

For the city in Iran, see Herat, Iran. For the principality by the same name, see Herat (1793-1863).

Herāt (/hɛˈrɑːt/;[4] Dari/Pashto: هرات) is an oasis city and the third-largest city of Afghanistan.[5] In 2020, it had an estimated population of 574,276, and serves as the capital of Herat Province, situated in the fertile valley of the Hari River in the western part of the country. An ancient civilization on the Silk Road between the Middle East, Central and South Asia,[6] it serves as a regional hub in the country's west, and its historic Persian influences has given it the nickname as Afghanistan's Little Iran.[7]

Herat dates back to Avestan times and was traditionally known for its wine. The city has a number of historic sites, including the Herat Citadel and the Musalla Complex. During the Middle Ages Herat became one of the important cities of Khorasan, as it was known as the Pearl of Khorasan.[8] After the conquest of Tamerlane, the city became an important center of intellectual and artistic life in the Islamic world.[9] Under the rule of Shah Rukh the city served as the focal point of the Timurid Renaissance, whose glory matched Florence of the Italian Renaissance as the center of a cultural rebirth.[10][11] After the fall of the Timurid Empire, Herat has been governed by various Afghan rulers since the early 18th century.[12] In 1716, the Abdali Afghans inhabiting the city revolted and formed their own Sultanate, the Sadozai Sultanate of Herat. They were conquered by the Afsharids in 1732. After Nader Shah's death and Ahmad Shah Durrani's rise to power in 1747, Herat became part of Afghanistan.[12] It witnessed some political disturbances and military invasions during the early half of the 19th century but the 1857 Treaty of Paris ended hostilities of the Anglo-Persian War.[13]

The roads from Herat to Iran (through the border town of Islam Qala) and Turkmenistan (through the border town of Torghundi) are still strategically important. As the gateway to Iran, it collects high amount of customs revenue for Afghanistan.[14] It also has an international airport. Since the 2001 war the city had been relatively safe while the rest of Afghanistan suffered from Taliban attacks.[15] In 2021, it was announced that Herat would be listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.[16]

On 12 August 2021, the city was seized by Taliban fighters, becoming the eleventh provincial capital to be captured by Taliban as part of the wider 2021 Taliban offensive.[17]

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History[edit]

See also: Timeline of Herat and Alexandria Ariana

Further information: History of Afghanistan

Herat is first recorded in ancient times, but its precise date of foundation is unknown. Under the Persian Achaemenid Empire (550–330 BC), the surrounding district was known by the Old Persian name of Haraiva (𐎱𐎠𐎼𐎿), and in classical sources the region was correspondingly known as Areia (Aria). In the Zoroastrian collection of Avesta, the district is referred as Haroiva. The name of the district and its principal town is a derivative from that of the local river, the Herey River (from Old Iranian Harayu, meaning "with velocity"), which goes through the district and ends 5 km (3.1 mi) south of Herat.[18] Herey is mentioned in Sanskrit as yellow or golden color equivalent to Persian "Zard" meaning Gold (yellow). The naming of a region and its principal town after the main river is a common feature in this part of the world—compare the adjoining districts/rivers/towns of Arachosia and Bactria.

Part of a series on the
History of Afghanistan

Timeline

show

Ancient

show

Medieval

show

Modern

Related historical names of the region

Arachosia Aria Ariana Bactria Gandhara Iran Kabulistan Kafiristan Khorasan Kushanshahr
Paropamisadae Sistan Zabulistan

Related topics

Name Afghan (ethnonym) List of years List of heads of state List of wars Hinduism history
Hindu and Buddhist heritage Muslim conquests

Category

Afghanistan portal

vte

The district Aria of the Achaemenid Empire is mentioned in the provincial lists that are included in various royal inscriptions, for instance, in the Behistun inscription of Darius I (ca. 520 BC).[19] Representatives from the district are depicted in reliefs, e.g., at the royal Achaemenid tombs of Naqsh-e Rostam and Persepolis. They are wearing Scythian-style dress (with a tunic and trousers tucked into high boots) and a twisted Bashlyk that covers their head, chin and neck.[20]

Hamdallah Mustawfi, composer of the 14th century work *The Geographical Part of the Nuzhat-al-Qulub* writes that:

