The determination of the English to find and install on the Afghan throne a man who was both well-disposed to them and qualified to exercise power involved Afghanistan in considerable upheaval. The British choice fell on Sardâr ʿAbd or-Rahmân Khân, the only son of the former emir, Muhammad Afzal Khân. He had fought in the civil war in which his father opposed another former emir, Shêr ʿAli Khân, and was now returning to Afghan soil after a long exile in Russian Turkestan. From this choice, which would reveal an autocratic administrator, a politically unified Afghanistan would emerge, a strong state within boundaries recognized for the first time. Domestically, some of the changes revived the series of reforms introduced by Amir Shêr ʿAli Khân; certain economic and social reforms were introduced; and Kabul was exposed to Western practices—industrial technology and medical techniques, for instance—through the skill of English and Indian technicians and doctors employed at the personal invitation of the emir. ʿAbd or-Rahmân Khân would die peacefully, leaving behind a stable, but quite isolated, kingdom.1

History tells of the political skill with which ʿAbd or-Rahmân Khân constructed a centralized Afghan state as well as his determination to organize its different regions. However, all areas did not receive his equal attention and in general the provinces remained far behind the capital, especially with regards to urban development. Under ʿAbd or-Rahmân Khân, Kabul experienced major changes and a radical alteration of its spatial development. First of all, there was a definite transfer of building activity to the left bank of the river, a subsequent alteration in the spatial organization of government with the ad hoc construction of administrative buildings, and the organization of production and economic activity with the emergence of an embryonic industrial infrastructure. Lastly, under ʿAbd or-Rahmân Khân a distinctly different royal architecture emerged.

When ʿAbd or-Rahmân came to the throne, it was a little more than a hundred years since Kabul had been made the capital. But aside from the tomb of Timur Shâh, it was a capital utterly lacking in monumental architecture—ʿAli Mardân Khân’s monument, the Châr Chatta, was no more than a curiosity. The citadel was a fortress in name only; there was no royal residence; nor were there any remaining fortifications. For a very long time Kabul had no defenses. The wall extending from the citadel along the Shêr Darwâza and Âsmâʾi heights was in ruins and the high walls which enclosed the residential area were now only a memory. Except for the crumbling Lahore Gate, which was the only one serving as the point of entry for merchants and goods, the other gates had all disappeared along with the walls. Only the Qezelbâsh quarter of Chendâwol retained its walls, protecting its Shiʾite identity. In almost all quarters, the city used the system of kucha-bandi, the ability to close off a street or alley. In the absence of overall defenses, this system assured some physical protection at the local level. Kabul as capital resembled an ordinary town, flanked at some distance by an abandoned site which was supposed to have been a

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1 Amir ʿAbd or-Rahmân renewed the Treaty of Gandamak, subordinating himself to Great Britain, which would control Afghan foreign policy in exchange for a sizeable annual subvention and a quantity of weapons. In return he would have full control over the internal affairs of the country. He would use harsh measures to suppress domestic rebellions, to pacify the central region of the country inhabited by Hazâra Shiʾites, and to conquer and Islamize the still “infidel” (kâfir) region of Kafiristan. At the same time, the Afghan frontiers with Russia to the north and India to the east were demarcated through bilateral negotiations. See Balland (1983), 553–554; Dupree (1973), 417–429; Gregorian (1969), 129–162; and Sultan Mahomed Khan (1900) II, chapter VI.
new Kabul. In the suburbs, the most recent royal garden estate, that of Amir Shêr ʿAli Khân, was the only one that remained, the others either having been divided up into lots or abandoned. Private gardens, however, flourished as always.

When ʿAbd or-Rahmân Khân entered Kabul, the city had become accustomed to months of instability and disturbance. Its occupation by English forces for the second time had provoked the population to violence. Once again the result was considerable destruction, some of which was irreparable. The citadel was devastated, the consequence first of the uprising of the Afghans against the British presence, then of repeated explosions in the store-rooms of the royal arsenal, and finally by people salvaging usable building materials from the rubble. On the other hand, the residential part of the city, which also suffered some damage, had recovered and its bazaar had resumed normal activity.

If Amir ʿAbd or-Rahmân Khân, for his part, gave any thought to the idea of an urban creation of his own, the state of dilapidation in which he found the city forced it upon him as an absolute necessity. The immediate difficulty that he confronted was finding a place of his own to live in a capital where the citadel palace and its ancillary buildings were in ruins and the individual houses available to him were, as he himself acknowledged, not very inviting. This then raised the question of the choice of a site for a new palace-citadel (arg), other than the rubble of the Bâlâ Hesâr, the site of a secular fortress, admittedly, but which had also been an arena for domestic struggles and the two foreign occupations that had endangered the country. Abandoning the right bank of the river, the new emir opted not for the place to which he had once given some thought in the Chârdeh valley, west of the Shêr Darwâza and Âsmâʾi Mountains in the direction of Paghmân, but for another location on the left bank of the river to the north of the city where there was plenty of open space bordering the Khiyâbân. This area had attracted the Sadôzay Shâhs in their time but now there remained nothing of their royal gardens. The proximity of the area to the city also made it highly suitable as an administrative center.

At the same time as the question of his own residence, ʿAbd or-Rahmân Khân faced the issue of how the government was actually going to function. Since the Bâlâ Hesâr was in ruins—and we read in the biography of the emir written by Sultan Mahomed Khan that “there were no public offices at all”—high officials and (their) secretaries managed the affairs of their offices from their own homes. Nearly half a century earlier, Masson had noted much the same thing. In the two chapters of ʿAbd or-Rahmân Khân’s biography devoted to the overall civil and military organization of the kingdom, the mere listing of central administrative functions and services, military offices, newly established workshops and factories, and other new structures clearly indicates a number of different sites, many of which had to be planned and constructed.

The building projects of the new emir began with the Arg (See Figure 3). There one finds the private life and the work of the king, on the one hand, brought together with the offices of the central administration and a reception hall for audiences and ceremonies on the other. At the same time, one sees a remarkable number of private residences built for members of the royal family, whether the emir himself, the queen, or the princes. A vast space extending south of the Arg as far as the river was given over to the construction of several palaces: the Bostân Sarây (See Figure 3), a second palace for the emir, less-enclosed than the one in the new citadel; Golestân Sarây (See Figure 3) for Queen Halima; and two others, the Gerdân Sarây (See Figure 3) and Zarnegâr (See Figure 3). West of the Arg, the village of Deh Afghanân gave up its market and pleasure gardens for the residences of the princes Habibollâh

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2 Sultan Mahomed Khan (1900), I, 223.
3 Gray (1895), 32; and Curzon (1895), col. a.
4 Masson (1844), 11, 256; Sultan Mahomed Khan (1900), 11, 50; Wheeler (1895), 212; and Yate (1888), 361.
5 Sultan Mahomed Khan (1900), 11, 14–78.