

WHERE
FOUR WORLDS MEET

HINDU KUSH

1959

BY

FOSCO MARAINI

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN BY

PETER GREEN

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**To the memory of
PETER NELSON
from his Italian colleagues**

Note on the transcription of Proper Names

Writing about any subject with an Asiatic setting at once raises one major problem: in what form are the names of places and persons, or foreign words generally, to be reproduced? The languages concerned are often remote from our own, and written for the most part in alphabets which bear little phonetic resemblance to the one we use. It is true that every Oriental language possesses one or more scientifically-based systems of transcription; but too slavish an adherence to these is liable to saddle one with fresh and even greater difficulties. The *locus classicus* is Tibetan, where the written and the spoken word frequently diverge from one another in a quite fantastic manner. As an alternative to this we have the old empirical system (Italian vowels and English consonants) which has stood up to nearly a century of use and abuse. This is the system I have for the most part adhered to in this book, though without any claim to rigid logical consistency of application.

PREFACE

IT WAS in 1958 that a group of young members of the Rome branch of the Club Alpino Italiano—the main initiative coming from two men, Franco Alletto and Paolo Consiglio—first conceived the idea of organizing a scientific-cum-mountaineering expedition to one of the most important peaks in the Hindu Kush Massif, the hitherto inviolate Mt. Saraghrar (24,000 ft.) on the borders of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Mt. Saraghrar had been attempted once before, during the summer of 1958, by a British expedition under the leadership of Mr. Ted Norrish. The route chosen by our predecessors had wound its way up the steep, and mainly rocky, Western face. Unfortunately, on 27 August 1958, Peter Nelson, a member of the party, fell to his death while crossing an icy couloir. This accident, which took place at a very tricky moment, obliged the expedition to return on its footsteps before reaching the summit. We owed much helpful information to Ted Norrish and we wish to thank him here.

'Paropàmisus' is the name which classical authors gave to the mountains lying between Sogdiana, Bactria, and Gandhara, which Alexander and his armies crossed during their famous invasion of India in 326 B.C., and which are, beyond any doubt, to be identified with the Hindu Kush massif. The eastern end of the chain rises to a group of high peaks, and may be labelled Greater (as opposed to Lesser) Paropàmisus to distinguish it from the longer, lower section stretching away westward into Afghanistan. Today, however, the name Paropàmisus (or Paropànisus), though it survives here and there, is used specifically of the long chain lying north from Herat, in western Afghanistan, and of that alone. Nevertheless, in the present work I have used the name Paropàmisus as a synonym for the entire Hindu Kush range.

As regards the origins of the word, it would appear to be a transliterated Avestic term, *Pareupairisaena*, possibly meaning: 'Beyond (the mountains) higher than the eagle's (flight).'

Once official permission had been obtained from the Pakistan government, the preparations for the trip were completed in a matter of weeks. Alessandro Datti, the president of C.A.I.'s Rome branch, managed, by the exercise of much charm and enthusiasm, to obtain the greater part of the necessary

financial backing; while Carlo Pettenati and Teodoro Brinati worked so hard to ensure everything was ready in time that (like a pair of beneficent Bodhisattvas) they appeared to have eight pairs of hands apiece. Finally I myself was invited to lead the expedition; and I am glad to have this opportunity of thanking not only Sandro Datti, but all other persons involved, for so signal a mark of trust and confidence.

This book is the story of our journey: a journey that was not merely a physical displacement of bodies from one point to another, but—for all of us—a most intense inner experience. Did we, I wonder, succeed in breaching that ideological barrier which rises so impenetrably between all major human civilizations? I cannot be certain. Yet every encounter, each fresh experience continually drove us to make the attempt: there was a constant lure, a constant challenge. I have dwelt on this theme at some length, over and above such conventional topics as porters on strike, glaciers, and avalanches. Many readers are bound to quarrel with my conclusions; but that, I think, will be all to the good. What I write may perhaps stimulate them to a deeper exploration of this century's overriding theme: the unity of mankind.

To make my account as full and detailed as possible, I have, fortunately, been able to draw upon notes jotted down by some of my companions. The photographic illustrations, too, are very much a collective responsibility. Our team-work, then, did not end with the difficult and exhausting ascent of Mt. Saraghrar; it continued afterwards, and is still to be found in this work, in both text and pictorial matter.

F.M.

CHAPTER ONE

KARACHI

*I am a wayfarer, and ever
I wander through the world seeing the marvels thereof.*
—SHIHABUDDIN SUHRAWARDI (1153-1191)

*A mighty God is Ahura-Mazda, who created this earth and
heaven, who created man, who created the blessing of happiness
for his creatures.*

—INSCRIPTION OF KING DARIUS (521-485 B.C.)
FOR THE FOUNDATION OF HIS PALACE AT SUSA

The stars are many, but God is One.
—FIRDUSI, *Shahnamé*

THE EARTH stretched itself in the sun like a satisfied giantess. In the ordinary way the hills and valleys of this part of the world were bare and inhospitable, either through months of scorching summer heat or as a result of the brief—but no less cruel—wintry frosts. But now wisps and filaments of vapour eddied up from the foliage of the few trees scattered here and there among the rocks: it hung over everything—sparse clumps of bushes, the roofs of the huts, the groups of horses and donkeys and goats. Traces of recent flooding were visible everywhere. A few late rain-drops still hung glittering from the leaves.

Presently the silence was broken by the asthmatic popping of an ancient internal combustion engine, together with a noise like scrap-iron being thrown about. A moment later, round a bend in the road, there appeared a bus, crammed full of passengers. From the point of view of any European both the bus itself and the people in it constituted the most extraordinary spectacle; but if you happened to be an inhabitant of this upcountry hill-region (deep in the State of Dir, a part of northern Pakistan at the foot of the Himalayas) such a sight was, it goes without saying, perfectly normal.

It was plain, both from their appearance and the noise they made, that the bus's chassis and engine were of American manufacture. The bodywork, on the other hand, had been stripped down and completely rebuilt in wood—a common practice in many parts of Asia—after which it had been decorated with multicoloured inscriptions in both Arabic and Roman lettering, as well as with floral wreaths and 'medallions' containing tiny landscape scenes:

there was something rather touching about those romanticized peasant motifs, with their gardens and fountains, their mosques and sunsets and bright sickle moons. Anyone with sufficient curiosity to scrutinize the whole thing in detail might also observe depicted there a well-kept lady's hand (long, scarlet, tapering finger-nails and a gold watch round the wrist) which drooped languidly over a telephone to indicate that the company owning the bus offered every up-to-date service and facility to clean, respectable passengers. The bodywork was surmounted, front and back, by a gable-like handrail, and down either side by a kind of coping, the whole embellished with copious decorations in every imaginable colour. The bus might perhaps best be described as a cross between a Sicilian *carretto* and a mosque (see illustrations nos. 38, 39, 40).

There was a large, indeed a positively overflowing load of passengers aboard. On the side of the vehicle were painted three huge Roman numerals indicating first, second and third class seats. The first and second classes were occupied almost exclusively by women, all swathed in white robes and looking like so many Fates. Some had their faces veiled, others were hidden behind that hideous quasi-cloak called the *burkha*, which makes its wearer resemble a ghost, or some outcast leper: it completely conceals head, face, and body, leaving only two minute eye-slits cut in the material (see illustration no. 61). The women were accompanied by children, many of whom were squalling vigorously. The third-class seats, near the back of the bus, were occupied by a few very old or very poverty-stricken women, together with a group of elderly, plump, prosperous-looking men who affected dyed red beards.

All the real men—that is, every male traveller between fifteen and sixty who was conscious of his masculinity and had some sort of personal dignity to maintain—were crammed together up on the roof of the vehicle: the pedimental superstructure which surmounted the coachwork served them as a kind of guard-rail, to which they clung as best they could. They were a motley crowd: in open shirts, with hairy chests and bellies, sporting moustaches and, as often as not, beards, their arms heavily muscled—a small sea of cruel, sensual, mocking mouths, that displayed a vast quantity of teeth and were always on the point of spitting somewhere, anywhere, with enormous skill and self-satisfaction; that managed, whether they happened to be laughing or chewing dried seeds or whatever, to give instant, visceral expression to their equally instant, equally visceral emotions. The topknots above these faces were adorned with a fantastic variety of headgear: small white gold-embroidered skull-caps, fezzes of astrakhan, Gilgit-style bonnets with a distinct look of the Renaissance about them, one or two battered felt hats, and even a few pith-helmets. Another thing that at once struck the eye was the arsenal of weapons they carried—ancient muzzle-loaders,

fowling-pieces, muskets, together with one or two sub-machine guns—and their curious mandolins or lutes (*zithara*), which were of the most elegant, delicate design, exceptionally long in the neck. Often the same man would have a rifle in one hand and a lute in the other.

They were obviously a violent, poetical, happy-go-lucky lot, equally ready to improvise a dance or knock somebody off. Perhaps there was a celebration going on somewhere: everyone seemed in a decidedly gay mood. Whenever the bus overtook a group of pedestrians, hoarse shouts would go up from the crowd on the roof, though whether these were greetings, rude comments, sarcastic asides or cheerful repartee remained in doubt. If those down below made a prompt and spirited retort, the little group up aloft would explode in a great burst of laughter, like a wood suddenly hit by a gale.

The bus was travelling very slowly, for three good and obvious reasons: it was old, it was overloaded, and the countryside had not yet recovered from the devastation wrought by the spring floods. Every so often the state of the road would be such that the old rattletrap had to stop altogether. At this point the driver—whose stern, authoritative manner proclaimed his status as leader—would call down the men from the roof, and set them to work repairing the surface. Sometimes they had to clear away boulders washed down by the floods, sometimes it was a great pothole to be filled in with whatever came to hand. They buckled down with a will, slinging their guns and lutes across their backs and shouting noisily as they worked. Their clothes were as variegated as their hats: the most popular garment seemed to be a set of dirty-white, loose-fitting pyjamas. Anyone coming unexpectedly on these curious roadmending operations might well have assumed he had to do with the occupants of some provincial madhouse in transit, and that—faced with this emergency—patients and nurses were, for once, cheerfully working side by side.

With much laborious effort the bus got going once more, and after a little while came upon something which could, without exaggeration, be described as 'absolutely out of the ordinary'. By the side of the road there stood a large pile of wooden packing-cases, on which mysterious symbols were painted in red. Guarding this cache (the tattered cloth stretched over it gave it scant protection) were three miserable-looking foreigners, presumably Europeans, soaked to the skin, splashed all over with mud, their clothes torn and filthy. It was plain that they had just—and only just—escaped some frightful disaster.

The driver slowed down, though without stopping, since in these parts (the same rule applies on most Mediterranean islands) everyone punctiliously minds his own business. Everyone turned and stared, even the women behind their *burkhas*, a row of ghostly egg-faces. The little knot of men up

on the roof kept silent: they had been caught unawares and were not quite sure what their reaction should be. Ought they to make sympathetic gestures, wave to the poor devils perhaps, give them some sort of encouragement? Or was it better to emphasize the ridiculous side of the situation by jeers and grimaces? But by now the little drama was over: the bus had drawn away round the next bend before anyone could make up his mind. In the end, however, the primitive instinct for a good joke prevailed, and the little group exploded into savage laughter. One or two emphasized the point with obscene gestures.



If any of the passengers had been able to decipher those curious red inscriptions he would have realized that the whole business had some connection with a 'C.A.I. (Rome) Expedition to the Hindu Kush'. We had, in fact, left Rome two weeks previously, by air. Three members of the party had flown out on 16th June 1959, and the other five on 20th June. The first landfall for both groups was the capital of Pakistan, Karachi.¹

After flying for hours across the Indian Ocean, and high over the desolate, terracotta-coloured coast of Makran—known in antiquity, by Alexander's Greeks, as Gedrosia—we of the second party at last saw our aircraft lose height and drop steadily earthwards. We passed Cape Monze (Ras Muari) and shortly afterwards perceived the port and city of Karachi spread out beneath us. In that vast panorama of buildings and bustling human activities the first thing to strike the eye is the uniformity of colour: everything seems the same tawny, reddish brown, shading off occasionally into grey. Green, unfortunately, is seldom to be found: one's eye searches for its cool relief, a comforting oasis in that dusty, barren wilderness. The desert laps against the city's outermost houses, invades the streets on the periphery, ravages the wretched shrivelled-up gardens.

When we came to a standstill we quickly spotted the rest of our party, who had come to meet us.

'Had a good trip?' they shouted.

'Fine,' we replied, 'just fine,' marching boldly out of the air-conditioned plane. But our smiles melted away in an instant: we were assailed by a violent, suffocating wind, which whirled fine sand and dust along in its wake. The grit forced itself under our eyelids and down our throats: it felt like red-hot iron filings.

'This means the monsoon's just about due,' I said, feeling the need to restore my self-confidence a little.

¹ The capital of Pakistan was, and at the time of writing still is, in process of being transferred from Karachi to Islamabad, near Rawalpindi, at the foot of the Himalayas.

A letter from the Pakistani Ambassador in Rome ensured that we got through the customs quickly and easily. Then we all piled into a large, noiseless car, driven by an equally silent chauffeur, and left the airport.

We were still in the open countryside—though the word ‘countryside’ is not really appropriate, conveying as it does an impression of tillage and greenery, trees and pasturage: ‘open desert’ would be more accurate. We were, in point of fact, driving across a kind of sun-scorched, burnt-up steppe. Here and there lay a few boulders, calcined by the intense heat; and that furious wind came whipping up off the ocean, raising clouds of yellowish dust. Soon we began to observe the first signs of the great city: tram-cables, with their metal standards, garden-walls, car-parks crammed with decrepit vehicles, warehouses, cranes, the occasional factory, rows of barrack-like hutments, suburban villas, refugee camps, a mosque. Here and there stretched whole acres of what the French call *terrain vague*, land lost to nature but not yet properly assimilated by man, where filth and refuse lay in heaps and the wind whirled old cartons and dried leaves about. Every so often we saw a makeshift pair of wooden goal-posts, with some netting stretched between them—a tribute to some enthusiastic sportsman or other; but who would have the courage to play football in that hellish, blinding heat, with the wind like the breath from a furnace door?

Indeed, most of the people we saw looked as though they had passed out till further notice. The few square yards of shade under some stunted tree or makeshift corrugated iron roof were packed with recumbent figures who lay there like the dead, trying to get through the worst part of the day by refraining, as far as was humanly possible, from giving any sign of life whatsoever. We drove on, and presently entered the city proper, where we were plunged into a chaotic stream of traffic consisting of bicycles, tricycles, little three- and four-wheeled delivery vans, lorries, and huge drays drawn by camels which plodded on with their slow, loose-jointed, couldn't-care-less gait, chewing away and peering at the world from a great height out of their small, bleary eyes. We also saw one or two vast gleaming black cars glide by—well up in the nabob class—inside which there reclined persons of delicate physique and great influence, all wearing dark glasses. The buses were packed with men, and corners of their grubby cotton robes fluttered like pennants from the open windows.

We drove through chaotically disorganized areas, where groups of brand-new blocks of flats, regular marble palaces, alternated abruptly with makeshift shanty-town huts which appeared to be made, for the most part, from bits of old wood and corrugated iron. Every so often we would pass yet another squatters' camp: it was as though a group of nomads had settled down for a slightly longer stay than usual. But the crowds that thronged the streets were gay enough, full of colour and movement. Here and there a few

lethargic figures were still to be seen, lying idle and supine in small islands of shade; but most people were now walking briskly along, mingling and regrouping, busy with the endless intrigues of their various private affairs. Gigantic posters on hoardings invited them to drink a purple concoction called Pakola. We also noticed certain buildings in that curious style which flourished towards the end of the nineteenth century, and can be described only as Indo-Victorian Neo-Gothic.

I was delighted to be back in the confused, kaleidoscopic hurly-burly of Karachi: there are few cities anywhere which give one a stronger impression of chaotic impermanence, of being a nomad encamped on the banks of Time. I suspect the peculiar fascination which Karachi possesses is something more easily experienced than defined. Perhaps it derives from the city's huge vitality, the fact that it forms a natural caravanserai for all Asia. Nothing seems to have changed here since the days of Alexander the Great or Akbar, even though slaves have been replaced by the Ford assembly-line, and wine has been abandoned in favour of Pakola. In Karachi you get a constant clash of extremes, affluence and indigence rubbing shoulders. Above this vast cauldron of men, beasts, vehicles, heterogeneous objects of every sort, the light-dazzle and fruit-stalls and neon-signs, above this palatial Luna Park with its blocks of flats and tumbledown hovels, there flutter innumerable birds, of every size and colour, filling the air with their mournful cries; while the hot wind from the desert—or, worse, off the sea—fills one's eyes and lungs with a yellowish, impalpable, salty dust.

The silent chauffeur delivered us to the Hotel Metropole. There, while the hot wind whipped by in gusts, bearing with it a mass of withered leaves, waste paper, and bits of straw, we unloaded our baggage. A little way off, in the scanty shade cast by a group of acacias, a snake-charmer was playing his clear-toned, bulbous flute. The greenish beast itself reared up out of a basket in front of him, swaying on its tail, and listening (or so it seemed) to that thin melancholy thread of music with every sign of ecstatic enjoyment.



With almost two million inhabitants, Karachi is one of the biggest capital cities in Asia: but it remains an improvised, *ad hoc* metropolis, and as a result there is, at base, something monstrous about it. Its improvised nature dates back to 15th August 1947, when the British withdrew from India. In the light of more recent events in Algeria, this can certainly be seen—on Great Britain's part, at any rate—as an act of great political wisdom and maturity. What followed the withdrawal invites comparison with the dismemberment of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire into a cluster of autonomous sovereign states. But there are certain vital distinctions between the two events. In the first place, the Austro-Hungarian Empire failed as a

result of military defeat, which procured its ultimate abolition, whereas Britain took a carefully calculated decision in the very hour of victory, and by means of the Commonwealth retained close links with the new, young, emancipated nations. Secondly, while the new European countries were constituted on a national, ethnic basis, in Asia the distinguishing criterion was religious. In Europe, Hungarians, Czechs, Slovenes, Italians and other peoples were formed into new states or reacquired their old natural boundaries; in Asia Moslems, Hindus, and Buddhists each wanted a state based on their own beliefs.

To understand this sequence of events—especially as regards the Moslems and Hindus—we must bear in mind that the rivalry between the adherents of the two major faiths practised in the Indian sub-continent was long-standing, complex, and in some ways quite horrifying. As early as A.D. 711 Moslem Arab invaders had occupied Sind, the southern region of the Indus Valley. (Only a few years later, in 732, the Arab advance in Europe was halted by Charles Martel between Poitiers and Tours, which gives some idea of the size their empire had attained.) But three centuries later, about 1000 A.D., Mahmud of Ghazni—to name but one of the leading *condottieri* involved—succeeded in forcing the passes of the Hindu Kush, in north-west India, and came down at the head of vast and well-armed migrant horde into the rich, fertile plain of the Punjab. From that time forth a large part of India came under near-continuous Moslem rule, and had a permanent Moslem population.

These Islamic invaders and the native Hindu inhabitants were continually at loggerheads, from those far-off times down to the present day, as was only to be expected with men who belonged to two civilizations so profoundly different and incompatible. Their respective religions were only the culminating and quintessential manifestation of two diametrically opposed ways of life. The one group were warrior-herdsmen, simple, brave, and intolerant; the other consisted of farmers, or civilized, peace-loving city-dwellers who preferred to discuss their differences rather than fight over them, and were open to any sort of intelligent, rational argument. This remote epoch marked the beginning of what was to become a more or less continual process of expansion. The new arrivals received reinforcements from the Afghan hinterland, from the remote fastnesses of Iran and Central Asia: they advanced steadily, consolidating their position as they went. Sometimes this advance was achieved by force; sometimes a defeated group submitted to conversion. The conquerors sparked off a series of Islamic dynasties, each more impressive and enduring than its predecessor. The Ghaznevids were followed by the Ghorids, the Ghorids by the Tughluq, till, finally, there came the Moguls, who with unparalleled magnificence succeeded in bringing almost the whole of India under their domination.

From the late seventeenth century onwards there was a notable resurgence of 'Indian' power (e.g. the Mahratta and Sikh empires, which flourished during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries); but by now Europeans had appeared on the scene. Of the various nationalities involved it was the British who, after years of deadly rivalry with the French, at last emerged victorious, their supremacy being established in 1757 by the battle of Plassey. Thenceforth for many years Hindu and Moslem alike were forced to live together under the *pax Britannica*.

During the first few decades of this century the situation was as follows: out of a total population of 340,000,000, there were some 70,000,000 Moslems, distributed in a haphazard fashion over almost the whole of the sub-continent. Certain areas, such as the Punjab, Sind, and the North-West Frontier, were more or less exclusively Islamic. Powerful Moslem communities existed in eastern Bengal and Hyderabad, while smaller minority groups were to be found all over the peninsula, particularly in large cities. Might not the passage of time have slowly brought about a fusion of the two faiths (or at least some degree of unification between the societies that professed them) and thus have put an end to this history of perennial feud and rivalry? Those who cherished illusions about man's immediate perfectibility liked to think so; but the facts proved them appallingly wrong.

The vast majority of Moslems, inspired by their poet Mohammed Iqbal, and under the leadership of M. A. Jinnah, were determined to set up an independent state of their own when the British withdrew from the sub-continent. The birth of this new state realized the dreams of the Moslem League, which had been founded in 1908. Underlying these nationalistic and religious Moslem ambitions were two other powerful motives: memories of the old Islamic dynasties, which had at one time dominated almost the whole of India, and the fear ('panic' might not be too strong a term) of finding themselves a large minority group in a country ruled by their own former subjects. Now that the situation had put the Hindus in such an advantageous position, they could only too easily 'take revenge' for past indignities. As Mr. Jinnah declared in a speech before the Moslem League, on 25th May 1940: 'The difference between Hindu and Moslem is not only one of religion: it has legal and cultural aspects as well. We are, in fact, concerned with two wholly distinct and separate cultures. It is not a question of rival theologies but of conflicting national entities: the dilemma can be solved only by allowing India to split up into autonomous—though not necessarily hostile—sovereign states.'

We should bear in mind that the Indian Moslem likes to think of himself as a simple, honest sort of fellow, not much given to talking, but a man of his word, a hard and thrifty worker, highly jealous of his own and his family's reputation, with just enough education to comprehend—via the Koran—

the Word and the Will of the One True God as revealed to His prophet Mahommed. Against this half-true, half-idealized *persona* he sets his own version of the Hindu, whom he regards as effeminate and dishonest, a glib tradesman with a talent for sharp practice, a sly, lazy creature always ready to compromise his principles for personal gain, a decadent fantast and idolater who (the last and worst charge) is incapable of lifting the scourge of caste from his own society. The Hindu, of course, sees things rather differently: his estimate of national character contains about the same proportion of basic human truth, but the emphasis, the balance of sympathy is everywhere reversed. For him the Moslem becomes an intractable fanatic, a rough, self-assertive ignoramus whose passion for the sword springs from his inability to master the intricacies of thought and speech, an ungovernable maniac determined to persecute the poor unarmed, peace-loving, cultured, non-military Hindu who is heir to one of the world's greatest civilizations.

Such estimates of national character—whether true or not is beside the point—have had considerable influence on the course of history. This was particularly true (and the consequences were particularly terrible) at the time of British India's dismemberment into three 'successor states': the 'Land of the Pure' (Pakistan), Hindu India, and the Buddhist territory of Ceylon. The centuries-old hatred between Hindu and Moslem had been only superficially appeased; at this juncture it burst out again in most ferocious fashion. There were abominable massacres on both sides, and the death-roll reached several hundred thousand.

So Pakistan came to birth in a blood-bath, and from its very first days of existence found itself up against gigantic problems of every conceivable sort. A country founded on a religious ideal is likely to be populated by citizens whose actual physical territories are ill-defined (and ill-conceived) from the geographic and economic points of view. Pakistan tried to produce national frontiers that embraced the major centres of Islam in India; but with all the good will and ingenuity in the world it proved impossible to launch a single, united state on these terms. The planners were forced to accept the compromise solution of two separate areas. The larger and less densely populated of these, embracing the whole of the Indus Valley, was called West Pakistan; while the smaller—which consisted of part of Bengal and the lower Brahmaputra valley, a district with exceptional population density—became East Pakistan. The numerous minority groups of the faithful were invited to leave India and take up residence within the frontiers of the new State. When I suggested to a Pakistani friend of mine that this regional distribution had considerable disadvantages, he replied that it was by no means a new thing: were not Great Britain, Japan, Indonesia, the Philippines, even Italy and Greece, all countries which consisted in whole or part of islands separated

from one another by the sea? Then why should Pakistan not succeed equally well with its parts separated by land?

Despite tremendous enthusiasm among many Pakistanis—especially the younger age-groups and the army—there were some powerful and destructive centrifugal forces at work in the body-politic of the new nation. First and foremost among these was the lack of a national language to give Pakistan's 75,000,000¹ inhabitants unity and cohesion. In the West the most prevalent language was Urdu, with Sindhi, Punjabi, Baluchi and Pushtu all to be reckoned with. In the East Bengali predominated, but again there were various important minority languages: and everywhere English was, and remains, the official *lingua franca*. Furthermore, despite the Islamic faith which they all professed, these 'Pakistanis' embraced a wide variety of traditional cultures. For example, the Pathans, a race of warrior-herdsmen living in the mountain country round Peshawar, as tough as they were ignorant, had little in common with the rice-cultivators of Bengal, with the townees and city-dwellers whose mastery of words gave them such smooth diplomatic finesse. Between their two ways of life stretched a gulf such as might well, in different circumstances, justify the setting up of two separate nations. Even at the level of physical characteristics, we find widely divergent groups. In the West the predominant type is one with close relations throughout Afghanistan, Persia and Arabia, and all round the shores of the Mediterranean: these are the men with black or near-black hair, strong, abundant beards and moustaches, finely chiselled and conspicuously masculine features, a fair or olive-tinted complexion, and a spare physique. They are usually of medium height. In Bengal, on the other hand, centuries of interbreeding and invasions have produced a physical type which combines certain southern features (e.g. a very dark skin) with other traits that are near-Mongoloid. The latter seldom appear in the facial structure, however: more common are a smooth, hairless texture of torso or limbs, and that natural corpulence which swathes itself cloth-like round the muscles.

Over and above this, there is the economic problem. British India, though it formed part of the Commonwealth, was a naturally self-contained unit: its division into two separate states had disastrous consequences, especially for Pakistan, with its piecemeal, fragmented territory. From the economic point of view, Independence proved a colossal luxury which weighed—and still weighs—very heavily on the shoulders of its citizens. India is larger, wealthier, with a bigger population: for several decades now it has been making progress towards industrialization, and, most important of all, it has greater natural unity. As a result the amputation inflicted by Partition affected India comparatively little, whereas Pakistan could not survive at all without massive foreign subsidies. Ten years ago it was a conversational

¹ 75,842,135 in 1951 (census); 93,720,613 in 1961 (census).

commonplace to say that all the centres of industry had been left in one segment (India), and all the raw materials in the other (Pakistan). Like all such aphorisms, this one was something of an over-simplification; but exaggeration apart, it did bring out the essential truth of the matter. Today, after a decade of herculean effort, Pakistan has much improved the balance of her economy. Dams, power stations, steelworks, cement factories and chemical plants have been built and put into commission by national and foreign (in particular, Italian and Japanese) companies. But the road ahead is still long and arduous.

Fortunately Pakistan has enjoyed a certain measure of political stability. A vaguely 'democratic' regime (in fact it was more of a plutocratic oligarchy) lasted until 1958, but in the end—as so often happens in Asia—collapsed through its own all-embracing corruption. It was succeeded—after a lightning-swift, superbly timed, and more or less bloodless revolution, which Gursel's Turks might have copied to their advantage—by a military government under General Ayub Khan. He is still running the country, with encouraging results.¹

The partition of British India nevertheless left certain serious problems unsolved, chief amongst them that of Kashmir. It is sad that one of the most enchanting regions in all Asia, whose flower-filled gardens look out on blue mountains thick with forest verdure, where Himalayan glaciers are mirrored among the water-lilies of the great lakes, that paradise of the Mogul Emperors, whose poets endlessly hymned its beauties, and whose artists reproduced them in the most exquisite miniatures—that this magic terrain should be the cause of such deep hatred (often violent, and always dangerous) between the two great neighbouring powers of India and Pakistan.

The story of the Kashmir problem is long and complex, yet it embodies all the elements necessary to make it a perfect text-book example in the field of international misunderstandings. Kashmir, a territory two-thirds the size of Italy, was originally populated by Hindus; from here came some of their most ancient and revered traditions, here the national culture found sources of deep inspiration. Brief periods of sovereignty claimed by the remote T'ang Emperors in China (eighth century A.D.) left no lasting impression on the country. For years Kashmir formed a bastion of Hinduism and Indian civilization against the besieging hordes of Moslems pouring in from the West. Then, in 1339, came the first Islamic dynasty. In 1586 Kashmir was made part of an India almost wholly united under the Mogul Emperors (the dynasty lasted through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries), and when the Mogul Empire finally collapsed, the political

¹ 'The military *coup d'état*, which is always a symptom of decadence in Europe, may, here in Asia, generally be welcomed as a guarantee of substantial progress towards democracy.' (A. Bausani.)

vacuum created in Kashmir attracted the attention of the Afghans, who moved in and ruled the country for several decades.

Nearly five hundred years of Moslem domination had profoundly changed the structure of Kashmiri society. The Hindus were reduced to a small and weak minority. The major centres of religious, intellectual, administrative and economic life were shifted from the East (the Magadha region, Ganges, Benares, Delhi) towards the West (Mecca, Iran, the Kabul Valley). The natural balance of the entire area, within the framework of its neighbouring territories, had been completely altered.

For a short while, between 1819 and 1846, Kashmir came under Sikh domination. In 1846 the English conquered the country and farmed it out, for a consideration, to their ally Gulab Singh, a Dogra by birth and the Maharajah of Jammu, who thus became *de facto* sovereign of Kashmir as well. He was required to pay his Western protectors an annual tribute of five shawls, made from the finest wool. So for a century Kashmir—a country now predominantly Moslem—was governed by a Hindu court, one drawn from a narrow circle of the Hindu aristocracy at that. We may note in passing that exactly the opposite happened in the state ruled over by the Nizam of Hyderabad ('the richest man in the world'), where a Moslem sovereign and court dominated a country in which the greater part of the inhabitants were Hindus.

The departure of the British in 1947 led to the downfall of some five hundred and sixty-two maharajahs, rajahs, nawabs, and other variously titled potentates, who were forced to choose between surrendering their authority to India or Pakistan. Only a few of the most powerful felt themselves in a position to play one claimant off against the other, and so—as they hoped—preserve their own thrones and prerogatives. The two most notable personalities who made this attempt to stand out against the natural tide of events were, as it happens, Hari Singh, Maharajah of Jammu and Kashmir, and the Nizam of Hyderabad. At this point Kashmir had a population of four million, eighty per cent of whom were Moslems. Everyone naturally expected the Kashmiri government to yield up its authority to Pakistan; in the event Hari Singh let several months go by during which he did little but stall ambiguously, with the obvious aim of delaying events and safeguarding his own position. He concluded several subsidiary agreements with neighbouring states, but was unwilling to compromise himself further.

One fine day the Pakistanis grew tired of waiting, and on 22nd October 1947 irregular forces, composed for the most part of Pathan mountaineers, invaded Kashmir. A sizable and officially sanctioned war blew up like a thunderstorm, right in the very heart of Asia. Hari Singh now acted with prompt enough dispatch: he appealed for help to India. The Indian government's reply was concise enough: help would be forthcoming, but only if

Kashmir first acceded to India. The Maharajah had no alternative but to throw himself into the waiting arms of the New Delhi government. So the Pathan warriors were halted, and gradually a demarcation line was worked out between the opposed forces—a line which found its way into maps, and was accepted by both countries as the basis of the armistice which they concluded in January 1949. As a result of this agreement Pakistan administers the so-called Azad Kashmir, or 'Free Kashmir', which includes the districts of Gilgit, Hunza, Skardu, and Karakoram, comprising one-third of Kashmir's total territory and a quarter of its population; while India, from the capital, Srinagar, governs the rest.

A foreign observer might have supposed at this point that the incident was settled, and that the general situation had at least been improved. On the contrary: a few of the larger knots in this hopelessly tangled affair had simply been drawn tighter than ever. Military forces, both regular and irregular, were now reinforced by diplomats, jurists, politicians, newspaper correspondents, prophets, fanatics, rabble-rousers, chauvinists, visionaries *et hoc genus omne*, and the battle was continued—as it still continues, even today—on different fronts. When the Kashmir Question was referred to the United Nations, in 1949, the following two points were tabled for examination: (a) Had Pakistan committed an act of aggression or not, and (b) was Kashmir's accession to India valid? It is only necessary to formulate such problems to perceive what contradictory solutions they can give rise to. Consider the first point. 'The Pathans are a notoriously fierce and warlike tribe,' say the Pakistanis; 'we couldn't control them.' 'Not so,' the Indians reply, 'they were acting on official orders.' And so the whole business degenerates into a series of claims and counter-claims, with dubious testimony, sensational incidents, and all the other characteristics of a court case resting solely on circumstantial evidence. Now look at the second point: 'The union of Kashmir with India is irregular,' declare the Pakistanis, 'there were conditions attached to it.' 'This is irrelevant,' the Indians retort. 'You should think less about the rules, and more about the actual facts of the case.'

Meanwhile Kashmir, with all its flowers and scented breezes, remains like an open wound, constantly poisoning the relationship between India and Pakistan. It is, moreover, one of the most inflammable danger-points in the whole shaky structure of world peace. For the Pakistanis there is, first and foremost, the position of Kashmir's overwhelmingly Moslem population to be considered as a matter of principle; they also point out that the economic links between Kashmir and Pakistan are far stronger, and more natural, than those between Kashmir and India. Lastly there is the problem of the rivers—the Jhelum, the Chenab, and one or two smaller streams—which flow across the Punjab, and rise in Kashmir. Who can guarantee the continued flow of these waters into Pakistani territory (the Pakistanis ask)

if their sources lie in foreign—and potentially hostile—territory? It should not be forgotten that in this part of the world an abundance or shortage of water can very often make the difference between life and death. As far as the Indians are concerned, the Kashmir problem is primarily regarded as a matter of high principle, something which affects the very integrity of the state. A friend of mine in Delhi, a doctor, told me: 'Ours is a young and artificially constituted country, peculiarly subject to what I may term centrifugal forces. If a region of Kashmir's importance were to be torn away—like the tearing of a limb from the body—there might well be disastrous consequences.' Fortunately, however, in Asia time has a healing quality all its own. Many hope that as it moves on, slowly as the sacred waters of the Ganges, it may at least take the pain from these wounds—and perhaps smooth out a problem which has defeated armies, prophets and diplomats alike.

But I must now return to Karachi. Little more than a century ago it was a miserable little fishing village. The British transformed it into a port of some consequence, which acted as a railhead for traffic from the North-West. But it was only after it became a capital city that the real demographic explosion took place. Just before the war Karachi's population was 200,000; in a very short time it rose to the million mark, and by 1950 was approaching a million and a quarter. It was inevitable, therefore, that Karachi should reflect (as indeed it still does today) that mixture of chaos and idealistic enthusiasm which marked the birth of the new Islamic republic. Tens of thousands of Moslems, who in 1947 found themselves on the wrong side of the new frontiers, were forced to move into Pakistan as refugees. Since they were jobless and penniless, they had no option but to make straight for the capital, where they camped as best they could on the outskirts. This, of course, was the explanation of those endless rows of huts I had seen in the outer suburbs, not to mention the nomad-like encampments—and, indeed, the palatial blocks of flats. . . .

Karachi embodies, in a peculiarly obvious and aggressive form, all those innumerable problems which the young Pakistani state must face if it is to survive, let alone develop. Because of this, and to avoid being suffocated by a local sense of exacerbation over national problems, the military administration decided—some two years after taking office—to shift the capital some six hundred miles farther north, to a locality which was named Islamabad and lies among the hills above Rawalpindi, at the foot of the Himalayas.

It is clear that military considerations played a very large part in the decision; and we should further recall that the troops themselves, being composed almost entirely of Pathans, Punjabis, and Kashmiris—that is to say, Northerners—had never felt comfortable in the South. The climate, both physical and moral, disagreed with them. Together with intense heat and an absence of any proper spring went an atmosphere of commerce,

intrigue, and venality. The transfer of the capital is still in progress, and the plans for the construction of the new administrative centre are very ambitious.



We were extremely comfortable at the Metropole. It is a vast square, a cubist structure in pale cream, its walls—inside as well as outside the square—studded with regular lines of windows and balconies. The inner court is full of flowers and greenery: there is something very charming about it, especially in the evening, when you dine out under the stars by lantern-light, to the accompaniment of pleasant music, breathing in that momentary freshness which fills the air at nightfall in the tropics. The Metropole is definitely a place of which, for some odd reason, one becomes very fond after a while.

Perhaps its secret lies in the piquant contrast between its air of comfortable domesticity and the cosmopolitan maelstrom of guests and visitors who pass through it. On the one hand you find bare-footed gardeners watering the dahlias, birds darting and swooping through the colonnades as though they had discovered some deserted country barn, and sundrenched white walls reminiscent of Capri; on the other—infinite variety. It might be a procession of fragrantly elegant and sari-draped ladies, moving noiselessly along on gold-sandalled feet, a mystical smile hovering about their lips, all bearing themselves erect, head poised as though beneath the weight of some invisible water-jar. It might be a group of neat little Burmese diplomats in their soutane-like robes, smiling and exchanging ceremonial greetings; or wilting European travellers, shepherded by stunningly chic Nordic air-hostesses, all blue eyes, pink-and-white complexions, and gleaming blonde pony-tails; or some tall, very dignified prelate, running a little to fat, and mopping his forehead with a coloured handkerchief, like a countryman at a village fair. It might be a group of Japanese boys, dressed up like young Americans and carrying all their father's gear—binoculars, cameras and the rest—slung jauntily round their necks; or again, it might be a high Pakistani official (his bearing as martial as that of an ancient war-god) followed by some local bigwig in pointed, gold-threaded slippers and baggy white cotton trousers, his shirt hanging outside his belt and a small turban topped with flounces of starched cloth on his head. Through this motley crowd squads of sulky-looking bearers moved to and fro, in a variety of coloured turbans, carrying trays loaded with iced drinks—all strictly non-alcoholic. Finally there were several ancient and dwarfish creatures, uniformed, turbanned, so many septuagenarian foetuses, who darted about between people's legs on a variety of errands, vanishing and popping up again with the same macabre smile still on their faces, ready to do any little service.

When night fell, and the air was a little cooler, we assembled for dinner round a table out in the central court. A dusky-skinned and moustachioed bearer, white-uniformed, in a green turban (he might have just stepped out of a Delacroix painting) hovered over us with solemn deference, serving the most exquisite chicken curry, fragrantly steaming mounds of rice, lentils, potatoes, pumpkins in a sweet sauce. Meanwhile we studied the human panorama offered by our fellow-diners, as they sat there under the dim embroidered pattern of the tropical stars.

On our right sat an Indian family, nibbling at a meal of corn-dal and greenstuffs with every appearance of relish. In front of us sat a thin, elderly gentleman with the long, drawn features of an ascetic and an expression of faint disgust on his face. Every so often he took a sip of coca-cola. From his chin there sprouted a neat white goatee, very faintly tinted with orange (a still-prevalent provincial custom); his eyes were almost invisible behind a pair of huge round tinted glasses. On his head sat a tidy, dignified turban, the colour of a tea-rose. Beside him were two restless-looking women, half-hidden by their shocking-puce veils.

Other tables were occupied by several young American families, gushing sentimentally over their spoilt and pampered offspring. There was also an elderly, dried-up British couple who formed a weak, and somehow rather touching, symbolic rearguard of the British Raj—that Imperial Britain which henceforth would exist only in the memories of old people, or in the history books. The only really beautiful woman present—a Parsee in a glittering yellow and black sari—was sitting at a table on the far side of the courtyard, all by herself, a living link with Zoroaster who, six hundred years before Christ, founded a great religion that the Persians preserved for over twelve centuries. Under the Sassanids it became the official state religion. Then in the seventh century A.D. the Arabs, still in the first flush of enthusiasm over the revelations they believed God had made to Mahommed, conquered the Sassanid Empire in a single campaign. The Persians gradually allowed themselves to be converted to the new faith. Only a few small groups of intransigent diehards preferred exile to apostasy, and these found refuge in India, the classic country of religious toleration. Their descendants form the Parsee (*Parsi* = Persian) communities, a hundred thousand strong, which flourish in Bombay, Karachi, and other cities along the Indian coastline. They are all rich, cultured, well-connected families, and have a reputation for being the most progressive minority group in India. Who could tell which of the Great King Chosroes' Chiliarchs was the direct ancestor of that elegant woman sitting opposite us?

Suddenly, between us and her, there appeared a most distinguished-looking personage, of middle age, clad in unidentifiable white Oriental robes—which somewhat resembled a senatorial toga—and wearing a close-

wound turban on his head. He rather reminded me of two Zoroastrian priests I saw last year, in this very courtyard. It was about five o'clock of a spring afternoon. The courtyard was packed with a very impressive array of costumes—Europeans in full ceremonial dress, some splendid Eastern robes, and all those women wearing saris: it was a Parsee wedding, obviously between members of two highly respected and influential families. Down in the open pavilion, where the orchestra was now playing *Scalinatella*, they had set up a small altar; and beside it there stood two priests, magnificent old men with beards, dressed in spotless white robes and turbans. Archaic incantations were going up to heaven—and those rather mysterious rites went on in front of a row of advertisements inviting people to fly Pan-American, or it may have been Air France.

I felt as though in some uncanny way I had made contact, direct personal contact, with all those ancient Persian emperors, from Xerxes onwards, whom I had come to know at school. It was in Xerxes' train that I retraced the route of the great march on Europe; and there, over the shoulders of his archers, amid the cries and confusion of battle, I glimpsed our true spiritual ancestors—the Greeks. If the Greeks hadn't shaken Xerxes and his generals at Thermopylae, and inflicted crushing defeats on him at Salamis and Plataea, perhaps today we might all be Zoroastrians, like the Parsees. What a strange thing history is! Of the two great religions founded by men of Indo-European culture one—Zoroastrianism—finished up as a fossil survivor along the coast of India, while Buddhism found its permanent home almost exclusively among peoples of Mongoloid ancestry. It was to Palestine that Europe turned for its inspiration.

But the indirect influence—chiefly through Babylonia—which Zoroastrianism exerted on Judaism and, later, Christianity was immense. For instance, the idea of a supreme Deity (Ahura-Mazda) at once bounteous and just; the Creation of the world from nothing; the early definition, in terms that have become familiar to us through centuries of use, of the triangular relationship between God, Man, and Nature; the concept of free will, and of evil as the improper use of free will; the Holy Spirit (*Spenta Mainyu*); the immortality of the soul; judgement after death; the idea of the Devil as God's adversary; heaven and hell, the resurrection of the body, the Saviour who shall come at the end of the world, angels, archangels, guardian angels—all these and many other similar beliefs were in circulation from the sixth century before the Christian era, and possibly earlier.

At the Parsee wedding, the young couple received a blessing and were garlanded with flowers. Once again this highly secular courtyard resounded with music from the very catacombs of the centuries. Then the ceremony was rounded off with a smart cocktail party before dinner. In a flash those taking part passed from the sacred elixir *haoma* to that worldly elixir the

negrioni; yet everyone seemed perfectly at ease. For sheer cosmopolitanism, the Parsees cannot be beaten.

Yet the one thing everyone seems to know about them is their Towers of Silence, and they *are* rather remarkable, like an anatomy theatre inside, all bare and scrubbed, and when a corpse is deposited on one the vultures polish it off with great relish, in about half an hour. There are several such towers in Bombay; the one on Malabar Hill is so famous that travel agencies include it among the 'things you must see' during a motor-coach tour of the city. But tourists can examine them only from the outside: entry into the tower itself is strictly forbidden. The Parsees keep their funeral rites very much to themselves. The same applies to the sacred fire which they keep burning in their temples, and those special sacrificial rites during which both priests and worshippers drink *haoma*, a liquid obtained by pounding up the roots of the soma plant in a mortar. The most interesting thing about *haoma* is that from remote antiquity it has been regarded as the mystical body of a divinity—indeed, of Ahura-Mazda's own son in the spirit. So the act of drinking *haoma* is a true communion with the Supreme Being, through the ritually sacrificed Son.

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To leave the Metropole and plunge into the city was—remembering the time of year—rather like setting out from an oasis to struggle against the fearful desert heat, or perhaps the humid, evil-smelling half-light of the jungle. The desert image tended to be evoked by certain Ministries and offices where I was obliged to spend hours at a time trying to clear up details concerning us or our possessions, and waiting for permits and signatures. The crowded bazaars, to which my companions gravitated in search of local colour, at once suggested the jungle.

Here—in the bazaars, that is—there was a constant flow of people along the sidewalks, which were rubbed smooth by the constant friction of shoes and bare soles. The men were almost all dressed in white. I saw young clerks or students in trousers and shirts, most of them hanging outside the waist-band, aflutter in the breeze, and I also encountered country shepherds in their flowing, picturesque robes, which were rather better adapted to protect their wearer from the sun. There were well-fed rural landowners, sweeping along with great dignity in various types of semi-official gown and sporting turbans of every size and fashion. They varied between the extremes of semi-nudity and near-mummification, according to their social rank, ethnic origin, and tribal usage. The women were almost all swathed in layers of dismal finely woven cloth, or stalked along like ghosts inside their white *burkhas*. Street-urchins rather like the *scugnizzi* of Naples (and just as quick-witted) darted about like so many cats between people's legs,

chasing each other, snapping up cigarette-ends, or conducting minuscule raids on the unwary.

This flood of humanity was contained, as though by a dyke, between the market stalls, especially those selling foodstuffs. I saw pyramids of swelling green cucumbers, apples straight from the Earthly Paradise, strange phallic-shaped fruits and baskets of curious berries or bean-like vegetables, not to mention piles of some sweet, fatty, sticky substance that was the colour of pus, or sulphuretted hydrogen. On some stalls gobbets of mutton were frying, and filling the entire street with a light blue smoke; on others various red or purple drinks were being dispensed—non-alcoholic drinks, of course: Islamic law forbids alcohol in any form.

All these visual prospects could be caught without difficulty on film, and indeed in black-and-white as easily as in colour. But the result would nevertheless lack two fundamental elements—smell and sound—without which the picture was bound to be incomplete. One's nose progressed through a sea, a storm, sometimes a very tornado of olfactory stimuli. The aromatic odour of spices mingled with rank human effluvia, the tasty smell of roasting meat with the heady, almost erotic scent given off by certain types of fruit, while the stench of drains and decomposing matter was permeated by a pleasant aroma of fritters and other sweetmeats. Dominating everything else came the musty reek of that special sort of oiled butter—generally rancid—called *ghee*, mingled with the staple condiment of Indian and Pakistani cooking—curry-spice. As for the noise, no tape-recorder on earth could possibly capture its full richness and variety: it ranged from the clamorous crowds and the stallkeepers' hoarse cries to the exotic Eastern music which was broadcast over invisible loudspeakers from the back of those cave-like shops.

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Every evening our small company met round our table in the courtyard of the Metropole.

'You know what I saw today? Two men standing right in the middle of the sidewalk, while one of them shaved the other's armpits. . . .'

'Well, I had a taxi-driver who said to me, like some sort of ancient bard, "Sahib, what does it profit a man to possess all the riches in the world if a mean and evil spirit inhabits his body?"'

'What bothers me about these people is the thought of their having two or three wives, but being forbidden to drink an honest glass of wine, let alone enjoy a pork chop or a cut of ham. Walk about the streets, and you see the most appalling poverty. Go into the nearest museum and you find works of art that take your breath away. What kind of a world is this?'

'It's very simple: we're on a Type Two journey.'

‘And what may that be?’

‘There are two distinct kinds of trip you can take on this planet of ours: those that are contained within the limits of a single civilization, and those which bring you under the aegis of other, alien, civilizations. The first make no contact with ideological barriers,¹ while the second stride over them. This expedition of ours falls into the second category. If we, as Italians, go to France or Denmark, Poland or Russia, even countries such as New Zealand or Chile, we may, it is true, find certain superficial differences. The landscape and climate will be very unlike those to which we are accustomed. We shall hear languages spoken of which we scarcely understand a single word. We shall find political institutions in force that are diametrically opposed to our own. We shall be obliged to use barbarously obsolete systems of weights, measures, and coinage. In almost every aspect of everyday life, in all your dealings with individuals and families, the same will be true—as it will also in matters of civil administration, art, poetry, or religious observances. Even things which might seem unimportant, like the local taste in Christian names.

‘Yet, despite all this, you are bound to find a basic element of familiarity, some fundamental essence common to both your country and theirs. You are still within the orbit of those peoples who developed and matured together, to a greater or lesser degree, through thousands of years of history. They and we are the products of what Toynbee calls an “intelligible field of historical study”. Present-day tendencies towards divergence, whether due to economic rivalry or political and cultural hostility, still find great trouble in obscuring one basic truth: the fact of our common origin, our ability to look back on a shared past, a mutual heritage of classical authors and religious prophets, artists and philosophers, styles and techniques—all those premises which go to make up a fundamentally consistent approach to things, despite differences of application in the particular instance, and which govern one’s concept of life and the universe, of man’s place in the general scheme of things, of the relationship between God, the world and the individual, besides conditioning the “tone” of organized society, the prevalent type of family-pattern, and (in short) all those things which distinguish one civilization from another. Take, for instance, Western civilization—and I’m not using the phrase in its contemporary political sense, but as the cultural anthropologist would understand it. How did it come into being? First there was the Graeco-Roman nucleus, which Hellenism diffused and standardized. At a certain point it became the vehicle for the spread of Christianity—and then, a short while afterwards, a Germanic branch was grafted on to the old stock. Later still came the Slavs, the Magyars, and the Finns. Centuries of common vicissitudes produced something which we now call “Europe”. This is not merely a geographical expression denoting a peninsula

¹ *Il muro d’idee*, lit. ‘the wall of ideas’, a key phrase of the author’s. (Trs.)

of the Eurasian land-mass, nor even a straightforward complex of states and alliances: it is also a market-place, a home, a vast family circle where rival opinions, diverse aspects of one basic faith can be thrashed out; where men fight each other indeed (and all too frequently) but always from a platform of virtually identical institutions, with friend and foe displaying tastes and habits that reveal their common ancestry. All concepts embracing subjects of any importance can normally be understood anywhere within the group, and are translatable into its various languages. Humanism, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, Romanticism, modern science, the revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, even the world wars of our own era—these are all manifestations of people with one thing, the most important thing of all, in common: historical roots.'

'What about places like America and South Africa and Australia?'

'Taken in this context they clearly belong, essentially, to the same family: they are Europe transported overseas—just as for centuries Sumatra, Java, Bali and the other islands in that group were an extension of India, or as the same Indonesian complex is today an outpost of Islam; just as Sicily and Calabria formed a "Magna Graecia", and the Hawaiian islands were once a "Greater Morea" to the Polynesians. Common roots imply, above all, a common minimum of cultural reference in schools throughout the group. They will all tell their pupils *something* about Christ and Aristotle, Moses and Homer, Shakespeare, Dante, and Goethe, Descartes, Galileo, Beethoven, Cervantes and the rest, right down to Tolstoy and Van Gogh. But bring up such names as Jalal-ud-din Rumi or Valmiki, Nagarjuna or Milarepa, Lao-tzu or Chu Hsi, Genghis Khan or Hideyoshi, and you at once realize that you are treading on ground which (at least as things are at present) is basically alien, exotic, and to be cultivated only by specialists: something concerning other "fields of intelligibility" than one's own. You have crossed the ideological barrier.

'From a strictly cultural point of view, nations and states are nothing but internal sub-divisions of some general civilization. They form simple regional or provisional cells within common ideological frontiers. It seems to me a more or less incontestable fact that there have for a long while existed in the world—and still exist today—certain great centres of spiritual and intellectual vitality, centres from which civilizations spread, prime integers of those infinite human achievements which display such variety within themselves, according to whether their source be Western, Islamic, Indian, or Sino-Japanese. It is true, though, that the moment we leave the highly idiosyncratic centre of such an organism, and move out to the periphery, we are at once faced with problems of contact, infiltration between groups, a reciprocal process of penetration and fertilization. There is no doubt, too, that our present-day trend in this direction is so marked as to upset the

traditional picture to some extent. Nevertheless the fundamental truth remains undisturbed, and yields highly significant results. Besides, one should always bear in mind that such a principle—however rigorous it may be in the abstract—produces useful results only if kept flexible enough to cope with the complex circumstances of each individual case.’

‘What is the position of the Communist bloc in this pattern of traditional cultures?’

‘At the present time, it seems clear, this bloc is still composed of slices taken from three major civilizations: the Western (Russia and her satellites), the Sino-Japanese (China), and the Islamic (republics of central Asia). But it may very well be that in the course of time the Communist bloc will, ultimately, coalesce into a new civilization, and one quite different from the rest. Civilizations are not eternal, merely very long-enduring. In the seventh century A.D. such a thing as an “Islamic civilization” scarcely existed; two centuries later it was in full and splendid flower, having absorbed by conquest peoples who had till then formed part, variously, of the Western complex (those along the shores of the Mediterranean), the civilizations of Mesopotamia and Iran, and, in part at least, India itself.

‘What, fundamentally, does the unity imposed by a civilization imply? Surely a common outlook, so far as basic principles go, on the world as a whole? All of us here were brought up on the same fundamental notions regarding God, human destiny, the world of nature and the soul, science and government, family relationships and property, beauty, honour and the rest of it. Therefore though we may be of different colour, have differently shaped skulls, range between every imaginable extreme of weight and size, and speak languages which have nothing whatsoever in common bar their common ancestry, we still in theory belong to the same civilization. That is why these “Type Two” journeys I mentioned, which deliberately set out to assault ideological barriers, provide so stimulating, suggestive, and emotionally intense an experience—for those, at least, who are willing to benefit by them.

‘On such a journey you may remain in the same climate and region (as happens if you travel from Salonica to Istanbul, or from Lahore to Agra); you may find the people very similar in their physical characteristics (anyone who sails from Trapani to Tunis can confirm this); the systems of government may be much the same, and there may even be a common language (as you can observe if you fly from Moscow to Samarkand, or travel with a caravan between Skardu and Leh); yet very soon you notice something in the atmosphere which tells you that you have crossed one of those human frontiers beyond which differences cease to be merely quantitative and take on a qualitative aspect. If you then proceed to make a closer examination of their habits in daily life, their traditional corpus of public and private laws,

the nature of their personal relationships with one another, the sociological characteristics apparent in their family groups and behaviour at work, the names they choose, the kind of art they create, the way they feel about religion—then you will find yourself moving, by slow degrees, towards a series of quite new and alien concepts regarding all that is vital in life, ranging from law to love, cosmology to psychology, history to art, cooking to music, sport to warfare. In other words, all those minds and intelligences around you embody a new mode of appreciating the universe.

‘To a large extent the frontiers of these civilizations coincide with those of the great religions; but not invariably, and certainly not by definition. Religion, in all its many aspects, is like a treasure-chest in which every civilization lays up an important part—very often almost the whole—of the finest and brightest products of its natural genius. If you look at it another way, it is a dynamic nucleus of impulses which shape the nation’s collective soul by directing it towards philosophy, civil institutions, and the arts. In either case, whether as product or prime mover, it acts as repository for an organic vision of the universe. When all is said and done, a civilization remains, in the last resort, an organism: the largest, longest-lived, most significant organism in existence; “civilizations” contain the entire human race. Just as India embraces Jains, Sikhs and Buddhists as well as Hindus, so in the West we have Jews no less than Christians: in any event, the West existed long before Christianity, and will remain established securely long after it. Except during the Middle Ages, the West has always kept a striking proportion of its intellectual dynamism at work on the very fringe of the Christian world-outlook, if not wholly beyond it: you need only to examine the history of philosophy, science, and politics, or post-Renaissance art, to see that. The same might be said of Buddhism or Taoism in the Far East. Sometimes, though, the two factors do almost wholly coincide: the Islamic world, of course, is a case in point.’

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A journey across ideological frontiers—especially when it is one’s first—produces some severe shocks to the emotions and intellect: it may even have physiological effects. On this expedition my companions were either students or young graduates, for whom mountaineering, though a major passion, was not a way of life. They were future lawyers, future architects, professional men already embarked on their private or public careers: what they all had in common was intense curiosity, a desire for experience, the urge to learn. For them the ‘journey’ was just as important a part of things as the ‘expedition’. Naturally enough, they were impatient to reach their goal, beyond the last scattered villages in the little-explored vicinity of the highest mountains of central Asia; but meanwhile they were enjoying every moment of

this new life, among people radically different from anything they had ever before known, and they reacted in a quick, often abrupt manner to the problems which such new experiences continually posed for them.

Their own private convictions, nevertheless, were clearly defined. Some of them were convinced Catholics, others equally convinced liberal agnostics, others again in sympathy with the extreme Left. The clash of ideas produced some very lively discussions, not least because the young are more prone to dogmatize than are their elders. The sharp edges of principle—whether implanted or freely chosen—have not yet been worn smooth by contact with the realities of human experience: realities which are always complex, sometimes contradictory, and very often highly mysterious.

One evening two of my companions turned up for dinner at the Metropole after having reacted in profoundly different—indeed almost diametrically opposite—ways to what was at base the same phenomenon. The first had been visiting a mosque: ‘The people here have absolutely no respect for religion,’ he burst out. ‘Oh yes, I know, you do have to take off your shoes before you go inside. But after that you find yourself among lots of little groups, all squatting down very comfortably and chatting of this and that as though they were in a bar. Others are reading, or asleep. Where I was, there were even two old men who sat poring over what looked like some sort of chessboard, as though they were playing a game! I felt I had strayed into some local club, not a church. It made a very disagreeable impression on me.’

The second had just got back from a brief expedition out to Clifton Hills: the sun had set while he was there.

‘It’s extraordinary what a strong religious sense they have in this country,’ he reported. ‘When the sun goes down the people in the public gardens spread out a little mat on the ground, turn towards Mecca, and begin to pray. A little while before that, when we were in the park, a man appeared who might have been an engineer, or the head of some business concern: he was carrying a briefcase crammed with papers, and had obviously just come from his office. Without paying the slightest attention to us he stopped under a tree, got out his prayer-mat, removed his shoes, put a little white cap on his head, and began a long series of bowings and genuflections, between which he remained quite still, eyes shut.’

‘Well,’ I said to them, ‘you’ve each had a personal experience of the way in which one civilization can differ from another: the difference lies in the fact that any individual who belongs to it has a special way of looking at life, a special concept of the world—’

‘What the Germans call *Weltanschauung*, in fact. I never cared for that word much.’

‘The idea behind it is rather distasteful, too: it sounds so cold and abstract, something imagined by an academic *voyeur*. Instead of conceiving the world

as an external panorama viewed by two inquisitive eyes, let us think of it as a living *inner* force, as the reflection formed by it within one's own imagination. In one sense the world external to the self, the *noumenon*—the mysterious source of all human awareness—may be termed the outer cosmos, or exocosm; but the reflection it produces within us, the world as we re-create it for ourselves, then becomes the inner cosmos, or endocosm. But the self, the "I", is not restricted to a passive role in this process. The acquisition of knowledge is in itself a creative function. As the universe is projected and reconstituted within our minds it goes through an endless process of evolutionary flux, living, growing, expanding, breaking into fragments, pulsing, ebbing—and then the whole cycle begins anew. The exocosm, the eternal mystery of being, is one; but there are a myriad endocosms, all profoundly different from one another, though we must bear in mind that man is a product of the society in which he lives and the education he is given. The collective ego is always more important than the individual ego. Thus, though the endocosmic impulse may be variously stimulated in individuals by intellectual ability or inherent character or man's infinitely varied thirst for knowledge, a cumulative process of "grouping" occurs, till we reach those vast intellectual and spiritual blocs which constitute civilizations. A Western endocosm is profoundly different from an Islamic or a Hindu one, just as within the Western orbit Catholic and Communist endocosms will be widely divergent from one another. In this context a civilization may be defined as a sphere embracing endocosms, inner worlds, of fundamentally similar structure.

'In contrasting Moslem ways with ours, the crux of the matter is the position religious experience occupies in the Christian and Moslem inner worlds. Christianity began as a spiritual movement whose main concern was with the advent of the Kingdom of Heaven, and thus remote from worldly considerations. Furthermore, Christianity had for three centuries to conduct an heroic struggle against the secular powers in order to survive at all. Yet in the end it overcame and assumed authority over the very empire which had struggled to destroy it. The whole subsequent history of Christianity was bound to be affected by these facts. Its relationship with the authorities of the Earthly City remained permanently unnatural and ambivalent. On the one hand, there was that fundamental and original indifference towards worldly things, and to society in its more highly organized form ('Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's')—an indifference which at times takes on a tinge of Manichaeian contempt, whether for the secular in general, the natural world, ordinary temporal events, or conscious opportunism of any sort.

'On the other hand we find a continuous effort (due to the events of those first desperate centuries) to control the course of history, to neutralize the

power of Caesar's descendants and reduce them merely to the "secular arm". By the Middle Ages the victory was all but complete, and the spirit of Europe virtually identical with Christianity.

'But from the fifteenth century onwards events took a fresh turn. The idea of religion was in the melting-pot once more; and for decades—indeed, for centuries—Europe was convulsed by schism and war, while knowledge, practical discoveries, jurisprudence and the arts generally regained a large measure of independence. Except for a relatively brief period, the Christian faith had failed to nourish the total richness of the spirit of Western man. It follows that in the Western endocosm religion tends both to be painful and limited in its application: a passion (in every sense) and a specialized interest.

'But Christianity has one other most important quality—indeed, its most prominent characteristic: it is by nature a sacramental faith; and thus, just as in the political sphere it makes for a natural dualism between Church and State, so in the life of the spirit it promotes a sharp distinction between the sacred and the profane. Islam, on the other hand, arose initially as a form of protest against an existing social and religious order—the tribal paganism which preceded it in seventh-century Arabia—but did not take up a critical or negative attitude towards the world and the flesh as such. From the very beginning, Islam appears as a movement determined to subsume within itself the entire orbit of human experience, knowledge, and desire, of individual and communal existence, with the ultimate aim of completing Allah's plans here on earth.

'Islam therefore has no ambiguity of attitude towards mundane realities, and is not obliged to square metaphysical circles in order to reconcile the possession of wealth with the needle's eye parable, or warfare with universal love, or Church and State—let alone the Flesh and the Spirit. It does not need to dispose of all those countless dualisms which undermine the Christian Inner World and Western civilization. Islam, similarly, is a religious phenomenon, but it is much else besides: it determines not only the theology, morals, and ritual practices of any society where it obtains, but all private jurisprudence and most of the public laws as well. Strictly speaking, the word Religion (if we use the term in the Christian sense) is untranslatable in an orthodox Islamic context.¹ We are faced here with two structurally divergent inner worlds.

'There is another general point to be borne in mind. From its earliest days

¹ That is, among the major group of Moslems called Sunnites, those who accept the sacred authority not only of the Koran, but also of its traditional appendix the Sunna, a body of aphoristic and juridical *sententiae*. From the seventh century onwards a minority group refused to recognize the Sunna; these were known as the Shiites, and were restricted to Iran. Sunnites recognize only the first four Caliphs as legitimate successors to the Prophet. (Trs.)

Islam has always emphasized the absolute oneness and autonomy of God. Allah rules alone, with sovereign power over the universe, its laws and its creatures. He admits to no plurality of persons, nor—except for the Prophets—does he allow intermediaries between Himself and man. The very word Islam (“submission to the Divine Will”) does not—as is so often supposed—signify a passive fatalism: it rather indicates an awareness of Allah’s omnipotence. In such a theological climate the whole idea of sacraments becomes a blasphemy: there is no act or sequence of words which can, in any way whatsoever, oblige God to co-operate with man. If there are no sacraments, there need be no priests to administer them; and without a priesthood there is no genuine “Church”. All the faithful, from the Sultan to his slave, are in direct relationship with God, and equal in His eyes; none has a special mandate, none is “anointed”. So the sacred essence, which at first was concentrated and implicit in the Godhead, equally remote from all alike, now in a sense is redistributed to society and the world at large.

‘It follows that the distinction between sacred and profane in Islam has far weaker historical and theological foundations than with us. While a Western endocosm puts its religion into an isolated compartment, an Islamic endocosm will reveal religion permeating its structure as a whole. The Islamic faith has boundaries and territories (not to mention a flavour and a temperature) which are not only incompatible with those prevailing in the West, but defy translation into Western terms. For yet another reason, we have here to do with two wholly separate civilizations. Islam, in brief, is more than a “religion” in our sense: it forms a vast all-embracing pattern where every known human experience—social, intellectual, spiritual—has its allotted place. By taking a frank and explicit plunge into history, and as a result of its almost complete and ascetic rejection of myth (together with other historical and circumstantial reasons) Islam has become an intensely virile faith.’

And so the discussion continued.

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It is important to realize that the universe as conceived by the ‘prophetic’ religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism) has a character which may be defined as ‘monobiotic’, i.e. centred on one physical existence only. Man is born, lives, and dies once; his performance is a single one, never to be repeated. No running account with Karma here! It follows that one’s earthly existence is a period of fearful obligation and responsibility, and that all else depends on the manner in which one lives it. This isolation of each individual being in the corridors of his own private and particular destiny has produced one odd side-effect in all the religions of the ‘prophetic’ group: animals are excluded from participation in the cosmic drama.

They form part of 'nature', the background to man's activities. They are living creatures, but nothing more.

One final characteristic of this related group is the presence—and the supreme importance—of sacred books, such as the Bible, the Avesta, the New Testament or the Koran, in which is set down the Word, or an echo of the Word, of God. From this derives another typical trait, which appears in all the prophetic religions. Each of them believes itself to possess the absolute and final truth concerning the visible and invisible world, not to mention man and his destiny. Hence the peculiar intolerance which marks them all, and which crops up throughout the course of history, so that even today it splits humanity into fiercely opposed factions.

When one takes a panoramic view of the prophetic religions as they are today, the most striking thing about them is their acute sense of cosmic history. Each one of them is a stupendous universal drama in which God, man, the world, angels and demons all have spectacular parts assigned to them. Time is only indeterminate in a quantitative sense; qualitatively it possesses a most precise meaning and pattern. It forms the bridge between the pawn and high noon of eternity: between the Creation and the Judgement.

CHAPTER TWO

INTERLUDE ON ISLAM

Citizens: be it known to those of ye who did adore Mahommed, that he is dead; and to those who did adore the God of Mahommed, that He liveth and is immortal.

—ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE CROWD BY ABU BEKR,
ON 8TH JUNE, A.D. 632

ISLAM, AS we have noted, belongs to the family group of 'prophetic' religions. Its founder, Mahommed, 'He-who-is-highly-praised', was born about A.D. 572 at Mecca, in Arabia. We know very little about his life. There are few autobiographical details given in the Koran. Biographies do exist, composed in the eighth and ninth centuries (the most famous being that of Ibn Ishaq, as revised by Ibn Hisham of Bassorah) which gather together the oral traditions handed down among the Prophet's companions and immediate successors; but in these accounts it is not always easy to distinguish real events from pious legends.

What we do know, however, is enough to form a picture of a powerful and many-sided personality. Two facts strike one immediately. The first is that from early youth till the day he died, Mahommed was immersed in the practical affairs of this world, at first within the limited circle of his family, later reaching out to grapple with the problems—sometimes exhilarating and sometimes heartbreaking, but never less than of all-demanding importance—which a community, a whole people thrust upon him. The second fact is that he combined, in the most remarkable manner, the qualities of a man of action and those of the poet, the seer, the contemplative with a passion for solitude. The Koran, and consequently all Islam, bear the marks of this early, most personal influence, directly imprinted upon them by Mahommed the man.

According to the traditional story, Mahommed was orphaned at a tender age, and during his childhood and adolescence had a very hard time of it. In the sixth century A.D. Mecca was an important caravanserai, and Mahommed found work, first as a camel-driver, and then as steward to a wealthy widow called Khadija: in the end he married her, thus considerably improving his own social and financial status. It seems that during these years Mahommed went on several journeys with Khadija's caravans, as far afield as Syria: during these expeditions he may well have made contact with various Jews

and Christians, thus extending the range of his own cultural awareness far beyond what was customary in an Arab.

Mahommed's career as a religious reformer did not begin until he was nearly forty, and was preceded by several long periods of spiritual retreat (*tahannuth*). At this point, according to the early biographies, 'revelation descended upon him'. Or, putting it in current phraseology, we could say that 'all the complex and varied material—religious, pagan, Christian, Jewish, Gnostic—which for some years had been fermenting in his mind' now came to a head.¹ The revelation was communicated to him through the agency of the Archangel Gabriel ('Mahommed! You are the Chosen of God and I am Gabriel!'), and dictated in a way which shows that the Prophet was simply a passive vessel, a true 'mouthpiece of Allah'. Such 'revelations' continued for a long period—a matter of decades, in fact. Mahommed began his public ministry in 612, but during those first few years he managed to convert no one except his closest relatives and a few intimate friends; and hardly had he begun to extend a little more widely his search for followers than a series of persecutions began against the more prominent Meccan families. As often happens, Mahommed found more proselytes outside Mecca than among his fellow-citizens—and he found them especially in the neighbouring city of Yathrib. Very soon the situation at home became so tense that Mahommed and his followers decided to abandon Mecca and flee to Yathrib (A.D. 622), which was thereupon renamed Medina (from *Medinat an-nabi*, 'the Prophet's city').

This event forms the keystone of the Islamic vision of history: from its date more than 400,000,000 Moslems today reckon the passage of the years and the centuries. (1964 by Christian reckoning corresponds to the Moslem year 1383. This number is larger than that obtained by a simple subtraction of the date of the foundation of Islam from 1964 because Moslems observe a lunar calendar which has eleven fewer days than the Gregorian.) This flight from Mecca to Medina was called *hijrah*, a word which, besides meaning 'flight' or 'migration', also carries the all-important significance of 'a cutting of tribal bonds'. In the context of Arab society as it then was, such an exile meant great ill-fortune, and carried a whole series of unpleasant legal consequences in its wake. It was like becoming an outlaw, in the full sense of the word, stripped of every protection society normally offers its members.

At Medina Mahommed became, by general consent, chief citizen and leader. This important township had a population composed partly of the Meccans who had fled with the Prophet, partly of local citizens who embraced the new faith, and partly of pagans and Jews. Here began Mahommed's life as a politician and strategist. The adherents of the new sect were united by the notion—revolutionary in seventh-century Arabia—of a spiritual

¹ See A. Bausani, 'Religione Islamica', in *Civiltà dell' Oriente*, Vol. 3, p. 373.

brotherhood which overrode all pre-existing tribal allegiances: Islam had been born as a universal religion, and at once began to vanquish all narrow barriers of colour, race, and culture. It was also identified with a people on the march, a community under arms. The first campaigns fought by Mahommed and his followers were little more than local raids; but very soon began that expansionist drive which was the prelude to the dazzling successes won later in the century—successes which, as we know, carried the banner of the Green Crescent westward as far as Spain and eastward to the Indus Valley.

Mahommed's relations with the Jewish community in Medina were unfortunate. To begin with he hoped to convince them that Islam was simply a 'strengthened and purified' form of Judaism. When this propaganda failed, he persecuted them savagely, confiscating their goods and expelling them from the city. As a result of these events, he changed the canonical direction in which the faithful were to face during prayer; whereas previously they had looked towards Jerusalem, now they were to turn towards Mecca. The incident had something more than political significance: it marked Islam's complete emancipation from Judaism. Mahommed could now take his place as a latter-day pioneer of monotheism, the founder of a community destined to succeed Christianity and Judaism alike as the spiritual spearhead of mankind. In A.D. 630 Mahommed entered Mecca at the head of some 10,000 followers. Further successful campaigns left him master of nearly all Arabia. Then, in 632, when he was a little over sixty, death struck him down.

Mahommed, we are told, is the author of the Koran. This statement must be qualified in two important respects. First of all, we should recall that for Moslems the author of the Koran is not Mahommed, but Allah—that is, God Himself. Mahommed was merely the human instrument of the divine message. Theologically, the position of the Koran is poles apart from that of the Christian Gospels which, even for the most strictly orthodox believer, are simply biographical sketches and collections of aphorisms written by human actors—inspired, perhaps, but human all the same—in which are set down various stories and recorded sayings of Jesus, the Son of God. For Moslems, on the other hand, the earthly Koran is nothing but a pale copy of the eternal and celestial Koran, which, as some of them aver, is to be found in Paradise, written in letters of gold. (For the strictly orthodox Moslem, this means that it cannot be translated, but must be read, studied, and committed to memory in Arabic alone.) To draw any sort of parallel in depth between the complexes God-Jesus-Gospels and Allah-Mahommed-Koran would be both superficial and inaccurate. In point of fact, it is the Koran which, in the Moslem's spiritual cosmology, occupies a position more or less analogous to that held by Jesus in the Christian's vision of the universe. Jesus is the Word; the Koran likewise is the Word: in one system the Word is

made incarnate in a man, in the other it is embodied in a book¹. A less misleading parallel, then, might run as follows: on the one hand God (the Father), Jesus (the Word), and the Evangelists; on the other, Allah, the Koran, and Mahommed. Confirmation of this is offered by the fact that, just as Christianity began its career with five centuries of subtle and frequently violent Christological disputation, so Islam underwent centuries of equally subtle and no less bloody disagreement on the essential nature of the Koran—whether it was created or eternal, whether or not it partook of the Divine Essence. History can point to individuals—e.g. Ibn Hanbal in 855—who suffered imprisonment and torture for having upheld the eternal nature of the Koran; and there were those who found themselves subjected to equally brutal treatment because they declared the exact opposite.

Secondly, if it is true that the Koran is a basic reflection of Mahommed's own thoughts, it is equally true that it was composed, for the most part, by his immediate disciples, who transcribed the Master's words on the first material that came to hand—stones, palm-leaves, polished animal bones. At the time of Mahommed's death, the Koran existed in one sense, though not in another: all one can say is that various accounts of the 'revelations' were circulating among his faithful companions, and that, so far as we can judge, these were more or less consistent with one another. It was only about 650, some 18 years after Mahommed's death, that his secretary Zaid Ibn Thabit, together with a select group of collaborators, produced an official, definitive version of the *suras*. All the same, this material was arranged in the most haphazard fashion: the longest *suras* were put at the beginning, the shortest at the end, without any regard for either chronology or spiritual coherence.

The Koran is a most extraordinary book. As has been remarked on innumerable occasions, any reader who is not emotionally involved with its contents will find it hard to understand the undeniable fascination this work has had—and continues to have—for countless millions of people. Side by side with *suras* of high-flown inspiration and sublime poetic achievement we find others which peter out in mere doggerel, or lose themselves in lengthy and wearisome Biblical paraphrases.

The Koran contains something of everything. We pass from the apotheosis of Abraham (as the first monotheist) and Adam (as the first known prophet) to violent anathemas against idolaters, unbelievers, hypocrites and apostates. We find much information about angels—those who bear up the Throne of God, those who carry out His orders, those who watch over men and record their actions in a heavenly Book, those who observe the faithful at their dawn prayers, or stand at their side as they charge into battle. There are sections on Paradise and Hell and Satan next to regulations regarding debts,

¹ The Italian text here has a play on words—*incarnato, incartato*—for which there is no adequate English equivalent. (Trs.)

fiduciary deposits, the proper division of booty, the manumission of slaves and the correct treatment of prisoners. There are frequent references to Jesus, Moses, Pharaoh, David, Elijah, Ezekiel, Jacob, Joseph, Isaac, Ishmael, Noah, and Solomon. One's eye flits over a general picture of the story of the Creation—of both the world and man—and moves on to the Last Judgement. This is not regarded as incompatible with lists of taboos about food and drink, prohibitions of usury, and prescribed forms for prayer and almsgiving. Falling stars and the law of 'an eye for an eye' are both grist to the Prophet's mill; so are demons and debtors, miracles and slander. Here you can find sketched out the first draft for a civil code, with all the information you could possibly want about parental and filial responsibilities, marriage, divorce, adultery, dowries, adoption, and laws of inheritance. We move with the greatest ease from the Holy War to menstruation, from astronomy to Noah's Ark. Strange legends abound concerning both historical figures such as Alexander the Great and mythical characters (Gilgamesh, Gog and Magog), and there is much diffuse matter about Jews and Christians. The Koran is an encyclopedia, a university, a constitution, a compendium of philosophy, a legal handbook, a vast lyrical paean to life, a mystical tract, a handbook of etiquette, a manual of hygiene and a poetic diary, all rolled into one. The tone in the best passages is sustained, vibrant, apocalyptic. Emotionally evocative words abound: foul, wicked, impious, glory, covetousness, compassion, mercy, invoke, judgement, error, demons, angels, fire, ignominy, rejoicing, torment, falsehood, hope, terror, famine. And almost every page quivers with the shock of Allah's presence: majestic, wise, compassionate, benign, lofty, thoughtful, rich in forgiveness—yet also ruthless in revenge, fierce to punish the wrongdoer. A Supreme Lord and Master, in fact, who showers delights upon His followers ('patient, sincere, devoted') and hell-fire on His enemies.

Modern scholarship has reconstructed the Koran in chronological order, sorting out the various *suras* as they fit best with the known activities of Mahommed and his followers over a period of some two decades. It is a remarkable fact that the chronological sequence is, more or less, the traditional order in reverse: in other words, the more concise *suras*, from the end of the Koran as we know it, are in fact the oldest, while the longer ones placed at the beginning of the compilation are really later than the rest. The 'short, concentrated *suras*, composed in solemn phraseology and with daring images',¹ are, generally speaking, also those which show the highest degree of inspiration and lyric genius: they were the fruit of the period in which Mahommed crystallized his earliest, intuitive thoughts on monotheism, his faith in a Day of Judgement when the virtuous should be rewarded and sinners punished, his call to purification and spiritual rebirth. The later *suras* are more

¹ F. M. Pareja, *Islamologia* (Rome, 1957), p. 377.

prolix and discursive, passing without apparent effort from mysticism or eschatology to such topics as jurisprudence and hygiene. The *suras* of Mahommed's later years reflect the preoccupations and administrative decisions of a head of state—which once led someone to describe the Koran as a collection of Mahommed's Orders of the Day.

The Koran contains innumerable echoes of all the great spiritual movements and most important cultural traditions current during Mahommed's lifetime. Sometimes they appear as genuine flashes of inspiration, which serve to quicken and illuminate the new gospel; more often as a dim candle-flicker, a distorted reflection made downright grotesque by the distance from which it is glimpsed, a mirage in some vast desert. The world in Mahommed's day, or at least that part of it which today we call by the generic title of the 'Middle East', was dominated by two major powers, Byzantium and Persia, which were more or less permanently at war with one another. The Arabs maintained regular contacts with both factions, through Syria, which was Byzantine, and Mesopotamia, which was Persian. These wealthy and highly civilized countries were linked to Mecca, and through Mecca to the cities of the Yemen, by the caravans which traded between them. It was a period in which various religious movements, sects, and churches were mushrooming everywhere, from Spain to the Hindu Kush. Gnostics, Manichaeans, Mazdaists, Mandaeans, Sabaeans, Marcionites and many other groups were engaged in subtle metaphysical battles with one another; similar theological warfare was raging among the Monophysites, the Nestorians, the Monotheletes, the Arians and the Pelagians, all within the broad general stream of Christian tradition. The Jews, divided into various more or less orthodox groups, were everywhere. Religious ideas provoked the same passionate interest and partisan divisions as politics do today. Lastly, the Arabs were in contact with monotheists—both Christian and Jewish—also in the south: Abyssinia was an important centre of Monophysite Christianity, and its links with the Yemen, on the farthest edge of the Arabian peninsula, were extremely close.

Of Arab polytheism before Mahommed's era we know very little. But Mecca was already the highly important centre of a cult which seems to have placed special emphasis on the worship of stone fetishes and which had adherents in all parts of Arabia. The famous black stone, in the shrine called Ka'aba ('square building') at Mecca, which is regarded as the spiritual focal point of all Islam, was in fact venerated long centuries before Mahommed began preaching his new religion. It may well be some sort of meteorite: originally it was connected with the worship of the god Hubal, who was often spoken of as 'Allah'—an antonomastic version of the word for 'God'.

It is clear, therefore, that Mahommed's religious ideas, though possessing considerable originality, also betray numerous affiliations both with the old

Arabic tradition (which he would naturally know) and also with the major religious and philosophical movements of Persia and Byzantium. Once again we have to acknowledge a fact of which the past three millennia have provided many parallel examples: the advent of a dominant individual personality who gives new life and shape to certain traditional or characteristic ideas which are found everywhere between the Hindu Kush and the Mediterranean—God, Creation, Adam, the soul, good and evil, nature, will, freedom, justice, the flesh, and so forth—by working them all into one magnificent synthesis capable of nourishing the thoughts and emotions of whole nations concerning the mysterious course of events on the stage of life, and about the universe in which they found themselves.

