

Concluding Remarks

In the preceding pages I have attempted to reconstruct the history of Herat and the ways in which it related to, and was embedded in, larger territorial and political frameworks. Special attention has been paid to the manner in which the region was perceived and represented during the period between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries. Spatial relations may be analyzed from different angles. From the vantage point of the *Annales* school, it is the geographical setting and its physical conditions that provide the framework for human action.¹ Other approaches assign a greater role to human strategies and social conceptions in an ongoing creation and negotiation of space. From this perspective, space becomes a function of the social relationships and forces of production.² Emanations and representations of power are a vital element in this nexus.³ Spaces are further enriched by the formation and perpetuation of cultural memories which endow them with an intrinsic value and in turn reinforce collective social identities.⁴

Given the fact that only certain phases and aspects of the history of Herat have been treated so far, this study explores the complexities connected with the notions of space on two levels. One important concern in the “mapping” of Khurāsān has been to outline the political developments and to determine the position of Herat within the prevailing configurations of power. The second strand of investigation revolves around the concomitant notions of space and territory. The resulting narrative is largely determined by the manner in which the terrain is depicted in the available Persian chronicles. From the nineteenth century on, British documents and European travelogues constitute additional sources of information.

The density and focus of the information on Khurāsān varies greatly. The prominent position Herat enjoyed in Timurid times is reflected in the available historiography. Throughout this period the city is central both in terms of exercise of power and of the sort of representation it receives. The resulting grid of information is relatively fine; it allows for a close look at the system of irrigation, administrative units, and other such specifications. In later times, Herat recedes to the sidelines of the historical narrative. Sources tend to take on a wide-angle approach and to highlight the dynamic and dynastic aspects of power rather than administrative minutiae. With the advent of modernity the relationship between sovereignty and the concepts of territory undergoes a decisive modification. At this point, the narrative shifts to the difficult transition from a setting of loosely negotiated allegiances to the notion of state power as linked to a clearly delimited territory.

HERAT AND KHURĀSĀN IN EARLY MODERN PERCEPTIONS

Designated spaces are typically described on the basis of their outlines. This also holds true for the eastern and northeastern boundaries of Khurāsān. Given its literal meaning as “the place where the sun rises”, Khurāsān carried the general connotation of the “eastern territory” or, loosely formulated, “anywhere east” in relation to western Persia or ‘Irāq-i ‘Ajam. In the extreme east and northeast this space was perceived to be bounded by rivers. The Indus (Sind, Mihrān) served as the dividing line between Khurāsān and Hind/Hindūstān, or northern India,⁵ whereas the Oxus was generally seen as the northeastern delimitation. This view is reflected by the late tenth-century Persian geography entitled *Hudūd al-‘ālam*, which delineates Gurgān in the west, the Oxus in the north and India in the east as the boundaries of Khurāsān.⁶ The perception of the Oxus as the northern limit is shared by the contemporaneous Arab geographer Ibn Ḥauqal.⁷

¹ Febvre 1974: 66.

² Lefebvre 2003.

³ Hochmuth & Rau 2006: 27; Power & Standen 1999: 1.

⁴ Fragner 1999: 11.

⁵ C. E. Bosworth, “Khurāsān.” *E.I.*, 2 V: 56; S. Maqbul Ahmad, “Hind.” *E.I.*, 2 III: 404–9.

⁶ *Hudūd al-‘ālam* 102, 325.

⁷ Kramers & Wiet 1964: 413–99.

Under the Safavids the river not only represented the border of Khurāsān; it also coincided with claims to sovereignty. In 1511 the first Safavid ruler Shāh Ismāʿil I. (r. 1501–1524) fixed the Oxus as the border between the Safavid and Uzbek spheres of interest.⁸ Throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Khurāsān was described as extending all the way from Qazvīn/Simnān in the west to the border (*sarḥadd*) of Qandahār in the east and the Oxus in the northeast.⁹

The perception of the Oxus as the delimitation of different geographical spheres helped to shape notions of political space. However, the river itself hardly presented a barrier in practical terms and did not prevent movement or military expansion in either direction. In the course of the competition for Khurāsān, countless troops traversed it with ease. While Khurāsān and Transoxiana were perceived to be separate realms, military action across this divide primarily met with ecological obstacles. The desert extending up to the western bank of the river presented a much greater challenge to invading armies than the river itself. In the existing historiography, the Oxus certainly does not figure as an embattled line of defense. The relative insignificance of borders is also discernable in other medieval and early modern settings. On the basis of his translation of Al-Idrisī's *Book of Roger* and the study of travelogues, Ralph Brauer observes that "apart from sea frontiers, sharply defined boundary lines within the Islamic Empire were either non-existent or of little practical importance." Given the strong urban orientation of the medieval Islamic Empire, he reaches the conclusion that "the projections of power over the territory of a given ruler was not uniform but rather radiated from his urban center(s) in ever diminishing intensity as the distance from the capital towns increased."¹⁰

Herat furnishes a prime example for the fact that the rather loose definition of space on the fringes of empires was offset by painstaking attention to the internal divisions of the fertile centers. Several sources document that a close account was kept of the economic assets of the province. Thus Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū's categorization of agricultural units on the basis of the intensity of production and the number of villages and hamlets making up an administrative unit conveys a clear linkage between territory, local patterns of production and the tax base. This grid information is further honed by descriptions of the irrigation system of the oasis proper. Qāsim b. Yūsuf's tax register details the units of irrigation and the amount of water apportioned. Based on the course and maintenance of irrigation channels, the resulting districts (*bulūk*) were defined from within, and their outlines were determined by the availability and reach of water. The extent and number of these administrative units were a function of patronage and security; they rose and fell along with the degree of political stability, or lack thereof.