Herāt was the name of one of the chiefs among the followers of the hero Narīmān, and it was he who first founded the city. After it had fallen to ruin Alexander the Great rebuilt it, and the circuit of its walls was 9000 paces.[8]

Herodotus described Herat as the bread-basket of Central Asia. At the time of Alexander the Great in 330 BC, Aria was obviously an important district. It was administered by a satrap called Satibarzanes, who was one of the three main Persian officials in the East of the Empire, together with the satrap Bessus of Bactria and Barsaentes of Arachosia. In late 330 BC, Alexander captured the Arian capital that was called Artacoana. The town was rebuilt and the citadel was constructed. Afghanistan became part of the Seleucid Empire.

However, most sources suggest that Herat was predominantly Zoroastrian. It became part of the Parthian Empire in 167 BC. In the Sasanian period (226-652), 𐭠𐭣𐭥𐭭 Harēv is listed in an inscription on the Ka'ba-i Zartosht at Naqsh-e Rostam; and Hariy is mentioned in the Pahlavi catalogue of the provincial capitals of the empire. In around 430, the town is also listed as having a Christian community, with a Nestorian bishop.[21]

In the last two centuries of Sasanian rule, Aria (Herat) had great strategic importance in the endless wars between the Sasanians, the Chionites and the Hephthalites who had been settled in the northern section of Afghanistan since the late 4th century.

Islamization[edit]

Further information: Islamic conquest of Afghanistan

At the time of the Arab invasion in the middle of the 7th century, the Sasanian central power seemed already largely nominal in the province in contrast with the role of the Hephthalites tribal lords, who were settled in the Herat region and in the neighboring districts, mainly in pastoral Bādghis and in Qohestān. It must be underlined, however, that Herat remained one of the three Sasanian mint centers in the east, the other two being Balkh and Marv. The Hephthalites from Herat and some unidentified Turks opposed the Arab forces in a battle of Qohestān in 651-52 AD, trying to block their advance on Nishāpur, but they were defeated

When the Arab armies appeared in Khorāsān in the 650s AD, Herāt was counted among the twelve capital towns of the Sasanian Empire. The Arab army under the general command of Ahnaf ibn Qais in its conquest of Khorāsān in 652 seems to have avoided Herāt, but it can be assumed that the city eventually submitted to the Arabs, since shortly afterwards an Arab governor is mentioned there. A treaty was drawn in which the regions of Bādghis and Bushanj were included. As did many other places in Khorāsān, Herāt rebelled and had to be re-conquered several times.[22]

Another power that was active in the area in the 650s was Tang dynasty China which had embarked on a campaign that culminated in the Conquest of the Western Turks. By 659–661, the Tang claimed a tenuous suzerainty over Herat, the westernmost point of Chinese power in its long history. This hold however would be ephemeral with local Turkish tribes rising in rebellion in 665 and driving out the Tang.[23]

In 702 AD Yazid ibn al-Muhallab defeated certain Arab rebels, followers of Ibn al-Ash'ath, and forced them out of Herat. The city was the scene of conflicts between different groups of Muslims and Arab tribes in the disorders leading to the establishment of the Abbasid Caliphate. Herat was also a centre of the followers of Ustadh Sis.

In 870 AD, Yaqub ibn Layth Saffari, a local ruler of the Saffarid dynasty conquered Herat and the rest of the nearby regions in the name of Islam.

...Arab armies carrying the banner of Islam came out of the west to defeat the Sasanians in 642 AD and then they marched with confidence to the east. On the western periphery of the Afghan area the princes of Herat and Seistan gave way to rule by Arab governors but in the east, in the mountains, cities submitted only to rise in revolt and the hastily converted returned to their old beliefs once the armies passed. The harshness and avariciousness of Arab rule produced such unrest, however, that once the waning power of the Caliphate became apparent, native rulers once again established themselves independent. Among these the Saffarids of Seistan shone briefly in the Afghan area. The fanatic founder of this dynasty, the coppersmith's apprentice Yaqub ibn Layth Saffari, came forth from his capital at Zaranj in 870 AD and marched through Bost, Kandahar, Ghazni, Kabul, Bamiyan, Balkh and Herat, conquering in the name of Islam.[24]