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In order to be accepted as a member of the Islamic community, all that one need do is to repeat, before witnesses, the *shahada*, a ritual formula which runs: *la ilaha illa Allah, Muhammad rasul Allah*—‘There is no god but God, and Mahommed is the prophet of God’. (Though not obligatory, circumcision is also regarded as highly desirable.) It has often been observed that this brief pronouncement contains, in a nutshell, the whole fundamental dogma of Islam, and that upon it, now and forever, rests the whole grandiose edifice of Moslem culture. Another scarcely less concentrated formula is the following, attributed to the Prophet himself: ‘The Faith consists in this: that you believe in God, in His angels, in His scriptures, in His prophets, in the life to come, and in the existence of Good and Evil through His providential decree.’

The central core of both these syntheses is the idea of God, or Allah. We at once notice the fact that all Islam is permeated, full to overflowing, with the concept of God as the One Lord and Master, absolute, dimensionless yet infinite, like some great adamant rock, the sovereign ruler of the universe. Mahommed—aiming to overcome the polytheism prevailing among the Arabs of his day—concentrated with passionate devotion on promoting a rigorous, ascetic, crystal-clear, magnificent, and, ultimately, irresistible monotheism; and in Allah the concept of personal Godhead was carried to its extreme logical conclusion. If one admits a personal God as the key to the mystery of existence, then the Islamic solution holds together better than most.

The theme of God’s Oneness is, therefore, paramount in Islam. It runs right through the curve of the Faith’s historical existence, at times with obsessive emphasis. No metaphysical heresy is worse than one characterized by the epithet ‘polytheistic’. In this—as in many other specific aspects of their creed, such as sacred scriptures, the absolute authority of the Law, the ban on graven images, circumcision, and food taboos—Moslems and Jews

come very close to one another. As for Christianity, Islam has two main objections to it: the doctrine of the Trinity is regarded by Moslems as a disguised form of polytheism, and the Christian attitude to 'the Prophet Jesus' is thought to confuse the means with the end by focusing men's adoration on the Messenger rather than his Message. It may be as well to bear in mind at this point that the criticism of the Trinity was based on a gross error of fact. Mahommed believed the Trinity to consist of God, Jesus, and Mary, thus confusing the Sacred Family with the tripartite aspects of the Supreme Being (Koran, 5.116). This objection apart, Islam finds symptoms of decadence in Judaism and Christianity alike: the atrophying or confusion of early precepts, a misconstruing by men of God's Divine Utterance. Hence the necessity for a new and final revelation, that of the Koran. Hence—as Moslems see it—the historical significance of Mahommed, the last prophet and 'Seal of the Prophets', who renewed and subsumed within himself the testament of Adam, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and a host of lesser visionaries.

Let us for a moment take these two concepts of God, the tripartite Christian version and the 'monopersonal' Islamic view, and set them side by side for comparison, in the impartial spirit of some observer outside the 'prophetic faiths', say a citizen of the Moon making a Grand Tour of terrestrial institutions. There can be no doubt that the 'monopersonal' vision would strike us as being something quite breathtakingly simple, and of a positively adamantine purity. On the other hand, its very lack of any field of reference, the absence of all myth, all cloudiness, of anything suggestive of compromise—this gives it a remote and sterile atmosphere, an air of geometrical and scientific precision which may provoke admiration, but hardly stirs the soul. Compared to this, the tripartite Christian image acquires added fascination just because of the heady mystery in which it is enveloped. The 'heavenly fellowship' opens up possibilities for the most splendidly subtle, airy and marvellous rival theories; with the entry into the drama of the historical element, by way of the Incarnation, that mystical Triad touches the deepest fibres of the human heart. Yet is it not true that the price for all this is a certain feeling of intellectual disappointment, a sense of equivocation, as though a vital move in the game had taken place off-stage, to be classified as a secret aspect of God's divine administration? Each theological concept balances out the other: both can be seen as symbols of universal divergent trends, with radiant centres that lure men like moths, both with a penumbra of shadow that provokes doubt and perplexity. This may partially explain their individual fascination, the adherence which each has claimed from millions of men down the centuries, an adherence they still claim today. And for long ages to come they will doubtless continue to exert no less powerful a pull, with neither gaining an exclusive advantage over the other.

As a corollary to the doctrines which define the existence and Oneness of God is the problem of His attributes. Some schools of Sunnite orthodoxy claim there are thirteen (or even fourteen) Divine attributes, but most accept the thesis of Al-Ghazzali (1038–1111) who lists seven only: power, knowledge, vitality, will, hearing, vision, and speech. In both lists the attributes most widely disputed are those which concern, on the one hand, Power and Will, and on the other, Speech.

In Christian theology it is true, beyond any doubt, that God's perfection sets certain limits to His omnipotence. The Greatest Good (*summum bonum*) cannot will what is negative or, in direct contradistinction to His own nature, evil; Justice cannot avoid rewarding merit, and so on. Nor is this all: God enters into certain binding obligations with man, such as make possible a continual two-way spiritual traffic between the Creator and His creatures through the direct mediation of certain agreed conventions, such as the Sacraments. In other words, we have to do with a remarkably *constitutional* Deity. In the Islamic cosmology, on the other hand, Allah dominates the universe with absolute sovereign power: He has no ministers, acknowledges no constitution, is answerable neither to independent authority, legal controls, nor yet the voice of public opinion. His omnipotence has no limitations whatsoever: the freedom He enjoys is complete, arbitrary, and boundless. He is the absolute master of all creatures on earth, and has not the slightest obligation to any of them; as Bausani puts it, 'He can inflict suffering upon them without its being accounted a sin, and reward them without its being reckoned to His merit' (loc. cit. p. 297). If the Christian God is fundamentally Love, the principle of Good in action, the God of Islam is, in essence, pure Will—the corollary being that the Good is only such in so far as it represents His decrees.

Similarly, in the Moslem view, Allah is to be identified with the whole space-time-mind continuum. There is no room for any subordinate authority, and *causae secundae* are not so much as glanced at. The Creation of the world must not be thought of as an event which took place once, at some specific moment in time; God creates the world, destroys it and refashions it, moment by moment for all eternity. If the universe had not been sustained—each individual atom of it, for every second in time—by the creative breath of Allah, it would have instantly dissolved into nothingness. Allah is like some employer who is determined to keep a personal eye on everything, and whose mania for centralization gives him an itch to put his own signature on even the most routine letters.

What place is there in such a universe for individual human freedom? A small and limited scope indeed! The explanations offered by Islamic theologians as to why man is not utterly shattered, pulverized and annihilated by his own ubiquitous and omnipotent Deity have a certain desperate

note about them, and give the impression of laborious hair-splitting. To quote Bausani, 'When a man moves his hand, God, having previously created both the man himself and his hand, now further creates the hand's movement, and the man's power of decision over that movement.' The man, in other words, is scarcely 'master' of his own actions at all: they, like every other event in the world, operate within a wholly occasionalistic sphere. As a special and extreme concession men are permitted to 'qualify' their own actions, to give them some faint personal flavour.

The true and valid Word (*kalam*) of God is, today, the Koran. God's word has been made known to mankind through the medium of His prophets. Each successive prophet abrogates that portion of the Law which God deems no longer necessary, and makes some new communication to humanity in its stead. The sequence of prophets began with Adam: the most famous are those in the Jewish tradition—Noah, Abraham, Moses—but certain Arab prophets are also cited. Jesus, as we have seen, occupies an important place in the Islamic prophetology. His birth from the Virgin Mary is acknowledged, but His death on the Cross denied: some double must have been crucified in His stead, while the Prophet Himself ascended, living, into Heaven.

As far as God's actions are concerned, we can only say that none of them is necessary, i.e., that all are contingent. In the Christian picture of the cosmic drama God's chief function is redemptive: this implies an abstract 'history' which is, so to speak, superimposed upon that of the Earthly City, though with certain fundamental points of contact between the celestial and the sublunary order of things. In the Islamic vision, on the other hand, the working of God's will is to be seen in the history of man's physical progress through the centuries—his empires and his failures, his pinnacles of achievement and troughs of despair. It is the same principle which prevents Islam from recognizing any sort of true dogma, any definition which might in any way circumscribe or limit God's proud and vigorously arbitrary absolutism.

All the prophetic religions have an eschatological side, and the Koran alludes on many occasions, with positively obsessive relish, to the prospect of the Last Judgement, of the resurrection of the body, of the reality of Hell and Paradise. Paradise is described in terms reminiscent of Rubens: 'Those who have the Faith and do good in this life shall be admitted to the Gardens of Paradise, where cool streams flow amid the shade, and there they shall rest for all eternity. . . . They shall recline on high couches, row by row, and We shall marry them to young maidens with great black eyes. And We shall furnish them with fruit and meat to their heart's desire. And there shall be passed round among them cups of a wine that doth not provoke foolish discourse, nor yet doth excite to sinful lusts. And there shall be assembled amongst them young boys to serve them, boys like unto pearls yet hidden in the shell . . .' (Koran 4.57 and 52.17-24). When we turn to Hell, on the other

hand, we find the most cruel punishments described with a really ferocious relish.

There are also certain special motifs peculiar to Islam, such as the interrogation of the dead in their graves which is conducted by the two angels Munkar and Nakir, or the idea of the bridge (*sirat*) hung over the infernal abyss: all the risen dead must attempt it, but only the just will cross it safely and reach the farther side; the damned will fall into the fiery gulf beneath. This is a familiar piece of imagery, borrowed directly from Zoroastrianism: it serves to reveal—once again—the presence of innumerable cross-currents in that vast rich creative ferment of ideas which stretched like a sea between Pamir and the Mediterranean, from the Aral Sea to the Arabian Gulf.

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Though theology has great intrinsic interest, and affords us certain vital evidence for our better understanding of the Moslem people, the real hub round which the whole of Islamic civilization revolves is that of the Law—*shariah*, that is, literally, 'the straight way' or 'the trodden path'. And when we talk of 'the law' in this context it is not merely the religious law of conscience that is involved, the 'inner' law; *shariah* controls the Moslem's every least overt action in the external world. Its range is quite extraordinarily wide, and aims at embracing every human activity, the entire day-to-day conduct of the Faithful. It covers all aspects of 'prayer and fasting, the law of purchase and sale, contracts and transfers, marriage and family law, the criminal code; war, together with the moral-cum-juridical regulations designed to make it more humane; the sharing of booty, the calculation of taxes and excise, sumptuary legislation, the proper procedure to be observed during sacrifices and the ritual slaughter of animals; rules for voting and oath-taking, regulations governing court hearings and the theory of evidence, slavery, and the manumission of slaves' (Bausani, *loc. cit.* p. 329). *Shariah* sets out to unite in one imposing structure the various emotional, spiritual and rational impulses which radiate from man's heart to every point of the compass, abolishing all distinction (except for severely practical purposes) between the spheres of religion, politics, and law; between dogma, ethics, ritual, and public, no less than private, jurisprudence. As Gabrieli says, it 'accompanies the good Moslem from the cradle to the grave, directs and circumscribes his every step, encompasses his life with a whole network of regulations, injunctions and prohibitions which may seem suffocatingly restrictive to us, but were not so regarded by generation upon generation of believers.'¹

This is a logical point at which to consider the fundamental Islamic

¹ F. Gabrieli, *Aspetti della civiltà arabo-islamica* (Rome, 1956), p. 37.

concept of God as the Divine Agent who, directly and continually, acts upon this mortal world of ours. There is, in the last resort, nothing rational or anthropocentric about the accumulated corpus of Islamic law; it has not the slightest affinity with 'nature' or the Roman notion of *civitas*, but is, on the contrary, quite explicitly theological in origin. Its validity rests upon the revelations made to the Prophet, or whatever may conceivably be inferred from them. Not for nothing does *shariah* regard as 'God's Law' all which transcends the interests of the private individual; not for nothing do those treatises so inaccurately defined as 'Moslem law' begin with a section concerning certain ritual acts (*ibadat*) which put man in touch with God and constitute the visible body of the Faith! If Islamic theology places the rational and the supernatural on exactly the same level, *shariah* similarly lumps together subjects which we would regard as wildly disparate, such as canon law and commercial law.

Here we find ourselves confronted with a remarkable instance of how one civilization can differ from another through some internal structural axiom which cannot be translated in terms other than its own; of how a civilization is, fundamentally, a way of looking at the world, an inner cosmos, an endocosm, which—though always representing some sort of structure—differs from all others as much as a Gothic cathedral differs from a Japanese temple, or a skyscraper from a country hovel; or indeed just as a ship differs from a locomotive or a jet aircraft, though all of them are modes of transport. The efforts of European scholars to frame a terminology capable of translating the fundamental concepts of *shariah* into Occidental values are doomed to failure in advance. Trying to introduce our basic juridical assumptions concerning public, private, constitutional or canon law into the fortified redoubt of the Islamic endocosm is rather like trying to grow fruit in a bookcase, or force steel cubes up one's nostrils. The converse process, of course, is equally difficult. *Shariah* may be equated with canon law when it is dealing with prayer or ritual, but it turns into civil law over matters of inheritance, contract and the like—and even here is liable on occasion to revert to theology pure and simple. Similarly the concept of *fiqh* ('knowledge of *shariah*') can only in the very crudest sense be translated as 'jurisprudence'. Antonio d'Emilia, after a lengthy and learned disquisition on this topic, concludes with the observation that while only part of *fiqh* is parallel to 'that material which we would term juridical', Islam also recognizes certain aspects of legality beyond and apart from *fiqh* as such ('Diritto Islamico', in *Civiltà dell'Oriente*, vol. 3, p. 496). In other words, any attempt to translate the concepts of one civilization into those of another brings us up against insurmountable difficulties, for the simple reason that we are dealing with entities that never match exactly, but leave incompatible loose ends on both sides.

There is, in fact, no such thing as a universal mould or pattern for civilizations, capable of accommodating a variety of contents one after the other. No individual civilization makes any sense except in terms of itself. No one possesses a grand cosmic yardstick against which they can all be measured. Only two things exist: man, and the world—that enigma, Rorschach's meaningful ink-blot—in perennial confrontation. A civilization is the conscious result of one major human family's efforts down the ages to interpret its own condition—to find a key that will unlock the enigma, a myth plausible enough to explain the ink-blot. Every civilization worthy of that lofty title is, therefore, profoundly original, and should be studied as a unique phenomenon. The languages in which it expresses itself, like its arts, its institutions, and the private citadels of its essential thought, are, in the last resort, comprehensible only to someone 'on the inside'.

Going back to *shariah* for a moment, we may legitimately ask whence its authority derives—and conclude, without hesitation, that it comes from the same source as does that of Islam theology as a whole. In other words, its source is the source of Moslem civilization as a whole: first and foremost, the Koran; then the *sunna*, and finally the *ijma*. The Koran we have already discussed. The term '*sunna*' literally means 'mode of action' or 'mode of life', and illustrates Mahommed's own conduct as attested, in circumstantial detail, by the *hadith*, that is, the tradition handed down to posterity by his closest companions. In other words, *sunna* can be equated with the *hadith* which testify to the Prophet's behaviour, responses, and reactions, and his decisions on countless practical problems relating to government, warfare, law and morals. This corpus forms, as it were, an extension or completion of the Koran. Third in order of importance is *ijma*, or 'consensus of opinion', which represents unanimous agreement on the part of theologians or jurists as representatives of the Moslem community at large. This particular source of authority seems decidedly vague, and very hard to utilize in any convenient manner. We should not forget, however, that our own methods of critical evaluation (for instance, in art and literature), which often achieve remarkable objectivity and stability, rest on more or less the same foundations. The greatness, as I conceive it, of Shakespeare, Michelangelo, Molière, or Bach rests, in the final analysis, on the *ijma* of those *ulama* who are recognized as authorities in their particular field, and holds good only so long as their consensus of opinion is not strongly challenged by some fresh evaluation.

A most important element in *shariah* is that known as *ibadat*, which deals with matters of ritual. The European, who normally thinks of Islam as a 'religion' and nothing more (thus transferring into this alien civilization some characteristic values from his own) will find, here if nowhere else, a range of readily comprehensible categories. They can be summarized under five main heads, as follows: *shahada*, or profession of faith; *salat*, or prayer;

zakat, or almsgiving; *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca; and *saum*, that is, fasting during the month of Ramadan. To these five categories, at certain periods and under certain dispensations, there may also be added that of *jihad*, or the Holy War.

I have already made some reference to *shahada*, the profession of faith. *Salat*, prayer, is not so much concerned with any private and intimate link between the worshipper and his Maker as with defining a highly formalized ritual. This should be repeated five times a day (at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and at night), according to specific instructions which lay down every gesture, position and phrase in the most minute detail. Such a prayer may be made only in a state of ritual purity. If the worshipper has been in contact with any unclean object or substance (e.g. pigs, dogs, blood, alcohol, any dead animal not ritually slaughtered, and any kind of excrement) he must perform various partial or total ablutions which can, in emergency, be done with sand instead of water. Prayer may take place anywhere ('the whole earth is a mosque'); though wherever possible the faithful try to congregate in a visible mosque with other fellow-worshippers. When engaged in prayer they face towards Mecca. The communal prayers offered up at midday on Friday are the most important of the week. When some particularly important ceremony falls due the prayers may be led by an *imam*, or 'provost', who often has some other profession as well: his position in society differs fundamentally from that of the priest, since he has no magical powers to distinguish him in any essential way from the main body of the faithful.

Zakat, or almsgiving, is regarded as a highly meritorious activity: the *fiqh* goes into minute details concerning the percentage of a man's goods that should be given to charity, and the various classes of person who are entitled to such benefit. At certain periods *zakat* may well have formed a handy system of social welfare designed to protect the destitute; but today it has virtually fallen into disuse.

One tradition still very much alive, however, is the observance of a month's fast (*ramadan*), during which Moslems are obliged, between dawn and dusk, to abstain from all food, drink and sexual contacts. It should be remembered that the Moslem calendar is a strictly lunar one, with each month twenty-nine or thirty days long. The entire year, which covers 354 days, slips back each year eleven days further behind the solar year. Ramadan therefore occurs a little earlier from year to year, according to our reckoning, until after a thirty-two year cycle it is back where it began. The end of Ramadan is celebrated by one of the greatest Moslem festivals, *Id al-fitr*.

All men and women are supposed to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lifetime. This obligatory act must take place during the month of *dul-hijja*. In actual practice—especially as far as remote countries are concerned—only the well-to-do can afford the time and money necessary

for such a journey, which even today may take several months, and in the past was liable to last for years. The rites connected with this pilgrimage are numerous and varied: they go on for several days, and form the only body of observance within the Islamic faith that could by any stretch of the imagination be termed sacramental. When the pilgrims reach Mecca they must put themselves in a 'state of holiness', wear special garments (generally white) and perform a considerable number of ritually prescribed acts. In Mecca itself they must walk so many times round the Ka'aba, the square building that houses the black stone which, according to legend, was placed there by Abraham himself, after angels had brought it down from heaven. Afterwards they must visit the miraculous springs at Zamzam, do homage to a stone with Abraham's footprint on it, spend some time in a plain which is four hours' journey from the city by camel, where they 'come face to face with God', undertake various gruelling endurance tests between sunset and sunrise, hurl seven stones into the air (exclaiming at each throw: 'In the name of God! God is all-powerful'), make the prescribed animal sacrifices, and, finally, have their heads shaved. The whole proceedings end with three days of feasting and relaxation.

Many of these curious archaic rites are survivals from the old pagan Arab religion which Mahommed absorbed into his new faith. The shadow of Abraham—the first monotheist—falls everywhere at Mecca, and bears witness to the close bonds uniting all the prophetic religions.

When we examine the *jihad*, or Holy War, we find that men's attitude to it has varied a great deal throughout history. Today it is, on the whole, regarded as a dead letter. But we should not forget the deep and terrible emotional impact which the sound of the cry '*Jihad!*' can—and may yet again—have on Moslems in special circumstances. *Shariah*, moreover, distinguishes only two sorts of political reality in the world: *dar al-harb*, the 'enemy realm' of the infidel, and *dar al-islam*, the 'realm of Islam' inhabited by the Faithful. The infidel are accurately sub-divided into two categories: the 'people of the Book' (Christians, Jews, and the all-but-mythical Sabaeans, about whom so much has been written), and 'Kafirs', or polytheists.

After the laws defining man's relationship with God and prescribing the proper rites (*ibadat*) by which He should be approached, there follow those which lay down man's relationship with his fellows (*muamalat*). Here we are within the sphere of real jurisprudence as the Western mind conceives it. The field of study is vast and complex, and this is not the place to add to the research already done on it; I would merely like to emphasize that the contrast with our own modern legislation (which is firmly rooted in the assumptions of Western thought) is, on almost every occasion, profound. The West regards its laws as essentially secular, civic, and territorial. Islam takes a diametrically opposite view: it regards *shariah* as based on religion,

above civic and personal considerations. This imbalance between the two outlooks leads to profound tensions in those present-day Islamic communities which, while anxious for some measure of reform, are at the same time frightened of the effect which may be produced by any abandonment of traditional values.

Some of the most obvious and visible cultural manifestations of Islam—those of which every traveller talks at irrepressible length—find their sanction and limitations in this branch of *shariah*. Take polygamy, for instance: that institution so frowned upon by some, and by others regarded as an unimaginable release of the natural instincts. The Koran limits the number of wives a man may possess to four, always insisting that he shall be able to maintain them decently and treat them on an equal footing. There is no top limit placed on the number of his concubines or, indeed, of his slaves. Marriage is regarded solely as a contract between the bridegroom and the *wali*, who 'represents the bride'; the bride is then asked for her consent. Marriage between a Moslem and a woman 'from the people of the Book', i.e. a Christian or a Jew, is permitted, but not the reverse. Divorce is extremely simple.

In practice this schematization of sexual life means that all adult women are married (and shut up at home): the result is a marked, indeed an aggressively, virile tone permeating the whole of Moslem society. On the other hand the Islamic moral conscience has always regarded prostitution, indeed any irregular relationship between a man and a woman, as the gravest of sins: so much so, in fact, that in many regions and at various periods of history prostitution was legalized by the invention of 'temporary marriages', which could be of extremely short duration, some lasting for only a single night. Therefore to imagine Moslem countries as havens of ripe sensuality, where passions flower with rank abandon like orchids in some steamy jungle, is to mistake the situation completely. Moslem countries are, on the contrary, characterized by their repression, which is always so strong as to be irksome, and sometimes past all belief. When the tone of a Moslem society is high, it tends to produce a warlike, Spartan-type virility (which may create its own safety-valve in the shape of more or less idealized homosexual relationships); when its tone is low, the most disastrous sort of hypocrisy becomes rampant throughout it.

The position of women is clearly less than satisfactory. This is a point over which the defenders and critics of Islamic civilization always end by fighting their fiercest battles. It cannot be denied, however, that a large proportion of those customs which work to the disadvantage of the weaker sex had their origins in pre-Islamic tradition rather than in the precepts of the Koran. The veil and house-confinement are two good examples. As support for this argument we need only observe how far less restricted

Indonesian women are; and on the other hand how rigidly anti-feminist despite their Christianity remote Mediterranean communities tend to be, on the islands or in the more isolated parts of the larger peninsulas.

Finally, let us consider one or two other details which, though of marginal importance only, do have a vivid impact on the eye and the imagination. As we have seen, it is taboo for a Moslem to eat pork, blood, or any animal that has not been slaughtered in the correct ritual fashion. Alcoholic liquors are similarly forbidden; so are gambling and usury (though in theory this should also preclude the establishment of banks). Music and singing, though not forbidden, are hedged about with various restrictions. It is stringently forbidden to make, copy, own or in any way use images of living persons ('O ye who believe, hearken! In truth wine and gambling and graven images and fortune-telling are abominable works of Satan: keep ye from them . . .'—Koran, 5.90). This explicit final prohibition has had a strong and decisive influence on the history of art, from Spain and Sicily to Transoxiana and the Punjab.

This virtual annihilation of the highest forms known to art and sculpture may, on the face of it, have been caused by the urge to avoid the siren lure of idolatry, but beneath this a much more basic psychological impulse was at work. Once again we must refer to that tremendously majestic concept, God conceived as pure arbitrary Will, sustaining the entire universe with His creative breath. Without Him, all would instantly collapse into nothingness. What point was there, then, in fashioning images which, however attractive they might be, reflected nothing but transience and empty vanity? So this phenomenon should be seen, not so much as a prohibition, an external setting of limits, but rather as a spontaneous limitation. No merely external restriction, however powerful, could have for so long—and in so many countries—wholly dammed up the artist's creative instincts.¹

As for the concept of *shariah*, this should not by any means be imagined as applying constantly in space and time, over half the world and for some fourteen centuries. I have been at some pains to give a drastically simplified picture of some aspects of Islam, and in the process I may have inadvertently suggested that such was the case. In fact, of course, no sooner does one put on one's mask and dive into the ocean of history than one is faced by deep abysses of rival schools and tendencies, whole shoals of contradictory theories. To prevent the reader's ideas from becoming too confused I shall

¹ A good example of the influence still retained by the aniconic principle in the Islamic world: in 1955 the diplomatic representatives in Washington of various Moslem states had the statue of Mahommed removed from the front stairwell of a New York court, where it had stood for half a century among other famous lawgivers of history. There has, however, always been a current of minority opinion that has sought to uphold and legitimize the use of images, though still in a very restricted way. See the *Enciclopedia Universale dell' Arte* (Venice-Rome, 1958), Vol. 7, p. 158.

merely note that there exist four major schools of theology and four principal types of juridical theory, with various intermediate combinations between them. These range from a 'left-wing' approach represented by the rationalist school of theology (*Mutazilites*) and a liberal theory of law (upheld by the *Hanafites*), to an extreme 'right-wing' approach which embraces anthropomorphists and literalists in theology, and strict traditionalists in law (*Hanbalites*). At the centre we find the moderate group—*Asharites* and *Maturitides* in the more strictly religious sphere, *Malikites* and *Shafites* where juridical interests are at stake. Generally speaking, the less liberal schools flourish in Arabia and round the Persian Gulf; the more open-minded and progressive are to be found in Turkey, Iran, and central Asia. The middle road is followed (though there are some exceptions to this rule) by the other Islamic nations in Africa and Asia.

One most important point, which may be treated within the general sphere of *shariah*, is the fact that Islam has no true sacraments. The more one considers this omission, the more one realizes just how important it is. It might even be suggested, with some plausibility, that the basic practical distinction between Western and Islamic society is that the first has a sacramental character whereas the second does not. Bearing in mind the Moslem's conception of Allah as a personal, absolutely unrestricted God, above all human categories of thought, it becomes plain that both the idea and the terminology of the sacraments are bound to be inadmissible in Moslem eyes. Who could ever constrain God 'to determine the course of events, *ex opere operato* and by human agency' (Bausani, *op. cit.*, p. 310)? The sacramental attitude presupposes a constitutional God, the Christian concept of Deity, in fact; under Islam such a proposition would be unthinkable.

Now, just as the presence of sacraments implies the growth of a group of men—priests—whose business it is to administer them, so their absence tends to produce a society without such metaphysical class-divisions. Theoretically speaking, in Islam all men are equal. There remains, it is true, that pernicious division of mankind into Faithful and Infidel; but once you are 'inside', no individual possesses any particular charismatic grace to distinguish him from his fellows. There is not that bipartite grouping we know so well—on the one hand those who wield what is, in the final analysis, a magical authority, and on the other the laity, or 'common people', who must turn to the first group if they wish to establish a fruitful relationship with God. This democratic structure is perhaps the most fascinating and up-to-date characteristic of the whole range of Islamic ideology; it is also, in all likelihood, one of the elements that may most easily be transplanted from Islam into the religious vision of generations yet to come.

Yet in practice things have, almost invariably, turned out rather short of this shining ideal: there is a wide gap between theory and actuality. It is

true that the *ulama* and *mullahs* and *koja* and *muftis* and *faqih* have never formed a separate and distinct 'clergy', being rather jurists, jurisconsults, professors of theology or exegetists, not priests as such; but from the sociological point of view they have almost always constituted a powerful and privileged group within the population as a whole, a group moreover which is opposed, in the most chauvinistic manner, to innovations of any sort whatsoever. It is, above all, to these 'Doctors of the Law' that Islam owes its present long-standing intellectual stagnation—a sad sequel to the intensely creative upsurge which marked its early years: only today, under the pressure of external events, is that long sleep at last being broken.



Viewed thus, as it were, from a distance, through the medium of this rough and superficial sketch, Islam may give the effect of some vast unitary edifice, from which a deliberate process of demythologization has for the most part removed any sacred aura of mystery or ineffability. One is tempted to compare it with certain harshly puritanical Protestant sects, whose chapels, stripped of all colour and embellishment, symbolize a universe without half-tones. Furthermore, Islam turned so frankly to the real and tangible world of everyday life that it savours a little too much of ledgers and cash-desks, business and family affairs, warfare and civil administration. Lastly, music is regarded with some suspicion, art is actively persecuted, and God is worshipped, as it were, to the rhythm of drums. How, in such circumstances, could a mystical sense of religious experience survive?

It may seem incredible, but in fact Islam has nurtured some of the most profound and dynamic mystical movements mankind has ever known. One generic name, Sufism (from *suf*, or wool, from which at one time the robes of ascetics were made) embraces a whole multitude of divergent groups and individual philosophies. It is not hard to reconcile these apparently contradictory facts. Islam—and again the resemblance to Judaism strikes one—may regulate man's outward existence in the most minute detail, ordering his life, from the cradle to the grave, over matters pertaining to the Faith, or his duties as head of a family, member of a profession, soldier, citizen, or sovereign; but on the other hand it leaves one maximum liberty over private matters such as the relationship between God and His creatures, and does not invade those secret gardens of the mind where the heart converses with its innermost thoughts. Where Christians make right belief take precedence over right action, and offer endless loopholes to the man whose actions are evil but whose faith remains whole, Jews and Moslems give greater weight to right action than to right belief. Christian theology remains, in consequence, a boundless sea of theories and counter-theories, schools and rival schools; whereas Islamic and Judaic theology are considerably less elaborate and, in

particular, more amenable to mysticism because less bedazzled by a geometrical-cum-syllogistic approach to their theme. Here, it seems to me (if I may digress for a moment) that Asia has perceived one vital truth: either theology accepts mysticism, or else it reduces itself to mere semantic quibbling, based on varying and subjective interpretations of the verb 'to be'.

I will not attempt here to plunge into the vast subject of Sufism, though for the poet, the philosopher and the historian alike its interest is immense. Suffice it to record that when we seek the leading figures of Islamic thought, it is always amongst the *sufi* that we discover them: take, for example, Al-Ghazali himself (1058-1111), whose personality so dominated the development of medieval thought that he persuaded orthodox Sunnites actually to accept certain aspects of his (very restrained) mysticism. Or consider Jalal-ud-din Rumi (1207-1273), the Persian poet and mystic whose works embody some of the most refined Gnostic motifs the West has known; or el Hallaj, whose expressions of extreme mysticism, proclaiming the mystic's conjoint and absolute identity with God, earned him a terrible martyr's death in Baghdad (922).

The mystics generally banded together in schools (*tariqa*), some of which played an important part in the spiritual and cultural history of Islam. Other rather less admirable aspects of Sufism were manifested—and made considerable stir—in the dances of the dervishes (from the Persian *darvish* = beggar) and the various activities of the faqirs, a term which in Arabic means 'poor person'.



Every important movement of mankind ends by splitting up into various divergent and contrasting trends. Just as Buddhism divided into *hinayana* and *mahayana*, or Christianity was fragmented into Catholicism, Monophysitism, Orthodoxy and the Protestant churches, so Islam underwent—very early in its career—a most important tripartite fission. On one side stood the Sunnite majority group; on the other, two minorities, the Shiites and the Kharijites. The original reasons for the break were political rather than religious. One is reminded of England's severance from Rome under Henry VIII—a situation in which primarily political (or at any rate not specifically religious) motives created a climate of precedence in which diametrically opposed religious and cultural factions were later to seek common justification.

One essential prerequisite for Sunnism is a nation-wide consciousness of the Islamic heritage. From a doctrinal point of view, if supreme authority is vested in the Koran and those documents (the *sunna*) which complete it, then the interpretation of these, throughout the ages, must devolve upon the community of the Faithful, as represented by well-known scholars and jurists.

In the Sunnite view, the Caliphate (office of the 'Vicar-General') must be—in theory at least, and within certain limits—an elective office.

Shiism, on the other hand, revolves round the notion of spiritual guides (*imam*) who embody in their own persons the heritage left by the Prophet for this world. Today they would be labelled adherents of a 'personality cult'. Furthermore, from the Shiite point of view, the *imam* must be able to claim descent from the Prophet's family, so that the 'personality cult' is reinforced with hereditary qualifications. The movement took root in the seventh century, as a result of the disputes arising after the death of Ali (661), Mahommed's son-in-law and fourth—after Abu Bekr, Omar, and Utman—in the line of 'uncontested Caliphs'. The word *shia* actually means 'faction', and the name was given to Ali's loyal descendants and their supporters when they were defeated by the Ommiads of Damascus, and reduced to the position of a fractional minority. The Kharijites (who survive today in the Ibadhi of North Africa and Zanzibar) likewise branched off from the main tradition as a result of the dissensions that arose over Ali's caliphate.

For reasons which it would take too long to elaborate here, the Shiites recognize twelve *imam*, of whom the first was Ali himself (d. 661) and the last Mohammed al-Mahdi (d. 874). At this point the *imam* were supposed to have 'gone underground', but they were to reappear at the end of time and lead the Faithful to the conquest of the world, when Islam would be established in its full glory: they were a variant on the theme of the Messianic Conqueror. The Shiites, commonly known as Twelvers (because of their twelve *imam*), today number some 30,000,000 adherents. Persia went Shiite in 1502 under the Safavi dynasty; and other important centres of the sects are to be found in Pakistan, Iraq, and Soviet Asia.

The 'personality cult', so characteristic of the Shiites, has been responsible for the diffusion through the Moslem world as a whole of one phenomenon highly repugnant to the orthodox: that is, the veneration offered to saints, holy men, ascetics, hermits, indeed even to relics and tombs, which displays numerous traits of popular religiosity that one might think more characteristic of Buddhism or Christianity than of Islam.

Apart from the 'Twelvers', there are several other groups of Shiites. The best-known are the Ismailis, who broke away from their former co-religionists after quarrels concerning the successor of the sixth *imam* (Jafar al-Sadiq, 669–765), and for whom the line of *imam* has never been closed. Indeed, after many complex and picturesque vicissitudes—including the famous *hashishin*, or 'Assassins', who maddened themselves with drugs before going into action—and after long periods of suspension or discontinuity, that line survives to this day in the Aga Khan dynasty. The title, which signifies 'Noble Prince', first appears as late as 1834; but in the eyes

of the Faithful, and according to most ancient tradition, it sanctifies the continued presence on earth of Allah's Vicar-General.

The whole panorama of *Shiism*—especially on its extreme fringes—is highly complicated, and includes various groups whose very presence within the confines of Islam is regarded as rather suspect: for instance the Druses, the *nusairi* (or *alawiya*), and the *yazids*. These last not only profess most intriguing beliefs concerning the transmigration of souls—beliefs which probably are Indian by derivation—but combine such disparate observances as baptism, circumcision, dervish dances, and the fast of Ramadan; they also conduct pilgrimages, alternately, to famous Christian churches and the tombs of certain Moslem saints. They are about 100,000 strong, and live in Kurdistan, Mesopotamia, Syria, Persia, and the Caucasus mountains.

SOME TALK OF ALEXANDER

*I sometimes think they never blow so red
The Rose as where some buried Caesar bled . . .*

OMAR KHAYYAM (TWELFTH CENTURY)

Trans. Edward Fitzgerald

FOR VARIOUS technical reasons we had to split up into two groups. Paolo Consiglio, Franco Alletto, Giancarlo Castelli, Betto Pinelli, Enrico Leone and Dr. Franco Lamberti went straight on to Peshawar by train; Silvio Iovane and I caught a plane to Rawalpindi.

The flight was uneventful. A few minutes after take-off we found ourselves suspended, apparently motionless, in a vast azure dome; below us, circumscribed by the horizon, lay a mother-of-pearl ocean of mist. Through a sudden break in the clouds, almost directly below us, we managed to glimpse a depressing panorama of barren, sandy wastes which looked virtually uninhabited. But the earth's anatomy, its tendons, muscles, ducts and bones, now stood out in dramatic relief; naked and enormous, the various geological strata dominated the pattern of the landscape. Soil-erosion, landslides, faults, dry and obsolete water-basins, cones of detritus, synclines and anticlines, downs, meandering river-valleys, deposits of salt or borax—each element in the earth's texture cried aloud to heaven the eternal war between land and water, wind and sand, rock and sun. We seemed to be flying through time no less than space—across the gulf of the millennia. Gradually the landscape became more barren and uniform: all we could distinguish now were the faint undulations of a tawny wilderness the colour of a lion's mane. We were skirting the Thar Desert, the largest of its kind in the whole Indo-Pakistani sub-continent.

Through the loudspeaker we were informed that our position was now over Multan. This meant that we were flying above the territories of the ancient Indus Valley civilization. During the mid-nineteenth century an English engineer named Brunton, in charge of the construction of the railway between Multan and Lahore, discovered near the village of Harappa what he described as a 'quarry crammed full of old bricks'. Having no better material to hand, he used them for track-ballast. 'To this very day', as K. M. Sen writes in his book *Hinduism* (London, 1961, p. 43), 'trains on the Multan-Lahore line run for about a hundred miles over ballast made from broken bricks that date back to the third millennium B.C. . . .' Students of

archaeology realized only later that these famous bricks were not 'old' but antique, and not antique merely but of well-nigh unimaginable antiquity; and that the supposed 'quarry' was in fact formed from the ruins of a city, half-buried by mud and sand. In 1917 another, larger centre of this type was discovered at Mohenjo-Daro, and it was possible to speak of a definite, but hitherto completely unknown, 'Indus civilization'.

This civilization flourished between 3000 and 1500 B.C., though its most important period can be restricted to a somewhat shorter span, the centuries 2600-1900. Numerous significant parallels with the contemporary culture of Mesopotamia were at once observed. An examination of skeletal remains showed that the inhabitants of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro were of the physical type we call 'Mediterranean'. It is not clear whether the contacts between the two worlds were direct, or made via other intermediate peoples; but contact there must have been, at frequent intervals and, during some periods, continuously. Climatic conditions seem to have been noticeably better than they are today: in particular there was a higher degree of humidity. Agriculture, in fact, formed the basis of the economy. But what strikes the observer most forcibly is the urban—and hence probably commercial—character which this civilization reveals. The archaeological remains suggest a law-abiding, rational people with a bent for organization (the city was planned in a 'grid' lay-out), industrious (their artifacts are of the highest quality), provident (they built public granaries), unwarlike (only a very few bronze weapons have turned up), clean in their personal habits (baths both public and private abound, and the sewerage system is excellent), well-disciplined, and under wise administration. Writing was known to them, but so far it has not proved possible to decipher; nor do we know very much about the language they spoke. As far as religion is concerned it is hard to speak with any certainty; there do not appear to have been any temples, but on the other hand some elegant figurines and rather odd seals discovered amongst the bricks already display characteristics that were to become typical of Hinduism many centuries later. For example, representations of ascetics in various *yoga* positions have turned up, together with many-headed divinities and—above all—statuettes of goddesses.

One most intriguing fact is the complete break that occurs between the Indus civilization (in so far as we can reconstruct it) and that which replaced it—a civilization brought by people who spoke an Indo-European tongue, and who invaded India during the second millennium B.C. by forcing the passes of the Hindu Kush and the Himalayas. The two worlds appear to have been profoundly different, indeed diametrically opposed. The Indus people were agriculturists and city-builders, whereas the newcomers were herdsmen and lived in villages. The former were peace-loving traders, the latter natural warriors: once they had gutted a valley or a forest they preferred

to move on. The Indus people were literate, whereas the invaders had nothing but a traditional oral culture. One group used bronze, whereas the other preferred iron. In the Harappa culture, it is thought, women played a prominent role; the newcomers were male-dominated and fiercely patriarchal. The former practised cults in which the Great Mother played a major part; the latter imported with them a rough, virile pantheon, deities of sky and weather, fire, sun, moon and water. Amongst these pride of place was enjoyed by Indra—the hero, the god of the warrior-caste, now loftily generous (to those under his protection), now cruel and vindictive (where his enemies were involved), but always swayed by the whim of the moment, capricious, unpredictable.

When I looked out of my porthole again, I saw that the sky had gradually begun to fill up with those sluggish, water-laden, matronly, off-white clouds which Indians in antiquity used to call ‘Indra’s elephants’, and whose appearance heralds the monsoon rains. We had read in the papers that frightful storms were raging over the whole of southern India, but that up here in the north the rainy season did not, as a rule, break till the beginning of July, and could often be a week—or even a fortnight—later than that. Between one cloudbank and the next, however, I managed to get a good glimpse of the country stretched out beneath us: bigger and more numerous villages, plains broken up into regular cultivated fields, long ribbons of road, bridges, an occasional factory. We were approaching the Punjab—the ‘Land of the Five Rivers’, the richest, most fertile part of Pakistan.

After three hours in the air we landed at Lahore, which has something like a million inhabitants and is the second largest city in Pakistan. As our plane banked down through the clouds, circling the airfield in order to come in on the right runway, this ancient city of marble minarets and mosques and gardens, which had seen so many dynasties rise and fall, looked, for a brief bright instant, like some fabulous tapestry hung from the horizon. Then it righted itself again, and we came in on the final run and touched down.

Lahore, unlike Karachi, conveys an immediate impression of nobility and antiquity. According to legend, it was founded by a son of Rama, the Indian hero of the Ramayana (second century B.C.); be that as it may, for at least two thousand years a major city has occupied this slightly elevated square of ground on the banks of the Ravi, one of the five great rivers that give the Punjab its name. It figured in the itinerary of that famous Chinese Buddhist monk Hsuan Tsang (605–664), a Marco Polo in reverse, who set forth from the Far East towards the Land of the Setting Sun, and travelled across most of Asia in order to visit the holy places of his faith, and acquire books and relics from them. Lahore became the capital of the earliest Islamic conquerors, about A.D. 1000, who embellished it with splendid public

buildings. But it was the Mogul Emperors, between the end of the sixteenth and the middle of the seventeenth century, who finally gave it the appearance which it preserves to this day, with the magnificent Mosque of Wazir (1634), the Royal Mosque of Aurangzeb (Badshahi Masjid, seventeenth century) and the Shalirma Gardens (see photographs 1, 2, 3).

From Lahore we took off again for Rawalpindi: a short flight this time, over the richest and most thickly populated area of West Pakistan. The first rains had already fallen; through ribbons and patches of cloud the fields shone green below us. We crossed, one after the other, two more of the Five Rivers, the Chenab and the Jhelum.

From the air Rawalpindi's 'split personality' was at once apparent. To the south lay the ancient citadel, a close-packed lichen growth of ash-grey houses framed in lush green countryside; down the middle was the railway line, with tiny toy trains running to and fro; and on the northern side was the city built by the British, which the Pakistanis have now inherited, and are using as their temporary capital. The real capital, Islamabad, is being constructed some thirteen miles farther on, about 3,300 feet above sea-level, among the lower foothills of the Himalayas, where plentiful sunlight is matched by an abundance of fresh, healthy air.

The moment one leaves the airport for Rawalpindi city—reclining on the dusty cushions of a small and ancient bus—one finds oneself transported straight into the heart of a fossilized remnant of British India. It would make a perfect background for E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*. The English miss with her parasol, the vicar clutching a tennis-racquet under his arm have vanished from the scene; but the tree-lined avenues, the villas buried away in sprawling gardens (where a mild but pleasant botanical disorder reigns), the churches (all built in that delightfully civilized late nineteenth-century Gothic), the military barracks, the shops (designed according to a vaguely 'London' style)—these still remain. The tongas, too—those small gigs drawn by muscular little horses—are as much in evidence as ever they were. Some parts of the city remind one of Oxford: rather dustier and more chaotic than the original model, but still essentially the same: here you find the water-meadow encircled by tall shady trees, and there, soaring above them, the exotic spire of some palatial and vaguely college-like building; there is even the appropriate background noise—a group of students playing football, and shouting to one another.

In any event, it is easy to see why such resemblances should occur: the English remained here for very nearly a hundred years, from 1849 (after their final, hard-won victory over the Sikhs) until 1947, the year of Partition. During the second half of the nineteenth century Rawalpindi became the most important military base in the whole of the Indian Empire, the key to the North-West Frontier defences.

Silvio and I booked in at Flashman's Hotel, one of the most agreeable places to stay at in this part of the world. The large hotels in Karachi, Bombay, Delhi and Calcutta are privileged observation-posts for anyone who likes to study the contrasting ebb and flow of humanity at some central meeting-point; but they are also noisy, ugly great urban clearing-houses which depend, in the final analysis, on the depressing international set that flows through the reception-halls of every Excelsior, Plaza, Imperial, Royal, Ritz or Grand Hotel in the world. They may vary in minor details—myths sedulously propagated for the benefit of gullible tourists—but their basic organization, their prevailing assumptions, their traditional rules and uniforms—indeed, their very smells, pleasant or unpleasant, and their characteristic flavours—remain perennially unaltered. Flashman's, on the other hand, was built for the use of officials who were far from home, and wanted to enjoy a certain kind of peaceful cosy atmosphere. It consists of a series of pavilions and chalets spread out in an ample garden: the walls are white, and the roofs scarcely distinguishable from the green foliage of the trees. There are pleasant colonnades complete with deck-chairs, cool shady lawns, sheltered corners where one can read or have tea, bedrooms looking out on little courtyards with a fountain playing in the middle. Silent, bare-footed servants flit about, carrying trays, bottles, brushes and cloths, ready—at your slightest nod or beck—to fetch you a drink, or clean your bath if you feel like taking a shower to freshen up.

It was appallingly hot in Rawalpindi. We were supposed to meet our official liaison officer here, but they informed us that he had already left for Peshawar, where he was overdue. On top of this, several unfinished pieces of business—mostly to do with permits and letters of introduction—proved impossible to settle immediately, on account of the impending weekly festivities. It should be borne in mind that Friday—a day of rest and prayer for all Moslems—is followed by Saturday, when nobody does anything for the simple reason that the day after *that* is Sunday—not that Sunday has any special significance, but it has become a traditional day for all offices to close, a legacy from the country's former Christian overlords. In other words, if you have urgent business to attend to, do it before Thursday evening, otherwise you will have to wait till the following Monday. In the circumstances we decided to go off ourselves, and get a few hours of fresh air: the place we chose was Murree, some 6,600 feet up in the hills.

The journey there is short—about thirty-eight miles—but very picturesque, along a first-class metalled road that loops and winds upwards through woodland and thickets towards the first outcrops of the Himalayas. Gradually, as one gains altitude, the air becomes more breathable. At a certain point the first conifers appear, and your heart gives a lurch of joy. Murree is no more than a village, a straggle of barrack-huts and tin-roofed hovels built

on the crest of the mountain among the pine-trees; but during business hours the constant flow of people offers a gay, colourful spectacle which simultaneously stimulates one's curiosity and has an oddly soothing effect on the mind. There is an excellent hotel. From its terrace we enjoyed a vast panoramic view out over the mist-wrapped plains far below us. Both terrace and reception-rooms were noisily occupied by various wealthy Pakistani families enjoying a rural holiday: their plump daughters lumbered awkwardly round the tennis-court in saris, while little boys dressed as sailors or cowboys quarrelled over plastic spaceships and model Martians.

All this irresistibly called to mind scenes from countless Pakistani films, which are always peopled with wealthy, enormously well-nourished families. The country is still too poverty-stricken to allow itself the luxury of projecting upon its screens any over-faithful representation of life as it really is: the spectator much prefers to plunge into this make-believe papier-mâché paradise, where he can take part in splendid banquets, rubberneck at rich weddings, sleep on vast downy beds, and enjoy the shade of fairy-tale gardens. The producers bow their heads before the public's number one desire: food plus comfort. In a similar fashion they pander to the Moslem's quite fanatical puritanism—a puritanism which, though basically a matter of superficial convention, is nevertheless applied with great strictness to every aspect of one's daily life. I remember on several occasions going to see some terribly respectable American film in a small Pakistani town: when the leading couple moved into a clinch and exchanged those two or three ritual kisses without which no Western film is regarded as complete, the virtually all-male audience broke into such a chorus of shouts, whistles and cat-calls that I thought the roof would come down. One or two women did watch the show, but they were herded into special 'boxes' at the back of the hall, which had black curtains in front: these could be drawn only when the lights had gone down and the performance was actually beginning.

The strict segregation of the sexes, together with this violent superficial puritanism in formal matters, produces in every adult male—especially the younger ones—a degree of erotic tension compared to which the not dissimilar situation existing in Southern Italy is positively mild and insipid. Furthermore, in addition to these repressive measures over sex, it should be borne in mind that equally important restrictions are applied when it comes to drinking. In some parts of the Islamic world, where contact with alien, other-directed societies is closer, people turn a blind eye; but here the regulations are not to be tampered with. I hate to think how many times we were approached by highly respectable gentlemen, who bore the furtive look of one about to make some highly dubious proposition to us, as it might be the offer of delectably smooth and bedworthy slave-girls for our pleasure, or a really hair-raising *cinéma bleu*, or some other subtle and un-

imaginable form of rapture. But not a bit of it: when they had made quite sure they were unobserved, they would say—blushing a little, and with a mischievous smile—‘You don’t by any chance happen to have a bottle of whisky or brandy in your luggage that you’d be willing to sell, do you?’ No experience could have demonstrated more clearly that if people are deprived of a normal pleasure it turns into a morbid craving. Prohibition, after all, was a great promoter of vice.

The previous year some of my Pakistani friends had taken me to a big fair-cum-religious festival (*mela*), which was held every spring in a village not far from Rawalpindi. It proved a most interesting experience. We left Pindi by car about ten o’clock at night, with a very full load aboard. My companions were young officials, some accompanied by their respectable middle-class parents: but all alike were in the sort of electrified mood that might have been appropriate if they had just disembarked on Cythera and found Aphrodite, together with a band of Nymphs, coming along the beach. Everyone had put away a few beers; but for me the homely German brew had proved soporific rather than stimulant, and I spent most of the trip asleep. I vaguely remember that the road got worse as we went on—narrower, dustier, and strewn with huge boulders that we scraped against (agonizing noise!) as our old rattletrap jolted along. Countless vehicles of every size and shape were proceeding slowly in the same direction as ourselves; very soon we found ourselves part of a crawling column that included jeeps, buggies, old-fashioned farm carts, and large American motor cars, which slowed us down to walking pace.

It must have been midnight before we reached our destination, a small hamlet famous as the birthplace of some much-revered person who, despite his enthusiastic following among the local populace, had not (I gathered) been viewed with much favour by authority. Literally thousands of people were milling around—or, to be more precise, thousands of *men*. At first glance, apart from the absence of women, it looked like a rather crude, noisy version of some provincial European fair that was being held at night: the streets were lined with countless stalls, at which one could buy presents, gew-gaws, and food of every possible sort. But this was the merest garnishing to the main feast: the principal attraction—to which I was at once dragged off—consisted of the ‘dancing-girls’. From my friends’ obvious erotic excitement (and indeed that of every male within sight—such goatish caperings, such randy satyrs’ grins, such jerking to and fro as though in some hypnotic frenzy), I concluded that these famous dancing-girls must be something extra-special, a feast fit for a Sultan. Nothing of the sort. The truth was far more surprising. For half an hour we battled and elbowed our way through the throng; our little group endured several crises of indecision, as a result of which certain weaker vessels, overcome by invincible shyness, were left

behind chewing mutton chops till the rest of us got back. We were shoved, squeezed, squashed, lifted off our feet, engulfed in the crowd, and battered by people's heels as we scrambled up a ladder that threatened to collapse under our weight. At last we found ourselves in the threshing-yard of an old colonial-style house, where several hundred men sat in a close-packed circle (I must say, they were most polite and well-behaved) watching two girls dancing. The girls were graceful, but about as sexy as two marionettes in a puppet-theatre, and so swathed in clothes that all you could see of them was their faces, hands, and naked feet.

The courtyard was illuminated with a variety of storm-lanterns and acetylene pressure-lamps. Some mildly mournful music came drifting out from one dark corner where a huddle of drummers and flute-players was just visible. The circle of men sat there in orderly rows, not making a sound, spellbound and transfigured in a positive frenzy of concentration. Those in front were squatting on the ground, those behind were either kneeling or standing. Thus a kind of amphitheatre had been created, full of eyes that constantly swivelled round to focus on the two dancers: a banked tier of pupils and corneas, a lake of liquid glassiness, a ring of sensitized retinas. Surely *something* must be going to happen? My friends urged me forward. To tell the truth I felt a little embarrassed: so far I had not seen a single other foreigner at this fair. Accordingly I put on a pair of dark glasses, the better to mingle with the crowd. But the owner of the house at once singled me out, and with a most conspicuous display of politeness (which included some highly theatrical gestures) he cleared a space in the front row for me and my companions. On either side of us were respectable middle-aged gentlemen sporting little white goatees, and with small turbans or the astrakhan fez on their heads. Their expressions suggested the excitement induced by pent-up anticipation.

'But surely this can't be all?' I asked one of my companions.

'No, no—the fun's going to begin any moment.'

Once again hope sprang eternal in my irrepressible Latin mind, and exotic fancies buoyed me up. The soporific effect of the beer had now passed off, and I was beginning to feel that, after all, the night was still young. But the 'fun' in fact consisted of the following little game. Each man in turn took from his pocket a one-rupee note, and stuck it either in his hat, his shirt, or his ear. One of the dancers would then come up, with a smile, and do a sort of special number for him. This involved a few highly chaste undulations of her body, a flirtatious glance, and an affected little bob of the head. Then she would stretch out her hand, take the rupee, and return to the centre of the circle.

'Some people stay here the whole night,' Captain Rasul told me. 'They get through a packet of loose change that way. The rich spectators offer five- and even ten-rupee notes, just to show off.'

'They must be quite deranged,' I murmured, not sure whether the captain had caught the note of irony in my voice.

'It's a terrible thing,' Rasul agreed, completely serious. 'No man should debase himself in such a way.' Then he smiled, as though to spur himself on to be a shade more self-indulgent. 'Still, we've all got to have some fun once in a while, eh?'

'But if we're going to take a moral line about all this, why don't we look at it from the point of view of those poor girls? Fancy having all you men wanting them and despising them at the same time!'

'Oh, I don't know about that. After all, they're born to it—it's their profession. They're different from ordinary women. Anyway, what's it matter?'

Naturally I too was expected—*noblesse d'étranger oblige*—to stick a rumpled five-rupee note on my head, a gesture which stirred a ripple of light-hearted approval from all quarters, and made a pleasant breach in the usual tiresome barriers that always exist between people from different backgrounds. The dancing-girl approached me, dancing slowly and with charming gracefulness to the rhythms of that sad, nostalgic music. Her face was pale, and almost hidden by strings of gilded coins. Her eyes stared into mine without the faintest flicker of sexuality, rather with the natural inquisitiveness of any peasant girl up from the country. She took the five rupees and passed them to an old woman sitting by the musicians, who looked as though she was the girls' employer.

'Do they go on like this all night?' I asked Captain Rasul.

'Indeed they do.'

'And people trek for miles over these ghastly dusty roads just in order to watch them?'

'That's right.'

'But look, Captain Rasul,' I said, 'what about, well, *later*? Doesn't the richest man present, the one who's put most rupees on his head, get the chance to, ah, spend a little time *alone* with one of the dancers?'

'Good heavens, *no*. Never.'

I wasn't quite sure whether the gallant captain's vehement denial represented the truth, or was merely another instance of habitual Moslem puritanism. I must confess, though, that he seemed absolutely convinced and sincere at the time.

About two in the morning we decided to leave the fair. By then we had visited three or four other houses where dancers were performing in the middle of a crowded circle of men: the setting was identical in every instance, and the 'fun' always followed the same pattern. There must have been dozens of dancing-girls there that night.

As we were walking through the village, back to where we had left our car, we noticed an isolated booth with another jam-packed male audience

surrounding it. In the midst of them, on an illuminated dais, a tall, slender figure was dancing with the most voluptuous abandon. Those watching seemed transfigured, mystically almost, by the spell of their inflamed senses. I could have gone round removing their wallets from their pockets, and not one of them would have noticed. I took a more careful look: the figure was partially nude.

'Captain Rasul,' I said, laughing, 'what do you mean by keeping the most spicy entertainment hidden away from us, eh?'

The Captain grabbed me by my coat and hurriedly pulled me away. 'Come on,' he muttered, 'this is quite horrible, we shouldn't be watching, let's go home—'

This really aroused my curiosity: I stared hard at the dancing figure. It was not a woman, but an adolescent boy.

*

Silvio and I left Rawalpindi first thing in the morning, by car, for Peshawar. The distance was something over a hundred miles, and our road lay through flat or gently undulating countryside, barren and treeless. Looking at the map, I saw that there were only two points at which the landscape might take on a bolder, more picturesque appearance: by the Margalla Hills, where we cut across a spur of the Himalayas running out into the plain; and at the Attock Gorge, through which the waters of the Indus flow.

But the whole region was, to say the least of it, soaked in history. Every stone, had it possessed the gift of speech, could have told us tales—both familiar and forgotten—of armies and invasions, of monarchies both benevolent and despotic, of flights, disasters, and triumphs; could have recalled, too, the faces and expressions and moods of the countless pedlars, pilgrims, kings, bandits, hermits, merchants, robbers, mountebanks, jugglers, fortune-tellers, courtiers and saints who, century after century, had passed like shadows across these dusty hills. The plains between Rawalpindi and Peshawar could, likewise, tell of the shores on which down the ages successive waves of humanity had broken—now advancing threateningly on India (waves of Vedic invaders, Persian waves, a tidal flow of Greeks, Scythians, Parthians, Kushans, Turks and Afghans), now surging back towards the mountains of Arachosia and Bactria (waves of Mauryas, Guptas, Hindu-shahiyas, Moguls, Sikhs, Britons). Here all these ideas, religions, cultures and customs had met; here all that remained of them lay buried—an infusion, a geode of Asia and Europe, India and Tartary.

When we left the last houses of Rawalpindi behind us the sun had only just risen, and the air blew fresh and clean off the fields through the windows of our car. If we passed close to a group of trees by the wayside they still seemed to have a breath of the cool night breeze lingering about them:

we inhaled deeply, relishing the coolness, the scent of herbs. As we drove on across the plain we saw few fields under cultivation; such villages as we passed were scattered and ashen-coloured in the morning light.

After about twelve or thirteen miles we could see the famous spur ahead of us; it ran straight out from the mountains, dividing the plain in two, like the upturned keel of some gigantic boat. The road began to climb its flank towards the tiny Margalla Pass, a narrow gorge running between two sheer walls of rock. Olaf Caroe, who wrote the history of the Pathans, remarks with some justice that this insignificant pass constitutes the true and final frontier between the land-masses of India and Iran—considering these in their broadest historical, anthropological and cultural sense.¹ It was no accident that here, or very little farther on, Darius I reached the extreme limit of his conquering advance; no accident, either, that the Brahmins of antiquity enjoined those who had set foot on the impure soil of Gandhara, befouled by invading *Yavana* (i.e. Ionians or Greeks), to perform ritual purifications. 'Do you realize,' I asked Silvio, 'that we are passing through what was for thousands of years the only door in the most impenetrable ideological frontier known to man?'

We stopped the car for a moment to take some photographs, and found a monument with an inscription commemorating John Nicholson, one of the most famous pioneers in the heroic early days of the Frontier, who died in his thirties, at Delhi, murdered by insurgents during the Indian Mutiny of 1857—at least, the British refer to it as the Indian Mutiny, but Indians and Pakistanis prefer the title of 'the first war of independence'. What an evocative sight that tall pillar was, standing there among dry, withered bushes at the head of the lonely pass, with the sun beating so fiercely down on it! Strange and sad is the fate that lies in store for all heroes, suspended between the adoration of one faction, the execration of the other, and, ultimately, the likelihood of universal oblivion. Today they are paladins: tomorrow, usurpers. All that remains in the end (perhaps a truer guide than most) is the evidence for one man's life; his *personality*, complete with those idiosyncratic features, the dreams, the ambitions, that made him what he was. For the British, General Nicholson was a myth. He was compared to Nelson in the rich, rhetorical prose of Macaulay and the torrential, messianic periods of Carlyle. They called him 'the Lion of the Punjab' and used the most extravagant similes to describe him—the mildest of which likened him to a meteor flashing across the sky of history. He appears to have been a tall man, black of beard and hair and eye, pale-complexioned, stern, irascible, proud: dedicated with missionary fervour to the profession of arms. Perhaps, since he was an Ulsterman, he was living out a martial version of the Celtic dream-fantasy rather than pursuing the more solidly bourgeois Anglo-Saxon virtues

¹ Olaf Caroe, *The Pathans* (London, 1958), p. 49.

associated with imperial rule. But he was the right man to understand the warlike Frontier tribesmen—and he was the sort of person whom they could understand in their turn. It appears to be a well-documented fact that there existed in his time a local religious sect known as the 'Nikalsaini', whose members revered the British officer as a god incarnate.

It is hard to imagine just what it meant to fight guerilla campaigns across this sun-scorched terrain in 1850, when the voyage out from England still took months: the sense of complete isolation, the absence of motorized transport, the constant pressure on all sides from strong and elusive enemy forces. Each of these pioneers must have re-enacted, to some extent, the epic achievements of Alexander the Great.

*

When Persia and all the domains of the Achaemenids, of the King of Kings himself, were in Alexander's hands and more or less subjugated, his only remaining task was to explore (or reconquer) the satrapies which lay beyond the vast mountains of the Hindu Kush—the Indian provinces, in fact. The King of Asia's royal authority must be carried thither as well. Alexander's notions concerning the shape and extent of this land called Asia over which he reigned were vague in the extreme. He thought—as did many of his contemporaries—that not far beyond India lay that Ocean which was supposed to girdle the earth. Was this, then, the same Ocean that he had already glimpsed from the mountains of Hyrcania, and which we know as the Caspian Sea? In any event he was eager to reach the main stream of Ocean, and know the farthest bounds of his kingdom in Asia.

It was the year 327 B.C. The preparations for the Indian expedition had been completed at his base camp in Bactria, and Alexander set out. His army of forty thousand fighting men was accompanied by at least as many non-combatant auxiliaries and camp-followers, of either sex: wives and children, concubines, slaves, artisans of every description, seamen and ships' carpenters to facilitate the exploration of Ocean, poets (the ambassadors-extraordinary of those times) and philosophers, technicians and traders, merchants and seers. This whole vast horde successfully crossed the rocky, forest-clad valleys of the Hindu Kush, battling in turn with the adversities of primordial nature and the local tribesmen, barbarians who made up in courage what they lacked in organization.

Then, quite suddenly, round a bend in the valley there appeared an unlooked-for and most extraordinary sight: a small army of vigorous young warriors, bristling with weapons, some on horse, some on foot, and in front of them twenty-five elephants—fabulous beasts indeed. This was King Ambhi of Taxila, who had come in solemn procession to salute the King of Asia, the new Achaemenid, and offer him the domains of Taxila in fealty and

allegiance. When his first feeling of pleasant surprise wore off, Alexander discovered that King Ambhi was as crafty as he was obliging. What in fact he wanted was that Alexander should lend him some troops and help in the final discomfiture of his rival, King Porus, whose domains extended (as it happened) over the region Alexander was approaching, i.e. the Punjab. . . . One can picture the scene: on the one side the Greek and Persian veterans, bearded, sweat-stained, savage-tempered after days of forced marching over the rocks and ravines of the Hindu Kush, hungry, tired, burnt black by the sun, drained of all energy, their sick and wounded borne behind them—and on the other, all the wealth of India, the painted and caparisoned elephants, the royal messengers bearing flowers and crowns, King Ambhi himself, lolling among slaves and peacock fans.

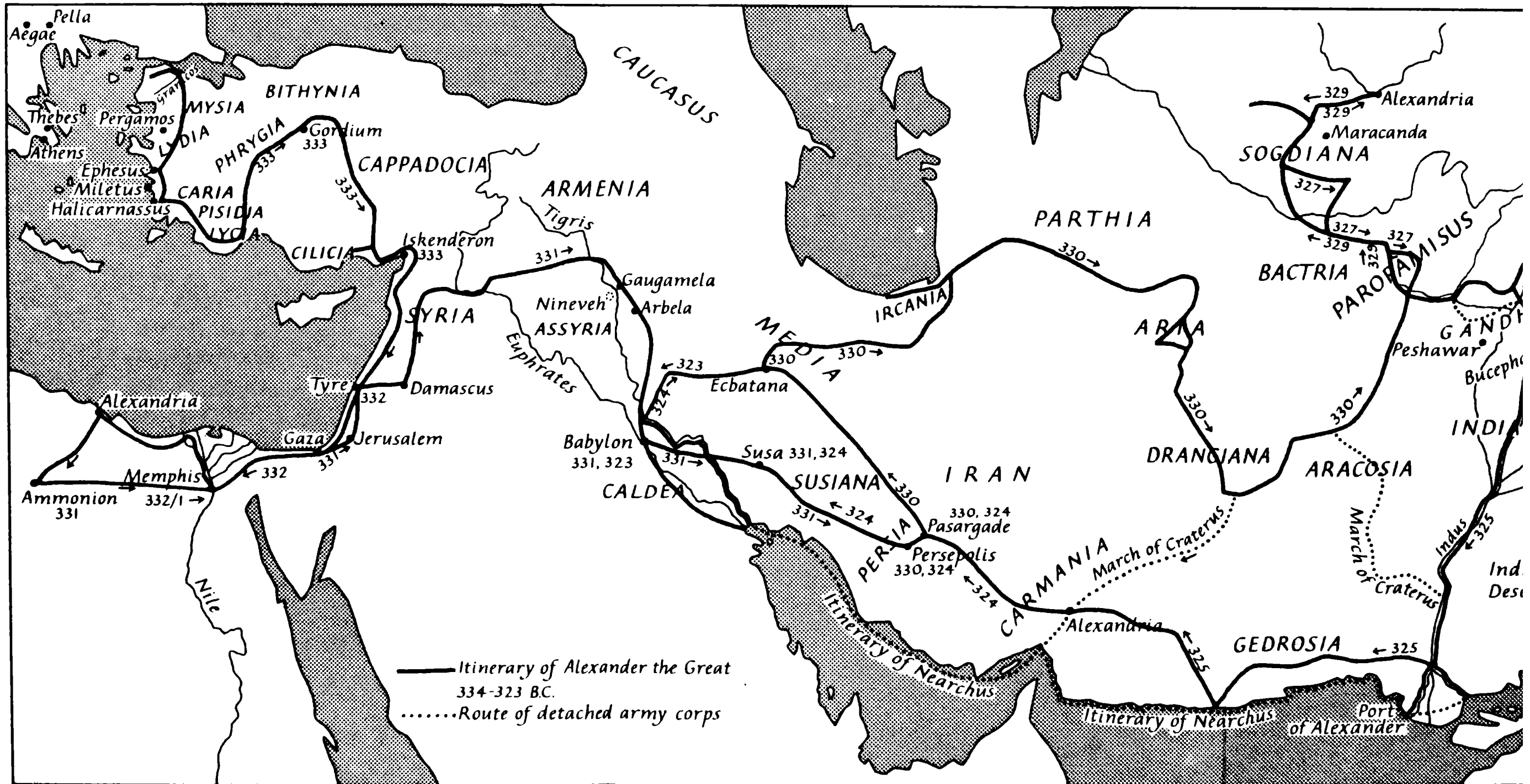
Yet even with the King of Taxila's unstinted help, the invasion of India remained a slow and chancy business, full of obstacles. The mountain tribes were then, as they are today, extremely jealous of their independence. Left to themselves, they fought savagely with one another; but if some foreign foe appeared, they at once allied themselves into virtually undefeatable guerilla bands. Alexander divided his vast column into two separate expeditionary forces. His general and friend Hephaestion, together with the auxiliaries and the least fit troops, set off by a direct route, parallel to and slightly north of the Kabul River, with the object of constructing a bridge of boats for the crossing into India. The King himself, with the pick of his best men, took a more northerly route, over high mountains and through fertile valleys rich in meadow and woodland, into the territory of the Aspasiens, the Guraeans, and the Assaceniens. In successive engagements he stormed a whole series of fortresses: the fall of Massaga was followed by a most brutal massacre. Eventually the two columns joined once more, and advanced into India.

Silvio asked me whether we should follow Alexander's route in our journey to Chitral. I told him it seemed very likely. The route followed by Alexander and his army will always remain, in the last resort, a matter for conjecture; but now that the ancient evidence has been gone over so thoroughly by scholars such as Aurel Stein and Olaf Caroe, who know every inch of the terrain at first hand, a much clearer picture is beginning to emerge. Even the names that have come down to us reveal some useful facts. The Aspasiens are connected with the Iranian word *aspa*, meaning a horse. The Assaceniens suggest a Sanskrit term, *asva*, which also means 'horse'. It follows that the true frontier of the Indian and Iranian world must have run between the two. The ancient authors embellish their account of the capture of Massaga, the Assaceniens' capital, with some highly romanticized incidental details. According to one version, the beleaguered forces within the city decided to surrender when they saw the Greek siege-engines. The gates of the fortress

were thrown open, and out came a procession of women, with the Queen—a most beautiful creature—at their head. Being as shrewd as she was lovely, she felt certain that by appearing thus, unarmed and without protection or escort, she would make a great impression on her conqueror; and in fact Alexander was so enchanted by her that he forgave these rude mountain tribesmen for having opposed his advance. The Assacenic battleground, indeed, now shifted from the fortress to the King's bed: with such effect that the chroniclers demurely record the birth, some time later, of a small Graeco-Assacenic Alexander, which might be taken as the best possible contribution to a policy of racial fusion.

Having invaded India, the Greeks spent some while at Taxila; and it is here that Alexander must have first become aware that he had set foot in a new, alien, incomprehensible world which could not be translated into any terms he knew. Persia might, at a pinch, be viewed through Greek eyes, a blown-up, exaggerated version of Greek notions taken to the ultimate extreme; but India was at once elusive, shattering, and monstrous, a constant challenge to every intellectual assumption and familiar emotional attitude. Yet Alexander's overriding desire was to search for traces of Dionysus's mythical journey through these far-off lands! The Indian gods, Brahminic philosophy and ritual, the naked ascetics who despised all civilized refinement, the weird costumes, the social stratifications of the caste system—all these things disturbed and disgusted him. What he finally came to feel was not fear, exactly, but an obscure sort of repulsion. It is no accident that the battles of his Indian campaign were the most bloody and bestial of any in the whole Grand Adventure: a classic instance is the engagement he fought on the banks of the Hydaspes (the present-day Jhelum) against the forces of King Porus, at the height of the rainy season, a battle which ended as a horrible confused mess of men, horses and elephants, struggling between marsh and quagmire, with the jungle before them and the flooded river at their backs.

In India Alexander did not fight simply in order to win: his object was total annihilation. Perhaps that is why the Indian tradition, as though in revenge, has completely forgotten his name. Alexander survives in India only as the monster called 'Skanda', with which mothers threaten their over-fractious children. Yet, odd though it may seem, it was his own men who finally put a stop to his ambitions. When the column had got some way beyond the present-day area of Lahore, and had reached a tributary of the Sutlej—the last river in the Punjab—the troops threatened to mutiny. Alexander had the whole army paraded, and delivered a powerful oration on the theme of world empire, with glory for every individual soldier. He cited the examples of Hercules and Dionysus, Achilles and Zeus, but all in vain. Finally he conceded defeat and let them turn about for the march home.



Eight long years had passed since his forces disembarked near Troy—the fourth part of a man's expectation of life in those times, the equivalent of sixteen years today. Even so, it took more than another year to get back home—or, more precisely, to Susa. The army embarked in boats and sailed down the Indus, stopping on the way to fight an engagement with the Mallians, which proved the most desperately close-run struggle of them all. Alexander himself was struck by an arrow which pierced one lung. Before they reached the sea, the least fit units turned off towards the Mediterranean along a route which led over the mountains of Arachosia. In the end Alexander and the rest struck the coast at a point not far from the site of present-day Karachi. There his forces were once again divided into two brigades. The fleet, commanded by Nearchus, made its way round the Persian Gulf, while Alexander, together with a picked body of men, set off across the Gedrosian Desert—hour after hour of that wrinkled, yellowish crust, all seamed and cracked, a wilderness of sand and splintered rock, without houses, roads, or any sign of life.

Looking down on that desert from the air, I found it more than understandable that Alexander and his men, having managed to struggle through such an inferno, were tempted to indulge in a certain amount of high jinks afterwards. Plutarch, with somewhat scant critical judgement, records a story put into circulation by Alexander's many contemporary enemies—that of the 'travelling orgy'. According to this tale, Alexander and his officers spent a week riding round the countryside of Carmania in big open carriages, drawn by teams of horses, with leafy branches spread above them to keep off the sun, and flowers galore for them to feast their eyes on, drinking, eating, singing, in all likelihood making love to exotic courtesans, lolling back on fine cushions and rare draperies, more or less permanently inebriated, and lulled to sleep by the music of flutes and pipes. The rank and file followed on behind, like their leaders, refreshing themselves when so inclined from capacious wineskins carried aboard the wagons. It seemed as though Dionysus himself had come down in person to celebrate with the survivors of so glorious an enterprise.

But the story does not end there; one final episode still remains to be told—historical this time, not legendary, an episode of great pomp and splendour which, at the same time, contained deep poetic value and the most moving symbolical significance. It took place at Susa, where Alexander's successful conquests were being celebrated. Nine thousand guests had been invited by the King, for five days and night, of continuous feasting. The principal event was a multiple 'marriage of Europe and Asia'. Thousands of officers and men from Alexander's forces, both Macedonian and Greek, took Persian women as their brides. Alexander himself, who had already married Roxana, now opened the proceedings by taking, as his second wife, the elder daughter of Darius.

In form and incidental detail, it is true, this occasion reflects the less creditable side of Alexander's character: his theatrical passion for anything that went beyond all accepted bounds, his need to shock and impress the entire world. But the true essence of the ceremony (as of all his acts henceforth) was the grand dream he cherished of a lasting, intimate, and solemn brotherhood of all men—at first within the boundaries of his empire, but later, perhaps, to be extended until it embraced the entire world. This is Alexander's great redeeming feature, the thing which lifts him head and shoulders above his contemporaries. When one reflects that even a mind so unbelievably clear and subtle as that of Aristotle (who created a universe that was to dominate man's attitude to knowledge for two thousand years) did not succeed in rising above the old tribal concepts of Greek and non-Greek, Hellene and barbarian, then Alexander's original genius shines forth in truly sun-like splendour. He had, it is true, found the seeds of this vision in the Achaemenid concept of monarchy, which saw the sovereign as representing, on earth, all powers for good working in the name of Ahura-Mazda; but in him the flower came to full fruition—and its scent and savour were Greek. It is from him, in the last analysis, that derive those fundamental notions which reappear in Augustus's concept of universal sovereignty, in Charlemagne, and so on down to the United Nations in our own day: the dream of a world that will succeed in reconciling its dissident factions peacefully, by the authority of one overriding law to which all nations subscribe.

Unhappily, Alexander died very shortly afterwards, in Babylon, stricken down by a common-or-garden fever. His great work remained incomplete: only the first phase, that of conquest, had been achieved. Its essential sequel—the process of amalgamation between Europe and Asia—was soon lost to view behind the vast ramparts of pride and prejudice (national, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious) which, then as today, were legion.



By now we were approaching Taxila. But instead of chiliarchs and hipparchs, elephants and horsemen wielding the *sarissa*, the terrible Macedonian pike, all we could see were a few ramshackle petrol pumps and sordid little shops. Here and there an old man, half prostrate with the heat, sat on a doorstep staring into space.

We drove through the modern village, and stopped on the far side: somewhere hereabouts were the remains of three successive ancient cities. We got out of the car and began to wander about in search of them. First in chronological order there was Bhir, the city of the Achaemenid period, of Alexander's brief overlordship, and of the Maurya Emperors (sixth–first century B.C.). A short distance away stands Sirkap, the city built by the Graeco-Indian kings, later rebuilt and occupied successively by the Scy-

thians, the Parthians, and the Kushans (second century B.C.—second century A.D.); and then there is Sirsukh, constructed during the first century A.D. by the Kushans. The remains of these cities, taken all in all, are not particularly impressive, especially if one compares them with the grandiose ruins of Baalbek or—to take an example known to me personally—Angkor Vat. A sceptic might dismiss them merely as ‘archaeological ruins’, since they consist for the most part of walls and ramparts, or outer perimeters which you have to look for on the map. Yet, plodding through the sites with the assistance of John Marshall’s wonderfully lucid monograph, it is possible to conjure up at least some pale shadow of what was, after all, one of the greatest cities of ancient Asia. Taxila (in its successive avatars of Bhir, Sirkap, and Sirsukh) was one of the great cosmopolitan metropolises of Asia, a vast market where Roman glass could be traded for Chinese silk, the furs of the barbarous northern ‘Hyperboreans’ for jewels from the kingdom of Taprobane, the modern Ceylon. It was also, of course, a famous centre of university studies, famed for both its philosophical and its medical schools.

Of the three cities, by far the most interesting is Sirkap, which preserves—embedded in the very heart of Asia—a characteristically Greek plan, of a highly civilized nature. Part of its ground-plan can be seen without difficulty in the checkerboard pattern of streets criss-crossing the bottom of a small valley: the surrounding hills were used as a foundation for defence-works; they contained also numerous small torrents which helped to supply the city with water. Nearby there stands an isolated hill on which Sirkap’s builders constructed their acropolis. The total circumference of the walls is rather more than three miles.

Today Sirkap’s only inhabitants are a few skinny goats and the barefoot boys who drive them out to pasture on the withered grass patches among the ruins. Yet once upon a time those solidly paved roads (somewhat reminiscent of Pompeii) must have been trodden continually by an animated, motley, colourful throng, in which Indians from the plains rubbed shoulders with tribesmen from the nearby hills, Greeks mingled with Scythians, Persians with Syrians, and men from Palmyra met such outlandish folk as the Malians or Bactrians, or Soghdians, or Arachosians and Assacenians, or even the Pacticans mentioned by Herodotus, who were probably the ancestors of the present-day Pathans. Perhaps the occasional Roman merchant might have been seen here too, or some Chinese caravan-leader who had travelled from the distant frontiers of the Han Empire: there is no reason to suppose that the two did not meet—perhaps in the very shadow of the great Buddhist *stupa* with its famous two-headed eagle—to discuss, through interpreters, the exchange of a length of fine, sweet-smelling material (destined for some matron on the Palatine) for a set of pellucid, iridescent glasses that would find their way to the ladies of Ch’ang-an or Lo-yang.

Generally speaking, the shops must have been packed with the most extraordinarily varied merchandise, from every quarter of the known world. Rich Buddhists could purchase tiny reliquaries, worked in precious metals and decorated with Cupids and looped flower-garland motifs in the finest Roman style. The wives and daughters of Greek officers could find an array of brooches, pendants, armlets, diadems, necklaces, bracelets, clasps, trinkets, perhaps also hand-painted jars and other such luxuries, all imported from the distant, fabulous world of the Mediterranean, about which they might have heard their grandfathers tell stories, but which they had certainly never visited themselves. A northern barbarian could hold in the palm of his coarse, calloused hand (rough from the reins after years of riding) jewels that shone like drops of pure tinted light—a ruby, a sapphire, an aquamarine, all quarried from the smoke-blue mountains of the South. Travellers from Europe would go back home with carved pectorals or ivory statuettes, wrought with delicate skill and sensuous charm by craftsmen of Mathura. Devotees of learning could purchase works composed in the most diverse languages: perhaps the works of Plato and Pythagoras, Aeschylus and Euclid stood there cheek-by-jowl with those in the Buddhist canon; perhaps esoteric Egyptian tracts stood on the same shelf as the Zoroastrian liturgy; perhaps mythical and erotic romances from Alexandria mingled with collections of Indian folk-tales, or Aramaic scribal handbooks, or instructional treatises for Chinese administrators.

Meanwhile, in the street outside, Buddhist bonzes would rub shoulders with Zoroastrian magi, and Hindu Brahmins with Jain gymnosophists. A Syrian Neo-Platonist philosopher might derive considerable pleasure from watching some Greek Seleucid ambassador pass by with his train of attendants—accredited to the court of a Maurya Emperor. At a later period Manichaean *perfecti* and Nestorian bishops would also have been in evidence. It was an ultra-cosmopolitan world not only in its essential nature, but—with gay emphasis—in its outward appearance: all the passers-by whether in their costume, the way they dressed their hair, or the type of necklaces or armlets they wore, revealed something of the region they hailed from. Even St. Thomas the Apostle, according to the apocryphal Book of Acts, visited Taxila during the reign of the Parthian king Gondofarres; and though his adventures may be legendary, the presence of Christians in Gandhara (among the adherents of so many other faiths) is proved by the fact that a statuette of St. Peter was discovered a few years ago in the ruins of Charsadda, near Peshawar.