Another measured entity was associated with the highroads connecting the important urban centers. The fourteenth-century geographer Ḥamdullāh Mustaufī attributed the institution of the prevailing length unit (*farsakh*, *farsang*) to the mythical Kayanid king Kai Qubād.¹¹ In more recent times, the Ilkhanid ruler Ūljāitū (r. 1304–1316) had metered a number of roads and set up milestones. Ḥamdullāh Mustaufī's description of the routes radiating out from Ūljāitū's capital of Sulṭāniya includes the highroads traversing Khurāsān.¹² A uniting feature of these descriptions is that they merely list the most important cities along these routes and the distances separating them. In this type of portrayal, the region is conceived of as a sequence of points and the intervening space only figures in terms of time and distance. Ḥamdullāh Mustaufī's *Nuzhat al-qulūb* also deals with the cities of Khurāsān and their noteworthy sites. This focus on towns rather than on the countryside in between can also be observed in early modern European travelogues.¹³ Yet other sections of Ḥamdullāh Mustaufī's work discuss larger geographical features, such as mountains, rivers, lakes, and seas, in an encyclopedic fashion.

⁸ AM 139.

⁹ AT 154; HS IV: 553; AM 166. See also Röhrborn 1966: 16, 103–104, 112.

¹⁰ Brauer 1995: 36, 42–3. See also Ellenblum 2002: 107. Yet there also are historical examples for rivers forming a hotly contested boundary line. See Amitai-Preiss for the Euphrates as the focus of the frontier strategies adopted by the Mongols and Mamluks from 1260–1320 (Amitai-Preiss 1999).

¹¹ Wiesehöfer traces the term *farsang* to *parasange*, which apparently denoted a sort of "milestone" in Achaemenid times (Wiesehöfer 2005: 117).

¹² Le Strange 1993: 160–1, 168–172. See also Melville 1990: 57.

¹³ Landwehr 2008: 104, 109, 111, 116–17, 121, 130.

Contrary to the rather static image offered by geographical accounts and tax registers, the chronicles primarily portray the lands of Khurāsān as a backdrop for the court in motion. A common feature of the Iranian courts was that they were “itinerant” and “military” by nature. This characterization broadly applies to all the ruling dynasties from the eleventh to the eighteenth centuries.¹⁴ Driven by the need to provide for large bodies of cavalry, the king and his retinue engaged in a pattern of constant movement between winter quarters (*qishlāq*) and summer quarters (*yailāq*). Within this frame of action, the available pastures (*ulang*, *chaman*) constituted vital coordinates. The map determined by the pastoral environment was of a dual nature. Known by specific names, the grazing grounds constituted fixed entities in space. But as their availability fluctuated according to season and frequentation, they were also relational in character. This phenomenon created what Lattimore has coined as the “sovereign importance of movement”: In order to survive, Mongol groups had to lay claim to a larger network of grazing grounds and to the routes of migration between them.¹⁵ The Ilkhanid court likewise “steadily ate its way round the country”.¹⁶

Aside from being motivated by ecological constraints, the onward motion played a crucial role in the representation and assertion of royal authority. The immediate presence of the court gave substance to territorial claims and affirmed vital alliances with the local leadership. The royal realm was actualized and became tangible by the physical attendance of the influential military commanders and their participation in courtly activities: The ceremonies involving formal submission and the granting of royal favors, the exclusive circle formed during hunting expeditions and other such ritualized activities served to map and enforce relationships of power.¹⁷ The field of gravity created by this exchange of patronage and allegiance found its practical expression in the positions the individual leaders assumed in the battle order during military action.

The nexus of royal power and perceptions of space receives a different treatment in the fifteenth-century sources concerning the city of Herat and its surroundings. Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū and Isfizārī portray Herat and its central position by means of two interlinked themes. Both authors attribute the prosperity of the region to the combined effects of geographical position and royal patronage leading to a mutually reinforcing cycle of beneficial effects: Given its uniquely favorable environment, Herat was predestined to be the political and spiritual nave of Khurāsān. The protection granted by the Timurid kings in turn fostered the economic well-being of the region and furthered its attractiveness as a center of learning and religiosity. As portrayed by the authors of the time, the combination of natural factors and just rule produced a sense of intrinsic coherence.

This mode of representation crystallizes around two themes. The first theme highlights the worldly and religious buildings erected and maintained by the Timurids. These edifices are portrayed as physical representations of royal power, and endowed with mighty proportions. Isfizārī places the turrets of the citadel of Herat in immediate contact with the signs of the zodiac and confers sky-high dimensions on the Friday mosque. These images of Timurid strength are rounded off with the depiction of a number of impregnable fortresses occupying strategic positions around Herat. The firmness of the fortress of Naratū is emphasized by the fact that it withstood a seven-year siege despite the fact that its only inhabitant was a cock crowing on its ramparts. The invincibility of the castle of Khaisār is illustrated by an anecdote that not even Chingiz Khān dared to besiege it for fear of defeat.

