

KHALAJ MARKET

PAPER NO. 1

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RB/ALD

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Introduction:

The study of a rural market, like the study of any social institution, is a continuous process, dependent upon how much information you want about it. The market is not a static unit of study but a continuously changing one that, at least in theory, responds to the peoples' changing needs. These changes may be seasonal, and so cyclical, or long term basic changes in structure and content. Some aspects of the market will remain relatively stable through time. The purpose of the papers to follow is to outline the structure and mechanisms of operation of the Khalaj Market in the Shamalan Valley of Helmand Province. Some of the papers will be purely descriptive, others will consider USAID policy as it relates to rural markets. All, hopefully, will add to our limited knowledge of the functioning of rural markets in Afghanistan and so, be useful to planners. It seems more useful to present a series of relatively brief research papers over a period of time on the market rather than to attempt a longer report at some time in the future. One reason for this method is that there are problems of obtaining information on the relationship between the market and the government. A second reason is that it gives those interested in the marketing system an opportunity to raise questions that might be overlooked by the researcher and answered by further study. Few of the papers will appear as complete units in themselves.

The Khalaj Market

Origins:

The Khalaj, Friday, or Juma Market is referred to by the locals as the "Khalaj Meila" which may give a clue as to the market's origin in the absence of any documentation. The term "mella" apparently comes from Sanskrit and generally refers to a festival. At the site of the market are two tombs which are places of pilgrimage or visitation for the local population, the history of which will be dealt with in a later report. In any case, the visitation day was said to be Friday which is a holy day in its own right. This and similar tombs may attract relatively large numbers of visitors especially on their special day who come to pray for aid in solving their problems, and thus becomes a mella. Mella is translated as "picnic" by English-speaking locals and officials. The variables associated with the numbers of persons making a visit are: the holy man's reputation for power and miracles both before and after his death; the type of problems a particular tomb is noted for solving (some are specialized, e.g. infertility, others are more general); and the sorts of problems the public is faced with at any particular time.

The market site is not located at any major population center or village, although there are numerous scattered settlements in the immediate area. The tomb as a place of pilgrimage appears to be the original vaison d'etre. Besides Fridays, the site becomes a center for festive activities on major holidays, with associated entertainment.

According to local oral history, some 40 years ago a sub-governor for the district, Abdu Rashid, was instrumental in expanding the activities of the site by instituting dog fights, bird fights and wrestling on Fridays for the already numerous visitors. An Indian shopkeeper from Girishk, with whom many locals traded (at the time Girishk was the chief market center for the region) periodically visited the area while collecting from his debtors. Recognizing the opportunity he began to bring items for sale on these Fridays. This pattern was expanded by the involvement of more merchants and locals with things to sell to the point where by 10 years ago the market was more or less like it is today although somewhat smaller. Some later sub-governor was responsible for having the road built between the canal and the market as the activities expanded. There has been considerable expansion of at least tea-house establishments even within the past 6 months of this survey.

As is normal in oral histories from villagers, the time statements are never clear and should be considered only approximate, give or take 100 + years. Some of the historical information (which is subject to change on further inquiries) was furnished by Haji Mobin, the owner of much of the market site, who did not seem too much more informed than some of the other less involved men.

The market as it functions today serves at least 3 purposes: the religious function -- there is also a mosque at the site; the social function of being a situation where men meet and discuss events -- many of the

local visitors come for the occasion; and the economic function where items can be bought, frequently at prices lower than in Lashkar Gah, traded, and surplus farm products sold at a convenient center.

