

Editors' Foreword

William B. Trousdale and Mitchell Allen

This manuscript, written in Dari, was delivered to William Trousdale by the late Ghulam Rahman Amiri in Kabul, September 1977 (1356 AH). A translation of the text to English was completed by James Gehlhar and Mhairi Gehlhar in November 1981. Amiri, then Director of Excavations at the Afghan Institute of Archaeology, collected the materials upon which this report is based during several autumn field seasons (chiefly 1973 to 1975) as a colleague and participant in the Helmand Sistan Project, a joint program of archaeological and other scientific investigations conducted by the Smithsonian Institution and the Afghan Institute of Archaeology.

The initiative to undertake this ethnography of the Helmand Baluch villages was Amiri's own, but he received every possible encouragement from the members of the mission. The work seemed important to us from two standpoints: 1) no similar studies had been conducted in the area since reports assembled by the Perso-Afghan Boundary Arbitration Commission early in the twentieth century, and 2) no such study had ever been undertaken by an Afghan scholar. Political events in Afghanistan since the completion of this study have brought such fundamental upheaval that no repeat study of the culture of Afghan Sistan that existed in the 1970s can ever be undertaken. This is an aspect of Amiri's work we could not have anticipated at the time, but it makes his work all the more important since it reports on a society now irrevocably changed.

Amiri was not an anthropologist, but he was deeply concerned with Afghan society for many years. His progressive attitudes more than once during his career as both educator and archaeologist were the cause of some anxiety for him, and these personally held beliefs could not but influence his observations and perceptions of village life in Sistan. For the most part, the text of the report has not been changed since it has value beyond the data it reports. Many of the observations in this report were subjects for lively discussions among the research team in the field, and on a number of occasions Trousdale made notes and observations of his own. It is on the basis of these that he annotated and augmented Amiri's text. To

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preserve the integrity of the original text, these comments are presented as endnotes, distinguishable from Amiri's own notes by the initials WBT.

Amiri conducted his research by observation and interview. We estimate that he conducted nearly one thousand hours of interviews with a hundred or more informants. These ranged from khans and members of the ulema to the poorest shepherds and laborers. With one notable exception,¹ these interviews were conducted among the men of the region, usually, but not exclusively, those employed by the mission. Amiri spoke Pashto and Dari. Most of the men interviewed were able to speak Pashto in addition to Baluchi and/or Brahui. Very rarely did he require the assistance of a third party interpreter.

Amiri's ethnographic research was conducted in two principal areas. When we worked in the Sar-o-Tar area east of the lower Helmand Valley, we hired workmen from nearby villages, chiefly Hauz, Qala-i Fath, Godri, and Jui Nao. Our archaeological field work in the Helmand Valley itself was conducted primarily in the villages at Khwaja 'Ali Sehyaka (but at the other Khwaja 'Ali villages to a lesser extent) and in the Lat, Lop, and Demarda districts of Rudbar, especially among the residents of Khel-i Bibarg Khan in the Lat district. A smaller amount of work was conducted at Deshu and at Malakhan, in the villages immediately to the south of Lashkar Gah/Bust, at the village of Asak on the eastern shore of the Hamun-i Puzak, and at the border village of Jali Robat, close to Kuh-i Malik Siah where the borders of Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan meet.

From Fieldwork to Publication: A Forty-Five Year Journey

In 1976 it was possible for Amiri to visit the United States for several months to access the meagre source materials pertinent to the work he was conducting and, free of other responsibilities, to commence the writing of his report. We know he would wish to express his gratitude to the Fulbright-Hayes Program for a travel grant, to the Smithsonian Institution for a research stipend, and to the Middle East Center at Harvard University for providing him with the facilities he required for his research. From the book's Acknowledgements, we believe he worked there with M. Hasan Kakar in organizing his notes and the text.

As noted above, by late 1977 the Dari manuscript was done. We are unaware of the steps he undertook to have the manuscript published in Dari in Kabul, but the volume came out from Ākadamī-i 'Ulūm-i J.D.

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Afghānistān in that year. Trousdale commissioned James and Mhairi Gehlhar, specialists in Farsi, to undertake a translation to facilitate publication in English. This was delivered late in 1981.