The second theme celebrates the uniqueness of the Herati setting by describing its agricultural wealth and lush vegetation. The meadows dotting the landscape around the city are depicted by means of a conventional imagery and likened to Paradise. Focus is further laid on the unique qualities of the local fruits, which will only thrive and develop their full flavor if cultivated in situ. Halva ingredients likewise lose their specific character if exported to other regions. While Isfizārī mentions numerous fine types of grapes, melons form the centerpiece of his culinary orbit. The value attached to this fruit also sheds light on court life and royal

¹⁴ See Morgan 1988: 35–6 on the Saljūqs and Melville 1990 on the Īlkhāns.

¹⁵ Lattimore 1962: 535. See also Ruggie 1993: 149.

¹⁶ Melville 1990: 63.

¹⁷ See Schlögl for the significance of communication patterns for the formation and enactment of political power in early modern urban society (2004a: 21–4, 27–28).

pastimes. Certain kinds of melon were considered luxury goods and served as costly items of exchange. Particular prestige was attached to the *bābā shaikhī* melons, which were submitted to the grandees of Herat as gifts. In Isfizarī's time the melon harvest was one of the factors determining the movements of the court: The king and his retinue preferably visited the famous centers of production to obtain their share of this produce. Finally, Isfizarī's account endows the melon with a symbolical value. The repeated mention of the size of the fruit and of its abundance underlines the prosperity and affluence associated with Timurid rule. This linkage between temporal power and agricultural production notwithstanding, the fine quality of the local melons was to prove a more enduring feature of Herat than many of the buildings erected by the Timurids. In 1740 the Kashmirian traveler 'Abd al-Karīm mainly observed signs of desolation in the urban fabric but still noted the inimitable quality of the local melons.

One recurrent theme in the Persian literature is the construction of Herat and its dependencies as an Iranian space. Many accounts people the region with mythical Iranian figures and embed it in an Iranian topography. One common element is an Arabic saying which locates Herat within a network of other association-laden Iranian territories: "If the soil of Isfahan, the north wind of Herat and the water of Khvārazm were combined, the local population would enjoy an everlasting life."¹⁸ Another field of meaning is created by frequent references to the legendary Kayanid dynasty, which figures as the forefathers of the Jamshīdī *ūymāq* and the leading lineage of Sīstān. The eighteenth-century author Muḥammad Kāzīm Marvī constructs the lands around Herat as an entirely mythical sphere, in which a man-eating serpent is done away with by a hero of Kayanid descent and the rebellious tribal leadership ignores the hostile activities of Nādir Shāh's troops, while leisurely reciting the poetry of 'Umar Khayyām on unassailable mountain tops.

MODERN NOTIONS OF TERRITORIALITY

The nineteenth century witnessed a fundamental shift in political paradigms: The perception of the state as a system based on personal bonds of loyalty ("Personenverband") gave way to the notion of the state as a territorially fixed entity. As part of this process, variegated and competing patterns of authority were replaced with a unified and centralized government.¹⁹ In the context of the Iranian and Afghan polities, the development of modern state structures owed its momentum largely to the impact of colonial intervention.

In early modern states, relationships of power tend to be fluid. In this setting, the political space is determined by an ongoing bargaining process between the king and his military aristocracy. The political system hinges on the maintenance of a web of personal allegiances, which in turn generates a high degree of decentralization and segmentation. Yet this phenomenon does not translate into uniform weakness. It is rather the scope of intervention that varies in different settings and at different times. In the early modern environment, the focus rests on the resources that the urban centers and their fertile hinterland have to offer. The exercise of power is intermittent and mediated by local elites, which control such local assets as trade routes and agricultural land in exchange for military service.²⁰ The early modern domain is charted by a pattern of movement which serves a twofold purpose: Reviving existing bonds of loyalty and feeding the troops. The constant mobility of the royal court serves to link the important coordinates of the realm and thus enhances the dimensionality of space and terrain. In this environment, regional boundaries are largely peripheral to the exercise of power.

In modern polities, the focus shifts to the outlines of the state: The territory is staked out by means of clearly demarcated borders, which embody the extent of sovereignty and simultaneously contain the inhabitants. In many ways, the properties associated with borders assume physical characteristics. Ideally speaking, they function as a vessel, protecting the population from external aggression on the one hand and

¹⁸ Variations of this saying have been recorded by Ḥamdullāh Mustaufī in the fourteenth century, Ibn Valī in the seventeenth century, Shīrvānī and I'tizād al-Saltāna in the nineteenth century (Le Strange 1993: 150; Akhmedov 1977: 82, *Ri'yāz al-siyāḥat* 419; *Vaqāyi' va savānih* 26).

¹⁹ Poggi 1978: 19–31, 86–108; Ruggie 1993: 149–51.

