



Pashtun Zarghun

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The district of Pashtun Zarghun¹ is situated in the eastern centre of Herat Province. It borders Karukh to the north, Obeh to the east, Adraskan to the south and Guzara to the west - and shares a common corner with the district of Injil. (Figs. 1; 61). Pashtun Zarghun covers a surface of 1,762 km², with an average population of 55 inhabitants per square kilometre.² Hence it belongs to the very densely populated districts in the Province of Herat³, with the majority living in the irrigated plain of the Hari Rud River, whereas the areas immediately beyond the channels show only widely scattered communities with a very limited number of inhabitants.

The mean annual precipitation varies between 200 and 300 mm. Merely the mountainous areas in the north as well as in the southeast of the district are located within a climate range of 300 to 600 mm rainfall and thus within an area where rain-fed agriculture is possible, but apparently only on a very limited surface. The mountain peaks in the north extend to a height of 3,000 m, and those in the southeast up to 2,500 m. The Hari Rud plain at the border of Pashtun Zarghun and Guzara in the west is situated at a height of 990 m and rises to 1,200 m towards the east, until the boundary with Obeh at a distance of 50 km.

To the north and south of the mountains are extensive alluvial fans (Fig. 454), expanding from the outlet of the side valleys down to the plain, a distance that can exceed 6–8 km. With an expansion of c. 600 km², these fans make up one-third of the total surface of the Pashtun Zarghun district. At the uppermost part of the



Fig. 451 Countryside south of the Hari Rud Valley



Fig. 452 Settlement in a southern side valley of the Hari Rud

1 Also: *Pashtun Zarghon, Pashtoon Zarghoon, Posht-e Zirghān or Posht-e Zirghūn.*

2 See 'Herat Province'. Government of Afghanistan and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development. Retrieved 2012-10-28. Total inhabitants: 90,817 distributed over 172 settlements.

3 With an average of 38 persons, irregularly spread, cp. Adraskan: 5, Chesht: 10, Guzara: 82, Injil: 151.

slope, at the foot of the mountains, small hamlets are located in almost every little side valley (Fig. 64) where the mountain streams have enough water throughout the year, at any rate sufficient for the irrigation of limited agricultural fields located in the vicinity of the settlements. In the side valleys only isolated buildings are encountered - this equally applies to the distribution of historical monuments.



Fig. 453 Irrigated fields and perennial creek in a side vale of the Hari Rud



Fig. 454 Alluvial fan east of Herat, showing extensive qanat systems, aerial view



Fig. 455 Spring on an alluvial fan south of the Hari Rud plain (PZ 14)

Size and structure of the residential areas correspond exactly with the settlement patterns in Obeh, including the architectural features of a *qal'e*, larger rectangular living quarters, surrounded by defensive walls, built of mud bricks and *pakhsah* (see pp. 39–40, Figs. 35; 36; 266; 267). The main ethnolinguistic group of Pashtun Zarghun is Tajik, while the Pashtun group represents only a minority.⁴

Only a few roads, none of them paved, crisscross the district, among them one of the main historical east-west connections, one of the routes from Iran to India, leading via Herat, Chaghcharan and Bamiyan to Kabul and over the Khyber Pass into Pakistan.

The Hari Rud Valley is covering either intensely or less intensely irrigated cropland or orchards and some areas of saline non-cultivated areas. The adjacent slopes towards the mountains are non-irrigated pastures although a few *qanats* crossing the gravel fans are still visible (Fig. 454). None of those visited during the survey were in use any more.⁵

The soils outside the irrigated plains are mountain light serozems to the north and high mountain desert steppe soils to the south. The vegetation beyond the irrigated plain changes from wormwood and wormwood-tragacanth ephemeral steppe to shrub-steppe vegetation with *artemisia* and *astragalus*⁶, *pistacia atlantica* woodlands and *juniperus excelsa/semiglobosa* woodlands.