— N. Dupree

“Pearl of Khorasan”[edit]

Further information: Tahirid Dynasty, Saffarid Dynasty, Ghaznavids, Ghurid Dynasty, Timurid Dynasty, and Safavid Dynasty

The region of Herāt was under the rule of King Nuh III, the seventh of the Samanid line—at the time of Sebük Tigin and his older son, Mahmud of Ghazni.[25] The governor of Herāt was a noble by the name of Faik, who was appointed by Nuh III. It is said that Faik was a powerful, but insubordinate governor of Nuh III; and had been punished by Nuh III. Faik made overtures to Bogra Khan and Ughar Khan of Khorasan. Bogra Khan answered Faik's call, came to Herāt and became its ruler. The Samanids fled, betrayed at the hands of Faik to whom the defence of Herāt had been entrusted by Nuh III.[25] In 994, Nuh III invited Alptegin to come to his aid. Alptegin, along with Mahmud of Ghazni, defeated Faik and annexed Herāt, Nishapur and Tous.[25]

Herat was a great trading centre strategically located on trade routes from Mediterranean

to India or to China. The city was noted for its textiles during the Abbasid Caliphate, according to many references by geographers. Herāt also had many learned sons such as Ansārī. The city is described by Estakhri and Ibn Hawqal in the 10th century as a prosperous town surrounded by strong walls with plenty of water sources, extensive suburbs, an inner citadel, a congregational mosque, and four gates, each gate opening to a thriving market place. The government building was outside the city at a distance of about a mile in a place called Khorāsānābād. A church was still visible in the countryside northeast of the town on the road to Balkh, and farther away on a hilltop stood a flourishing fire temple, called Sereshk, or Arshak according to Mustawfi.[8][27][28][29][30]

Herat was a part of the Taherid dominion in Khorāsān until the rise of the Saffarids in Sistān under Ya'qub-i Laith in 861, who, in 862, started launching raids on Herat before besieging and capturing it on 16 August 867, and again in 872. The Saffarids succeeded in expelling the Taherids from Khorasan in 873.

The Sāmānid dynasty was established in Transoxiana by three brothers, Nuh, Yahyā, and Ahmad. Ahmad Sāmāni opened the way for the Samanid dynasty to the conquest of Khorāsān, including Herāt, which they were to rule for one century. The centralized Samanid administration served as a model for later dynasties. The Samanid power was destroyed in 999 by the Qarakhanids, who were advancing on Transoxiana from the northeast, and by the Ghaznavids, former Samanid retainers, attacking from the southeast. Sultan Maḥmud of Ghazni officially took control of Khorāsān in 998. Herat was one of the six Ghaznavid mints in the region. In 1040, Herat was captured by the Seljuk Empire. During this change of power in Herat, there was supposedly a power vacuum which was filled by Abdullah Awn, who established a city state and made an alliance with Mahmud of Ghazni.[31] Yet, in 1175, it was captured by the Ghurids of Ghor and then came under the Khawarazm Empire in 1214. According to the account of Mustawfi, Herat flourished especially under the Ghurid dynasty in the 12th century. Mustawfi reported that there were "359 colleges in Herat, 12,000 shops all fully occupied, 6,000 bath-houses; besides caravanserais and mills, also a darwish convent and a fire temple". There were about 444,000 houses occupied by a settled population. The men were described as "warlike and carry arms", and they were Sunni Muslims.[8] The great mosque of Herāt was built by Ghiyasuddin Ghorī in 1201. In this period Herāt became an important center for the production of metal goods, especially in bronze, often decorated with elaborate inlays in precious metals.

Herat was invaded and destroyed by Genghis Khan's Mongol army in 1221. The city was destroyed a second time and remained in ruins from 1222 to about 1236. In 1244 a local prince Shams al-Din Kart was named ruler of Herāt by the Mongol governor of Khorāsān and in 1255 he was confirmed in his rule by the founder of the Il-Khan dynasty Hulagu. Shamsuddin Kart founded a new dynasty and his successors, especially Fakhruddin Kart and Ghiyasuddin Kart, built many mosques and other buildings. The members of this dynasty were great patrons of literature and the arts. By this time Herāt became known as the pearl of Khorasan.