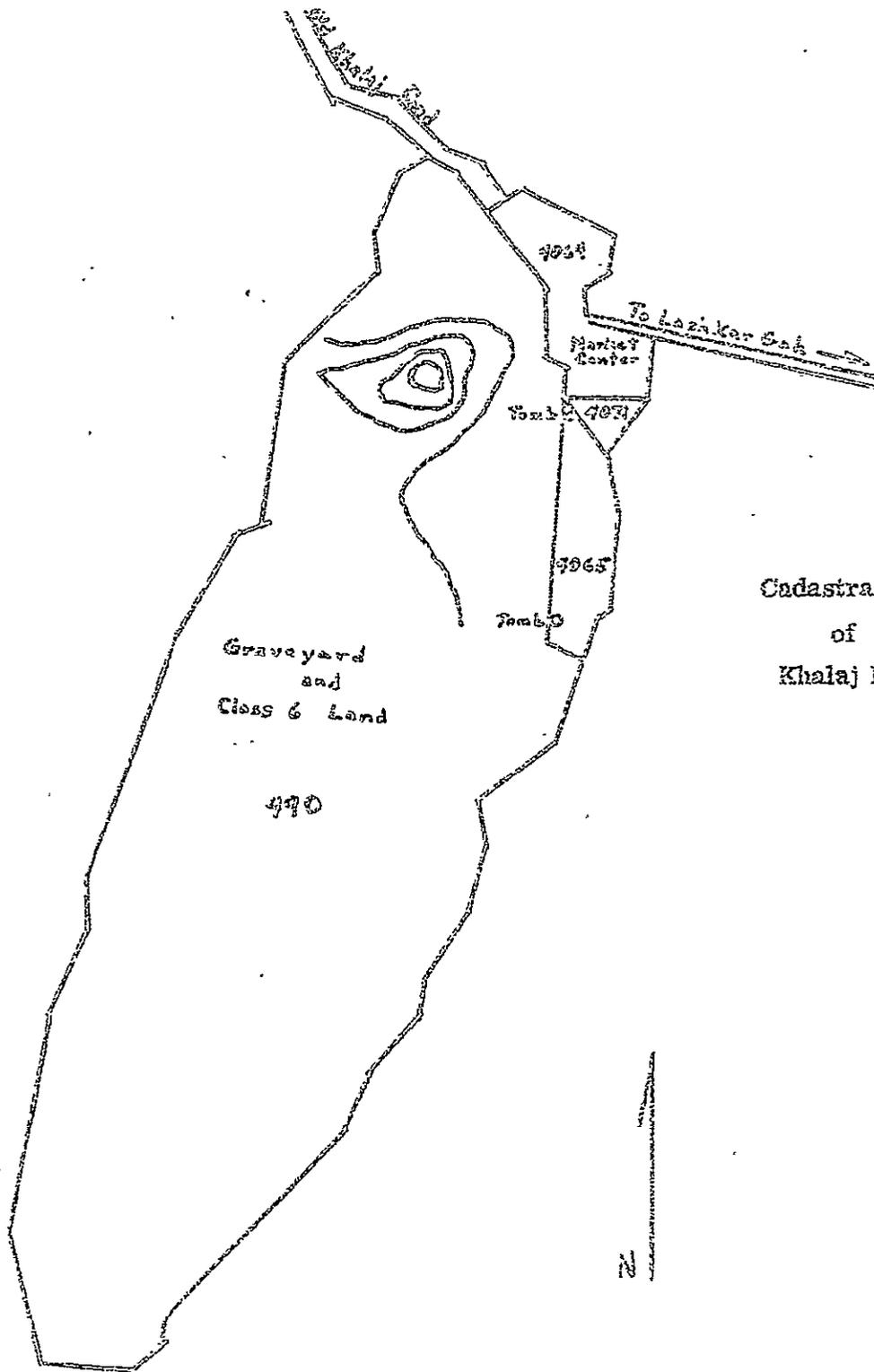
In terms of project involvement, this combination of elements indicates that the Khalaj Market should be considered as a potential site for public information activities for the region. As will be noted later, representatives of nearly every area in the Helmand Valley attend this market. And frequently those attending are points of contact and communication in the areas from which they come, e.g. small shopkeepers, indigenous health practitioners. Controversial topics of information, however, should probably be avoided since the potential for spontaneous and organized negative demonstrations would be present.

About 9 years ago the present group of shops was built by the man who owns most of the market site. Those are mostly open-front mud structures with branch and mud roofs. Except for the tea houses, the shops average about 2m. x 2m. While the landowner had the responsibility to build the structures, for which he collects rent (to be discussed under "Administration"), each shopkeeper makes repairs. Many shopkeepers retain the same shop week after week, especially the tea houses, butchers, "restaurants" and some general merchandise. The less regular sellers tend to shift their locations. The rent is paid each market day.

Location:

The Khalaj Market is located in the central Shamalan Valley about 20 miles south of Lashkar Gah in the district of Khalaj and administratively under the Nawas Barakzai Wolus Wali. This administrative center is located on the road between the Shamalan Canal (which is followed by the main north-south road through the valley, from Lashkar Gah to Darwishan) and the market, about a mile away. Although the administrative center is not a major population settlement, there are shops which close on Friday when their owners attend the Market.

