

TAJIKISTAN

THE LOFTY FASTNESS OF THE PAMIRS

This paper concentrates on those aspects of modern Tajikistan of interest to the toponymist: modern history, people, language, and geographical names. It is not otherwise a specialist text. Spellings of geographical names accord to the BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Tajik, adopted in 1994 and updated in 1998. The paper is drawn together from an assortment of material, from a wide variety of sources, all contained in the PCGN *Tajikistan* country file.

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SECTION A: Brief Introduction

- 1 Whereas most of former Soviet Central Asia has a Turkic ancestry, Tajikistan traces its cultural roots to a Persian background. Nevertheless, Tajikistan does share a common heritage with other parts of Central Asia, in particular with Uzbekistan. For centuries, these two countries formed essentially a single *Turkestan*¹, sharing a common history and culture. For instance, two of Uzbekistan's principal cities, Buxoro and Samarqand, are Tajik in origin. As is the case with Uzbekistan, Tajikistan did not formally exist until the early Soviet era (1924), and many inhabitants of Tajikistan have traditionally regarded their country as an artificial creation established as part of Soviet Moscow's desire to divide and rule its Central Asian constituencies. They resent having been deprived of much of the cultural heritage of Turkestan and having been allocated instead a rather forlorn and impoverished outpost.

- 2 In September 1991, Tajikistan claimed independence from the dying Soviet Union. Independence took practical effect upon the final collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991, whereupon Tajikistan became a founder-member of the newly created *Commonwealth of Independent States*². There was less of a Soviet heritage in Tajikistan than in other Central Asian states, because the inhospitable nature of much of the terrain had always hindered the implementation of communist policies. Traditional social features were quick to re-emerge on independence, and the first president, Rahmon Nabiev, immediately had to contend with the sometimes violent rivalries which split the country politically. By the autumn of 1992, Nabiev had been ousted, and there followed years of turmoil until an uneasy peace was negotiated in 1997.

- 3 During the two years from 1992 to 1994, a vicious civil war claimed perhaps 100,000 lives, with Russian-backed former Communists pitted against various Islamic and nationalist groupings. Much of the fighting was based along indigenous ethnic divisions³, and many thousands of Russians who had settled in the country during the Soviet period now left in alarm. After Nabiev, the presidential system of government gave way in favour of rule by the Supreme Soviet of Tajikistan, whose Chairman, Imomali Rahmonov, became *de facto* head of state. By autumn 1994, Moscow's support for the former Communists had swayed the balance of power in favour of the incumbent authorities, and it became possible to adopt by referendum a new Constitution, with Rahmonov as president. Internal hostilities did not cease, however, and it has remained a constant struggle to maintain the unity and integrity of the country. Despite the signing of a tenuous UN-brokered peace accord in June 1997, the danger of a renewed civil war, involving several parties, remains an ever-present threat. Russian troops, present throughout the 1990s, now number 25,000 in the light of the troubles in Afghanistan, where an estimated 12,000 Afghan refugees currently live on islands in the Panj river bordering Tajikistan.

¹ More specifically, a western Turkestan, with eastern Turkestan corresponding to the present-day Xinjiang autonomous province in China.

² This commonwealth is an association of independent sovereign states, comprising Russia and 11 of the former Soviet Socialist Republics (all except Estonia, Latvia & Lithuania).

³ See Section B.