If any one ask thee which is the pleasantest of cities, Thou mayest answer him aright that it is Herāt. For the world is like the sea, and the province of Khurāsān like a pearl-oyster

therein, The city of Herāt being as the pearl in the middle of the oyster.[8]

— Rumi, 1207–1273 A.D.

Timur took Herat in 1380 and he brought the Kartid dynasty to an end a few years later. The city reached its greatest glory under the Timurid princes, especially Sultan Husayn Bayqara who ruled Herat from 1469 until May 4, 1506. His chief minister, the poet and author in Persian and Turkish, Mir Ali-Shir Nava'i was a great builder and patron of the arts. Under the Timurids, Herat assumed the role of the main capital of an empire that extended in the West as far as central Persia. As the capital of the Timurid empire, it boasted many fine religious buildings and was famous for its sumptuous court life and musical performance and its tradition of miniature paintings. On the whole, the period was one of relative stability, prosperity, and development of economy and cultural activities. It began with the nomination of Shahrokh, the youngest son of Timur, as governor of Herat in 1397. The reign of Shahrokh in Herat was marked by intense royal patronage, building activities, and promotion of manufacturing and trade, especially through the restoration and enlargement of the Herat's bāzār. The present Musallah Complex, and many buildings such as the madrasa of Gawhar Shad, Ali Shir mahāl, many gardens, and others, date from this time. The village of Gazar Gah, over two km northeast of Herat, contained a shrine which was enlarged and embellished under the Timurids. The tomb of the poet and mystic Khwājah Abdullāh Ansārī (d. 1088), was first rebuilt by Shahrokh about 1425, and other famous men were buried in the shrine area. Herat was shortly captured by Kara Koyunlu between 1458 and 1459.[32]

In 1507 Herat was occupied by the Uzbeks but after much fighting the city was taken by Shah Isma'il, the founder of the Safavid dynasty, in 1510 and the Shamlu Qizilbash assumed the governorship of the area. Under the Safavids, Herat was again relegated to the position of a provincial capital, albeit one of a particular importance. At the death of Shah Isma'il the Uzbeks again took Herat and held it until Shah Tahmasp retook it in 1528. The Persian king, Abbas was born in Herat, and in Safavid texts, Herat is referred to as a'zam-i bilād-i īrān, meaning "the greatest of the cities of Iran".[33] In the 16th century, all future Safavid rulers, from Tahmasp I to Abbas I, were governors of Herat in their youth.[34]

Modern history[edit]

Further information: Sadozai Sultanate of Herat and Durrani Empire

By the early 18th century Herat was governed by the Abdali Afghans. After Nader Shah's death in 1747, Ahmad Shah Durrani took possession of the city and became part of the Durrani Empire.[12]

In 1793, Herat became independent for several years when Afghanistan underwent a civil war between different sons of Timur Shah. The Iranians had multiple wars with Herat between 1801 and 1837 (1804, 1807, 1811, 1814, 1817, 1818, 1821, 1822, 1825, 1833).[35] The Iranians besieged the city in 1837, but the British helped the Heratis in repelling them. In 1856, they invaded again, and briefly managed to take the city on October 25;[35] it led directly to the Anglo-Persian War. In 1857 hostilities between the Iranians and the British ended after the Treaty of Paris was signed, and the Persian troops withdrew from Herat in September 1857.[36][35] Afghanistan conquered Herat on May 26, 1863, under Dost Muhammad Khan, two weeks before his death.[37]

Traffic passing on road near the Herat minarets, 2005.

The two mausoleums with the minarets, July 2001.

The famous Musalla of Gawhar Shah of Herat, a large Islamic religious complex consisting of five minarets, several mausoleums along with mosques and madrasas was dynamited during the Panjdeh incident to prevent their usage by the advancing Russian forces. Some emergency preservation work was carried out at the site in 2001 which included building protective walls around the Gawhar Shad Mausoleum and Sultan Husain Madrasa, repairing the remaining minaret of Gawhar Shad's Madrasa, and replanting the mausoleum garden.[38][39][40]

In the 1960s, engineers from the United States built Herat Airport, which was used by the Soviet forces during the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan in the 1980s. Even before the Soviet invasion at the end of 1979, there was a substantial presence of Soviet advisors in the city with their families.