²⁰ Bayly 2004: 31; Ellenblum 1999: 107–8.

preventing it from evading the state's claim on its loyalty on the other.²¹ This imagery has indeed entered local modernist discourses. In the early twentieth century, the Afghan intellectual Maḥmūd Ṭarzī (1865–1933) constructed an interdependence between “homeland” (*vaṭan*) and “nation” (*millat*) by likening the first to a receptacle (*ẓarf*) and the second to its contents (*maẓrūf*): Just as a vessel without contents is of no use, the contents without its vessel would fall from a state of collectedness into confusion.²²

In the framework of this study, the transition from early modern to modern politics is highlighted by the genesis of Afghanistan as a national entity. While the neighboring states carrying the suffix *–stān* were created in the course of the twentieth century, the term *afghānistān* can be traced back to the early fourteenth century. Yet the formation of the modern political unit known by that name did not occur before the nineteenth century. In the Persian chronicles, this term is applied to region inhabited by Pashtūns (*afghān*, *afāghina*). In his account of the Mongol period, Saif al-Haravī uses the designation of Afghānistān in contradistinction to Khurāsān. He reports that 50,000 troops were raised in Khurāsān, Jibāl-i Turkistān, Shabūrghān (Shibarghān), and Afghānistān for Chingiz Khān's army in Shavvāl 618/November–December 1221.²³ The same author informs us that Afghānistān constituted the easternmost portion of the province of Herat: In 649/1251, the newly elected Great Khān Möngke awarded the city of Herat and its dependencies, comprising all the regions extending to the Oxus and Indus, to the founder of the Kart dynasty, Malik Shams al-Dīn (r. 643–675/1245–1276).²⁴ Saif al-Haravī's description of Shams al-Dīn's military campaign to Bhakkar in 657/1259 confirms the impression that the region of Afghānistān adjoined the Indus at that time.²⁵ This notion is taken up by seventeenth-century Safavid sources, which place Afghānistān in the Mughal realm. The Safavid geography *Mukhtaṣar-i Muḥīd* speaks of Kābul and “Afghānistān-i Hind” in contradistinction to Khurāsān.²⁶

While modern nationalist discourses identify Aḥmad Shāh Sadūzai as the founder of present-day Afghanistan, the Persian sources of the time do not yield any evidence that this term gained currency as a state designation during the eighteenth century. Aḥmad Shāh was generally addressed as the “ruler of Iran, Tūrān, Khurāsān, the eastern territories, and Hindūstān”.²⁷ His successor Tīmūr Shāh likewise styled himself as “king of the countries of Hind and the territories of Turkistān, the ruler of the region of Sind and the realm

²¹ Bayly 2004: 31–2, 37, 247–8. See also Chandler 1998:18–19.

²² Maḥmūd Ṭarzī 341.

²³ Saif al-Haravī 1943: 76–7.

²⁴ As recounted by Saif al-Haravī, Malik Shams al-Dīn's visit to Möngke's court in Turkistān highlights the encounter between the Persianate and the Mongol worlds. Swayed by Shams al-Dīn's Iranian manners (*ba-rasm-i 'ajam*), his eloquence and “sweet words” (*faṣīḥ va shīrīn suḥan*), Möngke Khān expressed his willingness to bestow on him all the regions in Iran and Tūrān he desired. Eventually he granted the province of Herat to the Kart ruler: *Malik Shams al-Dīn Kart-rā... [ba] malikī-yi shahr-i Harāt... va tavābī-i ū chūn Jām va Bākharz va Kūsūya va Kh-R-H (?) va Fūshanj va Āzāb va Tūlak va Ghūr va Fīrūzkūh va Gharjistān va Murghāb va Fāryāb va Marjaq [Mārūchāq] tā āb-i Āmūy va Isfīzār va Farāh va Sijistān va Tigīnābād va Kābul va Tīrāh va Bustistān va Afghānistān tā shaṭṭ-i Sind va ḥadd-i Hind firistādīm* (Saif al-Haravī 1943: 162–9; Saif al-Haravī 2002: 41; Saif al-Haravī 2006: 196–202; see also Isfīzārī I: 410).

²⁵ In a message to the governor of Bhakkar, Malik Shams al-Dīn asserted that he controlled all of Afghānistān up to the banks of the Indus: *Tamāmat-i ahl-i qilā' va biqā'-i Afghānistān tā ḥadd-i Sind va Hind ba'zī righbatan va ikhtiyāran va qaumī qahran va qasran ba kharājgudhārī va farmānbardārī-yi mā ba dam va qadam āthār-i khidmat ba izhār rasānīdand* (Saif al-Haravī 1943: 251). These territorial designations retained their validity in Ilkhanid times. In 714/1315, Afghānistān once again figured among the territories the Kartid ruler Malik Ghiyāth al-Dīn I (r. 707–729/1308–1328/29) received from the Ilkhanid ruler Ūljāitū (r. 703–716/1304–1316). The possessions assigned to Ghiyāth al-Dīn comprised the “land of Herat to the furthest reaches of Afghānistān and the limit of the Oxus” (*khiṭṭa-yi Harāt-rā tā aqṣā-yi Afghānistān va ḥadd-i Āmū badū mufavvaẓ kard* (Saif al-Haravī 1943: 619–20; Saif al-Haravī 2002: 139; Saif al-Haravī 2006: 626)).

²⁶ *Mukhtaṣar-i Muḥīd* describes Sistān as bounded by Khurāsān in one direction, and by Kābul and Afghānistān-i Hind in the other (I: 281). Iskandar Munshī mentions “Fūshanj” (Pishīn) as part of Afghānistān in connection with the activities of the Safavid governor 'Alī Mardān Khān in 1628–1629 (IM, *Dhail* 76). Against the backdrop of the Safavid campaign to Qandahār in the winter of 1648–49, Valī Qulī Shāmlū refers to *Afghānistān-i Tarakī* and *'Alīkhēl* (*Qīṣaṣ al-khāqānī* I 341).