The climatic-agricultural conditions resemble those in Obeh, but the Hari Rud plain plays an even more important role, when compared to the conditions in the neighbouring district. The overwhelming majority of the population lives within or immediately at

4 https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:US_Army_ethnolinguistic_map_of_Afghanistan_--_circa_2001-09.jpg

5 According to Afghan Statistical Yearbook 1980 (data for 1967–68) fifty years ago there were more than 200 *qanats* still in use in Herat Province, of which none could be encountered during our archaeological survey.

6 http://www.aims.org.af/maps/national/national_atlas/12_soils.jpg.

the borders of the agriculturally usable terrain⁷, which amounts to roughly a quarter (23 %) of the district, whereas in Obeh it only covers an area of 4 %. It is thus hardly surprising that Pashtun Zarghun is the agriculturally most profitable district of Herat Province. The share of Pashtun Zarghun in agricultural production was above average, ranging from cucumber (1,050 tons per year) to tomato, onion, cauliflower, carrot, potato, turnip and aubergine (493 tons).

The most important cultivated variety of the district's grain production (96.6 %) is wheat – roughly double the amount of Obeh and second of all Herati districts. Other crops split the remaining portion more or less to an equal share, only peas exceed a proportion of 1 %.

The fruit spectrum is similar to that of Obeh in the eastern part of the Hari Rud plain: Farmers grow primarily water melons (24 %) and grapes (32 %), only exceeded by honeydew melons (33 %). These three types of fruit dominate in the entire Herat Province, but melons are more popular in the western regions of the province, grapes in the east.

In Pashtun Zarghun, the Hari Rud River flows with a comparatively low gradient of 2.2 m/km from east to west, watering the plain that reaches a width of up to 10 km; the irrigated surface is located only a few metres above the riverbed.

The main irrigation channels tap the river water at a point farther to the east, making use of the natural gradient of the alluvial plateau, and running from there on largely parallel to the valley, from where small branches lead to the fields.

97.5 % of the districts water supply occurs through these channels, the remaining 2.5 % are provided by wells and springs (Fig. 455), the latter never having a high yield.

Springs play a certain role apart from mere water supply, because they are almost always associated with venerated graves or even elaborate mausolea.

7 Herat Province Agricultural Profile 2008, 5–7 [http://afghanag.ucdavis.edu/country-info/Province-agriculture-profiles/reports-usaid-naais/Ag_brief_2008_Herat_rev1.doc].



Fig. 456 Façade of a cistern with rectangular basin (PZ 2)



Fig. 457 Façade of a square cistern (PZ 18)



Fig. 458 Rear side of a rectangular cistern (PZ 8)



Fig. 459 Remains of a fortified mountain settlement, clandestine excavations along the perimeter wall (PZ 27)



Fig. 460 Remains of a historical settlement, excavated stone walls (PZ 38)



Fig. 461 Tepe on an alluvial fan (PZ 35)



Fig. 462 Fortified group of buildings (qal'e) in a town on the Hari Rud plain (PZ 17)



Fig. 463 Corner tower of a qal'e (PZ 24)

Not only the Hari Rud plain, but also the side valleys in Pashtun Zarghun are slightly broader in comparison with the district of Obbeh and provide a wider strip of agriculturally usable soil (Fig. 453).

The importance of water supply is reflected in the survey data. Pashtun Zarghun is one of the districts with the highest amount of cisterns (*houz*) in the centre or the *hinterland* of settlements. Some of these buildings have been in use for centuries and are only now neglected, as modern wells and additional channels are implemented in the context of provincial construction programmes. The historical cisterns are mostly built using flat burnt bricks on a square (Fig. 457) or rectangular ground plan (Fig. 456) and are either covered with a flat dome or a simple barrel vault (Figs. 456; 458). Although allowing access from more than one side in cases, some have a pronounced façade with a shallow *iwan* or a central pointed-arch, gate-like entrance flanked by two smaller niches (Fig. 456) or rooms. In the absence of inscriptions, their period of construction can mostly only be determined by stylistic and technological details, which may date back to the 15th century.