Between March 10 and March 20, 1979, the Afghan Army in Herāt under the control of commander Ismail Khan mutinied. Thousands of protesters took to the streets against the Khalq communist regime's oppression led by Nur Mohammad Taraki. The new rebels led by Khan managed to oust the communists and take control of the city for 3 days, with some protesters murdering any Soviet advisers. This shocked the government, who blamed the new administration of Iran following the Iranian Revolution for influencing the uprising.[41] Reprisals by the government followed, and between 3,000 and 24,000 people (according to different sources) were killed, in what is called the 1979 Herat uprising, or in Persian as the Qiam-e Herat.[42] The city itself was recaptured with tanks and airborne forces, but at the cost of thousands of civilians killed. This massacre was the first of its kind since the Third Anglo-Afghan War in 1919, and was the bloodiest event preceding the Soviet–Afghan War.[43]

Herat received damage during the Soviet–Afghan War in the 1980s, especially its western side. The province as a whole was one of the worst-hit. In April 1983, a series of Soviet bombings damaged half of the city and killed around 3,000 civilians, described as "extremely heavy, brutal and prolonged".[44] Ismail Khan was the leading mujahideen commander in Herāt fighting against the Soviet-backed government.

After the communist government's collapse in 1992, Khan joined the new government and he became governor of Herat Province. The city was relatively safe and it was recovering and rebuilding from the damage caused in the Soviet–Afghan War.[45] However, on September 5, 1995, the city was captured by the Taliban without much resistance, forcing Khan to flee. Herat became the first Persian-speaking city to be captured by the Taliban. The Taliban's strict enforcement of laws confining women at home and closing girls' schools alienated Heratis who are traditionally more liberal and educated, like the Kabulis, than other urban populations in the country. Two days of anti-Taliban protests occurred in December 1996 which was violently dispersed and led to the imposition of a curfew.[46] In May 1999, a rebellion in Herat was crushed by the Taliban, who blamed Iran for causing it.[47]

After the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, on November 12, 2001, it was captured from the Taliban by forces loyal to the Northern Alliance and Ismail Khan returned to power (see

Battle of Herat). The state of the city was reportedly much better than that of Kabul.[5] In 2004, Mirwais Sadiq, Aviation Minister of Afghanistan and the son of Ismail Khan, was ambushed and killed in Herāt by a local rival group. More than 200 people were arrested under suspicion of involvement.[48]

In 2005, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) began establishing bases in and around the city. Its main mission was to train the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and help with the rebuilding process of the country. Regional Command West, led by Italy, assisted the Afghan National Army (ANA) 207th Corps. Herat was one of the first seven areas that transitioned security responsibility from NATO to Afghanistan. In July 2011, the Afghan security forces assumed security responsibility from NATO.

Due to their close relations, Iran began investing in the development of Herat's power, economy and education sectors.[49] In the meantime, the United States built a consulate in Herat to help further strengthen its relations with Afghanistan. In addition to the usual services, the consulate works with the local officials on development projects and with security issues in the region.[50]

On 12 August 2021, the city was captured by the Taliban during the 2021 Taliban offensive.[51]

Geography[edit]

Climate[edit]

Herat has a cold semi-arid climate (Köppen climate classification BSk). Precipitation is very low, and mostly falls in winter. Although Herāt is approximately 240 m (790 ft) lower than Kandahar, the summer climate is more temperate, and the climate throughout the year is far from disagreeable, although winter temperatures are comparably lower. From May to September, the wind blows from the northwest with great force. The winter is tolerably mild; snow melts as it falls, and even on the mountains does not lie long. Three years out of four it does not freeze hard enough for the people to store ice. The eastern reaches of the Hari River, including the rapids, are frozen hard in the winter, and people travel on it as on a road.

hide

Climate data for Herāt

Month Jan Feb Mar Apr May Jun Jul Aug Sep Oct Nov Dec Year

Record high °C (°F) 24.4

(75.9) 27.6

(81.7) 31.0

(87.8) 37.8

(100.0) 39.7

(103.5) 44.6

(112.3) 50.0

(122.0) 42.7

(108.9) 39.3

(102.7) 37.0

(98.6) 30.0

(86.0) 26.5

(79.7) 50.0

(122.0)