²⁷ *Farmānnavā-yi Īrvān [sic] va Tūrān va Khurāsān va khāvarān va Hindūstān* (Petition of 'Alī Rizā Khān Shīrvānī (d. 1183/1769–70), the leader of the Qizilbāsh of Qandahār, to Aḥmad Shāh, no date, quoted in Fūfalzā'ī 1967: 724).

of Tūrān”.²⁸ In the early nineteenth century Tīmūr Shāh’s son Shāh Zamān mentioned the “Afghan kingdom” (*mamlakat-i afghānīya*) and described it as a realm embracing “Khurāsān and part of India including Kashmīr, Lahore, Sind, Multān and Shikārpūr all the way to the great ocean, Qandahār, Balkh up to the banks of the Oxus, the limits of Bukhārā, as well as the *dār al-saltāna* of Herat as far as the limits of ‘Ajam”.²⁹

The loose definition of the Sadūzai realm as comprising “Iran” or “Khurāsān”, as well as “Turkistān” and “Hindūstān” is also taken up by contemporaneous accounts, such as the *Tārīkh-i aḥmadshāhī*.³⁰ The divergent territories making up the Sadūzai kingdom could only be tied together by a rapid succession of military campaigns and a constant reinvigoration of the personal allegiances between the king and the local leadership. As Aḥmad Shāh’s successors lacked both the personal and military resources necessary for the maintenance of this difficult equilibrium between center and periphery, the Sadūzai kingdom underwent a gradual process of shrinkage, which accelerated towards the turn of the nineteenth century. Shāh Zamān’s energies were entirely consumed in the effort to safeguard his Indian possessions. Durrānī claims were hardly enforced in the western parts of Khurāsān, where the nascent Qājār Empire increasingly made its influence felt. This is reflected by Shāh Zamān’s correspondence with Fath ‘Alī Shāh Qājār, in which he referred to his realm as “the mighty Durrani kingdom” (*daulat-i qāhira-yi durrānīya*) or the “guarded domains of the Durrānīs” (*mamālik-i maḥrūsa-yi durrānīya*). Fath ‘Alī Shāh, by contrast, opted for the more modest designation of the Durrānī state as the “kingdom of the Afghans” (*daulat-i afāghina*).³¹

The ongoing shrinkage notwithstanding, the older territorial designations for the Sadūzai realm lingered on. In 1233/1818, when the Indian dependencies of Kashmīr and Dērajāt were about to slip from the control of Kābul, Boukhary still described the truncated kingdom as comprising “Khurāsān” and “Hindūstān”.³² The equation of the Afghan realm with Khurāsān even survived the dramatic territorial losses that coincided with the fall of the Sadūzais and the rise of the Muḥammadzai dynasty in the 1820s. As late as 1855, the Afghan historian ‘Aṭā’ Muḥammad Shikārpūrī consistently referred to the much reduced Muḥammadzai realm as Khurāsān.³³

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the term “Afghanistan” resurfaced and soon assumed a political connotation. British authors were the first to employ this designation for the Afghan kingdom. Writing in 1798, the British traveler Forster referred to the extensive territory ascribed to the Sadūzai rulers of Kābul as Afghanistan.³⁴ Forster’s description of this space also includes assessments of the peculiar features of its inhabitants, in particular their unruliness, which was to become a major theme in the evolving British discourse on Afghanistan:

The Afghans are the indigenous possessors of a tract of country, which stretches from the mountains of Tartary to certain parts of the gulf of Cambay and Persia; and from the Indus to the confines of Persia. The inhabitants of this wide domain, have no written character and speak a language peculiar to themselves. They are a robust, hardy race of men, and being generally addicted to a state of predatory warfare, their manners largely partake of a barbarous insolence, and they avow a fixed contempt for the occupations of civil life.³⁵

²⁸ *Shah-i mamālik-i Hind va bilād-i Turkistān, khadīv-i dāvar-i Sind va qalamrau-yi Tūrān* (Certificate of Tīmūr Shāh’s wedding with Khadīja Sultān, the daughter of the ‘Abbās Qulī Khān Bayāt, the governor of Nīshāpūr, on 1 Jumādā I 1201/19 February 1787, as quoted in Fūfalzā’ī 1958: 391, Fūfalzā’ī 1967: 268).

²⁹ *Mamlakat-i afghānīya-rā ki Khurāsān va ba’-i Hindūstān tā Kashmīr va Lāhūr va Sind va Multān va Shikārpūr tā kinār-i baḥr-i a’zam va Qandahār va Balkh tā lab-i Jaiḥūn hudūd-i Bukhārā va dār al-saltāna-yi Harāt tā hudūd-i mulk-i ‘ajam... musakhkhar namūdam*. Shāh Zamān gave this description of his former realm 17 years after his deposition in 1801 (Shāh Zamān to Rashīd Pāshā on the occasion of his pilgrimage to Mecca, Muḥarram 1234/November 1818, quoted in *Āryānā* 1343/1964, pp. 28–30; Fūfalzā’ī 1967: 548–50).

³⁰ TA (Humāyūn) 8; (ed. Saidmuradov) fol. 11a.

³¹ See the correspondence between Shāh Zamān and Fath ‘Alī Shāh in 1214–15/1799–1800 as reproduced in Fūfalzā’ī 1958: 139, 140, 142.

³² Boukhary, Persian text, p. 4.

³³ *Navā-yi ma’ārik*, introduction by Ahmad ‘Alī Kūhzād, p. III.

