

# From Kabul to Kandahar 1833-1933 (Part Two)

- Cities, Towns and Architecture
- People and Occupations

## ● Cities, Towns and Architecture

### Cities and Towns: Kabul

Afghanistan, the crossroads of Persia, Central Asia and India, was home to major trade routes. Situated at the crossroads, Kabul played an important role in commerce. On conquering Kabul in 1504, Moghul Emperor Babur could hardly contain his delight as he contemplated the prospect of revenues from trade:

*‘There are two trade-marts on the land-route between Hindustan and Khurasan; one is Kabul and the other Qandahar. To Kabul caravans come from Kashgar, Farghana, Turkistan, Samarkand, Bukhara, Balkh, Hisar and Badakhshan... Down to Kabul every year come 7, 8, or 10,000 heads of houses bringing slaves, white cloth, sugar-candy, refined and common sugars, and aromatic roots. Many a trader is not content with a profit of 30 or 40 on 10. ‘*

The foundations of Bala Hissar, Kabul's ancient fortress and seat of power date back to the White Huns in the 5th century. The fortress was partially destroyed in 1879. It was later restored under Amir Abdur Rahman Khan (1880-1901) and is today occupied by the Afghan National Army.



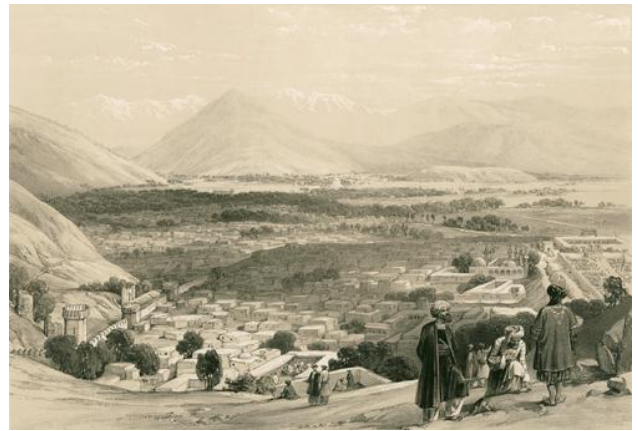
The Avenue of Babur's tomb by J Atkinson, 1842

***“Here is a fortune teller. They normally hang around the garden and holy places where they make money. They read Hafiz's poetry book and open up pages and read fortunes by interpreting the poems. Hafiz is a famous Persian poet. In those days this was a place of entertainment which people visited. It was a place where they visited the grave. Sometimes they kissed the grave or prayed for their children.”*** Moheb, journalist 2006

*“There is a wide path on each side of the terraces, and on every Friday the Mahommedan Sabbath - the walks of this favourite grove are filled “from morn till dewy eve” with crowds of people in their holiday attire - the women always veiled in their boorkhas, each enjoying with apparent delight the social scene around.”* James Atkinson, *Expedition into Afghanistan*, 1842



Kabul Street by Major W R Ray, 1933



The Balla Hissar and the city of Canbul from the upper part of the citadel by J Atkinson, 1842

### Cities and Towns: Kandahar

Historic concerns about security produced a number of large fortified cities in Afghanistan. Today, many of the forts still serve as military garrisons. The country was occupied by many invaders over a 2000 year period including Alexander the Great, the Arabs, and Genghis Khan.

Kandahar is one such city where Ahmad Shah Durrani established his capital of the Afghan empire in 1747. A fortified town since medieval times, the city was involved in both the First (1839-1842) and Second (1878-1880) Anglo-Afghan wars. Kandahar remained relatively peaceful for the next 100 years until the Soviet invasion of 1979. Today, Kandahar remains the centre of military activity.

The following photographs were taken immediately after the Second Anglo-Afghan war (1878-1880).



In the streets of Kandahar by B Simpson, 1881

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***“There are four gates main gates in Kandahar; the Durrani, Kabul, Eid and Herat gates. The wall in this part looks new; there is no damage to the walls.”*** Moheb, journalist, 2006



Camels running out of Durrani Gate by B Simpson, 1881



Artillery square showing main bastion of the citadel by B Simpson, 1881

### **Cities and Towns: Herat & Ghazni**

Herat is an ancient city with many historic buildings, although these have suffered damage in various military conflicts during late 19th and 20th centuries. The city is dominated by the remains of a citadel called the Bala Hissar built in the 7th-13th centuries on the foundations of an older fort that Alexander the Great built in the 4th century BC. Afghan troops are stationed in the Bala Hissar today.