But then so many odd things happened in this part of the world! Perhaps one fine day in the first century A.D. the inhabitants of Taxila saw a small caravan come into town with two men at the head of it: one a most striking figure, tall, handsome, with long blond hair rippling down over his shoulders,

wearing a white linen robe; the other somewhat younger, with the air of one who—torn continually between joy and apprehension—follows in the steps of a beloved master. Here were two of the most extraordinary characters known to the ancient world: Apollonius of Tyana and his disciple Damis. Apollonius has been described as 'the pagans' Christ': a sage, a prophet, a seer, a magician, an 'apostle of the Gentiles'. On good evidence we know that he was a neo-Pythagorean philosopher, an ascetic, a vegetarian, a healer and exorcizer, who predicted the advent of universal love among mankind. Apuleius regarded him—together with Moses and Zoroaster—as one of the rarest spirits humanity had known; one of the Roman Emperors kept his image (together with those of Abraham, Christ, and Orpheus) among the Imperial Lares. What little we know about his life has come down to us in a highly romanticized biography, the product of Gnosticism in its decline, put together by Philostratus at the beginning of the third century A.D. for Julia Domna, the cultured wife of the Emperor Septimius Severus. This aristocratic lady, besides being a great patroness of writers and philosophers, was always passionately seeking fresh material for her esoteric studies in the fields of spiritualism, theosophy and the like. Philostratus decided to give her what she wanted. In those last days of pagan Rome, Gnosticism, crypto-Christianity and mystery-mongering generally were all the rage. Well-bred ladies sat ecstatically at the feet of sages and quacks, prophets and diviners; and the heroic deaths of the early martyrs became inextricably confused with an all-prevailing atmosphere of orgiastic cult-practices. It was strange indeed to catch an echo of all this at Taxila, deep in the heart of a land that had once been Buddhist and now adhered to Islam.

From Rome we must turn our attention to a civilization at the other extremity of the ancient world—China. If Taxila formed a distant goal for the philosopher-pilgrims, the seekers after wisdom from the Graeco-Roman world, it was considered in a similar light by men who had been reared in a very different religious and ideological tradition, and who came thither from a diametrically opposite direction. Buddhism, which was born in India, gradually spread over the plains at the foot of the Himalayas (reaching Taxila in the process); then it was carried over the Hindu Kush by Asoka, and further disseminated in central Asia by the Kushan kings. In the end it outflanked the vast range of the Tibetan mountains, and advanced—protected by the Himalayas, the Hindu Kush massif, and other similar bastions from Karakoram to Kunlun—till it reached China, where the Wei Dynasty propagated it with sedulous enthusiasm. The universality of its message was a vital factor in the diffusion of the Buddhist faith; the Wei kings, who were of barbarian origin, found it a useful spiritual weapon with which to combat the Confucian or Taoist sages who dominated the culture and the lives of their subject peoples. During the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. Buddhism

took root and flourished vigorously in the region south of the Great Wall.

It was now that Chinese Buddhists began to feel the time had come to consider the origins of their creed rather more closely. Large numbers of monks undertook pilgrimages (which, bearing in mind what travelling conditions were like in those days, must be regarded as a highly heroic enterprise) to the Holy Land of Buddhism, the region between India and Nepal. Some of these monks have acquired lasting fame because they happened to write detailed accounts of the journeys they undertook in search of relics, sacred texts, and other evidence relating to the Buddha. Three of the best-known also visited Taxila. About 400 A.D. Fa-Hsien passed that way. The city must still have been an important centre of both trade and learning then; but a few years later hordes of White Huns began to pour down from the mountains, fierce destructive barbarians who took an especial pleasure in butchering bonzes and sacking monasteries. A century later (about A.D. 520), when the pilgrim Sung Yun passed through Taxila, its past splendours had vanished. The last and most famous of these Chinese travellers, Hsüan Tsang (who arrived in 630), found nothing but a heap of pitiable ruins and abandoned monasteries. The whole place was falling into decay, a scene of desolation that wrung the heart.

The sack of Taxila by the White Huns, and the various barbarian invasions of Europe, all form part of the same vast historical phenomenon. It seems very unlikely that the Chinese Emperor Shih Huang-Ti, who was responsible for completing the Great Wall in the third century B.C., had any idea that by so doing he would contribute to the downfall of an unknown empire much like his—that of Rome. Yet it was precisely this barrier which, by halting the eastward movement of those nomadic hordes in central Asia, turned wave upon wave of migrants back towards the West, thus bringing about the invasions of India, Persia, and, eventually, Europe. So the Roman Empire went under, while the Flower Empire of the Golden Mean continued, despite frequent setbacks, to expand and develop. The apogee of splendour and civilization in China ('Augustan China', as the period of the T'ang Dynasty has been termed) corresponds exactly with the worst of the Dark Ages in the West.

'If I understand you aright,' Silvio said after we had discussed all this, 'Taxila flourished as a city for something like a thousand years.'

'So the archaeologists tell us: from the sixth century B.C., when it was founded (or, at least, when it became an important centre) under the satraps of Darius I, to the fifth century A.D., when its destruction was begun by the people whom the Chinese called the Ye-tha, the Byzantines referred to as Ephthalites, and the Indians knew as White Huns.'

We visited the remains of a Buddhist monastery that dated back, in all

likelihood, to the second century A.D. Our guide, a turbaned and moustachioed person of considerable girth, put me in mind of a *malik*, or guerilla leader, and caused us both considerable uneasiness by indicating in the most peremptory fashion the route we were to follow, from cell to cell, cloister to cloister, and *stupa* to *stupa*. Only the walls of the monastery were still left standing, but from their arrangement we could get a fair idea of the sheltered peace, beauty, and tranquillity the place must have enjoyed in bygone ages. All that could be seen of the outside world was a few peaks of pale grey sandstone which marked the summit of the surrounding hills. Among the rocks there grew trees with fine, pale green foliage. At one point in our tour of inspection a lattice gate was opened, and we found ourselves confronted with a whole range of superb stucco sculptures, only recently excavated: they had escaped the iconoclastic fury of fanatical Moslems at a period rather closer to our own solely because, being buried, they were fortunately invisible.

‘Look,’ said Silvio, making for one work that stood out from the wall in high relief, ‘Apollo with a halo!’

‘Not Apollo,’ I told him. ‘That’s Buddha—a Greek Buddha, Buddha seen through Greek eyes, the image of Apollo transfigured by the spirit of a new and unimaginably remote faith.’

‘Then there were Greek Buddhists?’

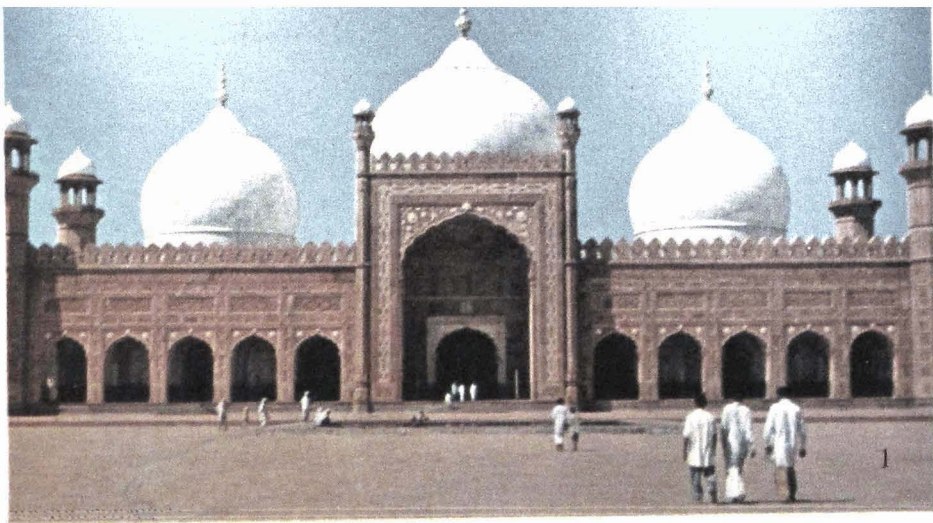
‘It seems quite probable. The trouble is, the whole subject is wrapped in mystery—well, three-quarters of it, anyway; and even the remaining quarter is mostly guesswork. With so intensely interesting a phenomenon, this is irksome, to say the least of it. There are very few points that have been properly cleared up—a wretched harvest after years of work. But the one fundamental and unassailable fact is that for many centuries there existed a flourishing school of art—confirmed by literally thousands of artifacts scattered round the world in every museum and innumerable private collections—which reveals the adaptation of the Graeco-Roman style to a Buddhist outlook. In other words, what we have is “the Buddhist legend expressed in formally Graeco-Roman terms.” This art originated in Gandhara, and flourished there for some seven or eight centuries, certainly from the first century B.C. to the sixth century A.D., though in certain areas it survived even longer. Gandhara is, in any event, a somewhat ill-defined area; its centre is located in the plains of Peshawar, but at some periods it has extended as far as Taxila and the surrounding mountain valleys. “Gandhara” was here once.’

What Alexander and his followers did was to open up a trade-route between Gandhara and the Mediterranean, and for centuries the two worlds maintained an active exchange of goods and ideas. It may well be that the first Greeks whose works had any impact on this part of Asia were political

exiles from the cities of Asia Minor—Ephesus, Miletus, Halicarnassus. If a man was a nuisance to the secret police maintained by Cyrus and Darius they would pack him off to a Siberia they called Bactria, at the foot of the Hindu Kush. Then came the episode of Alexander's invasion. Here we can see another wave of Greek influence at work. But quite apart from this, we should never forget the enormous centrifugal energy possessed by any civilization which is, relatively speaking, superior to those surrounding it. With its combination of artistic elegance and humanism, Hellenic culture proved almost magically irresistible. Today it is no longer presumed that the disseminators of Hellenism were necessarily themselves Greek: they might often be Hellenized Syrians, Egyptians, Iranians, Scythians, or Parthians. By destroying the Achaemenid Empire in Persia, Alexander and his followers had created a political vacuum, and this vacuum had soon attracted invaders from the steppes of central Asia. It was these very invaders who—lacking any alternative cultural values of their own—were most easily influenced by the spread of Greek culture.

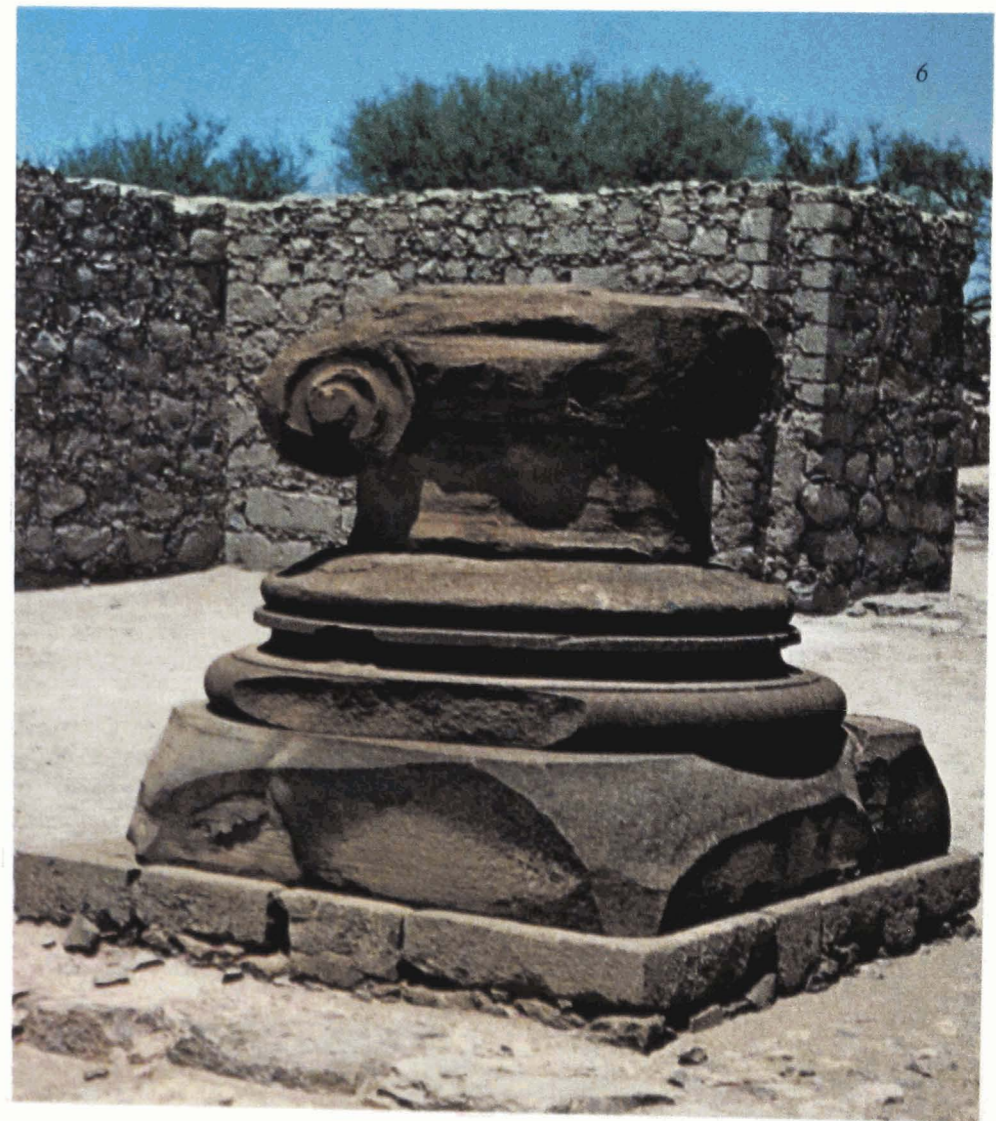
Direct Macedonian rule in Taxila was of very brief duration, perhaps less than ten years, certainly not more than twenty. There followed a vigorous Indian resurgence under the Maurya Emperors, who pushed the frontiers of the Iranian world back well beyond the Khyber Pass, into the very heart of Afghanistan. There has recently been unearthed, not far from Kandahar, an inscription dating from the reign of the great King Asoka (third century B.C.), who did for Buddhism what Constantine did for Christianity; it is carved in two languages which were patently amongst the most important known to North-West India at the time—Aramaic and Greek. We may conclude that not only did important groups of *Yavana* (Greeks) form part of the Maurya Empire, but that the cultural heritage they brought with them was flourishing and influential.

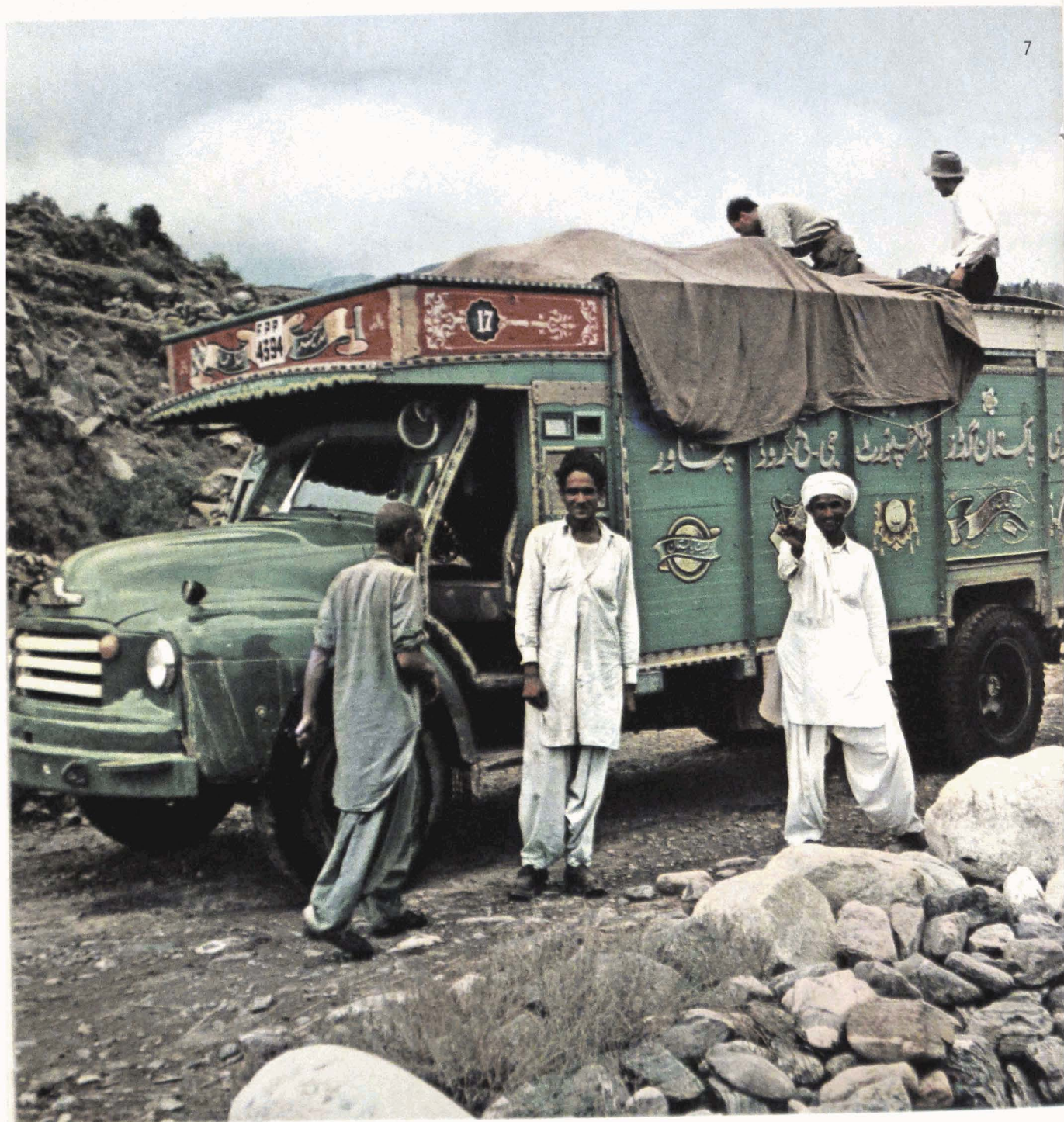
Meanwhile Alexander's empire had been dismembered and distributed first to the Diadochi, or 'Successors', and after them to the Epigoni, or 'Second Generation'. Some of these, with their garrison troops and small civilian colonies, had found themselves virtually isolated, far from home, in the very heart of Asia—Bactria. Here, somewhere around 250 B.C., the satrap Diodotus founded what might be described as a Greek state—at least as far as the governing class, rather than the population as a whole, was concerned. It lasted for over a century. Moreover, since Bactria was an arid and on the whole poverty-stricken country, its kings were constantly drawn by the lure of the South, where lay the lands of Gandhara—Greek by right of conquest since Alexander's day. The fourth sovereign in this dynasty did, in fact, set out to reconquer the Indian satrapies. So very soon we find, not only in Gandhara itself but also farther east, Greek states ruled over by kings or viceroys whose names have a decidedly Mediterranean flavour about



1: The Royal Mosque at Lahore, built by order of the Emperor Aurangzeb (17th cent.)
2,3: Lahore: the Shalimar Gardens, which date from the time of the Emperor Shah Jahan (first half of the 17th cent.)

4: Statue of meditating mystic from Gandhara (N. W. India) —
2/3rd cent. A. D. — reveals a typically Hellenistic pose
5: Fusion in statue-heads of the Apollonian and Buddhist iconography
6: One Ionic capital is all that survives of the Greek temple at Taxila





7: Motor-bus in the Hindu Kush

them. Those who ruled in Taxila between 180 and 100 B.C. were Demetrius, Pantaleon, Agathocles, Apollodorus, Menander, Strato, Eliocles, Lysias, Antialcides, Archebius. We have numerous specimens of the coinage issued by these Greek kings in Bactria—some of the most magnificent coins, in fact, from the entire ancient world. On their faces are portraits of Diodotus, Euthydemus, Demetrius, and so on; the obverse has deities such as Zeus, Heracles, Apollo or Athena. This suggests that we are still dealing with an uncontaminated Hellenistic tradition. But a few decades later we find Menander—by far the greatest of these Graeco-Indian monarchs—appearing as a character in a famous Sanskrit work, the *Milinda-Pañha*, or ‘Questions of Milinda’, where he interrogates the monk Nagasena concerning Buddhism. If he was not himself a Buddhist it is fairly clear that he must have protected Buddhism. Here—as was to happen at a later date in China, under the Wei—the supra-national character of Buddhism proved a strong attraction to a foreign dynasty. Brahminic Hinduism, being directly bound up with Indian culture, language, literature, tended to be hostile to all alien or external influences.

After the three main waves of Greek infiltration—the political exiles, Alexander’s invasion (spectacular, though with little immediate influence), and the Graeco-Indian monarchy, which lasted for most of the second century—we come to the first century B.C. This was an epoch during which successive waves of semi-barbarous tribesmen poured down from the north to invade Gandhara—people who had nothing in common save the fact that they all spoke an Indo-European language: Scythians, Parthians, Kushans. Any of them who stayed for an appreciable time in Iranian territory—especially in Bactria—tended to acquire a top-dressing of civilization. Now ‘civilization’, in that place and age, meant, above all, Hellenic culture. Barbarians who became civilized did so in the Greek manner. Amongst these various groups of barbarians it was the Kushans who scored the most striking success, and indeed founded a notable empire, which survived for a century and a half, till about A.D. 230. Their great king Kanishka, who favoured an active trade relationship with Rome, regarded himself as one of the mightiest sovereigns in the world. His successor, Kanishka II, embellished his name with the following titles: Maharajah, or ‘Great King’, as in India; Rajatirajah, or ‘King of Kings’, as in Persia; Devaputra, or ‘Son of God’, i.e. Son of Heaven, as in China; and Kaisara, or ‘Caesar’, as in Rome.

For a short period the Kushan empire was, in fact, one of the biggest in Asia; it extended from the headwaters of the Indus to the Aral Sea in central Asia, from eastern Persia to the Ganges Valley. It was under the great Kanishka and his successors that Gandhara’s first important period of Graeco-Buddhist art flourished. Yet about four centuries had passed since Alexander’s death, and a good many decades since the last of the Graeco-Indian kings.

Here, one is confronted with a quite extraordinary phenomenon: Greek—or more accurately Graeco-Roman—art, cultivated by a semi-barbarous people from the steppes of central Asia, used in the service of an Indian religion, and all in a former province of the Persian Empire. The cosmopolitan nature of Kanishka's empire is quite clearly demonstrated on his coinage, where we find a widely varied range of divinities in circulation, reaching from the Mesopotamian Nanaka to India's Siva, from Mithra of Iran to the Buddha himself. As a benevolent emperor ruling over many races, Kanishka did his best to keep all his subjects happy. The predominant creed during his reign—whether for personal or political reasons it is hard to tell—appears to have been Buddhism. Certainly the Buddhists have always venerated him as a second Asoka.

The Kushan empire fell in very obscure circumstances, about A.D. 230. It was followed by a strong Persian resurgence. The new empire of the Sassanids once again asserted Persia's claim to Gandhara. But after that the tide soon retreated. Another branch of the Kushans came down from Bactria under the leadership of their king, Kidara, and dominated Taxila for two or three generations, between about A.D. 380 and 460. During this second period a new development occurred in the art of Gandhara; and this development is of quite extraordinary interest, since it no longer merely reflects some remote and alien past, but has a marked originality and spontaneity about it. This is the period of the stucco figures, of an art refined by the techniques of humanism and closely preoccupied with the fleeting gesture, the transient moment or expression. It is often bathed in a gentle melancholy, as though the presentiment of imminent disaster hung constantly over it. This, indeed, was no more than the truth. Soon the city was ravaged by the first of those human cyclones that went through it with fire and sword, slaughtering, pillaging, leaving behind nothing but ruin and desolation. Today, so many centuries afterwards, the archaeologist can chart the passage of these destroyers by noting down the occurrence of a layer of ashes, intermingled with fragments of carbonized wood. And above that layer, nothing: the timeless earth, grass, sky, and tunnelling moles.

On our way back to the village and the museum, we stopped for a moment to visit the remains of the temple of Jandial. Its ground-plan, together with one surviving capital in grey sandstone (see photograph, no. 6), show, quite clearly, even today, that it must have been a Greek-style temple of the Ionic order. Numerous details about its structure bear the Hellenic imprint. Yet there is no possibility that it was designed for the cult either of the Olympian gods or of Buddhism. Many scholars believe that it was consecrated to the Zoroastrian fire-cult. We know very little of the Greek kings of Bactria and Gandhara; but it is by no means impossible that they adopted, or at least extended their patronage to, the religion of Zoroaster, which was,

after all, the official cult observed by the royal dynasty of Persia. In any event, this religion was widely diffused among their subjects. So here we find yet another element to complicate further the pattern of influences, disruptive factors, and ideological cross-fertilizing which bedevil this problem-ridden civilization.

Shortly afterwards we reached the museum, a low building that houses some first-class collections, both from Taxila itself and from Gandhara in general: these have been studied with loving care and a wealth of erudition by Marshall, and are set out, in their various rooms, about as well as they possibly could be. What a pleasure it is to visit a small, compact, *planned* museum! The first things that drew our attention were the cases containing the coinage of the Greek kings in Bactria and India: some in gold, some in silver, but the majority of bronze. Many of these were real gems of miniature bas-relief. Here were the satraps and Greek generals who had become kings, bare-headed, with flowing hair, like so many Roman emperors, or wearing curious hats not unlike late-Victorian solar topees—striking testimony to the power of the sun in the tropics. Next we inspected the Scythian, Parthian, and Kushan coinage: other rulers, different names, but always that veneer of Hellenization, the pathetic urge to appear cultured, to do the *right thing*. On the reverse of certain coins we observed a representation of the Buddha: the inscription—in Greek lettering—read ‘Boddo’. These coins, besides being evidence of artistic development, also form a priceless body of historical documentation. For decades on end, for entire reigns in fact, they are the only surviving testimony to this period we possess. It is rather as though the world we know today had been utterly obliterated in some enormous cataclysm, leaving behind for posterity nothing apart from one miraculously preserved album full of stamps.

Looking up from the glass cases, we found our attention caught by the numerous pieces of sculpture displayed all round the walls. It was easy enough to distinguish the grey sandstone of the early period from the stucco or terracotta which marks the second. Among the former most immediately striking were certain high reliefs in which the figure of Buddha appeared as a subtle, mysterious, and fascinating synthesis of Apollo and Buddha, Asia and Europe—two worlds which seem (and indeed are) so vastly remote from one another in spirit.

The personality of Apollo was built up over the centuries in the West from the intuitive visions of mystics, poets and artists, all composed about the central nucleus of a solar cult. Intelligence, the arts, music, the perfect symmetry of a young athlete’s body—these were some of the elements which expressed, in human terms, the wonder and the magic of that powerful and beneficent light, source of all life and symbol of all wisdom. Apollo embodies, at one and the same time, the world’s visible, physical perfections—

what can be grasped by the senses—and the sovereign virtue of pure intellect. The plane on which the Buddha operates is so alien to this that we cannot regard the two as in opposition: they intersect only marginally, as it were, and by accident. The perfection at which the Buddha aims is that of 'achieved understanding', and this means intellectual perfection; but 'achieved understanding' includes the awareness that the world is *samsara*—a spiral of birth and death to which we are bound by our imperative desires and passions. True perfection must be within us, and opposed to the things of this world. Faced with such a proposition, many of Apollonianism's fundamental principles become merely irrelevant.

Frequently, in the sculptures we saw, these two attitudes appeared to be united—or at least mechanically superimposed on one another, thus giving the impression of some sophisticated cosmopolitan joke, or, alternatively, of the most agonizing tension. But there were isolated instances where the artist had succeeded in creating a genuine synthesis: then Apollo became transfigured, endowed with an inner light, a secret clarity, a knowledge of the mystical significance attaching to pain and evil, while Buddha took on human lineaments that had the magic of beauty, the splendour of the sun (see photograph no. 5).

One fact, however, we should always bear in mind. The Buddhists of antiquity disliked representational images of the Buddha: this was a convention that sprang from the sense of holiness which the personality of the Enlightened One inspired. According to one ancient tradition, the body of the Buddha became invisible after he achieved to Nirvana. (This reverential awe attaching to any image of the great is so widespread a phenomenon that it needs no further elucidation here.) The Buddha's presence was accordingly indicated by various symbols: a small elephant stood for his birth, the peepul tree for Enlightenment, the wheel of the Law for prophecy, and so on. But at some point this taboo against direct representation must have been overcome. Our famous Oriental scholar Giuseppe Tucci maintains that the change was due to developments in Buddhism itself. As a religion it had begun to spread increasingly among the common people, thus losing its original character (that of a restricted cult for initiates) and also finding itself obliged to meet the needs of simple folk, who wanted a figure—not a symbol—to venerate and, after a very short time, to adore. Furthermore, Buddhism was now spreading among foreign peoples, many of them barbarians; and this involved a drastic simplification of its message (on the artistic no less than the doctrinal plane) if it was to become universally accessible. These are some aspects only of a long and important process by which Buddhism was transformed from a sublime philosophy into a viable religion, and gradually brought closer to the human no less than the divine.

It appears that the Buddha was first portrayed by direct representation—

an act which may well have required a high degree of independence—in two places: at Mathura, near modern Delhi, with predominantly Indian features; and in Gandhara, where the cultural influence of the Graeco-Roman tradition was particularly strong. This last factor produced the classical Buddhist style, which may be due either to the presence of Greek, Roman, or other Hellenized artists, or to the existence of a class who habitually purchased Hellenistic art objects and allied artifacts. The fact remains that when the sculptors wanted to endow Buddha with human features, they took as their model the figures of certain gods (or certain men) that they must have had constantly in view—ready to hand, as it were, in a very literal sense: busts of Apollo, or of some emperor in a toga, or one of the better known Athenian sages. It may well be that the ingrained tendency of Mediterranean peoples to represent their divinities in human form somehow—even here—helped to abolish the taboo against images of the Buddha.

One fact is certain, however. If we restrict ourselves to purely stylistic or formal considerations, there can be no doubt of the important influence which the classical tradition exerted—via the Gandhara period—on a large proportion of Buddhist art. Some aspects of that influence (e.g. style in drapery) can be traced on their subsequent migratory course through Asia: first to Serindia (the present-day Sinkiang), along the two great silk-routes which linked the oases north of Tibet; then on to China and Japan, and eventually to Java and Ceylon. It is one of the most striking instances of the diffusion of ideas in the whole history of mankind.

We now found ourselves in front of one of those typical Gandhara friezes, worked in blue-grey stone, which artists used either as decorative additions to temple and *stupa*, or else as a medium in which to portray (with figurines little more than a span high) various episodes from the rich store of Buddhist legend. In one scene Vajrapani stood grasping his oddly-shaped thunderbolt, which somewhat resembled a water-clock; elsewhere we could follow incidents from the Buddha's earlier incarnations, as told in those ancient Indian fables that go under the name of *jataka*. Here, again, were the main facts of Prince Siddhartha's earthly career, recounted in mystical-epic terms: his birth (with his opulent mother Maya clinging to the branch of a tree), the moment of Grand Renunciation, the moment of Enlightenment beneath the Bo (wisdom) tree, his death surrounded by his faithful disciples.

All this, besides representing a kind of metaphysical strip-cartoon, could be regarded as primary evidence for social history. Through the trees I glimpsed scenes of country life; the frieze provided a wealth of information about how people dressed or prostrated themselves or went about their daily work. I saw markets and villages, houses and terraces; I shared the pleasures of the wealthy, the simple joys of country folk, the children's games, the labourer's honest toil. A whole vanished world, long lost in the

misty depths of time, suddenly sprang to life before our eyes: the mildly melancholy silence of the museum was broken, as though by some cool refreshing rivulet.

Other friezes and figurines revealed the extraordinary eclecticism of the Kushan empire. From legends of the Buddha I passed to images of Indian gods, Parthian-cum-Mesopotamian deities, more-than-formal echoes, indeed, of Mediterranean culture: I saw centaurs, satyrs, Cupids, gods of sea and of river—the last, to my mind, much more reminiscent of Rome than of Greece. It was not hard to understand why certain scholars had written off the Gandhara phenomenon as ‘a mere stage in late provincial Roman art’.

We turned a corner and came abruptly upon the cases containing the rich collection of stuccoes from Gandhara’s second, much later period. These carried us into a very different world, far removed now from its Mediterranean, Indian, and Iranian roots, caught at the beginning of a new and independent road. When the barbarian invasions were flooding in a tidal wave over the kingdoms and empires of Europe and Asia; at a time when all art seemed frozen into complete formal and schematic rigidity (Malraux’s ‘great regression’), the artists of Gandhara and the surrounding region were expressing in stucco a whole magic, delicate, fleeting world: half-glimpsed shadows, snatched moments of perfection, transient expressions caught on the faces of monks, public benefactors both male and female, fauns, ascetics, old men and children, a whole people frozen at one specific point in the infinite changing flow of their emotions. The heads of Buddha or the Bodhisattva dating from this period often convey a sense of the ineffable: a fusion of absolute inner peace and a boundless compassion for the sorrows of this world—the highest values to which Buddhism can attain. All this came about (so far as we can judge) during the few short decades of the last Kushan dynasty, before the catastrophic descent of the White Huns at the close of the fifth century A.D.

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In the afternoon we left the museum, climbed into our car, and set off once more along the road to Peshawar. The sky had turned grey now, and the higher peaks were hidden by clouds. It was stiflingly hot. From time to time a few raindrops spattered against the windscreen.

Several hours later we reached the banks of the Indus: a vast muddy torrent plunging down—with remarkable speed and turbulence—between two high, precipitous, uneven walls of rock, with hardly a tree or a plant in sight. It may have been the time of day, or the lowering, cloudy sky, or the heavy atmosphere; but I experienced a vague feeling of suffocation, and found the spectacle so harshly violent that it caused me positive distress. Everything was the same dark, earthy colour; and the smooth, regular,

unremitting passage through the desert of this monstrous mass of water seemed to symbolize, in a most concrete way, the endless flow of time.

At a point where the two banks were close to one another, high on a knoll, there stood a most striking fortress built by the Mogul Emperors: the fortress of Attock. Its walls were nearly two miles in circumference: high, stern-looking, reddish in colour, and topped by exotic petal-shaped embrasures. There was room enough inside for an army to encamp. The whole structure gave off an intense atmosphere of brutally self-confident energy and power.

This fort was completed in 1583, to the orders of the Emperor Akbar (1542-1605), the greatest and most securely established of all the Mogul sovereigns. In a world which, then as now, was divided by the entrenched hatreds and irrational prejudices of men separated by different religious faiths, Akbar—a man brought up in the strictest Sunnite orthodoxy of Islam—not only did all he could to liberalize the laws governing his Hindu subjects, but also dreamed of a faith—he called it *Din Ilahi*, or ‘the divine religion’—in which Moslem, Hindu, Jain, Parsee, Christian and Jew could transcend their invisible, isolating walls, and find themselves united in adoration of the One True God. Many of Akbar’s courtiers would have liked to see him use his Imperial authority to impose *Din Ilahi* upon his subjects; but he opposed such a view steadfastly, on the grounds that truth both must and would prevail of itself. My only reason for recording these facts is that they shed some light on the personality of a most uncommon potentate, who grappled with the perennial problem of mankind’s divisions, and sought its solution in the right place—that is, in the realm of the spirit. But of this Akbar no trace was visible here: what we saw was a tough and unbreakable link in the chain of power, nothing more.

A little farther on we crossed the Indus by a strong iron bridge which the British built in 1885: those gigantic brick caissons and mammoth steel girders were a real museum piece, a survival from the West’s palaeo-industrial age. We reached Peshawar just as it was getting dark.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ROAD FROM PESHAWAR

O my friends, how can one describe the life of the people in this world of ours?

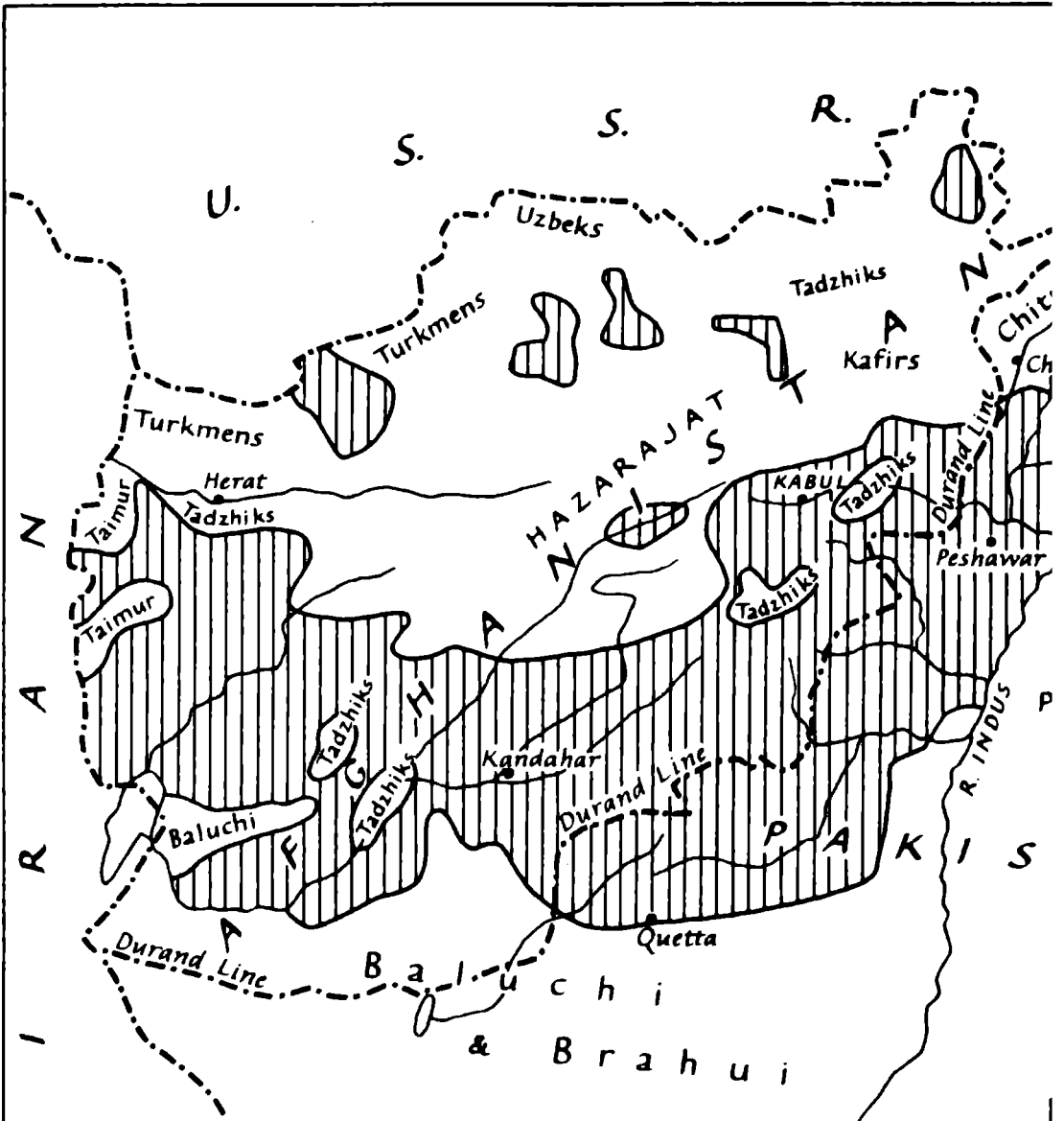
NAZIR DI AGRA (EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY)

PESHAWAR TODAY is just a sleepy frontier town. It takes some effort to recall that you are walking through an immemorially ancient city, whose name is blazoned on the pages of the past. The Indians called it Purushapura, the Greeks Paskapuros (or, by metathesis, Kaspapuros), and the Chinese Polushapolu; while Al-Biruni and the Arab historians referred to it as Pushabur. An endless succession of races passed through it: Persians, Greeks, Scythians, Kushans, White Huns, Turks, Mongols, Moguls, Afghans, the British. Its soil is rich with the ambitions, sufferings, memories, hopes, triumphs and disasters of the millennia.

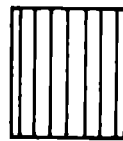
Fifteen hundred years ago there arose here one of the most grandiose monuments the world has ever known—now, alas, long since destroyed, and with only faint memories of it surviving. This was the great *stupa* of King Kanishka, a forerunner perhaps of the pagoda, as that was to develop later in the Far East. Its ground-plan—excavated in 1908—was a square, the sides of which were approximately 300 feet long. On this quadrilateral foundation were erected five successive stories in stone, which attained the remarkable height of some 250 feet. But this was only a beginning. On top of the great stone tower arose the *harmika*—that is, the pagoda proper: no less than 13 wooden floors, all intricately carved,¹ and about 410 feet high. Thus the entire edifice topped the 600 foot mark—a most prodigious landmark. It is not for nothing that the descriptions left by the Chinese pilgrims Fa-Hien and Hsuan Tsang, in the fifth and seventh centuries respectively, display such a sense of amazement: every traveller who passed that way must have experienced a similar reaction.

Peshawar stands on the edge of a fertile valley, where the Kabul River is joined by the Swat. (From this point on it pursues a more leisurely course, splitting up into various branches before flowing into the Indus.) This valley, which is linked with Afghanistan by the celebrated Khyber Pass, for centuries formed the heart and centre of Gandhara. To anyone coming down from the arid, inhospitable mountains of the Hindu Kush, Badakhshan, or

¹ H. Goetz, *India* (Milan, 1959), p. 75.



Territory of the Afghan-Pathan populations



Afghanistan this must have seemed a fairy-tale paradise after the bleak, windswept plateaux and scorched, stony, sun-baked deserts they had traversed to get there. A smooth expanse of verdure stretched away before them, like some green and peaceful lake, with only a gentle breeze to whisper through grass and tree-tops, cornfield and undergrowth. For half the year fruit and flowers were everywhere in abundance. To all this we must add the extraordinary impact which the distant spectacle of King Kanishka's pagoda must have made upon them: a lofty, gigantic pinnacle towering into the blue, like some mountain peak soaring above the clouds, a heavenly portent.

Peshawar is a Pathan capital. The city itself, together with its immediate environment, is inhabited by people of highly mixed origins: here the Punjabi rubs shoulders with the Chitrali, or with Tadzhiks and men from Sind, thus breaking up the ethnic unity which characterizes the country as a whole. Mountains and lowland alike are occupied almost exclusively by Pathans—but who *are* the Pathans? Here we are brought up against the most appallingly complex problem, a tangle with linguistic, historical, and racial threads running through it. By a desperate over-simplification, we might define 'the Pathans' as a part-nomadic, part-settled group, bound together by common tribal history, common mythical origins, and—above all—a common language, Pushtu, which in the North becomes Pakhtu. There is a marked difference between this group and any of their surrounding neighbours.

If we now look at the regional distribution of the Pathans (see map), we find that they occupy the greater part of Afghanistan, and a sizable slice of West Pakistan. Afghanistan itself, as a state, was the creation of Ahmed Shah (1724–1773), the dynamic leader of an Afghan tribe whose name he changed to Durrani. Originally, and for all practical purposes, the two words 'Afghan' and 'Pathan' were interchangeable: today, as is only natural, 'Afghan' has been extended to include those non-Pathan peoples who live within the boundaries of Afghanistan, such as the Tadzhiks (who speak Old Persian), the Uzbeks (who speak Turkish), the Hazars and other groups of Mongol origin, the Kafirs of Nuristan, and various smaller minorities—a total of some 12,000,000 persons.

It is obvious that a situation of this sort provides an ideal breeding-ground for strong irredentist movements; and in fact relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan are, precisely because of the 'Pathan Question', not as friendly as they might be. The frontier between the two countries—the Durand Line of 1893—was established (according to the Afghans) by the government of British India, and thus represents essentially Imperial interests which today are no longer tenable. The natural frontier, they claim, is the Indus, which means that Peshawar is rightfully theirs. . . . We should

bear in mind at this point that the British always regarded the Afghans as their fiercest and most indomitable adversaries. Between 1842 and the turn of the century two hard-fought Afghan Wars took place along the frontier formed by the Hindu Kush and the Sulaiman mountains; indeed, in the winter of 1842 the British sustained, at the hands of the Afghans, one of the most tremendous defeats in the whole of their colonial history.

In an attempt to resolve the Pathan Question, the Afghans have also proposed the establishment of a buffer state, to be called Pakhtunistan (see map). Obviously this would raise fresh problems in respect of minority groups, since the Utopian Pakhtunistan complex would embrace not only Pathans, but Baluchis, Brahuis, and Chitralis too. In short, one must never for one moment forget that the ethnic-cum-linguistic divisions in this part of Asia are vastly involved and intricate; and, moreover, that they hardly ever correspond to the natural geographical frontiers—let alone to economic unities, historical boundaries, or the pattern of current political interests. This brief outline should, I think, suffice to convince the reader of the difficulties which will bedevil any lasting peace settlement—in Asia as elsewhere—unless some far-reaching scheme of world federation is accepted as its basis.

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At Peshawar we at last met our official liaison officer, Shapur Khan. I must confess that I had been awaiting this moment with some anxiety. I was afraid we might be in for a repetition of the unhappy experience I remembered from the 1958 expedition, when for several months we were stuck with an army captain who had some excellent qualities, but was also, unfortunately, opinionated, intolerant and something of a martinet. Disagreements were, as one might expect, frequent. But by great good fortune Shapur Khan—as was at once apparent—turned out to be an open-hearted, friendly sort of person, with great sympathetic understanding of our problems. It was not long before we became close friends. He was a short, fierce-looking man, his face all pitted with smallpox scars; but a closer glance revealed a great gentleness in his eyes—a matter for some relief. Shapur had recently suffered a very severe attack of dysentery, from which he was now only just recovered.

At Peshawar we stayed in Dean's Hotel, which—like Flashman's in Rawalpindi—distributed its guests among a scattered group of garden chalets. Here we also met our future caravan leader, Mulai Jan, just down from Chitral. He was a tall, lean, sinewy man, about thirty years old, who bounced hither and thither like an animated marionette, and had the most extraordinary laugh, which he exercised relentlessly, often at most inappropriate moments, and in a bewildering variety of manners.

We spent much of our spare time wandering about the bazaar, a labyrinth of narrow backstreets peopled with characters in *Arabian Nights* costume, and flanked by shops in which an exotic array of goods was on show: barbaric jewellery in beaten gold and silver, coffee-pots, tankards, jars, flasks, copper dishes and cauldrons, lengths of cotton cloth printed with gay patterns and in the most striking colours—not to mention the usual piles of foodstuffs, fruit, sweetmeats, vegetables and cereals of all sorts (see photograph no. 31).

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It was ghastly at night. The heat was tangible, an aggressive force: when you breathed you found yourself gulping it down like mush, every time you changed position you became aware of it in your sheets, or the bedhead, or the wall behind you. If you got up it was still everywhere you went—baking your slippers, or the seats of your chairs, heating the water in the shower, scorching everything like some fiery spirit. It was not only the actual temperature in the air and on exposed surfaces, but also a thick, appalling humidity, which made the atmosphere resemble that of a steam-bath. Despite our exhaustion—both physical and emotional—we could not get to sleep. There was, too, the exacerbating problem of the ceiling fan in the middle of the room. If we turned it off we were at once bathed in a lake of perspiration; and then the sheets and pillows and pillow-cases and mattresses—indeed, the very bed itself—began, as our sweaty effluvia soaked into them, to recall—somewhere deep in their timeworn innards—the memory of countless others who had bedewed them as we were doing now; and there arose from them a stale, sweetish stink, somewhat akin to that of vomit. If, on the other hand, we left the fan circling regularly and silently above us, the sweat would dry up as though by magic, only to be replaced by sneezing and stiffness in the joints—sure harbingers of a summer cold, which is the worst sort of cold I know. It was *ghastly* at night.

Doors and windows—which opened on to the courtyard or the garden—were, naturally, left wide open. Outside we could hear a chorus of cicadas, backed by a myriad other unfamiliar nocturnal insects. Every so often we caught the swish of a wing in the darkness: some bird of prey hunting for food. Now and then a flicker of light would appear, and presently one of the hotel *chokidars*—barefooted, mysterious—would walk past clutching an electric torch in one hand. Mulai Jan lay on his *charpoy*, beside our loaded lorry: he was the only one of us cheerfully asleep, dead to the world. More than once we found ourselves turning an envious eye in his direction.

At last, some time in the small hours, we all managed to get a little rest: not true sleep, but that half-waking twilight state when time at least drags by a little less slowly. But at four o'clock, the sound of the alarm-bell shot us

into wakefulness again, and we were only too eager to shake off our stupor: at least it meant we were *going*, getting out of that horrible, soup-like atmosphere, so different from anything we had ever known before. Breakfast, at our special request, had been laid on for us, but was a very sketchy affair: now that we had grown accustomed to a full-scale meal of eggs, porridge, toast, butter, marmalade and the rest of it, we got up from the meal feeling as though we had eaten nothing.

Shortly after four o'clock, while it was still dark, Mulai Jan, together with two of our party, left in the baggage lorry. The remaining nine of us set off an hour later, plus a few more cases, close-packed between the wooden walls of a big American station-wagon. Dawn began to break as we were on the outskirts of the city. The weather seemed fair—though the humidity in the air was so great that until the sun actually rose it was difficult to tell whether we had a clear sky above us or not. (In the event, it proved almost completely cloudless.) Men, women and children were in the process of getting up: many of them had passed the night on *charpoy*s outside their houses, or under some nearby colonnade, and were now busy stripping off the few flimsy bedclothes they had brought with them, or dusting their *charpoy*s and standing them up on end against the wall.

Soon we were in the depths of the countryside. The Peshawar Valley is a really lovely place: with its lush greenery and numerous waterways it at once put me in mind of the Po delta. The resemblance is rendered yet more vivid by long rows of poplars, all ashiver in the breeze, which line the waterways and act as dividing boundaries between the fields of grain, vegetables, tobacco, and various root crops. Only the sugar-cane lends a certain exotic touch to this landscape; but this—constituting as it does one of the richest products of the Peshawar area—abounds on every side. From time to time we got a distant glimpse of a smoke-blue peak, part of the sheer mountain chain which acts as a natural boundary to this harmonious and bewitching paradise.

It can hardly have changed in two thousand years or more. True, the road today is asphalted (which does mean some slight improvement) and every so often you see a car on it, generally a very ancient model. Vans or lorries are more common—always with their coachwork painted in highly coloured fairground motifs; but the staple method of transport is still the farm-cart, a heavy, solid affair knocked together from beams and joists, and pulled, very solemnly, by a pair of oxen. The peasants we saw sitting on these carts, or trudging beside them, were almost all dressed in white, and many of them had their heads clumsily wrapped in disproportionately large turbans.

On the outskirts of the first town of any importance along our route—Mardan—we began to encounter numerous tongas: those small gig-like vehicles so popular with the better-off citizen for going about his business

appointments. Women were hardly in evidence at all, and those we did see were mysteriously swathed in white veils or hidden behind ankle-length robes. Captain Shapur lived near Mardan, and when we stopped in the main square for a while, various people came up and greeted him, giving him messages for their relatives, which were to be delivered via the driver of the local mail-van. Such homely encounters in the centre of this godforsaken backwater (as people tend to describe it) gave me unexpected pleasure. Those who travel long miles round the world are always in search of their roots; so perhaps to observe other people's gives them some sort of consolation.

Mardan (population 50,000) looked a prosperous town, and was certainly crowded—with people, vehicles, and animals; there was a rough, noisy atmosphere about it. It could be described as an overgrown village—one of those cross-bred semi-urban agglomerations in which the original features of village or citadel have vanished (always supposing they ever existed) under other, more modern buildings: a flourishing business house, a small factory or two, some cinemas, and the kind of pretentious dwellings run up by the newly rich. Such jerry-built growths have not yet had the means or the time to acquire that organic dignity which characterizes a real city. Today there are countless Mardans, all over the face of the earth: every province in every continent has its quota of them. There is no point in citing names: they spring up like mushrooms after a shower.

Beyond Mardan the countryside becomes more arid, with intermittent outcrops of rock and a general air of increased poverty. The sun was high above us now, beating down fiercely; yet the air seemed far less oppressive than it had done in Peshawar. Soon we reached our first road-block. Large notices announced that we were about to enter the 'Tribal Area'. This use of words deserves our attention. 'Tribal' here has no specifically primitive connotations; it should not arouse thoughts of howling savages with bones through their noses, brandishing assegais. 'Tribal Area' means no more than 'Autonomous Local Administration'. It refers to those territories which the British either failed to pacify as completely as they would have wished, or else felt it was not worth the expense and bother of occupying; and over which they therefore exercised a nominal form of protectorate only, leaving the actual running of affairs in the hands of various minor local potentates. Pakistan inherited this administrative set-up, and for the time being has preferred to leave it unaltered; though the ultimate aim, as Captain Shapur assured me, is to bring all Pakistani territory under direct, centralized administration.

When we were through the first road-block there seemed very little difference either in the landscape or the people, though Captain Shapur told us—several times and with great emphasis—that 'Pakistani law does not run in these parts'.

We asked him what this meant in practice.

'It means,' he said, 'that these bastards can knock each other off when they feel like it and run their own cock-eyed brand of justice afterwards.'

Like every Pakistani official with whom I have ever had dealings, Captain Shapur was all in favour of a strong central government, and of radical modernization in the old administrative system, particularly on its outer periphery. In this sense the military party represents a progressive force, a dynamic aspect of the new developments at work in the country. Nor should we forget the close bond that has existed, ever since the time of Mahommed (who indeed personified it), between the soldier and the propagator of the Faith. An Islamic militarist is always a crusader, a 'crescent-bearer', and especially prone to feel the pull of idealist motives.

By now we were approaching the mountains. Every moment their pale-blue silhouettes grew more clearly defined against the sky: we were at the foot of the very last outcrop in the Himalayan range. Beyond this initial chain of hills there lay three vast states: Swat, Dir, and Chitral. The captain continued to discuss the 'Tribal Area', and the more information he let fall, the more it appeared that we were entering a world straight out of comic opera. Swat, it appeared, which was ruled over by a prince who had the title of Wali, was simon-pure, the perfect model state: first-class roads ran from the tiny capital, Saidu, to every village, great or small, in the territory; no one went about the countryside carrying arms, no indeed; the land was full of markets, schools, hospitals, and mosques; peace, prosperity and justice held universal sway. Dir, on the other hand—whose ruler had the title of Nawab, or Nabob—was a black, evil, thoroughly detestable state. The old Nawab thought about nothing but his harem (which contained over fifty wives), and the ferocious dogs he took out on his beloved hunting expeditions. He detested good roads and schools and modern medicine and trade, and surrounded himself with a band of savage, dissolute brigands, all armed to the teeth. 'He doesn't want people to learn to read or to travel anywhere beyond the state frontiers; he's scared his subjects might get a few ideas into their heads if they did. And ideas—as he knows damned well—can lead only to revolution when things have got to such a point.'

Chitral, in Captain Shapur's view, lay somewhere between these two extremes: neither dazzling white nor coal-black, but a medium grey. The former Mehtar, as the hereditary prince of Chitral is called, had died a few years previously in a 'plane crash; and today—since his son, the young Mehtar, was only ten—the central government had, for all practical purposes, taken over the regime. At the moment all local administration was in the hands of a Political Agent.

A few days previously, in Karachi, we had seen banner headlines spread across the English-language papers, recounting the gory details of some

violent revolt or other that had broken out in Dir. Dead and wounded were claimed to run into several thousands. We remarked on this to Captain Shapur, saying that the figures seemed shockingly high. He did not appear in the least impressed. 'They're always having these tribal massacres; it's their favourite sport.' He did explain, however, that the revolt had been planned and executed by a party supporting one of the Nawab's sons, who, being acutely aware of his country's lamentable backwardness, and as a result in fierce opposition to his father's corruptly chauvinist rule, hoped to take over the government and initiate extensive reforms.

'They may have failed this time,' said Captain Shapur, 'but there'll be further attempts—and in the end, with any luck, they'll succeed. Let's hope so, anyhow. This kind of medieval enclave is a disgrace to Pakistan.'¹

Our route skirted the frontiers of Swat, went right across Dir, and at last emerged in Chitral, where we were to spend a couple of months. Meanwhile we had pulled up at our second road-block. This time it was only a kind of customs post. Once again our papers were examined by a group of most elegant military officials, all with splendid moustachios and a bristling beltful of weapons, who ended by saluting us in most amiable fashion.

About mid-day we reached the foot of the mountains, which had changed from that distant hazy blue into a brown, rocky, and (I must confess) rather unpleasant consistency when seen from close quarters. Here we reached the third and most important road-block, at which all our documents were examined with even more minutely captious care than on previous inspections. Above us was a vast black notice-board, inscribed with a lengthy text in white, which embodied all the rules and restrictions applicable to the three categories of traveller imaginable here: Pakistanis, Local Residents, and Foreigners. One curious sub-section informed the reader that foreign women were 'admitted beyond these limits only if escorted by a responsible male escort'; and even so they could not (naturally) 'stray off the main road without special authority from the Political Agent'. Here one caught an intense, genuine, and indeed positively incandescent breath of that sexual fanaticism concerning the mysteries of the boudoir which is occasionally discernible in the *piazza* of some mountain village in Southern Italy, or one of the more remote Mediterranean islands.

But here the situation is complicated by a third factor of a rather curious sort. It is not only love between man and woman which—via the medium of various accepted conventions—spreads its invisible, deadly web abroad behind walls, veils, and every other sort of camouflage; there also exists love between man and man, which has been institutionalized rather in the manner adopted by the ancient Greeks or the medieval Japanese, and concentrates especially on the relationship between an adult and a young boy.

¹ The local regime was, in fact, changed in 1961.

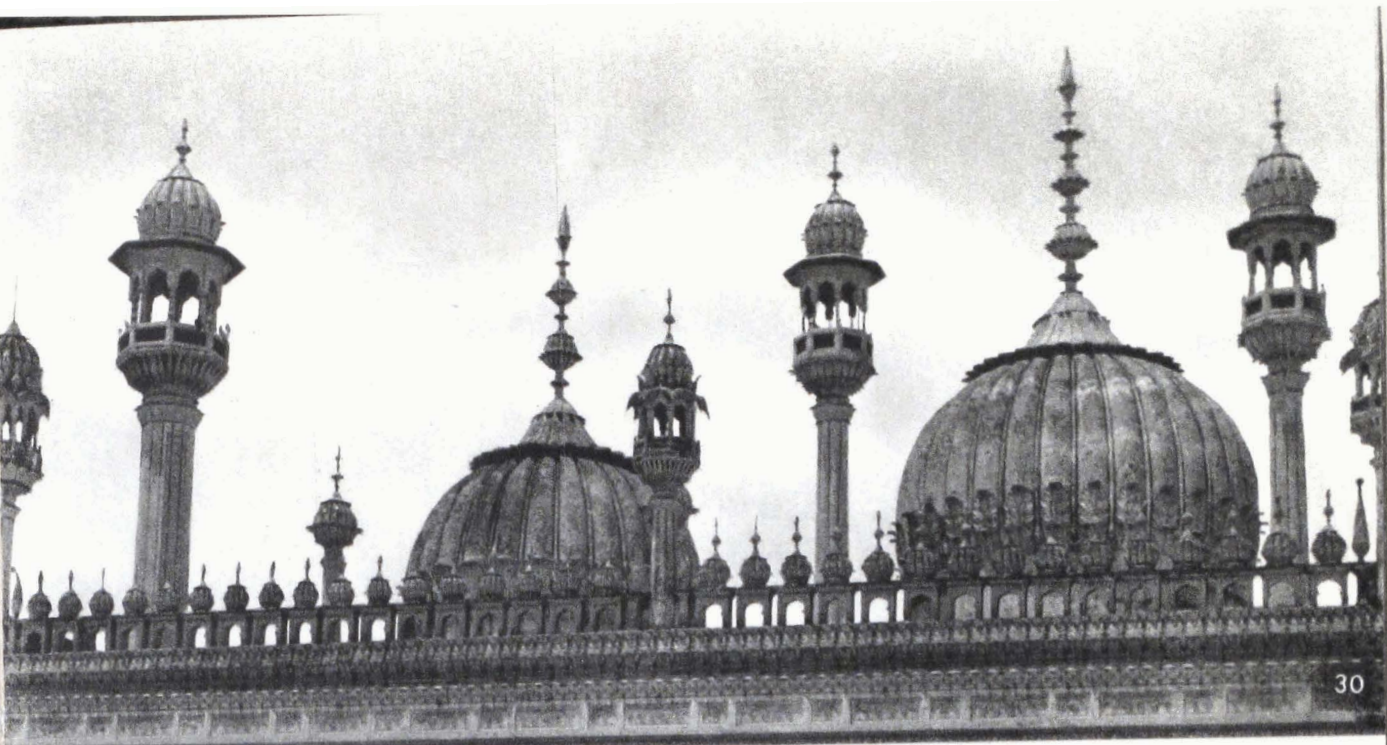
Everyone talks about it quite openly. 'If you want a woman here,' one Peshawar official told me, laughingly, after a few rounds of whisky, 'you had best pay court to her brother. Once you've accommodated *him* he won't mind if you go with his sister, ha-ha!' Another Pakistan official told me, 'In these parts a father is jolly proud if his boy goes with one of us—it means he's getting on in the world, being taken up by someone who counts.'

It is an odd fact that pederasty seems to flourish best, on the whole, under two diametrically opposed regimes: in those decadent societies which yield to none in soft luxurious self-indulgence—and also in predominantly military nations, dedicated to nothing but hunting, violent sports, and war. At Sparta—and not only according to Aristotle, who was openly prejudiced on such matters—homosexuality was regarded as normal phenomenon. The same was true of the Japanese *samurai*, as is shown by a whole class of literature from the Tokugawa period (1603–1867). In one respect a warrior caste may deliberately encourage pederasty, as a means of providing some outlet for the sexual and affective impulses without the need to submit to prolonged petticoat influence back in camp. Let the women stay at home and think of nothing save rearing sons!

It is certainly true that the Pathans are warriors through and through. To look at life—for a few hours—through the eyes of men brought up in such an atmosphere is a fascinating experience: it clarifies so many historical episodes. Even our civilized and sympathetic friend Captain Shapur was a Pathan at heart: indeed, the Pathan's principles and ideas and general attitude to life stood out all the more clearly in him because of the sharp contrast they made with his personal mildness of temperament. On more than one occasion he told us that his father absolutely forbade him to listen to music, on the grounds that it weakened the character.

On the other hand, in anything remotely connected with military history Shapur was quite extraordinarily well-informed. He knew all Napoleon's battles by heart, and was well up in the strategical events of both world wars. He was also—perhaps inevitably—a great admirer of Hitler, and even of Mussolini.

Here we found ourselves in trouble. When we advanced radical criticisms of a system which had brought nothing but death and disaster to our country, he exclaimed: 'But if you believe that, you are unpatriotic!' It was very hard going trying to have an open discussion with someone who had been brought up in a world where everything was all black and white, marvellous or abominable; a world untouched by any calm historical judgements, any rational criticism of life, innocent, in fact, of all those things which go to make up the very essence of civilization as it has always been understood in India, China, or the Occident. When we asked him for information about Pathan poetry it was not for nothing that he replied: 'I

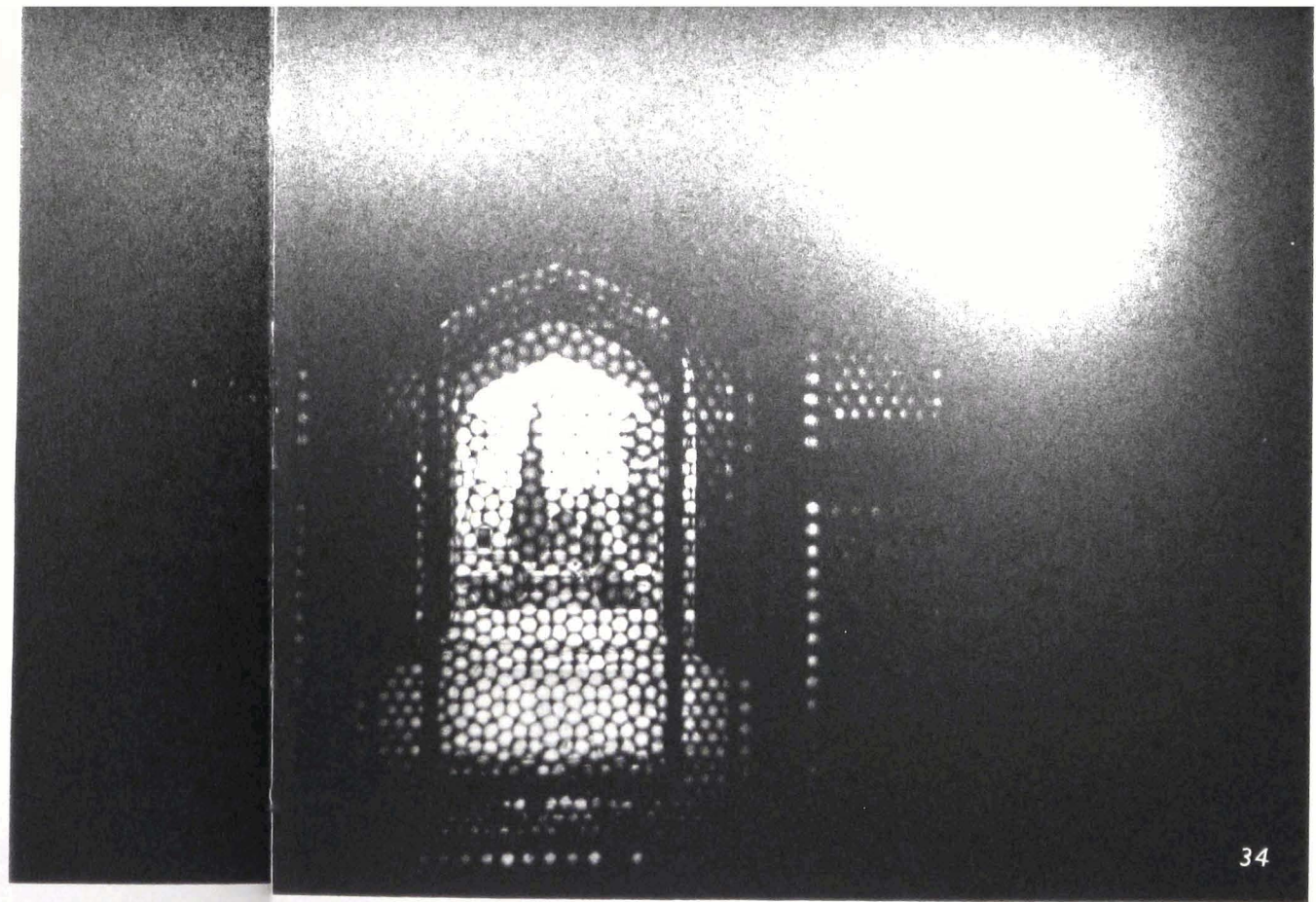


30: Peshawar: skyline of cupolas and tiny minarets

31: Peshawar: the dim and teeming life of the bazaars



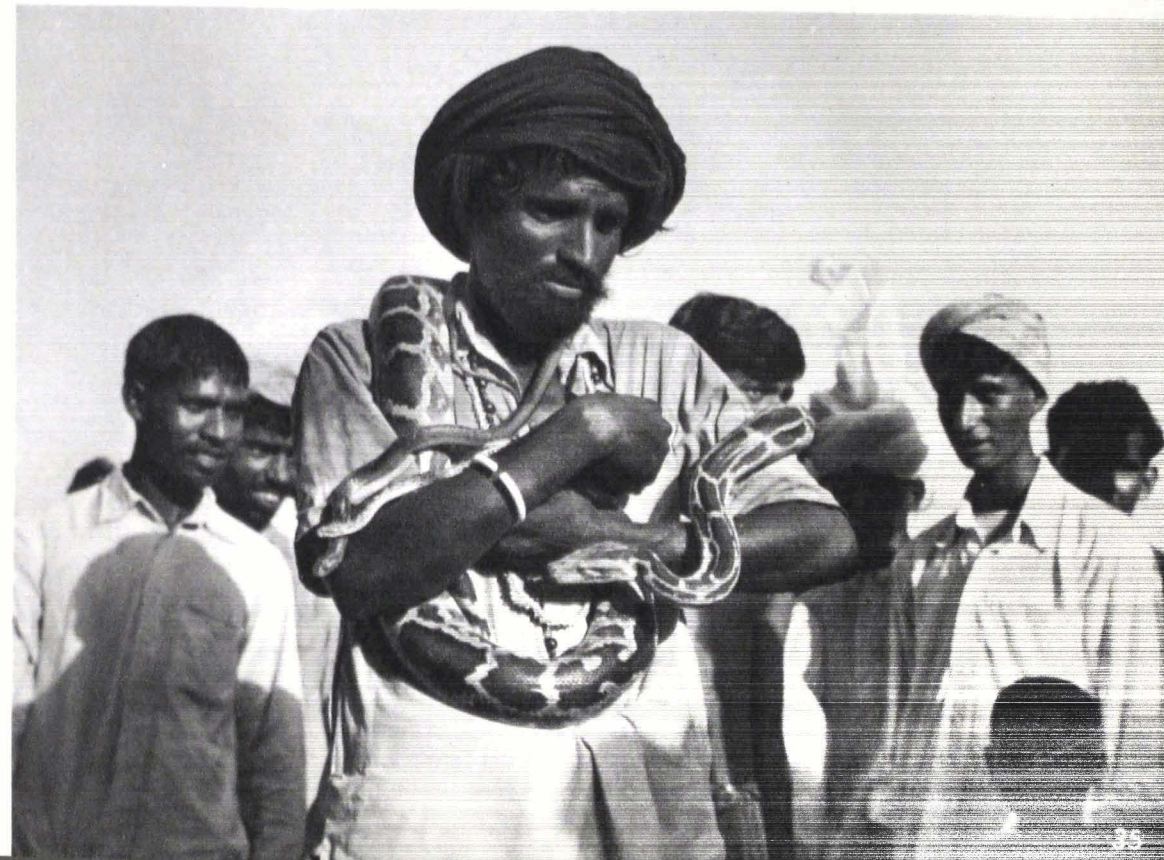
32



34



33



32: Pauper's funeral procession, Peshawar (very blurred)
33: Veiled women
34: Marble grating in an ancient building at Talta
35: Snake-charmer, Lahore



36

36: Fort in the foothills of the Hindu Kush

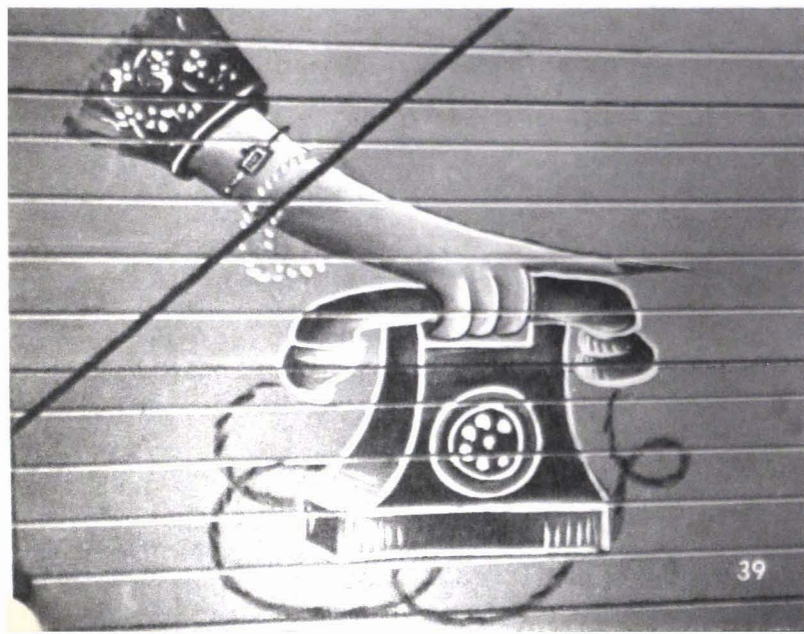


37

37: Guerilla tribesmen



38-41: Various shots of the motor-bus





42



43



44



46

42-6: Getting the motor-bus across a flooded river



45



47

47: Journey resumed on another vehicle
48: Afternoon tea in Kahal, at the house
of a local notable



48



49

49: More veiled women
50: Men carry rifles on their shoulders
everywhere — 51: — and mandolins as well



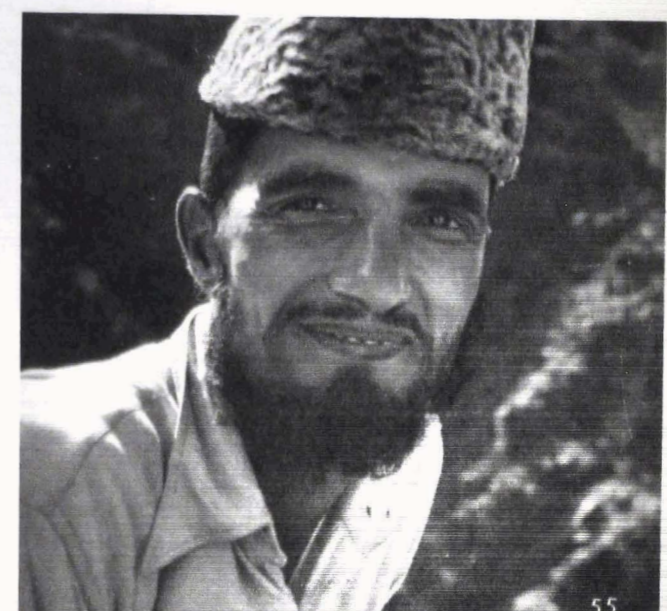
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51



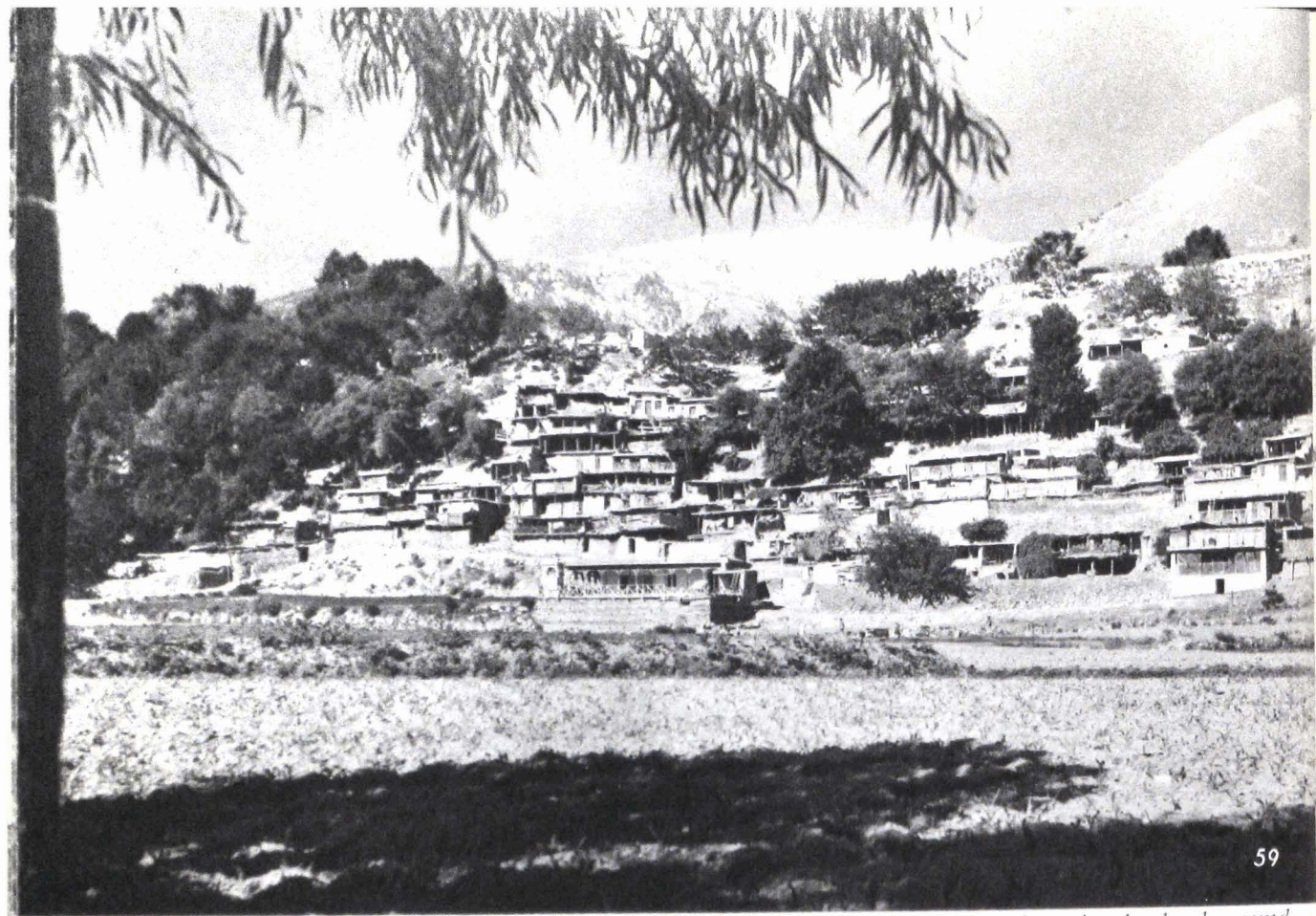
52: Donkeys can go where vehicles cannot
53: The Lowarai Pass (c. 9,600 ft.)
54: The eternal camel
55: Travelling technician





56: Caravan beyond the Lowarai Pass — 57: Chitral scene





59: Chitral houses 60: The Chu Bridge, with the mosque and palace of Mehtar in the background



have never taken any interest in such matters; we believe that poetry is only for women.'

Here, however, is a famous Pathan poem: a piece in the Anacreontic style, with a true Persian flavour about it. It is by Khushhal Khan Khatak (1613-1689), and the translation is Sir Evelyn Howell's:¹

Roses, wine, a friend to share—
 Spring sans wine I will not bear,
 Abstinence I do abhor,
 Cup on cup, my Saqi, pour.
 Hark! the lute and pipe! Give ear!
 What says music to our cheer?
 Time once flown returneth never,
 Idle moments gone for ever,
 Wouldst recall them? Call in vain.
 Life, our mortal life, hath sweetness,
 As its sweetness, so its fleetness,
 Count it nothing, 'tis no gain.
 Doth time tarry for thy prizing,
 Or make speed for thy despising?
 Time hath all young lovers slain,
 Time is heedless, time is heartless—
 Saqi, fill the cup again.

The mountains of Malakand towered ahead of us, blocking our path—or so it seemed—with their inaccessible spurs and buttresses. The landscape, except for a somewhat sandier tint in the rocks, reminded me of north-west Sicily. In the distance we glimpsed a hydro-electric power-station, powered by the waters of the River Swat, which have been channelled through the Malakand massif by means of an underground tunnel. Lower down, the same water is used to irrigate the Mardan Plain.

'Please don't forget that the use of cameras here is strictly forbidden,' Captain Shapur reminded us. He was a charming fellow; far from giving this remark a prohibitive or minatory tone, he managed somehow to make it sound like a special entreaty, as though to say: Yes, I absolutely agree with you, this is an idiotic rule, but the law's the law, and you wouldn't want to put me in a spot, would you? Our very loyalty to him made us obey without a second's thought; and thus he exercised far greater control over us than he would have done by more high-handed methods, such as the liaison officers attached to these expeditions seem to cultivate with conscious relish. The mania for secrecy is a serious collective psychosis which particularly affects young nations. Any excuse—not only a hydro-electric plant or a factory,

¹ Quoted in Caroe, *The Pathans*, p. 479. Saqi means cup-bearer.

but even some tumble-down bridge or stretch of barbed-wire fencing—will serve to turn the harmless pursuit of photography into a crime against the state.

At Malakand we at last rejoined the lorry carrying our baggage and boxes (see photograph no. 7). Heavily armed and fiercely moustachioed sentries helped us down from our vehicle with clumsy politeness; we followed them along a series of passageways, down various flights of steps, past bastions, watch-towers, sentry-boxes and barbicans—all hewn out of the solid rock—till we came upon a small group of huts clustering in the shelter of the overhang. One of these turned out to be the Political Agent's office. We were received in most friendly fashion, and offered glasses of orangeade. The Political Agent himself was a bland, tubby man, extremely pale-complexioned, and more like a diplomat than a soldier. One instantly striking thing about him was the exquisite way in which his hair was combed: most Pathans and Punjabis prefer to crop their hair short, *en brosse*. He chatted with us for a while, in broken English; the words emerged from those pouting, heart-shaped lips as though squeezed out of a tube. He told us he had spent two years in Chitral, and enjoyed himself very much there. He said we must behave sensibly, be careful what we did, and obey the Captain's orders. Then he wished us a good trip, and every success in our venture, and politely dismissed us. He had, it was clear, been briefed about us and our movements beforehand: we were not obliged—for the hundredth time—to produce our permits and letters of introduction. We left Malakand much heartened, with the feeling that we were welcome in high places, if nowhere else.

Beyond the checkpoint the road—still a good asphalted surface—began to climb through lonely, rocky gorges, with numerous watch-towers flanking it on either side. Then, suddenly, the valley opened out and we found ourselves driving through rice-fields. It was the bedding-out season: here and there we could see square patches of young plants, like a bright green handkerchief dropped on the ground. The paddy-fields themselves were strips of water reflecting the cloud-studded sky. A great number of people were working in them, and I noticed at once that they were all men. In Italy, as in Japan, it is always the women one sees engaged on this particular task—which, in point of fact, requires just those qualities of precision, concentration and patience that girls pre-eminently possess. But here we were in the land of fierce sexual taboo, and the women remain shut up at home. If they do go out they are most carefully veiled, and they are never seen in public with men. It must be borne in mind that the division of labour between the sexes is invariably determined by profound cultural factors of a general nature, and can hardly ever be altered through the whim or fancy of any individual person.

