (fiscal registers, instructional manuals, maps, pamphlets) are additional symptomatic highlights of the local environment in Kandahar during the final decades of the 19th century. The Kandahar newsletters reveal the practice of taking sanctuary at the Kerqa-ye Šarif Ziārat to be widespread among Hindus and Muslims in response to an increasingly bureaucratizing, industrializing, and intrusive state.

During the 19th century there were constant and fluctuating flows of laborers, pilgrims, prisoners, refugees, traders, and troops through the city and its surroundings. These migrations were both cause and consequence of transformations in the demographic, economic, and political profile of



Kandahar city and district during the 1800s. By 1900 Kabul had clearly become the singular exclusive capital city of Afghanistan (Hanifi, 2008, passim). This resulted in various forms of tension with Kandahar, which nevertheless retained active communications and interactions with a number of cities and interstitial markets, including Herat to the west, Ġazni to the north, and, despite recently imposed but still loose Afghan state borders, Źōb to the east and Quetta to the southeast in British India.

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