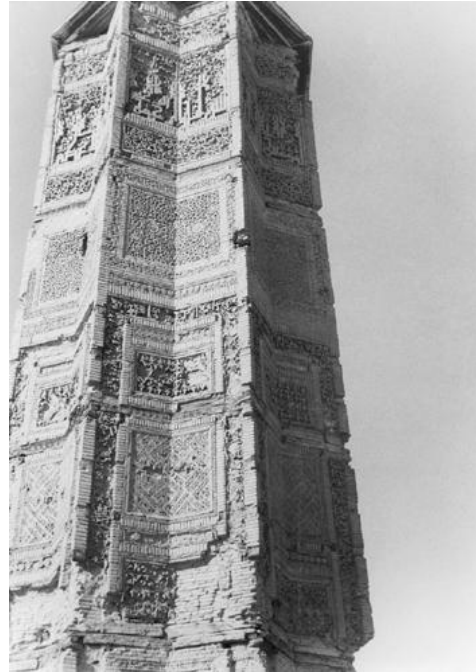
Ghazni is dominated by a 45 metre high citadel built in the 13th century and is associated with Mahmud of Ghazni (971-1030 AD). Known for his raids against the states of Northern India; Mahmud, a staunch Muslim, destroyed Hindu temples and forced conversions to Islam. His name is linked to a particular episode of repeated attacks on the temple to Shiva at Somnath in Gujarat. At Ghazni, his capital, he built a magnificent mosque.



The fortress and citadel of Ghaznee and the two minars by J Atkinson, 1842



The Musalla at Herat: Mausoleum (c.1430AD) and three of the seven minarets by R Byron, 1934



Tower of Victory erected near Ghazni by Mahmoud of Ghazni by B De Cardi, date unknown

***"I think are seven minars in all (in Ghazni) but not in the same place. Due to war, age and natural disasters, these sorts of things have completely gone now or in bad condition."*** Hooshang, Afghan Association of London 2006



The Bala Hissar, Herat by unknown photographer, 1933





## ● People & Occupations

The lives of many people in Afghanistan traditionally centred on farming and herding. Some people like the Baluch nomads were famed for their camel breeding, whilst the Turkmen and Uzbek peoples were renowned for the production of carpets, sheepskins and jewellery.

The Pashtuns, also farmers, herdsmen and renowned horse breeders, later elevated themselves in status to become rulers. The first leader, in 1747 of the 'modern' Afghan kingdom was a Pashtun.



Group of Fakirs, Kandahar, by B Simpson, 1881

***“Fakir means poor. They are Sufis and they sing and praise the Prophet. They have long hair and beards.. They are not usually beggars. They are called ‘Dervish’. They don’t normally have houses or family; they dedicate their lives to the love of god and are fed by people. They are given money by people for singing songs...they live in towns and holy places like mosques. If you go to parts of north Afghanistan you will find many of them. Some in this picture are Sufis and some are just ordinary beggars.”*** Moheb, journalist, 2006

*‘This fakir was permitted to do just what he liked, and even when he kicked the Amir’s own door one day, he received no punishment’.* Ernest & Annie Thornton, *Leaves from an Afghan Scrapbook*, 1903-1905

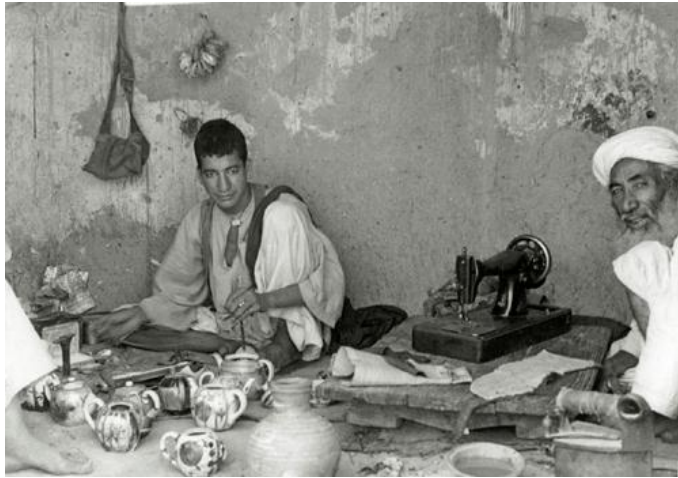


Horse Sellers, Kandahar by B Simpson, 1881

***“They sell horses and cattle. They are both Pashtuns because of their turbans and their faces. Pashtuns normally leave an end out at the top of the turban. The first end of the turban is pushed up and left out. The boots are western. I think this is the place where they keep their horses and animals.”***

Moheb, journalist, 2006





Mending Russian tea-pots, Kandahar by B De Cardi, date Unknown.