The most frequent types of sites in Pashtun Zarghun are settlements, with 31.8 %, a figure that rises to 50 % when the documented artificial mounds (*tepe*) are included (Fig. 461). The latter are mainly small, made up from the debris of only a few structures. Some of the settlements still buried in the ground reach a surface area of up to 9 ha (PZ 38, Fig. 460). They are rarely older than the Islamic Period and located mainly on the borders of the irrigated fields, but also on mountain ridges in the larger side valleys of the Hari Rud River (Figs. 459; 460). Only PZ 33 may be pre-Islamic in date.

'Modern' towns and villages on the Hari Rud plain are often built near or around larger mud-walled complexes consisting of square or rectangular enclosures with corner towers, some of them also with median towers (Figs. 462–464). These *qal'e* have perimeter walls that can be as high as 8 m and over 2 metres thick, mainly built in the *pakhsah* technique. Some are still inhabited (Figs. 462–464), others only in part, their multi-storey construction is rapidly decaying (Fig. 464).



Fig. 464 Remains of a two-storey gateway, seen from inside the qal'e



Fig. 465 Graveyard in the village of Karu (PZ 25)



Fig. 466 Tombs near Golmir, in the Hari Rud plain (PZ 9)



Fig. 467 Venerated tomb in the ziyarat complex of Soltan Ozayd (PZ 1)



Fig. 468 The shrine and tomb of Soltan Ozayd (PZ 1)



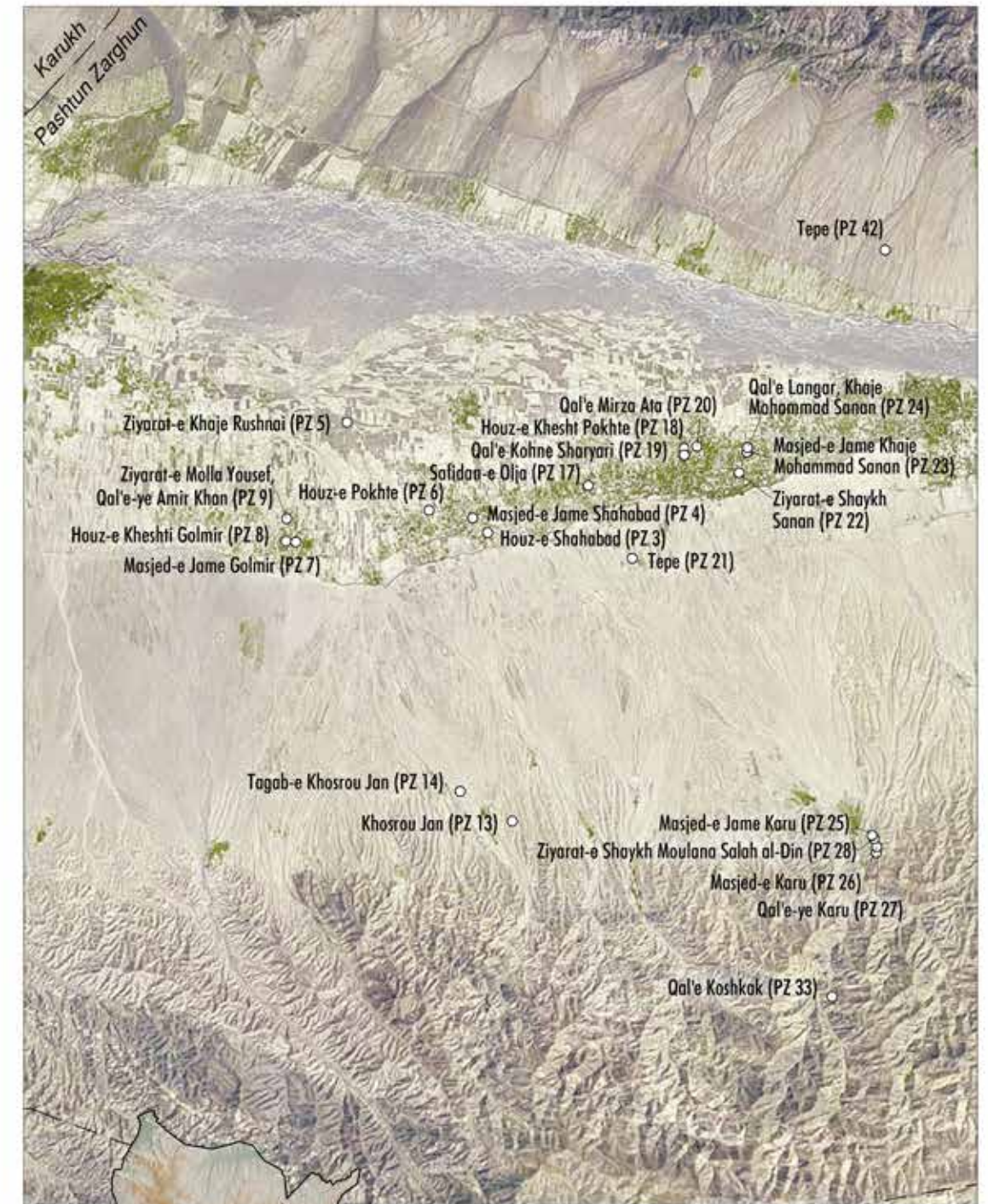
Fig. 469 Masjed-e Jame, near Salemi (PZ 15)