The road ran on, a broad, looping highway flanked by rows of willows and heavily laden mulberry trees, through a spacious valley where paddy-fields stretched away endlessly towards the smoke-blue peaks of the distant mountains, half-hidden now by cloud. We were skirting the happy and rose-tinted state of Swat, which, of course, was why the countryside seemed so well looked after. . . . Soon we reached a fork in the road: the signpost to the right read 'SWAT 20 miles', that to the left announced: 'DIR 71 miles'. We turned left. Very soon the asphalted surface and the mulberries both came to an abrupt end, and the rich, fertile paddy-fields were replaced by a series of scorched and rock-strewn hills. We were in another world—the world of Dir. We had left a land of farmers, craftsmen and traders, and were entering territory where the herdsman and bandit hold sway. The official boundary was marked by a great iron bridge over the River Swat; and here we found fresh fortifications, more soldiers, yet another checkpoint.

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By now it was well past noon. All in all, what with two stops, the checking of our papers, and polite conversation at the Political Resident's, we had travelled rather less than a hundred miles. Now we were beginning to understand why all the experts had told us that to get from Peshawar to Dir in a single day (though the actual distance is less than that between Rome and Florence) was a virtual impossibility. Meanwhile the weather, which had been so fine earlier that morning, was gradually taking a turn for the worse. When we left Malakand the sun was still bright, bathing the mountains in great pools of radiance; but then the clouds had begun to close in, no longer white and luminous now, but grey, heavy, lowering.

On the far side of the bridge the road at once deteriorated considerably: indeed, it seemed a mere track, formed by the constant traffic of carts and lorries across the countryside. It ran uphill, downhill, and round about in the most arbitrary fashion, following each irregularity of the terrain; and since there were no bridges, every minor watercourse became a ford. At least, we thought, we had done with checkpoints; but no such luck. When we reached the very first village (Chakdara) our little convoy was held up again. This time we had to deal with the Nawab's cut-throats, and my main regret was that we could not take pictures of them. Imagine three or four toughs dressed up like Sicilian bandits, clutching machine-guns and rifles worn bright and smooth with much handling, full cartridge-belts slung from their shoulders, moustaches all abristle—a bunch of fierce, genuinely primitive savages, in fact. We realized at once that, with folk of this sort, it would take all our time to make ourselves understood, let alone get the relationship on a cheerfully friendly footing. They did not speak a word of English or Urdu; luckily Captain Shapur managed to get through to them in Pushtu.

After a moment the leading bandit beckoned me imperiously with one finger, and I was obliged to follow him alone—carrying all our papers and official letters of introduction—to a distant office. Every few yards we passed more brigands, some sitting with rifles across their knees, others standing on guard, home-made weapons slung from their shoulders. There seemed to be no formal discipline, but their expressions spoke plainly of a considerable—and in all likelihood fanatical—devotion to the Nawab or his appointed representative. What did these poor men—kept in total and abject ignorance of everything from the day of their birth—imagine we had come to do in such a remote part? The world? Indeed a first wave of hostility was directed upon us simply because we had arrived from metropolitan Pakistan. ‘What on earth’, they probably thought, ‘do these fine Pakistani gentlemen think they’re doing, issuing passes through our territory—without so much as a by-your-leave—to a pack of infidels? Tourists, eh? A likely story! What are they after?’ On this fundamental base other motives for hostility, as ancient as they were irrational, began to accumulate.

I was kept waiting for some time in a small ante-room, watched over by two armed youths who sat on a bench in the opposite corner. They kept quite still, without so much as raising an eyebrow, never said a word, and never for one instant took their fingers from the triggers of their rifles. At last a door opened, and I was ushered into the presence of a middle-aged officer, sitting behind a table. His sole weapon was a pistol; he was wearing a cream-coloured shirt, and a white cap laced with gold. At least he seemed a little less rough than his subordinates: he handed me yet another pass, and then—translating an old Islamic formula—said to me in English: ‘May God be with you.’ I thanked him, and at long last returned to where my companions were waiting.

We resumed our slow, wearisome journey, driving now through a desolate landscape of rock-strewn hills where there was little vegetation and no sign whatsoever of any human presence. All we could see, in the far distance, was mountains. It began to rain. The other group, in the station-wagon, were well protected from the weather; but we were obliged to stop and haul a large tarpaulin over our cases. During the journey it thrashed itself loose, and it left plenty of gaps to begin with: in short, it formed a poor defence against the wind and rain, which penetrated it easily. The air began to get chilly, too. but after long sweltering days down in the plain, this at least made a welcome change.

Slowly we climbed towards the pass, which lay well over three thousand feet above sea-level. The rain was now falling intermittently. The road was narrow, a series of hair-pin bends under steep, overhanging rocks. Every now and then we passed a brightly decorated lorry, crammed full of passengers (almost all of them men, and these almost without exception armed to the

teeth) who stared at us in dumb, stupefied amazement. Once across the pass, we began to descend towards the lovely valley of the Panjkora River (its name means 'five districts'—the five tributary valleys which together form the river-basin); and here we found, if not civilization, at any rate a certain natural fecundity: paddy-fields, flowering gardens, orange and lemon groves.

The rivers were all in full spate. The water was the colour of very strong tea, and poured torrentially valleywards between its restraining banks, casting up a great cloud of spray wherever it encountered an obstacle. Even the tiniest tributary had swollen, and as we had to ford these, our rate of progress was considerably reduced. Often the drivers decided that it would be rash to push straight through one of these little torrents because the water had risen too high; then we had to get out and help them collect stones from round about, throwing them into the water till they filled the deep central channel.

About four o'clock in the afternoon we found ourselves confronted by a really serious obstacle: a far wider, more fiercely-flowing stream than any we had yet encountered. Some hours previously it must have been in full spate, since the banks bore ample deposits of mud and gravel; and though its violence had somewhat abated, it was still virtually impassable. Besides our two vehicles, there was a bus halted there; its load of prosperous-looking passengers were busy lobbing stones into the river to raise its level, and we united our efforts to theirs (see photographs nos. 40, 41).

This entire operation took place in pouring rain. The depression produced by exhaustion and sodden clothes was momentarily forgotten when a caravan of nomads came past, plodding down from the steppes of Baroghil in upper Chitral: it was, in its own way, a stupendous spectacle. The men wore black turbans, and boasted moustachios that were even fiercer and more imperious than those of our friends in Dir. They were leading tall grey hairless camels, which had acquired a very odd appearance in the rain: they looked for all the world as though they were made of rubber, with the same characteristic shininess, hardness, and elasticity. Vast loads of household goods were strapped between their humps: tents, cooking-pots, bundles of rags. The women were tall, and some of them extremely beautiful, with dark kohl-rimmed eyes; they strode barefoot over the stones or through the water, bearing themselves like savage queens, for whom such minor trifles were beneath contempt. On their hips they bore half-naked and bejewelled children. They wore no veils, and stared us straight in the eyes, as though their immediate reaction was one of scorn. It would be hard to imagine a more striking contrast than that between them and the local women, timid rabbits eternally hidden in rags and draperies, forever running away from something.

Finally the experts announced that the stream-bed had been sufficiently built up, and the vehicles could now attempt to ford the river. All of us in fact got across without overmuch difficulty. Shortly afterwards we halted in a miserable little village, its houses all clustering along the main road. Someone told us its name: Rabat. The drivers said (as they had said already) that we might just reach Dir by eleven o'clock—well, maybe by midnight. We had been travelling since five that morning, and had scarcely covered 125 miles! Beyond Rabat there were further torrents to fill in and struggle through. But a moment came when we found ourselves confronted by a landslide that had carried three-quarters of the road away. We all got out, and, as usual, sought advice from the drivers and our other pundits: though (as was immediately apparent) our only possible course was to turn back to Rabat, and ask permission to spend the night in a fort which stood overlooking the village.

So we retraced our path for a considerable distance, and drove up to the fort, a squat quadrilateral construction, perched on the summit of a small bare stony knoll. At each corner was a slightly elevated guard-tower, and sentries patrolled to and fro along the battlements. There was obviously a central courtyard inside. From the flagstaff there fluttered the green-and-white ensign with the Crescent of Islam on it.

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We were kindly received by the *khan* (a sort of senior warrant officer) who, after a lengthy discussion with Captain Shapur, authorized us to spend the night in the fort. We wanted to pitch our tents in a small field close by the main gate, under the shade of some mulberry trees, but the *khan* opposed this suggestion very firmly, saying that it was dangerous to be out in the open here at night, and you couldn't take chances with these people. We were shepherded into the fort itself, where—as we had expected—we found a large courtyard, with feeding-troughs for the mules and horses, and a series of dormitories that ran round under the wall; they had a projecting roof in front of them which formed a sort of narrow verandah. *Charpoy*s were provided for us, and we bedded down, some in a dormitory, others out on the verandah. But during the night it got very cold, and both Pinelli and Captain Shapur suffered in consequence: Pinelli had caught some sort of rheumatic fever, while Captain Shapur was still suffering from the after-effects of dysentery. Both of them were running pretty high temperatures. The doctor dosed them more or less at random: luckily for them they managed to get to sleep, and everyone hoped that this in itself might aid their recovery.

By the morning they were, in fact, much better, and we decided to press on. There was only a thirty-mile stretch to Dir now, and we could hardly take more than four or five hours to cover that, even at a walking pace.

'You never know where you are with these roads,' the *khan* told us, 'especially now the place is half-flooded, eh? Let's hope for your sake that the mountain streams aren't all in spate, and that the road hasn't been completely washed away. Allah be with you: good luck on your journey!'

We left the fort about eleven o'clock. In the early hours of the morning the weather had looked hopeful, but now the clouds were beginning to close in again, and looked even heavier and more purplish than usual. Just after passing through a village called Kahal, we found the road blocked by a raging torrent, which had both widened and deepened its bed to such an extent that it now presented a sheer drop of some six feet on either bank. Luckily we had picks and shovels with us; but even so, repairing the damage proved a lengthy job. In the end, by crossing at an angle, the big station-wagon managed to reach the other side; but the lorry could not follow it. Since time was getting on, we decided to send the station-wagon ahead with our two invalids; Castelli, Leone, Iovane, and I, together with Mulai Jan, would follow on as soon as we could.

But the lorry was large, with over four tons of freight aboard; and to manoeuvre it across by the same route as the much lighter vehicle (with a proportionately more powerful engine) was no easy task. A bunch of men and boys suddenly appeared on the scene—heaven knows where from—and offered us their assistance. It was interesting to note how the physical pattern was beginning to change: there were one or two genuine blond types among this lot, and some of the boys had chestnut hair and clear blue eyes: the first evidence that we were approaching central Asia! In Asia there are no precise frontiers for the European-type physiognomy: from being the prevalent characteristic it gradually passes—via an infinity of cross-breedings—into Mongoloids on the one hand, and black-haired, frequently dark-skinned peoples on the other. But this was not exactly the best moment to begin meditating on the subtle complexities of creation. Those ghastly purple clouds, having piled up over the mountains like rows of decomposing monsters, were now dissolving into water—all of them, north, south, east and west. Down came the rain: a steady, blinding, torrential downpour. We were all forced to take cover under the lorry's tarpaulins.

The moment the weather eased a little, the driver started the engine again and had another shot at crossing the 'ford'. Everything seemed to be going well when, with a sudden crack, one front wheel jammed itself between two boulders, and a leaf spring in the suspension snapped clean through. It was at once apparent that the engine—even when boosted by the willing shoulders of a score of men—could not possibly release the lorry. At this point we decided to unload all the equipment: partly to have another shot at freeing the wheel with no weight aboard, and partly to get our stuff into safety.

About ten of the men agreed to lend a hand in this operation, but insisted on fixing a flat rate for the job first: thirty rupees, which in these parts was a very considerable sum. Their request formed the first move in a kind of mail-coach hold-up: the foreign sahibs were presumably millionaires, and therefore fair game. Indeed, we had to thank our lucky stars that the 'hold-up' was only financial, and then by (more or less) mutual agreement.

In the pouring rain—which had begun to come down harder than ever—we somehow managed to assemble our 170 packages on a little raised knoll close to the road, and get the tarpaulins over them. Never was any operation better timed. We had scarcely finished this chore before a really torrential cloudburst hit us. Then, quite unexpectedly, heralded by a fantastic roaring sound, came the water-avalanche.

We had all seen avalanches of snow and ice, and major landslides, and terrifying storms at sea: but this was one manifestation of Nature's fury which we had never before witnessed, and which we found very hard to forget. From the upper end of the valley there surged towards us, at the most appalling speed, a great wall of water—chocolate-coloured, or perhaps darker still, almost black—smashing through everything that stood in its path. A most peculiar sound emerged from it: that of various solid objects being whirled round in its core, smashing and grinding against each other as they went. It was a horrific, frightening, and, to tell the truth, rather macabre sound: like gigantic bones being broken and pounded in a mortar.

In a matter of seconds the water had reached our lorry and swirled round it. We all made desperate efforts to drag it clear, but to no avail. Meanwhile another lorry, larger than ours, and empty, had appeared on the scene. We asked the driver and his mate to help us. If we hitched our lorry to theirs, we said, and put both of them into reverse we might just save the day. They agreed to do so—for a consideration of twenty rupees. People with their backs to the wall are in no position to haggle. But it proved hopeless. We had no steel hawser, and our nylon mountaineering ropes snapped like string under the strain. There was nothing we could do. The first wave—the 'wall of water'—had come down the central channel, and the lorry had thus been spared the full force of its impact; but soon the water began to rise even higher, and lapped up round our vehicle ominously till eventually—while everyone ran to and fro shouting and gesticulating—the lorry swung about, floated loose on the flood, and was carried away downstream like a child's toy (see photographs nos. 42-46).

For a moment we thought it would pass clean out of sight and be buried heaven knows where; but as luck would have it, it lodged against a projecting rock which the current had failed to uproot. Our helpers—still yelling and waving their arms about—anchored the helpless hulk with ropes, in such a way that there was no danger of its being completely lost. Meanwhile the

waters continued to rise steadily: it looked as though they might even threaten the knoll on which our cases stood. Once again we were forced to do some quick bargaining with the few locals still available, and in the end Mulai Jan persuaded them to lend us a hand in return for a further fifty rupees. We hauled all our boxes and baggage a few hundred yards farther back, dumping them at a point where no flood could possibly reach them.

Time had sped past without our noticing; and it was five o'clock in the afternoon. We were soaked to the skin, worn out, ravenously hungry, and minus our lorry; on top of this, we now found ourselves stranded, together with over four tons of valuable goods, in unfamiliar country, among a hostile people. The problem of where to spend the night was both serious and urgent. Luckily we had Mulai Jan with us: he seemed more than capable of dealing with this kind of crisis. Everyone kept telling us that we mustn't stay where we were, that it was dangerous after dark, that if we left our gear there it was bound to be stolen. As luck would have it, a decent-looking youth rode past on a bicycle at that moment, from the direction of Kahal: he turned out to speak excellent English. He too emphasized that whatever we did, we must not stay where we were after sunset, or leave our equipment behind. 'These people aren't used to foreigners,' he explained. 'They'd try to pinch all your stuff, and if you put up any resistance they'd murder you. All cats are black in the dark, and who's to tell afterwards?' He offered to go and send a lorry out for us, and we accepted gratefully.

About an hour later—just as it was getting dark—the lorry arrived. Naturally it was far too good an opportunity to stick to normal prices. The driver and his mate wanted twenty rupees to load up, and another forty for the trip to Kahal—an exorbitant sum for a journey of little more than three miles. But we were rather like the crew of a derelict boat: we had to take what we could, and be thankful.

While we were standing there waiting for the lorry to show up, a last faint ray of sunshine unexpectedly broke on the scene—and it was at this point that the busload described in my first chapter drove past us. Little did they know, as they howled and jeered, that a hundred yards farther on they, too, would be brought to an abrupt halt by the floods. . . .

After this momentary break in the weather the sky clouded over once more. By the time we reached Kahal it was quite dark. At first it looked as though we should be able to deposit our equipment in a go-down and find accommodation where we could get some sleep ourselves; but then it turned out that no one was willing to 'take the responsibility', i.e. that no one wanted to have 'all those valuable boxes' under his roof.

'Suppose thieves break in during the night, who's to be held responsible?' This question was asked, several times over, by a bald and moustachioed ancient who looked more than a little sinister himself.

There was only one alternative solution: to make tracks back to the fort at Rabat. Once again we were cheerfully fleeced by the lorry-drivers for the last mile or so of our journey. To add insult to injury—and being cautious by nature—they flatly refused to help carry our gear up to the fort in the dark. They stopped at the bottom of the hill, took their money, and made off very smartly. But things might have been worse: the *khan* of the fort at once sent the three or four men he could spare from his tiny garrison to help us. So, little by little, we humped about 8,000 lb. weight of gear up to the inner courtyard, through a pitch-black moonless night, and along two hundred yards of steep uneven track. It was eleven o'clock before our day's work could be said to be done. The lorry was out of action, though we had the lorry-drivers' word for it that it had been properly secured. Our various portrages had cost us a great deal in cash, but at least none of the gear had been lost. And since we were all half-dead with exhaustion, it mattered little now we lay safe behind the good stone walls of our little comic-opera fortress.



It was only by a hair's-breadth that our expedition had avoided ending in disaster. If we had unloaded the lorry a few minutes later, all our equipment would probably have been washed away and destroyed by the flood-water: heaven knows where it might have ended up. So it was a great consolation for us to find ourselves safe and sound, with a roof over our heads. But the weather continued appalling, and the occasional reports which came in from the surrounding countryside were not calculated to cheer us up. 'The roads are completely washed away,' someone told us. 'It'll take at least a week to repair them. There's a landslide at one point, and a great pit in the surface a bit farther on—the bridges aren't safe, either, I've heard.'

Next day the station-wagon came back. It had managed to get only a few miles farther than we had the previous afternoon, and had then stuck. Our companions, however, had been able to get a lift on a mail-van, and by now should be safe and sound in Dir.

There was only one thing for us to do: stick around a bit and try to find out something about the local inhabitants—who, if we were to believe what everyone told us, were a pretty fierce bunch. In the morning Mulai Jan and I went down to the village to do some shopping; and the first thing we saw in the square was two of our tarpaulins spread out to dry: no doubt they had been filched the night before during one of our many baggage-shifts. We recovered them at once, to the accompaniment of loud laughter all round: approving laughter, be it noted, since we had turned the tables on the thief. In their primitive system of ethics Craftiness is regarded as the Highest Good.

Later, Castelli, Mulai Jan and I went down again in search of a lorry that would get us somewhere near Dir. The rain had stopped, but the sky was still grey and threatening. Evidence of flooding caught the eye everywhere: the road was in a shocking state, and no one seemed concerned to repair it. Kahal is the typical sort of village you find in this area: a long string of single-storey houses, most of them built of sun-baked brick, with wooden verandahs or balconies, and all facing directly on to the road. They much resemble the villages of Baltistan, at the foot of the Karakoram range. The bazaar consisted of a few wretchedly poor shops where it was possible to buy only the barest necessities of existence. It was hopeless to look for any signs of curiosity in the inhabitants, or even for a flicker of recognition: they were wholly non-existent.

Both in the shops and on the street we encountered nobody but men—really sinister characters, these, who uttered not a single word. They strolled slowly past, at a leisurely, unconcerned pace, with rifle or machine-gun slung from a bandolier, or resting on their shoulders like a mattock (see photograph no. 50). Not unexpectedly, we failed to strike a bargain: the best price we were offered was 200 rupees (about £23 or \$70) which for a journey of not much more than thirty miles was plain daylight robbery.

We went back to the fort and had something to eat. During the afternoon we were visited by Haider Shuaib, the English-speaking youth we had met earlier. He was beyond a doubt the most civilized person we had come across in these parts, and we at once got on friendly terms with him. The object of his visit was to invite us all to his home, and he had changed his clothes for the occasion. He was wearing the regular local costume—a pair of baggy white cotton trousers with a shirt (also white and baggy) hanging over them—and on his feet he had a pair of those popular Indian sandals called *chaplis*.

Once again we all strolled down towards Kahal village. It was over half a mile from the fort, and we talked the entire way. Haider's attitude was nothing if not frank.

'How I envy people like you, living in a civilized country!' he declared. 'This place is a real prison, I don't mind telling you. The old Nawab who runs it is eighty-five years old; he's got dozens of wives, and three hundred ferocious dogs that are fed on milk and raw meat. He won't listen to any proposals for "modern education" in case people might get ideas into their heads as a result. And what *are* these strange ideas he's so anxious to avoid? Disarming all these ruffians for a start. Opening schools, building roads and hospitals, reorganizing the finances—in other words, embarking on the plans which our neighbour the Wali of Swat has carried out with such success. Can't this frightful old savage realize that he's simply cutting his own throat? One day there's going to be a bloody revolution here—'

'We read in the papers a while back that there *had* been a revolution.'

'Oh, they hushed it up, but it was a pretty serious business—worse than any account of it you've read, I can assure you. For once the papers have underplayed the truth. Now a lot of repressive measures are being enforced—it's risky so much as to open your mouth.'

'Good Lord. You've got some nerve, then.'

'Oh, we're alone here; and anyway, I'm the only person in these parts who can speak English. I take it you're not siding with the Nawab?'

'We're on your side, that goes without saying. What seems incredible to me is that the Nawab can't realize that a programme of reform is the only safe policy nowadays for any monarch who wants to hang on to his place in the sun a bit longer. It may be difficult for the central government to touch the Wali of Swat—after all, he's built up a lot of credit with his subjects by making a model province out of nothing: they really adore him. But the Nawab's digging his own grave by taking this line. Why doesn't the central government interfere? Can't you young people get something done?'

'It's not so easy as that. The fact of the matter is that during the hostilities between Pakistan and India over Kashmir, just after the partition of British India in 1947, the Nawab sent a very strong armed contingent to support the Pakistan cause: indeed, his men were the best and toughest fighters throughout the entire campaign. So the old man built up a lot of credit with the central government. And you know what he says? He says he's an old man, and as long as things last his time, his sons can sort out the mess when he's gone. What a mentality! And meanwhile he relies on all these semi-bandits you see prowling about the place with their guns. All he's interested in is hunting—not just wild game, either. If he sees a pretty face in some outlying village, he has its owner brought to the palace for his personal enjoyment. His latest flame is just thirteen. I tell you, he's a really terrible old man. These ignorant peasants admire him for his fabulous virility.'

'Tell me, Haider, how did you come to learn English so well?'

'I went to school in Peshawar. I'd like to go back to the university there, but I can't get the Nawab's permission. Do you know what his line is? None of this damned education, he says, otherwise people'll get above themselves and start wanting reforms. I'd like to study medicine. I told him so. Do you know what he said? "Medicine? Medicine? We've always done very well here with herbs and prayers. D'you think you can be a better man than our ancestors? Is that what you're after?" He kept on about how dangerous it was to show even the slightest unorthodoxy in matters of faith. A fine joke, that, coming from him!'

While talking thus we had reached the outskirts of Kahal. At last a few labourers were shovelling away at the deposits left by the flood: did this mean there was some hope of the road's being repaired fairly soon? We passed through the village, with its sinister guardians still sitting about clutching

rifles, cigarette-ends, and mandolins, and followed Haider to a little bridge over a river. 'I live over there, at the foot of the mountains,' he told us. 'That's where we have to go.' There was an old man standing guard over the bridge, with a scarlet cap on his head and a long musket at the ready; but when he saw Haider accompanying us he quickly stood aside. It was obvious that Haider's family must be one of the most important in the area. Everyone we passed saluted our guide with great deference.

Once across the bridge we found ourselves walking through well-kept paddy-fields. The rain had stopped, but the sky was a vast landscape of clouds—grey, pearl-white, purple—which lay reflected in the still waters, while beneath the reflection, and mingling with it, one caught the green tint of the young rice-plants. I am not sure why, but once we were across the river, we all got the feeling that we had entered a world immeasurably distant and alien from our own. We passed by an ancient water-mill, its wheels groaning slowly round, filling the air with a syncopated medley of creaks and bangs as its primitive wooden cogs engaged with one another. A little farther on, in the middle of a clearing beside a house, Haider pointed to a gigantic plane-tree: 'That is our school,' he told us. 'Under that plane-tree the Mullah sits, teaching children to spell out the Koran. All very pretty—poetic, in a way; but today there are many other things we ought to be teaching the young. A little chemistry, for a start: how can people know anything about methods of fertilization without some scientific grounding?'

Beyond doubt, Haider was right. Yet there was something enchanting about the idea of that open-air school under the plane-tree, lessons learnt to a background of the wind sighing through the leaves. Why was the long-bow more attractive than the cross-bow, and the cross-bow more romantic than the arquebus? Why was the arquebus more satisfying than the rifle, just as the rifle was preferable to the machine-gun? Was it all mere silly romanticism—the past as a retreat for those who preferred to avoid facing the present? I cannot be sure; this is a problem, I suspect, which will always remain debatable. How can there ever be innovation without destruction?

A little farther on the same problem presented itself in somewhat different guise. Let me try to sketch the scene: the rice-fields stretching away before us, stepped up at wide intervals to allow for the gentle upward slope of the valley, and overhead that strange sunless afternoon sky, filled with delicate, mildly melancholy clouds. Then, winding towards us down the valley, came a procession of women in trousers and veils—the regular costume here—with near-spherical water-jars balanced on their heads. They were bare-footed, and walked along in absolute silence, with tiny little steps of quite extraordinary elegance. Some of them were still mere children, others were adolescents. Beautiful? It was impossible to tell: you could scarcely see so

much as their eyes. Furthermore, when we got near them, they all stopped, turned away from us, and covered up their faces, remaining thus till we were well past.

Haider said nothing, though he was probably brooding over the emancipation of women in what he called 'this backward country of mine'. Rightly so, too: in this we were all with him. Moreover, the more enlightened sort of Moslem has for some while now been well aware that there is no scriptural authority that can justify the absurd subjection of women in Islamic countries. It is, they insist, no more than a traditional custom 'which we can change at will'. And yet, and yet, I would have been sorry to have missed that curious spectacle amid the flooded rice-fields, whose still waters reflected the sky with such fidelity that they seemed the surface of some vast abyss; I should have been sorry to have missed the subtle sense of magic and mystery in those mute figures, through whom, as we passed by, we sensed a secret current of femininity flowing.

About twenty minutes later we reached the group of houses where Haider's home was. 'Look,' said our friend, 'there's my father's house.' He pointed to a sort of semi-fortified homestead such as one can find in northern Italy: a remarkably large establishment, part farm, part country-house, and part private fortress. Round it were grouped a cluster of miserable huts, through which wandered a maze of rough, uneven tracks, thick with filth and refuse. The only people we could see about were men, for the most part in a hurry to finish off the last labours for the day—penning sheep, feeding cattle, or cutting firewood.

We crossed a small courtyard, on the far side of which was a very pleasant verandah, where chairs, tables, and a divan had been put out in readiness for us. We sat down. Servants at once appeared with eggs, sweets, fruit, biscuits, tea—in fact, a very substantial meal. Shortly afterwards there appeared from an upper floor a long procession of paunchy, imposing gentlemen in white shirts and carpet-slippers (see photograph no. 48). Haider introduced us to his father and uncles and cousins and brothers. We had struck the local Big House right enough, and no mistake. We exchanged brief greetings and good wishes, which Haider did his best to interpret; then the imposing gentlemen withdrew, and we in turn took our leave, retracing our steps to the bridge, the village, and, finally, to the fort.

We said good-bye to Haider with sincere regret and genuine affection. He was a kindly, decent boy, and we had become very attached to him. His desire to better the deplorable condition of the people among whom he lived was so patently sincere that it touched our hearts. We would have liked to help him in some way—but how? Life is a complex business, and each individual has his own invisible spider's web restricting his actions. My only doubt about Haider was due to his social status. Would not the fact of his

belonging to the local squirearchy, and being one of the 'gentlemen' in the valley, ultimately prove his undoing?

I had seen countless boys like him, in the remote villages of Sicily and Japan, or the backwaters of southern Italy. When they were twenty their every word betrayed a genuinely sincere passion to reform the world in which they lived; ten years later I would go back and find them transformed—married men, often with sons and heirs, wearing carpet-slippers, taking the long view, cautious, conservative, gradually acquiring (like a slow patina) the attitudes and traditions of their forefathers. Everything went on as it had always done, and as it always would in the future. The temptations were too great. The family house, their womenfolk, dominated by *mullahs*, *kannushi*, priests; money, possessions, property, position—these had proved their undoing. The house of cards must fall, there was no escape. To bring about any sort of reform—much less a bloody revolution—pre-supposes either quite exceptional will-power, or an initial position where you have nothing to lose. But in these backward societies, far from the main stream of modern existence, you can only perceive how much needs to be changed if you are educated above the average to begin with; and the only people who fulfil this condition are the sons of the nobility. The result is a vicious circle from which it is almost impossible to break loose.

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The following day the weather at last cleared up. At eleven o'clock, while we were busy bargaining with yet another lorry-owner, Franco Alletto and Paolo Consiglio suddenly appeared on the scene. They had managed to find a vehicle in Dir, and had come to pick us up. They brought us good news of the invalids, who were now completely recovered, but had a fearful tale to tell about their trip to Dir in the mail-van.

'You can't imagine what a business it was. After we'd left you at that torrent we struggled on, with great difficulty, for another four or five miles—and then, when we were fording the next big stream, the station-wagon stuck between two rocks, and the driver burnt out his clutch trying to get us clear! All the time we could see the level of the water rising. There was a cloudburst—well, you know what it was like—and I really thought we'd be carried away. By some sort of miracle, we managed to get the old bus clear before the full flood arrived. But even so it was out of action, and we were all soaked to the skin.'

'What about your poor invalids?'

'Well, you know what they say about kill-or-cure treatment: all this upset and confusion actually seemed to have done them good! Anyway, they were decidedly better; I suppose the bacilli had given up in exhaustion. Well: three or four hundred yards ahead of us, through those blinding sheets

of rain—it was coming down heavier every moment—we caught sight of what looked like a small mud hut, with lorries standing outside it. All we had to do was hump our baggage that far. But when we got there we found the two lorries crammed full of people—there were passengers even on the roof, despite the rain. The “hut” turned out to be nothing but a roof on piles, a sort of squalid cattle-stall, crowded with local peasants waiting for the storm to blow over. All around were donkeys, munching away in perfect contentment while streams of water poured off their backs. A cheering sight, as you can imagine. A few yards farther on was the Panjkora River, a muddy, headlong spate of water nearly overflowing its banks.’

‘We were so sodden, and by now so chilled to the bone, that we didn’t know what to do. We huddled miserably round a wretched little fire, together with a whole crowd of other people—all equally sodden and chilly and none of them exactly cheerful. Just before dusk, the rain stopped, and the sun actually came out for a minute or two. Lots of them took advantage of this lull to perform their evening devotions. In a way we found this rather reassuring: surely such outward signs of piety must presume a certain degree of civilization and reasonable behaviour? On the other hand it did rather underline our status as infidels. It was odd to see the way these whiskery old bandits knelt and bowed towards Mecca, in the most charmingly unself-conscious way, and then began chattering to their neighbours again immediately afterwards, or putting more fuel on the fire.’

‘It was nine o’clock at night before the bus got moving, and by then it was completely dark. We must have looked the most extraordinary lot. Pinelli and the Captain, as convalescents—actually they were much better by now—got the most privileged seats, up in front beside the driver. The rest of us, together with seven or eight cases, were crammed up on the roof, in among the usual crowd of gun-toting toughs. In addition there were three what you might call regular militiamen, with the most gigantic moustachios, and some sort of sketchy uniform, and long rifles slung over their shoulders. Every now and again we passed through a village, and this meant an interminable wait, not to mention the most frightful scrimmage as people got off and on. We had to fight pretty hard ourselves, just to keep our luggage intact; mysterious hands kept tugging it this way and that in an effort to use it as seating accommodation.’

‘Which, I don’t doubt, would have eventually vanished into their houses.’

‘Just so. Once outside the villages, there were long stretches of absolute darkness, without a light to be seen anywhere. The countryside looked deserted, empty, dead. Sometimes we had to labour up terribly steep hills, at little more than walking pace, with endless stomach-turning hairpin bends; coming down on the farther side was like plunging over a cliff, a series of screeching skid-turns round narrow, unexpected twists in the road.’

There were those high bridges, too, over the most frightful abysses, and only just as wide as the lorry; when you looked down from the roof, it seemed quite crazy to drive over them, and every now and then you felt that empty gulf echoing below and around you—it was worse than being on a rock-face. At last, half an hour after midnight, we reached Dir. Imagine, if you can, a really miserable shanty-town, deep in mud and stinking to high heaven, all in the pouring rain. The only signs of life were outside the caravanserai, where someone had lit a fire, and people were hurrying to and fro with acetylene lamps. The caravanserai itself, which was euphemistically described as an “hotel”, consisted of a single-storey building constructed from corrugated iron; it overlooked a malodorous beaten-earth courtyard, all churned up now by the rain, where large numbers of people were asleep on *charpoyas*. The rooms opened directly on to this courtyard. The one we were given was divided into three by wooden screens. The only articles of furniture it contained were more *charpoyas*. Its walls were black with filth: the ceiling was peeling off in patches, and bits of plaster lay scattered over the floor. To compensate for all this, we had some quite exceptionally fine spider’s webs, and (if it comes to that) an exceptionally fine spider, which scuttled across one of the walls as we came in. There were also a number of geckos, which woke up when we shone a light on them, and began to run all over the place. The smell was past description: a mixture of sweat and unwashed armpits and mouldy paper and dirty feet and decaying sweets and the inevitable curry. Somewhat dashed, we went out again, thinking we might at least dry ourselves at the fire we had seen on our first arrival. But all round the flames we found a circle of tall, muffled figures who refused to shift so much as an inch to let us near the warmth. Their faces, moreover, were even less reassuring than usual. So it came about that—sodden, filthy, frozen, and completely demoralized—we trailed back to our room in that so-called hotel. To cap everything, we were starving. In a brotherly spirit we shared five lumps of sugar—all we had available in the way of food. God, what a night!

‘When we woke up next morning we were so empty we were nearly out of our minds. Captain Shapur came in bright and early, carrying a pitcher of water and a large quantity of fruit tied up in a napkin. We were just about to fall on the fruit with whoops of delight, when Franco, as our doctor, firmly forbade us to touch it till it had been thoroughly disinfected—a process which in the normal way took anything up to half an hour. Captain Shapur, who took no notice of such precautions, watched this scene in high amusement. “All right, he can laugh,” said Franco. “He’s the one who’s had dysentery, though.” We were forced to admit he had a point there. Anyway, everything around us was in such an appallingly filthy state that some sort of clean-out was essential.

‘Later, thanks to Captain Shapur’s good offices, we found rather better

accommodation in the local fort. But even there we found the bedclothes provided with the *charpoy*s quite disgustingly dirty. "It doesn't matter," the gallant Captain assured us, "these are soldiers—fine, healthy, clean-living young men." In point of fact nothing could have been further from the truth than that last remark. Young they may have been, but as far as "healthy" or "clean-living" went, a discreet silence was the only possible reaction.

'No sooner had the word gone round that one of us was a doctor than a regular queue of patients beat a path to our door: among other complaints, Franco diagnosed several sorts of dysentery and venereal disease, not to mention abscesses and numerous parasitical ailments. He had quite a field-day.'

*

We reloaded all our gear on to the lorry that had arrived from Dir (a lengthy and awkward operation, seeing that we had a great deal of equipment and space was strictly limited), and then broke off for a mid-day meal. After this we set off. First, however, we took a very cordial farewell of the *khan* and his garrison, who had not only provided us with accommodation, but had helped us in a hundred other ways. It was early afternoon when we started—this time with the sun blazing down on us out of a clear blue sky. The floods, and indeed all the troubles we had endured twenty-four hours earlier, now seemed very far away. As we passed through Kahal, we saw the usual brigand-like figures lounging about here and there by the roadside, in loving colloquy with their rifles, as though suffering from some sort of violent delirium. Our faces must have been quite familiar to them by now, but no one saluted us. Only a few small children waved as we passed.

A little way past Kahal we crossed the notorious ford that had bothered us so much some days before. The bed of the stream was already dry; our derelict lorry had been hauled out of it, and stood like wreckage from a battle, a melancholy and (now that the sun was shining with such cheerful brightness) mildly ridiculous souvenir.

The rest of the trip went without a hitch. We saw the same steep hills and unexpected abyss-like descents, the same hairpin bends, zig-zagging through a wide, deserted valley (see photograph no. 47) that our friends had guessed at in the dark without being able to study them in any detail for themselves. We went through some wretchedly poor villages, and on several occasions stopped for a cup of tea at one of those *chaya-khana* that crop up all over the place in this part of the world, and might be defined as a backwoods version of the small coffee-bar-cum-lunch-counter. In the *chaya-khana* you are always sure of finding a drink and a snack—not to mention a large number of people sitting about, very relaxed, chatting to one another, or—more relaxed still—fast asleep.

Once or twice we glimpsed the typical sort of fort which turns up all over this area—examples occur in Swat and Lahul as well: big square buildings made of sun-baked bricks and wooden beams, with a high guard-tower at each corner (see photograph no. 36). 'That's where the Nawab keeps his hired thugs,' one of the drivers remarked. Obviously he was either from outside Dir or else a member of the opposition. It must, I reflected, be hard to find another country in the world where the wretched peasant lives in gloomier, more medieval conditions—under the shadow of those fortresses and their ruffianly garrisons, without proper laws or education or civil rights, ground down by iniquitous taxes, always liable to have the old Nawab cast a lewd eye on his daughters and haul them off to the palace by main force.

At last, just before five o'clock, somebody exclaimed: 'Look—there's Dir!' After driving round two more bends, we got our first glimpse of the famous palace. Dir is an ugly town, of about 20,000 inhabitants, set at the bottom of a narrow valley without any specially striking characteristics; and the Nawab's palace, at least from a distance, is about the ugliest thing in it. It is a huge box-like building, a cross between a barracks and a nursing-home in appearance, crowned with an absolutely obscene corrugated iron roof. It embodied, to perfection, every criticism we had heard levelled at the Nawab and his court: arrogance, niggardliness, bad taste, terrorism. As we drove in, we spotted a pair of sturdy menials with four great tawny dogs on the leash. These looked both ferocious and alarmingly well fed: from His Highness's kennels, beyond a doubt.

*

Dir (at the time of writing) is the last point you can reach on this route by normal mechanized transport. Some jeeps have been known to get to Chitral and even penetrate beyond it, but this is a hazardous undertaking. Dir in fact lies at the foot of a highly important pass nearly 10,500 feet above sea-level: the Lowarai Pass, which links the Panjkora valley with the valley of the upper Kunar and its tributaries—in other words, with the whole of Chitral. A road wide enough to take lorries over the pass has been under construction for several years, and they say there is every chance that it will soon be completed. But until that day comes, if you want to travel on up-country from Dir you have to organize a caravan—donkeys, mules, camels, whatever beast of burden happens to be available at the time.

So far as we were concerned, the various operations (hiring of animals, weighing and distribution of loads) took up an entire day, though they went through without any snags or particular difficulties. The transport service, one gathered, was organized by faithful adherents of the Nawab; and the Nawab himself (or so they assured us) made a very profitable business out of

the special tax imposed on such undertakings. Meanwhile, we found accommodation for two nights in the guest-quarters of the fort, which were very generously put at our disposal by the officer commanding the city garrison.

Naturally we also visited the town of Dir itself. At one point the word got round that the Nawab wanted to see us—an experience which would beyond doubt have proved at least as interesting for us as for him—but in the end, for some reason or other, the idea fell through. Captain Shapur confabulated with ‘a high Palace official’, and conveyed our respects to the Nawab; and that was that.

The bazaar in Dir is large, picturesque, and indescribably dirty. ‘Each man for himself, and Allah for all’ should be the basic rule here. There are no proper sewers; all waste matter flows along the street in open gutters. You never can be sure of their state: after rain the place is a sea of mud; when the sun is shining you kick up clouds of dust. The shops stretch for over half a mile along either side of the main street, and are pretty well stocked with anything liable to be wanted in this mountainous region: rolls of cloth, foodstuffs, domestic utensils, arms, agricultural implements. We noticed one or two small goldsmiths’ shops, but none of them seemed to sell any object for severely functional, let alone imaginative or decorative table-use. It was hopeless trying to find any art objects, or, indeed, craftsman’s work of any sort; and only the ethnographer could have found anything to interest him in some of the rare and poor local products.

We paused for a moment or two outside the caravanserai. Dozens, perhaps even hundreds, of mules and donkeys were taking their turn at the feeding-troughs. The courtyard was in the most stupendously filthy condition, being covered to a depth of over a foot with a yellowish slush, compounded from mud and droppings, which resembled béchamel sauce. Urchins were splashing about in this with great delight, and hurling turds at one another—a sport which was something of a danger to those who, like us, happened to be strolling past at the time. Everyone stared at us: foreigners in these parts are a rarity. Some shopkeepers looked sly and secretive, as though they had our measure very well; others sat there on their little hassocks in the shop doorways and eyed us up and down with an air of amused superiority that we found verging on the offensive. Many people going about the streets carried arms; and the Nawab’s dogs, held on the leash by huge tough uniformed menials, were everywhere—panting and sniffing at everything in sight as though they owned it, while dribbles of saliva and froth rained down from their jaws to mingle with the filth underfoot.

From the far side of the valley we had observed five or six small, cheaply built chalets grouped together: we took them to be a barracks. ‘No,’ someone told us, ‘that’s a hospital; they’ve just finished building it. They want to

show the world that we've got every amenity here, too. . . . ' We never managed to find out if the place was actually in use, or was there just to impress visitors from the outside world.

By the 7th July we were, at long last, really on our way.

CHAPTER FIVE

GUJUR AND CHITRAL

*If pain, like fire, gave off smoke, the world would be shrouded
in eternal darkness. . . .*

ABU 'L-HASAN SHAHID (TENTH CENTURY)

If two lords meet, who shall hold their horses?

CHITRALI PROVERB

*I walked abroad in the world, hither and thither; and wherever
I turned my eye, Thou wert manifest there.*

DARD OF DELHI (EIGHTEENTH CENTURY)

WE LEFT Dir at 7 o'clock in the morning. The sky was clear, and a fresh breeze blew off the mountains. Our caravan was in perfect order, and all the officers and N.C.O.s from the fort were there to see us off. We had one hundred and seventy-three pieces of baggage, almost all of them loaded on the backs of little donkeys not much bigger than the Sardinian breed, and somewhere between cigarette-ash and coffee-grounds in colour.

The road was an excellent one, climbing in easy looping gradients up the valley through patchwork smallholdings and scattered thickets. At first we passed numerous cottages; but the farther we went the fewer they became, and those there were looked increasingly poverty-stricken. They were always built according to the same plan: there would be a central edifice, often two stories high, containing the main rooms, and a large porch, made of wooden beams, to protect the front entrance. The walls were normally of sun-baked brick. Soon we saw our first conifers, and the landscape took on a more alpine appearance. Roughly speaking you could say that conditions in the Alps and Hindu-Kush are similar, with about 4,000 feet difference in height. (See photograph no. 53.)

We met large numbers of people on the road, and numerous donkey-caravans, carrying every kind of merchandise—very often rock-salt. We also saw several ragged, sweating youths, bent double under long, oddly shaped loads all wrapped up in fresh bracken: they told us they were carrying snow, which came from the slopes above the Lowarai Pass, and was destined for the Nawab's palace. That terrible old man certainly knew how to do himself

well. Yet the snow was a minor pleasure, the merest trifle, compared to the enormous tax he levied on every caravan: *that* had the chink of pure gold about it. From what some of the locals told us (in a moment of over-confidential euphoria), a very large percentage of the high price we had been forced to pay the muleteers for their services went straight into the Nawab of Dir's capacious pocket.

Meanwhile the road continued to climb. If we had really wanted to command respect during our journey we ought to have travelled on horse-back: only the poorest sort of person travelled on foot. Everyone of any consequence whom we met on the way—paunchy landowners, bearded mullahs (complete with turban and black umbrella), officials followed by a retinue of armed toughs—advanced with some dignity, squarely in the saddle. On the other hand, we had our physical training to keep up, which was more important than our status among the local population. Every step we took seemed to revive us a little more: we felt like someone getting up after a bad illness, slowly coming to life again after those long days of oppressive heat down in the plains.

At one point—I forget how it came about—we found ourselves chatting with a student who was, or so he told us, 'going to Chitral for the vacation'. He spoke fairly fluent English, and informed us that his father was a Russian refugee from Samarkand who had married a Chitrali lady. He was an intelligent boy, endowed with a great natural thirst for knowledge. Normally he lived in Peshawar, he said, but now he was going to the village where his mother's family were settled. He wanted to study science and become an engineer. This passion for science (often very moving in its fresh ingenuousness) is something that I have encountered among the adolescents of every country in Asia where I have spent any length of time. They seem to regard science, instinctively, as a kind of spiritual liberation, an adventure into new and virgin territories of thought, the golden key to a future very different from the times of their fathers.

About mid-day we reached Gujur Fort, situated a little way below the Lowarai Pass, on the banks of a roaring mountain torrent. All round us we could see the most superb landscape of grey rock-formations, studded with tall, vigorously growing conifers, like so many barbed arrow-heads. The so-called 'fort' was really little more than an ordinary hut, but with rather solid walls than usual, and built of stone.

*

The night of the 8th July was another ordeal—but not, like our night in Peshawar, by reason of the heat. Here, at an altitude of nearly 10,000 feet, the air was becoming appreciably chilly. The position was this: sleeping accommodation inside the Gujur Fort being strictly limited, some of us—since we had sleeping-bags and inflatable rubber mattresses ready to hand—

bedded down under the stars, up on the flat roof beside the parapet. When we went to sleep the sky was clear, a twinkling map of galaxies and constellations: but during the night this celestial tranquillity must have been disrupted by the silent gathering of cloud-formations, since we suddenly woke to gusts of wind and rain. Peals of thunder echoed dully behind the surrounding peaks, and very soon a violent storm broke overhead. We were forced to take cover 'under hatches', and naturally there was a great deal of confusion. As generally happens on such occasions, sleep went by the board; we were all up before 5 o'clock.

In the long run this incident worked to our advantage, since we managed to get away really early. One of the longest and most exhausting days of the entire journey lay ahead of us. It was 6.30 when we left the fort. The weather had cleared, and the air had that special bracing cleanness which tends to appear immediately after a storm: the wind still blew in gusts, sending bright white clouds scudding across the sky. We passed through Gujur village, which is little more than a series of stables for caravans; the thing we noticed most was the heaps of dung lying about everywhere, which could so easily have been collected and used as fertilizer instead of being left there to disperse into dust under the influence of sun and wind.

Beyond Gujur we began to climb the steep track which carries the caravans over the Lowarai Pass. The new road—good enough, at a pinch, for heavy motorized transport—wound round in a series of easy looping gradients; but the path we were following cut straight up the hillside. Captain Shapur, accompanied by one of the Nawab's militiamen, had scrambled on ahead at incredible speed, till they were both out of sight; we followed more slowly, enjoying the scenery and the mountain air, and stopping every so often to take photographs. From such instances as I have personally witnessed, I would say that when Pakistani officers go on a route-march, the system they adopt for preference is more or less as follows: start at top speed and press on like madmen till you reach your immediate destination, where you promptly drop on to a *charpoy* and pass out. For military requirements this may serve very well; but if you want to learn something on your journey and enjoy the landscape through which you are travelling, it is utterly hopeless.

The approaches to the pass—and indeed the whole watershed above Dir—are almost entirely treeless, and those scannel grazing-slopes reminded me very much of the Abruzzi. In the distance we could see several donkey-caravans ascending or descending the same track. From time to time we passed a group of barefooted women, wearing black veils and balancing bundles of firewood on their heads; as we approached they stopped ostentatiously and turned their heads the other way—though if you looked back quickly you saw that a hand had lifted the protective veil, and that two eyes were scrutinizing you: a pleasant instance of human frailty.

During this march it seldom happened that we were all together, since each individual moved at his own pace; and thus the fastest got well ahead, while the slower or the more curious plodded along in the rear. Couples or small groups were the nearest we came to any sort of cohesion. However, we all reached the Lowarai Pass more or less at the same time—'the gateway to our Promised Land', as Betto Pinelli called it—and there we stopped. A strong wind was blowing: the air was very fresh, cold almost, and from time to time clouds obscured the sun.¹ On the farther side, towards Chitral, we saw a deep valley, its flanks covered with trees and shrubs, while beyond it gleamed the first snow-capped peaks. 'Just like Switzerland,' Paolo Consiglio exclaimed; and indeed those clumps of conifers did have a curiously vigorous, well-kept look about them. The trees frequently grew to a very great height.

But the moment we started observing the Lowarai Pass for signs of life—houses, people, animals—we were whisked straight back from Switzerland to Asia. On one side of the track there stood a few rest-huts for travellers, and also a small *chaya-khan* where you could get a glass of hot tea; on the other was a group of large, lazy-looking camels, with unmistakably irritable expressions on their faces (see photograph no. 54), and some tall, haughty Afghans, who wore heavy military moustaches and black turbans, which gave them an extraordinarily ruffianly appearance. Camels and men were engaged on the transport of large and heavy logs from Chitral to the pass; there they stacked them in piles, ready to be collected by the lorry-drivers who came up from the Dir side, and loaded them on to their lurching, jolting vehicles for the next stage of the journey.

As I have already observed, any attempt to discuss the Afghans at once lands one in a veritable morass of historical, anthropological and linguistic problems. One thing, however, is certain: the majority of those who inhabit these valleys and plateaux—the people, that is, who were welded by Ahmed Shah into the Afghan state (1747), and have since then successfully maintained their independence against British and Russians alike—treat foreigners with a species of primitive pride that frequently verges on insolence and at times is near to open contempt. It is true that this is a part of the world where the guest's person is sacred, and friendship imposes weighty obligations; but in your every contact with these people you sense the implied belief that no foreigner should regard himself as in any way superior, and

¹ In 1960 Professor A. J. Toynbee, notwithstanding his seventy-one years, made a trip through Afghanistan and Pakistan, much of it in the path of Alexander the Great. On 28th May he was obliged to give up his attempt to reach the Lowarai Pass because of a violent snowstorm! (See A. J. Toynbee, *Between Oxus and Jumna*, London 1961, p. 137.) Another scholar who crossed the Lowarai Pass was Sir Aurel Stein, in 1906, at the beginning of one of his explorations into central Asia. (See M. A. Stein, *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, London 1912.)

perhaps not even equal, to the Afghans. All this one could read, only too clearly, in the eyes of those black-turbaned camel-drivers: not that it stopped them from pressing us for *bakshish* in return for the one or two photographs we took of them.

‘Wherever you go, it’s always cash that rules the world.’

‘Yes, but did you see how he asked you for it? A bargain between equals, no less. You want a picture of my face? Very well: you can pay for it. Not interested? Then a very good day to you.’

Shortly afterwards we emerged from the pass, and found ourselves in Chitral.

The conifers gradually turned into a genuine—and very beautiful—forest, the trees in which showed every sign of extreme antiquity. Many of the big firs had trunks whose weirdly knotted, almost hieroglyphic bark, together with the oozing, resinous stumps of snapped-off branches, told a long story of storm and tempest, winter frosts and avalanches. (I was at once put in mind of the forests of Corsica—perhaps the most fabulous and impenetrable forests in all Europe.) Sunlight struck down through the branches in thin, sword-like slivers, throwing sudden radiance on the undergrowth, highlighting a patch of grass or flowers which resembled those one finds in the Alps. Numerous streams of icy, crystal-clear water came tumbling down through the rocks, between clumps of saxifrage, and some other vivid green plant I did not recognize. Higher up, where the trees thinned out a little, we saw steep rock-faces in which a few firs had still, somehow, managed to take root. This, beyond doubt, was the sort of place that the Persian miniaturists had in mind when they took up their delicate brushes and sketched a royal hunt: the prince with his bow and arrows, mounted on a small, agile pony; the birds fluttering through the tree-tops, the courtiers following at a distance.

We gradually made our way down into the valley till we reached the fort of Ziarat (‘The Sanctuary’), round which there clustered a group of barrack-huts occupied by the troops guarding the valley. Our arrival was clearly no surprise to anyone: a soldier met us on the track, and asked us to follow him. After negotiating various steps and staircases we found ourselves in what must have been the officers’ mess, where a first-class meal awaited us, set out on a low table: plates of grilled liver, some *anda halwa* (a sweet made from eggs, butter and sugar), fruit, biscuits, and cups of tea. We were received with a great show of cordiality by the commandant himself: a tall, strongly-built man of about fifty, smiling and affable, and far less obviously the martinet than most senior officers in his position. His uniform was improved by one or two borrowings from Pathan tribal costume. It was at once apparent that here was a man who would be at his ease anywhere. His whole personality, in particular his dignified bearing, was redolent of

some quality it would be hard to define, but which at once suggested an aristocratic background. In these aggressively masculine, warlike societies, only the man who is 'born above the clouds' (as the Japanese put it) can allow himself the luxury of appearing suave, kindly, almost—as it were—vulnerable; such privileged persons stand, in reality, at the apex of a pyramid (whose base is composed of fanatical mountain tribesmen) and command universal loyalty from high and low alike. The substance of their authority is such that they can easily afford to disguise it a little.

The conversation, in somewhat halting English, covered the usual topics: our journey, our impressions of the country, our immediate plans, any possible complaints we might have. Then came the question which it was always so hard to answer: 'But, after all, why do you want to go climbing mountains?'

We tried the usual arguments: that mountaineering was a fine sport, that supremacy in any field was eminently desirable, and that international prestige was involved here, since the Norwegians had already scaled Tirich Mir and the Americans Istor Nal. Such considerations were readily intelligible to a present-day Moslem Pathan. But Major Mahsud was determined to explore the subject at a more fundamental level.

'There must be something more,' he insisted, 'to make you spend so much money and risk your lives so far from home. No, don't worry,' he went on, handing us some more grilled liver, a cheerful grin on his face. 'I'm not—as I have no doubt you supposed—making dark allusions to espionage. I really want to know the answer.'

To give him the simple, concise explanation he sought proved extraordinarily difficult. Some of the motives involved we found ourselves tracking down in far from readily accessible territory—in the subconscious mind, in the history of the West, in various mental strong rooms to which the keys had long since been lost. When one gets down to it, how many of life's activities are wholly lacking in any rational basis! We accept the fashions, dances, and social customs of the period coincident with our own journey through life upon this planet, and act accordingly: perhaps the most important thing is to act, without thinking overmuch about it.

I said: 'Believe me when I tell you that the basic underlying motive for our actions is, in this particular instance, the thirst for knowledge, a desire to better our understanding of God's world in all its many aspects. Such a desire—such an appetite, I might say—is typical of the West. Here the instinct and the conscious urge have joined forces with a codified, ritualistic sport: mountaineering. The result? All these expeditions to the world's highest and most remote mountains.'

The major sat gazing at the ceiling for a moment before he replied.

'I think what you say is essentially true,' he observed at length. 'But

perhaps you do not make sufficient allowance for the degree to which the western desire for knowledge is allied to the instinct for possession—or the right of disposal, which comes to much the same thing. Your desire for knowledge is genuine, mark you, and I have nothing but respect for your scientific achievements. But having wrested all Nature's secrets from her, you make your knowledge an instrument of power rather than of contemplation. Some of you, certainly, would like to use it for the subjugation of other peoples. We are among the very few who have always resisted any such attempt.'

The major stared at the ceiling again; then, after a brief pause, as though at the conclusion of some particularly cherished argument, continued.

'Anyway, all this is very natural. Strife is the essence of life. Once we too were a mighty nation: the Green Banner was acknowledged from China to Spain. Anyone who wanted to learn philosophy, mathematics or medicine had to come to us. We were the inheritors of Greek wisdom, we had divine poets and a magnificent court life. Then came the divisions and rivalries, and everything collapsed. It was like a sickness of the soul. We withdrew into ourselves. (Ahmed! Give the sahibs some more tea. And you there, pass the sweets round again!) Meanwhile you in the West were studying the secrets of the universe and making yourselves strong. But I tell you, the last word on this subject has not been spoken! Our young men will learn all that you have discovered. The world has a great future. . . .'

He smiled. That last remark was a deliciously ambiguous diplomatic flourish. The discussion continued a little longer; then we said good-bye to our host and went on our way. The sun was now blazing hot, partly because it was the middle of the day, and partly because we had slowly descended to something like 4,800 feet above sea-level. I walked for a while with Captain Shapur and questioned him about the major.

'He belongs to one of the leading *malik* families, the Mahsuds. What, you mean to tell me you don't know about the Mahsuds? I take it you've heard of Waziristan? Good. Well, the Waziris and the Mahsuds are the two most powerful clans in the entire region. No one has ever succeeded in imposing an external regime on them. The British were forced to fight a regular war against them in 1919; but their efforts at subjugating these troublesome tribes cost them some two thousand men and forty-five officers. Not even Pakistan could force them to their knees—and we are, after all, of the same Faith. In fact we try to make concessions to them, so that they'll remain reasonably amiable. Have you seen the battalion here? All Mahsuds, every man jack of them, including the officers, who are Mahsud chieftains. The major is one of the most influential members of the clan alive. We hope the system will pay off with some good results—when they break out they're really terrifying. You heard the way he talked, though? He might have been

the Shah of Persia. Great warriors and great talkers, these Mahsuds: no one can do a thing with them!

During this discussion of the Mahsuds my eye had been caught by a curious spectacle some way ahead of us: several posts all hung about with coloured ribbons. I told myself it must be one of those not infrequent tombs which one finds by the roadside in these parts. But when we reached the place—at a point where the valley is divided into two halves by a great spur of rock—what I found was a little grotto, or cave, half-blocked by a low stone wall, and equipped with a tiny wooden wicket-gate. From a sort of dark lair inside two bright, questioning eyes stared out at us.

‘Who on earth is that?’ I asked.

‘Oh, just a hermit. Here, let’s drop a couple of annas in his bowl.’

The two eyes stared at us harder still, but now with an air of benign curiosity. The encounter left us oddly shaken. We walked in silence for a while along the white, dusty, glaring track.



By now the valley had become baking hot, and the beautiful alpine forest of the Lowarai Pass was nothing but a memory. All around us was a landscape of rocks and brushwood, with reddish, increasingly dry soil: every mile we travelled the vegetation became sparser (see photograph no. 57). The main survivors were holm-oaks, very much like those to be found in the most sun-parched regions of the Mediterranean. The river—a cheerful, clear-flowing stream still—wound its way along the bottom of the valley: we wanted to take a dip in it, but Captain Shapur advised against stopping. We had a long way to go yet, he said; and he was right.

Shortly after mid-day we reached Ashiret, a tiny village with a vast walled compound which served as a combined corral and stable for cattle. It seems that the local inhabitants, called Dangariks, speak a special dialect, Palula, and have quite different customs from those of their Chitrali neighbours. They may possibly be descended from a group of immigrants whose original home was Gilgit, or the upper Indus valley.¹

We had covered nearly twenty miles on foot since 6.30 that morning; we were exhausted and horribly thirsty—not to mention that nasty empty feeling in our stomachs. But all we had time for was a miserable snack, after which we spent two hours sweating over the transfer of our baggage—paying off muleteers and organizing the disposal of those one hundred and seventy items aboard a couple of ancient lorries—really ancient, almost museum pieces. Their creaking wooden superstructures were patched together with nails, lengths of wire, and broken boards. As for their engines, it seemed—as the ancient Chinese used to say of invalids—that the ‘hundred infections’

¹ R. C. F. Schomberg, *Kafirs and Glaciers* (London, 1938), p. 206.

had taken final possession of them. It was appallingly hot, though luckily the heat was of the clear, dry sort; if we had struck the heavy, thick, humid variety I think we should simply have collapsed.

By 3.30 we managed at last to get our lurching vehicles on the road, and set off in a cloud of dust and flies, followed by numerous shouting urchins. For some miles the road continued to run downhill; then we came out into the main Kunar valley, with high mountains on either side of us, and a river which displayed that characteristic pearly-grey tint common to all glacier-fed streams. The Kunar, as I have mentioned earlier, after picking up every tributary river in Chitral, plunges underground to re-emerge in Afghan territory: eventually it joins the Kabul, and its waters—after a long and varied journey—help to enrich the plains round Peshawar.¹

Shortly after entering the Kunar valley we passed through a village and saw another fort—that of Mirkhani. From here on the road behaved as though it had suddenly become drunk. With crazy zest it went circling downwards, skirting sheer precipices above the river, only to change its mind suddenly and begin climbing again, through great drifts of dust and shale. To take a new vehicle in first-class condition over this unpredictable route would have been child's play; but with our ancient wheezing monsters it was a painful progress. First we had to stop and let their over-heated pistons and cylinder-block cool off after the excessive strain that had been placed on them (see photograph no. 58). Then one of them showed signs of developing red-hot innards, and we were obliged to give it a drink of oil. At every spring, rivulet, or puddle we passed, their thirsty, roaring radiators cried out for water, water, and more water.

In this part of the world any vehicle passing through is naturally regarded as a form of public transport available to every one. The moment we pulled up in any village there was a regular stampede of young and old, some with guns and some without, the smart and the ragged, all fighting to get a seat beside the driver, or—better still—on our mountainous piles of baggage. We tried to protest, but with little success; some few retreated, but the rest—with huge ingratiating smiles and much rolling of the eyes—clung on regardless, shoving in between us or remaining outside, hooked, limpet-like, to the various projecting bits of the lorry's bodywork. The best policy, it turned out, was that practised by the Roman emperors: the employment of barbarians to keep the barbarians at bay. We selected two or three of the likeliest-looking toughs and gave them the job of holding off the rest. The Roman Empire ultimately fell by playing this game too enthusiastically;

¹ This river, which runs right through Chitral, and which the Greeks called Choaspes, has several modern names: in lower Chitral it is called the Kunar, in upper Chitral the Mastuj; but when you approach Pamir it turns into the Yarkhun.

but we were immune to such dangers. As Enrico Leone said, by way of a joke, we couldn't fall much lower than we had already.

In the midst of this cheerful free-for-all I found myself sitting next to an elegant young man in a white shirt. The shirt was of the finest quality, and its owner clean-shaven, apart from a neat little imperial: both of which suggested acquaintance with city ways. On his head was a fez made of astrakhan—a material so expensive that only the well-to-do can afford it (see photograph no. 55). He spoke excellent English, and there was none of the 'I'd never stay here a moment if I could get somewhere else' line. He told me he was a government technician, travelling on to Drosh (which lay a short distance ahead of us), where he had recently been transferred. We chatted of this and that for a while. Naturally he, too, was curious to know 'why we wanted to go climbing mountains.' By now I had five or six ready-made explanations in reserve, which I did my best to adapt to the particular needs of each individual occasion. I had even elaborated a special theological argument: we belonged to a religious sect which sought out the highest mountains because they were closest to God. On the whole, the nationalist explanation was the one most readily understood and accepted: a fact which leaves one with many things to ponder concerning the world we live in—none of them very cheerful, I fear.

Then my young companion asked me, as we bumped along together: 'Tell me: do you have the original tongue?'

'I'm not quite sure—in fact, I honestly don't know. What "original tongue" are you talking about?'

'Why, that of the Koran, of course! The Koran was directly dictated by God to Mahommed, and the words of the Koran are God's own utterance. Mahommed added nothing to them himself. The Koran which we possess is an exact copy of the gold-lettered Koran in heaven. That is the "original tongue". What I meant just now was this: you are *kitabiyā*, people of the Book, are you not? But you do not—correct me if I am mistaken—possess the original tongue.'

'Yes, I know exactly what you mean. But it's a little difficult, you see, to work out just what the original tongue spoken by man was, in fact. Look, the Koran was written more than six hundred years after Christ, and, at a rough estimate, some eighteen hundred after Moses. My point is that, beyond the slightest doubt, men were talking an endless multiplicity of tongues centuries before the Prophet. For instance, Alexander the Great—whom you call Iskander—passed through this way nine hundred years before the Prophet's day; and he spoke Greek. Don't you honestly think that if we are to talk about an "original tongue" at all, we ought to pick on some genuinely ancient language rather than the Arabic of only thirteen centuries ago?'

'I'd never thought about it in that way. Well, maybe "original" really means "divine", timeless as it were? What do you say to that? The Koran is undoubtedly the word of God; about that there can be not the slightest doubt.'

'And supposing God had chosen a prophet from a different linguistic group—a Syrian perhaps, or a Greek or a Persian, or a Punjabi like yourself?'

'But this supposition is absurd: the Prophet could be none other than Mahommed ("Pray God for him and may he attain salvation!"). Therefore he had no alternative but to speak in Arabic.'

'All right—but just assume it for a minute for the sake of argument. In that event the "original tongue" would be a different language altogether, right? I can't help feeling that this whole idea of the "original tongue" is just a bit vague—and above all, that it's unscientific. You told me a little while ago that you are deeply interested in biology, and that your job is developing methods for eradicating agricultural parasites. You also told me—and a fine joke you found it—that the peasants still imagine they can keep blight off the crops by the use of amulets, and you're determined to teach them how to apply proper fungicides—'

'How does all this come into it?'

'How do you suppose the scientists ever managed to produce genuine fungicides rather than chimeras? By studying the natural world, and examining it with passionate and scrupulous accuracy; by accepting any conclusion such a study forced upon them, and applying the free exercise of reason to each successive problem. One must do exactly the same when dealing with the idea of an "original tongue". I am not for one moment denying the possibility of such a language's having existed; but let us examine every aspect of the problem, and not accept what the mullahs have told us for centuries as though it were pure gold—'

'But these are sacred matters—I don't see what fungicides have to do with the case at all. Let us consider another possible solution—that God thinks in Arabic because He has known, since the beginning of time, that this would be the tongue used by the last and greatest Prophet, the Seal of the Prophets himself. What do you think of that?'

At this point our venture into the fields of philology and dogma was interrupted by several violent jerks and a hubbub of voices. 'Come on,' roared the drivers, 'get down and lend a hand, or the old bus'll be stuck in this accursed sand till kingdom come.' Down we clambered, and after much shoving, sweating, and cursing, finally got on our way again.

The discussion was resumed, but it proved absolutely impossible to break through my temporary companion's mental carapace when examining the 'original tongue' concept. On any other subject his reasoning was sound and subtle; but get him talking about religious doctrine and he became like a blind child.

Meanwhile, as the afternoon wore on, the beauties of our old planet Earth became ever more enchanting. The sun shone low above the horizon, bathing the breeze-stirred tree-tops in a warm golden glow; and at each bend in the road fresh patterns of light danced and glittered on the river. Even the features and expressions and gestures of the people we met seemed to reflect a less tragic and tormented spirit than that prevailing among the folk beyond the pass, in the land of Dir. The women wore coloured dresses, and there was no sign of those wretched black veils. Many, indeed, dispensed with the veil altogether. And none of the men was armed.



Soon we drove into Drosh: a sizable town and a vital fortress. The military citadel, built by the British in 1895, stood on a hill, beyond the houses and the bazaar. Naturally we had to stop our convoy, get out, and make the long trek up in order to be presented to the commanding officer. Captain Shapur seemed rather worried that we were not as punctiliously turned out as we might have been; it was clear that he regarded this as a highly important visit.

Paolo Consiglio later described the scene in his diary: 'The moment we passed through the guard-post of the fortress, we got the sensation of having been transported into another world. Order, discipline, efficiency, spit-and-polish: these were the dominant impressions; together with the trees, and the style of building, they made me think of England rather than a quite different country more than four thousand miles away. A small guard of honour presented arms; and when Silvio Iovane wandered in with his usual lackadaisical air—he had dawdled along about a hundred yards behind the rest of us—the guard of honour were thrown into a fine confusion, not sure whether to line up and repeat their performance or not. As a sort of compromise they came to attention, and it would be hard to decide who was more astonished: the sergeant in charge, or Silvio himself, who was so thunder-struck that he almost fell at the soldiers' feet.

'We were conducted on to a green, well mown lawn, with a splendid view out across the valley; and here, under a clump of enormous trees, we were met by a fresh-faced, amiable young captain, who introduced himself, apologized for the absence of the colonel—he had been held up in Chitral on business—and offered us the usual glasses of orange squash. These, together with cigarettes in a silver box, were carried round by two bearers. In the end we were taken into the H.Q. officers' mess; and here at last, comfortably seated and waited on with punctilious attention, we assuaged our gnawing hunger. The magnificent carpets, the silver salt-cellars and sugar-sifters, the polished mahogany furniture, the old English prints on the walls, the

curtains and door-hangings, the mounted heads of ibex and various other hunting trophies, including the extremely rare snow-leopard—all these things demonstrated the care and enthusiasm which the officers had put into the adornment of their mess. After the long days we had spent in Dir, it seemed like a dream. We felt almost as though we were rude up-country simpletons who had come down to the city for the first time in our lives. . . .’

At Drosh we managed to obtain one extremely valuable thing which we had vainly sought in Karachi: a set of topographical maps covering the area in which our mountain was situated. Anything to do with maps is always a sore point in newly-independent countries. At Karachi we had been obliged to go through endless bureaucratic formalities in order to obtain the most common sort of touring map, such as we at home could buy in any stationer’s shop. We had had to make formal application to the Ministry of the Interior, backed by a note from the Italian Embassy; on the strength of this we were referred to a certain office where, after endless signatures, counter-signatures, and the rest of it, we were at last entrusted with these explosive documents: maps which, in point of fact, had been surveyed, drawn up and printed under the British administration. What possible secrecy or security could be involved here?

We left Drosh at dusk. We had a brief and distant glimpse of Tirich Mir’s 25,000-foot peak, a truly divine spectacle: while all the valley slowly passed into darkness, those high, far-off glaciers were still resplendent in the tranquil glow of the setting sun’s last rays. Only twenty-five miles still lay between us and Chitral. The road—as could clearly be seen from our map—was one long succession of loops and curves, sharp ascents and descents interspersed with bridges. Since our vehicles could not, alas, be miraculously rejuvenated, we had, beyond any doubt, a good few hours’ travelling still ahead of us.

Our adventures were not long in beginning. As we approached one of the bridges, we were stopped by a picket, and a long discussion took place between them and our liaison officer. Finally we were informed that the bridge was dangerous, and that we would therefore have to unload our four tons of equipment, hump it across on our backs, drive the empty trucks over the weak section at a snail’s crawl, load up again, and then—if everything was in order—continue our journey.

‘You don’t need to worry about your stuff,’ these tall, white-clad, moustachioed toughs assured us. ‘After all, we’re here. . . .’ Captain Shapur informed them, in thunderous tones, that he regarded the whole business as a ridiculous piece of red-tape: maybe the bridge was a bit rickety, but these foreigners were quite prepared to cross it at their own risk. In the end he gave up. ‘They look nasty customers,’ he said to us. ‘Best to do as they say.’

So another whole hour was wasted over this crazy transshipment, which—on top of everything else—cost us quite a few extra rupees. Soon afterwards we ran into the usual flood-damage: the road vanished in a welter of debris and mud, the direct result of that same storm which had caused us so much trouble at Rabat.

But when we were actually travelling it was all very enjoyable. We lay or squatted on top of our gear, between the big tent-rolls and our personal baggage. The air was cool, and laden with all the heady scents of the herbs that grow in such dry regions: wild mint, rockrose, rosemary, thyme, together with their distant Asiatic relations. The sky was a vast field of bright-flowering stars, which tilted about in a cheerfully crazy way as our vehicle lurched and slithered from side to side, following the arbitrary, unpredictable twists of the road. Down on earth, however, there was not a light to be seen anywhere, not even the one tiny, remote gleam so popular in fairy-stories. From time to time there flitted past us colossal and rather terrifying shadows of unidentifiable 'things', that could equally have been distant mountains or overhanging rocks—it was hard to tell the difference. Often we felt the presence of yawning precipices to the left of the road, hundreds of yards below us, towards the Kunar. At times the roar of its tumbling waters was borne to our ears, above the creaking of the bodywork of the lorries and the exhaust noises of the engines.

Even the last few miles were a fight against odds. The usual flood-damage: for nearly two thousand yards the road was three feet deep in mud and debris. We had to get out and push, find a way through in pitch darkness, be constantly digging little dykes and escarpments; and—as if that were not enough—we were no sooner aboard again than we realized that the road at this point was lined with large trees (willows for the most part, but a particularly robust and spreading variety), the branches of which threatened to decapitate us if we raised our heads so much as an inch above the top of the baggage-load. We reached Chitral at last, just before midnight—eighteen hours after our departure from Gujur. By the end we felt we would never get there at all—and to think that when we sketched out our original programme we had talked about a 'two or three days' journey from Pesh-awar'!

I had, at the time, warned my team that in Asia you may know your time of departure, but that it is rather more difficult to predict just when you will reach your destination. I did not labour the point; to do so would have been tedious. It is true that we had the floods to cope with; but that was a relevant and characteristic factor—there are always floods, or landslides, or epidemics, or local revolutions, or religious festivals, or auspicious and inauspicious days. . . . The fact of the matter is, if you want to go from point A to point B with a time-table clutched in your hand, you ought to stay in

Switzerland. Here, the most attractive thing about life is its unpredictability.

We could certainly not have foreseen the gleaming, fantastic spectacle that greeted us on the morning of 9th July, when we opened our window at the rest house. Any temptation we might have had to grumble about the irritating accidents which had befallen us on the journey at once vanished: if we had arrived here on our knees it would have been worth it. The air was mild and bracing: the panorama before us of unparalleled splendour. In the foreground we saw masses of flowers: great fleshy blooms that made me think of Hawaii; beyond and above them were the green, luxuriant tree-tops encircling the villas and houses of Chitral city, all set against a background of ancient, crumbling, rock-strewn hills, yellowish-orange in colour, with outcrops that resembled the shattered ruins of prehistoric temples; and last of all, remote and imminent at once, gleaming white and azure in the sunlight, rose the fabulous, the incredible peak of Tirich Mir, towering some 20,000 feet above us.

My companions went mad with excitement at the sight: for me, however, it was not only a marvellous spectacle in itself, it was one which evoked old memories. Quite unexpectedly, I found myself re-living the emotions associated with 'the first time'—that special, intangible magic which springs from the impact, on one's virgin mind, of some truly significant experience. For me, that 'first time' had been the sight of Kanchenjunga's mighty peak, more than 28,000 feet above sea-level, as I glimpsed it from the tropical forests of Sikkim. Naturally, I also thought of Mt Chomo Lhari in Tibet, as well as K.2 in the Karakoram group. Yet I must admit that this panoramic view of Tirich Mir possessed many qualities which tempted me to rate it above all the rest. The perfect way in which those flying buttresses led the eye on and up, as though by magic, towards the remote and supreme focal point of vision; the dewy, crystalline harmony of colour permeating the whole; the mystical feeling conveyed by that great glacier-clad peak, whose massy rock-ribbed base was lost in a sea of blue-grey haze floating down the valley—all these things, like some cherished piece of music, combined to evoke the most profound aesthetic and religious feelings in me.

K.2, certainly, is a breath-taking spectacle; and the sight of Kanchenjunga from the tropical forests of Tista is both fantastic and awe-inspiring; but this view of Tirich also embraced houses and gardens, paddy-fields, winding roads—it possessed a touching human element, a breath of poetry, a sense of pattern and proportion which called to mind a background by Mantegna or Benozzo Gozzoli. This titanic mountain towering up aloft there resembled some pagan angel's throne. It did not, like K.2 and the giants of Karakoram, reach out in fellowship towards the frozen interstellar spaces. When I contemplated it, I did not feel an infinitely small, lost creature, trembling as

much with terror as with wonder. I greeted it as one might greet some mighty yet exquisite friend who has invited one to a banquet as his guest.



The rest house consisted of one medium-sized bungalow set in an excellently kept garden. The town and the bazaar were farther down the valley, on an undulating stretch of land beside the Kunar River; here we were slightly higher up, on the first ridge linking the valley itself with the bare and rocky mountains encircling it. The rest house had been built by the British to accommodate officials in transit through this remote corner of the Indian Empire, and for such infrequent tourists as might find their way here. Nothing had changed since those days: one glance at the furniture, cutlery, and general lay-out was enough to identify, in every minutest detail, a vanished epoch and a vanished world. The staff included bearers and a cook; we were admirably looked after from the first moment of our arrival. Unfortunately Captain Shapur was still indisposed, and at one point it even looked as though he might decide to withdraw from the expedition—a move which would have greatly complicated our arrangements, since we had no firm permit from the authorities to proceed on our own.

The first thing we did was to stroll down, in groups of two or three, to the post office. We were starved of news from home; some of us had by now gone for weeks without any information about our families. The post office was situated in a group of buildings outside the town, and almost a mile away from it. To get there we followed a pleasant road lined with mulberries and willows, which gave us a very fair idea of the Chitrali landscape. It at once struck me that Chitral had much in common with Baltistan, some two hundred and fifty miles away to the east, at the foot of the Karakoram range. Here, as there, I remarked three basic and distinct features: high up, the mountains, sheathed in snow and ice; half-way down, a stratum of rocky, barren escarpments, for the most part tobacco-coloured, but sometimes varying from ochre to cinnamon; in the valley, brilliant green patches which denoted oases inhabited and cultivated by man. We were actually a little lower than Baltistan—about 5,000 feet as opposed to 7,500—and so the air, though fresh and bracing enough, lacked that alpine sharpness, and possessed instead a softer, more caressing quality. The vegetation, too, was more profusely luxuriant: the first things we noticed were some really gigantic plane-trees.

Till that moment all I had known of the Chitrali landscape was contained in a memorable description by Sir George Robertson:¹

'The dominant note of Chitral is bigness combined with desolation; vast silent mountains cloaked in eternal snow, wild glacier-born torrents,

¹ G. S. Robertson: *Chitral: The Story of a Minor Siege* (London, 1898), pp. 1-2.

cruel precipices, and pastureless hillsides where the ibex and the markhor find a precarious subsistence. It takes time for the mind to recover from the depression which the stillness and melancholy of the giant landscape at first compel. All colour is purged away by the sun-glare; and no birds sing. Life is represented by great eagles and vultures, circling slowly or poised aloft, and by the straight businesslike flight of the hawk . . .

‘Enclosed in such a mighty frame, the space for human life and action seems almost microscopic, so small is the spot it occupies, so completely is it lost in its surroundings. It consists of tiny fan-like oases of cultivation on soil deposited by mountain streams, just before they noisily hurl themselves into a main river. These torrents are the tutelary deities as well as the creators of the village holdings, for they provide life and nourishment, through little canals, to the fields, which would otherwise vanish under the rainless sky. Such fertile patches, completely dwarfed by the limitless expanse of rock, glacier, and crumbling hillside, are beautiful to the eye of the traveller. . . .’

Having run the post office to earth amongst a group of other houses, we found ourselves in a small room piled high with old files and papers, where a fragile, elderly gentleman held court in the politest, most ceremonious manner imaginable. He wore a small turban, had a pair of spectacles pushed down on his nose, and a little white tuft of beard on his chin.

‘Any mail for you? Yes, indeed there is. Just a moment—what did you say? Italian expedition? No, that’s wrong, I’m sorry, I was thinking of the Americans—you’re sure there aren’t any Americans with you? No? Ah well, they’re sure to turn up. Ah now, here’s something for you, yes, yes indeed—good heavens, all this post is yours! I’m so sorry, please forgive me. Perhaps we haven’t found it all yet, I’ll just have another look . . .’

He was such a kindly old creature, and his unpremeditated apology so patently sincere, that we could only laugh; it was impossible to feel annoyed with him. We began to open our letters. The old postmaster at once clutched my wrist, a beseeching expression in his eyes.

‘Oh, please, don’t throw the stamps away—I should so like to have them for my son if you can spare them—’

We handed over a large handful of stamps, and began to rip open our mail with impatient curiosity.

That evening Betto Pinelli wrote in his diary: ‘At first, these letters have a faded, unreal quality about them. It is only later that one realizes—rather uneasily—just how tenacious and fine-drawn our roots can be, and how, though living here, we are in reality still finding our natural sustenance elsewhere, in the world of university examinations, visits to the cinema, dinners in town. This may be a subconscious process, but it is true none the less; grotesque though it may seem, we constantly scale down these vast

horizons against which we move—horizons embodying human encounters and civilizations no less than light-effects or rock-formations—to the smaller, infinitely limited horizons of our own normal lives. The more I study this phenomenon, the more clearly I perceive that it is, in fact, the product of natural laws. Here, we are simply so many individuals out of context. But we exist as the sum—the product, rather—of a certain ambience. To label this ambience “external” is obviously inaccurate, since henceforth it exists within each one of us, as an integral part of our personalities. And there is nothing we can do about it!

I find this passage most striking: it clarifies the whole concept of the endocosm in a remarkable manner, revealing it as the ‘inner world’ which serves us as a key to the infinite mystery of the exocosm, the ‘external world’—and which we consult at every moment of our lives as a necessary preliminary to action.

The postmaster’s young son suddenly appeared, carrying a pile of books under one arm, and with a rather ostentatious I-am-a-student air about him. Like nearly everyone in Chitral, he wore a pair of loose white cotton trousers—rather like those affected by Camel Corps officers—and an ordinary shirt hanging outside them; his feet were shod in those tough, comfortable Indian sandals called *chaplis*. He spoke English very well, and we struck up a friendship; later, on our return journey, we were actually invited to the old postmaster’s house. The invitation was not altogether disinterested, since we were plied, not only with tea, but also with much missionary propaganda on behalf of the *Ahmadiya*.