SECTION B: Ethnicity and Related Issues

- 4 The population of Tajikistan is estimated at some 6,500,000, nearly half of whom are under 14 years of age, in an area of approximately 55,250 square miles⁴. There is a distinct geographical imbalance owing to the topography of the country, with fewer than 500,000 people inhabiting the mountainous eastern half of Tajikistan. Of the total figure, over 60% are ethnic Tajik and about 25% are ethnic Uzbek. The total number of ethnic Tajiks in Tajikistan therefore approaches 4 million, a figure which is in fact exceeded by the Tajik diaspora; the number of Tajiks in Afghanistan alone is over 5 million, with a further 2 million in Uzbekistan. There are a dozen or so much smaller ethnic groupings, particularly Russians and Ukrainians (both mainly in the towns), and Kirghiz (mainly around the eastern town of Murghob). Related to the Tajiks in the Iranian group of families are the Pamiri peoples of the mountainous east of the country, numbering perhaps 50,000. The principal religion of Tajikistan is the *Sunni* branch of Islam, but the Pamiri peoples are mostly of the *Ismaili* sect of the *Shia* branch.
- 5 Heartlands of the Tajik majority include the country's capital Dushanbe⁵ and the Qūrhontepa portion of southern Khatlon region⁶. The sizeable Uzbek minority is concentrated in the northern lowland portion of Sughd region (especially around the regional capital Khujand), much of which is virtually surrounded by Uzbekistan and economically closely associated with that country. Other Uzbek concentrations are located in the Kūlob portion of Khatlon region in the south, and around Tursunzoda in the west. The ethnic and clan rivalries between the main southern towns of Kūlob and Qūrhontepa are notably fierce⁷. Additionally, the Kūlob peoples have a close link with Khujand in the north, both areas being Uzbek strongholds.
- 6 In the absence of the ethnically Tajik cities of Buxoro and Samarqand, located in neighbouring Uzbekistan, no single centre in Tajikistan has been able to assume a cultural and political ascendancy. Certainly Dushanbe, which was little more than a village until the Soviets made it a capital, has not been able to fulfil this role. In practice, it has largely been Khujand society which has traditionally (in both Soviet⁸ and post-Soviet times) provided the governing nucleus of Tajikistan. The Supreme Soviet took to meeting in Khujand rather than Dushanbe in 1992 in order to avoid the hostilities of the civil war. The strong individual local identity of the various regions is illustrated by the Tajik saying: "Khujand governs, Gharm does business, Kūlob⁹ guards, Pamir dances, Qūrhontepa ploughs". With Dushanbe, and the nearby town of Hisor, these places constitute the seven distinct focal points of Tajikistan.

⁴ About the same size as New York State, and slightly smaller than England & Wales combined.

⁵ Dushanbe literally = "Monday", a recognition of the town's celebrated Monday market.

⁶ See Section D for information on administrative divisions.

⁷ See also paragraph 12.

⁸ Khujand society was never particularly communist by conviction; rather it used the Communist Party mechanisms as the means of acquiring and retaining political control.

⁹ President Rahmonov is from the Kūlob region.

SECTION C: Language

- 7 Article 2 of the 1994 Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan¹⁰ begins: “The state language of Tajikistan is Tajik. Russian is a language of communication between the nationalities”. The Tajik language, which in fact was denoted as the state language as early as 1992, belongs to the Persian family of languages, and is closely associated with the Persian of Iran and the Dari of Afghanistan. In 1940, the Soviets imposed a Cyrillic script and alphabet on the Tajik language; it had formerly been written in a modified and extended Arabic script. Cyrillic script remains the standard medium for written Tajik today, though some Arabic script is once again encountered (for example in newspaper mastheads) in parallel with Cyrillic. Both Iran from outside, and Islamic elements from within, have been keen to advocate a return to the use of Arabic script, which is taught in secondary and tertiary education in Tajikistan. Iran has also tried to promote the use of Persian as a language in Tajikistan.
- 8 Russian, although not official in the Constitution of Tajikistan, remains important as the main language of administration and business, and as a language of inter-ethnic communication. In the preparation of the 1994 Constitution¹¹, and partly in an effort to stem the tide of Russian emigration, thought was given to making Russian a second official state language, and granting dual citizenship to Russian residents of Tajikistan, but in the event these ideas were rejected. However, many signs in public places remain in Russian, a legacy of Soviet times, and recently (March 2001) President Rahmonov announced that he wished to make study of the Russian language once again a compulsory feature in education, to further Tajikistan’s economic and strategic partnership with Russia¹².
- 9 Uzbek and Kirghiz, both belonging to the Turkic group, are the natural languages of the Uzbek and Kirghiz ethnic minorities in their respective locational clusters¹³. The Pamiri peoples of the mountainous east speak a variety of languages which in the main belong to the Persian family, but which differ substantially from Tajik, and do not have a standard written form. In Soviet times, efforts to replace these Pamiri languages with Tajik were attempted, but currently efforts are being made to enhance the status of these languages, along with the status of Uzbek and Kirghiz.
- 10 The US Board on Geographic Names (BGN) and the PCGN adopted an agreed romanization system for Tajik Cyrillic in 1994. In September 1998, the Tajik Cyrillic alphabet was simplified and re-sorted by the authorities in Tajikistan. The current alphabetical sequence of letters can be seen in the BGN/PCGN romanization table for Tajik Cyrillic appended as Annex A to this paper.