³⁴ Forster 1798 II: 48, 50, 72, 74–5, 79–80, 85–7.

³⁵ Forster 1798 II: 74.

Soon after, the term “Afghanistan” was employed in the Anglo-Persian treaty of 1801. Interestingly, this designation only appeared in the Persian text of the treaty, which spoke of the Afghan king as *pādshāh-i afghānistān*. The English version, by contrast, referred to the “King of the Afghans”.³⁶ The Anglo-Afghan treaty concluded by the British envoy Elphinstone in 1809, by contrast, described the Sadūzai ruler Shāh Shujāʿ as “King of Cabool”.³⁷ Elphinstone’s account of his visit to Shāh Shujāʿ’ s winter residence in Pishāvar points to a persisting fluidity of regional denominations. The author himself admits his inability to arrive at a clear-cut definition for the competing concepts of Afghanistan and Khurāsān:

The origin of the name of Afghaun, now so generally applied to the nation I am about to describe, is entirely uncertain; but is, probably, modern. It is known to the Afghauns themselves only through the medium of the Persian language. Their own name for their nation is Pooshtoon; in the plural, Pooshtauneh... They have no general name for their own country, but sometimes apply the Persian one of Afghaunistaun... The name most generally applied to the whole country by its inhabitants is Khorassaun; but this appellation is obviously incorrect; for, on the one hand, the whole of the Afghaun country is not included within the strict limits of Khorassaun; and, on the other, a considerable part of that province is not inhabited by Afghauns.”³⁸

At the time of the conclusion of the Anglo-Persian treaty in 1801, the Afghan kingdom represented a concrete political entity more strongly than in the period after 1818, when the Sadūzai realm was reduced to three competing principalities. Although the British authorities initially denied sovereignty to the new Muḥammadzai rulers of Kābul and Qandahār, the concept of “Afghanistan” as a political entity gradually took hold in the official correspondence and was firmly established by the 1830s. While the territorial boundaries intended by this designation remained vague, it was employed in a cumulative sense for all the regions under Afghan overlordship, or, as a residual category, for all the territories beyond immediate Iranian control. Thus in 1835 a British memorandum critically commented on the fact that Muḥammad Shāh Qājār “has very extended schemes of conquest in the direction of Affghanistan [sic], and, in common with all his subjects, conceives that the right of sovereignty over Herat and Kandahar is as complete now as in the reign of the Suffavean [Safavid] dynasty”.³⁹ The British officials negotiating with the Qājār court, by contrast, formally treated the “kingdoms of Persia and Affghanistan” as equal entities and based their objection to Muḥammad Shāh Qājār’s planned invasion of Herat on the terms of the Anglo-Persian treaty of 1801.⁴⁰ By signing this treaty, they argued, the Iranian government had officially accepted Afghanistan as an independent country and was in no position to revive ancient claims to the region.⁴¹

While the notion of Afghanistan as a new territorial and political unit gradually acquired a life of its own, Qājār authorities held on to historical precedents and insisted on the restitution of the “proper” order of things which had prevailed during Safavid times. In 1835 the Iranian government rejected any notion of the

Affghans as a Government or a consolidated state, with whom relations of peace or equality could be maintained. They declared that a large portion of Affghanistan belonged to the Shah of Persia, and that he was at liberty to decide how he would deal with the Affghans as being his own subjects.⁴²

In 1838, as the Qājār siege of Herat dragged on inconclusively, the Persian Prime Minister Ḥājji Mīrzā Āqāsī bitterly complained to the British agent Stoddart of Britain’s one-sided interpretation of the Anglo-Persian treaty and of her hostile attitude to the Qājārs’ attempt at reclaiming their rightful possessions. Noting that Iranian sovereignty was accepted as far away as Kābul and Qandahār, Ḥājji Mīrzā Āqāsī pointed out that historical precedents justified his government’s continuing claims to Herat, which had always formed a corner stone of the Persian Empire:

³⁶ Aitchison 1983: 48; Champagne 1981: 59–60; Parvanta 2002: 18.

³⁷ Aitchison 1983: 233–4; Parvanta 2002: 18–19.

³⁸ Elphinstone 1992 I: 200–1.

³⁹ Ellis to Palmerston, Teheran, 13 November 1835 (IOL, L/PS/20/A7/1, No. 19 p. 11). See also Kashani-Sabet 1997: 217.

⁴⁰ McNeill to Haji Mirza Aqasi, n.d. (IOL, L/PS/20/A7/1 Appendix, enclosure 6 in No. 4, Dispatch No. 45 of 1837, p. 4).

⁴¹ Champagne 1981: 61.

⁴² Ellis to Palmerston, Teheran, 30 December 1835, IOL, L/PS/20/A7/1, p. 12.

This town, the second town in Persia in the time of the Suffaveans; Ispahan [Iṣfahān] the seat of the Shah; Herat the seat of the Walu Uhad [*valī 'ahd*, "heir apparent"]; the very ground I sit on, the property of Hasan Khan Shamloo, whose house stood where the camel artillery are pitched; this you won't help us get possession of...⁴³

The moment in history captured above is interesting in several respects. For one thing, Ḥājī Mīrzā Āqāsī's resentful comments on the ill-guided nature of British policy exemplify the emotive content and longevity of territorial designations. At the same time, the *vazīr*'s frustration at the British unwillingness to restore the status quo ante reflects the emergence of new political realities entirely opposed to traditional Iranian notions of territoriality.