Over the succeeding several years, Trousdale, who does not speak Dari, Farsi, Pashto, nor Baluchi, worked through the English manuscript, editing for style and lightly for content. For more substantive matters, he began an extensive series of notes that addressed some of the points of Amiri's manuscript that he thought required clarification or expansion. Many of these were based upon notes about village life recorded by Trousdale during discussions with Amiri while they were still in the field. Others stemmed from Trousdale's own observations during each field season. In some cases, it would have been impolitic for Amiri, a high ranking official in the Afghan government, to include his observations, but reasonable for Trousdale to make the same statement. In the mid-1980s, English publication of the manuscript ground to a halt as Trousdale focused on other parts of the Helmand Sistan Project. At some point in the early 1990s, Trousdale lost contact with Amiri after Amiri fled Afghanistan for India. The manuscript was shelved as Trousdale retired in 1996 and shipped his files, including the Dari text and the typed English translation, to his retirement home in the Los Angeles area.

Resuscitating the Baluch ethnography began when Allen, a junior field archaeologist on the original Helmand Sistan Project in 1974 and 1975, retired from a forty-year career in scholarly publishing in 2016. Discussions with Trousdale led Allen to volunteer to take the lead on completing publication of the work of the Helmand Sistan Project, including Amiri's ethnography.²

The typed draft of the Gehlhar translation was scanned and then edited by Cyndi Maurer, difficult because of the large number of non-English terms. Trousdale's lengthy handwritten notes were deciphered, transcribed, and edited by Sorayya Carr. Both Maurer and Carr are trained in anthropology. Various pieces—photos, charts, tables, introductory matter—were found within Trousdale's voluminous professional papers, collated, and then the entire manuscript was re-edited by Allen.

One of the key concerns was in finding Amiri himself, who owned the intellectual property to the book, but who hadn't been contacted in over two decades. Several web searches by Allen for him or a descendant turned up no firm leads. The book was once again stalled, this time for lack of a legal right to go forward. A later attempt turned up an online interview with a young Muslim woman, Geeti Amiri, living in Copenhagen

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and writing in Danish. Fortunately for us, Geeti was a public figure in Denmark, a political advocate for the Muslim minority and for Muslim women in the broader Danish society.³ Not yet thirty years old, she had already published her autobiography, was very active on social media, and a regular blogger. Within the limitations posed by Google Translate from Danish to English, it appeared that Geeti's father had once been an archaeologist and an Afghan minister. One interview finally clinched it—she mourned the loss of her late father, Ghulam Rahman Amiri, and was seeking to find out more about him. We had found his family!

A Facebook message to Geeti provided an almost immediate response, not only from her but also from her oldest brother Babrak Amiri, an engineer living in Portland, Oregon. Amazingly, Portland was Allen's destination the following week for an applied anthropology conference. Dinner was quickly arranged, and Babrak became an invaluable partner in the process of getting the book completed and published. The Amiri family, consisting of ten children, his second wife, and various cousins scattered among the United States, Denmark, Sweden, and Afghanistan, has been enthusiastically supportive of the publication of the book ever since. Sadly, Amiri himself succumbed to ALS in 2003 after living his final years in Denmark.

Babrak Amiri reviewed the Gehlhar translation and improved on converting the colloquial Dari to English, as well as reviewing place names and personal names. The Gehlhars were re-contacted after forty years and gave their blessing to go forward. Carr and Maurer polished the text, tables, and images. Attempts were made to locate the publisher of the Dari work in Kabul without success, not surprisingly given the changes in Afghanistan over the past four decades. Allen secured the interest of Berghahn Books, a high-quality international publisher of anthropology books, for publication. He also presented a brief synopsis of the work at the American Anthropological Association annual meeting in Vancouver in 2019. Given that this was an innovative work both of Baluch ethnography and native ethnography, Allen added a chapter summarizing both literatures and placing Amiri's study within it (see Afterword). Trousdale, now ninety years old, reviewed all the elements as they were completed. The original Dari manuscript, long lost from view, was digitized by Babrak Amiri.

That there are a large number of names listed on the title page is no accident—numerous people contributed to converting Amiri's original manuscript into the book you have here. It took over forty years from writing the original manuscript until its English publication, but each of the participants is delighted to see that it finally happened.