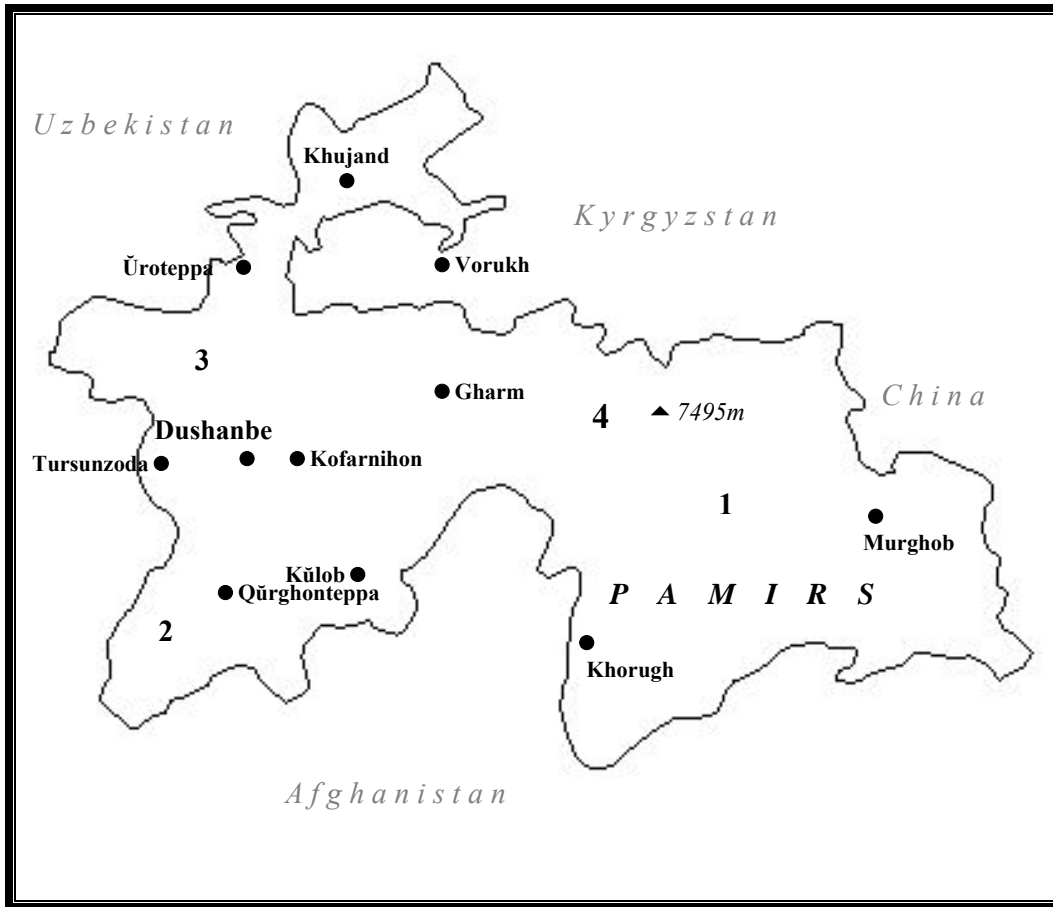
¹⁰ = *Jumhurii Tojikiston* in Tajik.