Average high °C (°F) 9.1

(48.4) 11.9

(53.4) 17.9

(64.2) 24.0

(75.2) 29.6

(85.3) 35.0

(95.0) 36.7

(98.1) 35.1

(95.2) 31.4

(88.5) 25.0

(77.0) 17.8

(64.0) 12.0

(53.6) 23.8

(74.8)

Daily mean °C (°F) 2.9

(37.2) 5.5

(41.9) 10.2

(50.4) 16.3

(61.3) 22.1

(71.8) 27.2

(81.0) 29.8

(85.6) 28.0

(82.4) 22.9

(73.2) 16.1

(61.0) 8.8

(47.8) 4.7

(40.5) 16.2

(61.2)

Average low °C (°F) -2.9

(26.8) -0.6

(30.9) 3.8

(38.8) 9.1

(48.4) 13.3

(55.9) 18.2

(64.8) 21.2

(70.2) 19.2

(66.6) 13.2

(55.8) 7.4

(45.3) 1.0

(33.8) -1.4

(29.5) 8.5

(47.2)

Record low °C (°F) -26.7

(-16.1) -20.5

(-4.9) -13.3

(8.1) -2.3

(27.9) 0.8

(33.4) 9.7

(49.5) 13.3

(55.9) 8.4

(47.1) 1.3

(34.3) -5.6

(21.9) -12.8

(9.0) -22.7

(-8.9) -26.7

(-16.1)

Average precipitation mm (inches) 51.6

(2.03) 44.8

(1.76) 55.1

(2.17) 29.2

(1.15) 9.8

(0.39) 0.0

(0.0) 0.0

(0.0) 0.0

(0.0) 0.0

(0.0) 1.7

(0.07) 10.9

(0.43) 35.8

(1.41) 238.9

(9.41)

Average rainy days 6 8 8 7 2 0 0 0 0 1 3 5 40

Average snowy days 2 2 1 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 1 6

Average relative humidity (%) 72 69 62 56 45 34 30 30 34 42 55 67 50

Mean monthly sunshine hours 149.3 153.5 202.5 235.7 329.6 362.6 378.6 344.8 323.2

274.0 235.0 143.1 3,131.9

Source 1: NOAA (1959-1983)[52]

Source 2: Ogimet[53]

Places of interest[edit]

Foreign consulates

India, Iran and Pakistan operate their consulate here for trade, military and political links.

Neighborhoods

Shahr-e Naw (Downtown)

Welayat (Office of the governor)

Qol-Ordue (Army's HQ)

Farqa (Army's HQ)

Darwaze Khosh

Chaharsu

Pul-e Ragine

Sufi-abad

New-abad

Pul-e malaan

Thakhte Safar

Howz-e-Karbas

Baramaan

Darwaze-ye Qandahar

Darwaze-ye Iraq

Darwaze Az Kordestan

Parks

Park-e Taraki

Park-e Millat

Khane-ye Jihad Park

Monuments

Herat Citadel (Qala Ikhtyaruddin or Arg)

Musallah Complex

Musalla Minarets of Herat

Of the more than dozen minarets that once stood in Herāt, many have been toppled from war and neglect over the past century. Recently, however, everyday traffic threatens many of the remaining unique towers by shaking the very foundations they stand on. Cars and trucks that drive on a road encircling the ancient city rumble the ground every time they pass these historic structures. UNESCO personnel and Afghan authorities have been working to stabilize the Fifth Minaret.[54][55]

Museums

Herat Museum, located inside the Herat Citadel

Jihad Museum

Mausoleums and tombs

Gawhar Shad Mausoleum

Mausoleum of Khwajah Abdullah Ansari

Tomb of Jami

Tomb of khaje Qaltan

Mausoleum of Mirwais Sadiq

Jewish cemetery – there once existed an ancient Jewish community in the city. Its remnants are a cemetery and a ruined shrine.[56]

Mosques

Jumu'ah Mosque (Friday Mosque of Herat)

Gazargah Sharif

Khalghe Sharif

Shah Zahdahe

Hotels

Serena Hotel (coming soon)