The road between the canal road and the market is earth, apparently sometimes graded, and becomes nearly impassable with heavy rain, which occurs rarely in the region. There is an old road leading west out the market to the "Old Khalaj Road" and the desert which is considered impassable for vehicle traffic aside from tractors. On some occasions buses from the Marja - Nad-i-Ali areas, after having crossed the desert are seen parked several miles away from the market on this road, the passengers having completed the journey on foot. Given the importance of this market for the region, the proposed road development projects and the Shamalan Land Development Project activities projected for this area, (the market sits near the center of Construction Unit 14) road improvement from both directions should be considered essential, the work perhaps being carried out by the food-for-work program. There are also numerous foot and animal trails that converge on the market from all directions and are crowded on market day. Most people arriving on foot



Cadastral View
of
Khalaj Market

As far as can be determined, the market-tomb complex sits on at least four parcels of land by the Cadastral records, Nos. 490, 4064, 4065 and 4071. The market itself is concentrated on Nos. 4064 and 490. No. 4064 is owned by one of the larger landowners in the area who collects rent from the sellers on each market day, to be discussed in more detail under "Administration". No. 490 is government land which consists of: a mound, apparently the ruins of a fortress or series of fortresses, or some other type of long-term settlement site; burial plots, and generally Class 6, unirrigable land. There is a depression that covers most of the top of the mound where, during the spring, dog-fights were held on Tuesdays. On market day the area is generally used for tethering pack animals, mostly camels, and is becoming a parking lot for local tractors. No. 4071 is owned by a smaller land owner who has 4-5 other small plots in the area. There was no information gathered on the owner of No. 4065. Further studies may probe more deeply into the characteristics of these land owners and their market involvement. (See map).

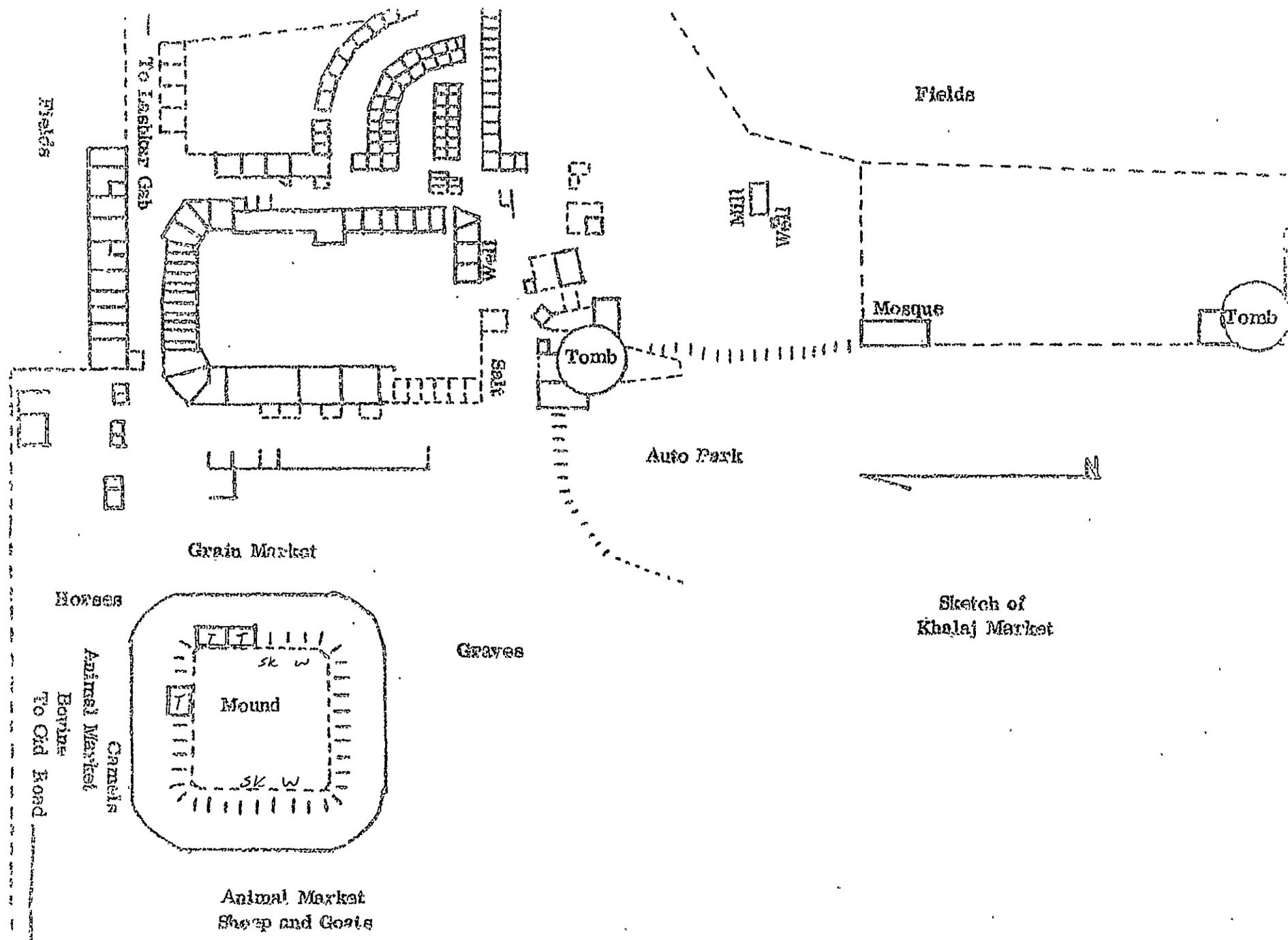
The land to the south and east of the market may be summarized as generally being made up of relatively small plots, most of less than 5 jeribs (1 jerib = 1/2 acre, approx.), with high concentrations of housing and settlement, vineyards and orchards. To the north and west the plots tend to be larger, probably less productive, Classes 2 and 3 irrigable land, edging over into Class 6 and desert land to the west. There is only one