¹¹ The 1994 Constitution was, interestingly, officially published in Tajik, Uzbek and Russian.

¹² See also paragraph 3.

¹³ See paragraph 5.

SECTION D: Administrative Divisions and Associated Information



- 1 Viloyati Mukhtori Kūhistoni Badakhshon
- 2 Viloyati Khatlon
- 3 Viloyati Sughd
- 4 districts directly subordinate to the republic

11 Tajikistan contains three first-order administrative divisions. In the east is the area known officially as *Viloyati Mukhtori Kūhistoni Badakhshon*¹⁴, which is more usually seen in English by its Russian name of *Gornyy Badakhshan*¹⁵. This division, which has the status of an autonomous region, is centred at 3800N 7300E and is administered from the town of Khorugh (3729N 7133E). Politicians from the region have on several occasions in the 1990s voiced unhappiness at the status suggested by this terminology, advocating that the region should instead have autonomous republic status as an equal subject of a proposed federal Tajikistan. In fact, the terminology “autonomous republic” was included in the draft of the 1994 Constitution, but this was re-graded to “autonomous region” in the final approved version.

¹⁴ = “Autonomous Region of Mountainous Badakhshan”. Until 1996 the word *Avtonomii* was used instead of *Mukhtori*, but a change was made as part of the promotion of Tajik rather than Russian terminology.

¹⁵ Or sometimes in the adapted form *Gorno-Badakhshan*.

- 12 There are also two regular (non-autonomous) first-order divisions: *Viloyati Khatlon* in the south, with administrative headquarters at Qūrhonteppa (3750N 6846E); and *Viloyati Sughd* in the north, administered from Khujand (4016N 6937E). Viloyati Khatlon enjoys a precarious existence, combining as it does the mutually antagonistic towns of Qūrhonteppa and Kūlob (3754N 6946E)¹⁶, which formerly were each the centre of separate first-order divisions. The Soviet regime attempted to unite the two into a single Khatlon division in 1988, but the civil war of the early 1990s caused them to split again. They were re-united in 1993. In the north, Viloyati Sughd was known as Viloyati Leninobod until August 2000, and its administrative headquarters Khujand was known as Leninobod¹⁷ until February 1991.
- 13 The remaining portion of Tajikistan, the central area around 3900N 7000E and including the capital Dushanbe, does not constitute a first-order division at all. Instead, the second-order divisions which occur there, each known as a *rayon*, are directly subordinate to the Republic of Tajikistan as a whole, rather as if each were a first-order *viloyat*. In the early 1990s, suggestions were made that this region should become a first-order division with the name of *Viloyati Qaroteghin*, named after one of the mountain ranges found therein, but nothing has ever come of this proposal. Mention should also be made of three small exclaves of Tajikistan which exist in surrounding territory; two of these are within Kyrgyzstan and one is within Uzbekistan. Only one of these three exclaves, that of Vorukh (3952N 7035E) in Kyrgyzstan, is of significant size.
- 14 A final interesting point concerns the highest mountain peak in Tajikistan; indeed, the highest elevation in the entire former Soviet Union. This peak (at 3857N 7201E) has an altitude of 7495 metres. Until 1933, it was known as *Pik Garmo*, at which date that name was transferred to a lower peak¹⁸ to the south (3848N 7204E), where it still remains. The new name for the highest peak was *Pik Stalina*, which lasted until 1962, at which juncture the name of Stalin was removed and the mountain became known as *Pik Kommunizma*. Upon the independence of Tajikistan in 1992, this name changed from Russian into the Tajik equivalent *Qullai Kommunizm*. Finally, in the autumn of 1998, the name was changed to *Qullai Ismoilī Somonī* to mark the 1000th anniversary of the Samanid state which ruled the area in the ninth and tenth centuries.

¹⁶ See paragraph 5.

¹⁷ *Leninobod* is the Tajik spelling; strictly speaking this should be the Russian form *Leninabad*, because at that time (1991) the Soviet Union was the supreme governing authority and Russian forms of geographical names enjoyed primary status.