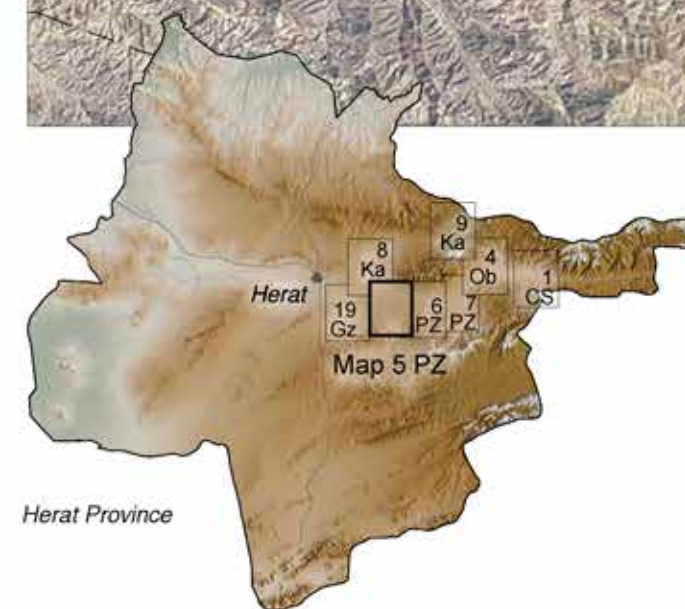
Fig. 470 Masjed-e Jame Karu (PZ 25)

A relatively large portion of historical sites in Pash tun Zarghun are extensive graveyards, containing tombs of significant age (Figs. 465; 466), some with elaborately decorated headstones, in other parts marble cenotaphs, seldom, however, well kept (Fig. 466). These graves are prominent tombs of outstanding personalities, varying from overlong stone graves with or without intricately decorated headstones, adorned with coloured bands and simple offerings, to associated multi-storey shrines with three *iwan* façades (Fig. 468).

A second group of historical sites in Pash tun Zarghun are diverse mosques. They range from a simple two-bay mud-brick building, decorated only with geometric applications of small stones (PZ 04), to a recently restructured 75 m long building with 26 domed rooms (PZ 15, Fig. 469) and a tripartite construction containing three different mosques with completely diverse ground plans and historical backgrounds (PZ 25, Fig. 470).



satellite image: Atlogis Geoinformatics



Map 5
Pashtun Zarghun (PZ)

Herat Province
Survey 2004-2006