settlement and no vineyards or orchards in this west and north direction within 2Km of the market. The increasingly larger plots in this direction with the lack of settlements, vineyards and orchards are likely a function of: limited availability for water (for crops and people), perhaps lower fertility, and the limited amount of time under cultivation; much of the land probably not having come under cultivation until the Shamalan Canal was completed in its present form. There is no information on the frequency of double-cropping in this direction. It would be expected to be low.

Market Layout:

As with many traditional middle-eastern markets, specific types of sellers and services tend to group themselves. In its extreme form this pattern of grouping of sellers, trades, and crafts are or were (under the Ottoman Empire) organized into guilds complete with patron saints, and represented government recognized administrative and residential units in cities and towns with some degree of autonomy. Apparently similar structures are found in some cities and towns of Afghanistan. In this market which occurs only on Friday (the area being more or less abandoned during the rest of the week), with tradesmen and craftsmen coming from a variety of places (both from local villages and from the towns and cities of the region), only the geographical grouping pattern has been examined. Further study may focus on any of the other structural arrangements that may be present.

The attached sketches of the Khalaj Market are attempts to indicate the relative locations of the various items sold. In several instances they



Fields

Mosque

Tomb

Tomb

Auto Park

Grain Market

Graves

Sketch of
Khalaj Market

Animal Market
Sheep and Goats

To Fashion Gap

Fields

Morass

Cameels
Animal Market

To Old Road

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Key to Sketch Maps:

- B .. Butcher
- Br - Barber
- BF - Bird Fights
- F - Food Seller
- G - Glass Ware
- GM - Herbs, Nuts, Rasins, Sweets, etc.
- HW - Hardware
- M - Medicines (modern and indigenous)
- N - Notions
- S - Shoes
- Sk - Skins
- SR - Shoe Repair
- T - Tea House
- W - Wool

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represent trends in the locations rather than the specific use made by each location on market day. There were a variety of shifts of location and seasonal variation in items sold. Some items and sellers are not indicated. There were, for example, men selling tawiz (amulet), religious books, toys (which included condoms sold as balloons), snuff, pottery, soft weave basket-bags used for hauling earth, water skins, roots used for dye, and a multitude of other items, a list of which would be too lengthy to present here and of limited value. Some sellers do not have a fixed location on market day but simply wander through the market selling their goods.

Handwritten signature: J. J. Jones

The tea houses are numerous and respond to the demand of the large numbers of visitors to the market. While they appear scattered, they are located on the main routes of the movement of the foot traffic. The food sellers (food to be consumed at the market site) are more centrally located at the corner which most everyone passes.

The animal market is to a degree separate from the rest of the market, being beside and behind the mound (see map). This section, too, tends to have the types of animals grouped for sale. In March, when the nomads were preparing to begin their annual move out of the Helmand (this year they were given an early nudge by the heavy rains in the area reviving abandoned desert pastures) the sheep market expanded to nearly cover three sides of the mound and several hundred yards to the south. This will be discussed in more detail in a future paper on the animal market.

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Aside from the buses that tend to group at what may be considered the main entrance of the market, most other vehicles, jeeps and trucks, pass completely through the market to an open area west and south of the central tomb. The drivers generally congregate under the line of trees between this tomb and the mosque. Aside from the location of the first tomb, which is located on the edge of the market area, the religious aspects of the market site are outside the main flow of the people, and are relatively quiet.

To conclude, this paper is primarily aimed at giving a general description of the physical arrangement of the market and something of its origins.

Further papers will deal with administration, grain prices and their variation, the animal market, etc. Since the opportunity to make further observations in this market is possible, interested parties should present questions or suggestions for consideration.

Summary of Implications:

1. Given the large numbers of people who attend this market for social, economic and religious reasons, and the regional representation found among at least the sellers, the Khalaj Market should be considered as a potential major site for public information activities for region, with some reservations. (p. 4)
2. Given the importance of this market in the economics of the region and its location relative to the Shamalan Land Development Project, market road improvement should be given some development priority, if not some government input in market site development and improvement. (p. 5)