The ongoing metamorphosis of existing territorial denominations, as well as the creation of new ones, was filtered by different sets of sources, which were in many ways interdependent. The views of British travelers and agents on the prevailing configurations of power had an impact on the members of the governments they interacted with. The incorporation of the term "Afghanistan" into the mainstream of Iranian historiography in the middle of the nineteenth century in turn influenced the later Afghan chronicles. Although the Iranian and Afghan authors offered divergent interpretations of the historical encounters reflecting the political and military weight of their respective governments, Afghanistan as a political concept became firmly embedded in both discourses.

The first Afghan historian to mention "Afghanistan" as a political entity is Sulṭān Muḥammad Bārakzai, who began to write his *Tārīkh-i sulṭānī* in 1280/1865. Reflecting the altered political realities of the second half of the nineteenth century, the author identifies Afghanistan as the territory located *between* Hindūstān, Iran, and Turkistan, and subject to Russian, British, and Iranian imperial ambitions. Furthermore, he distinguishes different uses of the term "Afghanistan," firstly its connotation as the territory controlled by the Afghan kings during various phases of history and, secondly, as the area the Afghāns/Pashtūns call their home. While he traces the coinage of "Afghanistan" as a political term to the Sadūzai era, the author projects its usage further back into the past, employing it also for the Nadirid period.⁴⁴

On the political level, the emergence of Afghanistan as a separate entity was sealed with the Muḥammadzai conquest of Herat in 1863 and the delimitation of the borders between the two countries from 1872 on. Combined with the loss of the Caucasian provinces in the early nineteenth century, these developments implied a dramatic process of shrinkage for Iran. Until 1863, the project of reclaiming ancient possessions in the east rated high on the Qājār agenda. These endeavors climaxed in the 1850s and were accompanied by a rich output in historical works buttressing long-standing territorial claims. A case in point is Rizā Qulī Khān Hidāyat's *Mulḥaqāt-i tārīkh-i rauzat al-ṣafā-yi nāṣirī*. The author endowed the Qājār dynasty with deep historical roots reaching back to Ilkhanid times⁴⁵ and created a linkage between their current political aims and historical junctures reflecting the "proper" order of things. According to this point of view, not only Marv and Sarakhs but also Balkh, Qandahār and Kābul formed an integral part of the Iranian state.⁴⁶ A further ingredient in these irredentist claims was the preoccupation with Herat and Marv as strategic "key positions" to the region.⁴⁷ This process of territorial focusing was accompanied by a corresponding sense of urgency and efforts at incorporation. Ironically, the endeavor to secure a whittled down version of Khurāsān still fed on a nostalgic view of the former metropolises and took no account of the structural transformation that had taken place in the meantime. Owing to political and economic decline, Herat and Marv did not even present a shadow of their former grandeur at the time when the governors of Mashhad attempted to bring them into the fold of the Qājār government. This situation was most pronounced in Marv, which had been taken over by Turkmen nomads in the course of the nineteenth century. At the time of the Qājār invasion of 1860, all vestiges of the ancient capital of Khurāsān had been obliterated, the region

⁴³ Extract of Stoddart's journal (IOL, L/PS/20/A/7/1 Appendix, Enclosure 6 in No. 19, p. 35).

⁴⁴ T Su 10, 114–115.

⁴⁵ TRSN IX: 4.

⁴⁶ TRSN IX: 283; TRSN X: 479, 540. In keeping with his expansive view of the regions properly belonging to Iran, Hidāyat prefers the term of Zābulistān to that of Afghānistān (TRSN X: 652–5).

⁴⁷ NT 1192; *Sifāratnāma* Persian text 112. See also Kashani-Sabet 1999: 32.

was dominated by felt tents and reed huts, and agricultural activity continued on a much reduced scale. Sīstān, which fell into the orbit of Qājār activities from the 1850s on, had likewise experienced an influx of nomadic groups in the meantime.

In the course of the nineteenth century, the altered political realities gradually found their way into the imagery employed by local elites. While adhering to the conventional expansive idea of Khurāsān, Hidāyat himself described the region as the most formidable of the four boundaries making up the “house” of Iran⁴⁸ and thus added a new, spatial element to traditional conceptions of political authority. Several decades later, the Afghan ruler Amīr ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Khān compared the newly-constructed Afghan state to a sturdy edifice warding off encroachment from outside and allowing greater control within.⁴⁹ This imagery is remarkable in that it replaces the early modern dynastic idea of a ruling “house” resting on a flexible system of loyalties with the notion of the state as a physically fixed structure. The stability associated with the newly established state borders created a sense of boundedness and constriction. At the same time, this new setup caused the effective seat of power to shift towards the center and enabled the government to broaden its scope of local intervention. The traditional role of the nobility changed accordingly. In Amīr ‘Abd al-Raḥmān’s perception, this group turned from privileged allies into vermin to be eradicated. A similar development took place in the Iranian setting, where the establishment of the northeastern border with Russia deprived the Khurasanian aristocrats of their role as wardens of the frontier and eventually made them obsolete.