***“These are not Russian teapots. In North Afghanistan they make this type of teapot. When it broke, the people were poor and couldn’t buy a new one, so they took it to this sort of person to mend it. The teapots are ceramic. They would be made in North Afghanistan or Central Asia.”*** Moheb, journalist, 2006



Jeweller’s shop in modern bazaar, B De Cardi, Date Unknown.

***“The women of Kabul are notoriously given to intrigue. They are allowed to go anywhere they please in their booka poshes, which completely cover the whole person. They leave their homes on pretense of visiting mother, sister or a female friend, and remain as long as they like, but they must take especial care to ‘keep their purdah (veil).”*** James Atkinson, *Expedition into Afghanistan*, 1842





Group of Ayub's ambassadors, Abdulla Khan (sitting on the right), son on left and Umrjan Sahib Zadah in the centre. The last named is said to have raised the Ghazis against us (the British) at Maiwand. Group, Timuris, Kandahar by B Simpson, 1881

***“They look like representatives from all over Afghanistan. The men with the big hats are from the north, Uzbeks. According to Islamic tradition, those that fight foreign enemies is called a Ghazi. The word does not refer to a particular group or tribe.”*** Wahida, Afghan Association of London, 2006



Group, Hazaras, Kandahar by B Simpson 1881

***“You can see the woman's face. She's not wearing a burkha (veil). (Years ago) in many Pashtun tribes the women didn't wear burkha...during the Taliban period they forced women to wear the burkha.”*** Moheb, journalist, 2006



Group of Parsiwans, Kandahar by B Simpson, 1881

Farsiwans are of Persian descent and originally come from the area around the eastern Iranian border.

***“Many Pashtuns cannot say ‘Fh’ to say ‘Farsiwans’ and say ‘Ph’ instead. This is a local accent. They are basically Tajiks, this guy (sitting to the right of the man in the centre). You can tell he is a Tajik by the coat he is wearing. They wear this style in Tajikistan and not Afghanistan. The coat has embroidery.”*** Moheb, journalist, 2006

## Women

Photographs and images of women, with or without veils, are rare finds from this period. Social, religious and cultural traditions of the time were not necessarily as strict as they may have been perceived to be. Traditions depended on whether you lived in the north or south, or were from a large town or a village. Historically, wearing ‘burkhas’ (veils) was more widespread in northern Afghanistan than the south. However, women generally spent more time at home and hence were less likely to be captured by the photographer’s camera.

The Taliban rule in the 1980s brought with it stricter codes of conduct for women under Islamic religious laws and the veil became compulsory. Today these laws have been relaxed.

*“Out of doors they are closely veiled up - obliterated, in fact - in a cotton cover, which consists of bloomers and burkah. The latter garment resembles a voluminous skirt, closely gathered in at the top and sewed on to a cap. In front of an Afghan woman’s eyes is fixed a linen ‘rui-band’, which has in it a few tiny squares of drawn threadwork and what she sees through these is all she knows of the world outside her home.”* Ernest & Annie Thornton, *Leaves from an Afghan scrapbook*, 1903-1905

*“The women (along the Khyber pass) unlike the Mahomedan (Muslim) townswomen, are not closely veiled, the head is covered by a blue or white cotton shawl, which when a stranger approaches is drawn across the lower part of the face.”* John A Gray, *At the Court of the Amîr*, 1895



Kabul Costumes by J Atkinson, 1842

***“This costume is more Persian. Many Persian poetry books show this, and they are described like this in ancient poetry books like Omar Khayam and others. Because she is wearing a cap, I think she is more likely to be from Central Afghanistan where there are mainly Hazara people – they wear skull caps. Or she is from North Afghanistan where the Uzbeks and Turks wear caps. They still wear Uzbek type braids in the villages today.”*** Moheb, journalist, 2006



Turkoman Women by an unknown photographer, 1932

***“This is interesting; these are Turkomens from north Afghanistan. It’s not their hair, they wear a cap and they still wear them. It’s not just for special occasions. They wear it after marriage. The building behind is a ‘Yurrt’ – that means house.”*** Daud, journalist, 2006

# Credits

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