And who, you may well ask, are the *Ahmadiya*? A sect, it appears, on the fringe of Islam, founded in 1888 by one Mirza Gulam Ahmad, from Qadyan, in India, who claimed to have had visions and divine revelations, and announced himself as the Jewish Messiah, as Christ come back in the fullness of time, as the Moslem’s Mahdi and (on top of everything else) the final incarnation of Krishna. Ahmad’s aim, in thus gathering so many divine avatars together within his own person, was perhaps to bring about some measure of unification between Moslem, Christian, Jew and Hindu; but the great prophetic religions are basically incompatible with one another, and all his efforts merely served to enrich the Islamic world with yet another dissident group. But Ahmad had borrowed many propaganda techniques from the Christian mission-field, together with some elements of a practical, day-to-day system of ethical conduct: his followers concentrated on these in the spirit of certain Protestant sects which, conscious that they were unorthodox and therefore liable to persecution, are distinguished by hard work, willing co-operation, and the most intransigent brand of honesty.

Some *Ahmadiya* doctrines are rather interesting, nevertheless. First and foremost, they regard the whole concept of *Jihad*, or the Holy War, as

obsolete, a dead letter. Secondly, they hold that God may have revealed Himself—and could do so again—through the persons of other historical personages than the Prophet Mahommed. They regard Arabic as the mother of all human languages, and believe that one day it will become the universal language of mankind.

Concerning Jesus Christ they have some curious doctrines. He was, they concede, crucified (a fact which orthodox Moslems, as we have seen, deny *tout court*), but he did not die on the cross; he merely became unconscious, was afterwards rescued, and ended his days in Kashmir, where he died at the ripe old age of one hundred and twenty. It seems that in Srinagar the faithful are still shown a shrine, known as Yus Asaf, where Jesus is supposed to have been buried. Similar fantastic legends have been found in various parts of the world. In northern Japan, not far from Aomori, there flourishes a curious sect of pseudo-Christians according to whom Jesus (after one of his brethren had been crucified in his stead) managed to flee right across Asia, taking refuge among the mountains of the Japanese archipelago, where he passed away at a ripe and Biblical old age, leaving numerous sons behind him. One local family still claims direct descent from Christ!

In the late afternoon we decided to go for a stroll through the town. According to official sources, Chitral's population is about 5,000, but most of them live in houses scattered through the vast oasis down the valley. The 'town centre', the bazaar proper, consists of two long strings of poor huts, built from the usual sun-baked mud bricks, which flank the road for about half a mile at the most (see photographs nos. 59, 64, 65). Almost every house is also a shop, or at least has one room open on the street, with goods laid out for sale in it. Every house also has its little wooden porch. As in Dir, we noted the absolute prevalence of basic commodities essential for day-to-day life: food, bales of cloth, ready-made garments, agricultural implements, kitchen utensils, and so on. The products of local craftsmen have already been ousted by factory-made goods from the plains of Pakistan: we saw hardly a single object that was worth buying for its intrinsic value. As for Pakistani industry itself, it is only too easy to see that—in the field of consumer goods, at least—it is still in that first and most disastrous phase when the sole consideration is to produce a multiplicity of goods at the lowest possible prices. A day will certainly come—it has already arrived in Japan—when they will rediscover a wealth of inspiration in their traditional heritage of motifs, designs, patterns, and materials; but who can tell how long it may be before this happens?

The people we saw in the bazaar—sitting in the doorways of their shops, or trudging in from the country behind a couple of donkeys loaded down with sacks of grain, or bundles of firewood, or bales of fodder—were very different from those we had left behind us on the farther side of the Lowarai Pass.

Physically, most of them were rather small, often lean and bony—though we noticed quite a few well-covered men, too. From the anthropological point of view they seemed very close to European people, and to see them was like coming home after a long absence: many had clear blue eyes, the complexion of some could only be described as pink-and-white, and mid-brown hair was a commonplace. As far as character went, these people—in striking contrast to the inhabitants of Dir, with their rough, surly voices and suspicious expressions and general air of indifference—at once struck us as very smooth types, whose shifty features and somewhat unctuous politeness tended to arouse one's suspicions. We found the shopkeepers the very reverse of ill-mannered; they would beam and smile and invite us to come in and look round—but there was something false and lacking in sincerity about them.

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Any preconceived notions I had about the Chitrالي character were not exactly encouraging. Though it is true that all generalizations about peoples as a whole should be taken with not one, but many grains of salt, there tends, nevertheless, to be some sort of statistical truth about most honest judgements in this field—judgements, that is, which are not dictated by resentment, jealousy, or pride, or distorted by prejudices. Certain Scotsmen and Florentines are generous and openhanded to a fault, positive spendthrifts, in fact; yet it undoubtedly remains true that a great number, perhaps the majority, of Scotsmen and Florentines tend to think very carefully before dipping their hands into their pockets.

In Japan there is a saying that the inhabitants of Kyoto beggar themselves to dress well, those of Osaka to eat well, and those of Tokyo through their mania for speculation. Though in many individual instances this statement may not be borne out by the facts, generally speaking it does, I think, reflect a profound general truth which popular wisdom has crystallized into a proverb. Kyoto, for a millennium the capital of Japan, is permeated with the most subtle social stratifications, and thus to dress well becomes a badge of good breeding, education, knowledge of the world, and ascendancy in the class structure. Osaka is the city of industry and commerce, where everyone works hard and enjoys the obvious pleasures of everyday life. In Tokyo—the seat of political power for more than three and a half centuries—life tends to be regarded as a game, a lottery, and people are less interested in acquiring substantial possessions than in bringing off some spectacular coup, getting ahead in the struggle for power: cash to them has no intrinsic value in itself, but simply offers a springboard to positions of authority. Even the word meaning 'an idiot' carries different connotations in each city, as we learn from a brilliant article by Takeo Kuwabara. In Tokyo it means 'one who fails to adapt himself to circumstances'; in Osaka it signifies 'one who fails to

make money', and in Kyoto, 'one who does not know how to behave like a man of the world'.

But to return to the Chitralis. Robertson, who had encountered them as enemies in battle, and therefore knew them better than most—warfare being the human condition which best reveals virtues and flaws of character—gives a most disconcerting verdict: it would, he asserts, be hard to find any other race in the world more naturally addicted to cruelty and treachery. They are unrivalled in cowardice, corrupt and vindictive; yet (says Robertson) they do make the most enchantingly picturesque companions.

Holdich's conclusions follow a very similar pattern. According to him, the Chitralis are lazy good-for-nothings with no sense of responsibility, and a special weakness for inter-family massacres and vendettas, though 'such vices are allied with many qualities which make them attractive, even at times lovable people. . . .' R. C. F. Schomberg, who spent years wandering up and down Chitral, repeats the by now familiar explanation: 'The fatal quality in the Chitralis is their softness; when confronted with any sort of difficulty, however trifling, they give up at once: they are incapable of self-discipline. A slight shortage of food or water, a small torrent overflowing its banks, the most ordinary cold spell or heat-wave, and they are instantly done for, useless. . . .' Their extraordinary laziness, Schomberg goes on, is due to 'a curious and contradictory blend of love of comfort and distaste for even the slightest exertion. One might suppose that their luxurious instincts would impel them to work, if only to satisfy their desires; but the reverse is true. With them, lethargy always has the last word. . . .' Schomberg, one may also note, crossed several high mountain passes using Chitrali porters; he was very dissatisfied with them, declaring that he found them 'a sad disappointment'.

Naturally, I approached the Chitralis without giving too much weight to all I had read, and determined to make genuine contact with them as human beings; my aim was to avoid all facile pigeon-holing, general value-judgements, and aprioristic labels while doing so. But very often it proved hard to discount the impressions of our predecessors, especially since they had been formed on more ample experience than we could ever hope to achieve. Schomberg's negative opinion of the Chitralis as mountain porters seems to me entirely unjustified; but so far as the other aspects of his portrait go I would say—looking back in retrospect and surveying the expedition as a whole—that there is a good measure of truth in them. The Chitralis are very pleasant companions at table or over a drink or for a sing-song round the camp-fire—when all is going well and hospitable equality the order of the day. But they can be extremely nasty enemies the moment any differences arise between you and them. As we shall see later, this not over-flattering conclusion was formed on the basis of amply sufficient evidence.

This is perhaps the place for a brief portrait of Mulai Jan, our constant companion during the next few months (see photograph no. 38: M. J. is the man standing beside the bus). In none of the many Chitralis with whom we had to do did virtues and defects seem more disconcertingly and inextricably interwoven. Mulai Jan had been originally recommended to us, as caravan-leader and general factotum, by the British team which had preceded us in an attempt on Saraghrar the year before (1958)—an attempt which was given up after a serious accident resulting in the death of a young mountaineer named Nelson. As I have already described, Mulai Jan came down to meet us in Peshawar. He was a tall, lean, lackadaisical figure, very slovenly in his attire. His most prominent feature was a great hooked nose, which made him on some occasions resemble a fierce bird of prey, and on others look more like Punchinello casting round for help. He had very bright, lively eyes: they expressed more low cunning than real intelligence, but, taken all in all, they did play their part in highlighting the upper part of his face, where a fine forehead was crowned by unruly black curls with dark auburn lights in them. His complexion was dark brown; but in this—indeed, because of it and other physical traits he possessed—Mulai Jan could easily have passed for a Mediterranean type. Where his physiognomy became positively catastrophic was in the area about his mouth and chin. Here you could never be quite certain whether that curious rictus would develop into a smile or a sneer: I could not make out most of the time if his expression was one of alert servility or couldn't-care-less arrogance. Was the homunculus hidden within the innermost fortress of his private thoughts and fears and wishes laughing with one, or against one? Was his feeling one of fear or contempt? Was he contemplating an honest, friendly action or some devious rascality?

When he introduced himself, he at once announced that he spoke very good English; in fact, he had only a smattering of it. Yet his cunning was such, and his brain so naturally agile, that it always proved very difficult to decide just when he actually *understood* what one told him, and when he was making an inspired guess. In general he supplemented the gaps in his knowledge with flashes of intuition; he was a notable sizer-up of atmospheres and situations, expert in emotional danger-signals, significant gestures, invisible social patterns. There was an endless game of human chess going on about him, in which he contrived, with extraordinary speed and dexterity, to foresee a large number of the moves before they were made. But one rather sinister doubt always remained: was all this acrobatic skill in the manipulation of words, thoughts, emotions, expressions, and the relationships between people (or between people and things) used to further the purposes of a fundamentally loyal and affectionate servant, or a fundamentally crooked trouble-maker?

It was hard to answer this question. Yet it was quite easy to let oneself

be convinced that Mulai Jan acted the way he did—laughing, drinking, telling jokes with extravagant gesticulation and linguistic somersaults, always playing the clown in the way he dressed and moved (he somehow managed to grasp a stick as though it were a halberd, and when he put on his bonnet he seemed to be donning a helmet)—because he was really enjoying himself, because he was a natural party man, a hearty disorganized drinker who stayed up till all hours and loved it—not because he was a crafty dissembler anxious to camouflage his ulterior perverse intentions beneath the confetti-whirl of false bonhomie. Furthermore, he had absolutely no trace of that resolution and perseverance which are vital qualifications for any man setting out to excel in the art of self-aggrandisement at his neighbour's expense. All these characteristics of his were rather endearing, in fact: they made him a pleasant and amusing companion. But one had to beware of trusting him too far, of relying on him too much; and unfortunately we all fell a little under his spell, so that in the end, when we were least on our guard, and had really accepted him as one of ourselves . . . But this is to anticipate.

Mulai was the son of the religious and administrative ruler over a group of villages at the foot of Tirich Mir; and he himself had (as far as I could gather) taken over his father's position in the fullness of time. The *Mulai*, or *Maulai*, constitute a sub-group of the Ismailis, that influential Moslem sect which acknowledges the Aga Khan as its leader. There are several communities of them in Chitral, scattered among various valleys, especially below Tirich Mir and round about Mastuj. It appears that they have, on frequent occasions, suffered discriminatory treatment and even violence at the hands of the orthodox Sunnite majority; indeed, they are known locally as 'the heretics'. When we met any fellow-countrymen of Mulai Jan's on our journey, it was easy to tell, from the way they looked and talked and behaved, in what high esteem our caravan-leader was held by them. They bowed and kissed his hand, and he made a show of shooing them off; but it was easy to see that in his heart of hearts he enjoyed their attentions much as a cat likes being stroked the right way . . .

A quite different proposition from Mulai Jan was our cook, Murad, a tubby, insignificant-looking man of about forty, whose head was always covered with one of those Renaissance-style bonnets which in Gilgit—where they first appeared—are white, as opposed to the brown variant found in Chitral. At first no one took any particular notice of him; then, little by little, he revealed himself as the ideal person to have around on a caravan journey. The moment any difficulty arose, Mulai Jan would appear on the scene like some small but lethal battle-cruiser, all set to engage the enemy. I know just what to do, he would say: you just leave it to me. Very soon the situation would have become so unutterably confused that none of us knew where we

were. Murad, on the other hand, within his own sphere of operations, much preferred action to words: the consequence was that difficulties tended to get solved before we had become aware of their existence. Anyone who slept badly heard Murad fussing about over the fire and the cooking-pots at some improbably early pre-dawn hour; however early we got up, breakfast was always waiting for us, complete with a whole range of appetizing delicacies. Murad's beneficent sphere of influence extended outside the kitchen, too. Did someone unexpectedly need a pair of pliers? Murad could provide them. Would it be useful to ferret out some village headman? Murad had already gone and paid a call on him. Were there any items, not antique perhaps, but at least reasonably old, to be found in these parts? Murad would turn up with two carpets and a necklace. His accounts were always drawn up in the most precise detail, and scrupulously honest. The archetypal image of Murad (good old Murad!) as it will always remain in our memories, shows him wearing tennis-shoes, and dressed up in a hybrid outfit compounded of military uniform, Chitrali costume, and hunting-kit; he has our one rifle across his shoulder, and a mattock and a can of olive-oil clutched in his hand—the very guardian spirit of our hearth and camp (see photograph no. 96).

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The two or three days we spent in Chitral were taken up—apart from the hiring of donkeys for the caravan, sorting out our postal problems, and re-loading the equipment—with what might best be described as 'a whirl of social obligations'. To begin with, we called on the Assistant Political Agent, who resided in a long, low country-style house surrounded by orchards and a wonderfully laid out garden. Behind the house was a lawn so smooth that it resembled some soft, close-textured carpet of green wool. Irregular flower-beds and shrubs encircled it, while shade was provided by the foliage of some really gigantic plane-trees (*chinar*); it was a rare, mysterious spot, which gave subtle delight to the mind and senses alike. When trees attain a certain size, they acquire some kind of sacred aura; the whispering of those loftily remote leaves in the wind seems to embody strange oracles and incantations, while the surrounding world becomes at once vaster and more limited. The upper foliage is lost in the sky, while the branches seem to form a substitute horizon; those massive, age-old trunks awaken atavistic memories of times when every wood was the temple and dwelling-place of the gods. One becomes conscious of one's own puny and ephemeral nature, one's ineluctable mortality: yet this feeling is mixed with pride at forming part—however insignificant a part it may be—of the miracle of life.

We were taken through the house and out on to the lawn, where we found Syed Imran Shah with some of his counsellors and assistants. Our host

received us most cordially, and asked us to sit down on chairs that had been placed ready beneath the largest plane-tree. The Assistant Political Agent (in conversation everyone referred to him simply as the A.P.A.) was a slight, dark-complexioned young man, impeccably got up in clothes suitable for some country squire about to go hacking from his own stables. He spoke reasonably good English, and we spent some time going through the usual appropriate topics: hunting, polo, the curious fauna and flora in the valley, photography, and special local dishes. As usual, our Polaroid camera scored a great success, being one of those which develop the film and deliver a print in a matter of seconds after exposure. Our visit was rounded off with a stroll through the grounds and a feast of apricots. As we walked back across the lawn I think we were all struck, once again, by the magic that emanated from this particular spot. We paused for a moment, to look round and breathe the air. A cool scent of herbs and mown grass was wafted to us from the surrounding fields, a truly paradisaical odour. What a place, I thought, to sit and hear the immortal wisdom of some Eastern sage (complete with white imperial and small, neat turban), here under the shade of these mighty plane-trees!

A few hours later we turned our steps towards the lower valley and the river: we had been invited to tea at 'the palace'. The residence of the Mehtar, like some white and gaudy mosque, stands in an arm of the stream, where the land forms a low promontory.

The portico of the palace turned out to be a most portentous exercise in what I can only describe as Indo-Islamic wedding-cake style. From the ground there rose up a forest of smooth columns: so far so good, but they supported numerous arches, large and small, in the Arabic style; and above the arches there was an ornate pediment, intricately over-decorated with floral motifs. The whole edifice was rounded off with a bewildering proliferation of lanterns, windows, and star-shaped pierced lattices, not to mention pinnacles that resembled chessmen, in a positive orgy of fancy stonework. It was all gleaming white, and kept in meticulous repair (see photograph no. 66).

We passed through this portico (collecting some military salutes from a group of uniformed men in the process) and found ourselves in a colonnaded courtyard. Here there stood some ancient field-guns, and several machine-guns with the old-fashioned, cumbersome water-cooling jacket: spoils of war (or so we were told) acquired in battle against the Afghans. Captain Shapur knew these various types of weapon very well, and told us all about their history with his usual professional and technical omniscience.

We made our way under several smaller arches, and through a series of courtyards, gardens, and corridors. Finally we were ushered into the presence of a limping, rubicund, beaming gentleman in baggy trousers and

a ballooning, whale-like shirt: the young Mehtar's uncle. His features were fleshy, his fingers so plump that they resembled sausages; his backside and his porcine neck conjured up thoughts of mighty belches and ructations—and yet his bearing, his way of speech, his every gesture displayed that indefinable quality that comes from being born and growing up in the very seat of privilege and power. He greeted us, apologized for the absence of the Mehtar—he was away at his summer residence in the mountains above Chitral—and then invited us to look round the palace.

'Palace' is a wholly inadequate word to describe this heterogeneous congeries of buildings. As more and more sections were added, higgledy-piggledy, with the passage of time, wings and corridors began to proliferate and inter-connect in a highly chaotic manner: chaos, indeed, had the upper hand over picturesqueness. The central nucleus was a fort—that very fort, indeed, in which Robertson, together with 550 soldiers and civilians, was besieged for a month and a half, under the most severe conditions, during the spring of 1895.¹ A few ramparts and guard-towers could still be seen: they were built in the usual local fashion, from sun-baked mud packed into and over a wattle frame. This sort of architectural pudding-work, we were told, was first carried out by the engineers of Aman-ul-Mulk, referred to in local chronicles as 'the Great Mehtar', who ruled over these valleys with true Oriental despotism between 1857 and 1892.

From room to room we wandered, from gallery to gallery, and all about us were the neglected, decaying relics of lost provincial splendour: by turns ridiculous, sinister, and frankly pathetic. Pinelli said the place was a Chitrali copy of a Persian imitation of a Turkish adaptation of a central European version of Sans Souci, and we all laughed—though it was rather like laughing at a skeleton with a comic hat set askew on its cranium. We were told about the fabulous *darbars* that used to be held here, when the great halls were lit up as bright as day, and men in fantastic uniforms strutted about, looking as though they were descended from the generals of Genghis Khan or Akbar the Magnificent. The bestial intrigues that went on in this tiny mountain court must have been obvious even to the least perceptive eye, since the Great Mehtar surrounded himself with a special bodyguard whenever he received his sons in audience, and (for greater security in this pleasant atmosphere of fratricide and parricide) kept a drawn scimitar across his knees as well!

The Great Mehtar was gathered to his fathers in 1892; and at once several of his numerous sons—sixty is the general estimate—together with countless other relatives, split up into various rival factions, and began a grim struggle for the succession. To achieve their ends they were all prepared to commit any crime in the calendar. The first occupant of the throne was

¹ G. S. Robertson: *Chitral: The Story of a Minor Siege* (London, 1898).

the Mehtar's second son, Afzul-ul-Mulk, who at once incurred considerable hatred through his pointless acts of cruelty: it appears that, among other things, he took particular pleasure in torturing the women of the Mehtar's household, on the pretext that they had refused to reveal where certain legendary treasures were hidden. Afzul-ul-Mulk was shot to death by the cut-throat followers of one of his uncles, Sher Afzul. But this new Mehtar survived very little longer: Nizam-ul-Mulk, the Great Mehtar's eldest son, drove the usurper across the border into Afghanistan, having besieged him for some time behind the dour battlements of the palace-fortress at Chitral.

Nizam-ul-Mulk, they say, was an extremely handsome man: a great polo-player and the idol of all the ladies. Unfortunately, he had rather peculiar tastes: everyone knew about his regrettable liaisons with page-boys and other presentable youths. For a few months in 1894 the palace seemed to return to all its ancient splendours: there was an endless round of hunting-parties and polo-matches, with music and dancing laid on for the entertainment of the Mehtar's innumerable guests. Now it became the fashion at court to recite the most impassioned lyrics from the Oriental anthologies—poems about 'rich breakers of hearts' or 'beautiful young cup-bearers' or 'heady perfumes'—with frequent and obvious allusions to the present company. But these were iron times: roses were out of season. It would have taken a strong man indeed to hold all the warring factions at bay—not to mention the Afghans and the British, who were hammering ever louder at the gates, while up in the North the shadow of Russian infiltration advanced daily. Nizam was splendid but futile, a handsome hedonist lacking in any real courage or vision. He persuaded the British to recognize him as Mehtar, but was shortly afterwards assassinated, during a hunting-party, at the instigation of his younger brother, Amir-ul-Mulk. No one mourned his passing, or was concerned to avenge him.

And so it went on: a succession of murders, by pistol, carbine, dagger, trapdoor, poison, torture. Every step brought forth its flower, each month a fresh crop of doomed elegance; and every year a new Mehtar sat on that leather-padded provincial throne. As we wandered through the maze of reception-rooms, bedchambers, corridors and cloisters which formed the palace, it seemed as though we were continually rubbing elbows with the ghosts of those wild, anarchic times: ghosts of betrayers and betrayed, of ambitious men and craven cowards, of debauchees and men given to cold calculation.

And of noble ladies, too—for the most part fat, idle, and over-addicted to sweets. 'You know, after a while one just can't stand it here any longer,' these ghosts whispered in our ears. 'One simply must get away—last month we were in Bombay, you know, and two years ago we made a trip to Paris. Oh,

what wonderful things you can buy there!' And we saw these things, these horrible, expensive artifacts from another world—all gilded metal and alabaster, Italian-made twisted barley-sugar columns, mirrors and stucco-work. Then, like a ray of sunshine, the austere colours and exquisite form of some priceless Chinese vase would catch the eye; but immediately behind it we were liable to find a door fitted with stained-glass windows, the sort of thing that used to turn up in third-rate Italian brothels. Numerous carpets lay on the floors, carpets which long years ago must have come from Bokhara, Samarkand, Kashgar, Tekke, Herat, Meshed, and every other famous weaving centre in the world; but now they were threadbare, patched and in holes. Over everything there brooded an indefinable odour of staleness, of unopened rooms, of fine, age-old dust.

We observed a number of faded photographs hanging on the walls: here were the Mehtars of yesteryear, surrounded by their entire court, all wearing the most luxurious oriental costumes, complete with turbans, jewels, and elaborate pointed slippers. There were also a number of British officers in full-dress uniform, very stiff and starchy with their big military moustaches, but wearing faintly amused expressions, as though caught unawares during a fancy dress ball. Ghosts and shadows from a day that has turned to dust. Gradually, as we moved on, we felt an unutterable melancholy stealing over us. Our ironic comments died away on our lips. We were playing with Time's wheel; we had turned back the mysterious cycle of the years. It was like listening to a bitter-sweet, nostalgic melody. I felt glad it was not the little twelve-year-old Mehtar who had accompanied us on our tour of the palace: to see a child in this dead, morgue-like place, where time had long since stopped, would have made angels weep.

It was with a feeling of relief that we emerged into the open once more—close to the Kunar, whose waters came tumbling thunderously down the valley, bearing a breath of freezing air from the ice-covered mountain peaks far above. In a small, silent courtyard, well-shaded by plane-trees, we were offered refreshments: the usual choice of tea or orangeade. Finally we said good-bye to our host and made our way back to the rest house.

The following day we were invited to the home of Chitral's former prime minister, who was himself a distant relative of the Mehtar's. His villa stood a little way outside the town, and fortunately gave not the slightest impression of having survived from a dead epoch: no dusty relic this. Refreshments were served in the garden (see photograph no. 67). Our host was an ancient bespectacled gentleman, somewhat lofty and withdrawn, with the face of an ascetic hedonist and a little red-dyed tuft of beard. Every so often he would emerge from his state of abstraction and break into a broad, beaming smile, grasping our hands and wheezing out polite nothings; but the moment was soon past—too great a concession, one felt—and that

statue-still body, that vague, enigmatic smile were once again left with the task of projecting his image among us lesser mortals. Since on top of everything else he did not speak English, the conversation was sketchy to a degree, being filtered successively through Captain Shapur and a middle-aged male secretary with the resounding name of Wakir Ali Shah. Wakir was also the correspondent for a metropolitan newspaper: very probably he was the only intellectual in Chitral city—or throughout the whole length and breadth of the valley, if it came to that. He looked rather sad and lost.

The festivities were rounded off with a game of polo between two rival valley teams. Polo, as is well known, is a sport of great antiquity, which probably originated in Iran: it has been popular for centuries throughout the area bounded by the Himalayas, the Karakoram range, and the mountains of the Hindu Kush. No village is of any account unless it has its own polo-ground, and a valley scarcely deserves the name if it cannot turn out at least one team. For us polo automatically suggests a pastime for the privileged classes; but here I saw postman and peasant, cobbler and bus-driver all charging round the field hell-for-leather, managing their mallets with amazing dexterity, and driving the ball squarely through their opponents' goal-space, while a crowded audience of enthusiasts (liberally sprinkled with vociferous urchins) alternately roared their delight or pulled long faces in disappointment as the game went this way and that. Polo is really a homely, enjoyable game, not in the least sophisticated: more like a Third Division football match than anything else.

The local bigwigs sat at one end of the field in a small covered stand; and we—as distinguished guests—were invited to join them there. The A.P.A. himself was playing for one of the teams, looking as dandified as ever, and assisted at every turn by a pair of bearers, who had gloves, mallet, and scarf ready for him when he needed them, and held the rein of his muscular, high-spirited little bay pony. Polo carries various incidental risks: you can have a severe fall, or get hit in the face by a mallet, or be knocked cold by a high-flying ball;¹ and it was at once apparent that the obvious respect which the A.P.A. commanded was due not only to his position, but also to the personal vigour and courage he displayed. While the game was going on, a small drum-and-fife band played some long, monotonous piece, whose only variation was one of mood—now gay, now gloomy—and which was carried on the breeze for a surprising distance (see photographs nos. 68–72).

When the game was over, the A.P.A. dismounted and came over to say hullo, a cheerful grin on his face. He was a trifle out of breath, but his silk shirt had not a single crease in it.

¹ Formerly, it appears, the balls were made of wood taken from the roots of the apricot-tree. A well-aimed shot was quite capable of smashing in some luckless player's skull and sending him straight to the arms of Allah.

'First time I've played in two months,' he told us. 'Hope I soon get my eye in again.'

'But you won,' we said. 'There can't be all that much wrong with your game.'

'Nonsense; we won only because we had better horses.'

Meanwhile, according to tradition, the losers had to pay some sort of forfeit: on this occasion one member of the beaten team was required to dance, solo, to the music of the band. Now besides being the home of polo, this part of the world is also well known for its vigorous male dancing: the chosen victim, a sergeant, danced for a considerable time, with incredible power and elegance of movement, while everyone sat and watched him as though he were some famous athlete going through a series of rigorous exercises.

CHAPTER SIX

FROM CHITRAL TO BASE CAMP

*Though a man had an ass for a father, let him be an honest man
and it will suffice.*

CHITRALI PROVERB

*Golden be the valley
And gold its tutelary
Spirit, we pray . . .*

CHITRALI INCANTATION

*The night has fallen, my friend, and darkness is here: so light
the fire, and pour out wine. While all the world sleeps it will be
as though we, though encircled by shadows, had embraced the sun.*

IBN AL-MUTAZZ (NINTH CENTURY)

THE 11TH July turned out a wonderful day in every sense—meteorologically speaking no less than from the organizational point of view, physically as well as psychologically. At 7.30 a.m. the first part of our caravan set off. At last we were on our way.

This moment of departure had not been attained without certain difficulties. Our one hundred and seventy-three pieces of baggage represented such a load as had never before been seen in these parts. For two days we had been rounding up every donkey-owner in Chitral, but it still proved impossible to find more than sixty beasts. Not even Murad had managed to round up the full quota—which more or less proved the impossibility of doing so. We therefore decided to split the expedition in two for a few days. Alletto, Consiglio, Castelli, Leone, Dr. Lamberti and Captain Shapur would go on ahead with one hundred and twenty-six pieces of baggage, while Pinelli, Iovane and I would follow as soon as possible with the rest.

In agreeing to this decision Captain Shapur showed himself extremely reasonable, and touchingly anxious to help us. As is well known, one point which is made in every letter sent by the Pakistani Government to those organizing expeditions is this: the caravan must, repeat must, proceed in a single convoy. A liaison officer who cares to be a martinet (and many of them do) can cause no end of trouble if logistical requirements suggest—or even, as often happens, make it essential—that the convoy should proceed in sections. Once again we thanked our lucky stars that on this particular expedition

we had drawn so intelligent, sympathetic and co-operative an escort. When Shapur left he wrung me by the hand, and then, facing all of us as though in supplication, said: 'The bridges, my dear friends, the bridges—do whatever else you like, but take my advice and don't photograph the bridges, however old and decrepit they may look.' Then he vaulted into the saddle—the local authorities had got hold of a horse for him—and waved good-bye, still shouting, an expression of acute anxiety on his face: 'The bridges, the bridges, the bridges. . . .'

The weather now seemed to be set fine. Furthermore, hardly had we crossed the Lowarai Pass than we realized that, from the meteorological point of view, we were in a totally different world. South of the pass, that outcrop of the Hindu Kush which divides Dir and Kohistan from Chitral, the air was heavy and humid, typical of a monsoon area. Even when it was not raining, even if the sun blazed down into the valley from a cloudless sky, one still remained aware of the humidity as a faint mistiness towards the horizon. Besides, one had only to look at the vegetation which, though not exactly tropical, was flourishing and rich in those species of plant—e.g. fern or colt's-foot—which do not take kindly to a dry climate. After we crossed the Lowarai the air suddenly became crystal-clear, exhilarating, while even the most distant mountains took on a delectable turquoise tint; we had passed out of Asia's monsoon area, and were on the threshold of the high central plateau. The vegetation here was typical of regions which enjoy a dry climate: often, indeed, it suggested the fringe of the desert, though exceptions had always to be made for the green splendour of the oases.

In the afternoon we had a brief storm, with squalls of rain and some magnificent peals of thunder; but half an hour later the sky was clear again. We took advantage of our free time to write long letters home. When we reckoned it up, our departure had taken place scarcely a month before, yet we felt as though we had been wandering through unknown territory for far longer, so long we could only with difficulty recall the date. But this is what always happens: the first few weeks crawl by, and after that time goes in a flash.

On our last evening we received an invitation to dinner—'absolutely informal'—from Syed Imran Shah, and spent a most enjoyable evening at his delightful home talking about big-game hunting. He had lived for years in Bengal, and made our hair stand on end with his tales of tiger ambushes. (I shall always remember his description of a tiger which had managed to load a buffalo on to its back and held this burden firmly there with its claws.) But even the arcadian Chitral valley had its quota of surprises.

'Did you know,' said the A.P.A., 'that we have a special kind of small black bear in these parts? They live in caves just below the snow-line—there must be springs up there, too, because you find some scattered

vegetation at that height, including a few nut-trees. Well, during the summer these bears pick the nuts very carefully, and mix them with honey. The result is a weird kind of primitive sweetmeat, which they store away in their dens. One day I found a really perfect tart—it might have come straight out of a pastry-cook's shop-window!

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On the morning of 12th July there was a certain amount of panic in the air: would the donkeys turn up to transport the remaining forty-seven cases, or would they not? It looked very much as though we had commandeered every single donkey in Chitral. Every so often a country peasant would come round to the rest house with the news that so-and-so had six donkeys which he would bring along presently, or that such-and-such had two, but couldn't get there before 10 o'clock. Mulai Jan had got hold of a horse, and from his superior position in the saddle issued orders to his army of scrawny donkeys in preparation for a departure which looked as though it might never take place. At 9 o'clock Silvio, Betto and I turned up, trying hard to believe in Mulai Jan's reiterated assertion: 'Tonight we shall all be in Koghozi, I give you my word!'

The stretch from Chitral city to Koghozi is short enough—only about fourteen miles, in fact—but the heat made it very tiring. After going through the bazaar we came out into open country, and followed a wide, if somewhat uneven mule-track, which for a little while led straight towards Tirich Mir. The mountain seemed to float free in the sky, high above the clouds that gathered round its base. We turned round and took a last farewell look at Chitral: the mosque and the palace were still visible when everything else had passed out of sight (see photograph no. 60).

Shortly afterwards we reached the famous Chu Bridge, a primitive, tottering framework of planks and beams on which we passed over the Choaspes-Kunar-Chitral-Mastuj-Yarkhun, to give that angry torrent its full complement of honoured names. These bridges are generally built at the narrowest possible point of the river. First a shoulder is constructed on either bank. Next two rows of logs are put in place on top of the shoulders, and anchored with heavy stones. These are worked out into the middle, bit by bit, till they are almost touching. Two central trunks, resting squarely across the shoulders, form the bridge proper: above them are laid rows of transverse planks to facilitate the passage of men and pack-animals. When such a contrivance is new, and securely lashed together, everything goes smoothly: but the passage of time, aided by floods, tempests, and innumerable caravans, eventually turns it into a sort of gigantic and exceedingly rickety clothes-horse, which sways most alarmingly if so much as a child

steps on to it. When you turn back and look at it (once you are safely across and can relax, that is) you experience a feeling of affectionate compassion for this pathetic old monster, which one fine day will go crashing down into the river-bed, amid clouds of dust and splinters. We would dearly have loved to photograph the Chu Bridge; but we remembered Captain Shapur's entreaties, and put our cameras back in our haversacks. (Photograph no. 57 was taken on the return journey, when certain restrictions had been lifted.)

Farther on we drove through a long, irregular stretch of upland plateau, where one or two excellently farmed estates alternated with tracts of barren and stony terrain. To tell the truth, the fields became steadily poorer as we journeyed on; the great oasis that is Chitral gradually fades out in this direction, to be replaced by the rocky wilderness of the surrounding mountains. There were also houses here and there, for the most part surrounded with trees, which nearly always struck one by the way they were sited—near a stream perhaps, or beside an irrigation-canal, or under the lee of some rising ground. Every time they were arranged in the most deeply satisfying pattern, and not only, I think, to achieve visual harmony: they seemed to suggest an overall attitude to life as such, they revealed a civilized, practical approach to the problems of work and leisure and prayer—in short, a refined, almost poetical feeling for the relationship between man and nature.

After some two hours' journey we left what appeared to be the main valley—the one leading to the townships of Lutkho and Arkari—and branched off sharply right: our route now lay towards the east. Almost at once we entered a wild, rocky gorge. The river, a swollen torrent here, roared furiously down its narrowed bed, swirling round huge boulders, and at times surging between sheer walls of solid rock. As with all glacier-fed streams, the summer, far from reducing the water-level to a trickle, sends it down in spate. The brighter the sun shines, the hotter the weather becomes; and the hotter the weather, the more fiercely do these mountain torrents come boiling down through the gorges to the plain, fastest of all where their passage is most confined. As regards the identity of the present channel, it was clear that we still had to do with our old friend the Kunar—though, as we were told, 'from above this point they call it the Mastuj' (see photographs nos. 73, and 74).

The rocks on either side of the gorge hung over us: sheer walls, as it seemed, towering up into broken spires and peaks. The mule-track, like some mountain ledge, followed the line of the rock-face at its most perpendicular: the way it twisted up, down and round may have been somewhat primitive, but its actual construction was sound, and it had been well maintained—which was all to the good, since for much of its course it hung sheer above the torrent. If we had been traversing a less peaceable country than Chitral, we should certainly have approached each successive blind bend with

considerable apprehension: there could hardly have been better terrain for brigands who wanted to ambush the unwary traveller. Every foot of the way the rocks offered endless hiding-places, and even on the track itself one man armed with a rifle could have held a battalion at bay—indeed, could probably have destroyed it single-handed. But no such accident befell us. Every so often we passed small caravans—always of donkeys—coming down into Chitral: peaceful travellers who greeted us with much cordiality. One or two families passed us as well: the man in front, with all the solemnity and self-importance that befitted a paterfamilias, while the womenfolk followed on behind, heavily veiled and clutching their children by the hand, terrified by the presence of these alarming foreigners. The children's eyes, though, were always full of wonder: huge liquid jewels that stared and stared and stared at you, till they passed out of sight.

The gorge, alas, proved all too short. While passing through it we had enjoyed the most delicious fresh breeze all the time—a fact we appreciated only when the valley widened once more and we found ourselves plodding through a series of the most appalling dust-bowls, strewn with reddish sand and lacking any vestige of vegetation. Here the tropical sun beat down on us so fiercely that there seemed almost an element of personal vindictiveness about it. We proceeded thus for several hours, sweating more profusely at every step, and after a while the prey to violent thirst which drained away our energy. We would struggle to the top of a rise only to find another slope, another rise confronting us. On we went, without a moment's respite. The valley was ringed in by mountains on every side, and not so much as a breath of wind reached the bottom of this god-forsaken funnel-like depression. Earth and rocks alike had the most extraordinary colours, ranging from yellow to violet, from green to black: this was an all-mineral world. The only intrusion, and that a rare one, was provided by one or two ancient Moslem tombs, with two headstones set obliquely above them and various brightly-coloured pennants fluttering at the top of long poles close by. When we reached the river we took off our shoes in order to ease our aching feet, but the water was too icy cold, and gave us the most frightful cramp. We then soaked our hats and put them back on our heads dripping wet: the relief lasted only a few minutes.

Shortly before 4 o'clock that afternoon we came round a bend in the valley and saw the green patch of an oasis ahead: this was Koghozi (see photograph no. 8), and never before had I so appreciated the double meaning of the word 'paradise'—both its most ancient connotation as the *paradeisos*, that is, an enclosed park or garden, and its later association with the ideas of reward, and peace, and relief from all distress. We passed abruptly from the fury of a malevolent sun, beating down on the bare, cracked mountain landscape, to a cool, lush, intensely green carpet of sweet-smelling

herbs and grasses, irrigated by a network of little canals through which there flowed, in perfect silence, the clearest, most crystalline water imaginable. Overhead the foliage of planes, mulberries, willows and apricot-trees provided a deep green shade, laced with the song of birds. We were tired, dusty, sweat-stained, half-dead with thirst: but here every deprived sense found its reward and its peace. (See photograph no. 11: though this in fact shows another oasis rather higher up the valley, the effect of 'greenness in the desert' is exactly the same wherever it applies.)

Koghozi is little more than a cluster of houses buried amongst all this verdure: but the local inhabitants welcomed us with a most generous display of hospitality. An old man who wore a most imposing turban, a large beard, and curly-pointed slippers—he looked as though he had stepped out of some nineteenth-century illustration of *The Arabian Nights*—after much bowing and many salaams led us to a grassy clearing under a group of plane-trees, where *charpoys* stood in readiness for us. Both on the *charpoys* and strewn about the grass itself were a number of carpets, old now and somewhat threadbare, but which must, once upon a time, have been superb. Here we reclined, while small boys plied us with bowlfuls of fresh fruit.

The actual village of Koghozi is tiny, and—as nearly always in these oases—very hard to find, being almost entirely camouflaged by flourishing greenery and foliage. A series of narrow winding paths, flanked by low walls in baked mud and stone, wander and criss-cross in all directions, seemingly getting nowhere, so that when you follow them you lose your sense of orientation, as though you were in a maze. Beyond the walls you catch glimpses of little gardens and courtyards and threshing-floors. You get the impression that family life here is a jealous, highly suspicious affair for the men, secret and rather furtive where the women are concerned. The only really vivid splashes of colour are of red and orange, caused by fruit, spread out to dry on the flat roof-tops. One odd thing we noticed was the colour of the little local mosque: a curious lizard-green.

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The march from Chitral to Koghozi had been so distressing on account of the heat that we decided to set out at 5 o'clock the following morning, and reach our destination before mid-day. Now this all sounded very fine, but we were travelling with a caravan, and to put it into practice was more difficult than might have been supposed. With a great effort we did manage to get ourselves up at 4; but by the time our muleteers, pack-animals, and baggage were ready to move off, it had already turned 6.30. All the time the sun continued to climb implacably up the sky. But by great good luck the caravan was now up to full strength. Mulai Jan had joined us with his last quota of donkeys: for once he had kept his word.

Just outside the village we were accosted, in very graceful English, by a young man dressed in white and wearing one of those gaudy Gilgit bonnets: he turned out to be the local schoolmaster (see photograph no. 76). For a while he walked along with us, chatting of this and that. Presently we entered a small valley with a few thinly cultivated fields in it; and here, on the banks of the river—which was quite close to us at this point—we saw a modest white house surrounded by a thick circle of trees.

‘I know you’re in a hurry and have a long journey before you,’ said the schoolmaster, ‘but do, please, honour me with your company for a moment or two—this is my house, you see, and I have never had any foreign guests before; I should be most honoured—’

We crossed a pair of wretched kitchen-allotments, all wilting now in the heat, and made our way to his house. The building must have been very old—the deeply worn stone threshold showed that—but it was kept up with great care. The general impression was not unlike the kind of house to be found on Capri or the Aeolian Islands; and, again like them, it was lime-washed. Doors and windows displayed a wealth of carved woodwork, all executed with the greatest skill and care.

‘My father did all this,’ the young man told us proudly. ‘The house itself is much older, centuries old in fact—but it was he who made these new doors and windows, and the furniture; he did everything with his own two hands, he was a real craftsman. My family lives in Koghozi, but we often come out here—the children adore the place. I come here nearly every day myself: I like to read and think and meditate in these surroundings.’

The larger rooms inside were typical examples of Chitrali domestic architecture: the ceiling was held up by a pair of wooden pillars with wide capitals, these too being carved out of wood. The fundamental pattern can be traced right across Europe and Asia from the Balkans to Japan; but each valley and region has its own characteristic variant. Equally characteristic was the skylight (see photograph no. 80).

‘Do come outside,’ said our host. ‘It’s so hot in the house, and the river-bank is really deliciously cool.’

Beyond the house itself, on the side facing the river, was a small grassy clearing shaded by apricot and mulberry trees: here we found *charpoy*s and rugs set out for us, together with a small table on which stood bowls of fresh fruit.

‘Do sit down and have a little fruit—it’s such a hot day.’

We gratefully sank on to the *charpoy*s, and took some of the fresh-cut fruit offered us.

‘What an enchanting retreat this is!’ I exclaimed. ‘If it were mine I’d never want to leave it.’

‘I often feel that way myself; but there’s the school to think of, after all,

and these children must be taught something, mustn't they? Their view of the world is so circumscribed here, they simply can't begin to conceive its sheer size.'

'What do you teach them, in fact?'

'Well, we've got ten classes, and far too few instructors. I teach English, geography, and history. Other important subjects include Urdu, Pakistan's future national language; Persian, so that they can appreciate a bit of literature; and also Pushtu, which is essential if they're going to trade with the other groups in the area. Naturally, Islamic theology is a fundamental ingredient in the building of their minds and characters. We also teach arithmetic and the natural sciences.'

'Very interesting. At what point does the history teacher begin, just as a matter of curiosity?'

'He starts with Adam, of course; where else should he begin?'

'I see. Yes, of course. And then what?'

'Then he goes on to Abraham, Moses, the prophets, the Roman Empire, the Greek philosophers (*fālsifa*), the glorious history of the Prophet, and the Caliphate. Once almost the whole world was under the sway of Islam. Then there came the years of internal division and fratricidal strife, which did the Faith irremediable harm. Even the Emperor of China and his people would have turned Mahommedan if we had not been so divided and weak. But now we must re-gather our strength and make up for lost time. You Westerners have advanced scientific knowledge in the most extraordinary manner, no one would deny that; but it was we who laid the foundations! Algebra, chemistry and such-like terms are all Arabic by derivation, even in English, aren't they? What I always say is, if we were the pioneers, why shouldn't we come to dominate the field of science again?'

As he talked, our host grew more and more excited: his expression and his gestures betrayed an enthusiasm that bordered on the fanatical. Luckily he was a pleasant young man, whose wide, engaging grin was a guarantee of his natural kindness and generosity. But in these parts such a situation is universal: it is simply a matter of dividing up the fanatics into two main groups: the cheerfully whimsical and the sullenly malignant. Islamic civilization (with one or two exceptions in particular areas and at particular periods) has always permeated every aspect of life so powerfully and subtly as to choke the last vestige of critical sense in people, thus atrophying the ability to 'stand outside oneself', to take an objective view of things. In Europe, in India, in the Far East, intolerance and fanaticism—vices to which human nature is all too often prone—have over the centuries been checked if not actually abolished by the highest manifestations of the humanist tradition. Here it is quite otherwise. Here one vision of the world has prevailed, without any contrasting view against which to set it: one vision of history,

of fate, of human obligations. People's minds have lost all aptitude for free speculation on the fundamental problems of existence.

Every so often our host would interrupt his flow of words for a moment to go and see whether the kettle was boiling for tea; we could hear him clattering about with pots and pans and putting more fuel in his little stove.

'Nearly boiling now,' he would say, throwing himself down on his *charpoy* again. 'Just be patient a little while longer. . . .'

Both of my companions, as it happened, were in rather a bad way. Betto was suffering from a nasty cold and a sore throat, which caused him a great deal of pain; while Silvio had not yet recovered from the previous day's sun, not to mention the ill-effects of drinking too much water. Furthermore, neither of them could really take part in the conversation, which was being held in fast, idiomatic English. I could see their eyes imploring me to cut the cackle, and say good-bye to the schoolmaster without another moment's delay. I would have liked to oblige them, but it was difficult to do so for two reasons. On the one hand I knew that hospitality must be respected as such even if one does not enjoy it, and that the schoolmaster would have thought us the most fearful oafs if we had walked out without accepting a cup of tea; on the other, I found the visit a decidedly interesting one. Any journey worth the effort, besides introducing you to new mountains, seas and plains, should above all make you understand, or attempt to understand, new kinds of men, with different mentalities from yours, and an unfamiliar attitude to the world at large.

'What branches of science do you teach the children?' I asked our new friend.

'Oh, lots of things, as much as possible! In the modern world science is far more important than knowing how to write an elegant letter in Persian—'

'Could you be a little more specific?'

'Of course. Well, we teach elementary chemistry and physics, with some botany, zoology, and hygiene. It's really quite amazing how no scientific discovery contradicts anything in the Holy Koran. This makes me quite certain that Islam will become the world religion of the future. It is the only creed to have retained all its ancient purity and simplicity, and yet to rest on a sound scientific basis at the same time. . . .'

At this point the schoolmaster popped away again, because a whistling from the kitchen announced that the water had come to the boil at last. Silvio was half-asleep; Betto had got up to pick himself an apricot. The waters of the Mastuj ran silently and abundantly at this point, because the stream-bed was on a gentle slope: it made one slightly dizzy to look at it—rather like some huge clock, chopping off time, second by second, in total

and absolute stillness. On these banks there had lived the Kafirs, who for long centuries had seen in the mystery of life and death the capricious and sanguinary will of their traditional gods; for centuries after them the local inhabitants had been Buddhists, who had interpreted the Great Inscription with most impressive profundity and many subtle variations; today all was regarded as the work of Allah. Yet the basic ingredients always remained the same: on the one hand river, rocks and sky, on the other people, suffering, life, death. A time will certainly come in which Islam, Christianity and Communism will be nothing but unremarkable entries in the massive encyclopedias of later ages; but man in his perennial youth and the river in its eternal beauty will always be the two opposed extremes. We and Mystery; these are the eternal aspects of existence.

'Wake up, Silvio, tea's here!'

The schoolmaster came in from the kitchen carrying a steaming tea-pot, and poured out for us. We went on talking for a while as we sipped at this infusion, but by now it really was high time for us to be on our way. Silvio had not yet managed to get any down his throat: it was far too hot for him. When he at last put the cup gingerly to his lips he pulled a wry face and exclaimed: 'Hell, this bloody stuff has got salt in it!'

The rest of the trek was sheer agony—for us three, at least, the very worst day in the whole expedition. Over fifteen miles of dazzling light and that fierce sun overhead, of endless sand and stones relieved only by the occasional stump or thorn-bush. The valley was a deep one, sunk between 'gigantic walls of glittering schist, varied with falls of red sandstone or pudding-stone', as Betto later recorded in his notebook. Under that merciless dog-star heat everything was split and calcined, friable. Silvio seemed only half conscious: he walked on like an automaton. When we reached the river he flung himself down amongst the pebbles, and doused his head and hat; then, without uttering a word, he staggered forward once more. Every now and again he would babble incomprehensible phrases to himself: only a will stretched to the limits of human endurance kept him going at all. At one point we saw him wavering straight towards a precipice which the road (by now high above the river) wound round and avoided. We rushed after him and grabbed him by the arms.

'Silvio!' we yelled.

'Christ,' he said, 'I was asleep.'

From that point on Betto walked arm-in-arm with him, keeping up a flow of conversation in an effort to stop him from falling asleep on his feet again. About half-way to our destination, we snatched a little rest in the oasis of Maroi; but after lunch we resumed what we always afterwards referred to as the 'great thirsty march'. Far in the distance, above the Tirich valley, we could make out a series of high ice-capped peaks, but they hardly interested

us at all: they seemed part of some cruel, derisive joke. Our immediate surroundings became steadily nastier and more barren. We trudged slowly up a long interminable slope: its surface was formed from crusted mud, and at every step we raised a cloud of fine, white, burning hot dust, which settled in our shoes, clung to our legs and clothes, powdered our hair, and found its way into our eyes and throats. Our parched gullets felt as though they were on fire; the taste of dust filled our mouths, and the water we drank became diluted mud. After a time the mud-slope merged into a forest of strange yellowish earthy objects rather like haystacks, round which the track climbed and looped in endless circles. Suddenly, in the very midst of this inferno, we came upon a torrent of icy, crystal-clear water; and almost immediately we were in Barennis, where we camped in a meadow under the shade of some apricot trees. Our exhaustion was such that we could not really appreciate even the coolness and comfort after our nightmare trek.



The two following days' marches—from Barennis to Charun (14th July) and from Charun to Drasan (15th July) —were both tough going, but not nearly so bad as the Great Thirsty March in the lower part of the valley. We managed to arrange things rather better, so that we got off to an earlier start (reveille at 4, on the road by 5.30) and covered the better part of our daily fifteen to sixteen miles while the morning air was still fresh. Furthermore, the valley had become more open now, and the mule-track frequently climbed high up the hillside in order to avoid some rib or spur of rock, which meant that we caught a little breeze; and all the time we were slowly gaining height. Eventually, the oases were more frequent, and some of them—like that at Reshun—extended for a considerable distance.

After linking up with us at Koghozi, Mulai Jan had left again in order to make contact with our companions, who were one day's march ahead of us. Pinelli, Iovane and I continued our journey at the normal speed and with our usual quota of donkeys strung out behind us.

We were now travelling through comparatively fertile country: a shade more humidity, and vegetation would have come sprouting up among the rocks, as green as any emerald. In some of the oases we saw well-kept paddy-fields, their waters occasionally reflecting the ice-capped peak of Bumi Zom (21,300 feet); we were feeling in better state and found this white gleaming cone, high in the cobalt sky, an exhilarating and invigorating spectacle. The villages we passed through were in good repair and far less poverty-stricken (to judge from appearances) than those we had seen the day before. Each little cluster of houses had its own tiny mosque, and its own *chaya-khan*, where travellers stopped to drink tea, or take a breather preparatory to the next leg of their journey up or down the valley. Some

even had their own polo-ground, a large roughly levelled meadow.¹ As far as the mosques are concerned, they should not be pictured as modelled on the great Egyptian, Turkish, Persian or Indian prototypes, with arches, minarets, and numerous cupolas. In Baltistan the mosques are reminiscent of Tibetan *gompas*, in China of Taoist temples, in Indonesia of Hindu *shikara*: in Chitral the mosques tend to differ remarkably little from the houses of the wealthiest local inhabitants. They are small square flat-roofed buildings, with an assembly-room for the faithful, and the usual front porch, supported by wooden columns: these are often covered with fairly intricate carving. But the one absolutely essential item for any building which sets out to be considered as a mosque is the *mihrab*, the niche which shows the faithful the direction of Mecca, towards which they must prostrate themselves during prayer.

At one point not far from Reshun we passed a small mosque on our left with robust decorations that would certainly have pleased Picasso (see photograph no. 78). It was not possible to discover, however, whether this was the isolated work of some fantastic free-thinking artist, or one example of a recognized style, with similar examples scattered about elsewhere in the surrounding valleys.

Near the villages we frequently saw men with trained hunting falcons on shoulder or wrist (see photograph no. 76). They were sleek, well-fed predators, with a fiercely aggressive look about them. One cheerful youth was only too delighted to show off his falcon's paces for us. He released it with an encouraging shout, and it made straight for a tree where large numbers of sparrows were perched. The sparrows took off very smartly indeed: the falcon singled out one for pursuit, swooped down on it like a thunderbolt, and brought it straight back to its master, leaving a trail of tiny feathers behind it. The youth grinned more broadly than ever, with a triumphant gleam in his eye, like some amateur conjuror who has just brought off a really difficult trick. Hawking is a very popular sport in central Asia; it appears to have been known in China as early as 2000 B.C. The Mongols brought it to a fine art and were responsible for its gradual spread westwards. Today you have to penetrate these remote valleys if you want to see the sport

¹ In March 1893, when relations between Britain and Chitral were decidedly tense, a game of polo took place at Reshun which has gone down in history. Its supposed object was to facilitate some measure of agreement and discussion between the conflicting parties. While the men on horseback were chasing their little ball round the meadow, two British officers and a detachment of Indian troops were silently surrounded and taken prisoner. Robertson's account of this episode (*op. cit.*, pp. 138 ff.) conveys with some skill the amazing capacity of the Chitralis for dissimulating their plans and then putting them into action with concerted energy—smiling all the time. The prisoners were released only some weeks later, when the whole of Chitral passed under the control of the Government of India.

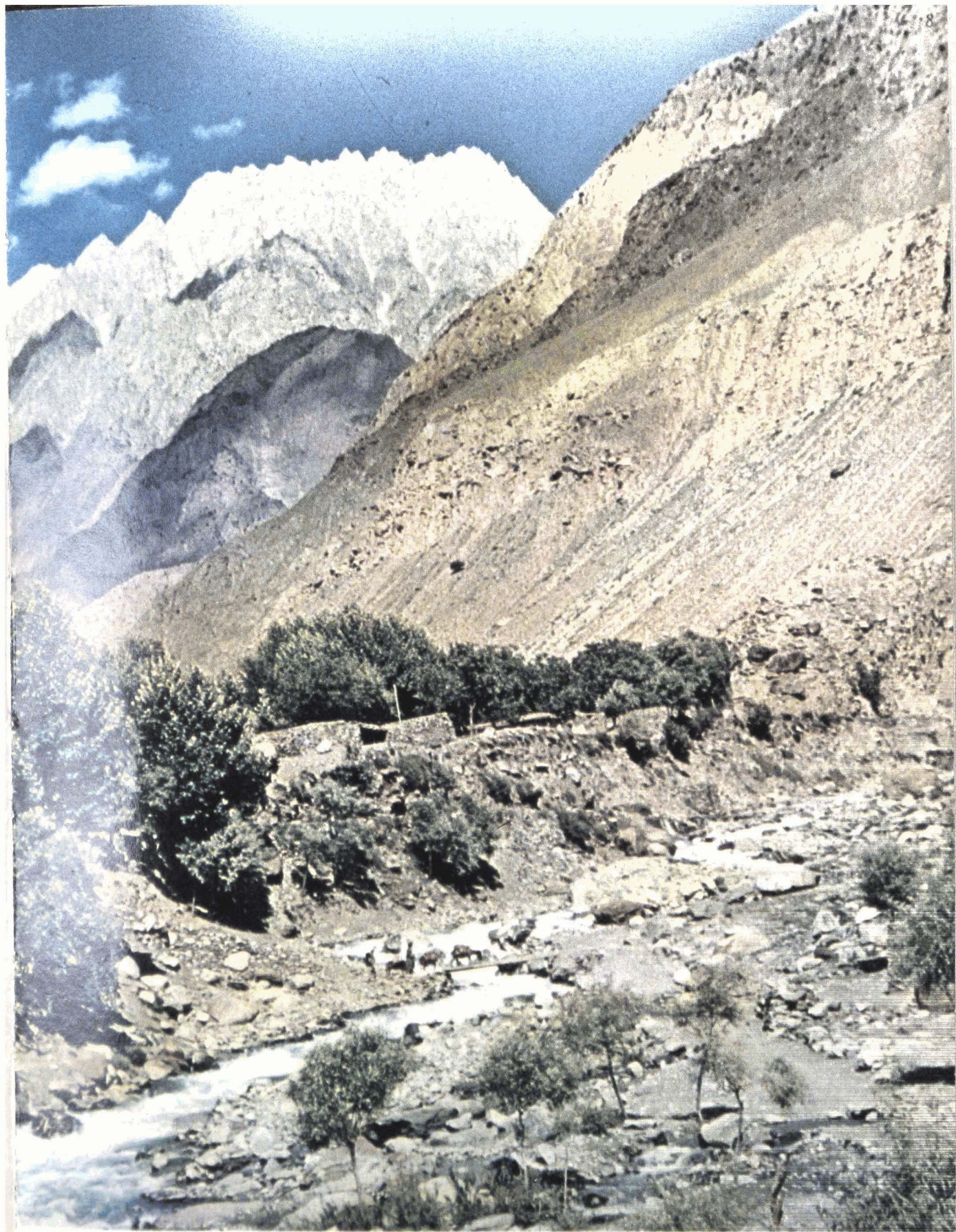
practised with any sort of expertise and enthusiasm. It appears that the acquisition of a trained falcon is one of the most cherished desires nursed by every local 'sporting type': the more ambitious—or so I was told—often virtually beggar themselves in order to purchase a real pedigree bird.

One of the ways used to catch these falcons for training much resembles the method by which condors are trapped in the Andes. A man conceals himself in a hole in the ground, which is then covered with a large flat stone. There is a hole in the stone large enough for him to pass his hand through. A small bird is then placed on top of the stone, with one leg tethered by a thread; when the falcon drops down to snatch its prey, the man thrusts up a gloved hand and catches it by its talons.

As we climbed farther up the valley, we also saw increasing numbers of the highly idiosyncratic Chitrali bow (see photograph no. 77), which shoots not arrows, but small stones. The bow has two strings; between them, at a central point, is sewn a strip of material which acts as a sling for the missile. The actual shooting requires very considerable skill; you have to give the bow a sudden special twist so that the stone is cleanly discharged and does not hit the thumb of your left hand. Needless to say, we all had a go at this curious weapon, and all—on the first attempt, at any rate—made a sad hash of it.

During the march we had several times observed, close by the mule-track, groups of primitive *graffiti*, which for the most part portrayed that type of ibex called in Chitral the *markor*—a beast much sought after by hunters, but today exceedingly rare. It is difficult to date the *graffiti*, even approximately: examples occur at various points throughout the upper valleys of the Hindu Kush, the Himalayas, and the Karakoram range. It is not impossible that they had some sort of religious significance (in the widest sense of the phrase), and were connected with magical rites designed to promote animal fertility. A particularly striking group turned up on some rocks beside the river, a short distance beyond Barennis.

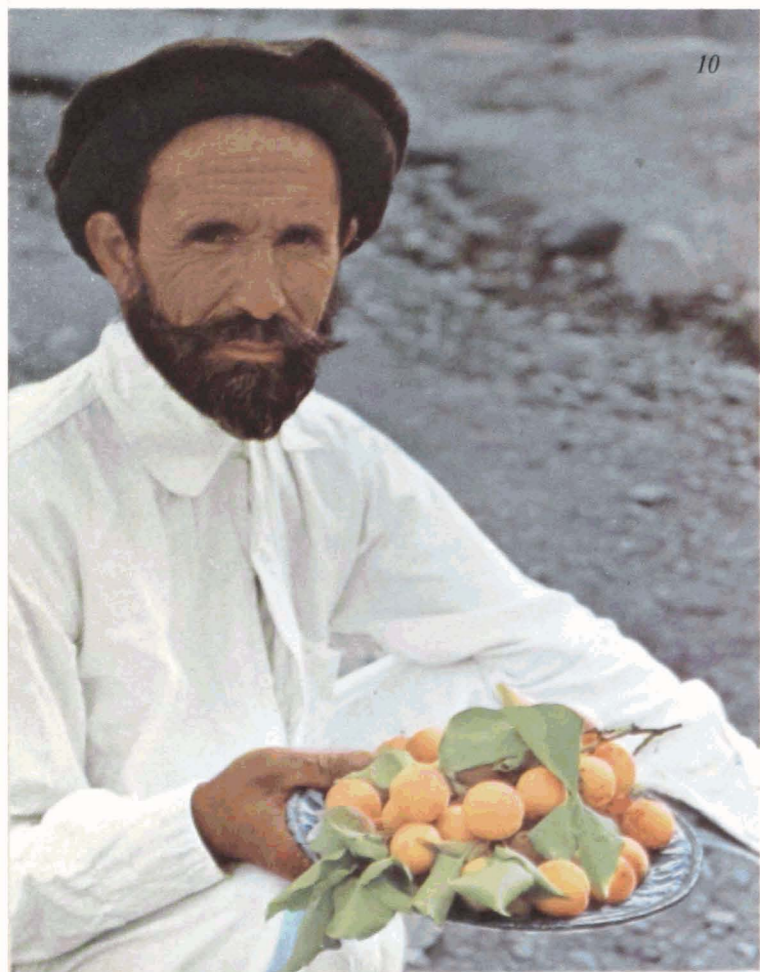
And what of the traces left by that ancient Buddhist civilization which flourished for several centuries in these valleys? Though the heat and the glare and the dryness made it an arduous exercise on so long a daily march, Betto Pinelli and I kept our eyes constantly alert for the ruins of some monastery or *stupa*, for any *graffiti* or rock-sculptures. But we had no luck. I must emphasize that we were travelling too fast to be able to state, categorically, that no such remains exist; we can only put it on record that a rapid and cursory inspection revealed nothing obvious. We also passed the word to Mulai Jan and Murad, who made enquiries amongst the local population on this score; and on two or three occasions information was forthcoming. In such and such a place, we were told, there stood a large stone with Chinese writing on it. Or it might be a wall full of statuary, or



8: *The oasis of Koghozi: the stony foothills of lower Chitral only show greenery close to running water*



9



10

9: The oasis: bough laden with fruit
10: The oasis: group beneath the trees
11: The oasis: a travelling hawker finds refreshment



11

12: Mountains at sunset
13: Camp-fire scene



some 'ancient ruins'; but when we reached the site of these famous stones or statues or ruins, they always turned out to be tricks of the light or natural rock-formations.

In one instance only—and this was higher up the valley, near Shagram—did we find indisputable traces of Buddhist culture, in the shape of a *stupa* (or *chorten*, as the Tibetans call it) cut on the sloping upper face of a colossal pink granite rock. The outline was some twelve feet in length, and drawn with a wealth of detail. The elegant elongated form of the *stupa* was a sure guarantee of its great antiquity (see photograph no. 81).

We reached Charun shortly after noon on 14th July, during a period of intense heat. The place was no more than two or three houses clustered beside one of the usual tottering bridges which span the raging waters of the Mastuj. The best house belonged to one of Mulai Jan's uncles, who welcomed us with dignified and lavish hospitality: we were made to recline on soft, multi-coloured rugs, and plied with fruit, chapattis, fried eggs and tea. There were also innumerable flies, but our poor host could not be held responsible for them: we all did our best to keep them away by swatting at them with small leafy switches.

That evening we pitched camp on a little rise not far from the bridge. On one side there were our twenty-five donkeys and six or seven muleteers; on the other, the three of us. 'We put up our tent,' Silvio wrote in his diary, 'and had a meal off two roast chicken—though the bulk of them went to our excellent porters, who fell on the carcasses avidly; then we stretched ourselves out and chatted for a while. The sky was a little overcast, and we felt it might rain. Clouds across the moon. Played a tune or two on my mouth-organ. The setting was perfect: the narrow valley, moonlight and shadow, the porters round the fire, feeding it with dry aromatic brushwood, the mules—in fact, everything about this caravan of ours, now crossing so barren and deserted a range of mountains in the very heart of Asia. As we dropped off to sleep a strong night wind stirred overhead. But I would always rather sleep under the stars than cramped inside a tent.'

Partly owing to such energetic activities as walking sixteen miles a day in the blazing sun, taking dips in ice-cold river-water, and eating pounds of apricots, and partly as a result of their youthful resilience, Betto and Silvio had quite recovered from their illnesses, and were beginning to enjoy life again. At this point it was my turn to run into trouble. My shoes had been hurting me since the second day, and by now I had a fine crop of raw blisters: I dragged myself along like a cripple, suffering acute agony at every step.

The weather cleared during the night, and on 15th July we managed to get off soon after 5 a.m. We crossed the Mastuj by the same rickety bridge we had seen on arrival, and pressed on in the direction of Kosht, where, unable to bear the torture of walking on my martyred feet any longer, I

sent a boy off to round up a horse for me. As good luck had it, he found one immediately, so that our journey could continue without interruption. From Kosht onwards I saw very little of my two companions, since every so often the horse would suddenly kick up its heels and gallop furiously for half a mile or a mile—after which it was liable to stop dead and stand cropping the grass.

Above Kosht the track entered a secondary valley, some sixty or seventy miles long, which runs roughly parallel to that in which the Mastuj flows. This valley is divided into two sections: as far as Shagram it is known as Mulikho, or low march, and from Shagram onwards as Turikho, or high march. The landscape of each is notably different. I noticed that the old division into 'desert' and 'oasis' no longer applied; there were fields (poor ones, it is true) and clumps of trees everywhere. Here and there one still glimpsed the occasional rice-field, but these were heavily outnumbered by fields of grain or clover. As far as trees were concerned, poplars, pears and apples began to appear in addition to the ubiquitous planes, mulberries, apricots and willows, while the vine was now a fairly common sight. The poplars in particular gave quite a different tone to the landscape: they at once reminded me of the valleys of Baltistan. We had, besides, gained something like six thousand feet in altitude, which made the resemblance even more striking. I also saw a few beasts out at pasture—some stunted cows, a few goats; naturally pigs were nowhere to be seen (religious taboo) and dogs exceedingly rare (being regarded as ritually unclean and in general beneath contempt). I was surprised to notice large numbers of women at work in the fields—though they were always well muffled up in their rags, and veiled as well. The men seemed friendly and hospitable; more than once we were stopped, given amiable or respectful greetings, and plied with platefuls of apricots by small groups of old men and boys. It is extraordinary how fast news travels up and down these valleys: everyone knew all about us before we got there. It is not difficult to see why the movements of two foreign caravans, with whole mountains of gear in their wake, should be the object of such conspicuous interest—especially in a region where travellers are comparatively few.

Soon after mid-day we reached Drasan.



Drasan consists, basically, of an ancient fortress, which several times played a vital role in the endless internecine struggles between local clans—what an English writer once described, with witty accuracy, as 'family butcheries'. There seems to have been little love lost between these various rivals: the victors made a clean sweep of their defeated adversaries, old men, women and children included. When seen from a distance, with the rough

silhouette of its guard-towers framed between poplars, Drasan has a vaguely Tibetan air, which is lent further verisimilitude by the shape, colour, and nakedly austere grandeur of the surrounding mountains (see photograph no. 79).

But as one approaches it, the fortress gradually loses much of its impressive appearance: not only because it becomes clear that it is really quite a small affair, but also because from close quarters anyone can see that its ramparts are crumbling away and its towers built of nothing more solid than sun-baked mud. In its day this mud must have been a particularly strong, lasting, and adaptable material, easily applied to the wicker core round which the fortress was constructed, and quite capable of keeping out enemy missiles. But old age had left its mark here, not only in the crumbling, friable super-structure, but in the general appearance of imminent collapse which characterized the place. The fortress is, however, most beautifully sited, on a natural platform high above the river, where it gets the full benefit of sun and fresh air. Round the fortress itself, and inside its various walled precincts, trees grow thickly: the fresh young greenery of their early summer foliage makes a striking contrast with the ancient ramparts beyond them.

Passing through an archway like that of an old-fashioned farmhouse, I found myself in the courtyard, or keep: someone came and took my horse, and tethered it to a ring in the wall. We were led through several rooms, and emerged on to an open lawn—still inside the ramparts—where we found our equipment stacked in heaps, and the rest of the expedition on the point of sitting down to lunch, in a large Urdukass-style tent which served equally well as office, dining-room, or dormitory.

'We've got a delicious treat in store for you: we've taught Murad how to cook *pasta*! But the chickens are very small, and as tough as old boots; I think they must feed them on nails, or barbed wire, or something.'

Drasan marked another stage in our caravan's progress to its eventual goal. Up to this point our gear had been carried on the backs of donkeys; but from here onwards we should be obliged to hire upwards of 170 porters, since the mule-tracks petered out into mere paths, where the only feasible means of transport was a pair of human shoulders. This meant a good deal of work for all of us: we had to settle up with the muleteers, engage porters, re-distribute the load, and so on. Franco and Paolo, who were used to normal European methods of work, hoped to conclude all these arrangements in a few hours—indeed, they were relying on doing so. But in Asia the rhythm of all human activity is calm and deliberate, like that of the great rivers; and any attempt to force it merely means fury and frustration. It was a foregone conclusion that we should have to sacrifice an entire day to re-organizing our caravan.

In order to gain some time, we decided to split up once more, again into

two groups. Alletto, Consiglio, Castelli and Pinelli, with about a dozen porters and the minimum of equipment, would set off as early as possible the following morning: they would form an advance party, the object of which would be to explore the Ziwar Gol, a wild and remote valley that looked—on the map, at least—as though it might offer the most convenient access to the glaciers of Saraghrar. The rest of us would follow on the moment we had got everything organized. The whole region was virtually unexplored, and it had proved impossible to get any hard information about the best route to take in order to reach the foot of our chosen mountain: the only course open to us was a personal reconnaissance. We arranged for some of the porters to be sent back, at stated intervals, to bring us directions and general briefing as to the route we should follow. Eventually we would all assemble at a point marked 'Gram Shal' on the map, which lay some 10,500 feet above sea-level.

The weather was variable and capricious. Sometimes clouds would blow up—black-centred, with white or bright-glowing edges—and bring sharp showers in their wake. At other times the sun shone briefly from a clear and azure sky. But no one paid any attention to these irritating bursts of rain, much less to the weird clouds that heralded them; a constant stream of visitors, young and old, paraded across the lawn, while our team, assisted by some of the porters who had already been hired, re-organized cases and tents and kit-bags—all of which had many miles yet to travel. Over everything and everyone, Mulai Jan ruled supreme, like some Mongol chieftain among his faithful followers: the familiar bonnet cocked at a rakish angle, stray curls blowing in the breeze, big Punchinello nose cleaving the air ahead of him. He darted to and fro, ostentatiously clutching a notebook in which he jotted down all sorts of mysterious details with an indelible pencil, which he pushed behind one ear when he was not actually using it. He gesticulated, he waved his arms about, he shouted; every so often he would burst into ear-splitting peals of laughter, and once or twice he unexpectedly lost his temper, in no uncertain fashion. He was delighted to feel not only useful but important—more than important, indeed, absolutely essential.

There could be no doubt, moreover, that Mulai belonged to a family which enjoyed a remarkably wide sphere of influence. As day by day we climbed farther up the valley, the status of our caravan-leader appeared to rise in proportion. Down at Chitral he had looked like a respectable provincial, no more; but in Koghozi we had seen country peasants salute him with particular signs of deference, while here in Drasan groups of shepherds or labourers would bow when they met him, and, if possible, kiss his hand. It is true that other passers-by regarded him with an air of studied indifference; but these may well have been people who belonged to a different religious persuasion. It was precisely with these 'recusant heretics', who had

no intention of bowing the knee to authority, that he had to exert all his innate gifts as actor, buffoon, and hail-fellow-well-met; yet he managed, by sheer personal magnetism, either to persuade or intimidate the great majority of those who stood out against him.

It was interesting to observe this group of men, who for several days would be our constant companions on the march. Their physique—from the point of view of a prospective buyer looking over a horse's points at market—could only be described as disappointing: for the most part they were small, lean, dried-up men, and I seriously wondered whether they would prove capable of humping over 50 lb. each for long distances and over high mountain paths. Their faces, however, were cheerful and pleasant enough: their eyes nearly always suggested alertness, and often intelligence too, while some conveyed an air of free-and-easy rascality. Only a very small minority made me think of the 'cowardice and sloth' which Schomberg denounced so vigorously. Perhaps he had had to deal with Chitralis from farther down the valley? We were right up in the north here, at the foot of the high mountain ranges, and the whole population must have been accustomed to a pretty tough life, particularly during the winter months.

As regards facial characteristics, they were a sorry mixture. The great majority of the men—say ninety per cent—revealed clearly-defined European-type features; mingling with the swarthy individuals who were descended from Afghan or Iranian stock, I saw obvious 'Alpine' types, with light brown hair, and others so blond and blue-eyed that they could have passed as Nordics. The dominant physical characteristics of the Oriental were conspicuous by their absence; I scarcely ever saw the Mongoloid fold at the corners of the eyes, and only occasionally noted an instance of that smooth, thick, shiny black hair, or the hairless, creamy-textured skin which indicates a deep epidermal layer. Rather more frequent were examples of 'tropical' anthropological characteristics: dark skin, strong pigmentation round the eyes, wavy or kinky black hair.

In the matter of dress near-uniformity seemed to be the rule: apart from one or two caps which could (like the faces beneath them) be labelled 'European'—not to mention the odd shirt, the occasional military tunic, and one or two pullovers—almost all of them wore loose cotton trousers, barracans,¹ and brown woollen bonnets. The last were simply lengths of cloth wound round their heads; if they were cold they unwound them a little and covered up their ears. But the worst item in their equipment was, beyond any doubt, their footgear—shoes would be too dignified a term for these strips of rag wound round instep and ankle, and fastened with a leather thong: they resembled nothing so much as an incredibly crude version of the

¹ A coarse waterproof cloth of wool or goat's-hair.

ciocia.¹ Franco Alletto and I discussed this problem at some length, and I must confess that I was very worried at the prospect of leading these men into places where unexpected snowfalls were always a possibility. But one group-leader assured us (via Mulai Jan as interpreter) that such footgear was quite adequate—‘we use them in the coldest winter weather’, he said. At this point I recalled the fine boots worn by the Baltistanis at the foot of Karakoram: ‘primitive’ if you like, but perfectly adapted to protect the feet on any surface, including snow and ice.

The language spoken by our porters was more or less incomprehensible. It was a Kowari dialect, and thus, in the last analysis, one of the innumerable offshoots of the Indo-European family; but its pronunciation was difficult and in conversation it tended to flow very rapidly. We were further hampered by the fact that no satisfactory work has yet been done on Kowari; to set about learning a language without even the aid of a small dictionary is a task which calls for ample leisure and unending supplies of patience. Nevertheless I managed to compile a vocabulary of about two hundred common words, and this proved very useful on various occasions. In the context of any given situation, two or three key words sufficed for explanation or understanding. Here I will just give a list of the numerals from one to ten: *i, ju, troi, chor, ponch, choi, sot, osht, nyò, josh*. The reader familiar with a little Greek or German—or, better still, Urdu—will instantly recognize the basic Indo-European pattern.

The physical appearance, clothes, and customs of our men combined to project an image of their life: the kind of life led by peasants and herdsmen, hard, but not miserable. They suggested poverty above the bread-line rather than grinding indigence. Apart from their language and ‘local colour’, we might have been dealing with peasants anywhere in the Apennines—and not the most backward areas, either.

During this operation Captain Shapur left more or less everything to Mulai Jan; though naturally when anything difficult or controversial cropped up, his presence, as official representative both of the army and of that mythical entity ‘the State’, proved extremely valuable. He sat somewhat apart, under a tree which protected him from both rain and sun, and received small delegations of malcontents, with whom he conducted interminable discussions. Even he had to talk to these men through an interpreter, since hardly any of them could speak Pushtu (the language in widest use throughout the Frontier Province), let alone Urdu.

At one point in the afternoon we got the indefinable sensation that something was about to happen: there was a sudden and (I thought) unplanned

¹ The *ciocia* was a form of sandal attached to the leg by puttee-like fastenings, and formerly worn by Italian agricultural labourers: it is especially associated with the Roman Campagna. There is no exact English equivalent. (Trs.)

lull in the various operations taking place on the lawn, and even the sky, by letting a bright shaft of sunlight break through, seemed to be contributing to the general setting. Then we saw a small procession emerging from a doorway, with men carrying several ancient chaise-longues of the Anglo-Indian type, together with a small table and an umbrella. Last of all there appeared a tallish, thinnish, youngish man, in sandals, brown slacks, and a shirt which had once been white but was now so filthy that it looked grey rather than grubby. In one hand he vaguely clutched an antique, long-barrelled rifle, and an uncertain smile hovered over his face: his bearing, and the furtive glances he darted about him, gave the instant impression that he suffered from a quite crippling inferiority complex. Behind him came two young attendants—grooms, I suppose they could best be termed—who managed to look effeminate and uncouth at once. This disconcerting person was unexpectedly dark-complexioned; indeed, his features made one think of a Bengali rather than a native of Chitral. His hair was jet-black; he wore it long, and drenched in hair-oil. One's first reaction on meeting him, anywhere in the world, would be the same: But who is this little fairy? In actual fact, as Mulai Jan at once informed us, he was a prince, descended on his father's side from Timur (Tamburlaine) and on his mother's from Genghis Khan! The Prince, that curious ill-defined smirk still on his face, sank on to one of the chaise-longues that his minions had set up, beside Captain Shapur.

For some reason I could not fathom, the captain did not call us over for the expected presentation. After the first moment of uncertainty had passed—and having observed the Prince's far from prepossessing appearance—we all went on with our own jobs, and left the V.I.P.'s to sort things out between themselves. Whenever we came near the little group our ears were assailed by those two voices—Shapur's deep male growl, and the Prince's screaming falsetto—interweaving in an absurd kind of counterpoint. After a while the captain got up and came across to our resident medical officer: the Prince, he said, required his professional opinion concerning the princely state of health. The consultation lasted a long time. Franco, as was his wont, went to endless lengths to help the sick people we met on our journey: prince or beggar, it made no difference to him. Meanwhile we continued to work on the assembly of the caravan, dividing the men into teams, making endless inventories of names and stores.

We did not see Franco again until dinner-time.

'We don't,' we said, 'want to infringe the sacrosanct laws of professional secrecy, but is this Prince of yours seriously ill?'

'Poor man,' said Franco. 'He's got scabies.'

'Are you serious?'

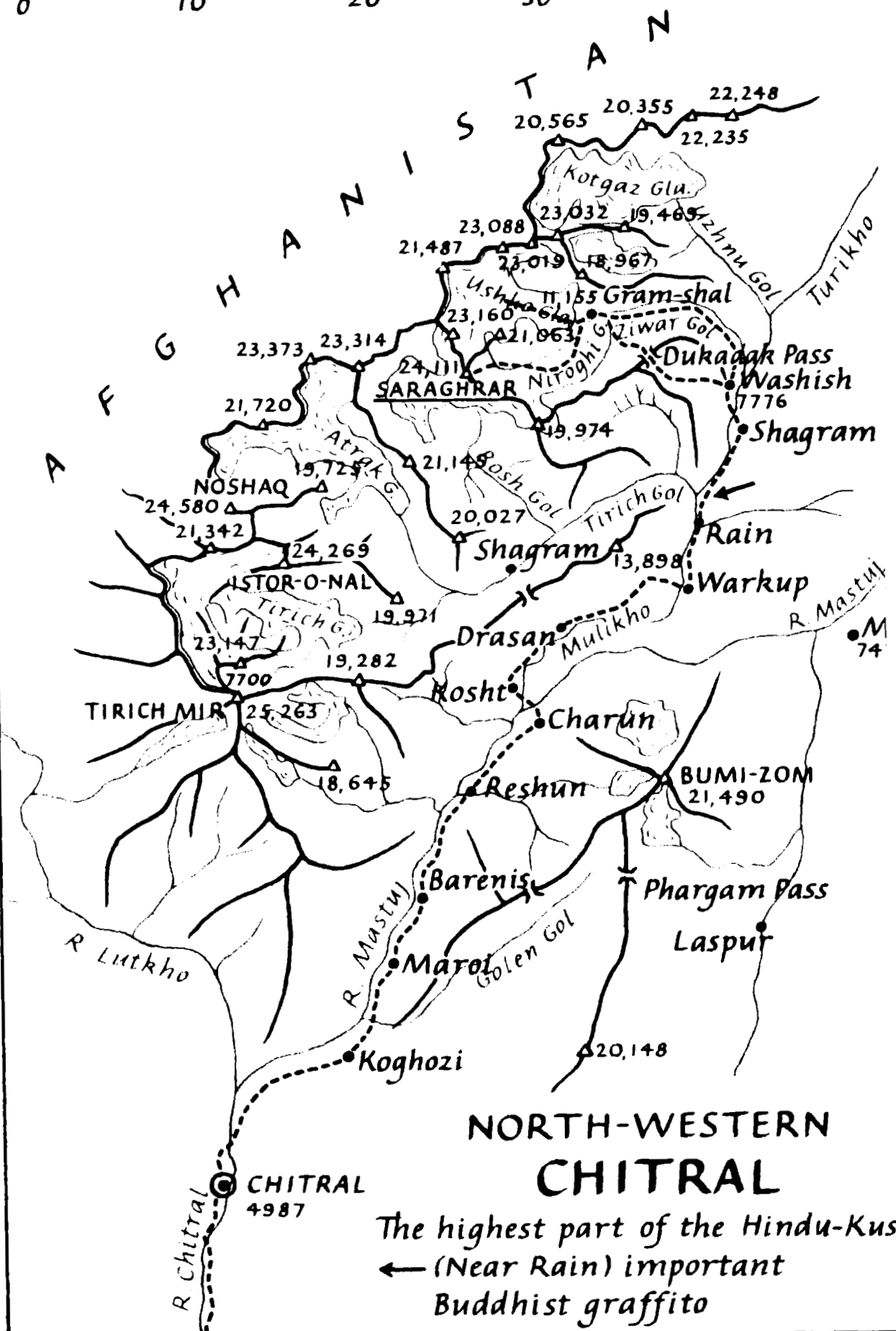
'Indeed I am; a riper case I never saw in my life.'