The new political formulae that arose with the recasting of power relations in the historic region of Khurāsān coincided with, and mirrored the European debate concerning the evolving European borders and the increasing demarcation of the colonial space. In the early twentieth century, the former Indian viceroy Curzon (1899–1905) contrasted the time “when England had no frontier but the ocean” with the ongoing project of delimiting the “manifold Frontiers of dominion, now amid the gaunt highlands of the Indian border, or the eternal snows of the Himalayas, now on the parched sands of Persia or Arabia, now in the equatorial swamps and forests of Africa”.⁵⁰

Modern notions of boundedness also entered the impressions Curzon gathered on the political state of Khurāsān during his visit in 1889. Contrary to his later credo concerning the validity of modern boundaries, Curzon viewed the imposition of the Russian border across the historic space of Khurāsān in terms of loss. The Iranian defeat at Marv in 1860 heralded a process of territorial fragmentation which culminated in the Treaty of Tehran of 1881, and eventually left Iran in control of a territory defined by a line originating on the right bank of the Tejend in the east, passing in the east along the northeastern rim of the Kopet Dagħ mountains, and coinciding with the Atrak river in the west. As a result, the modern Iranian province of Khurāsān represented a whittled down, truncated version of the formerly claimed territory. In his attempt to capture the impact of modern regional developments, Curzon described Khurāsān as a human body divided by brute force:

Khorasan has experienced a history of great and stormy vicissitudes. Situated on the borders of Iran, it has been the perpetual theatre of armed struggle, and a favourite battle-ground of races. Its capital cities have alternately excited by their dimensions the bewildered admiration of Arab chroniclers, and have been swept off the earth, as though by a tornado, by the passions of conquerors and kings... At one time its name implied a dominion that included Kharezmi (Khiva) and Merv on the north, that stretched to the Oxus and embraced Balkh, the mother of cities, of which Herat was a central point, and that extended beyond Kandahar. Later, as limb after limb was torn away, and independent sovereignties were created out of the fragments, its boundaries became more and more contracted, until the kings of Persia would sometimes have found it difficult to say how much they really held of Khorasan.⁵¹

⁴⁸ *Pūshīda mabād ki khāna ba-chahār ḥadd muhayyā ast va az jumla-yi ḥudūd-i arba‘a-yi Īrān ḥadd-i a‘zam va rukn-i afkham Khurāsān ast* (TRSN IX: 275–6).

⁴⁹ Sultan Mahomed Khan 1980: 175–7. For a similar European portrayal of the protective function of boundaries, see Curzon 1907: 7.

⁵⁰ Curzon 1907: 8, 56.

⁵¹ Curzon 1892 I: 180.

From the Iranian point of view, the territorial losses also added a new quality to the corporeal images Khurāsān was credited with. The traditional imagery had highlighted the centrality of the region, for instance, by likening the world to a body, Khurāsān to its breast and Herat to its heart which instilled the entire being with spiritual life. In the late nineteenth century a sense of bereavement crept in. The imagery adopted by twentieth-century Iranian authors, seems to mirror Curzon's notion of Khurāsān as a region subjected to repeated acts of mutilation or amputation by colonialist forces. In the 1960s the Iranian intellectual Muḥammad Rizā Khusravī held imperialist intervention responsible for the sad state of present-day Khurāsān: The old metropolises—once the diamonds in a precious necklace—have been rent and scattered. Herat—once as central to the region as the pearl to the oyster—has been torn out of the noble body of Khurāsān, which “has been cut to pieces by the butcher's knife of fate and colonialism...” Khusravī's excursion to Herat and his interpretation of historical events exemplifies the continuing conceptual gap between the political facts established about a century earlier and a persistent memory of what Khurāsān ought to constitute in terms of size as well as cultural and political magnitude. His quest for Herat's former greatness as a city of kings and poets, and of grapes and roses, culminates in the bleak observation that he has ended up instead in “a silent and bereft town [which is a] part of a country called Afghanistan”.⁵²

This statement highlights the dimension of time, or rather of historical memory and its role in shaping current perceptions of space. In their confrontation over Khurāsān, the Qājār rulers and their Afghan counterparts not only based their strategy on the political status quo and its exigencies; both parties sought to buttress their claim by adducing historical reasoning on the “proper” state of affairs. The lag between the past and the present of the actors took on yet another twist in the historiography of the time. Informed by the political developments that had taken place in the interim and reflecting the perspective of their royal patrons, chroniclers inevitably projected recent interpretations into the past and cemented into the narrative a number of set pieces in support of their respective territorial assumptions. This process became all the more intensive as the nascent nationalist discourses in Iran and Afghanistan set out to root their modern states and the related concept of fixed geographical boundaries as deeply as possible in the past. From both perspectives, Herat, and significantly its incorporation into Afghanistan in 1863, is credited with pivotal importance. Yet the interpretations attached to these events vary widely depending on the respective nationalist viewpoints. Afghan historians emphasize Herat's natural belonging within the ancient Afghan state, which, in their opinion, has occupied the space between the Oxus, the Indus and the Arabian Sea since antiquity. This sense of ownership collides with an acute sense of loss on the Iranian side, which reverberates in the historical accounts of the two unsuccessful military campaigns of 1837–38 and 1856 and continues to inform the Iranian mindset to this very day. On a larger scale, the conceptual loop confounding an idealized past with present-day notions of territoriality has likewise heightened nostalgic preoccupations. The evocative idea of “Greater Khurāsān” (*Khurāsān-i buzurḡ*), so central to the current academic debate in the Persophone world of Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia, may essentially be understood as a product of modern times, and as the upshot of nationalist concerns.

⁵² Khusravī 1985: 98.