Diamond Hotel

Marcopolo Hotel

Stadiums

Herat Stadium

Universities

Herat University

Demography[edit]

Further information: Demography of Afghanistan

The population of Herat numbered approximately 592,902 in 2021.[3] The city houses a multi-ethnic society and speakers of the Persian language are in the majority.[57] There is no current data on the precise ethnic composition of the city's population, but according to a 2003 map found in the National Geographic Magazine, Persian-speaking Tajik and Farsiwan peoples form the majority of the city, comprising around 85% of the population. The remaining population comprises Pashtuns (10%), Hazaras (2%), Uzbeks (2%) and Turkmens (1%).[58]

Persian is the native language of Herat and the local dialect – known by natives as Herātī – belongs to the Khorāsānī cluster within Persian. It is akin to the Persian dialects of eastern Iran, notably those of Mashhad and Khorasan Province, which borders Herat. This Persian dialect serves as the lingua franca of the city. The second language that is understood by many is Pashto, which is the native language of the Pashtuns. The local Pashto dialect spoken in Herat is a variant of western Pashto, which is also spoken in Kandahar and southern and western Afghanistan. Religiously, Sunni Islam is practiced by the majority, while Shias make up the minority.[citation needed]

The city has high residential density clustered around the core of the city. However, vacant plots account for a higher percentage of the city (21%) than residential land use (18%) and agricultural is the largest percentage of total land use (36%).[59]

The city once had a Jewish community. About 280 families lived in Herat as of 1948, but most of them moved to Israel that year, and the community disappeared by 1992. There are four former synagogues in the city's old quarter, which were neglected for decades and fell into disrepair. In the late 2000s, the buildings of the synagogues were renovated by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, and at this time, three of them were turned into schools and nurseries, the Jewish community having vanished. The Jewish cemetery is being taken care of by Jalil Ahmed Abdelaziz.[60]

Sports[edit]

Professional sports teams from Herat

Club League Sport Venue Established

Hindukush Stars Shpageeza Cricket League Cricket Herat Cricket Ground 2021

Toofan Harirod F.C. Afghan Premier League Football Herat Stadium 2012

Stadiums

Herat Cricket Ground

Herat Stadium

Notable people from Herat[edit]

Rulers and emperors[edit]

Tahir ibn Husayn 9th century Abbasid Caliphate army general, and the founder of Tahirid dynasty

Ghiyasuddin Muhammad, was the emperor of the Ghurid dynasty from 1163 to 1202.

During his reign, the Ghurid dynasty became a world power, which stretched from Gorgan to Bengal

Mīrzā Shāhrūkh bin Timur Barlas, Emperor of the Timurid dynasty of Herāt

Abu Sa'id Mirza, ruler of the Timurid Empire during the mid-fifteenth century

Mīrzā Husseyn Bāyqarāh, Emperor of the Timurid dynasty of Herāt

Shāh Abbās The Great, Emperor of Safavid Persia

Ahmad Shah Durrani, founder of the Durrani Empire

Emir Dost Mohammad Khan, founder of the Barakzai dynasty, buried in the city

Sultan Jan, ruler of Herat in the 19th century

Politicians[edit]

Ahmad Maymandi 11th century Persian vizier of the Ghaznavid empire

Ismail Khan, former governor of Herat Province and Minister of Water and Energy

Amena Afzali, politician

Faramarz Tamanna, politician

Poets[edit]

Asjadi, 10th-11th century royal Persian poet at the court of the Ghaznavids

Khwājah Abdullāh al-Herawi al-Ansārī, a Persian poet of the 11th century

Pur-Baha Jami, 13th century Iranian poet, Pun master, satirist, and often scathing social commentator, born in Jam, spent his youth in Herat

Nūr ud-Dīn Jāmī, a Persian Sufi poet of the 15th century

Nizām ud-Din ‘Alī Shīr Herawi, famous poet and scientist of the Timurid era

Hatefi, a Persian poet of the 16th century and nephew of Nūr ud-Dīn Jāmī

Latif Nazemi, Persian poet

Scientists[edit]

Abu Mansur Muvaffak Harawi, 10th-century Persian physician

Abolfadl Harawi, 10th-century astronomer under the patronage of the Buyids in Rey, originally from Herat