On 16th July the weather was fine once more: when we got up, early in the morning, the air was fresh, almost chilly. After the usual preparations, which inevitably took up some little time, our advance party—four Italians, a dozen porters, and Murad—set off at 7 a.m. in the direction of Ziwar Gol. Considering that Mulai Jan and Captain Shapur were staying behind with us, it was only fair that the one member of our team who both spoke Urdu and understood a few words of English should go ahead with the reconnaissance party. In any event there was no doubt that Murad—an infinitely resourceful fellow—would be more use there than back at base.

The remainder of the day (a long and exhausting one) was taken up with the countless other preparations necessary to hasten the caravan's departure. The one hundred and seventy loads were made all of exactly equal weight, to avoid unfair distribution and possible complaints: a more complex task it would be hard to conceive. Some packages had already been weighed before our departure from Italy; but in addition there were the supplies we had purchased locally, our personal luggage, the photographic gear and movie-cameras, and the tents. This necessitated endless readjustments to the load-distribution. I worked out, for instance, that a load made up of one tent and a few cans of condensed milk weighed exactly 60 lb.—only to find, by practical experiment, that such a package was virtually impossible to fasten securely: I would, I realized, either have to find a sack to put it in, think up another solution altogether, or consign the entire problem to perdition for ten minutes while I brewed up some hot camomile tea.

The men were first of all each given a number, and then formally enrolled and divided into small teams, each under a responsible leader; lastly, each porter had to be assigned his individual load, and two rolls of names and numbers had to be drawn up, one for me and one for Mulai Jan. I still possess my copy of this list, among my other papers, and the names inscribed on it convey an atmosphere of the old Caliphate, complete with Crescent and minarets: Nadir Khan, Mir Mohammed Khan, Sher Ali, Hassan Beg, Abdul Murad Khan, and so on. Only the frequency of the titles Khan, Beg, and Shah remind us that we are nearer to central Asia than to Arabia. Originally Khan, Beg and Shah signified 'king', 'lord', 'prince' (in Mongol, Turkish and Persian respectively), and they still bear this meaning in certain specific contexts. But gradually they came to be adopted as noble, fine-sounding names by almost anybody, rather as some Americans have made a practice of calling their children Earl (a title of Scandinavian origin), Lord, Duke, or Queen.

When we go through lists of this sort one fact instantly strikes us: that personal names form one of the most typical—and revealing—distinctive characteristics of any civilization. When we pass from the world of John, Robert, Michael, Augustus, George to that of Karim, Abdul, Rasul, Murad—



NORTH-WESTERN CHITRAL

The highest part of the Hindu-Kus
 ← (Near Rain) important Buddhist graffito

or Krishna, Ananda, Chandra, Gopal—we can be quite certain that we have crossed one of mankind's major frontiers, those separating areas that regard the world, and life itself, in fundamentally different ways. One might even—somewhat paradoxically—define the spatial concept of a civilization as 'a territory within which certain specific personal names predominate'. The names we give our children stick to them for the whole span of their natural life; but the matter does not end there. If those children make their mark in the world, their names pass into the fabric of social history: it follows that these brief syllables possess enormous importance, and every civilization has invariably linked them with its particular basic view of the universe, its own central historical drama. This takes no account of the most purely magical aspects of the name as a substitute for its owner—a theory which has evoked endless monographs by social anthropologists. It was not for nothing that the Christians insisted on combining the ceremony of name-giving with the sacrament of baptism, solemnizing both together in one of their most important rites.

Even within the confines of a single civilization, how much we can learn from personal names! The three main types most common in Europe—the Graeco-Roman, such as Alexander, Irene, Claudio, Domitilla; the Jewish, e.g. Michael, Sarah, John, Elizabeth; the Germanic, such as Bernard, Matilda, Alfred, Isolde—at once reveal the three main cultural and intellectual roots of our 'inner world', our endocosm: the classical heritage of the Mediterranean and the Near East, the Hebrew tradition from Palestine, the Germanic strain centred in northern Europe. Even in the most simple, elementary facts of our daily lives, we see reflected those great historical movements and ideals which form the very essence of the civilization in which each of us lives and breathes and has his being.

During the day some seven or eight 'high altitude porters', who had taken part in previous expeditions, turned up offering their services and were engaged by Mulai Jan. The hiring of these special porters, who subsequently have to carry heavy loads over snow and ice, often in conditions of extreme difficulty, is one of the most ticklish jobs confronting any expedition. Judging men on appearances is always a chancy and dangerous business. Physique can be summarily assessed, but who can gauge and pigeon-hole character? Often some hulking giant with the muscular development of Mr. Universe turns out to possess the courage of a rabbit, or about as much will-power and determination as a piece of cooked spaghetti; and, conversely, men who seem quite unremarkable on the face of it prove themselves prodigies of muscle and energy. There are, it is true, the letters written by previous travellers, recommending some individual or praising his services; but these are for the most part couched in general terms, and often give the impression that the writer was deliberately trying to avoid specific statements.

For the time being we decided to take no more than half a dozen such men with us, reserving the right to decide later which of them were the best for the job. We also reckoned on upgrading some of our more willing young caravan porters from the 'ordinary' to the 'special' category in due course. The real high altitude porters—those recognized and licensed as such—often put on the most insufferable airs, and are as difficult to manage as thoroughbred racehorses. Almost all those who turned up during the course of the afternoon were wearing either shoes or some other article of clothing of European origin. This served to impress on the less fortunate majority (who gazed at them in open-eyed astonishment) their familiarity not only with high mountains, but also with the *sahibs* who climbed them.

One such fellow turned up wearing a black dinner-jacket, with shiny watered-silk lapels: these in particular appeared to arouse great envy among the onlookers. He explained that it held the heat wonderfully, and that he always wore it up in the mountains, even through the ordeal of the highest snow-clad passes . . .



The 17th July was a Friday¹: it began so badly that even the most convinced and scornful disbeliever in all superstitions might have had cause to reconsider his attitude. The previous evening Mulai Jan had announced the imminent arrival of the last twenty to twenty-five porters—the number we were still short of to bring the caravan up to its full complement—but by 9 in the morning there was still no sign of them. Mulai Jan for once was visibly shaken, and went off on a personal tour of the houses in the valley to try and round up more men. Meanwhile we were left to argue, in various languages none of which we really understood, with a collection of minor patriarchs who, having learnt how matters stood, were determined to squeeze a few quick rupees out of us. By the will of Allah (seeing that we were now under Allah's jurisdiction) we managed to get moving at 1 o'clock in the afternoon. Some of the men that Mulai Jan had promised us turned up at the last moment; the rest we had scraped together from local talent.

The sky was clear, and the heat appalling. For a couple of miles the path skirted a range of high, bare, dusty hills. Then we came to a bend in the valley, where the track cut through a rocky gorge, and there opened out before us the stupendous panorama of the Hindu-Raj range, culminating in its loftiest peak, Bumi Zom (21,300 feet), which towered up nearly 14,800 feet above the valley-bottom. Bumi Zom was not a single isolated cone, however, but a mighty rampart of brownish-purple rock, snow-capped and striped with steep tongue-like glaciers; crowning the whole was a cap of ice

¹ There is a superstition, especially in S. Italy, that a Friday on the 17th of the month is particularly unlucky. (Trs.)

rich and heavy as cream. Light, delicate clouds floated caressingly about the multiple peaks of this great massif, now misting them over, now gleaming above them like a halo. We stood and stared, unable to take our eyes from this awe-inspiring, inaccessible realm of purity and light.

Yet—in sharp contrast to this scene—we suffered considerably from the impurities and weaknesses so prevalent in the world below, with all its chances and uncertainties. Above all, there was the heat. The constant spectacle of those frozen glaciers failed to mitigate in any degree the sultriness of the air or the blazing sun that beat down upon us so mercilessly. There was also diarrhoea to contend with. To some extent we all suffered from it; in me it had taken a peculiarly violent and debilitating form, with continual stomach-gripes. It was, I had to admit, a great privilege to rest every so often in the shade of a poplar with that magnificent view spread out before us; the trouble was that we had to make so many stops, and resuming the march when one felt sick and giddy was an unpleasant business.

The path wound slowly upwards for several miles, climbing out of the parched, precipitous, rock-strewn gorges of the Mastuj; at last we crossed a small saddle and were greeted by the first faint ghost of a breeze. We stopped, some to eat, others to purge themselves; then for several further miles we were confronted with a series of long, shallow slopes, up hill and down alternately. The whole district was more or less uninhabited; here and there we saw a house or two with poplars growing round them and a few fields attached; but the general impression the landscape gave was of a wretched stunted barrenness: it called to my mind desolate areas in central Sicily, where ceaseless backbreaking toil wrings only a bare sustenance from the sterile earth.

We plodded on and on; the day seemed as though it would never end. One bare hill succeeded another, one ridge merged into the next. Sometimes we stumbled through a cracked gully; then those lopsided hummocks of dried mud would begin again. But at least we were much higher now, which made matters better: we could see the river winding far below us, and the whole far side of the valley, with tiny green oases in the general arid wilderness of the mountains.

A little farther on we crossed another saddle, and began to descend, following a jagged rocky ridge; the path plunged steeply, down, down, to where the Mastuj flowed far below us, a drop of some eighteen hundred feet. The river was in furious spate; its mud-coloured waters boiled angrily over the rocks, filling the valley with a dull, thunderous roar. A breath of damp, icy air rose from the depths, and followed the torrent downstream. Above this grandiose inferno there hung one of the usual wooden bridges; but this one was so slender and unsteady that we all trembled as we passed over it. Naturally we laughed and swaggered and clowned about during the crossing (not forgetting to remind each other that this was a Friday!), but in his

heart of hearts every single one of us was scared stiff. Out in the middle, where the bridge consisted of a single plank, rigged up in an alarmingly rough-and-ready fashion, every tiny vibration was enhanced horribly by the shakiness of the structure as a whole. We had to inch our way through this flimsy wooden cage, holding our breath. If anyone had tumbled into the water, he could have done little to save himself. It was no use knowing how to swim: if you escaped the whirlpools you were sure to be smashed up on the rocks, or vice versa. Once we were across, the thought suddenly struck us: How on earth will our porters manage? Soon afterwards we saw them all cheerfully swarm across this perilous obstacle, with our precious gear on their backs, not in the least bothered by the potential hazard it presented. The moral, I suppose, is that there are some sports to which you start acclimatizing yourself the moment you are born.

The sun was setting; luckily we had reached our goal for the day, a fairly large village called Warkup, set in the middle of one of the most extensive oases in the valley. As usual, we were received with great hospitality by the *tahsildar* and other local notables, who had laid on *charpoys*, carpets, eggs, fruit and roast chicken, all spread out in the shade of the poplars, apricots and mulberries that grew thick overhead.

By now it was growing dark, and the shade of the trees no longer served any immediate purpose (though how we would have welcomed it at some intermediate point during the day's march!). It is easy to see how the usual evening chore of putting up the tents was made rather more difficult than usual on this occasion by the rapidly fading light. But nothing could deter the local rustics, young and old alike, from squatting round on any hump or hillock they could find, in order to enjoy the rare and wonderful sight of foreigners intent upon some ancient sacred ritual, which required the most extraordinary gadgets for its proper performance. Every human being had to lie down and go to sleep; but these men inflated strange mattress-like objects, made from a species of goatskin such as had never been seen hitherto. Every human being cooked and ate food; but the foreigners had devil-bottles full of fire, on which they boiled various tins filled with some unidentifiable mush.

The evening meal, which always followed our tent-erecting operations and was something of a communal occasion, would have been much more enjoyable if it had not been for the Chitralis' habit of continual spitting, right, left, and centre. We often wondered where on earth they stored away so much liquid for this endless expectoration—especially when the air was so dry and they themselves such withered creatures. But every Chitrali is in fact a sort of walking fountain: when he talks, he tends to emphasize important words and ideas with a jet of saliva, and when he is silent, he will mark the passing of the minutes by regularly hawking a gob on to the grass or earth

around him. Spitting here is a real art, like the use of the double-strung bow, with its proper recognized style and technique. The spitter accumulates saliva in his mouth, and then—with the faint enigmatic smile of one meditating in some unfathomable manner on life, death, and the universe—exerts a sudden concentrated pressure (involving tongue, lips and teeth) which expels the jet of fresh, gleaming spittle in a sharply confident manner. The ear registers this discharge as a faint hiss, the liquid fart produced on occasion by a hosepipe. There is no dribbling or slobbering, either: the gob flies clear like a tiny bullet, reaching the ground all in one piece, without any sign of disintegration. The wretched foreigner has no alternative but to accustom himself to this man-created rainstorm; and if he is particularly squeamish, he can always spread a groundsheet before he sits down.

Saturday's march, from Warkup to Washish, was brief and pleasant. This whole section of the valley is extremely well-watered, and the oases follow one another almost without interruption. The houses are more carefully and lavishly built than is usual in these parts, the fields are well-tilled, and the poplars—which dominate the scene wherever you look—grow tall and luxuriant. Shortly before reaching Shagram—that is, opposite the point at which the Tirich valley joins the valley of the Mulikho—we observed, on a large raised slab of rock, the *graffito* representing a Buddhist *stupa*, which I have already described above (see p. 153).

Shagram is a town of some importance: among other amenities it boasts a police station and a post-cum-telegraph office. This was, in fact, our last point of contact with the 'outside world'.

We reached Washish about midday, and found the usual *charpoys*, carpets and fruit awaiting us in the shade of the trees: this was, indeed, the most enchanting *paradeisos* we had yet encountered. Here we ate and rested for a while: my companions slept peacefully, but my own repose was broken and restless.

To our problems of health and hygiene there was soon added a fresh headache, for which the porters were responsible. 'Late in the afternoon,' Silvio noted, 'the porters staged a sort of revolution: there was a hell of a noise, and a lot of scuffling, and then the whole hundred and fifty of them went marching off across the lawn in procession . . .' We were still resting and knew nothing of all this. Mulai Jan came hurrying across to warn us.

'They say the work's too hard,' he told us. 'They refuse to go any farther.'

I hurried off with Mulai Jan in the wake of the retreating crowd, to see if we could possibly reach some sort of compromise.

'Not even if you doubled our pay!' declared one of the less flustered rebels. Mulai Jan duly interpreted this, and advised me to let them go: they were nothing but a bunch of impertinent layabouts, he declared, and he personally would find us a new and far, far better lot. By now my faith in Mulai Jan's

abilities was somewhat diminished; but there seemed to be no alternative solution. We paid off about seventy men who were determined to leave, and considered ourselves lucky that over eighty more had, at the last moment, decided to stay with us after all. Mulai Jan went out in search of reinforcements and by that same evening had brought some fifty new porters into camp; for once he had said little and acted effectively.

After a disturbed night (including a number of little trips which helped fertilize the surrounding fields), I woke at dawn to another day of problems. We were still twenty-three men short; and despite Mulai Jan's frantic efforts (bonnet thrown away, hands plunged into wild, disordered hair) he failed to enrol a single further recruit. Meanwhile news had come back from our reconnaissance group in the Ziwar gorges. Franco Alletto sent me a long account of the hazards they had encountered in working along precipitous slopes where the surface was formed of calcified, rock-hard scree, and firmly advised me against attempting the difficult Ziwar valley route with a fully loaded caravan. It would be better, he said, to take a longer and in all likelihood safer route over the mountains. He sent us back two Washish guides who said they knew this track, and proposed that we should all forgather in a few days at Gram Shal, some 10,400 feet above sea-level.

In order to avoid wasting any time I decided to send Enrico and Silvio on ahead with 120 porters. Mulai Jan, the doctor, Captain Shapur and I would follow as soon as possible: perhaps later that same afternoon.



Let us now for a moment join the reconnaissance party, which was advancing through unknown territory beyond the farthest outposts of civilization: Washish in fact is the last inhabited centre before one comes to the great mountain ranges. This first group had left Shagram on the morning of the 17th—the same day as we set out from Drasan. The total of twenty-one men was increased at the last moment by the addition of four *shikaris*—hunters and guides who know the mountains intimately, being accustomed to trek across them in pursuit of ibex or when doing a little smuggling into Afghanistan. These 'mountain wolves' at once created an excellent impression. 'They are a completely new and unexpected breed,' Betto Pinelli wrote in his diary. 'They may well be the last living representatives of an all-but-extinct profession . . . They are all men of advanced years, and have a very strange air about them: there is no confusing them with the rest of the local population. They are as lively as squirrels, and at the same time display the natural dignity appropriate to someone who feels himself, from head to toe, free as the wind.'

One member of this quartet, called Pahlawan, was later to become one of our most trusted high-altitude porters. He was a slim-built, fair-haired,

elderly man, with bright blue eyes, all nerve and muscle, who bounded from point to point like a wild animal: his expression had a strange alert primeval quality about it, and could veer in a moment between charm, aggressiveness, and sheer diabolical fury. He dressed rather like a soldier in the early decades of this century: puttees wound round his legs, tennis shoes on his feet, a khaki shirt, a grey woollen balaclava, and always in one hand a very characteristic sort of stick, with a little pointed iron ferrule: we used to refer to it, jokingly, as 'De Saussure's ice-axe'.¹ When we made him a present of a real ice-axe his delight was such that he could not find words to express it. We never managed to discover his precise age, but he must have been something like fifty-five. When he was on form, and leaping from crag to crag with positively feline agility, he said he was forty. When he succumbed to an unexpected fit of exhaustion (as all nervous, energetic men are liable to do) he claimed to be sixty. This may have shown scant respect for chronology, but displayed a good deal of human understanding.

Shortly after Washish our troubles really began. This whole area is composed of a highly friable type of calcareous rock, which also happens to be highly soluble in water: consequently there are large numbers of sharply sloping screes, with a solidified shale surface that is both extremely hard and sheer murder on your feet when you try to get a grip on it. Here and there the effects of secondary erosion are visible in the form of gullies and almost vertical cracks through the rock; if there is no path, you have to cut steps with an ice-axe, a procedure which demands much time and attention. In fact, once you began to slide on these slopes, it would be impossible to pull yourself up. The danger becomes even more acute when there are rocky cataracts or a raging torrent at the bottom. Betto Pinelli, eyeing the rose-pink pinnacles and crumbling ridges and yellowish spurs and buttresses of rock that encircled our valley, found—in a moment of savage irony—an appropriate nickname for the whole accursed mountain-chain, describing it (quite untranslatably) as 'le Dolomiti di merda'.

Yet even the Dolomiti di merda were liable to conceal unlooked-for poetic qualities among their dismal rocky fastnesses. Did my companions, I wonder, see the famous juniper-tree to which local travellers make offerings of bread and apricots when they set foot in the Ziwār gorges? It appears that particularly pious folk even tear strips of material from their clothes, and tie these to the branches of the sacred juniper. All this is in propitiation of Kol-i-mukhi, a daughter of the Great Goddess of Tirich Mir. Kol-i-mukhi has Ziwār Gol as her personal fief, and one must take great care not to offend her.

Goddesses or no goddesses, for an entire day the caravan struggled on, with great difficulty, through this treacherous and difficult terrain. At times

¹ De Saussure was a Swiss scientist from Geneva, and one of the first men to climb Mont Blanc, in 1787.

the guides took our team high up the flank of the mountains, at times they led them right down till they were on top of the torrent as it roared through the gorge, almost within range of the spray it cast up. 'At two separate points,' Paolo Consiglio recorded, 'we had to work large boulders into place to get through safely, since the water had so hollowed out the overhang of the gorge that it seemed a positive danger. About half past one our guides informed me that the worst was now over. How we managed to understand this is a mystery that still baffles me; but we certainly did. Now we are waiting for the remainder of the caravan to catch us up: I am lying under the shade of a large thorn-bush, hungry, tired, and extremely hot, hoping to get forty winks later. Our two guides, both middle-aged men (between forty-five and fifty-five) are full of near-paternal solicitude for me: I find their kindness most touching. Both of them are great characters. The first is a short, slight man, who carries his rifle slung across his shoulder (he is never parted from it), and whose natural expression—shrewd yet guileless—is enhanced by a pair of twinkling eyes, all the more noticeable on account of the blue line traced round them—a very popular affectation in these parts, and one which does not imply what we Europeans might assume it did. Not knowing his real name, we at once christened him Mr. Eyeshadow. His companion is much taller, a gangling lamp-post of a man, and sports a vast handlebar moustache reminiscent of some retired mid-Victorian colonel. Both carry a sort of poncho wrapped round the waist, which they use as a coverlet at night; though I tried hard to stop them from doing so, they insisted on spreading them out on the stones for my benefit, to make me more comfortable. The only return I can make at present for all their kind attentions is to share my last cigarettes with them, and make them a present of my three remaining sweets . . .'

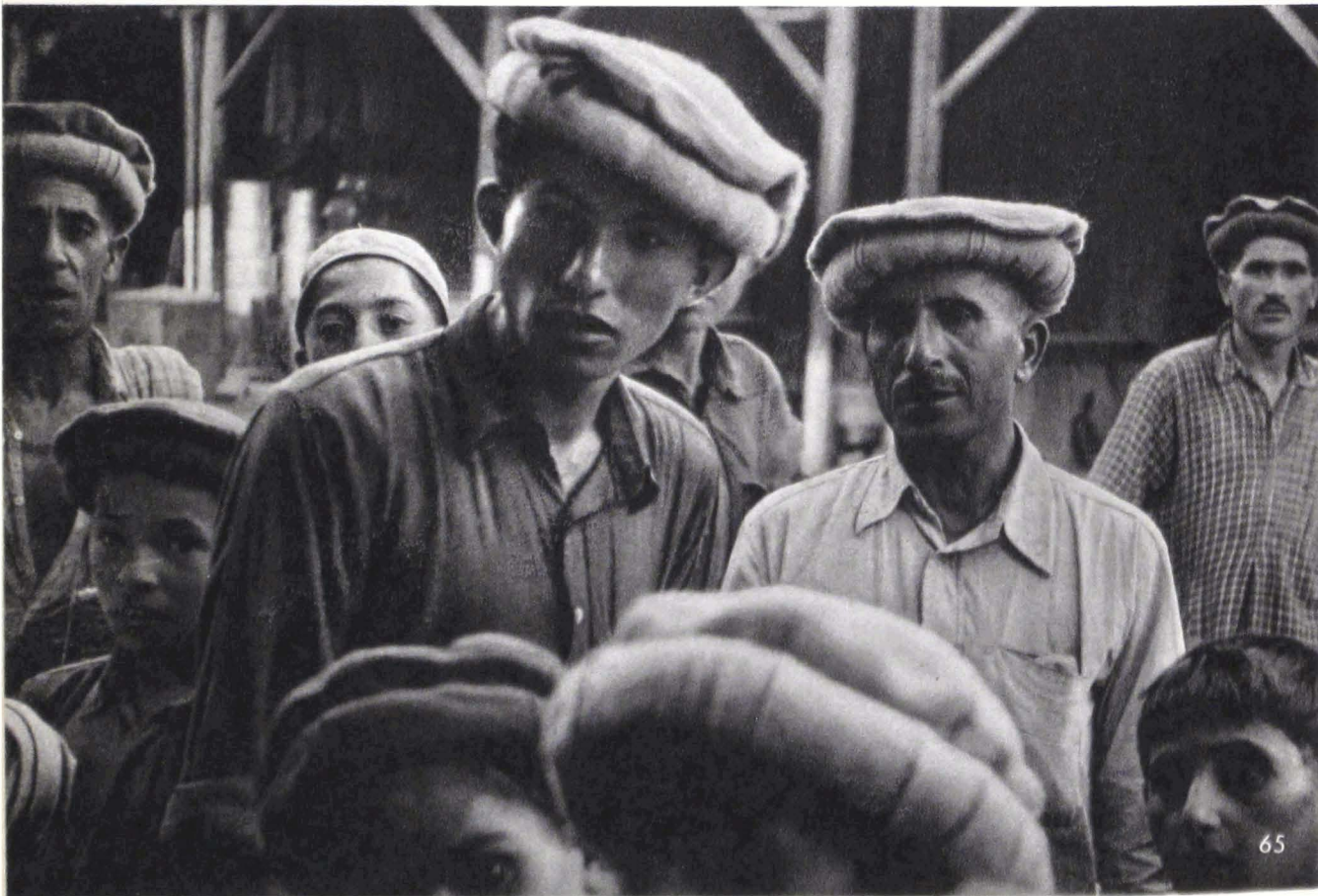
Midway through the afternoon the little caravan reached a flat terrace-like shelf called Ziwar Uts, where they pitched camp for the night. Shortly before this they had been obliged to ford a mountain stream: 'We took off our shoes and rolled our trousers up nearly to the groin,' Paolo Consigli recorded. 'When we entered the water we at once got the feeling that we no longer had legs, but mere freezing extensions to our bodies; despite this we could not hurry across, since the current was extremely swift, and there was a danger that we might step in some pothole or other, slip, and be carried away. . . . It turned out that there are some hot springs on the other side of the valley; but, with the river in spate, it is impossible to get anywhere near them. People go there in winter, Murad explained to us; and they are an admirable cure for rheumatic complaints!'

The weather, which had been variable, now cleared up completely; and that evening a bright silvery moon shed its radiance, in sharp-drawn chiaroscuro, upon the perilous passage through the gorge.



61, 62: Women and children cover their faces as we go past
63: Group of boys

64, 65: Scenes in a Chitral bazaar



66: Entrance to Mehtar's palace
in Chitral
67: Chitral garden party





68-72: *Players and spectators at polo*

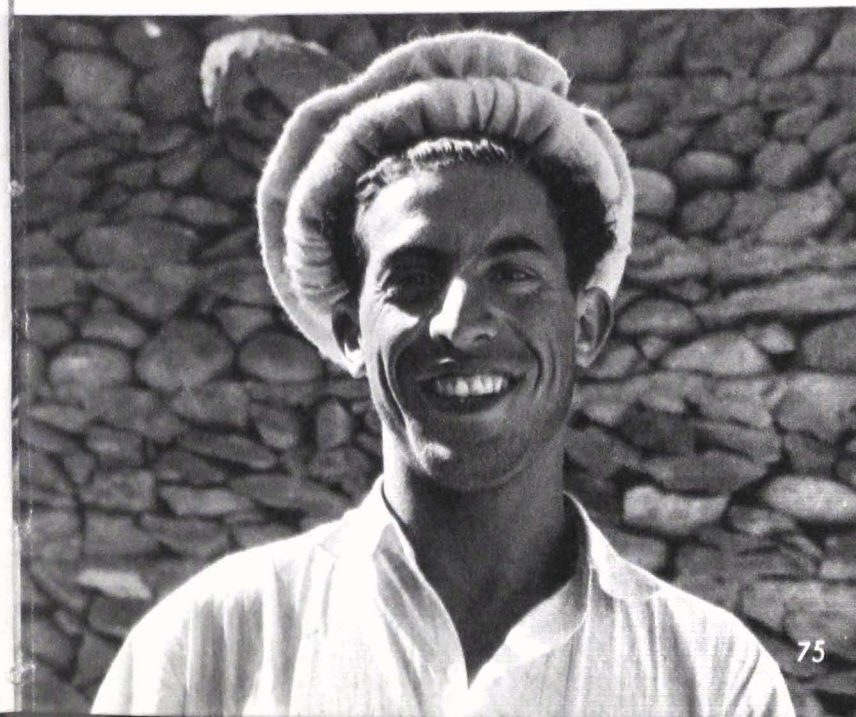




73, 74: The Mastuj Gorge; torrential rapids



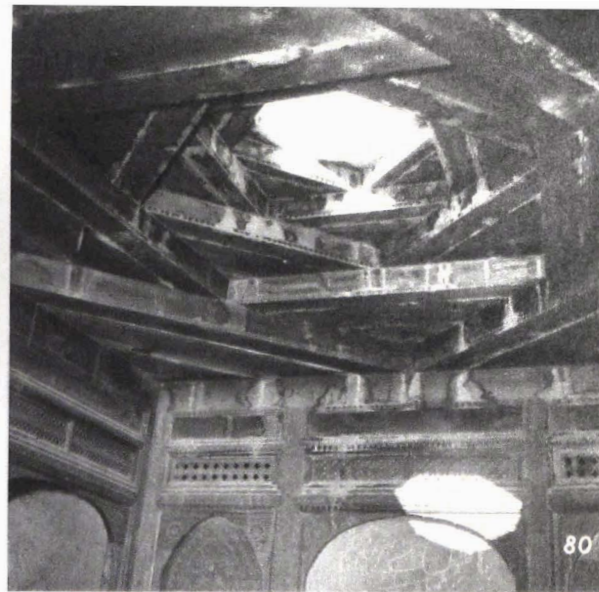
75: Elementary school teacher at Koghozi — 76: Young falconer
77: Using the sling-bow





78

78: A mosque that would delight Picasso
 79: One of the guard-towers at Drasan Fort
 80: Skylight of a Chitral house



80

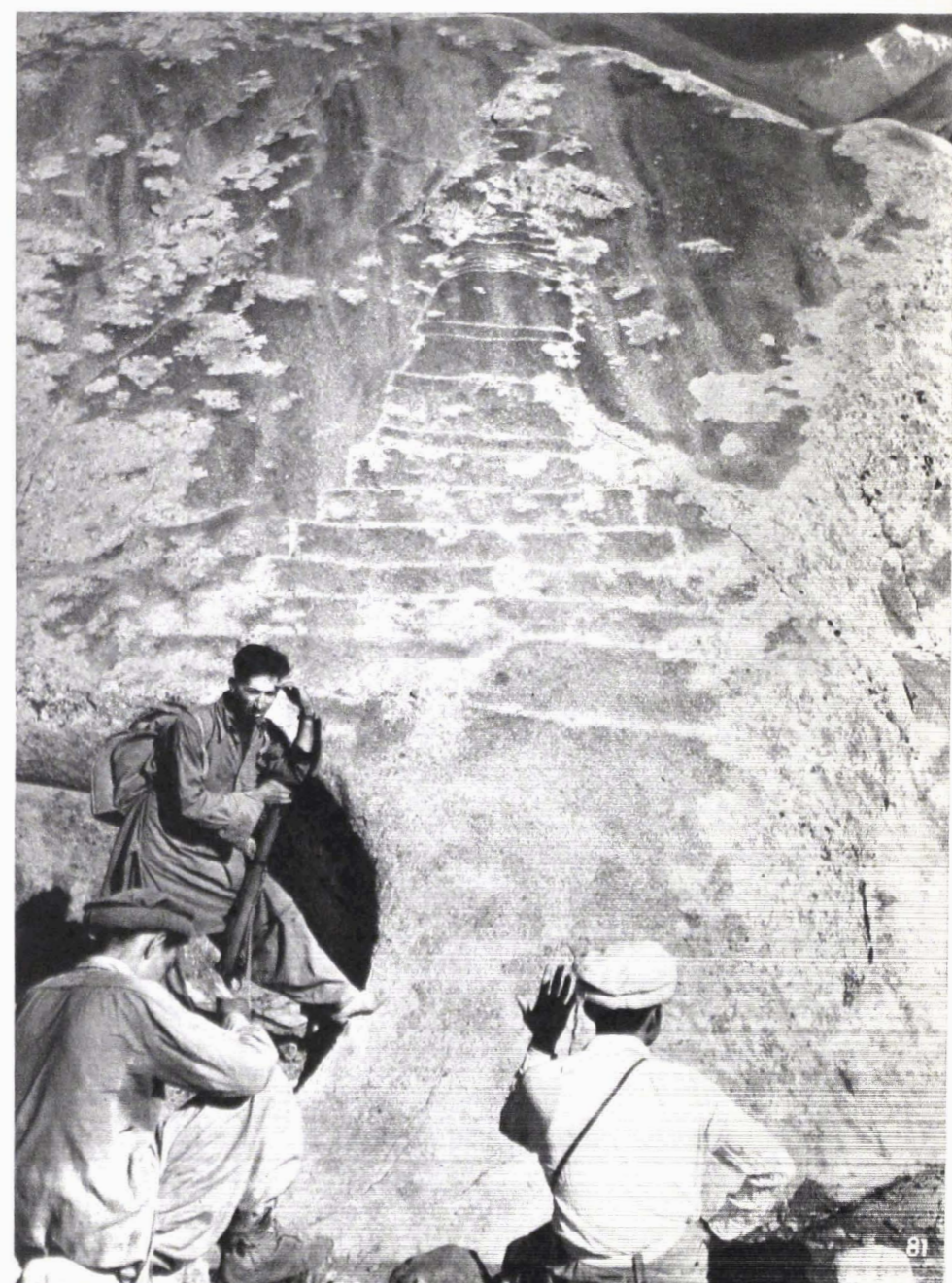
81: Ancient picture of a Buddhist stupa
 82: Archer hunting ibex: rock-carving at Gram Shal



79



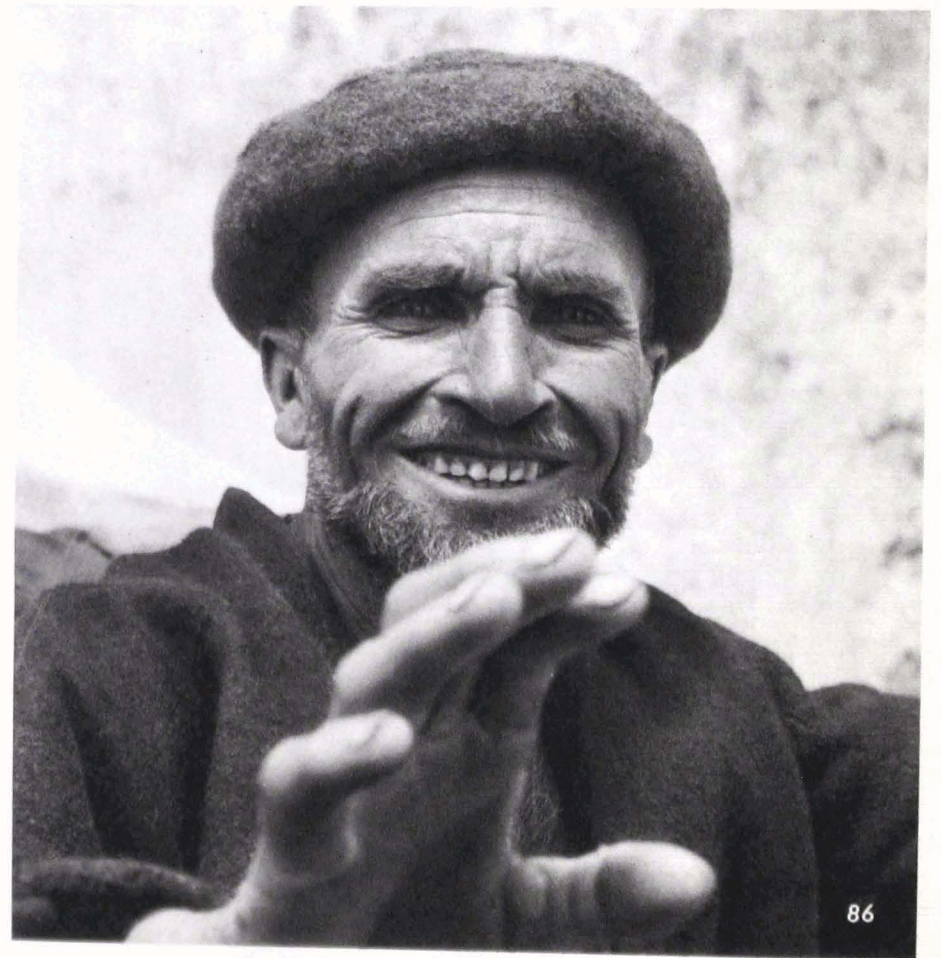
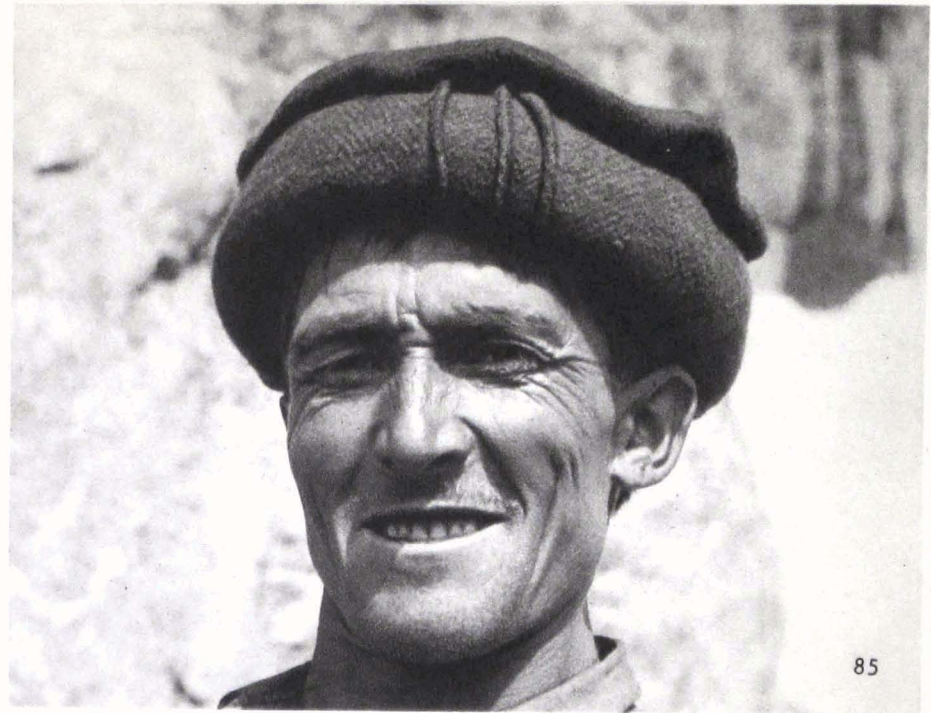
82



81



83-6: Some of our 150 porters: men from the upper Chitral valleys





87, 88: *Climbing the Dukadak Pass (c. 13,800 ft.)*



and the descent on the far side

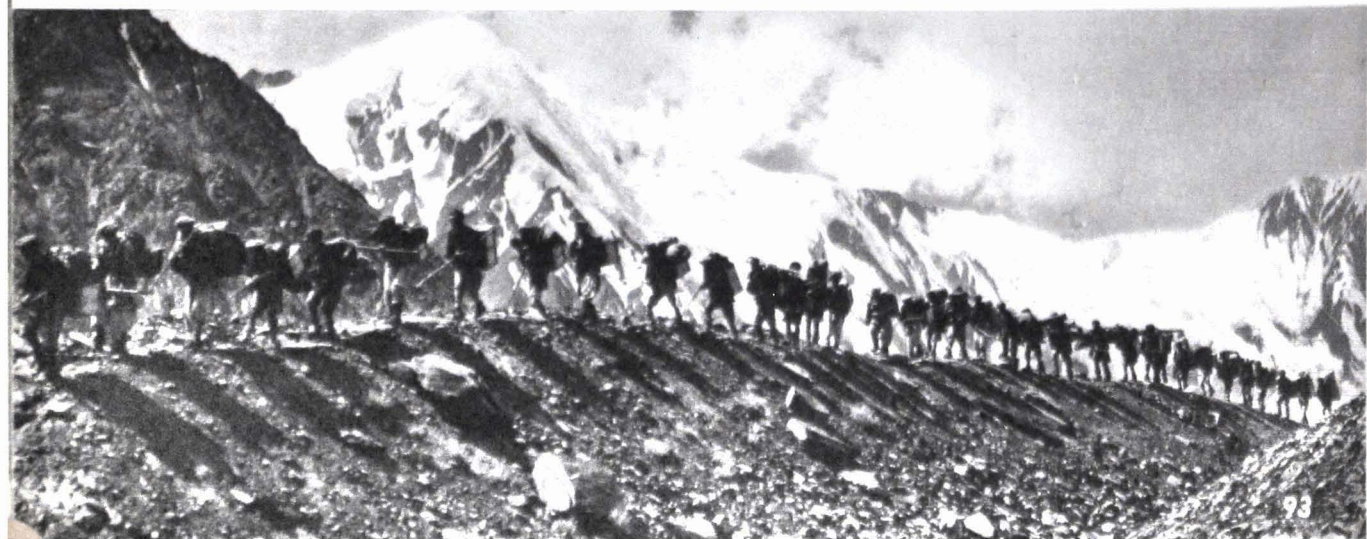


89: Panoramic shot of the Saraghrar massif (c. 22,050 ft.) taken from the upper slopes of Gram Shal: the two great glaciers are clearly visible, Nirogli on the left, and Ushko on the right

90, 91: Porters on strike in the mountains



92: The north side of the Dukadak Pass, from the mountains above Gram Shal
93: The caravan moving along the moraine of the Niroghi glacier



Above Uts the Ziwar Gol becomes far easier going for travellers, and its beauty increases proportionately. At its lower end the valley is chaotic and, to all appearances, fortuitous, a kind of vast rock-strewn wilderness; but higher up its various elements coalesce, harmoniously, into a superb and striking unity. On your right, as you climb the pass, there rises a tall, linked series of crags, a massif that recalls the Dolomites—this time the comparison is serious rather than mocking—with reddish peaks and spurs, sharp-silhouetted in the sunlight. This range curves very gently towards the left, i.e. to the north-west, thus closing in the valley; the result is a limitless world of stone, bounded only by the horizon.

At one point—on the left again—there is the most stupendous waterfall. The rock-face here is not only toweringly high, but a sheer drop as well, with a slight overhang; so the water falls clear into space, breaking up as it goes, a fine light spray fire-glinting with sudden rainbow streaks if the wind blows it against the sunlight.

The small shelf beside the torrent, before you reach the main bend in the valley (and the first slopes leading up to those gigantic vertical rocks), is covered with a sparse growth of enormous and extremely ancient cypresses. As happens in some Mediterranean olive-groves, planted heaven knows when by heaven knows who, every separate tree is an individual character, a monument to its own past existence. Trunk and branches bear the marks of an age-old struggle against storm and tempest, thunderbolt and avalanche, the beasts of the field and the birds of the air, perhaps even against man himself. Many trees are near-skeletons, their arteries worn and polished by wind and sun, that stand silhouetted against the sky like so many Sibylline ideograms. Others, again, cling to life with feverish determination. Parts of their trunks and branches may be dried-up, lifeless; yet elsewhere they sprout little tufts of tender—indeed, positively gay—greenery.

Beyond the point at which the valley turns sharply east (almost south-east), our advance party caught their first glimpse of Saraghrar. 'It consists of a high peak rising above a steep glacier-covered massif,' Paolo Consiglio noted, 'with black rocky spurs and buttresses lower down. It seems so placed that it shuts in both sides of the valley, which fall away from it continually along the lines of perspective, as though prostrating themselves at its feet.' But it was still a great way off, and they could not tell at this point whether it was accessible or not, much less from which flank the assault on it should be launched.

From here the valley proceeded in a straight line for several miles. There were one or two difficult stretches along the rock-clustered bank of the torrent, and the porters quite often had to go over their knees in ice-cold water. Luckily for us, the advance party discovered a huge snow-bridge somewhat farther on, right across the largest stream.

Twelve hours after leaving Ziwar Uts the party reached the sloping plateau of Gram Shal, perched above the valley like some artificial stepped terrace. It was an enchanting spot: an oasis of grass and shrubbery, with birches and willows and budding flowers, their roots reaching down into well-watered soil (there were numerous springs on the plateau), while all around lay that barren stony wilderness. There was also plentiful dry brushwood with which to make a fire. Here and there the ruined remains of buildings were visible, crude stone fortifications put together without mortar. It appears that in bygone ages, when the glaciers had not advanced so far as they have today, and the passes were consequently both open and easily crossed, Gram Shal served as a base for those travelling from Chitral into Badakhshan, or vice versa. It is no accident that the word 'Gram' means 'village'. Perhaps these ancient hovels, now destroyed, once sheltered men whose wallets were stuffed with the precious lapis lazuli they quarried in far-off Bactria. But there is one very vivid survivor from the mysterious past here, to keep any passer-by company: a hunter, carved in profile on a rock, bow drawn, about to let fly his arrows at a group of ibex (see photograph no. 82).

Everything would have been fine for the advance party if Franco Alletto had not felt decidedly off-colour. By the end of the morning he found walking an effort; and the moment the advance party reached Gram Shal he took his temperature, only to find it was over 102 degrees. Paolo, Giancarlo and Betto took care of him as best they could, and settled him down in his sleeping-bag for the night. The next morning he was much better; his temperature had dropped almost to normal.



The main body of the caravan left Washish on the 19th July, in the afternoon. We still lacked our full complement of porters; but Mulai Jan (with a wealth of dramatic gestures, wild laughter, and mimed suffering) promised and swore that he would get them somehow. I was reduced to such a state of desperation that I had no option but to take him at his word; and so I left, with Franco Lamberti, leaving Mulai behind to bring on about twenty loads of equipment. There was a long haul up as far as Wazmish; but we had left the valleys beneath us now, and the air was freshening. There was not a tree in sight, though here and there we saw a miserable patch of pasturage. When we got more than 9,000 feet above sea-level, the landscape took on a genuinely alpine appearance.

Silvio and Enrico, who were four hours ahead of us, had observed numerous *graffiti*, or rock-carvings, in the neighbourhood of a small knoll beside the track; but by the time we reached this point it was getting dark, and we did not notice them. 'After a long, long march,' Silvio wrote, 'we found ourselves close to a little hill, with the narrowest part of the Ziwar Gol gorge

far below us. In the distance some big mountains were visible, but not ours. We made a halt here. Smooth black rocks everywhere. Certain marks on them caught our attention, and we discovered them to be prehistoric carvings—stags, and other designs, all extremely primitive . . .’

At dusk, after some casting around, we reached Wazmish (11,000 feet), an abandoned pasturage with a few mountain huts. Even Mulai Jan managed to make it, and actually brought the remaining quota of porters with him. I was finding it increasingly difficult to reach any final judgement on Mulai Jan: that paradoxical mixture of Punchinello and Lucifer was baffling in the extreme. Just as you were beginning to think you could really rely on him, he would either let you down or else start horsing around, which hardly inspired confidence if things came to a crisis; but when you had more or less given him up in despair, and had made up your mind to ditch him once and for all, he would choose that precise moment to pull off some superb *coup*, with the nonchalant dexterity of a professional conjuror. Anyhow, it was a beautiful evening. The last rays of the setting sun slanted across the blue smoke from the porters’ camp-fire, where they were boiling water for their supper; the branches of *burtsé* they used as fuel gave off a delectable aroma. It was wonderful to feel we were really in the mountains at last.

On the 20th July our difficulties began. It had been a cold night, and the porters had slept badly, despite the blankets and groundsheets we had distributed among them. A certain amount of muttering was going on. The weather, luckily, came to our assistance: I had high hopes that the heat of the sun would soon make them forget all their troubles. But it was not as simple as that. After two hours’ march, when we were at a height of some 11,500 feet, the men stopped, and refused to go on: indeed, they declared that if fresh terms were not agreed upon, they would simply leave us in the lurch altogether. We resigned ourselves to a bargaining session between labour and management.

At this point Captain Shapur moved into action. For the past day or two he had been suffering from a severe attack of dysentery, and the two of us had got what comfort we could from commiserating with each other’s symptoms and doing research on the comparative efficacy of various pills. But now—probably because of the fresher air—we had both recovered a little. It may in fact have been because of his taciturnity that Captain Shapur commanded such tremendous respect amongst the porters. With great firmness he marshalled those 150 men into a circle, split them up into fresh groups, assigned each group a leader, and discussed terms with the leaders only. It was agreed that the porters should receive normal pay for the first two days, and double pay for the crossing of the pass and the subsequent trek to our base camp. That night, once again, we could go to sleep confident that no further stumbling-blocks would beset our path till we reached our objective. The net

result was a heavy drain on the expedition's finances; but there was no other possible way out of such an impasse.

The morning of the 21st July dawned ominously: the sky was grey, the temperature had dropped, it felt cold enough for winter. The steep rocky slopes that led up to the Dukadak Pass, nearly 3,300 feet above us, were hidden by dark purplish clouds: a storm seemed imminent. I must put it on record, however, that there was no further grumbling or discussion. The men drank down their hot tea and shouldered their packs; and we all set off together, firmly determined to reach the summit of the pass.

The climb took hours, and we saw no trace of a path anywhere. Right at the head of the column went Pahlawan, as agile as any mountain goat, clutching his long stick in one hand. The silhouette of that thin, seemingly weightless old man resembled (I thought) one of the immortal Taoists, going up to Heaven with the elixir of eternal life tucked away in his knapsack. But it was plain that not even he knew precisely where our best route lay. Perhaps he had travelled in these parts, but it must have been a very long time ago. Every now and then he took a false turning, and then we all had to go back in our tracks and try again. It would not have been a difficult ascent for unburdened men; but for our porters, who were carrying sixty-pound packs and wearing only the most primitive of rag-shoes (*tashin*), it was a formidable undertaking. Quite often, when crossing patches of steep shale-strewn rock, they had to use hands as well as feet. On such occasions the high altitude porters would help their more heavily-laden companions: we noted, with pleased relief, that the former displayed an unmistakable familiarity with the mountainous terrain through which we were passing.

The weather got steadily worse: very soon it began to snow, and we heard occasional peals of thunder. A storm was raging beyond the pass, and the snow now came down mingled with hail, laying a carpet of freezing slush over rocks, stones and earth impartially. We also found some steep and treacherous slopes with a mud surface, and experienced several uncomfortably dramatic moments in consequence. The porters did not appear discouraged by all this; but if the storm got worse we should have no alternative but to stop. In the event the weather cleared up, very suddenly and unexpectedly, so that we managed to reach the Dukadak Pass, some 15,000 feet above sea-level, not much later than we had estimated (see photographs nos. 87, 88). We were exhausted and ravenous. Many of the men were suffering from 'mountain sickness', and our doctor had to distribute a large number of mysterious European pills.

All the same, we felt very satisfied at having got so far—though the descent was not, by the look of it, exactly a joke. The north side of the pass faced on to a glacier, which began with a steep, almost sheer slope of hard-packed snow, several hundred yards long and covered with intermittent

patches of frozen hail. We had to unpack our ropes and cut steps in this slope with our ice-axes—in short, to prepare a path for the porters, good enough to prevent them from losing their balance and perhaps causing themselves serious injury. There was so icy a wind blowing across the top of the pass that we pressed on almost without a pause. Silvio later wrote a graphic account of what happened: ‘I went down the slope at an angle,’ he noted, ‘cutting steps as I went, till I reached the rocks on the far side; but those pigheaded porters would have none of it. At a certain point they decided to go straight down the slope: ungrateful creatures. It was snowing, and I was snug enough under a groundsheet, so I let them go their own sweet way. One fell, and was quickly followed by another, who went sliding down the slope; Enrico quickly moved across and blocked their fall. I yelled out to them to use my path, which avoided the steepest part of the slope, but they couldn’t or wouldn’t understand what I said. At this point I moved out across the slope myself, to catch those who slipped or lost their balance. One old fellow was scared stiff and didn’t want to go any farther, though the worst that could happen to him was a tumble in the snow: there was no real danger. I took his load, carted it down to the bottom, and made my way up again. Went on catching more porters as they fell. It was a fantastic and rather repulsive scene, with all these half-wits screaming and shouting up and down the snow-slope. Some of them refused to make the descent, and three cases came tumbling down on their own. One of these burst open, but the other two were still intact at the bottom. It was a pretty nasty situation, but in the end, somehow, the whole lot reached level ground farther down. A goat made the descent with us. We spoke about eating her, to everyone’s amusement. The porters were scared out of their wits at first, but they very soon recovered . . .’

The descent over the Pachhalkush Glacier was a lengthy business. Luckily the weather continued to improve; from time to time the sun actually broke through. The mountains lowered over us, threatening and chaotic, an ugly, senseless, disorganized panorama. Sudden buttresses jutted up from re-entrant rock-faces, glacier-tongues dropped almost sheer towards the bottom of the valley, in crooked, twisting channels. Beyond and above this scene, great peaks towered among the clouds, but we could not tell on what foundations they rested. There were weird and horrific effects that reminded me of those distorted landscapes of Mantegna’s. Leonardo’s rocks may be fantastic but they are also logical: they have an inner consistency, they stand as a whole. Leonardo certainly knew, by intuition if not rationally, that every rock-formation testifies to age-old erosive processes, that it lays bare a pattern, an inner structure. Mantegna, on the other hand, constructed his wild, tangled thickets from the outside, like a sculptor slapping clay on a wire armature to model a piece of statuary. The final effect is odd, illogical, as though the

geology of the landscape had something seriously wrong with it. This, precisely, was the effect Dukadak had on us.

About 3 o'clock we left the last of the snow behind us, and settled down on some convenient rocks to have a meal and to rest for a while.

The remainder of the descent into the valley was a lengthy, back-breaking business, especially for the porters (see photograph no. 92). The moraine was formed of loose, sliding slabs which endangered every step we took. On the last stretch, just before reaching the river, we had to make our way down steep slopes of solidified shale and gravel, packed into a tight mass by the action of flood-water—I have described this type of surface already—where, once again, we were obliged to cut steps with our ice-axes. Once across the river (that snow-bridge came in very handy), we had only a short climb before we reached Gram Shal. Here we at last pitched camp, built up two gigantic fires, and settled down for the night.

*

When we woke the next morning it was cold and raining, the sort of gloomy day associated with winter: to say, 'But today's the 21st July' sounded like a rather poor joke. To organize our departure in such conditions was difficult. Relighting the fire gave great trouble, to begin with; the men were frozen and indifferent, and it was hours before they had brewed their tea, eaten their chapattis, and packed. But at last we were moving, and after an hour and a half reached the advance party's camp, where we had a cheerful reunion with Franco, Paolo, Giancarlo and Betto. While we sat and drank cups of Murad's hot, strong tea, we at last got some hard facts about the two approaches to 'our' mountain—from the lips of someone who had himself seen what he described. But even so, we felt tempted to christen Saraghrar the Secret Mountain: it seemed consistently hostile, and what little it revealed of itself left considerable perplexity.

'On the 18th July,' said Alletto, passing the biscuits round, 'we moved camp from Gram Shal to here. Luckily, thanks to our resident wizard's pills, I was beginning to feel a bit better. We then split up into two parties, with a view to exploring the large glaciers immediately above us here—the Ushko' (meaning straight, without a bend) 'and the Niroghi.'

'With all this cloud about we can't see a thing. Do these glaciers stretch a long way?'

'The Niroghi's seven or eight miles long, the Ushko more like thirteen.'

'Well, what's your verdict? Can we get through?'

'We think so; our provisional choice is the Niroghi. Pinelli and I got up as far as the foot of the final rock-face. There wasn't much to be seen, but I'm pretty sure there ought to be a way through. We also spotted a little valley that would be ideal for our base camp. As for Consiglio and Castelli, they

went almost to the head of the Ushko glacier: you'd better tell this bit, Paolo—what did you see?’

Paolo took a sip of tea. ‘The Niroghi glacier,’ he said, ‘is wedged in between two mountain spurs, and ends flush against the rock-face of Saraghrar. The Ushko, on the other hand, looks as though it has split the whole chain in two’ (see photograph no. 89). ‘Its channel is wide and impressive, and full of light. It climbs very gently up towards some passes which might well lead across to Afghanistan. On either side of it there are some really magnificent peaks, some twenty-three thousand feet high—’

‘Were the two of you on your own?’

‘No, indeed not. We had Mr. Eyeshadow with us; and then there were two other porters to carry the tents and provisions. We had four gruelling hours on that moraine, you’ve no idea; endless stones and rocks, all loose, some as big as a car, but they’d still go if you so much as stubbed your toe against them. Well, after four hours of this we pitched camp on a fairly level stretch; there was a small stream nearby, running down from the base of a lateral glacier, the Shogordok. Unless I’m much mistaken we were about 14,000 feet above sea-level. We sent the porters back and settled down for the night.

‘Next morning we went on up the Ushko glacier for another six hours, which brought us almost to its head. There was a splendid view, but as far as finding a way up was concerned, we drew blank. Saraghrar overhangs the Ushko for about six or seven miles, either with vertical buttresses of rock it would be impossible to climb, or else with solid walls of ice that it would be lunacy even to attempt: you’d hear the avalanche coming down on you before you’d properly set foot on them.’

What with exchanging news and listening to Paolo’s narrative and eating biscuits and drinking Murad’s wonderful tea, nearly an hour had passed; it was high time we were on our way to the Niroghi glacier. But at this point Mulai Jan came and informed us that a hundred and thirty-seven of the porters refused to go any farther.

‘Weather very bad,’ he announced. ‘Porters say clothes all wet, shoes worn out, not go on. Maybe want more rupees, you think? I find out. *My* men O.K. still. Wait and see . . .’

When Mulai Jan said ‘*my* men’, he meant those from the Tirich valley, who—partly because of the authority he exercised over them, and partly because they were, in fact, somewhat better material than the rest—tended, by and large, to be less mutinous. At this juncture the discussions began, but they very quickly degenerated into a near-brawl. Tirich or no Tirich, every man shouted and waved his arms about; some actually beat their breasts, while others snatched off their woollen bonnets and then crammed them firmly back on their heads again, a gesture which appeared to indicate defiance.

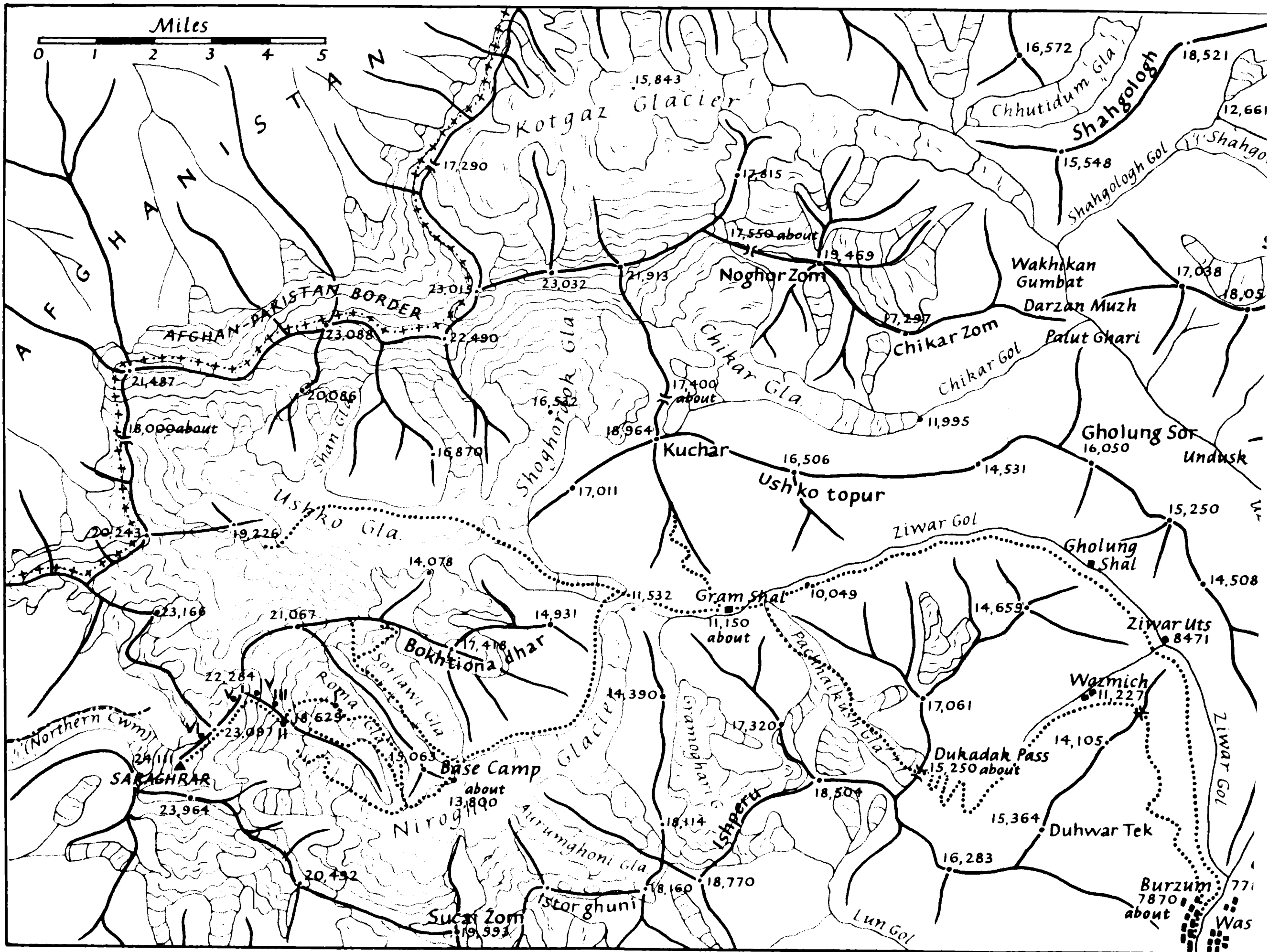
At one point this noisy hullabaloo took on an air of mild tragi-comedy, since those who wanted to press on were in danger of being mishandled by the rest, and the younger members of the expedition encouraged 'our' men with shouts more appropriate to a Roman touch-line. For a brief moment we all began to laugh out of sheer desperation.

Perhaps this flash of good humour had some positive effect, since a number of men now moved across from the strikers' group to the 'workers' party'. Mulai Jan and Murad set about translating what the porters were saying to Captain Shapur, together with his replies. In this crisis the good captain was of inestimable assistance, though the babel of tongues involved (Kowari, Pushtu, Urdu, English, Italian) made it incredibly difficult to understand anything. It was something of a miracle that the row did not degenerate into a slaughterhouse general brawl, with these silent, austere mountains as its only witnesses. At last a pioneer group of about twenty men set off with Betto and Enrico. At intervals one or two more decided to accept our arguments, and followed on behind them. Meanwhile, we were assembling the more vital parts of our equipment, setting aside the loads that could without inconvenience be brought on afterwards.

It was nearly midday before our laborious work of persuasion had reached its natural limits—having been conducted throughout under a wintry sky and in a persistent drizzle, both deeply depressing. There was nothing further we could do; neither promises nor pressure, nor threats from Captain Shapur or anyone else had the slightest effect. A total of sixty-five men had gone on, with their allotted loads, for our base camp; the remaining seventy-one had decided to go back down the valley.

At this point in the proceedings a new discussion—and a new deadlock—took place (see photograph no. 91). The porters who were going back said they wanted all their pay, and also the special bonus we had promised them before crossing the Dukadak Pass. We told them they should have their full pay, but not the bonus, since it had been clearly understood that that was in return for their labours in reaching base camp. If they failed to complete this task, they forfeited their claim to the bonus. What sort of justice would this be to their comrades, who had shouldered their packs and gone on? Someone brought the *tahsildar* of Shagram into the discussion. 'All right', Mulai Jan shouted, 'go and see the *tahsildar* and see where that gets you!' Captain Shapur was firmly and unreservedly on our side. 'The porters are breaking a clearly defined contract,' he said, 'and you must not on any account climb down. We shall go and see the *tahsildar* at Shagram on our return. If by some unfortunate chance he decides we are in the wrong, we can pay up then. But not a penny now—it would be an insult to those who have agreed to continue the march to base camp.'

When it was clear that neither party would budge an inch over our de-



..... Italian route 1959

----- English attempt 1958

cision, the seventy-one malcontents, still cursing, set off back down the valley. Photograph no. 90 perfectly catches our state of mind at this juncture. Captain Shapur is on the left, Murad next to him, then Mulai Jan; in the corner of the picture stands one of the old Washish guides. Each of them is a speaking portrait of frustrated determination; and our own expressions must have been much the same.

As things turned out, it was clear that Captain Shapur had been right, and that our decision to stand firm was amply justified. After about a quarter of an hour the seventy-one rebels came trotting briskly back into camp, and accepted our offer of pay without the special bonus. Then there began the lengthy business of handing out the money. Here is Paolo's account of the scene: 'Mulai Jan sat on a packing-case at the mouth of the tent, with his huge ledger on his knees; one by one the porters came up, and as they did so Mulai Jan would write down the name and the amount due. Beside this entry there appeared the recipient's finger-print—the finger having previously been inked as well as we could manage with Silvio's ballpoint pen. On the other side sat Fosco, checking and paying out the cash. Captain Shapur also formed part of this little group at the entrance to the tent, with another packing-case to sit on; but he was crushed and dispirited, with all the fire and fury gone out of him. He gave in before this blank wall of obstinacy, impenetrable to any reasonable argument, only in order to preserve the honour and good name of Pakistan. . . .' And Silvio recorded seventy-one 'revolting thumbs, filth-encrusted hands, and broken fingernails' which passed before him. Meanwhile outside the tent that soft, silent, steady drizzle continued to fall from a sky that was a low inverted bowl of unbroken winter cloud. 'The porters are cold and hungry,' Paolo wrote, 'and in the last resort they're not entirely to blame.' When our first gust of anger and obstinacy had passed, we felt a warm surge of sympathy, indeed compassion, towards these wretched men, dragged up to the roof of the world to assist in a venture which they must, beyond doubt, have found quite meaningless. On the other hand, we could not stop at this point, nor was it right that we should squander at random money which had been entrusted to us for a specific purpose.

Shortly before 3 that afternoon, we broke camp ourselves: Alletto, Castelli, and the guide we called Mr. Eyeshadow stayed behind to guard the baggage we could not carry. Next morning we would send the porters back to pick it up, and then the rear party could proceed to join us at base camp. A steep ascent over patches of loose, sliding scree brought us, in an hour or so, to the edge of the moraine of the Niroghi glacier. For something like five hours we scrambled along this treacherous surface, up and down, round jutting buttresses, over mountain torrents, up stony escarpments, till at last we came out on a broad flat stretch of sand, dotted here and there with

clumps of grass, where we had decided (apart from one or two subsequent moves of little importance) to pitch our permanent base camp.

The little valley we had chosen lay some 13,750 feet above sea-level, and was in a well-protected site. Naturally the air was chilly, and we at once opened up our two big Urdukass tents to provide some shelter for the porters. Then we pitched our own tents. We had really settled in.

'The rain has eased up a little,' Paolo recorded in his diary, 'but it is cold and dark. We have just finished having supper in the open, comfortably seated on our canvas camp stools (which have an inappropriate Riviera atmosphere about them) in front of a small, rain-sodden table. My first instinct was to go to ground in the tent, and the sight of Maraini having table, chairs, plates and cutlery taken outside annoyed me considerably. But after a while this imperturbable attitude of his—so Anglo-Saxon, I thought—began to amuse me, and I joined in the joke, as though we were sitting at a discreetly-lit table in some fabulous restaurant, perhaps wearing dinner jackets for the occasion, rather than dumped down amidst unexplored mountains hundreds of miles from the last outpost of civilization. The small pressure-lamp standing on the table, its glass half-obscured by the rain, provided the illusion of an intimate little supper-party . . . Even Murad rose to the occasion, standing there in that dismal drizzle and cooking a first-class dish of spaghetti. I'm beginning to think he is a kind of wizard. . . .'

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ADVANCE FROM BASE CAMP

*Rather would I dwell in a patched tent through which the winds
blow than in some lofty castle. . . .*

—MAYSUN, WIFE OF CALIPH MUAWIYA
(SEVENTH CENTURY)

*Verily God supporteth the earth and the firmament, that they
do not fall; and if they fell none could raise them but He. Verily
He is merciful and compassionate!*

KORAN, XXXV, 41

ON EVERY expedition, be it scientific, exploratory, or mountaineering, the base camp becomes for a while the capital of a minuscule civilized state in the surrounding wilderness. There are large, comfortable tents for rest and sleep, and these also provide a safe refuge during bad weather. There are first-aid supplies, adequate to cope with possible accidents or illnesses. The base camp is a clearing-house for both personnel and news, the point at which mail is collected and distributed, and where, every now and again, supplies of much-coveted fresh food arrive. Here you can get a good hot meal, and relax your tense nerves, after a gruelling stretch up in the forward area (with us, high-altitude camps). In short, the base camp is a vital institution, not only from the point of view of logistics, but also as a psychological reassurance. Great care must therefore be taken to ensure that it is as well sited and organized as is humanly possible. Only when you begin to think of your base camp as a minor paradise is there a chance that your venture will go really well.

We were fortunate to light on a valley which caught the sun at midday, had a surface of mixed sand and gravel in which a few tufts of grass and alpine plants contrived to flourish, and—most important of all—was as well protected on every side as the inner courtyard of a nuragh, or some ancient fortress. ‘*Hic manebimus optime*,’¹ someone remarked as he dumped his rucksack on the ground; it was generally agreed, by tacit consent, that the speaker had a point. At our back there rose, sheer and unexpected, the gravelled surface of an old moraine belonging to the Sorlawi glacier, which

¹ ‘We’ll have a pleasant stay here’: similar *graffiti* (often with less charitable comments) have been found scratched all over the walls of inns and taverns in Pompeii and Herculaneum. (Trs.)

gave us admirable protection. In front of us, ranging through 180 degrees of the visible horizon, there rose the lateral moraines of the Niroghi glacier; these, in combination, had the appearance of a more or less regular rampart, formed from earth, scree, gravel and small rocks, which stood some thirty feet high throughout. We also had a little stream running through the valley, and flowing into a tiny lake (rather a muddy one, if the truth be told); two hundred yards farther upstream we could actually see the snow melting into it, so that a regular supply of water—one essential requirement—seemed more or less assured. It was a mild, restful, hospitable place, the ideal site for a base camp. It had only one serious shortcoming: its low altitude, not much more than 13,750 feet above sea-level. Such a position admittedly guaranteed the climbers a real rest after descending into the valley; on the other hand, it also meant a much greater effort to reach the altitude—between 16,500 and 17,000 feet—from which any serious assault on the summit would have to be launched. To ensure that our plans went forward without a hitch, the valley should, ideally speaking, have been situated at a height of between 14,500 and 15,000 feet. But, as we all admitted, anything more than a token objection to this minor drawback would have branded us as the most shocking hypocrites, let alone as the biggest grumblers of all time.

The view from the camp was superb. On the west side we had Mt. Saraghrar itself, its peak towering some 10,000 feet above our valley. The base of the mountain was partially obscured by several spur-like glacial moraines in the foreground, but the visible portion was enormously impressive; it looked like a great fortress, perched on sheer, purplish-black crags and towering thousands of feet into the air, with minuscule ice-formations encrusted on it in the most fantastic shapes and positions—sills and balconies of ice, glacial stalactites. All this side of the mountain was clearly inaccessible, not least because it was continually swept by avalanches of ice and snow, which were heralded by a thunderous roar like an artillery barrage opening up, and left hanging in the air afterwards great white clouds of ice-particles which slowly blew away, disintegrating into fine, misty, iridescent streaks. To the south of us there towered up another peak, very elegant and sheer, more than 19,000 feet high, and sheathed in glaciers: the younger members of our team at once christened it *Sucaï Zom*.¹ Eastward the Niroghi valley was hemmed in by a whole chain of peaks, none of them particularly high, but all fierce, inaccessible, and glacier-ridden. In the far distance there rose the lofty silhouette of Mt. Sararich (20,400 feet), sometimes described—rather over-kindly—as Chitral's Matterhorn. The few known geographical names in the area were strange and made us want to giggle.

Within a few days our base camp was organized down to the smallest

¹ 'Sucaï' is formed from the initials of the Sezione Universitaria Club Alpino Italiano.

detail. The baggage that had been left behind, a short distance above Gram Shal, after the strike and defection of seventy-one of our porters, was fetched by thirty of the men who had stayed on: they completed the entire job in three days. The last of the men from the villages were paid off and went back home. We were left with Captain Shapur, Mulai Jan, Murad, and eight high-altitude porters. For a good month and more Niroghia (as we christened the base camp) could count on a total population of nineteen. It consisted of several individual tents for sleeping in and storing personal gear; a large double tent which we used as a godown, office, mess, and recreation-room; and the two big Urdukass bell-tents, which were earmarked as dormitories for the porters. We constructed a rough-and-ready kitchen out of the cases in which our provisions had been carried, roofing it over with a couple of tarpaulins; Murad was delighted with the result, and lorded it over this small domain of his for weeks, among the primus-stoves and bags and tinned goods, not to mention certain mysterious jars and pots of his own, from which he extracted the ingredients for highly spiced dishes that earned the warm approval of Captain Shapur and Mulai Jan. Every now and then Niroghia's population was increased by the presence of sheep, goats, chickens, in blissful ignorance of their imminent fate.

On any expedition to the highest mountains of Asia, it is vitally important for those taking part to become fully acclimatized to a shortage of oxygen in the air. During the first few days our doctor, Franco Lamberti, was constantly occupied with tests to determine our physical condition and our degree of adjustment to these new surroundings. Several of us reacted rather badly, the most common complaint being an ill-defined gastro-intestinal disturbance, very common in tropical countries, but extremely difficult to cure. Our porters, too, were given an examination by Franco, who expressed his surprise at finding them all scrupulously clean in their persons, with the exception of one man who had fleas.

Our complement of eight porters was decided upon only after lengthy argument and some highly complex negotiations. Some of the guides from Washish, and some of the high-altitude porters laid on for us by Mulai Jan, were eliminated on the grounds that they had not yet given adequate proof of their abilities in action. These we sent back down the valley: among them was Dak-lal, the distinguished mountaineer (according to his own account) who struggled over passes in the most appalling conditions wearing his dinner jacket, but had so far shown himself a lazy good-for-nothing. At the moment of departure he burst into tears, which we found rather moving; but for complicated reasons of administration, it was impossible for us to revoke our original decision. On the other hand we invited a select group of our ordinary porters—those who had displayed most courage and sense of initiative during the trip—to stay on with us for the rest of the expedition.

Amongst them there was one who had particularly caught our attention, a twenty-year-old youth called Sher ('The Tiger')—see photograph no. 102.

The rest of the team consisted of Pahlawan ('The Fighter'), our old guide from Washish, with the fair hair and blue eyes, whom I have already discussed (see photograph no. 95); Abdul Karim, from Barun (photograph no. 97), a man of about thirty, the most experienced and serious mountaineer in the whole group, who had already been on two or three previous expeditions; a tough character called Musharaf ('The Noble'), aged thirty-five, and liable to periodical fits of depression; a younger man called Neap, rather more cheerful and devil-may-care, but sharing Musharaf's Iranian-cum-Mediterranean cast of feature (see photographs nos. 99, 101). A strange character, not quite like any of the others, always impatient and often surly-suspicious, with unmistakably southern-type features, was Qadir ('The Strong Man'), who like Sher was about twenty years old (see photograph no. 100). The remaining two were Mr. Eyeshadow's son, Hakak, twenty-five years old, a brave, courageous, and very pleasant-mannered young man (see photograph no. 98); and Murad II, a muscular brute of fabulous strength but strictly limited intelligence, whom we were obliged to get rid of after a week.

All in all, these men succeeded very well as high-altitude porters, besides making most agreeable companions and friends. The disastrous prophecies of Schomberg and other travellers through Chitral proved ill-founded. It may be that luck was with us; it is also possible that the men of Tirich, Washish and Shagram, being mountain-bred, were better adapted for such a task than those whose natural habitat was the lower valleys—indeed, this would seem a virtual certainty. On balance I feel that our Chitrali porters made a better showing at high altitudes than the Baltis we employed in 1958, during the Gasherbrum IV expedition in the Karakoram range. They also turned out to be more amiable, more congenial, more genuinely approachable as human beings—in periods of stress and danger no less than when everything was going well and we could afford to relax.

The postal service had been so arranged that every five or six days two runners reached base camp from Shagram, with a load of mail and newspapers for us. We were kept supplied with airmail editions of one Italian daily, together with the *Pakistan Times*, and *Time*; thus we maintained continual contact with the outside world. Besides this, we had been presented with an excellent portable radio set; though—perhaps for topographical reasons—we never managed to pick up Rome. Our position, in the very heart of Asia, was emphasized every evening by the broadcasts that filled our wave-bands, in which a variety of mysterious tongues was accompanied by the most delicious and exotic music: the best reception we got was from

stations in Uzbekistan, Tadzhikistan, Sinkiang, Mongolia, China, Russia, Pakistan, India and Ceylon. Sometimes we realized, with a start of surprise, that the language being spoken was Italian; but these turned out to be special overseas broadcasts from Moscow or Peking. We also picked up some transmission in excellent French—from Tokyo.

We had a small library with us, the titles (as always happens) being dictated partly by our particular circumstances and partly by individual preference. Those who wanted information about the countries we had passed through could read Alessandro Bausani's *Storia delle letterature del Pakistan*, Olaf Caroe's *The Pathans*, R. Schomberg's *Kafirs and Glaciers*, Robertson's *The Kafirs of the Hindu Kush*, a short History of India, or—if the worst came to the worst—could bury themselves in an Urdu grammar. For our hours of relaxation we had one or two novels, amongst them Wright's *Black Boy*, Goytisolo's *Fiestas*, and Save's *Lo Splendore del Deserto*. Meditation was served by a paperback containing four of Euripides's plays, the *Divina Commedia* in a pocket edition, and Iqbal's poetry, translated by Bausani. One or two medical textbooks belonging to Franco Lamberti, a Larousse encyclopedia about mountains, and Jean Franco's account of the French assault on Makalu completed the sum of our reading matter. (All of us were obliged to hope, however, that there would be very little time to spend with books, since such leisure was bound to mean something like bad weather, if not a broken leg!) To write our various letters and diaries we had brought a portable typewriter with us.

Immediate impressions of life at base camp appear in several of my companions' journals. 'We sit down to dinner in a wonderfully peaceful atmosphere,' Silvio Iovane wrote on the 26th July. 'Murad has killed three chickens, and makes signs to us that he is roasting them: the smell is quite delicious. . . . Excellent chicken, but a frightful rice-pudding, smothered in jam. . . . A Russian station is broadcasting Rimsky-Korsakov: most enjoyable. . . . Through the opening of the tent we can see those huge rock-walls with the glaciers running down them. . . .' And again, from the entry for the 25th July: 'The postman, a tall black-bearded fellow, has just gone off with 35 letters and about 240 postcards; he will be back in five days' time. . . . Here it is 8.30 p.m., and we comb the wavebands very carefully trying to pick up one of our favourite stations, ears alert in case we might, at any moment, get through to Rome. But what we hear are the usual lot—Radio Peking, Radio Delhi, and above all the Russian stations, one of which is broadcasting *Madame Butterfly*. . . . The sunsets here are incredibly beautiful; that mountain behind which the sun goes down is Saraghrar itself, towering high above us, a vast, awe-inspiring mass, one of the most colossal peaks to be found anywhere in this group.'

Later, on the 4th August, he wrote: 'As I finish writing, the rock-face

below the ice-cap is flushed pink by the last rays of the setting sun. Every so often one of the porters comes and sits opposite me on a packing-case, staring at the typewriter and its keyboard with a mixture of concentration, curiosity and astonishment. At one point all the porters were chasing hens for our evening meal, and it made me laugh till I cried to see them bounding about the rocks in their baggy trousers, arms outstretched after those poor doomed squawking creatures, which were to make us so tasty a morsel an hour or two later. . . .'

*

As soon as we were more or less settled in, and the weather had improved—it had been snowing at high altitudes and raining in the valley—we began to study 'our' mountain. The romantic could relish its mysterious hollows, its towering buttresses, its vivid colour-tones, the ribbons of cloud floating over it and the majestic avalanches which it unleashed; the mountaineer could size up its slippery glaciers and rocky crags; the strategist concentrate on the problems of approach and assault. One little question, meanwhile, remained unsolved: just where was the summit? Believe it or not, we were unable to single out the actual, undoubted summit from our observation-post below. This mountain was a very different proposition from the big single-peak type, such as the Matterhorn, K.2, Mustagh (K.5), or Cerro Fitzroy in Patagonia; it resembled, rather, Monte Rosa, being a kind of fortress defended by ramparts and barbicans. High up on the massif an undulating plateau of ice was visible, and above this there rose a series of spurs and domes and pyramids, one of which must, technically speaking, be the 'peak' of the mountain as a whole. To put it in general terms, our problem—our initial problem, at any rate—was to surmount the outer ramparts and reach the ice-plateau; having done this we must then identify and climb the highest peak.

For two weeks after our arrival in base camp we explored the terrain assiduously. A glance at the map facing this page at once reveals that the north-east face of Saraghrar runs out into four great spurs, with glaciers between them (the upper Niroghi, the Sorlawi, and one which we christened Rome). Our first general reconnaissance, carried out almost the moment we arrived (24th July), took us to a small crest on the spur between the Rome and Sorlawi glaciers, whence we were able to see a great many things of interest to us.