Measurement Equivalences of the 1970s in Afghan Sistan

Right Bank/Left Bank

The path of the lower Helmand River traces a large letter U in southwest Afghanistan, therefore traditional cardinal directions do not adequately describe on which side of the river places are located. The early European visitors solved this by labeling the sides as *right bank* and *left bank* as a person looks downstream toward the *hamun* lakes. Thus, the right bank would designate locations on the inside of the U, the left bank those on the outside of the U. Both Amiri and Trousdale use this designation regularly in the book, as do many of the sources they quote.

Currency

Afghanistan's national currency, the *afghani*, varied in value against the US dollar in the early 1970s when the fieldwork was taking place.

1971 80 afghanis = US\$1

1972 80 afghanis = US\$1

1973 55 afghanis = US\$1

1974 52 afghanis = US\$1

1975 43 afghanis = US\$1

The *qeran* was worth 120 to an afghani

Crop Weights

1 *satri* = a "handful" of sickled wheat

1 *kisheh* = 20-25 *satri*

1 *pav* = 452 gm = 1 lb of wheat

1 *man* = 10 *pav* = 4.5 kg = 10 lb

1 *kharvar* = 80 *man* = variously, in the text, 560 kg (1,232 lb)
and 360 kg⁴ (800lb)

1 *sir* = 7 kg = 14.4 lb

Land Area

1 *jerib* = 0.2 hectare⁵ = 0.5 acre

Notes to the Manuscript

Notes to the text are located at the end of each chapter. Amiri's textual notes from the 1970s are designated by the initials GRA. Trousdale's annotations

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to this text in the 1980s are shown by the initials WBT. Allen's and Babrak Amiri's 2020 comments are followed by the initials MA and BA respectively. Quoted passages from original English sources are not exact, having been translated by Amiri from English to Dari then back to English by the Gehlhars. The accompanying references can provide the exact quotes.

Data Preservation

Amiri's original field notes were lost in his rapid departure from Afghanistan in 1989. His manuscript from which the Gehlhar translation was made was preserved by Trousdale, scanned by Babrak Amiri, and is available online at <https://sistanarchaeology.org/>. The original print photos, manuscript, translation, Trousdale's handwritten notes, and other related items are being deposited with Trousdale's archives at the National Anthropological Archives of the Smithsonian Institution. The website of the Helmand Sistan Project (<https://sistanarchaeology.org/>) contains some of the material appearing in the book, as well the archaeological work of the project, of which Amiri was a full partner.

Acknowledgements

While Amiri provides his own acknowledgements below, the editors wish to thank the many people involved in bringing the English translation into reality. These include the original translators of the book, James and Mhairi Gehlhar, and Babrak Amiri. Maps were produced by the CAMEL Project of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, by project geologist John W. Whitney, and by Joshua Allen. Editorial consistency was sought through a team consisting of Sorayya Carr, Cyndi Maurer, Ariadne Prater, and Babrak Amiri. Maurer scanned both the manuscript and the figures for publication and constructed the index. From the Helmand Sistan Project, the photographs of the late Robert K. Vincent, Jr., and the geological information from John W. Whitney were essential. Funding assistance toward publication was provided by the White-Levy Program for Archaeological Publication. Marion Berghahn and the Berghahn Books team has been an invaluable partner, as has the superb editorial team of Hannah and Michael Jennings. The Amiri family has been enthusiastically supportive of the project since we reconnected with them, and we are pleased to be able bring Ghulam Rachman Amiri's book to print in English at last.

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Notes

- 1 See chapter 5, note 20 concerning our worker Shaparai in the village of Khawja 'Ali Sehyaka. MA
- 2 The main field report of the project is still in process but expected to be published by 2021. MA
- 3 https://da.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geeti_Amiri MA
- 4 Neither figure matches the weight of a *kharvar* in Iran at the time, which was 300 kg (Kramer 1982, p. 37). MA
- 5 Amiri never defines the size of *jerib* in the volume at the time of the study, and its standard size has changed over time. Recently, the *jerib* in Afghanistan has been considered to be 0.5 acres/0.2 hectares (Grace 2005, p. i).