Taftazani, a Muslim polymath of the 14th century

Muhammad ibn Yusuf al-Harawi 15th century Persian physician

Nimat Allah al-Harawi 17th century Persian chronicler at the court of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir

Religious figures[edit]

Fakhr ad-Din al-Razi, polymath and Islamic scholar of the 12th-century

Hussain Kashefi, a 15th-century Persian prose-stylist and Islamic scholar and scientist

Ali al-Hirawi al-Qari, from 17th century, considered to be one of the masters of hadith and Imams of fiqh

Artists[edit]

Ali ibn Abi Bakr al-Harawi 12th and 13th century Persian traveller and first known graffiti

artist in the Muslim world, originally from Herat

Ustād Kamāl ud-Dīn Behzād, the greatest of the medieval Persian painters

Mir Ali Heravi, prominent Persian calligrapher and calligraphy teacher of Nastaʿlīq script in the 16th century

Alka Sadat, Film producer was born here[61]

Sonita Alizadeh, rapper and activist

Sports[edit]

Nadia Nadim, Afghan-Danish football player, most influential and greatest Afghan female football player of all time, won the French league title in the 2020-21 season with Paris Saint-Germain

Hamidullah Karimi, Afghan footballer, plays as a forward for Indian club Delhi United S.C.

Mohammad Rafi Barekzay, Afghan footballer, plays as a midfielder for Toofaan Harirod F.C

Others[edit]

Gowhar Shad, wife of Shāh Rūkh Mīrzā

Zablon Simintov, last remaining Jew living in Afghanistan

Ferdos Hosseinzadeh, last remaining king in Afghanistan[citation needed]

Economy and infrastructure[edit]

Transport[edit]

Air[edit]

Main article: Herat International Airport

Herat International Airport was built by engineers from the United States in the 1960s and was used by the Soviet Armed Forces during the Soviet–Afghan War in the 1980s. It was bombed in late 2001 during Operation Enduring Freedom but had been rebuilt within the next decade. The runway of the airport has been extended and upgraded and as of August 2014 there were regularly scheduled direct flights to Delhi, Dubai, Mashad, and various airports in Afghanistan. At least five airlines operated regularly scheduled direct flights to Kabul.

Rail[edit]

Further information: Rail transport in Afghanistan

Rail connections to and from Herat were proposed many times, during The Great Game of the 19th century and again in the 1970s and 1980s, but nothing came to life. In February 2002, Iran and the Asian Development Bank[62][63] announced funding for a railway connecting Torbat-e Heydarieh in Iran to Herat. This was later changed to begin in Khaf in Iran, a 191 km (119 mi) railway for both cargo and passengers, with work on the Iranian side of the border starting in 2006.[64][65] Construction is underway in the Afghan side and it was estimated to be completed by March 2018.[66] There is also the prospect of an extension across Afghanistan to Sher Khan Bandar.

Road[edit]

The AH76 highway connects Herat to Maymana and the north. The AH77 connects it east towards Chaghcharan and north towards Mary in Turkmenistan. Highway 1 (part of Asian highway AH1) links it to Mashhad in Iran to the northwest, and south via the Kandahar–Herat Highway to Delaram.

Gallery[edit]

Notable places in Herāt

Outside the Shrine of Gazar Gah, c. 1939

U.S. Consulate in Herat

Landmark at a traffic circle

Mausoleum of Mirwais Sadiq Khan, son of Ismail Khan, who was killed in 2004 in clashes with the Afghan National Army

Shopping center

Pol-e Mālān, a historical bridge

Pillar of Musallah Complex

Khwājah Abdullāh Ansārī shrine, a Sufi of the 11th century

Gazar Gah cemetery

Tomb of Jāmi, a poet of the 15th century

The Jewish cemetery

View of Herat from a hill

Herat in fiction[edit]

The beginning of Khaled Hosseini's 2007 novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is set in and around Herāt.

Salman Rushdie's novel *The Enchantress of Florence* makes frequent reference to events in Herāt in the Middle Ages.

Sister cities[edit]

Council Bluffs, Iowa, United States (since 2016)[67]

See also[edit]

Aria (satrapy)

Geography of Afghanistan

Greater Khorasan

Herāt Province

History of Afghanistan