Consiglio, Pinelli, Iovane and I left base camp at 8 in the morning. The weather was set fair: some clouds had begun to gather round the summit, but did not appear threatening. Moving very slowly, in single file, we clambered up the moraine above our camp, and after an hour reached the valley of the Rome glacier. Every time we stopped we turned to stare at Saraghrar.

The mountain's dark rock-face was striped with greenish channels of ice, and swept by intermittent avalanches, which piled up above pale hanging ledges of frozen snow and used them as a springboard for the plunge into the abyss. This fantastic panorama reached up skywards to a very considerable height, eventually vanishing among the dark clouds overhead. From this side, beyond any doubt, our noble mountain looked abominably unprepossessing. In every Alpine chain the world over, you find rock-faces remarkable for sheerness and height and overlay of glaciers—all qualities which have a certain air of splendour and nobility about them. Such are the north face of the Dent d'Hérens, the west face of Monte Civetta, the east face of Broad Peak in the Karakoram group, or the west face of El Tronador in the Andes. You gaze on them with awe and wonder, but at the same time they hold you spellbound. This is Nature at her most formidable, a symphony of rock and void, sky and glacier. If you choose to regard such phenomena with the eye of one bent on struggle and conquest, you might well concede that you were up against a terrible adversary, but one with great capacity for loyalty which, in the last resort, compelled your liking and admiration. Other mountains confront you with a repellent personality, of the sort to be avoided at all costs: these you regard as you might some monstrous insect. They are ugly, poisonous, and mean. To this type belong the north face of the Eiger and the Matterhorn, and these great rock bastions of Saraghrar. There was something about those crumbling buttresses, those curious, ranging colours (from purple to green, from black to yellow), that patternless immensity, that brutish accumulation of precipice on shadowy precipice, which induced a feeling of horror and alarm in the spectator.

We climbed slowly, and for a long time—we were still acclimatizing ourselves to the altitude—up slopes of loose broken scree. We found numerous lumps of brownish-purple schist that gave off an oddly musical ring if kicked. Here and there lay crumbs of mica or of lead-glance, glittering like gold. By now we were on the first shoulder of the glacier, though it was hard to tell precisely where the scree ended and the glacial moraine began. But a little higher up, the glacier lifted itself clear of its encumbering stones, rising up in what looked for all the world like waves of solid frozen water, green beneath and whitish at the crest. For the time being at least, the clouds had closed in till the sky was one uniform grey. We put on our snow-boots, roped ourselves together, had something to eat, and took a few photographs: then we moved on.

Very soon the glacier began to slope steeply upwards. The waves dissolved into confused 'breakers', those vast irregular blocks of ice known to mountaineers by the French-Swiss name of serac. It seems that serac was originally the name of a cheese, which probably crumbled into little lumps and fragments, and by analogy the word was used to describe a glacial formation.

Where we were, nothing could have been farther from that etymologically correct cheese-ancestor than the mad lunar landscape which now swallowed us up. Its surface had the hardness and consistency of glass, with the same greenish transparency: its atmosphere was one of windy solitude, mystery, danger. The seracs were ice-towers, ice-palaces, houses and steeples all of ice, some fairly straight and well-proportioned (such as might appeal to an architect), others listing crazily, half toppled over, split and cracked and full of holes, as though after an earthquake—yet quite immobile. An earthquake outside time, I thought: the day that was lost to history. And among these monuments of my ice-city (which was never abandoned because it had never been inhabited, had never been inhabited because no human hands had built it, had never been built because it had simply happened, was the sport of gravity and chance), there opened up deep, narrow chasms, which wandered this way and that, criss-crossing each other: streets and alleys and lanes that started from nothing and led nowhere. Sometimes between one serac (I mean one house) and the next there appeared a black 'doorway', a darkened shop-front: sometimes one seemed to glimpse the entrance to a block of flats in the very heart of the glacial moraine, in those deep subterranean places where rivers first begin and the mountain-side has been polished smooth by long millennia of attrition. As we walked, our footsteps rang hollow beneath us; we were striding over the roof of ice-catacombs.

To make any progress through this grandiose chaos of glass and space required unlimited time. We had to proceed with immense caution, giving a wide berth to those ill-balanced piles of ice-blocks which looked as though one touch might bring them down, and taking care not to slip into any of the chasms, since these were often concealed at various points by thin 'bridges', or masking layers, of snow and ice. Then we clambered, with vast effort, up to the flat summit of a 'turret' a hundred and fifty feet high, only to find that it led nowhere but to further similar isolated pinnacles. At this point we had to climb down the turret again, go back for a little, and try a different route. We soon reached the conclusion that any attempt at finding a path through this labyrinth was doomed to failure in advance. We worked our way across to the extreme right, where the glacier lapped against the rock-face. Here too there were a great number of obstacles—in addition to ill-balanced seracs, we had to contend with very shaky-looking rocks above us on the outhang—but at least it was easier to find a path that we could follow.

Early that afternoon we emerged into the upper part of the valley, which was virtually level: somehow we had succeeded in forcing a passage through the field of ice-blocks. Meanwhile, the sun had broken through the clouds, and the glare off the ice was appalling. We put on cotton hoods with two eye-apertures: Ku Klux Klan style. Through these apertures, and the dark goggles we were wearing, we glimpsed a marvellous panorama of snow and

rock and glacier; but we were still unable to grasp the true relationship between the various hollows, spurs, and crests of Saraghrar, one of which must be the true peak. Perhaps it was impossible to work out this problem from below; we therefore decided to strike out from the glacier, and make our way up to the crest which divides the upper basins of the Rome and the Sorlawi glaciers (the 'West Cwm' and the 'East Cwm' respectively).

We at once set off up a steep snow-channel, some 1,300 feet high; we encountered no real difficulties, but the rarefied air—we were 16,400 feet up by now—began to have a noticeable effect on us. It is always difficult, at first, for a man to modify his habitual rhythm of movement: he inevitably sets off at too rapid a pace, and very soon is forced to stop through sheer breathlessness. It takes some time before he gets used to walking in slow motion, almost as though he were under water. About 4 p.m. we assembled on a small rocky pinnacle at the top of the ridge, some 17,000 feet above sea-level.

For my companions this was a memorable occasion. They had attained a considerably greater height than Mont Blanc (15,780 feet), the loftiest peak available to them in western Europe: we celebrated the event with a cheerful song or two. A wide and harmonious panorama lay spread out before us: deep undulating cwms and great shelves of snow lay to left and right beneath our feet; bold ridges curved upwards, converging on the highest peaks; while in the background endless mountains stretched away towards Karakoram and the Himalayas in a sky dotted with tiny ragged clouds. The topmost summit of Saraghrar remained in scornful obscurity, behind its protective camouflage of mist; but this apart, we saw many details of extreme interest, and singled out at least three likely routes for our preliminary reconnaissance. Then the air turned chilly, and we were forced to retreat from our look-out post; but not before we had seen enough to realize that we still needed to see a good deal more.

It was clear that no easy, safe, and obvious route existed by which we could attain our goal. Several alternatives presented themselves to us, but they were all of a highly problematic nature. We had to study the terrain at closer quarters, and undertake a more systematic reconnaissance. Accordingly we divided into several groups, and between us, during the days that followed, we examined the lie of the land and made attempts to work out our best lines of approach.

Right from the start there was one route which seemed our natural choice—at least, when seen from base camp it did: if the Niroghi glacier cut through the mountains like a well-paved highway, we argued, surely all we had to do was follow the line of its moraines. But in actual fact this was pure illusion, since the valley of the Niroghi glacier turned right and ended, quite literally, flush with the terrible north-east face of Saraghrar, losing itself in a network

of ice-channels that were constantly swept by avalanches and bombarded by falls of stone. On the 25th July Franco Alletto, Giancarlo Castelli and Dr. Lamberti set out to explore this somewhat unpromising valley. At least we could say that we had not scamped the investigation of any remotely feasible loophole in the defensive fortifications.

After traversing a long stretch of moraine, the three roped themselves together and began to climb up through a series of crevasses. The glacier narrowed progressively at this point, pressed in between overhanging walls of crumbling rock, all streaked with snow and ice. 'As we slowly edged our way forward,' Franco Alletto wrote afterwards, 'we saw that the entire surface of the glacier was covered with the detritus left by avalanches. Then, suddenly, a huge avalanche broke loose in the main channel down from Saraghrar, leaving a white cloud hanging over the whole lower end of the glacier. A few moments later another avalanche roared down the face on our left: not so large as the first one, but a good deal closer.' Franco is a man of action rather than words; but even from his terse account of these events it was abundantly clear that the natural hazards involved here precluded any idea of taking our mountaineering team, let alone heavily loaded porters, by such a route. The doctor confirmed my fears: he assured me it would be suicidal. The recognition of this fact at least served to convince us that we could rule this way out as a possible approach to the mountain.

The exploration of the West Cwm, in the upper basin of the Rome glacier, was a more protracted and elaborate affair. Four of us undertook the task: Franco Alletto, Giancarlo Castelli, Betto Pinelli and myself, together with porters to carry our tents and equipment. We took two days over it, the 28th and 29th July. The weather was excellent on the whole, and we were able to investigate various possibilities. At the time of our first reconnaissance (14th July) we had observed a vast rampart of snow and ice which stretched up from the West Cwm to a very prominent rocky spur; this spur then rose, without any serious fault or interruption, to a point on the summit plateau well over 22,000 feet above sea-level. We all agreed, instantly, that here was our way up. Yet at the same time we were forced to acknowledge the presence of many incidental hazards on such a route: for a good part of the ascent, we would have ice-falls both below and above us, and these were only too liable to produce avalanches.

Franco Alletto and I, together with the two porters Pahlawan and Musharaf, now went to examine this famous rampart at closer quarters. The farther we climbed up the undulating face of the West Cwm, the more logical the route appeared. On the other hand, we could not dodge the fact that the whole upper part of the Cwm was covered with snow and ice to a depth of a number of feet, and that the sun had melted these great blocks in such a way as to form a pocked and hummocky surface: there was clear evidence that ava-

lanches had fallen from the upper slopes across the rampart, and piles of ice-blocks still hung precariously balanced above us. Franco did not regard the risk as over-great; but since I had to shoulder the direct responsibility for so many people's lives, I preferred to explore every route as thoroughly as possible before making my final decision. But at any rate we returned to camp that afternoon with the certain knowledge that, even though it might not be the best approach, the way up by the rampart was at least feasible.

While the four of us were examining this approach, Giancarlo Castelli and Betto Pinelli were attempting the ascent of a remarkable (and sharply outstanding) peak on the crest which divides the West Cwm from the Niroghi glacier. Our primary aim was to see whether it might prove possible to reach the upper part of the spur without first ascending the ice-rampart; even if this proved too hazardous an undertaking, we thought that from such a vantage-point our friends would at least be able to examine—in exceptionally favourable conditions—both the upper section of the rampart and its relationship with the high spur that reached the 22,000-foot level.

The ascent of this 'minor peak' (which we afterwards christened Mt. Paola, after Giancarlo's then fiancée) turned out to be a pretty gruelling climb. 'The higher we got,' Betto Pinelli recorded in his diary, 'the tougher and steeper the ascent became. We very soon realized that it would be quite impossible to get our team of porters up over these crags; but nevertheless we pressed on, and finally reached the summit. We got there just before 1, after struggling up an extremely steep snow-shelf. The peak itself is quite fantastic, with a great mushroom growth of glacier spreading out and down on three sides of it. We edged forward in single file, roped together for support, to investigate the possibility of getting any farther—but not a hope! After an initial drop, the ridge continued into the distance with a most impressive sequence of ledges and cornice shelves . . .'

Almost all of us were in a rather precarious state of health. The height, our physical exertions, and the unaccustomed food meant that all of us in turn, one day or the next, tended to suffer from intestinal complaints, shortness of breath, or at the very least insomnia. Today it was Franco's turn; I felt a little better, though I was still not completely over my dysentery.

The only exception was Betto, who seemed bursting with health. 'I feel in splendid form,' he noted at the conclusion of his diary entry for the 29th July, 'and full of confident determination. Let's hope that both prove enduring!'

While we were exploring the West Cwm and the Rome glacier, four other members of our team (Paolo Consiglio, Dr. Franco Lamberti, Silvio Iovane and Enrico Leone) had gone off to camp on the East Cwm, above the Sorlawi glacier, in order to study the possibility of an assault on the mountain from

that side. Any route that started from the Sorlawi glacier would be an extremely long one; but if its length were offset by ease of access, and above all by comparative safety, it would have been well worth the effort of carrying through a reconnaissance of it.

The Sorlawi glacier, in sharp contradistinction to its parallel companion the Rome glacier, was easy to climb, free of ice-fields, and almost without crevasses. The ascent began directly from base camp, and proceeded without difficulty—despite some very steep stretches—right up to the East Cwm, at a height of more than 16,000 feet.

Two further pieces of exploration were scheduled for the following morning. Paolo Consiglio and Franco Lamberti were to complete the reconnaissance of the ridge above the East Cwm, while Silvio Iovane and Enrico Leone, plus two porters, were to investigate a steep couloir, some 2,600 feet high, which led straight to the eastern ridge, slightly east of the unnamed peak marked at 21,000 feet. This gorge was first spotted by Iovane, and so we named it 'Silvio's Couloir'.

Consiglio's reconnaissance (Dr. Lamberti had felt ill and had been unable to accompany Paolo all the way) helped to demonstrate the inaccessibility of the eastern ridge. That carried out by Iovane and Leone, on the other hand, produced very hopeful results, even though—unfortunately—they had been able to get only two-thirds of the way up Silvio's Couloir with the rope they took.

Throughout our brief exploratory period the weather had remained satisfactory. That same evening we struck camp (on the East and West Cwms respectively) and by seven o'clock had all got back to base camp again. There we were warmly welcomed by Captain Shapur, who had spent two days reading the papers and listening to the radio. The first piece of news he gave us was that a guide on the Monzino Expedition, Camillo Pelissier, had on the 19th July succeeded, unaccompanied, in scaling the peak of Kanjut Sar (25,640 feet) in the western Karakoram group. 'We opened a bottle to celebrate the occasion,' Paolo wrote, 'and toasted both their success and our own hopes.'



The results of our labours during the past two days were such that we now had a pretty clear picture of the situation. Three approaches were ruled out: those by way of the upper Niroghi glacier, the summit of Mt. Paola, and the eastern ridge explored by Paolo Consiglio. Of the remaining two—the ice-rampart, and Silvio's Couloir—the first was direct but hazardous, and the second, though possibly safe and not too difficult, was beyond question very long indeed. At this juncture, as the reader may well imagine, lengthy arguments took place between those in favour of rampart and couloir respec-

tively. The young were all for the couloir, the older generation for the rampart. I knew very well that the rampart offered the one direct and natural access to the plateau on which the peak was situated; but since I was responsible for the safety of the entire expedition, I could not but choose a less risky solution to our problem (always supposing such a course presented itself) even though it might require more time and effort on our part. So I came down in favour of the couloir, and we decided to launch our first assault on the mountain by this approach. It was the 1st August, our tenth day at base camp.

We therefore made our way up to the East Cwm, where we pitched camp at about 16,400 feet. On the 2nd and 3rd August, Consiglio, Castelli, Pinelli, Iovane and Leone, with some of our best porters, made two exploratory attempts to get up the big gorge, which was at least 2,600 feet high; but the upper section turned out to be extremely steep, and also dangerous on account of loose snow. Pinelli managed to get up the other face, whence he could examine this surface layer of snow. It continued to well over the 21,000-foot mark, and he reported that it looked 'discouraging in the extreme'; the ridge was in fact nothing but 'a blade of sheer vertical ice'.

We decided to return to base camp. It was plain enough that our assault would have to be launched along the ice-ledge, from the West Cwm and the Rome glacier. We allowed ourselves one day's rest only (5th August); then we set out once more, in successive groups, for the assault on the peak.

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An attempt on one of the big Asiatic peaks, especially when the expedition is a small one and five or six camps are anticipated, requires a most exhaustive and precise plan of campaign. In the last analysis the problem can be stated in these terms: if you want to make it possible for two (or even four) persons to reach the summit, you need so much weight of food, equipment, and miscellaneous supplies (climbing gear, ciné-cameras and photographic material, first-aid box, scientific instruments) moved up to one final camp x feet below the summit. The question is, how to get them there? Looking at it back to front, if you need 100 lb. net weight for the last camp, you must allow 200 lb. for the last but one, and so on all the way down. Very soon you realize that you will need something like a ton weight of equipment to begin with, perhaps even more. The Japanese, with their passion for precise calculations, have published some most instructive comparative tables on this score.

Such arduous weight-lifting operations necessitate a movement-plan as closely worked out as any railway time-table, to ensure that no one makes a useless journey, and no one arrives in any camp unless he is expected there: every individual, be he mountaineer or porter, must always be guaranteed a

place to sleep and some food. I do not propose to bewilder the reader at this point with all our complicated comings and goings during the next three weeks up and down the Saraghrar glaciers; sufficient that I have given a general picture of how the situation developed.

On the 6th August one group made another ascent of the West Cwm, high above the Rome glacier, in order to set up the tents of what would be a vital site: Camp One. This camp was situated at about 16,700 feet above sea-level, and seven hours' march from base camp. Both the distance and the change in altitude (nearly 3,000 feet) were extremely trying; for a while we even toyed with the idea of establishing another intermediate camp. But in the end we became accustomed to this long haul, and Camp One became a sort of advanced base camp. Meanwhile the other members of the team were waiting below for their turn to go.

On the evening of the 6th August, we opened a bottle of whisky to celebrate the launching of the assault on the peak. After the ritual toast, I and several of the others withdrew into the tent and settled down for the night, leaving only Paolo, the doctor, and Captain Shapur still sitting round the table. One drink led to another, and each discussion triggered off a fresh one: it was very late before the party broke up. 'Before our amused and slightly disconcerted eyes,' Paolo Consiglio recorded in his diary, 'the gallant captain began to unbend, and—more important—to talk freely about his personal views . . . Normally a reticent and secretive character, he expressed his feelings very clearly on this occasion; and what he told us, especially concerning our relations with the porters (not to mention our relations with him) should prove most useful to us . . . The most important fact we discovered was that Franco Alletto, the doctor and I are the ones who have made ourselves most popular, both with him and the porters, simply by the way we behave. A number of small instinctive acts have aroused their gratitude—a kindly word at the right moment, an understanding or encouraging smile, the fact that we shared a bar of chocolate with them, fifty-fifty, rather than giving them a whole bar to themselves . . . Captain Shapur kept telling us, again and again, that even porters were "human beings", and were pleased with themselves for having guessed the right way to the summit. It amused me to hear the words "human beings" enunciated by Captain Shapur, of all people; how often had we not seen him, during the journey to Chitral, treating his inferiors as from a height! At times, as he had flung down the miserable rupee that served as payment to some hawker who had offered him fruit, I had really felt ashamed on his behalf . . .'

I too had frequently observed this curious contradiction of attitude among Pakistani officials: all things considered, it seems to me that it reflects a normal tendency of the human mind, what one might call the 'suspension of criticism in respect of one's own group'. We are all extremely prone to

notice—and to point out—faults in our relatives, our fellow-citizens, our fellow-countrymen, our co-religionists, and so on; but let the same criticisms be voiced by someone outside the group, and we fly into an absolute passion of irrational resentment. As an Italian I can say, with some confidence, that I belong to a naturally noisy race, over-addicted to rhetoric, and so on. But if an Englishman or a Russian tells me so, I feel faintly annoyed; the facts have not changed, but their emotional associations are different. Pakistani officials extend the concept of ‘suspension of criticism’ to include ‘suspension of action’; they can be as tough and high-handed as you like with their own people, but foreigners are expected to treat all Pakistanis politely, even when suffering a wrong at their hands.

‘As usual,’ Paolo continued, ‘Shapur took the argument to extremes. He spoke of the relations between Europeans and Pakistanis during all mountaineering expeditions, saying that Europeans were far too liable to arrange things so as to avoid taking a Pakistani to the summit with them: they wanted all the glory for themselves. He gave one or two examples, and then claimed that the same thing had happened at Gasherbrum IV, where Captain Dar, who had got as far as the camp under the north-east Col, was sent back to base—though he knew very well there was no one better fitted to make a successful attempt on the summit . . .’

Since I took part in the expedition to Gasherbrum IV, I have some slight personal knowledge of the facts. Captain Dar’s assertion is absolutely fantastic, and demonstrates the most childish kind of presumption. To reach Camp Four (22,600 feet) was a most creditable achievement for him since, though he was a sportsman and an athlete, he had never before done any high-altitude mountaineering. But it was here that the real trouble began. To imagine that he could reach the summit shows that in fact he knew nothing whatsoever about mountains: it took two of the toughest, most experienced alpinists alive, Walter Bonatti and Carlo Mauri, to set foot at last on that peak, and even they had to be supported by a large team of fellow-mountaineers, with almost unlimited resources at their command. Still, no one blames Captain Dar for that; the only thing that is really annoying is to see this kind of perverted nationalism leading someone to offer false explanations for purely technical facts. Captain Dar was invited to return from Camp IV because he was beginning to suffer from the effects of high altitude, and would very soon have become a burden on the rest of the team. If he had been fit to go on, no one would have dreamed of sending him back to base ‘because he was a Pakistani’. But let Paolo take up the story again: ‘Since my English is not all that good, I thought I must have misunderstood, and turned to Franco Lamberti (who speaks English fluently) with an astonished, questioning glance. Meanwhile Shapur concluded his argument by declaring that he would give us six months of his pay if we would take him

up to the peak of Saraghrar! Incidentally, he earned something like £1,200 a year. We tried to explain to him that it was not a question of money, but of capacity and experience; he shook his head obstinately. We could do nothing to destroy his unshakable conviction that Captain Dar had been speaking the truth.'

I have not recorded this episode out of a mere addiction for tittle-tattle, but solely because of the profound interest I have always taken in exploring alien beliefs and attitudes. To ignore such things is useless; one must take cognizance of them, and, in the long run, act accordingly. It would be very nice to be able to take one's liaison officer up to the summit: not only would it give him great personal satisfaction, but would also convince the local public of the expedition's wholly disinterested motives in climbing the peak at all. But such an undertaking would present colossal difficulties. Though many of these officers are keen sportsmen, very few of them have any experience of high-altitude mountaineering. On the other hand, an expedition makes such energetic demands on all its members that it would be more or less impossible to find time to lay on a specialized course in rock-and-glacier climbing for the lieutenant or captain or whatever he might be. Then, suppose you do get him up to the top, and he falls ill, or dies? These are not decisions that can be lightly undertaken. Perhaps the best solution is to let the officer climb far enough to convince himself that the high-level peaks require not only strength and will-power, but also a considerable background of skilled technical knowledge. If he declines this test, so much the better; but in any event he will then return to base camp of his own volition, without being able to say, 'They got rid of me'.



The fifteen days we spent scrambling up and down the moraines, rocks and glaciers of various spurs and buttresses on Saraghrar proved extremely valuable to us. We were all feeling well on the way to acclimatization by now: we were sleeping better, had more appetite for food, and became less exhausted by walking or climbing. The air at these great heights, moreover—especially during the first few days—had a notably stimulating effect on our mental processes. Perhaps this was why, when our day's work was over, almost all of us tended to gather, evening after evening, in the office-cum-store-cum-recreation-room tent, where we enthusiastically took the world to pieces (and put it together better) in discussions that sometimes lasted till ten or eleven at night. We really enjoyed these metaphysical orgies of ours on the Niroghi glacier: they added a genuine spice to our existence. The whole universe, both internal and external, was passed through our intellectual sieve: then we gathered the tiny fragments together and examined them under the microscope. When the last crushed remnants were disposed of, we would

have a final nightcap, then walk out into the cold tropical night and douse our heads in a cataract of stars.

One evening we were talking about the number of transmissions in absolutely incomprehensible languages that we could pick up on our radio: a fact that forcibly reminded us of the living, breathing presence, all around us, of innumerable human groups utterly alien from the familiar one we knew. From this point we moved on to consider the future. After considerable discussion as to the chances that Christianity, Islam or Socialism would prevail—the representative of each belief naturally favouring the survival of his own creed—the question was thrown to me.

‘There are four of us here, and between us we represent at least three pressure-groups that regard the world to come as their exclusive possession: Christians, Communists, and Moslems. It follows that the future must inevitably present a picture of hatred, war, and destruction. What real peace can there be when everyone, in his heart of hearts, thinks of the rest as “heretics” or “infidels”, representatives of errors that must at all costs be suppressed? The only way out open to mankind has, in fact, been followed, albeit unconsciously, since the dawn of time—eclectic synthesis. To visualize the future you must look back at the past. What does it show us? Among other things, two major phenomena which can do much to help us fill in the blank page of ages yet to come. One is the undoubted fact that though civilizations are long-lived, all-pervasive, and creative entities, they are not immortal: they are born and die, they undergo metamorphoses. We should not, therefore, think of future civilizations in terms of those we know today, or try to construct them with those bricks we have ready to hand, as though they were static objects, unvarying parts belonging to some heavenly Meccano set. Any civilization of the remote future will be qualitatively different from those in our present world. There will be no Christian, Communist, Moslem or Buddhist categories, or any other contemporary grouping—though such a civilization will, nevertheless, be ultimately rooted in all of them, and draw spiritual nourishment from their influence.

‘The second phenomenon is this. Each fundamental change in any civilization—each sudden forward jump, if you like—is brought about by synthesis and compromise. What are we Occidentals? A synthesis, a chemical compound (not a mixture) of the Graeco-Roman, Palestinian, and Germanic worlds. Three civilizations, once sharply distinct and indeed the most bitter enemies—yet we remain in every respect the heirs of them all. When we consider the complex picture of our contemporary existence—examining it through the historian’s or the sociologist’s lens—it is possible to isolate many individual elements that can be traced back to their original roots; but we scarcely ever think consciously of our civilization as the framework within which we live and act and have our being. We exist, we act and move

like any healthy organism, which remains quite unaware of the complex web of influences that have gone to form it. Do you ever stop to reflect that your famous Christian faith would have remained pure Near Eastern Messianism had it not ridden the steed of Greek philosophy, and settled in Rome as the true heir to the empire of the Caesars? Do you never consider, during the most commonplace transactions of your everyday life as a citizen, just how much of your legal code—particularly in the sphere of private law—has been affected by the influence of German institutions? In your political life there is a continual interfusion of Germanic elements (in the Anglo-Saxon version) with Latin customs and Palestinian morals. There is hardly any object in discussing art and literature from this point of view, the facts are so self-evident. From the *Divina Commedia* to the Sistine Chapel, every major work is a masterpiece of synthesis, a fusion of all our diverse roots. Botticelli depicts both Venus and the Madonna, Michelangelo is as likely to offer us a Sibyl as the Creator.

‘Our true spiritual roots can be identified through the names of our spiritual masters, and the works they left us. You will find Plato cheek by jowl with St. John, and Albertus Magnus beside Euclid; Shakespeare and Goethe keep company with Dante, Bach and Goya with Ibsen. But you will not find Li Lung Mien or Murasaki Shikibu, nor yet the Koran or the Prajna-paramita. We have discussed all this on a previous occasion. Every civilization is the territory that is covered by its own natural roots.’

‘Fair enough. But other present day civilizations aren’t in any way the product of such a synthesis as you describe.’

‘You think not? Look at India: an inextricably tangled mixture of Vedic and Dravidic elements, fused in the closest possible union. The same is true of China: Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, the Shamanism of the steppes—each played a contributory part in the making of that great civilization which we can properly isolate as “Chinese”. In Japan these elements were added to another tradition, derived from a culture connected with certain southern civilizations of the Oceanic peoples, and mainly represented by Shintoism.

‘Basically, such fusions come about as the result of prolonged co-existence between groups of men whom the events of history have thrown into close contact. We have our triple Graeco-Roman, Palestinian and German roots because, firstly, Rome united Greece and Palestine into one coherent political organism; and, secondly, because the Germanic peoples afterwards took over the mastery of Europe from Rome. If Palestine, instead of being Romanized, had found itself under the domination of (let us say) the Arsacid dynasty, who knows whether we might not have had a Christian-Iranian civilization, complete with various unacknowledged borrowings from the Avesta in the Gospels? India, as far back as the time of the Maurya Emperors,

was the result of invasions made by Aryan-speaking peoples. China was born of the fusion between a pastoral north and the nations of the agricultural south. Wherever you look you find that history, if you take a sufficiently long view, is the story of synthesis and fusion. Today we are on the threshold of another such transformation, due this time to technological rather than military conquest. We are paving the way for world-wide co-existence, the mingling of the most diverse races, with utterly disparate origins and well-differentiated endocosmic traditions, in one vast common public forum. If we do not want to envisage a future of unending bloody strife, we must needs favour such international fusion; we must think of man's spiritual birth as a citizen of the world, a participant in world-civilization. Fusion is both right and inevitable; it is the highway to human progress and cultural development. There are only two alternatives—either we take a parochial and reactionary stand against this trend, or else we look forward to a future that aims at uniting, as far as possible, all mankind intellectually and spiritually.

'But any new civilization is by definition unpredictable: not only because it is a synthesis, but also because it always contains a spark of rare originality, something that makes it more than a sum of its component parts. Here we are in the domain of organic and integral wholes rather than of mere arithmetical computation. On the other hand, it is clear enough that man's future roots will be world-wide, rather than narrowly nationalistic as they are today. In order to understand this point better, let us look at the past again for a moment. A man who was the product of Graeco-Roman civilization, such as Celsus (whose works are known to us only through their refutation by Origen) could regard both Moses and the Bible as something strange and incomprehensible, monstrous almost; for him they had the same exotic quality that the temples of Madurai or the pyramids of Chichen-Itza have for us. Go on two thousand years or so, and we find Moses as much a part of our common heritage as Homer, Lucretius, Isaiah or Celsus himself. The panoramic view—as seen in the perspective of centuries of fusion—has acquired unity. Thus the men of the future will have a wonderfully mixed spiritual heritage flowing in their veins: Socrates and Confucius, St. Paul and Nagarjuna, Napoleon and Genghis Khan, Dürer and Sesshu, the Gospels and the Bhagavad-Gita, Jesus and Mahommed, Buddha and Lenin. From the high pinnacle on which they stand the human panorama will no longer seem, as it does now, divided into separate valleys and counter-valleys. All past history will be one vast undivided heritage, the legacy of mankind as a whole.

'And since the component elements in any historical synthesis have always undergone profound changes during the process of assimilation to new organic growths, it seems very likely that the same thing will happen in the future. Christianity, I suspect, will shed all its complex dogma concerning

the Trinity, together with its mythological elements, the drama of Creation, Original Sin, Incarnation, Redemption, the Real Presence and so on; that great mass of scheduled and codified doctrine, so like a manual of instruction for tax-collectors, will in all likelihood find an honoured refuge in some museum for fossilized ideas, and what will continue to flourish—with undiminished vigour—will be that one sublime message of active love amongst all mankind, the concept of *caritas*. Here, surely, is Christianity's supreme gift to the world. No previous religion or philosophy had ever assigned this virtue so central a position or such obvious cogency. What will survive of Islam? Its adamant monotheism—always supposing mankind still wants by then to pursue the idea of a personal God. Another thing that will certainly survive is the concept of the people as the Church, the tradition of a dynamic faith unburdened by the useless accretions of sacraments and charismatic magic, which go hand in hand with a priesthood. Buddhism and Hinduism will contribute the spirit of a new, all-embracing bond between man and the world, man and the animal kingdom, man and the concept of time (even though the metempsychotic attitude to the universe may not win general acceptance); while from the various Chinese philosophies there will survive the basic predominant idea of human goodness, the concept of cosmic order and peace with that order. These seem to me some of the most significant elements—but who can tell? Perhaps others will prevail; perhaps we shall have such elements and groupings as we cannot today even conceive.'

The rumble of a distant avalanche brought us out into the still, solemn darkness. A sickle moon was shining, and its light lay in streaks upon those gigantic mountains: we stood silent for a moment, till someone looked at his watch, and found—horror of horrors!—that it had turned midnight.



The assault proper was now launched.

On the 10th August most of the party assembled at Camp One (16,700 feet) on the West Cwm. There were several tents up, and their colours—green, orange, dark brown—made a gay pattern against that blinding white background. A babel of voices could be heard, with occasional snatches of song, and frequent polyglot curses, because a cooking-stove refused to work properly, or a zip-fastener obstinately stuck. Upon this magnificently indifferent, ice-pure, murderous scene a clutter of all-too-human phenomena had descended, ranging from hunting to prayer, from soup-cubes to cheap paperback editions of Euripides and Dante.

The siting of the camp had been decided with two main criteria in mind: first, to get it as high as possible, and second, to keep it out of the path of any large potential avalanche. In the end, therefore, we had chosen a level space towards the eastern side of the cwm, almost overlooking the steep rocky

fall of the East face itself, where there was almost no snow or ice—and as far as possible from the West face, on which a bountiful God had bestowed ice-blocks and glaciers in ample abundance, and which was therefore always liable to produce avalanches. What we did not discover till afterwards was that we had sited the camp on the crest of an isolated serac, entirely surrounded by crevasses!

From the point of view of spectacular Alpine scenery, it would have been hard to imagine a more impressive spot. We were in the arena of a great natural amphitheatre—or, perhaps better, at the bottom of a vast chasm. The bowl of this deep, gigantic funnel was lined with snow-covered glaciers and the detritus from numerous avalanches; its high (and for the most part regular) walls were formed from an austere-looking black, or dark brown, sandstone, which lay in near-horizontal strata, and was covered—particularly at those points where the sun seldom penetrated—with great glacial deposits that were always breaking loose in patches: the thunderous crash of their descent echoed and re-echoed round the ‘funnel’ (see photographs nos. 94 and 104).

This funnel, this bowl of ours was a fundamentally austere, not to say harsh ambience in which to find oneself; sometimes, especially towards evening, it became so depressing as to give off a positive air of the macabre. It seldom inspired sympathy, and affection never. The details of its appearance were grim; many of them we found positively horrific, and some—no question about it—just plain ugly. The colours in the rock were striking, but not exactly exhilarating. That elegant sense of design revealed by the spurs and crests of other mountains (a quality which, even if it does not give one’s heart a fillip, at the very least attracts the eye and stimulates the mind) was entirely absent here. As we looked around us, two adjectives kept cropping up in our conversation: ‘simple’ and ‘colossal’.

Avalanches fell frequently, and made a tremendous noise when they did. They made me think of aerial bombardments—uncomfortably close ones, at that. A large mass of ice and snow—often hundreds or even thousands of tons in weight—would detach itself from those overhanging seracs and come thundering down the rock-face, from precipice to precipice, ending up in a pile of fragmented ice-blocks and a cloud of white sparkling particles. During the day avalanches were cheerful occasions, a sort of pyrotechnic display, and we followed their progress as though they were the fireworks accompanying a procession of some patron saint. But at night their sudden rumbling roar awoke archaic terrors in us, echoes of a pre-human world.

Only towards the south-east did the bowl open on a vaster and less severe panorama. Here there rose a series of charming and elegant peaks, above which the monsoon clouds hung like a solid wall: still, heavy, luminous. When one’s eye wearied of the bowl’s severities, it could find unexpected

(and often most delectable) consolation in this breathtaking, sky-dominated landscape. The weather remained almost permanently fine; for several days at a time nothing would mar the sky's absolute serenity. Whether all summers here are the same I do not know; but certainly our personal experience, and that of other travellers who have visited these parts, would seem to confirm the fact that the prevailing monsoon winds, with their clouds and storms, seldom penetrate as far as the highest peaks in the Hindu Kush.

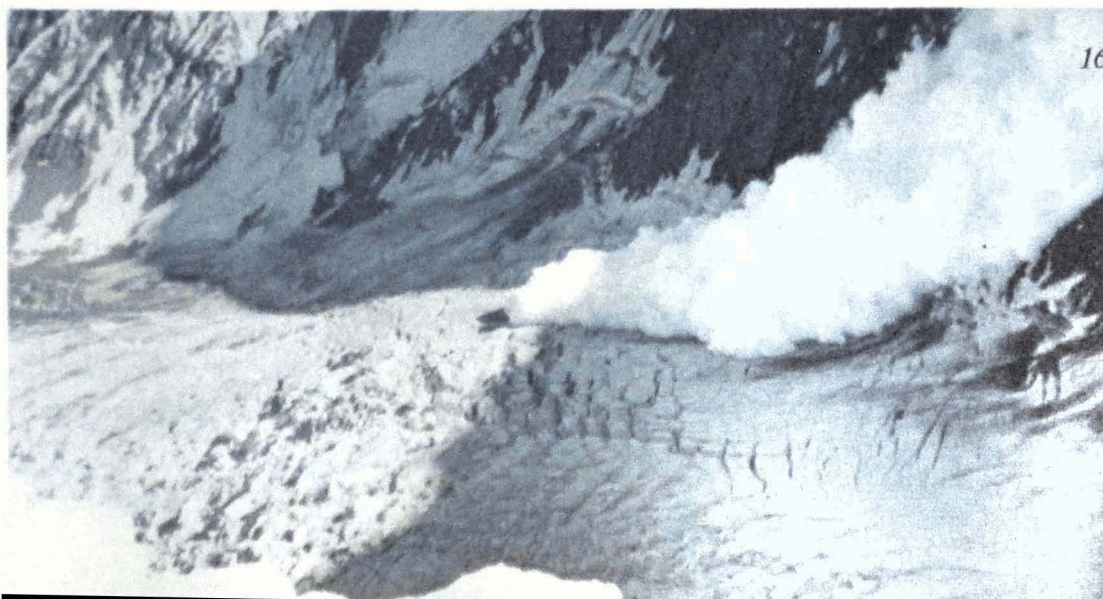
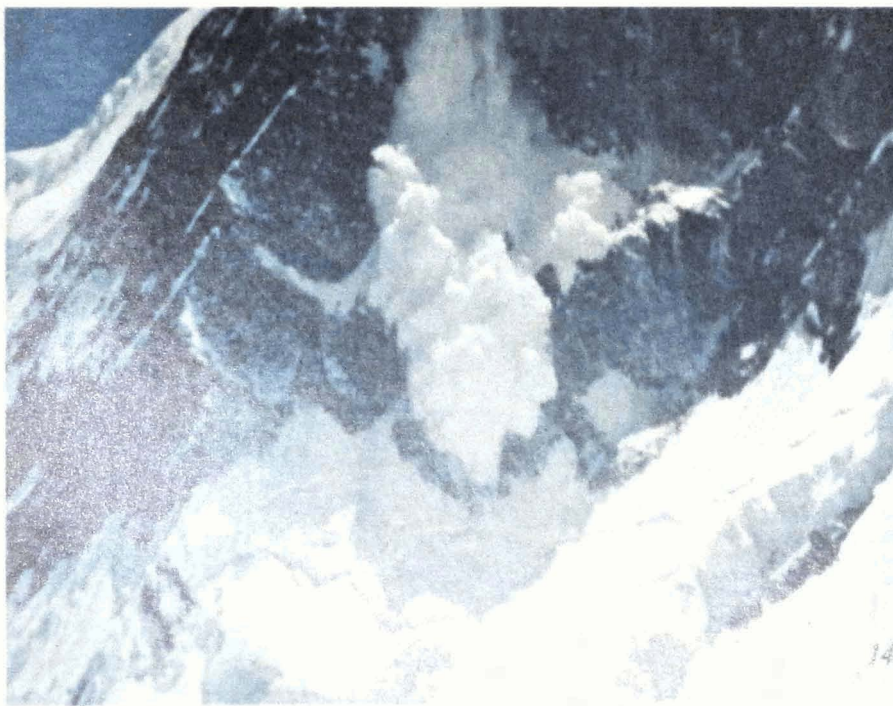
Naturally these were ideal conditions in which to undertake a lengthy mountaineering operation. The continuous good weather enabled us to work out precise schedules, and to put them into effect without the random factor of storms or clouds to complicate matters. On the other hand, it was only to be expected that such notable advantages should have certain compensating drawbacks. During the day the sun became a ball of fire, whose rays had the shattering impact of a machine-gun; at the height of the day we were nearly driven mad by the glare. Though the air remained cool, the sunlight had terrifying powers of penetration: woe betide anyone who took off his dark glasses! The skin on one's face was burnt raw, even though a thick growth of beard afforded some protection. But then, almost the moment the sun went down, it would begin to freeze: immediately, in a matter of minutes. An icy blast would blow down off the high peaks, and everything would turn glassy-hard. Our steps re-echoed on the ice like those of some giant crunching across a carpet of nuts. For a brief moment or so we would tell each other what a relief it was to be free of that blinding, tormenting light; but such respite was all too brief, and almost at once we would be preparing to grapple with the cold. Where were our gloves and balaclavas? And just look at that soup, left out in the snow for three minutes and it's as hard as a rock! All we could do was to take refuge in the tents, and wriggle into our sleeping-bags. The world outside quickly turned from a delicate pink to shades of purple and green: then it vanished altogether as night fell, and overhead the immortal festival of stars was resumed.



For the present everything was going extremely well. The expedition had, by and large, progressed as planned: the famous ice-rampart was conquered; Enrico Leone, Silvio Iovane, and Betto Pinelli had established a second camp at about 18,300 feet, on the ridge between Mt. Paola and the 22,250-foot contour line.

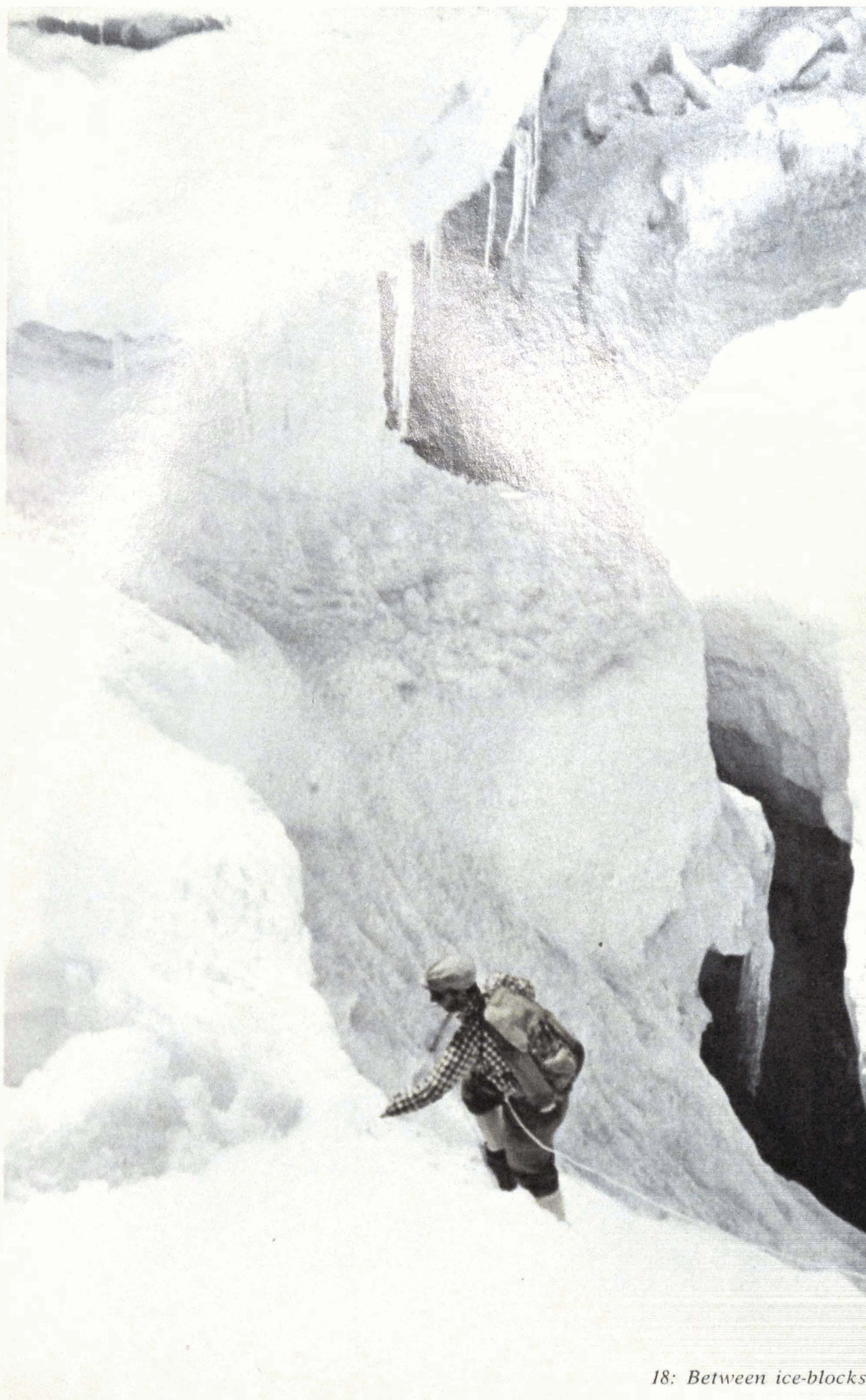
The preliminary reconnaissance for this vital advance was carried out on the 7th August, by Franco Alletto and Giancarlo Castelli. 'We left camp at 8.45 a.m.,' Castelli wrote in his diary, 'and worked our way up on the right side of the glacier, afterwards traversing it in order to get on the ice-rampart itself. There were traces of enormous avalanches, which had come down

14, 15, 16: An avalanche plunges from the slopes of Saraghrar and comes to rest on the Niroghli glacier, in clouds of powdery snow



17: At the base of the Tower of Ice





18: *Between ice-blocks*



*Franco Alletto and Paolo Consiglio
Giancarlo Castelli and Carlo Alberto Pinelli
The peak of Saraghrar (c. 22,050 ft.)*



from the head of the glacier: formations that resembled the spume thrown up by breakers, or even petrified breakers. We trudged on in silence, each thinking what our first move should be when we heard the sound of ice breaking loose from the rock-face. We passed close to huge seracs and to caves of ice formed by blocks which had fallen into position over other, larger blocks. We circumnavigated the last crevasse. Then we worked our way up a further 1,000 feet or so along a ridge of rocks in the centre of the gorge, which provided tolerably easy going. But then the question arose as to whether we should go back along the gorge, traversing to the left till we made the ice-ridge, or continue straight up it, keeping to the comparative safety of the rock-seam.' After carefully scrutinizing the advantages and dangers of both routes, the two men decided to continue up the gorge. But they soon found themselves in serious difficulties, and it was only after a tremendous struggle that they managed to traverse to the left and, eventually, reach the 'plateau' of the ice-ridge. As they came down Giancarlo cast an eye over the steep slopes they had worked their way up in the morning.

'Too damned risky,' he said.

'Better not use that approach any more; we'll make the climb from lower down.'

In fact this was what happened. Henceforward we took the route which traversed the gorge, and brought us up to the top of the ice-ridge without any major problems or obstacles on the way. Yet though this climb was not particularly difficult, it turned out to be the most hazardous part of the entire assault—both then and every time we attempted it subsequently. A few days later I went over it myself, together with Silvio, Mulai Jan, and a couple of porters, and was able to study it in the minutest detail. Scarcely 300 feet above Camp One, we found ourselves in the stratum where traces of former avalanches abounded in the form of 'petrified waves': it was a sea of storm-tossed marble, a forest of squat and monstrous candles which the sun, at its brief zenith, sculpted into the most unseemly shapes.

But this was no place to stand and lose oneself in fantasy: indeed, the less time we spent there the better. We had to keep up a steady pace which, at the same time, did not place an excessive strain on our lungs: a difficult achievement, since at heights above 16,400 feet you find yourself very quickly out of breath even without running. The level cwm gradually began to slope upwards, and our path now pointed directly towards the farther side of the 'funnel', where there was a dark, chill passage in the rock face, on which the lines of half a dozen minor ice-fields converged. The traces of avalanches became progressively more recent as we advanced. Small falls occurred every day, and big ones were quite common. We would have to beseech the gods of Saraghrar to go easy in their Neronian sport of dismantling the mountain piecemeal . . .

The bottom of this 'passage' was one of the most impressive places I have ever seen in my life. All round us there rose enormous towers of ice—old, tired ice, seamed with cracks and crevices. Every so often I heard groaning, cracking sounds: the tower's foundations were obviously unsteady, and the ice was tired of standing up on its own. For years it had dreamed of the blessed repose it would get if it collapsed: it was aching to stretch itself out on that level snowfield—right in the direction of our tents—and slowly melt away under the sun's caressing rays. It was a macabre place: the very bones of the mountain seemed to show through here. These crevasses and caves and clefts made one think of wounds (see photograph no. 103). The dominant colours here were a livid green, and several shades of pale violet, which tinged even the white and innocent snow with their reflected light; the echoes were such as you might hear in a crypt.

The ascent rapidly became very steep indeed, and for a short distance we advanced under cover of some protective rocks; then came a lengthy traverse, during which we were fully exposed to any potential avalanche, but which finally led to the plateau and to safety. For three weeks this ascent was continually in my mind. Every day processions of my companions, together with our porters, made the trip to and fro through that passage between the towers of ice. On the 16th August a huge avalanche swept down through passage and gorge a few minutes before Enrico Leone and a caravan of porters were due to begin the ascent. Blocks of ice as large as cars lay tumbled everywhere on the floor of the passage: Franco Alletto likened them to 'a chest of drawers thrown out of the window', an image which exactly caught the atmosphere of ruin, destruction, disaster, and sheer grinding, explosive disintegration: a spectacle which was at once grandiose and grotesque, brutal and awe-inspiring—at least, if one could observe it in safety; but to be caught in it—God, that was better not thought about. The avalanche stripped the entire gorge bare, so drastically indeed that all its snow vanished as if by magic; all that remained in the central bed was an ancient, hard-frozen, greenish glacier, up which the advance party was obliged—with laborious effort—to cut a fresh series of steps.

The metaphysical reflections provoked by this operation through the 'passage' were most interesting. Captain Shapur kept telling us that there was no point in our worrying: each individual's hour was written in heaven when Allah willed that we should be summoned, whether from a mountain gorge or the peace of our own beds. So, he counselled us, take your time, go at your natural pace: the result will be just the same. Others uttered a brief prayer to Our Lady and kissed the holy medal they wore round their necks. Personally, after some consideration, I entrusted myself to the benevolent offices of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara: hoping that the assembly of Invisible Powers—already intrigued by the lucky way our timing had fitted

with the 'chest of drawers thrown out of the window'—might regard the representative of any major faith as a further guarantee of security.

The moment we emerged on the summit of the ice-ridge we found ourselves in a different world: before us there lay a broad panorama of mild, airy snow-slopes, bathed in sunshine and with a positively welcoming air about them. If we had been nine or ten thousand feet lower down, we would have earmarked the area as the perfect site for a ski-camp. Only a few deep, mysterious crevasses, which ran through the very heart of this tiny ice-block of a plateau, reminded us that the airy catwalk where we stood rested on a foundation of highly unstable seracs (see photograph no. 18). From time to time—as the evidence clearly told us—an avalanche must come down this way, too: but such falls proved comparatively rare. During the weeks we spent working over this stretch, not a single one took place. Now we had only to climb (very slowly, putting one foot in front of the other) for a couple of hours, till we reached the top of the ridge. Here, right beside a yawning crevasse (see photograph no. 112), we set up the tents for Camp II, at a height of about 18,300 feet (see photographs nos. 106 and 107).

The first couple to spend a night there were Silvio and Enrico Leone. 'We sorted out all the gear,' Silvio wrote, 'and put the tent in order. Enrico smoked a stinking cigarette which, in the confined space of the tent, really turned me up . . . Then we slept for a bit, till the agreed time came for us to make R.T. contact with the rest of the expedition down below. Felt in excellent shape: this pleased everyone. Shortly afterwards we got roped up and went on towards the summit of the ridge, to see what it was like. Took the R.T. set with us to give an on-the-spot description of the summit itself. However, this whole spur of the mountain soon turned out to be highly dangerous, being composed of terrifying glacial overhangs which were liable to collapse when trodden on (see photograph no. 109). Accordingly we went ahead roped together, and took every precaution to ensure that neither of us fell. . . . We gave a running account of our difficulties over the R.T.; the sun was by now sinking towards the horizon, and we turned back in the direction of our tent. The distant peaks were flushed with red; as we were on the eastern face of the mountain, we caught the worst of the cold. The temperature dropped right down in the course of a few minutes, and our hands and faces were frozen.

'Inside the tent, everything was very snug. The little petrol stove melted snow to heat up our tea and soup. We took one last look at that fantastic sunset, striped in horizontal strata—a violet-blue sky, an intense yellow streak along the horizon, the shadowy peaks below—and then closed the tent flaps. I went straight to bed. Beautiful warm feather-quilted sleeping-bag: soon felt ready to drop off. Then, suddenly, I heard a loud crash, there was a bright flash of light, and the whole far side of the tent seemed to be a wall of flame.

Enrico was by the stove, still bending over his pots of tea and camomile. By now everything was burning. I waited a split second to see if it went out; but when the bottom of my sleeping-bag caught fire, and Enrico rushed through the flames and hurled the pressure-stove into the night, I tried to struggle free myself—but the zip-fastener on my bag stuck, and simply refused to open. It took me something like two seconds to rip the bag bodily apart, and hurl myself, bullet-like, into the fresh air. Outside all the snow was aflame with spilt petrol. . . . We threw snow on the flames, and eventually they went out.'

On the morning following this little episode (17th August) the two resumed the reconnaissance of the ridge, clambering up to a huge wave-like formation of ice and snow which was christened the Ship. At one point they had to retreat some way because of a dangerous overhang: as luck would have it, though, they found, by pure intuition, what turned out to be a far better approach, across the steep rock-face skirting the Ship. They also encountered a huge crevasse, and experienced some difficulty in getting round it. After this successful sortie, fading light forced them to turn back. But the way to the summit seemed open.



It was clear that the key to the ascent to the upper plateau at 22,250 feet lay in the ridge linking the shelf on which Camp II was set up. Its exploration was resumed on the 11th August by Giancarlo Castelli and Betto Pinelli. For the present, these two were the strongest working team in the expedition. Franco Alletto was still suffering from gastric trouble, and Paolo Consiglio had not yet fully acclimatized himself to the high altitudes. As for the two youngest members of the group, they had shown themselves capable of extraordinary exertions over a short stretch, but it was not possible to rely on them when a long, sustained effort was called for. Dr. Franco Lamberti-Bocconi had proved himself a first-class mountaineer and an ever-ready comrade in moments of need. I myself was beginning to suffer a fresh attack of dysentery; I thought I had got over this, but the intense cold on the cwm started it up again.

To return to the reconnaissance of the ridge. Betto Pinelli wrote in his diary at this point: 'If we can justly be likened to Stone Age cave-men at the moment (and to judge by our facial appearance such a comparison seems most apt), the way up to the summit of Saraghrar resembles some gigantic dinosaur. . . . Daily we advance a little farther along its squamous, glacial tail, accompanied at intervals by the thunder of fantastic avalanches, falling from the rock-face of Saraghrar (17th August).'

These avalanches were among the most tremendous natural spectacles to be seen anywhere in the world, and our position up on the ridge was particularly

advantageous for observing them. It felt as though we had front seats in some mythical theatre specially fitted for a new entertainment called Avalancherama. Right in front of us, less than a mile away, we could see the entire north face of Mt. Saraghrar, with its fearful black rocks and its festoons and pendants of ice. High up on the summit plateau lay the glacier-cap, clearly defined at the edge of the rock-face, where it revealed a wall of clear ice which, at some points, was over 300 feet thick.

From this greenish stratum, every so often, there would erupt great towering, explosive masses of ice-masonry, ice-rubble: an avalanche. If it was a major fall, we would first hear a series of reports like bombs going off (these must have been caused by the ice-blocks smashing into the projecting spurs on the rock-face), and then a prolonged, thunderous roar. A few seconds later the avalanche would reach its flowering fullness (see photograph no. 108): by now the ice was completely pulverized, and the resultant clouds, thick and sparkling as sea-spume, would drift away on the breeze and gradually disperse. Between us and the rock-face lay the great chasm of the upper Niroghi glacier (see photographs 14-16), and so we were completely safe on such occasions. Indeed, chance favoured our photographic requirements in the most striking fashion: round about mid-day these avalanche-clouds showed up to perfection, shot through with sunlight against the background of mysterious and almost eternal shadow which lies over the crags of the north face.

Very soon Betto and Giancarlo reached the Tower of Ice (clearly visible right-centre of photograph no. 115): this was a steep and unpredictable pinnacle, a fantasy creation in glass and sugar-floss; probably it had a central core, an animating soul, as it were, of rock, but hidden well away under that thick mantle of snow and ice. Here progress became decidedly difficult. Photograph no. 115 gives a very inadequate idea of the terrain, because the two sheer, slippery slopes on either side of the tower are not in the picture, and cannot easily be visualized; photographs 17 and 113 give a much better idea of just how steep the glacier-wall could be.

'It took us a long time and great effort to work over yesterday's two rope-stretches,' Betto Pinelli noted down that evening. 'But we pressed on, traversing across the slope, which had once more become extremely steep. Giancarlo, who was leading, advanced with extreme caution, searching all the time for good, solid, climbable ice under the treacherous lacework of the *penitentes*. Time passed slowly, too slowly, inching painfully through my hands like the rope itself. But at last we came up against a buttress that was all crevasses, open and hidden, a lacework of rotten snow and icicles, the most daunting (not to say hazardous) sight imaginable.' At this point they were forced to turn back.

Nevertheless their reconnaissance work was of the utmost value. At least

160 feet of rope had been pegged firmly into place, with crampons, across one of the most difficult stretches of the entire ascent; and numerous steps had been cut in the treacherous, all-too-exposed ice above the chasm of the Niroghi glacier.

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While Pinelli and Castelli were opening up a new stretch for the heavy-laden porters, and Iovane and Leone were making a noteworthy contribution to the vital business of keeping our supply-lines open (by guiding roped teams of porters and often carrying their huge packs themselves), Consiglio and Alletto were getting ready to relieve the men up top, the spearhead of our advance.

Franco, as I have already mentioned, was still in a poorish state of health—a fact which worried us a good deal, on several counts. He was suffering from the same intestinal complaint as several of us had had: another man might well have let himself succumb to it, but Franco—being a man of strong moral fibre and unshakable determination—obstinately refused to yield an inch. Paolo enjoyed a few hours of rest and relaxation at Camp One. ‘A day of plans, discussions, reading, and moments of the most delectable idleness,’ he noted in his diary for the 10th August. ‘Euripides is the author who has come with me all the way up the mountain—probably because he is in a lightweight paperback pocket edition! This evening a strong wind got up, which shook our little cluster of tents; I lay in my snug, warm sleeping-bag, browsing through the Mad Heracles and brewing some tea. The sound of avalanches, which have been falling ever since this morning from every face of the “bowl”, forms the constant, perennial music here, the one real sound that breaks this frozen stillness. About 10 p.m. a louder and more prolonged roar than usual made everyone poke his nose out to see what was going on; the spectacle of all those inquisitive, balaclava-clad (and the slightest bit worried) faces, protruding from the tent-flaps and turning this way and that, was one I found richly comic. The front of the avalanche, which had fallen over 3,000 feet, came to a chaotic halt a short distance from our camp. A silent, white cloud drifted past us; a transient phantom caught in the light of the rising moon.’

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On the 11th August, Alletto and Consiglio made the climb from Camp One to Camp Two. ‘I don’t feel at all well,’ Franco noted in his diary. ‘I’m very listless, and tire easily.’ Paolo also referred to this: ‘Franco is still suffering from his gastric trouble, so we are making slow progress. I can’t help admiring the sheer will-power which is all that keeps him going.’ For anyone who has not experienced it, it must be hard to imagine just how grim a business—

'bestial' is hardly too strong a term—these hand-to-hand struggles with the highest mountains in the world can be: they are fought out thousands of miles from home, after a journey through regions where unfamiliar climatic conditions prevail, after a long preliminary trek. Those who undertake them are often prostrated by the sort of illnesses it is only too easy to pick up in the tropics, and are always hampered by the lack of oxygen at high altitudes. One is very seldom in a condition to overcome hazards cheerfully, much less with the sort of inebriated enthusiasm that so often takes possession of one when climbing in the Alps. Here one just grits one's teeth and plods on, only too well aware that this is the supreme test, a task which, once one has accepted it, one cannot morally resign.

The next day Franco and Paolo managed to get moving from Camp Two at 9 a.m., to continue their preparatory work for the final assault on the summit. The reader should think twice before condemning such late-rising as more appropriate to some retired and club-bound colonel. The nights at high altitudes are generally freezing, and hard to sleep in; when you wake up in the morning you tend to be listless and stupid. Outside it is bitterly cold. Every decision costs you an enormous output of mental energy, and every movement has to be made with slow deliberation. Lighting the pressure-stove is a problem (where the devil have the matches got to?). You hunt round for the condensed milk, and find climbing-irons, rolls of film, biscuits, scarves, everything, in fact, except that blasted tube. . . . Putting on your boots is a job in itself. At last the sun comes up, and its rays (beneficent for a few moments, before they start that hellish glare) give one a brief respite, which relieves the tension and recharges the batteries of one's will-power. To get moving at 8 o'clock is remarkable; 9 is a fair average.

Franco and Paolo worked their way fairly quickly along that part of the ridge which they had already reconnoitred, and which was, for much of its length, equipped with fixed ropes. In these conditions the climb was one of the most exciting high-altitude attempts imaginable. I forget who it was first suggested calling the long, more or less horizontal part of the ridge the 'Promenade of the Gods', but the name caught on at once, and stuck. It was true, one did feel like a god up among these frozen waves, these ship-like landmarks, these layers of snow and ice, with marbled or crystalline pinnacles and filigree-work hung overhead—suspended between two voids, the West Cwm on the one side and the chasm of the Niroghi glacier on the other, while in front of us the rock-face of Saraghrar towered up, complete with its carnival of avalanches. I never knew whether to be lost in admiring wonder at the details of my immediate surroundings—the fretted patterns formed by the ice, the sun's dazzling reflection, the misty, cottonwool puffs of falling snow, the weird ice-fields of the *penitentes*—or at the whole majestic spectacle taken together (see photographs nos. 109 and 111).

Soon Franco and Paolo found themselves launching out into virgin territory again. 'The stretch we have prepared,' wrote Paolo, 'is a really lovely piece of work—but even so it is wise to proceed, using the rope as a safety device, turn and turn about. Beyond this point there is a wall of ice some 60 feet high, which must be conquered if we are to reach the top. I managed to scale it with the assistance of three crampons, while Franco, anchored to a fourth crampon, made sure I was safe during the operation.' Having overcome this obstacle they advanced for another 150 feet or so up the ridge, to the point where it ended, at the edge of a steep, uneven slope, all caves and colossal potholes, linked by ramparts and ledges of snow. It was getting late, and they were obliged to turn back to Camp Two. In terms of pure altitude, they had gained only a few feet, but it could now be said that the most hazardous part of the entire assault had been fully reconnoitred. Furthermore, they had found an excellent position for Camp Three, up on the 'plateau by the ice-caves' (see photograph no. 111).

'At five to seven we were back in Camp Two,' Paolo wrote, 'where we received a tumultuous welcome from our four porters: they eagerly relieved us of our rucksacks, untied our ropes, and took off our climbing-boots. They had hot tea waiting for us, too: it was all extremely touching.'

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE FINAL ASSAULT

*When all ways seem closed, then all suddenly open,
And behind the most dolorous agony, joy gushes forth.*
ABU SAID (968-1048)

*In the desert wilderness I heard a moth cry: Give me one brief
moment of life, of feverish excitement and fulfilment! Scatter
my ashes to the winds when morning comes, but grant me a single
night of passion and burning glory!*

MOHAMMED IQBAL (1873-1938), FROM *The Tulip of Sinai*

EVERYTHING SEEMED to be proceeding in the most satisfactory manner. It is true that the difficulties were greater than we had anticipated, and that our conditions of safety were often highly precarious, far worse than we had hoped they might be; but by and large the assault was going ahead according to plan. Every day we advanced at least a little farther towards our goal. The weather produced an almost unbroken fine spell, and this helped us a lot. Yet in the account of every expedition you will find at least one crisis which seriously threatens the outcome of the entire undertaking. The worst thing that can happen is the death of a member of your team (e.g. the sudden demise of Puchoz, during the 1954 assault on K.2, or that of Downes at Masherbrum in 1957): such an incident will fundamentally shake the morale of the toughest, most enterprising mountaineer, though his nerves are hard as steel. There is also the chance of some stray avalanche, which buries the larger part of your supplies (this happened to the Austrian team led by Morawec, near Gasherbrum II, in 1956), or a series of storms which disrupt your programme for transporting equipment (e.g. during the German ascent of Nanga-Parbat in 1938), or even unexpected defections among your porters. We, too, had to face our own testing ordeal: during the period 12th to 14th August the success of the expedition hung by the merest thread: one touch could have destroyed the entire organization, which now extended from base camp to the spur, nearly 20,000 feet above sea-level, that led up towards the summit plateau.

How did such a thing come about? We were faced, on the one hand, with a grave moral crisis involving two of our youngest team-mates; and on the other with a wave of panic among the porters. The experience of half a century has shown that the ideal age for these expeditions (which test to the

uttermost not only one's physical strength but also one's mental and emotional resources) pivots round an optimum point between thirty-two and thirty-five, with outer limits of twenty-eight to twenty-six on one side and forty to forty-two on the other. The youngest candidates often do better in the laboratory tests; they are capable of greater effort and certainly have quicker reflexes. But at the same time their physical resistance is more delicately balanced, and their emotional stability is often uncertain. A mountaineering expedition not only means poor food, shortage of sleep, and the most gruelling drain on one's energies; it also requires a mind that can habituate itself to constant anxiety, uncertainty, and loneliness. Though the conscious part of one's personality can steer a reasonably successful course through all these perilous, rock-infested channels, the great ocean of one's subconscious mind remains subject to electric storms such as might well disorientate even the best-designed compass.

Equally delicate is the balance of personal relationships within the group. It is the merest rhetorical nonsense to picture a mountaineering or scientific expedition as a column of men marching forward into the unknown, singing songs and waving banners, their eyes fixed steadfastly on some lonely, awe-inspiring peak against an endless expanse of blue sky. In the basic, primitive conditions which characterize such undertakings—and which may stretch on for months at a time—every individual's true nature emerges; he reveals the full extent of his complex personality, without the protective façade offered him by a sophisticated urban culture. The gloves are off here with a vengeance. When persons of widely differing temperaments are placed in intimate contact with one another over a lengthy period, the sparks may easily fly. One does not need to take an over-simplified, quasi-Manichaean view of the situation—to see one side white and the other black, with a corresponding pattern of good and evil—nor yet to maintain the proposition 'all men are beasts beneath the skin'. All that is needed, say, is for a precise and methodical character to find himself cooped up with some cheerful, hand-to-mouth improviser: two such diverse keys in the music of human personality are bound to set up a vile discord sooner or later. It takes only one dashing and one cautious type in close conjunction for nerves to become perilously taut in a variety of situations; it needs only a set-up in which a cerebral introvert has to deal with a volatile extrovert for earth-shaking dramas (internal, that is) to break loose around one; and so on and so forth. With advancing age people tend to become more tolerant: they rub along together rather better, and are readier to apologize for their own shortcomings. The human panorama is seen in broader perspective, and one can more clearly view the small immediate faults under one's nose in the context of those potential, if far-off, qualities of greatness to which they point. One has become accustomed to evaluate objects, events, motives and persons

within a general frame of reference: one has come to terms both with life and oneself, and there is no longer the ever-recurrent need to prove the fact of one's own existence, or to demonstrate one's worth to others. A man of thirty-eight or forty has, it is true, less physical energy than one of twenty-three or twenty-five, and his reflexes are far slower; but at the same time he has an incomparably greater degree of emotional stability. He knows his own limitations, both physical and mental; he foresees, hours or even days in advance, the warning signals of imminent collapse. All this makes him far better adapted to deal with hostile conditions of every sort.

Now our two youngest companions, who were extremely popular with the rest of us and had shown themselves so willing throughout, could not cope with these various tensions, and during the three days of the 12th to 14th August went through an acute crisis of morale. I do not propose to go into the details of this episode, which could be of no possible general interest. Nor should it be thought that the incident reflects in any way upon the characters of the two individuals involved. It was simply a classic example of collapse under stress, due to sheer inexperience. Four or five years later the same men, given identical conditions, would have responded in a totally different way.

Nevertheless, taken in the context of our assault on the peak, which had reached its most crucial stage, the episode threatened to assume somewhat perturbing proportions. The morning of the 14th August was the worst—but also, fortunately, the turning-point of the whole business. With a nice sense of timing, Paolo Consiglio chose this moment to come down from Camp Two, together with old Pahlawan; and there, between the tents of Camp One, at the very heart of the great chasm—where every so often the thunderous roar of an avalanche would interrupt our deliberations—we held a meeting (Paolo, Dr. Lamberti, myself, and the two young men involved) to thrash the situation out in all its aspects. The discussion took hours, and at times it was very sticky going. But in the end good sense prevailed. At 10 in the morning it looked as though we would be forced—very much against our natural inclination—to send both men back to base camp for good; but by mid-day the unburdening of feelings all round had generated a conciliatory atmosphere, which made it possible to regard the past as buried, and opened up a new vista of harmonious relationships for the immediate future.

According to several of my team, I should have taken a different line at this juncture—'showed who was in charge', 'not tolerated any insubordination', and so forth; but I preferred the path of reconciliation and agreement, even at the price of forgiving those who had clearly expressed distrust in the good intentions of the rest. My overriding concern was to preserve the expedition as a united team, avoid tedious and widespread repercussions afterwards, and proceed with the final assault as soon as might be, in a spirit

of mutual concord. Besides, I could see clearly enough that this was in fact just a passing storm, due in the first place (a point I must re-emphasize) to lack of experience. It scarcely needs saying that the moral support lent me in this crisis by Paolo Consiglio, who had known both boys for years, was of quite inestimable value.

That evening, in an atmosphere of great cheerfulness and good humour, we resumed the pleasant 'group existence' that had for several days been given up, with no immediate prospect of resumption. 'I got the pressure-cooker working for dinner,' Silvio wrote, 'and produced a first-class risotto in twelve minutes. Afterwards four of us gathered in an empty tent—Fosco, Captain Shapur, Enrico and I—complete with flasks of tea, biscuits and sweets, and a pack of cards; and there, in the middle of the night, perched on a glacier over 17,000 feet above sea-level, we played three hands of *scopone*.¹ Perhaps, all unbeknown to us, there was a vast chasm-like crevasse yawning beneath us; but since we were running an illegal gambling-den we had to run a few risks . . .'

As for the trouble with the porters, this was closely linked to Captain Shapur's activities during the same period. On the 11th August he had climbed up with me to Camp One, and on the 13th announced his determination of carrying on to Camp Two. As a matter of principle, I wanted our liaison officer to get as near the summit as possible; if he really showed himself an outstanding natural mountaineer, and managed to reach the top with one of our roped teams, it would mean a moral victory for the expedition as a whole, and an inestimable boost for Italy's reputation in Pakistan; on the other hand, if he found the ascent too difficult or exhausting, the decision to turn back would be his rather than ours. In this way there would be no room for a repetition of the absurd accusations made by Captain Dar against my fellow-mountaineers on the Gasherbrum IV climb. So it came about that on the 13th August, bright and early, with excellent weather to assist him, Captain Shapur set off, roped to Dr. Franco Lamberti, and a short way behind the Castelli-Pinelli team.

We were now pushing our assault-gear up above Camp Two. 'About mid-day,' Paolo Consiglio noted in his diary, 'we saw first the caps, then the heads, then the entire bodies of Betto and Giancarlo push up above the level of the ice-ridge. Shortly afterwards it was the turn of the good doctor, who was straining in a most peculiar way on his rope: he had it over one shoulder, and it was stretched as taut as a steel hawser. A moment later Captain Shapur appeared, hooked on to the other end by the guide-ring, and looking, all things considered, reasonably comfortable in such a position. Poor Lamberti was heaving him on in a desperate sort of way, with the most exemplary

¹ A common card-game in Italy, for two or four players, using a forty-card pack: 36 cards are dealt out, the last four being placed on the table to begin with. (Trs.)

patience; but Shapur was absolutely knocked out. He said afterwards he would have done all right if it hadn't been for scarcity of oxygen. We didn't question that for a moment! He at once flopped down inside a tent, with his feet projecting through the flap, while the indomitable Lamberti set about a general tour of inspection. . . .'

His experimental venture into this world of all-too-thin air seemed to have satisfied Captain Shapur: by the afternoon he had made up his mind to go back to Camp One, down on the West Cwm. The decision was entirely his own: neither then nor at any other time did we attempt to dictate his movements. If he had wanted to stay—or indeed to continue with the ascent, up along the Promenade of the Gods—no one would have discouraged him, even though such a step would, inevitably, have necessitated major revisions in our general plans for the movement of men and supplies. But his sudden retreat, as things turned out, did look as though it might make trouble for us, in a rather unexpected quarter. The very next day, in fact—while the vital problem of our two youngest team-mates was being thrashed out down at Camp One—Alletto, Castelli and Pinelli had for the first time shepherded four porters, with full packs, along the Promenade of the Gods, and had succeeded in getting most of the equipment for our future Camp Three stacked on the small plateau by the ice-grottoes. Now this was the first part of the climb on which our brave Tirich highlanders had encountered real difficulties (though it was not in fact dangerous); and being men of great physical strength but little true mountaineering experience, they were thoroughly frightened—far more so than during those stretches at lower altitudes (for instance, through the passage between the sheer towers of ice) which, as a matter of fact, were really dangerous, but not all that difficult. Captain Shapur's hasty retreat must have confirmed all their fears that the *sahibs* were going about this business in a reckless and crazy fashion.

Be that as it may, on the evening of the 14th August Abdul Karim, up at Camp Two, asked if he might talk to Captain Shapur (now down in Camp One) over the R.T. link. Their conversation went on for a very long time. In the end we were given to understand that Abdul Karim and his companions regarded the Promenade of the Gods as far too difficult and hazardous a climb, and did not intend to go a step farther than Camp Two. This was a facer, and no mistake. No sooner had we resolved our own personal differences than we were faced with the threat of being left without help on the most exacting stretch of the ascent, and at the most crucial point in the entire project.

Next morning the porters came down to Camp One, and another meeting took place—this time between the Tirich highlanders, Captain Shapur, Silvio Iovane, and myself. As Silvio later wrote in his diary: 'It is Abdul Karim who has stirred up the rest of them: before this they were perfectly

happy. At the meeting he turned to Captain Shapur, inviting him to confirm, from his personal experience, just how difficult the ridge was.' The captain was thinking of accepting. Fortunately he gave up the idea. Unfamiliar as he was with those icy crags, he would have promptly said that the *sahibs* were leading their porters to perdition. In such situations it needed the eye of the expert mountaineer—someone who had been climbing at high altitudes for years, summer and winter, on crags and glaciers alike—to make a clear distinction between what was dangerous and what merely difficult. The ridge was difficult, but not dangerous. The passage through the ice-towers had been dangerous, but was comparatively easy.



On the 15th August, Silvio, accompanied by four porters, made the climb from Camp One up to Camp Two—at a slow but steady pace, as one should at heights of over 16,000 feet. While they were thus engaged, two roped pairs—Pinelli and Consiglio in front, Castelli and Alletto immediately behind them—had made quick work of the Promenade of the Gods (now it had steps and fixed ropes it could be climbed in under two hours) and were now advancing along the steep, treacherous ridge which formed the link between the ice-grotto plateau and the large spur on the 22,280-foot contour line. The sky had begun to cloud up very slightly; but it looked as though the sun would soon come out again.

'Once again we are moving into the unknown,' Paolo wrote. 'The ridge, after a first brief stretch of wet snow, became very hard going indeed. Its surface is solid ice, and on the side facing the West Cwm it is horrifically steep: for about six feet at one point we had to work our way along *below* the edge, which was knife-backed and so sheer that it virtually overhung the Niroghi chasm—besides being snagged with sharp little flakes of ice (see photograph no. 116). Considering its length, not to mention the fact that one is continually exposed and working from insecure positions, this must be reckoned a pretty severe climb. We all had to anchor ourselves to pitons to safeguard ourselves. With the sky partially overcast, and the sun all too often obscured, we suffered a good deal from the cold, especially during our frequent rests. The only defence we had against it was to wield our ice-axes energetically and bang in pitons as hard as we could—which was necessary anyway if we were to get them fixed. In places the ice was so hard that a piton got slightly bent, and the whole business had to be started again . . .'

Early in the afternoon Pinelli and Consiglio turned back, so as to reach Camp Two before it got dark. Castelli and Alletto, who intended to spend the night at Camp Three, continued to blaze the trail up the ridge for a little while longer. 'Reached Camp Three at 6.30 p.m.', Castelli noted. 'Bitterly

cold.' That simple, laconic statement may not convey much to anyone who has not undergone a similar experience: but those who have will instantly feel the frosty air that bites like a mad dog, sparing no one; see in his mind's eye the cheerless gloom of the fading light; feel as though he, too, were still moving in a heavy armour of anorak, balaclava, gloves. Everything you touch burns your hand, is dead yet inherently hostile. In the bottom of a saucepan you find some dirty milk and sugar, hard as a chunk of alabaster; half an hour, an hour even, may pass before you can create a tiny centre of warmth and humanity in this horrible world—horrible despite its nobility and magical charm.

The first night spent in a new camp is always rather depressing and miserable. But little by little various things—the presence of several tents, trails of footprints in the snow, voices, even the empty tins thrown out here and there—will, between them, infuse some humanity into the most drably unprepossessing site. The mountain gets under our skin; and we in turn manage to tame and domesticate the mountain. Even the ice-slopes and glacier-faces seem less steep when one has been up and down them a few times. The most threatening serac looks a good deal more stable when you have been personally acquainted with it for a day or two. At the beginning we are still floundering in a vast, hostile complex of things and events, that loom at us through the fading light.



Today, looking back at events in the perspective of their subsequent development, it is easy to see that the 16th August was the decisive day for the expedition. Alletto and Castelli established a route right along the knife-edged ridge of ice above Camp Three, and then launched out on to the steep slopes of the spur that would carry them up to the 22,280-foot level. From here they pressed on up a long, wearisome slope, till they reached a huge crevasse, the mouth of which was blocked by a kind of ice-grille, composed of numerous long, thin stalactites. These gave the whole thing a mildly ridiculous resemblance to a whale's mouth; and the Whale's Mouth it was promptly christened. The site seemed suitable enough, provisionally at least, for the establishment of Camp Four. The way to the summit lay open.

Iovane and Leone had genuinely recovered from their moment of uncertainty, and were pressing on for the summit, brimming over with enthusiasm. Everyone had the exhilarating feeling of 'Now we're getting somewhere!' Even the porters seemed to have caught this new mood of ours. 'Great excitement at Camp Two,' Silvio noted. 'The way to the summit is clear, and the porters all want to go up with the assault-team: no more talk of strikes now . . .' Paolo wrote: 'Slowly but inexorably, foot by foot, we are getting

the better of this mountain; and as time goes on the peak looks progressively less remote and unattainable . . .'

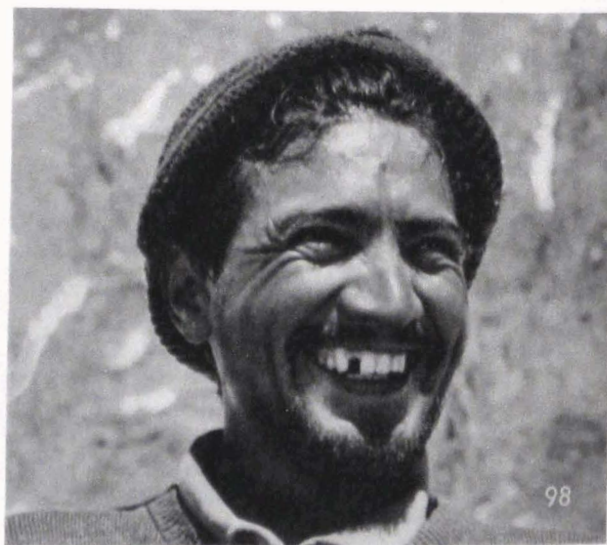
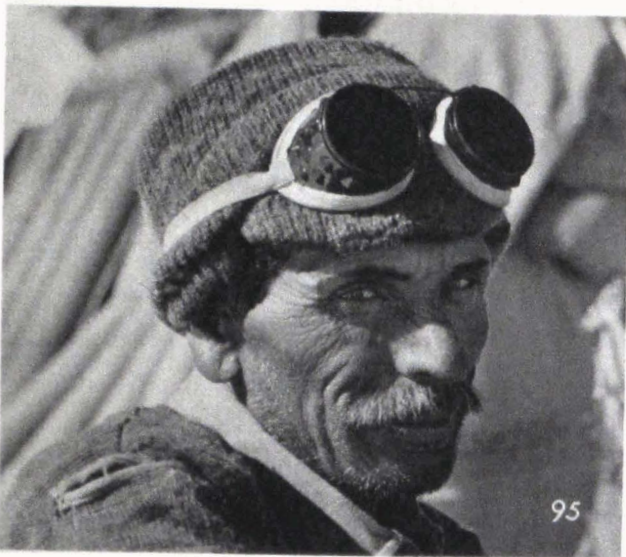
The last eight days (17th–24th August) were extremely wearing for all of us: they involved an immense effort on two counts—sheer physical strain coupled to the worry of constant methodical planning. Eight days may seem ample time in which to climb a mere 4,900 feet; but the reader should bear in mind that the head of the spur and the peak itself were several miles apart, lying at opposite ends of Saraghrar's summit plateau; also that this distance had to be traversed at a height of well over 22,500 feet. It was, furthermore, necessary to protect our team against any unforeseen event (such as a sudden change of weather, illness, or a severe accident) by stringing out a regular number of small camps along the plateau, each of which had to be properly equipped.

