



KUŠK

KUŠK (also called Kušk Kohna; MacGregor, p. 542, uses the earlier spelling “Khūshk” [Kušk]), originally the name of a river (Kušk Rud), arising in Afghanistan on the north slope of the Paropamisos (Kuh-e Bābā), north of [Herat](#), and flowing north to empty into the [Morgāb](#), which it meets in the Panjdeh oasis (modern Taḳt-e Bāzār) in Turkmenistan. The name subsequently was applied to a district, and then to several towns in succession, one of which has in modern times received the name Kušk Kohna (“Old Kušk”). Kušk, which means “dry, dried-up river,” was a fairly widespread toponym, already known from Arab geographers in various countries (Le Strange, p. 196, 396, 469; Schwarz, III, p. 282; VII, p. 94; *Ḥodud al-‘ālam*, tr. Minorsky, p. 117; etc.). But it does not seem to have been used by them for any location in modern northwest Afghanistan.

In fact, it was not until the end of the nineteenth century that this name appeared in geo-history when the task arose, after the Persians’ decisive renunciation of their claims on [Herat](#), of fixing the northwest border of Afghanistan (Balland). The British *Gazetteer* (Adamec, pp. 283–85), for instance, knew Kušk as a district, inhabited in 1885 by about 3500 families of [Jamšidi](#) who made their winter quarters there and summered in the Kuh-e Bābā. Deported to Herat by the Afghan authorities in 1889, several years later they were authorized to return to their former territory, but there they had to live with some 2000 Pashtun families that had been settled there to keep watch over the border. As for the district capital, known, as was customary, by the same name as the district, it had been sacked by Persian troops during the



siege of Herat in 1837 (MacGregor, p. 542) and was still inhabited when Ferrier (I, p. 359–60), passed by “Kouchk-Assiab” on June 24, 1845. It was next seen in 1884 by P. J. Maitland (Afghan Boundary Commission, apud Adamec, p. 285). At that time it was, at an elevation of 1100 meters, in the depths of the valley, a very modest town of some thirty households, gathered close to a fort which was the residence of the tribal chief of the Jamšidi.

Throughout this period it remained a minor administrative center attached to the province of Herat until 1964, and the town had grown to a population estimated at 5500 by Afghan sources in 1938, and at nearly 10,000 by Humlum (pp. 131, 148) in 1948. The creation by the 1964 administrative reform of the province of *Bādġis*, to which Kušk was then attached as a second-rank *woleswali* (sub-province) seems however to have negatively impacted its prosperity. At the beginning of the 1970s (Grötzbach, p. 185), the two bazaars (one old, one new) remained quite modest in size, with only about a hundred shops, and the village had a very difficult relationship with the provincial capital, Kala Nao, some 90 km to the east, to which it was linked only by a very poor trail, impassable in winter.

The polarized nature of the region had long been altered as a result of the establishment of the boundary. As direct relationships developed between Herat and the terminus of the Soviet railway (completed in 1960 by the construction of a bridge over the Kušk Rud in the area where that river constituted the international border, opposite the Afghan border post of Toraġundi), and even though commercial relations, with business brought about by transshipment, had never been particularly active (3000 vehicles a year in 1981–82; Balland, p. 409), the economic center of gravity of the region moved toward the border post and the villages along the route. The name of Kušk (Kuška) was thus applied early on to the small town that grew up on the Soviet-Turkmen side of the border (Humlum, p. 148; Balland, p. 407), as well as to the Afghan border post; then, on this side, to the capital of a new district reporting directly to Herat, which was elevated to *woleswali* in 1964. The 1:1,300,000 map published in Kabul in 1347/1968 by the Afghan National Cartographic Institute thereupon fixed the location of Kušk on the major road to Herat some 40 km south of Toraġundi, at a point that appears to correspond to the site called Murladzā’i on the English maps (Adamec, III, 8A). As for the most recent Western atlases, they assign the name Kušk to various locations depending on the date of the sources they used regarding the residence of the head of the district. Simultaneously, the old capital little by little came to be

called Kušk Kuhna. But some atlases (e.g., Lewis and Campbell, p. 55) long continued to use for it the simple name Kušk.

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