¹⁸ Various given as 6595 metres or 6602 metres.

Populations of towns with over 50,000 inhabitants

| | | |
|------------------------|---------|-------------|
| Dushanbe | 692,000 | 3833N 6846E |
| Khujand | 205,000 | 4016N 6937E |
| Kūlob | 97,000 | 3754N 6946E |
| Qūrghonteppa | 76,000 | 3750N 6846E |
| Ūroteppa ¹⁹ | 60,000 | 3955N 6901E |
| Kofarnihon | 56,000 | 3833N 6901E |
| Tursunzoda | 50,000 | 3830N 6813E |

Boundaries of Tajikistan

| | |
|-------------|-----------|
| Uzbekistan | 725 miles |
| Kyrgyzstan | 545 miles |
| China | 260 miles |
| Afghanistan | 755 miles |

TOTAL = 2285 miles

¹⁹ Possibly renamed *Istaravshon* in August 2000, though this is uncertain (especially as there is already a small settlement named *Istaravshon* just 6 kilometres from Ūroteppa).

ROMANIZATION SYSTEM FOR TAJIK CYRILLIC
BGN/PCGN 1994 System

The BGN/PCGN system for Tajik Cyrillic was designed for use in romanizing names written in the Tajik Cyrillic alphabet. The Tajik Cyrillic alphabet contains six characters not present in the Russian alphabet: **Ø**, **ǎ**, **í**, **ò** and **ó**. An orthographical reform of the Tajik Cyrillic alphabet was implemented under the auspices of the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan. This reform was promulgated in a decree of 3 September 1998 by the government of the Republic of Tajikistan. The reform abolished the characters **ц**, **ш**, **ъ** and **ы** (see notes 2 to 5).

| | Tajik | | | | Romanization | | Tajik | | | | Romanization |
|----|----------|----------|----------|----------|--------------|----|----------|----------|----------|----------|--------------|
| 1 | А | а | <i>A</i> | <i>a</i> | a | 21 | Р | р | <i>P</i> | <i>p</i> | r |
| 2 | Б | б | <i>B</i> | <i>b</i> | b | 22 | С | с | <i>C</i> | <i>c</i> | s |
| 3 | В | в | <i>B</i> | <i>ǎ</i> | v | 23 | Т | т | <i>T</i> | <i>m</i> | t |
| 4 | Г | г | <i>G</i> | с | g | 24 | У | у | <i>U</i> | <i>y</i> | u |
| 5 | · | Ø | · | Ø | gh | 25 | ½ | í | ½ | í | ǔ |
| 6 | Д | д | <i>D</i> | <i>d</i> | d | 26 | Ф | ф | <i>F</i> | <i>φ</i> | f |
| 7 | Е | е | <i>E</i> | <i>e</i> | e | 27 | Х | х | <i>X</i> | <i>x</i> | kh |
| 8 | Ё | ё | <i>Ë</i> | <i>ě</i> | yo | 28 | Ā | ò | Ā | ò | h |
| 9 | Ж | ж | <i>Ж</i> | <i>ж</i> | zh | 29 | Ч | ч | <i>Ч</i> | <i>ч</i> | ch |
| 10 | З | з | <i>Z</i> | <i>z</i> | z | 30 | Ā | ó | Ā | ó | j |
| 11 | И | и | <i>I</i> | <i>u</i> | i | 31 | Ш | ш | <i>Ш</i> | <i>ш</i> | sh |
| 12 | | | | | í | 32 | Ъ | ъ | <i>Ъ</i> | <i>ъ</i> | ' |
| 13 | Й | й | <i>Ï</i> | <i>ǔ</i> | y | 33 | Э | э | <i>Э</i> | <i>э</i> | è |
| 14 | К | к | <i>K</i> | <i>к</i> | k | 34 | Ю | ю | <i>Ю</i> | <i>ю</i> | yu |
| 15 | ± | ǎ | ± | ǎ | q | 35 | Я | я | <i>Я</i> | <i>я</i> | ya |
| 16 | Л | л | <i>L</i> | <i>л</i> | l | | | | | | |
| 17 | М | м | <i>M</i> | <i>м</i> | m | | | | | | |
| 18 | Н | н | <i>N</i> | <i>н</i> | n | | | | | | |
| 19 | О | о | <i>O</i> | <i>o</i> | o | | | | | | |
| 20 | П | п | <i>P</i> | <i>п</i> | p | | | | | | |

NOTES

1. The character sequences **гзж** and **ц** may be romanized **g·h**, **z·h**, **k·h** and **s·h** in order to differentiate those romanizations from the digraphs gh, zh, kh and sh which are used to render the characters **ж**, **х** and **ш**.
2. The obsolete character **ц**, abolished in 1998, should be romanized **s** (before a vowel and/or after a consonant within a word) or **ts** (between two vowels).
3. The obsolete character **ш**, replaced by **ш** in 1998, should be romanized **sh**.
4. The obsolete character **ь**, abolished in 1998, should not be romanized.
5. The obsolete character **ы**, replaced by **и** in 1998, should be romanized **i**.

Glossary of Geographical Terms found in Tajikistan

Sources:

- 1 *Instruktsiya po russkoy peredache geograficheskikh nazvaniy Tadzhikskoy SSR*, Glavnoye Upravleniye Geodezii i Kartografii, Moscow, 1975
- 2 *Jumhurii Tojikiston*, 1:450,000, Tojikaerokosmogeodeziya, Tajikistan, & Ministry of Defence, Uzbekistan, 1992
IMPORTANT NOTE: this Cyrillic-script map source, printed in Uzbekistan, does not carry the particular Tajik Cyrillic letter and replaces it with the letter ■ instead. Care is therefore needed when transliterating from this source.

Note:

This glossary lists generic terms in their lexical (=dictionary) forms. In any given geographical name, however, the connecting particle (the letter **i**) is likely to appear at the end of the generic term, relating the generic element to the specific part of the name. Thus, whereas *aghba* is the term for a mountain pass, a geographical name containing this term will be (for example) *Aghbai Oqbaytal*.

| | |
|----------|--|
| adir | hill, ridge, slope |
| aghba | mountain pass, gorge, defile |
| alafzor | meadow, pasture, field |
| ayloq | summer camp, seasonal camp, mountain pasture |
| balandí | upland |
| band | dam, embankment |
| bar | land, dry land; bank |
| barzkūh | high mountain, high peak |
| bogh | garden, orchard, park |
| bolo | summit |
| boloob | upper reaches of a watercourse |
| bora | hill |
| bosh | summit; source of watercourse, headwaters |
| botloq | marsh, swamp |
| buloq | source, spring |
| buq | hill, knoll |
| būston | garden, orchard |
| charogoh | pasture |
| chashma | headwaters, source, spring |
| chin | difficult mountainous terrain |

| | |
|------------|--|
| choh | well; deep depression |
| chorbogh | garden, orchard, park |
| chorroha | crossroads |
| dahana | river mouth; gorge, defile, valley of mountain stream; mountain pass |
| dara | gorge, defile, mountain pass |
| darakhtzor | grove, wood |
| darband | pass, gorge, defile |
| daryo | river |
| dasht | steppe, plain |
| davon | pass |
| deh | village, settlement |
| dehqonobod | settlement |
| devlokh | summer camp |
| di | settlement, village |
| dūng | hill |
| faromadgoh | stop, halt |
| ferma | farm |
| garmoba | hot springs |
| ghar | hill, mountain; pass |
| ghor | cave, grotto |
| gil | earth, land |
| goh | dwelling |
| goz | meadow, pasture |
| gudar | quarter within a settlement; bridge, ferry, ford |
| gūr | grave, tomb |
| guzar | bridge, ferry, ford; street, quarter |
| havza | basin |
| hisor | fort, fortress; rampart |
| homun | wide valley, steppe |
| il | summer camp |
| iloq | pasture |
| istgoh | stop; station; camp |
| jailov | summer camp, highland pasture |
| jangal | forest |
| jar | deep ditch, trench; valley, gully, ravine |
| jingal | forest |
| jūy | stream; ditch |
| jūybor | area of streams, area of ditches; stream |
| kamar | slope, ledge; mountain(s), mountain range; depression; defile |
| kanal | canal |

| | |
|-----------|--|
| kanor | bank; area, land |
| kent | town, settlement, village |
| khamb | lowland, depression, hollow |
| khambay | plateau |
| khok | land |
| khor | sharp scrub |
| kon | mine |
| kū | hill(s), mountain(s) |
| kūch | temporary camp |
| kūcha | street, road, passage |
| kūh | mountain(s), hill(s), upland, ridge [plural = kūhho] |
| kūha | ridge, escarpment |
| kūhiston | mountainous region |
| kūhpoya | foothills; mountain road |
| kūl | lake; marshy land |
| kūpruk | bridge |
| kūtal | mountain pass, gorge, defile |
| kūy | village, town; quarter; street, passage; dwelling; hill(s) |
| lab | bank; area |
| langar | stop; inn; post office; monastery; cemetery |
| loy | earth, mud |
| makon | stop; dwelling |
| mamnū'goh | nature reservation |
| marghzor | meadow, glade |
| maydon | square; field; open upland area |
| mayn | settlement |
| mazor | cemetery, grave, tomb |
| men | settlement |
| nov | valley, pass, defile |
| ob | watercourse |
| obburda | gully, ravine |
| obguzar | river channel; bridge, ferry, ford |
| obod | populated place |
| obraha | mountain stream channel; road; canal |
| obshor | waterfall; stream |

| | |
|--------------|---|
| osiyo/osiyob | mill |
| ou | watercourse |
| ov | watercourse |
| ovring | mountain trail; slope |
| pasti | lowland; depression, basin, hollow |
| piryakh | glacier |
| pormayn | lower part of a settlement |
| poyon | (low) area |
| poyonob | lower reaches of a watercourse |
| pul | bridge |
| pushta | embankment; cairn; hill |
| qal'a | citadel, fort, fortress, castle |
| qatorkūh | mountain ridge; mountain steppe |
| qir | upland, hill |
| qishloq | village, settlement |
| quduq | well |
| qulla | summit, peak |
| qum | sandy area |
| qūrghon | fort, fortress, citadel |
| rabot | caravansaray; suburb; border post |
| rah | road, way, passage |
| rayon | district (second-order administrative division) |
| reg | sandy area |
| rogh | meadow, field, foothills |
| roh | road, way, passage |
| rūd | river, stream, canal |
| sanglokh | rocky place |
| sangob | rocky river |
| sangov | dry river bed; stony bank |
| sar | summit |
| sarchashma | headwaters, source, spring |
| sardoba | glacier |
| sarga | headwaters, source |
| sargakh | upper part of a settlement |
| sarob | headwaters, source |
| sel | mountain stream after rain |
| shahr | town |
| shahrband | town wall, town ramparts |
| shahrison | fortified town; group of towns |
| sharshara | waterfall, rapids |

| | |
|------------------|--|
| shimayn | high settlement; upper part of a settlement |
| shokhob | tributary watercourse |
| shokhsor | thicket, grove |
| shūr | salt pan |
| soy | stream; gully, ravine |
| su | watercourse |
| sughud | low-lying marshy land; cultivated land with abundant water |
| takh | hill, mountain, rock |
| tal | hill; upland; marsh |
| tegha | summit |
| tepa | hill |
| teppa | hill, mountain, upland |
| togh | hill(s), summit, ridge |
| tor | summit |
| viloyat | region (first-order administrative division) |
| viloyati mukhtor | autonomous region (first-order administrative division) |
| vodí | valley, river bed |
| vuch | summit, head |
| yakhpír | glacier |
| zamin | land, ground |