As luck would have it, the weather remained almost uniformly fine. True, the sun flayed our faces, dazzled our eyes, and gave us thumping headaches; but this was a price we gladly paid for certain inestimable advantages: the fact that we could work out a programme and stick to it, that we could always see the way we had come and what lay ahead of us, and that our morale was not liable to be snapped by the feeling of uncertainty and discouragement produced by clouds or, worse, blizzards. On the summit plateau any reduction of visibility would make further progress impossible, except at grave risk to life: every ledge had a bottomless abyss beneath it, and to slip over the edge would be all too easy.

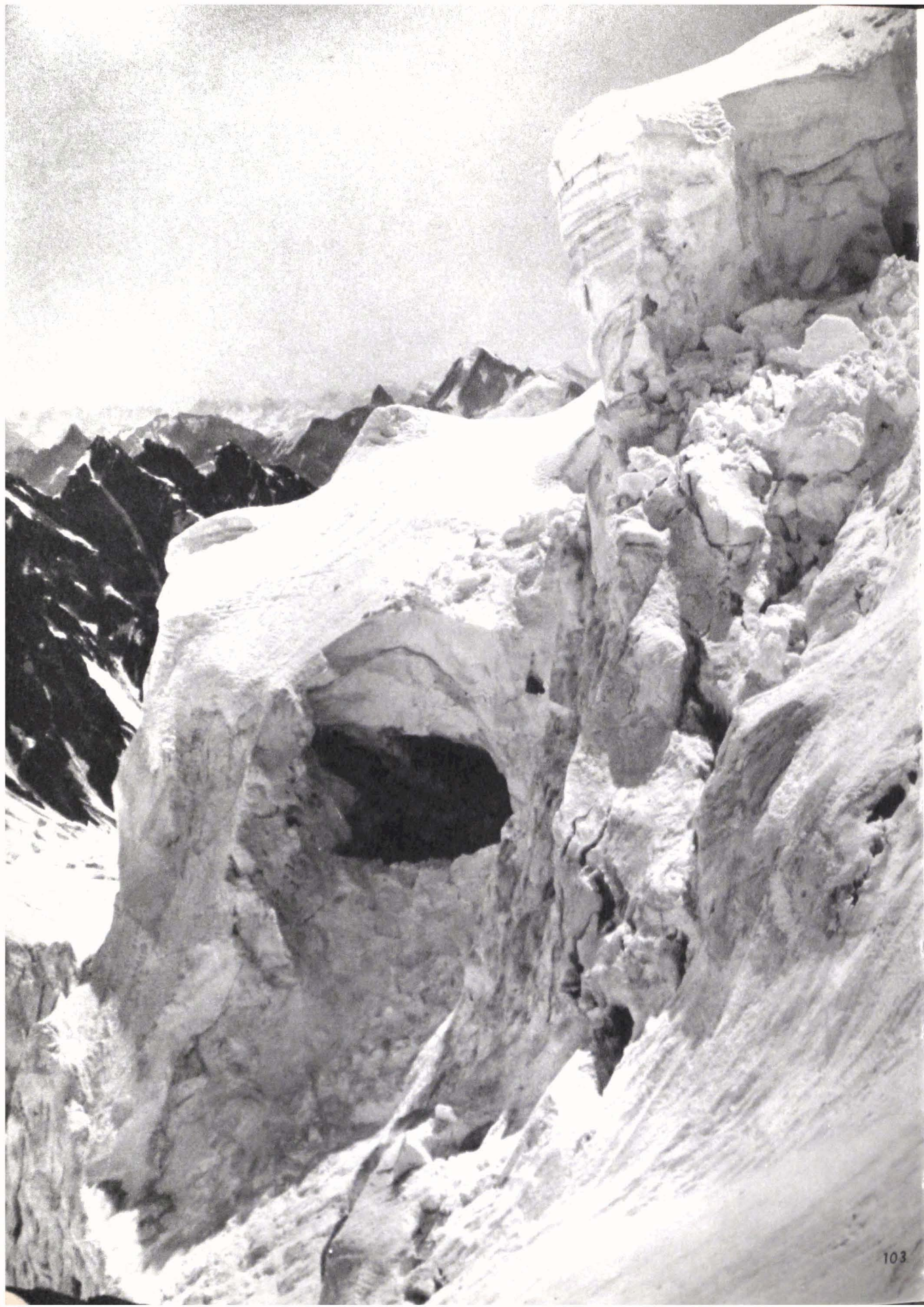
The whole assault-route up the face of Mt. Saraghrar, from base camp (13,750 feet) to the summit plateau (22,950 feet) was like a multi-track railway line, along which there moved various freight-trains, transporting food, mountaineering gear and other equipment from one station (or camp) to another. We were extremely fortunate in that the spiralling route we had chosen allowed us to maintain constant R.T. communication with one another; we called up early in the morning, at mid-day, and several times towards the end of the afternoon. As may easily be imagined, these conversations, besides serving a most useful purpose from the point of view of logistics, also made us conscious of 'the expedition' as a united group, acting together in a joint communal effort. No one was left on his own for long: the R.T. link was a constant boost to each individual's morale.

As far as my own position was concerned, it had been all too clear to me, from the moment I reached Camp One, that it would be the sheerest folly for me even to consider an attempt on the summit: partly on grounds of age, but also (a more weighty consideration) because I was suffering an acute recurrence of my old intestinal complaint, which had left me like a limp rag. 'He has lost nearly two stone', Silvio noted, 'and his face has aged a great deal, especially with that beard.' However, I tried to pull my weight as best





95-102: Our Chitrali comrades on the final assault on Saraghrar: Pahlawan, Murad, Abdul Karim, Hakak, Musharaf, Kadir, Naep, and Sher



103: Huge accumulated ice-blocks, just before a landslide
104: The Ledge of Ice at Camp I

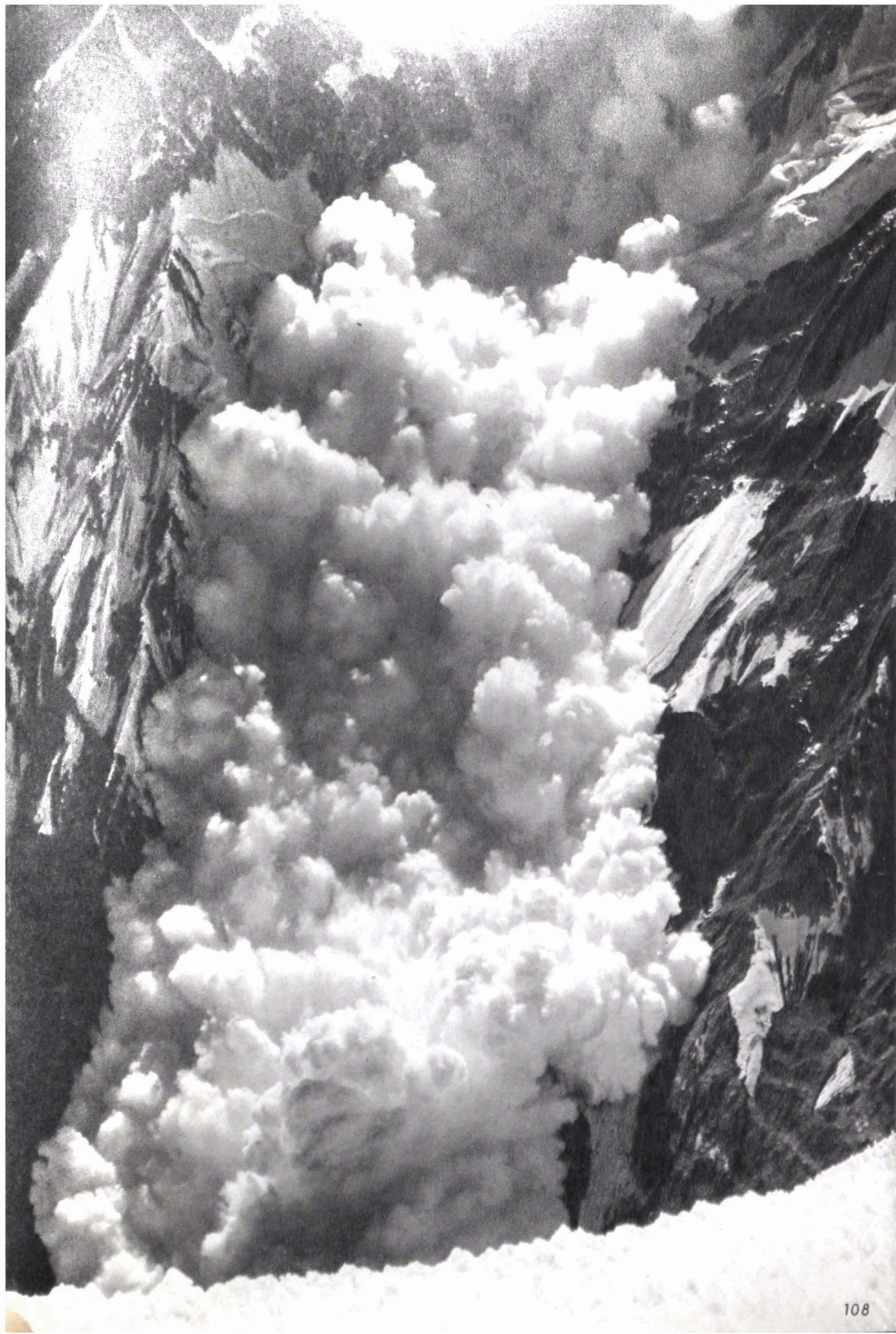


105: Members of the expedition assembled at Base Camp
top row, l. to r., Iovane, Pinelli, Capt. Shapur, Leone,
Castelli, Dr. Lamberti; bottom row, Consiglio, author, Alletto





106-7 (composite shot): On the left, Camp II (c. 16,800 ft.), with the peak of Mt. Saraghrar above it, beyond the terrible and precipitous North Face. On the right the ribbed mountain flank up which the final ascent was made



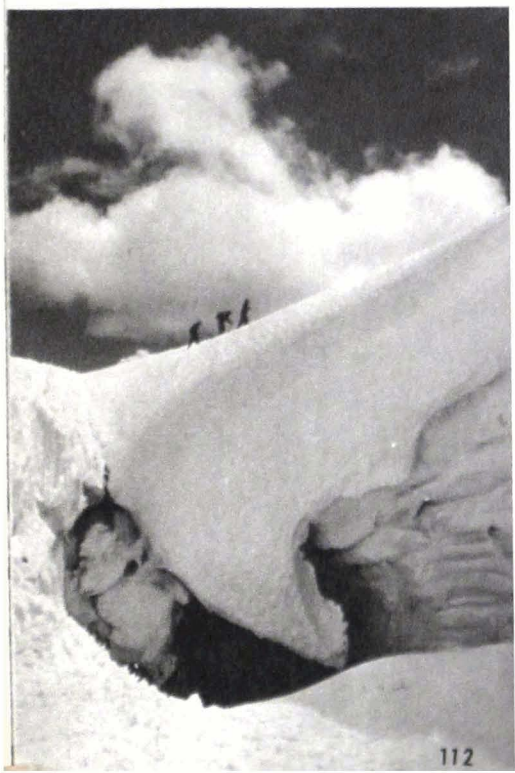
108: An avalanche on Mt. Saraghrar, in full spate



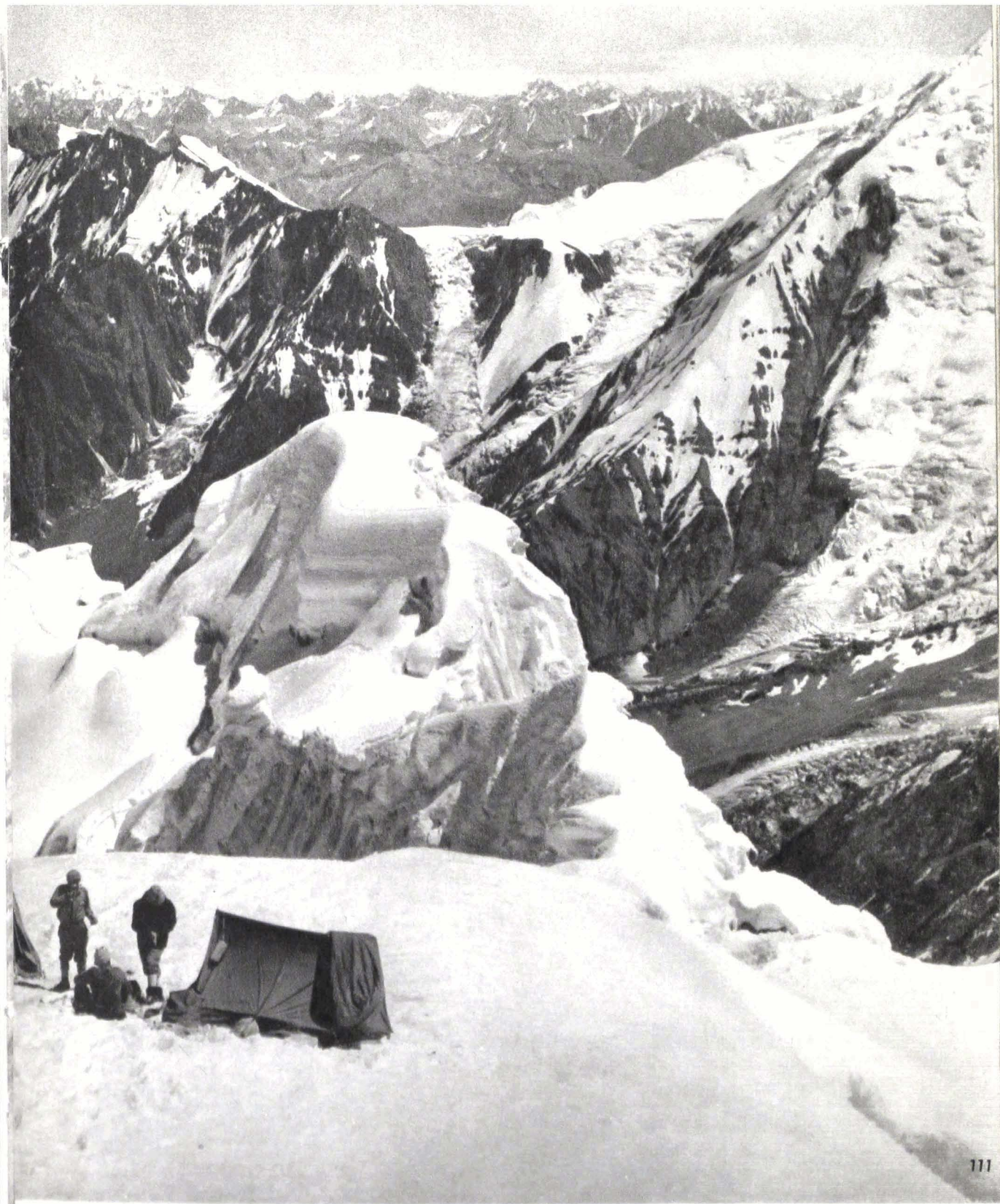
109: The Pass of the Gods, between Camps II and III (c. 17,500 ft.)

110: Supper in camp,
high up the mountain:
a freezing cold night

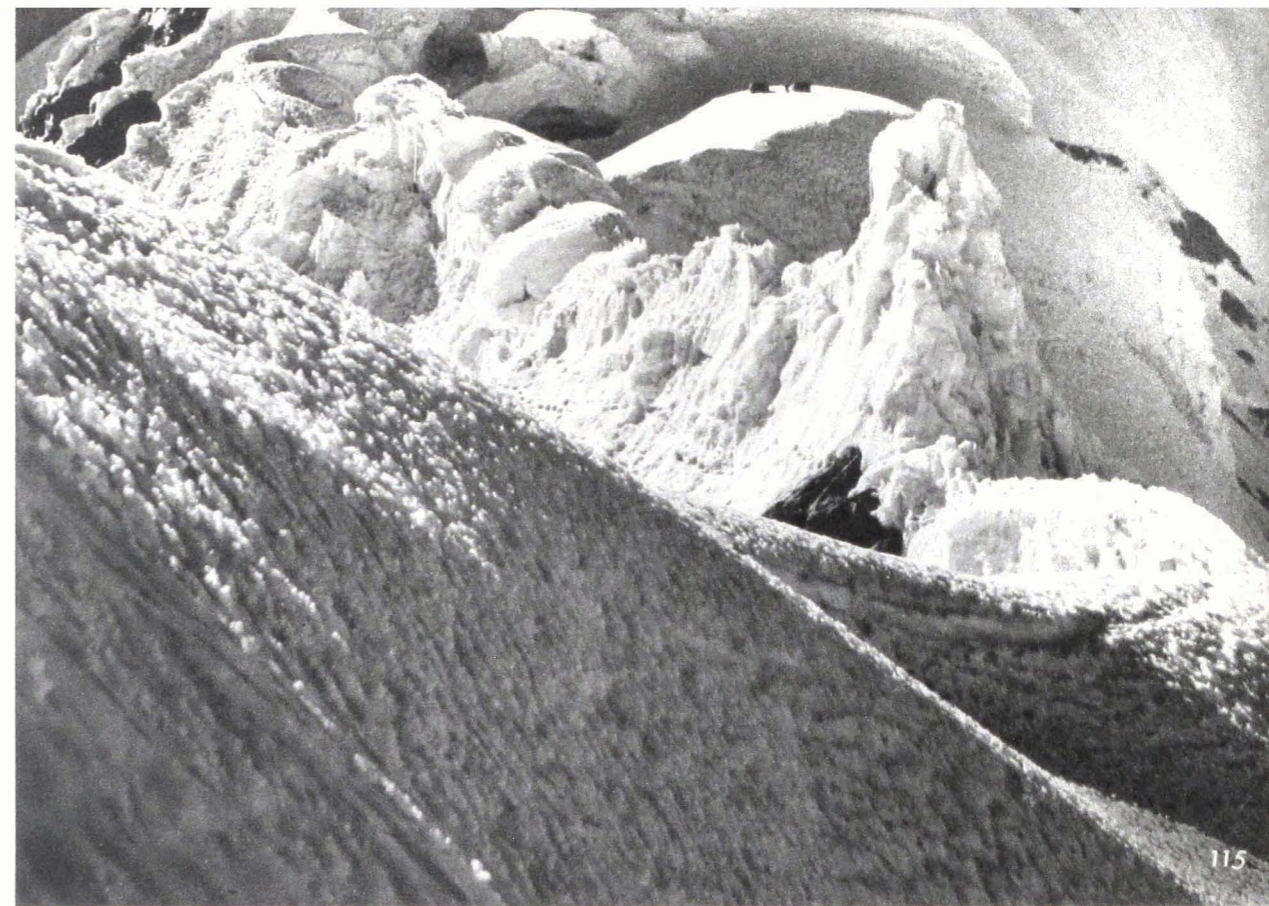
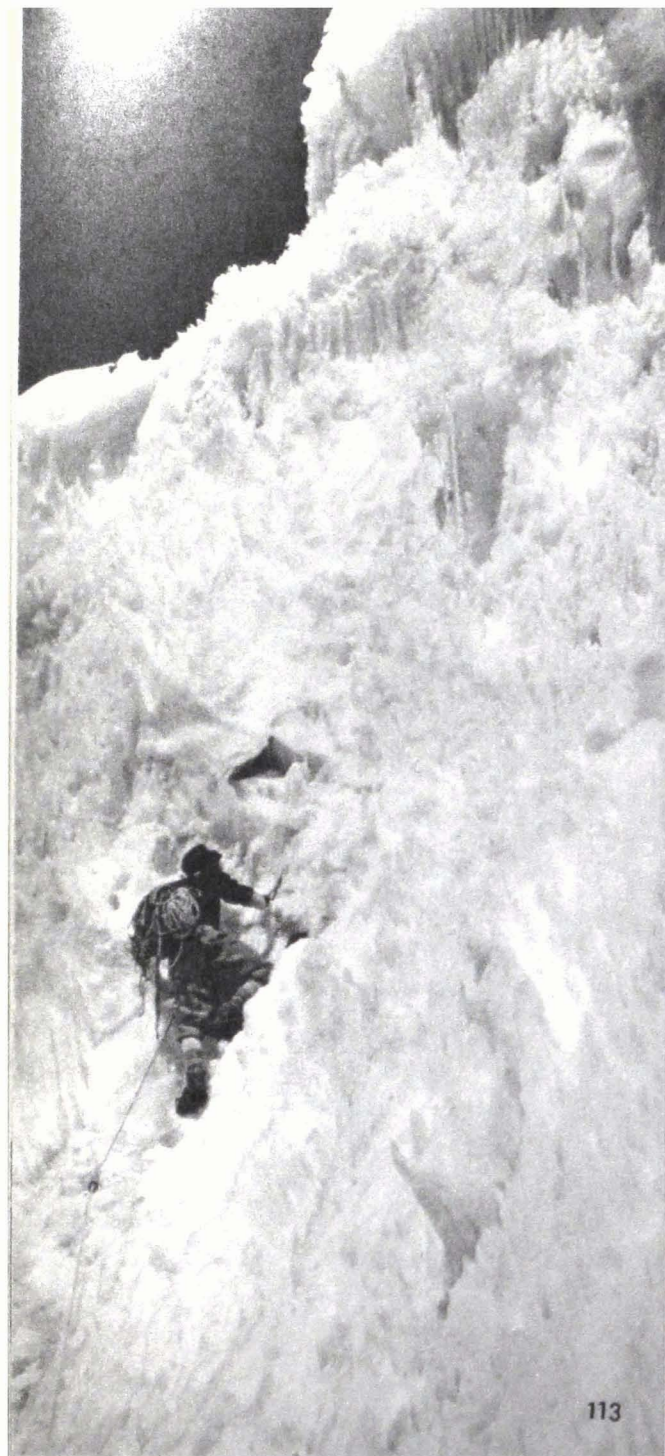




112: Before reaching Camp II we had to cross a 'bridge' over a gigantic crevasse



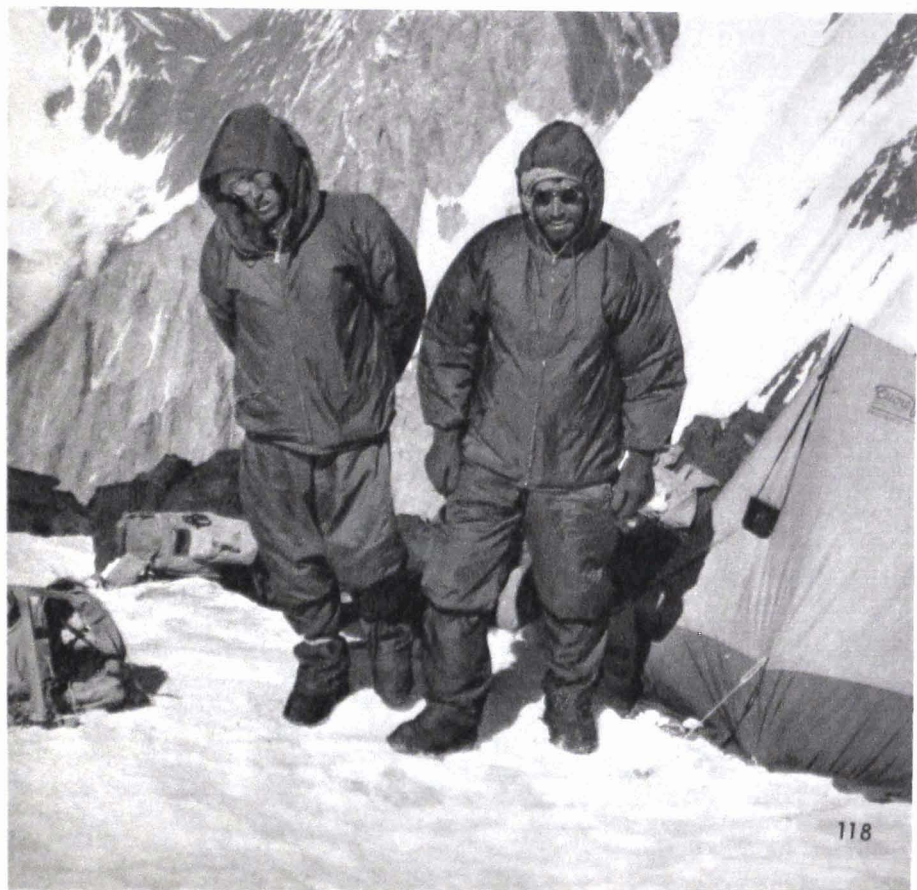
111: View from Camp III (17,750 ft.) towards the Pass of the Gods. The huge mass of frozen snow and ice right of centre is 'the Ship'; left of it, on a level stretch of snow, the roped party's tracks are visible. Directly below the peak on the left ('the Cauliflower Glacier') the tents of Camp II are just visible



113-4: Sheer frozen waterfalls under the 'Tower of Ice'

115: The 'Tower of Ice', from the slopes of 'the Ship'

116: A narrow ridge of ice links the Pass of the Gods and the higher snowfields



117: The upper plateau of Saraghrar, from Camp V

118: Alletto and Pinelli at Camp V (c. 20,000 ft.)

I could by appointing myself, so to speak, stationmaster on the Saraghrar Mountain Railway. I shuttled to and fro between Camp One and Camp Two, with an occasional visit to Camp Three, keeping in constant radio contact with everyone, from those down in base camp on the Niroghi glacier to the roped teams working along the upper skyline. I sorted out boxes, rucksacks, tents, provisions, photographic gear and mountaineering equipment; I worked out and assigned loads to each individual porter. One most striking operation, for instance, was the dispatch of certain special spools of film from base camp to Camp Five, for the attempt on the summit: co-ordinating my porters like a relay team of horses, I got the package up there within a few hours. If there had been a sudden emergency call for medicine or oxygen we could have repeated the feat, and perhaps even have improved on it.

On the 17th August, Paolo Consiglio, Pinelli, Iovane and Leone, together with four porters, set off to establish Camp Four. During an attempt to climb the Whale's Mouth Pinelli went through several moments of tense drama. 'The snow-bridges here,' he afterwards wrote, 'are as thin and insubstantial as pasteboard, and no one in his right mind would risk setting foot on them at all. I, however, being an eternal optimist, decided to risk it—having first asked Silvio to secure my rope really firmly. One step; two steps; and then—whoomph! A great gaping chasm opened up under my feet, so deep that it seemed to go down into the very bowels of the mountain. By some miracle I managed to block my fall with my elbows, on the very edge of the crevasse, and quickly hauled myself out, helped by the rope. Silvio looked very pale, and even my enthusiasm was a little shaken.' The surface of the mountain—or at least, those parts of it which our various roped teams explored—seemed not so much sheathed in ice as made of the stuff; and water, even in its solid state, always preserves something of that capricious, independent quality it possessed as a liquid. To stand, move, and live on ice is a very different proposition from doing the same thing on any rock-face. Ice is an inherently treacherous substance, a mass which is liable to shift (though extremely slowly), and to change its texture (extremely unexpectedly): a mass with secret upheavals in its innermost depths, great flaws and caverns that weaken its structure; a mass which shows you one appearance today and another tomorrow, which is—in short—utterly unreliable at all times.

The porters were highly alarmed by the little episode they had witnessed. If *sahibs* nearly killed themselves in crevasses, things must be tough, and no mistake. They flatly refused to go a step farther—at least for that evening. So the first tent of what had to be regarded as a highly provisional Camp Four was pitched beside the Whale's Mouth. Pinelli, Iovane, and the four porters went back down to Camp Three, leaving Consiglio and Leone behind. The

following morning these two would attempt the final section of the spur, and thus, at last, reach the summit plateau of Saraghrar.

By half-past four in the afternoon the sun had already gone down. Paolo and Enrico managed to discover one reasonably flat surface: the lower lip of the crevasse, of the Whale's Mouth, in fact. The night gave promise of being both bleak and comfortless. Next morning (18th August) they took a long time waking up, and felt extremely listless: the preparations for departure required the most enormous effort on their part. However, the weather was still set fine, and the task for the day one of paramount importance. Paolo and Enrico set off at 10 o'clock, and began to climb the endless slope that would, ultimately, bring them out on the summit plateau (see photograph no. 103). Very soon they reached a small saddle, at a height of about 20,500 feet, which looked the ideal permanent site for Camp Four; and here they dumped some of the gear they had brought with them.

Down below, in Camp Two, we had our binoculars trained on those two black dots, as they slowly crawled across the vast, elemental shoulder of Saraghrar. Those dots were our friends, and the fact at once gave a human dimension to the whole scene. At times Paolo was leading; at times Enrico took over. We could imagine their condition—bent almost double, panting, ravenously hungry: mere husks of men, in whom whole strata and millennia of human history had been burnt away, leaving a residual core of primitivism, as hard as some seasoned, centuries-old log. All that remained was the sense of one overriding duty: to put left foot in front of right, right foot before left, and so on for ever, unceasingly.

At four o'clock we saw the two dots—now mere pinpricks against the immensity of the snow—vanish over the crest of the plateau. At this point, as Paolo noted afterwards, Enrico was leading. 'He stopped for a moment, just below the summit, and beckoned me forward—clearly as an invitation to be the first over the top. This supremely unselfish and generous offer touched me deeply.' Anyone who has ever been up a mountain—even the lowest and easiest of climbs—will know just how satisfying it is to get to the top, conscious, as he slowly labours up one side, of the splendid view awaiting him on the other. Imagine, then, how rare an experience this must have been for Paolo and Enrico. They were actually setting foot on the plateau towards which all their energies over the past few weeks had been directed—with the aid and support of a whole team of fellow-mountaineers and porters. Furthermore, the view from the top was not just 'the next slope', but a whole panorama of the very heart of central Asia. 'Close at hand, beyond one or two minor peaks on the Afghan border, we could see the deep chasm of the Amu-Daria valley,' Paolo wrote, 'and beyond it the first spurs and foothills of the Pamirs; only about fifteen or twenty miles away, as the crow flies,

lay Russian Tadzhikistan. The most striking feature in our immediate vicinity is the small black rocky peak, as yet unnamed (23,100 feet), which impressed us so much by its sheerness and isolation when we saw it from the Ushko glacier. The true summit still remains hidden.'

After a brief halt (to smoke a couple of cigarettes and take some photographs) Paolo and Enrico turned back. The next two days (19th and 20th August) were entirely taken up with shifting men and supplies along the line of camps in order to consolidate our position. The provisional Camp Four was removed from its site beside the Whale's Mouth to the little saddle at 20,500 feet (its permanent position henceforth): this operation was carried out by Pinelli, Iovane, Castelli and Alletto, together with some of the porters: fortunately their refusal to proceed any farther, announced two evenings earlier by Abdul Karim, had been nothing more than the result of a momentary panic. The weather continued perfect.

Poor Iovane, who had set off with such tremendous enthusiasm for the final assault, now succumbed to a violent attack of mountain sickness, almost the moment he reached Camp Four, and had to go back down again. His account of this episode has that special vividness which attaches only to a description written very soon after the event. 'The landscape around us,' he wrote, 'is quite indescribable: so vast, so terrifying—we are really at the heart of Saraghrar here. There was this continual pain in my skull, a real blazing headache in fact—at first I thought it might be due to indigestion, but after a bit I ruled that out: it was mountain sickness all right, but I didn't dare tell Pinelli, just in case it might clear up, otherwise good-bye to all my hopes! The sun went down and it began to get cold, so we retreated into our tent and started getting supper ready. But now my headache was frightful, and promised to get even worse. I stood there at the end of the tent, and Pinelli realized something was wrong. He gave me some Polagin, but this had no effect. Later I tried a tranquillizer. Still no good. Took another Polagin in the evening. Same result. The other two had arrived meanwhile' (that is, Consiglio and Leone, after their successful assault on the last stretch of the spur) . . . 'Outside, the snow on the peak and the summit plateau was flushed red in the sunset. But I still felt really ill. This headache had just about finished me. While Pinelli was in the tent, cooking, I sat outside on a rucksack, despite the intense cold—I couldn't stand the foul air inside, it made me heave, especially at over 20,000 feet where there's so little oxygen. Managed to gulp down some soup for dinner: filthy stuff. More or less resigned to throwing in the towel tomorrow. . . . Headache eased up a bit later, and I went to bed, if you can call it that: a narrow, uncomfortable sleeping-bag in this ghastly tent, with a wall of iced-up canvas an inch or two from my nose. Still, at least I wasn't cold, and I actually managed to get to sleep. In fact, I slept the whole night through: extraordinary. Woke up in a

funny sort of state, wondering where the hell I was. Then I remembered I wasn't in bed at home, far from it, but up here at Camp Four, 20,000 feet above sea-level.'

The next morning (19th August) he seemed a bit better. But after a while 'the headache got worse and worse again, and I felt I could hardly move. To think that on my first trip up here I had a full load and still felt fit at the end of the climb—good for another five hours, in fact! We made ourselves some breakfast, but my stomach was in no state to digest anything: a hot drink was all I could manage. . . . We came down to the temporary site of Camp Four. So exhausted I could barely stand. In this condition the thought of sitting down takes on the most intoxicating attraction. My muscles were so weak and flabby that I could have cried with rage—especially when I looked back up at our peak, the peak-that-might-have-been. I know, now, that I haven't a chance of getting up there: this is the decisive moment of the expedition . . .'

'Silvio is in a state of complete collapse,' Pinelli noted. 'It is not merely physical: his morale has gone too. He would have given anything to reach the summit, and now he finds himself forced to go back down, and abandon all hope of realizing his ambition.'

On 21st August, still in unbroken weather, Pinelli, Alletto and Castelli, plus the two porters Pahlawan and Neap, made the ascent to the summit plateau, following the route pioneered by Consiglio and Leone, and taking with them all the equipment necessary to set up Camp Five (21,650 feet). Towards evening Pinelli came back down to Camp Four, together with the two porters; but Alletto and Castelli remained above, the first members of the expedition to occupy the plateau. The final attack on the peak could not be far off (see photographs 117 and 118).

'The view up here is magnificent,' Castelli wrote in his notebook, in handwriting that was barely legible for the cold. 'We can see the mountains of Afghanistan and Russia; below us lies the Gram Shal valley, and beyond it mountain after mountain, as far as the eye can see. At last we are in a position to enjoy the panorama that has been denied us for so long: it is a wonderful feeling to have really reached this coveted plateau of ours. Horribly cold: the sun sets early, and by half-past four the wind has an icy nip in it, shadows are lengthening. We cooked a meal in the tent, and I took a pill against mountain sickness. I'm scared that I too might be beginning to feel the effects of this high altitude, and have to go back down.'

Luckily for Giancarlo, however, his indisposition was only temporary. Both he and Franco spent the next day (22nd August) in Camp Five, recuperating their energies for the final assault. About 2 p.m. they were joined by Consiglio, Pinelli, and three of the porters, Pahlawan, Neap, and Hakak. Neap and Hakak went down to Camp Three on their own later that afternoon;

Paolo, Betto and Pahlawan remained up at Camp Five, where another tent was pitched to accommodate them.

That evening the conversation over the R.T. link was less technical than usual, and rather more excited.

'Camp Two calling, Camp Two calling, do you hear me, Camp Five? It's the Old Man here. Over.'

'Hullo, Camp Two. Receiving you loud and clear. Everything's buttoned up this end. If the weather holds, and no one gets ill, the day after tomorrow is D-day. Over.'

'Hullo, Franco—how are you? Over.'

'Better, a great deal better: one day's rest has done me no end of good. Over.'

'We'll be listening tomorrow at the usual time, just in case there's anything you need urgently. The doctor and Enrico are both up at Camp Three with the porters, and they could always make the climb up to Camp Five at a pinch. Over.'

'Everything'll be fine, don't you worry. Thanks a lot all the same. How are you doing down there?'

'Not too bad: a little deafness, one or two with the squitters—the usual sort of thing. The doctor's really a tough nut: he's fitter than all the rest of us put together! We're thinking about you. You're very close to us. Good luck with the goddesses of Saraghrar—we're all madly envious! Over.'

'Envious, hell. It's blowing a gale up here, and freezing cold. We may have a good view, but it's not exactly comfortable. Over.'

'Can you see the Pamirs? Over.'

'Yes—just like a huge mosque, with masses of cupolas. Over.'

'How's Pahlawan doing?'

'Pretty well so far. Over.'

'I'd like you to make every possible effort to get him to the summit. It'd be a tremendous moral victory—you know that, don't you? A Pakistani with the final assault party. Do your best, won't you? Over.'

'Don't worry, we know the score—we're all agreed about this one. Closing down now—over.'

'Hold on a second—can I have a word with Pahlawan? Over.'

'*Sahib—Sahib!*'

'Hullo, Pahlawan! *Tikh hai?*'

'*Acha—acha! Chatir ushak . . . [it's cold in the tent] . . . Tikh hai . . . [all's well] . . .*'



So far I have said nothing about the selection—a delicate and vital matter—of the team to attempt the peak itself. It is clear that the success of an

expedition is in no way diminished if only one man succeeds in attaining the final goal, the summit. Classic instances are those of Hermann Buhl on Nanga Parbat (26,600 feet, 1953) and Camillo Pelissier on Kanjut Sar (25,460 feet, 1959). At the other extreme are those ventures in which the entire team reaches the peak; and here the examples that at once come to mind are the French assault on Makalu and the British conquest of Kanchenjunga. Obviously the second category represents the greatest degree of success, and is a tribute to near-perfect organization. Between these two extremes we find many intermediate examples.

What we may term the constitutional set-up of each individual expedition is another factor that should be taken into account. In some the leader is the strongest mountaineer, or one of the strongest. In others what the leader brings to the expedition is experience—of terrain, climbing techniques, and men—so that he is primarily an administrator: when that is so, the final assault team will carry an independent technical responsibility. Our own set-up was peculiarly complicated from the constitutional point of view—and peculiarly weak, as well. I had been invited to lead the expedition because of my previous Asiatic experience, my practical knowledge of caravan procedure, my languages, and so forth. Naturally I had accepted, with the greatest enthusiasm, though I made it quite clear that, both on account of my age and because I had no more than middling qualifications as a mountaineer, I would have to leave specific responsibility for the actual ascent to others. This responsibility was entrusted to two men: Franco Alletto and Paolo Consiglio. We were very lucky in that the delicate balance of this triumvirate was maintained by friendship, mutual respect, and similarity of interests—factors which enabled us to ride the inevitable swell, circumnavigate the inevitable reefs, and, finally, win through to our goal.

Heavy seas and reefs there certainly were ahead of us, and in abundance. It is only natural that on any expedition each individual should have a passionate desire to attain the pre-ordained goal in person. If the object is to make a 32,800-foot dive to the ocean bed, everyone will want to be in the bathyscaph for its crucial descent. If the expedition's target is one of the Poles, everyone will want to be able to say, 'I was there'; and if the aim is to conquer a peak, no one will fancy being left behind at base camp. Summing up our situation about mid-August, it was abundantly clear that Giancarlo Castelli and Betto Pinelli were our strongest pair. Such a verdict makes no claim to be a general assessment of the persons involved: these assaults on the high peaks in Asia and America are such enormous, lengthy, demanding undertakings that by sheer force of circumstance—by the laws of statistics, almost—some individuals are bound to do better on them than others, irrespective of their general moral or physical attainments. An attack of dysentery is enough to lay a man low; a few broken nights may trigger off a series of

mishaps that go on day after day. At this point, and in these particular conditions, there was no doubt about it: Castelli and Pinelli were our most battle-seasoned pair.

Franco Alletto's health was still far from satisfactory. He continued to sleep badly, and to convert what little food he managed to swallow into horrible dirty water. Nothing but a will of iron, as desperate as it was admirable, drove him on from camp to camp. Besides, he was one of the two men responsible for the mountaineering side of the expedition, and had played a major part in conceiving and planning the entire project: so when he insisted on going on he was well and securely within his rights. Many times, with Dr. Lamberti's full approval, I had suggested that he ought to go back to base and have a rest: but I had no authority to present this suggestion as a command. In the last resort, too, there was something both moving and heroic about this death-march of his. At the time, perhaps, it had moral significance only because it enabled us, once or twice, to see our endeavours in their true, full perspective—homunculi crawling like ants up the fretted filigree-work of glaciers, hanging like flies above the avalanche-swept abysses of Saraghrar. But now, looking back at these events with the wisdom of hindsight, I feel that this was one of the most vividly human episodes in the entire affair: a symbol, a banner blazing defiance, the refusal to surrender. It is something the young should remember with admiration.

Paolo Consiglio had not been in the best of health when he left Rome. On several occasions he told me, privately, that he would be happy to get as far as Camp One or Camp Two, and make what contribution he could to the success of the expedition, but he feared he might prove unable to get much higher. Later, when put to the test the hard way, his physique gave every indication of positively thriving on gruelling exercise, high altitudes, and the irregular, chaotic routine of camp life. As the weeks passed, Paolo's health steadily improved; though every now and again, like the rest of us, he had an off-day. So when the crucial moment came he too was quite fit enough (both physically and in respect of his morale) to join the select list of those eligible for the final assault.

At this point I must confess that I had, from time to time, sensed the elements of a potential conflict in the atmosphere: a conflict which, had it developed, I should not, by and large, have been in any position to control. On one hand there was the Castelli-Pinelli team, whose claim to the privilege of scaling the final peak rested on the irrefutable fact that they were, at the time, in better physical shape than anyone else. On the other there was the rival pair, Alletto and Consiglio, whose claim—an equally valid one—was moral rather than physical. They had reconnoitred the assault-route; they had conceived and planned the entire expedition; they had, lastly, fought a superb battle against the most unexpected and debilitating handicaps. The

reader should remember, furthermore, that all this took place in an atmosphere of general fatigue and tension. Everyone was liable to go into ecstasies over the stars that shone down on the mighty ramparts of Saraghrar; we treasured every moment of this sublime and gruelling period in our lives. But the opposite urge—to get back down into the valley, where there was a normal supply of oxygen; to regain our appetites and our ability to enjoy a decent night's sleep; to see such things as houses, fields, women and children again—was now so strong in us that it amounted to a kind of frenzy. Anyway, what about the weather? Who could guarantee that it would go on like this for ever, an unbroken sequence of blue skies and sunlight? So every hour wasted was agony to us, and these burning questions might well have led to desperate solutions.

Fortunately the dramatic conflict I had envisaged never came about. Betto's diplomacy and good manners, plus Giancarlo's natural generosity, and the strong communal feeling they both had for the expedition as a united whole—not to mention their readiness to defer to the older members of the team—all ensured that our advance continued in a spirit of harmonious co-operation, without any jarring awkwardness. In all respects on this score their conduct was exemplary. How I sighed with relief when I learned that all four 'summit-climbers' were under canvas together at Camp Five! It was quite obvious by now that they would all reach the peak together: perhaps they might even manage to get Pahlawan up there too. It really looked as though we were going to score an unqualified success.

The biggest surprise of all, so far as mountaineering went, was our doctor, Franco Lamberti. He, like Paolo Consiglio, had undergone a slow but steady process of acclimatization. By the end he was so fit that he could, beyond any doubt, have reached the peak of Saraghrar. But he knew very well just how much extra strain the addition of one more person to the assault team would place upon our movement and transport arrangements; and he chose instead, with extreme self-effacing modesty, to contribute as best he might to the success of the expedition as a whole. He led roped teams of porters up to Camp Five; he carried packs himself; he was always there when he was needed. A great deal of the expedition's ultimate success was directly due to him.



So far I have, for the most part, described the mainstream of events: but (as in all wars throughout history) life continued the whole time, even in the humblest corners, with a rich profusion of incident and motive. From base camp right up to the glacial summit plateau of Saraghrar—a distance of some ten miles involving a 8,200-foot change in altitude—there stretched a line of camps, a chain of individual human beings subject to the constant changing pressure of time and events. Indeed, one could look even farther,

right back to Washish and Shagram. From this unimaginably remote world of children, and women, and blossoming flowers, there came the carriers who brought mail, potatoes, fruit and chickens over the Dukadak Pass (or through the Ziwar Gorge) to the little outpost on the Niroghi glacier. Everywhere in these mountains our presence contrived to make itself felt.

*

Back at base camp Murad and Captain Shapur reigned unchallenged. From time to time we took a quick trip down there to sort out the equipment that was needed at high altitudes. It was rather like wandering into one of those old cities that in the past had enjoyed a period of importance, perhaps even of glory, but had subsequently sunk back into peaceful rural oblivion, like Populonia, Tuscania, or Eryx. Almost all the tents had been shifted up the mountain, leaving stacks of boxes and other material behind; a crop of tiny flowers had sprung up in the little plateau's sandy top-soil, and everyone was very careful not to tread on them. Murad kept trying to cook fresh meat for us, which he afterwards sent up by porter; but all that arrived at the high-altitude camp were bits of dry black stuff, frozen solid and quite inedible. We told Murad, firmly, that though we appreciated his efforts on our behalf, we would much prefer him to keep the steaks in reserve till we came down again. Captain Shapur was busily going through every paper and magazine he could lay hands on, when not absorbed by news-bulletins or music on the radio. Had his father, I wondered, forbidden him to listen to music as a child? Was this the reason for his passionate preoccupation with it now? Mulai Jan, accompanied by some of the porters, made an occasional two-way trip between base camp and Camp One, or down the valley with the departing mail-carrier. He would have made a very respectable mountaineer, but showed no real ambition to get any higher.

Daily, indeed almost hourly, there was someone coming up or going down along the line of camps; and according to the identity and outlook of the viewer, Saraghrar had a whole quivering visual spectrum, a wide-varying range of mood and sensibility. Once, for example, Consiglio, Lamberti, and Musharaf the porter found themselves in circumstances which made it necessary for them to navigate the Promenade of the Gods at night, by moonlight. They set out from Camp Two just as dusk was falling. 'Soon afterwards the moon rose,' Paolo wrote, 'and by its light we began the traverse from the Tower of Ice, which glimmered vaguely above us in the darkness. It was a new kind of spectacle, this, and an infinitely fascinating one. All those peaks, as far as the eye could reach, and we clinging to the face of a glacier that was striped with alternating bands of darkness and moonlight, while high overhead there gleamed long translucent icicles, like sword-blades. We found ourselves identifying our pitons by a streak of darker

blackness against the night, and stopping every so often to use them as an anchor, while the man ahead executed some manoeuvre that required special safety precautions. I was aware of a strange feeling—I had experienced it before on mountains at night—that I was somehow an integral part of this moonlit scene . . . ?

There is an absolute quality about the night in these remote spots: an air of finality, almost of eternity, as though it were daylight that constituted the off-beat exception to the norm; as though the day as we know it, with its precise limits, its familiar attributes, its breadth and depth, its whole general orientation—including, in the last analysis, those bonds which hold us anchored to the world of our fellow-men—were the merest insubstantial dream. At night mountains, desert, sea or forest cast an immediate and absolute spell over us, draw us into themselves; here we can see an ancient, essentially feminine victory of the inanimate world over the male world of human relationships. The roped team moved from patches of shadow to bars of moonlight and always below them was the no less fearful mystery of the bottomless void, the yawning abysses that dropped sheer to the Niroghi glacier. The episode might well have struck them as a hideous and terrifying ordeal. But Paolo, with his ever-alert sensitiveness to atmosphere, recorded a diametrically opposite impression: 'Lost in this vast and icy wilderness, I got the feeling that the mountain-face had a more *protective* quality at night than during the daytime.'

Somewhat different, though no less psychologically valid, were Pinelli's reactions to the natural world that had, as it were, taken us to its bosom. At Camp Four he wrote: 'No doubt about it, this camp is magnificently sited: perhaps the most attractive position of any camp we have yet set up. To the right of us especially, the great peak has a tranquil grandeur and a purity of line that take one's breath away. This emphasizes the fascination of a boundary which, by hiding the immensity, suggests infinity. Walls of ice at 20,000 feet—and beyond us lie the Pamir Plateau and the Oxus valley and mountains that were there, silhouetted against the stars, when prehistoric man first raised his eyes from the ground.' Then he added: 'Now we are on the heights, it has become very difficult to shrug the weight of this inexorable landscape off one's shoulders—inexorable, all-powerful, yet lacking any true centre, and so always liable to insinuate itself into the recesses of one's mind at moments of tiredness or distraction, or when for any other reason one's vigilance is relaxed. . . . It becomes progressively harder to square one's shoulders, to stand up straight and maintain, against this world of mountain peaks and limitless horizons, our own superiority as human beings—man the conqueror, the master, the creator.'

Here we find two utterly different approaches to the interpretation of nature. Paolo's attitude was quasi-Oriental: by penetrating the mystery

humbly, on tiptoe as it were, he hoped to avoid any disruption of its timeless, miraculous essence. Betto's reaction, on the other hand, was wholly—and consciously—Western; he instinctively rebelled against the idea that a man's own identity could be in any way diluted, adulterated or dissolved by the world of things: they might be magnificent, divine even, but things they remained, now and for ever. Perhaps these form the two extremes between which the whole spectrum of man-nature relationships is contained.

Throughout this period the porters, I had to admit, worked very well indeed. They may not have been Sherpas, but they were a good deal more impressive than the Baltis. One or two really extraordinary episodes involving them are worth putting on record. One day Musharaf, the big, strong fellow who always looked a little depressed, set out, fully loaded, from base camp—and reached Camp Three before nightfall. This was a fantastic achievement, nearly seven miles over moraines and glaciers, and a change in altitude of some 6,000 feet. Small wonder that the following day he was in a state of complete collapse. We really ought to have stopped him from doing such a thing; but he insisted he felt fine, and the advantages of such rapid transport were great enough to make us jettison normal precautions for once. After the first ten days of the final assault period, the porters had assimilated our climbing technique so well that they were able to move from camp to camp in roped teams of their own, without an escort. Hakak and Neap, indeed, made a solo trip along the Promenade of the Gods—which only a few days before had so scared their leader, Abdul Karim, that he had threatened a strike! Four of the porters—Abdul Karim, Pahlawan, Neap and Hakak—reached Camp Five (21,650 feet).

There was only one thing, within the limits of their ability, which the porters refused to do: and that was to spend a night on their own in one of the high-altitude camps, unaccompanied by a member of the expedition. Here the fear of purely physical dangers—slipping and falling on a glacier, being buried by an avalanche—was transmuted into a vaguer, more archaic terror of the mysterious and the unknown. They whispered in hushed voices of goddesses, evil spirits, *shawan* and djinn, strange portentous beings who veered between open malevolence and irresistible, deadly enticement. During the daytime, with all the sounds and sights of humanity comfortingly around them, they felt no cause for alarm; but at night, when the moon hung full in the heavens and the landscape was everywhere dotted and patched and stippled with pockets of dark shadow, who could tell whether some lurking apparition might not be spying on them unawares?

The female spirits that haunt the Chitrali mountains are supposed to have pure white skins—this, one is told, is why they sought refuge up here amid the ice and snow; hence, too, their passion for wandering over these towering, fretted glaciers, or plunging into the bluish-green, turquoise-tinted

mountain tarns. Their feelings towards men are highly unpredictable. Sometimes, if they are disturbed or pursued, they are liable to turn and kill their assailant—an easy task, since they possess supernatural powers. On other occasions they may fall in love with a man, and forcibly seduce him—a fate, we are told, little better than death itself. Be that as it may, when one enters the domain of these strange creatures one must take care to treat them with the most scrupulous respect, and not offend them in any way. One day, Paolo noted, 'We saw Abdul Karim, very early in the morning, carefully boiling some snow on a primus and then washing his face all over. . . . I had seen some of the others doing the same thing. It might have been the normal morning ablutions of a good Moslem—but it might also have been, as Mulai Jan assured us it was, a ritual safeguard against meeting the female spirits of Saraghrar. Another porter, apparently, said that the spirits did not want the *sahibs* on Saraghrar—but perhaps if we all behave well and give no cause for offence, they might turn a blind eye for once.'

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Up at Camp Five everything was now ready for the final spurt. Our four 'summit men' had agreed to proceed in two roped pairs: Alletto and Consiglio leading, Castelli and Pinelli behind. As far as the summit plateau they planned to move as a group. Castelli and Pinelli would then return to Camp Five, leaving Alletto and Consiglio at Camp Six. Next morning, if the weather continued unbroken, one team would set off from Camp Five and the other from Camp Six, both aiming at the summit.

On the morning of the 23rd August Alletto wrote: 'We can feel the snow that has piled up outside the tent pressing against our bodies.' The latest news of Pahlawan was most discouraging: he was feeling ill, and seemed absolutely exhausted. He flatly refused to move, and, as Paolo said, 'all attempts to change his mind proved useless. We feel a little dashed by this, though it is a fact that all the porters who have come this far have suffered, more or less severely, from the effects of the high altitude. Our only hope is that a day of complete rest will put him on his feet again . . .'

The wind and the intense cold between them made even the most ordinary action a lengthy ordeal: it was 11.30 before they could get moving. 'The sun is well up,' Paolo wrote, 'right in the middle of a cloudless sky; but it seems a mere blob of light, very strange and remote, something from another world. We cannot feel any heat from it.' The file of four men advanced very slowly: partly on account of the great height, partly because each was carrying a pack that weighed over 30 lb., and partly through the state of the snow, which was being scoured and whipped up by the driving wind. At times it felt so close-packed that the studs of their climbing-boots scarcely dented it; at times it was the merest surface crust, liable to give way suddenly

beneath the weight of one's body, 'flaking away in a series of soft layers over a wide area', as Betto observed.

Anyone who had been there and watched this quartet pass by would have found them, in outward appearance at least, a weird and monstrous lot. Over their undergarments they wore heavily quilted climbing-suits, with a sheath of rain-proof nylon outside. Their heads were hooded, and their eyes hidden behind dark goggles. They looked like overgrown insects, or Martians who had landed on some part of the planet Earth by mistake (see photograph no. 19).

When they had crossed the first big hump of the plateau (it was christened the Dome, being somewhat reminiscent of a similar configuration on Mont Blanc) they found a suitable site and set up the tents for Camp Seven, at a height of nearly 23,000 feet. From here they had a clear view of the peak itself—though 'peak' was perhaps a misnomer: what greeted their eyes was a long ridge with three major crests, and how to tell which of them was in fact the highest? Everyone hoped against hope that it would turn out to be the first one, though at this distance it was impossible to tell. There still remained another 1,300 feet or so to climb, and a similar distance to cover across the flat. In the afternoon Castelli and Pinelli returned to Camp Five, where they were sleeping; when they got there they found Pahlawan slightly improved, but still in no fit condition to go on the final assault next morning.

In Camp Six, Alletto and Consiglio were settling down for the night. The wind had lost some of its fierceness. 'For the first time,' Paolo noted, 'the setting sun is not hidden from us by the parched, barren mountains of Afghanistan. It is quite unbelievably beautiful.' Below them they could see the edges of the summit plateau, and the sheer face of the precipice above the Niroghi glacier—a fearful and dismal spectacle. Beyond it they had a view of the upper half of the North Cwm, by which a British expedition had, in 1958, attempted to approach the summit plateau of Saraghrar; they found it appallingly difficult, and had no hesitation in discarding it as a possible approach during their preliminary reconnaissance. In the far distance the sun went down at last, behind whole ranges of unknown peaks that stretched away to the remote horizon, to Afghanistan, and Persia, and Russia. 'Soon afterwards darkness fell, and we wriggled into our sleeping-bags. We chatted for a bit while we smoked a last cigarette: then we extinguished our little lamp, and slept.'



Thanks to all the gods of Saraghrar, the weather continued to be glorious. The 24th August was no exception, and dawn broke clear and brilliant. Up there on the plateau, among the broken domes and pyramids that encircled

the peak, mists or sudden blizzards could well prove a fatal hazard. Everyone knew by now that we were a few hours only from the crucial moment; in each camp men sat and waited, breathless with impatience. 'This,' wrote Alletto, 'is the great day.' 'At last—the day of decision' was how Consiglio put it. 'Horrible night,' wrote Castelli, as though to peg his notes to the mundane level usually observed in such entries. 'Got very little sleep. Crammed in between Pahlawan and Betto. P. kept digging his elbows into me, B. went on moaning because he couldn't find a comfortable position. At 6 a.m. we got up and made breakfast.' They had a series of pills with them, containing proteins, glucose, and various other 'scientifically prepared' ingredients; in theory these should have been perfectly adequate, but when it came to the point everyone's stomach howled for sugar, soup, cheese, bread, meat and the rest of it. It is difficult to anticipate everything, and at high altitudes people develop unexpected arbitrary whims, rather like pregnant women. 'We cooked the last of the rice,' Giancarlo went on, 'and I was so preoccupied with thoughts of the vast effort I would shortly have to make that I could hardly get it down. . . .' They set off at eight, leaving Pahlawan in the tent, with enough supplies of every sort to last him for at least thirty-six hours.

By a great stroke of good fortune, the wind had dropped almost completely. The footprints left on the previous day's trek round the flank of the Dome were still visible, and they could thus climb comparatively quickly. They reached the tents of Camp Six by 10.45 a.m., to find that Franco and Paolo had just left. But from this point onwards the two teams were always in sight of one another.

The terrain they had to cross was ridged and undulating, and looked, on the face of it, curiously un-Himalayan. Those snow-hillocks, together with a few exposed patches of small rocks and broken stones, were much more reminiscent of some wintry scene in the Abruzzi. 'Crossing the plateau,' Alletto wrote later, 'is a straightforward march across almost level ground, but nevertheless extremely exhausting. We had to go very slowly, taking two or three breaths at every step, and make our way over a crust of surface snow which frequently subsided under us.'

Gradually, with frequent rest-periods, the two teams advanced towards the mountain's topmost peak, that triple massif whose separate cusps we afterwards labelled Saraghrar I, II, and III. The first of them seemed beyond any doubt the highest (see photograph no. 21), and this was a great piece of luck, since the effort required to keep going became more and more crippling as time went on. Paolo wrote: 'Franco and I now found ourselves at grips with the final pinnacle; we were on a steep, frozen face, which presented no outstanding difficulties, but had to be tackled cautiously. Behind us the two 23,000-foot peaks of the Ushko—those fantastic and

exciting twin pyramids, compact of rock and glacier and so regular they might have been a geometrical drawing—now looked far flatter, as though someone had squashed them. . . .’ Franco normally led, but every now and then Paolo would go ahead to set the pace for him, establish a proper rhythm. At heights such as this rhythm is vitally important. ‘Take one false step, out of time,’ Paolo recorded, ‘and a halt becomes necessary—indeed, indispensable.’

Meanwhile down at Camp Two, on the ridge just below the Promenade of the Gods, we followed their progress towards the peak through binoculars. We had a very clear view of them. Every time they stopped we wanted to give them all our own remaining energy: we were like supporters at a hard-fought football match.

The slope seemed to be somewhat less steep now. Franco was leading again.

‘Carry on for this next rope’s length and then let’s change over again,’ Paolo called out to him. Franco slowly clambered up a shallow snow-bank, which was followed by a stretch of glacial detritus, the slope becoming continually less pronounced. This in turn led to a small rocky crest. By now the gradient was so slight that the ground seemed more or less flat. ‘There was nowhere higher for us to climb. Wherever we looked, the ground sloped down, all round us.’ Was this the peak? Franco at once took a look at the two alternative possibilities. The second peak could be ruled out right away: it was clearly much lower. But—so was the third! Franco noticed that it lay level with another peak, above the Rosh-Gol, which was a bare 23,000 feet. This meant that the first peak, Saraghrar I, was the highest, and that they were actually standing on the mountain’s summit at that moment. He called down to Paolo: ‘There’s no need for you to take over from me now—we’re there! This is it!’

Paolo joined him, and the two men threw their arms round each other. It was ten minutes to three. About half an hour later Castelli and Pinelli also reached the summit, and they all stood there together on this great pile of loose scree and wind-scoured, frost-cracked rocks that formed the topmost peak of Saraghrar. Though the four of them heard nothing on their remote pinnacle, shouts of joy and congratulation were going up from every camp along the line: every minute of the final assault had been watched by those down below.

What did the four victors feel at that moment, as they stood—rare and remarkable achievement—not only on the top of a great mountain, but also at the apex of a pyramid whose base had to be measured in months rather than feet? Their success was shared by the whole expedition, and everyone who had made the venture possible—our friends and backers in Rome not least. It justified all the help we had received on our journey, all the labours

of our Chitrali porters over the stony heights of the Dukadak Pass, or through the frozen avalanche-haunted passage beneath the Tower of Ice. But at such moments people are liable to the most unpredictable emotions, untrammelled and instinctive reactions which have nothing to do with the rational, circumstantial context in which they take place.

Franco gave very little away. After a reference to embracing Paolo, he went straight on: 'We took a careful and accurate note of the panorama before us.' How typical of the man of action this laconic simplicity, this total absence of even the briefest personal reflection, this instant turning to the external world—as though his achievement were no more than a prelude to further discoveries and conquests. Yet to have been the first man to set foot on this patch of the earth's surface represented a deeply satisfying victory on his part—a victory won, at long odds, over himself and every possible sort of adversity, the hazards of Nature included. Yet—and this was in perfect conformity with his character as a whole—he preferred not to make any direct reference to such matters.

Paolo, on the other hand, looked in as well as out: with him action and analysis, initiative and reflection were equally balanced. 'We climbed on, and it was as though the climb would never end. The one thing we knew was that we had to walk with our eyes on the toes of our boots, our whole attention concentrated on preserving the rhythm of our breathing. The peak? Well, one day perhaps we might get there. . . . The important things were not to hurry, not to become over-tired, and to get used to the thin air: especially (this was our constant nightmare) not to hurry, not to hurry. . . . Why did we have to get there today, anyhow? Then, suddenly, as though we had been transported thither by the wave of a magic wand, Saraghrar was beneath our feet. Even at the eleventh hour that damned mountain had wrong-footed us again. . . . Now, wherever we looked, there was nothing above us. There followed what seemed like a slow resurgence of feeling and energy, an ebbing away of all the tension that had gripped us during the past few days. . . . Those months of hope and uncertainty, with all their dreams and struggles, were over now, part of the inexorable pattern of the past—yet still we couldn't quite believe it.'

Perhaps death may be much the same: a dazed state from which, very slowly, one begins to re-awaken. But there was no doubt in anyone's mind about the sudden relaxation of a general inner tension that had become almost unbearable. 'Instead of the wild happiness, the explosive and unrestrained outburst of joy that I expected to sweep over me,' Pinelli noted, 'there was this barely perceptible sense of relief, this serene tranquillity slowly spreading through my mind—a less obvious satisfaction, perhaps, but certainly no less deep or mature: as a workman who can with modest honesty say, when knocking-off time comes, that he has done his full day's stint,

and done it well.' Shortly before this he had written: 'The dinosaur has succumbed to man's assault, and our climbing-boots have trampled across its head. . . .' Here is Betto once again expressing his thoroughly Western nature; here he is living up to that secret St. George in his heart!

Giancarlo confessed that the emotional effect of reaching the summit was enormous: 'For no apparent reason I began to cry,' he wrote.

But time was getting on. There were the usual ceremonies of taking pictures and unfurling flags, performed in accordance with the iron tradition governing such moments. This done, they had a little while left to rest and survey their kingdom. 'The view leaves one absolutely breathless,' Paolo scribbled; 'we can see all the way from the Pamir Plateau, rising in the distance with its 23,000-foot peaks, to the white and awe-inspiring throne of Nanga Parbat in the east, rising some 26,600 feet above the haze and mist of the Indus valley.' Closer in the foreground rose Tirich Mir (seen now from the opposite side to the usual and much-admired Chitral view), Istoru Nal, Noshaq, and a whole host of other, lesser peaks, already half-obsured by the first evening shadows.

It was time to think about their return journey. The morally-inspired energy that had sustained Paolo right up to the summit was suddenly much less in evidence. 'Perhaps now that the nervous tension of the ascent itself was over,' he wrote that evening in his notebook, 'one's physical system—which was badly overstrained and exhausted, and kept going only by sheer will-power and determination—firmly took the upper hand. I sat there on that peak, hardly moving (while the others were still rushing round taking photographs from every angle), and doing my best not to waste one single precious calorie of energy. I looked at the panorama directly in front of me, but I didn't turn round, since this would have required physical effort. I was concentrating on one thing alone: husbanding all my strength for the return journey. So this was the famous "Himalayan listlessness", the odd condition of prostration about which I had read and heard so much. Now I had it . . . It felt as though my head and my body were two detached objects, joined by nothing. . . .'

The descent to Camp Six was slow, lengthy, and laborious. Paolo in particular had to drag himself along, teeth clenched: 'On the last stretch, just before reaching the tents, our route doubled back uphill for a short way, and every step was sheer agony for me. Every few yards I had to stop and gather my wandering will-power again before I could muster enough energy to go on. Franco gave me a lot of encouragement. If I could have sat down for a moment it would have been a great help, but dusk was coming on . . .' The four men reached camp about 7 o'clock in the evening. The original plan had been that Franco and Paolo should carry on as far as Camp Five; but they were too worn out for this, and it was decided that they should all

spend the night in the one tent. They were so exhausted that morning came almost before they were aware of it: besides, being squeezed in so close together, almost on top of one another, prevented their feeling cold. On the other hand, they were beginning to feel horribly hungry; and provisions were running short.

Next morning (25th August) the four of them said goodbye for the last time—‘with a sharp if unadmitted pang of nostalgia’—to the spot where, for two nights only, our tiny Camp Six had existed. They took all the gear with them. Hunger continued to gnaw at their vitals. Shortly after mid-day they reached Camp Five, where they found Pahlawan stretched out on his rubber mattress, ‘motionless and looking just about done in,’ as Paolo noted. ‘Beside him stood a pot containing a little half-melted snow to quench his thirst. We found he had eaten nothing at all for three days. We therefore got in touch with Fosco at once on the R.T. link. From Camp Two, he had followed our progress through binoculars. In great excitement we told him of our victory, and he, for his part, informed us that the doctor and Hakak were on their way up. At that moment we could have hoped for no better news . . .’



While the four members of the assault team were panting laboriously up towards the summit, with glassy expressions more appropriate to victims of hallucination, down at Camps Two and Three a secret drama was raging in Silvio’s mind. If I had known about it at the time, I should have been really furious—not so much because of the gesture he was contemplating as on account of the serious danger to which two of our men would have been exposed, possibly with fatal consequences. Nothing remains of the episode today but a few scribbled notes: the facts no longer matter in themselves. All that can interest us is the manner of their telling; and here, my dear Silvio, you more than get your own back on everything and everybody. You suffered a lot; far too many things went awry for you, you never achieved any of the ambitions you so desperately cherished, and well deserved to attain. But today—let me say this in all sincerity—you speak to us through some of the most honest (and most finely expressed) pages this or any mountain can have inspired.

‘Monday 24th August. Wake to the faint warmth of the just-risen sun, feeling confused and worried. I have to go to Camp Five to pack the equipment: from there to the summit is only a matter of hours, I must make some attempt to get there! It will be an ordeal, right enough, but I don’t mind: such a chance comes only once in a lifetime, and it’s worth having to grit your teeth. At the most I might suffer extreme exhaustion—surely nothing worse could befall me? Try to see if I can spot Neap, who I know desperately

wants to reach the summit himself: will try to persuade him to make the attempt with me tonight, at the full moon. Come what may, I will reach the summit, and then I shall rest content. But there is no sign of Neap anywhere along the track immediately below me. Stay in the tent and try to sleep, while outside the sun blazes down and the air is hot and stifling. My mind remains constantly obsessed by the same problem: is it, or is it not, worth it to make this desperate attempt of mine? But win or lose, and whatever my motives, it's a chance I mustn't let slip, the opportunity of a lifetime. At 1 p.m. Neap arrives. Excellent fresh chapattis for lunch. While Fosco is busy watching the ridge through his binoculars I secretly broach my plan to Neap. Since we have few words in common in any language and communicate largely by gestures, there is the advantage that Maraini cannot overhear us; and as all his attention is directed towards the peak he is unlikely to notice us either. However, it seems that Neap does not fancy the idea of setting out at full moon. *Mas no tikh*, he tells me: "moon no good".

'A sudden shout from behind us: there they are on the plateau! Fosco has spotted them, they're nearly at the summit. There they are, we shout, they've made it, and we dance about in the snow from sheer excitement. I wait eagerly for the actual moment when they set foot on the summit itself: wait for them to embrace each other and hoist the flags and take the photographs. During this period a strange feeling invades me, a mixture of envy and immense joy—and the envy is not true malicious envy so much as the natural desire to stand in another man's shoes, without any personal feelings of hostility towards him. In many ways I am honestly pleased and happy: I know so well how they must be feeling at this moment, seeing the last few yards of the mountain above them, and beyond that the sky, nothing but sky for endless miles, knowing that their task is done, that they are on the summit of Saraghrar. This must arouse unbounded joy and impatience in their hearts, and I, too, have the right to share their feelings, if only in some small degree. Try to grasp the element of joy, and find it genuine and strong. But one mad desire still rules me: I must, I must reach the summit myself. Fosco says they are climbing without ropes, and that means there are no serious difficulties or dangers. Also, if I can't find anyone to accompany me, it means I could very well make the attempt from Camp Five—or even from Camp Four—solo; it would be wonderful not to be enslaved by another person's movements and needs. Somehow I must do it. I can hardly restrain myself, and Neap, too, is making gestures which suggest the same urge: every so often he mutters *bisi!*—"let's be off!"

'But we have to wait till the doctor reaches Camp Four and sends a message over the R.T. link—in particular we must find out how much petrol they need up there, since the summit team will probably come down to Camp Four for the night. The sun is beating down fiercely, and the two

porters, Sher and Neap, are beside themselves with excitement. Shortly afterwards the cry, "There they are!" goes up again, and two more figures appear on the peak which the first pair have already scaled: Pinelli and Castelli. The time is 2.35 p.m.; at this decisive moment I feel simultaneous happiness and deep dejection—the expedition is over and done with now as far as I am concerned. Fosco is talking to the doctor. Just at this moment two cyclopean avalanches plunge down towards the Niroghi glacier. Manage to get away at last, with the intention of reaching Camp Four, where the doctor says there is room for me. Even if it's inconvenient it should do me for a few hours. After getting a short way up the ridge I suddenly realize I've forgotten my windcheater, which I normally carry knotted round my waist, in such a way that I can sit on it when I rest in the snow, and not get my trousers wet—especially since the trousers have got a hole right through them, and I don't want snow in my underpants. Go back to get it feeling filthy-tempered, and extremely impatient. At every step my feet slip and skid in a particularly awkward way on the wet, yielding snow. I begin to tire, and this induces a feeling that I had hoped to achieve too much: how presumptuous of me, thinking I could ever haul myself up to that distant peak! Find an old abandoned case full of chapattis, and eat heartily. But I know I'm at the end of my tether, and that we won't get any farther than Camp Three. Neap is all for pushing on, but it's late and I'm tired, and this is where we sleep, I tell him. We chat for a little, rather constrainedly, about the summit, and some of the gear which is being left behind and which he would like as a present. Then I give him one of the sleeping-bags that are still stored at Camp Three, and he goes off to bed. I stay outside, heating up a little broth on the one remaining primus. There's nothing else to eat, but I'm not hungry anyway. Then I go into the tent, prop myself up on my rucksack, and begin to write up my diary, thinking that some day, in Rome, I shall look at these inked words and recall how I wrote them one chill evening at a height of 19,000 feet, alone in my tent, with a boundless horizon before me and frost nipping my fingers, full of nostalgia and the bitterest disappointment. Till a few hours ago I still had hopes of success; now the whole thing is finished, over. Find myself thinking how many disappointments mountains can bring one—but in the last resort, how many good things as well. . . . Settle down for the night in my tent, hunt out the sewing-box (still done up just as Teresina sent it to me) and the pullover I bought with Pierino at Porta Portese for 4,000 lire; then I write a few more lines, here on this white ridge at 19,000 feet, knowing that the time will come when I shall recall today's unhappiness, and find it, too, good in retrospect. Open my sleeping-bag, and get a horrible shock: the zip-fastener is broken, and the bag is too small for me anyway. So it's pretty clear I'm going to have a cold night of it. Fix myself up as best I can, and lie there listening to the silence

(broken occasionally by the rumble of an avalanche) while through the tent's green canvas the last light slowly ebbs away.

'I think about the air-trip from Rome, and how I would describe it; I live the whole experience over again—it's all far away now, and to recall it gives me pleasure—from the moment when I turned back for the last time to look at the friends I was leaving behind, as they stood there outside the airport buildings. Then I awake from my delightful daydream to a very different reality: this implacable cold, this mountain solitude. Re-arrange my sleeping-bag, but it keeps coming further undone, till in the end it is wide open. Being so narrow, it is no earthly use as a coverlet: my feet are so frozen I can hardly feel them. There is very little I can do about this. Look at my watch and find—horrors!—that it's just 9 p.m. Feel as though I'm stuck for the night on some Alpine route. . . . After what seems an eternity of waiting, it is still only 11 o'clock. Try to sleep, but it's quite hopeless. I turn this way and that, huddled up in a corner, stuffing pullover, pants, socks and other objects into every crack where the cold comes in—but each time I move I get uncovered. Meanwhile the canvas wall of the tent has become luminous again, with a pale, faint glow: the moon is up, that same moon by whose light I hoped to reach the summit. From time to time the entire situation gets me so desperate and furious that I begin talking aloud to myself, belly-aching and cursing away till Neap, from the other tent, makes some quite unintelligible reply, and I dissolve into fits of laughter. Finally I emerge from my tent into the moonlight, and Neap, hearing me, pokes his own head through the tent-flap and stares at me in horrified amazement. What is worrying him is the fact that I have put on my trousers and am tightening my belt: amazement gives way to blind terror as he comes to the obvious conclusion—that I am determined to climb Saraghrar in the middle of the night, as I in fact proposed to him yesterday. But at the time he said no, very firmly; and now he stands there goggling at me, with God knows what going on in his mind, while I continue to admire the dim, moonlit panorama of these eternal mountains and glaciers, wrapped for the moment in silent sleep. Neap sees I'm cold, and offers me his own sleeping-bag; but I think of him, poor devil, and can't bring myself to take it. Put on my American pullover while he goes out in his pants to relieve himself.

'The remainder of the night is even more ghastly: I lie there watching the tent wall, waiting to see the moonlight relieved by the first flush of dawn. Now we are here I must take a photograph of dawn coming up. Throughout this entire expedition I don't think anyone has ever managed to get up early enough to catch an actual sunrise; well, I shall rectify the omission. Throw off all the bits and pieces covering (or rather, not covering) me, and look out of my tent towards the east. See the distant mountains in clear-cut silhouette, and behind them a fine sky that heralds the sun's imminent rising—but it's

still a long way behind them, somewhere over China and Japan and all the countries of the East. Come in again. At last, some little while later, the crucial moment arrives: a wonderful streak of orange light, an infinity of fine rays spearing upwards behind the mountain-peaks, and brightly patterned against a curtain of morning mist. A magnificent spectacle, that speaks eloquently to me of the far, unknown lands where those rays so lately passed. But I am pretty certain that such scenes, for all their splendour, are virtually impossible to capture with a camera. Very soon the sun pushes up above the horizon, and I open the tent-flaps. The tent is completely frozen, since the vapour from one's breath condenses on the canvas and leaves a hard icy surface there. The sun's first rays immediately strike warm as I let them in. After a little I pull the mattress outside and lie down in the sunshine. Neap comes out of his tent and tells me, firmly, that we ought to go on; but he very soon realizes that, after such a night, I have very little stomach for further exertions. I get dressed, and we begin to dismantle the tents. Mine is split and warped (to cap everything else) by the past few days' sunshine. Then we pile up all the equipment that will be of no possible further use here, and sort it out: there is a remarkable amount of it. Rather unenthusiastically we divide it into two and make a couple of packs out of it. Find it exhausting enough merely to stand up, but now we must hit the trail—downhill, it is true, but each carrying a load that weighs at least 30 lb. I honestly don't think I can make it.

'Tuesday 25th August. One good thing at last, anyway: I got my shoes and socks off, helped by Neap (what a decent fellow he is: a young family man, with that dark-complexioned, friendly, typically Pakistani face of his, and those splendid moustachios): when he discovered what the matter was he got hold of my frozen feet and gave them a lengthy, most efficient massage. In return I presented him with my pocket nail-scissors, having heard him complain he had nothing to trim his moustache with. Reach Camp Two, where we are greeted with some surprise by Maraini, who expected us to be on our way to Camp Four by now—indeed, by his reckoning we should have been at Camp Four last night and on the way to Camp Five this morning. Explain to him that I just didn't feel up to it, last night or this morning; and I must really look flaked out, not to say shaky on my pins, since Fosco at once suggests my going back to base camp, concluding with a word of approval for my decision to come down when I did, and to bring back the surplus gear from Camp Three. Try to eat some breakfast, but my stomach rebels. Manage to stay on my feet despite intermittent giddy spells. Realize that my reserves of energy are very slight indeed. Sit down on a coiled-up climbing-rope, and am forced to face the fact that I must go back to base camp, though such a course of action makes me feel wretched, almost as though I were a deserter, with all the rest of them still up here, slaving away,

sleeping and eating badly, suffering from the cold and innumerable other hardships. Still, at least I can make myself useful by taking eight telegrams with me announcing our victory. Retire to my tent and sleep for a little; but am woken up by the hoarse, unbelievably loud shouts of Neap, who is trying (from Camp Two) to make himself heard by Hakak, up at Camp Four, and is under the illusion that his efforts are meeting with success. At the arranged time, the doctor comes through on the R.T. link, and contact is re-established. The news of our victory is broken to him: this is the first he has heard of it. This shouting goes right through my head, and despite the heat, I feel shivery, which probably means I have a slight fever, and therefore am quite right to go down to base camp. My most pressing problem is the great difficulty I have in standing on my own two legs: how on earth am I going to manage the journey back, especially with that damned great pack weighing me down? About 12.30 p.m. I painfully drag myself out of my tent and get ready. The load seems to weigh a ton, and nearly bends me double. How on earth am I going to move? But somehow I march off, together with Sher—though I haven't the heart to turn round for one last look at the place (and can't make up my mind whether it's beautiful or ugly at that), or the energy to think back to my arrival there; down I plod, my mind concentrated on one object only—reaching the bottom. For the last time pass under the Tower of Ice (it doesn't fall), and then I'm out of danger. Reach Camp One safely. Find Enrico there, chewing a hunk of goat's meat; I have some too, and we chat for a while. . . .'



On the West Cwm and the whole of the high-lying Rome glacier, as far down as Camp One, summer was suddenly with us: the brief, transitory summer characteristics of these Asian altitudes. A slight rise in temperature from that prevailing at the beginning of August, plus a series of brilliantly sunny afternoons, sufficed to transform the landscape utterly. Hitherto the surface of the glacier had been covered with an even layer of snow, with gentle dips and hummocks, that looked as though it might make an easy ski-run, just the thing for schoolchildren on Sunday afternoon. But now the snow was almost totally gone, and all that remained of it was an occasional small, dirty patch between one crevasse and the next. The whole glacier lay revealed to us: an age-old, glass-green, skeletal structure, its surface split all over (like ribs or knuckles) with clefts, chasms, fissures and crevices of every sort. Water came tumbling down everywhere, in gurgling cascades, and contributed to the feeling of general break-up that was in the air. The tents of Camp One acted as a protection to the snow on which they stood, and prevented it from melting; with the result that they were left high and dry on curious altar-like erections a yard or so above the

rest of the glacier, looking rather like miniature versions of the Meteora rock-monasteries in Thessaly.

The camp was occupied again for a few hours, and the chasm beneath it—round which the thunder of avalanches echoed louder than ever—rang also with the sound of gay, cheerful voices. Everyone had suddenly calmed down: those pent-up desires and appetites were released. The only surviving appetite, in fact, was for food, and the cooking-stoves were kept going continuously.

The final descent was a hard, exhausting business. On some expeditions the return is a kind of flight (not to mention those that involve downright tragedy, such as befell the Americans on K.2 in 1939) and a great deal of equipment is left behind at high altitudes, abandoned for ever. Thanks to the weather, which continued either good or fair the whole time, we were able to conduct a planned withdrawal and brought down to base camp everything in the way of tents, utensils, and climbing gear that could be of any possible use to us. All that was left behind, in fact, were the fixed ropes and the pitons attached to them—either because they had to be used by the last men down, or else because the heavy strain placed upon them had left them somewhat weakened, to an extent which meant that they could not be regarded as fully trustworthy for future use. Enrico Leone volunteered, most altruistically, for the hard chore of going back to Camp Four with Hakak, Neap and Sher, to recover the last store of tents, sleeping-bags and climbing-gear still left up the mountain. He did this in one day and still had time left to get back to base camp before nightfall—a truly remarkable achievement.

Taking our last farewell of a camp was always a quietly moving moment. We pulled out, and everything returned to its original condition: a few empty cases and tin cans were left scattered about perhaps, but the perennial elements—the snow and ice and rocks that have remained unchanged since the Creation, or very nearly—were already reasserting themselves. We had lived through what seemed interminable hours on these sites, had known every sort of emotion there—hope, despair, envy, resentment, joy, fear, and misery. Now, in a flash, it was all over: no more than a parenthesis in our existence. That subtle human warmth which a tent radiated over these fretted glaciers and snowy domes and chasms of black rock vanished into thin air, as though it had never been; and we had but to snatch a backward look before our departure, when the last pack had been hoisted on to the last pair of shoulders, to feel the strong, almost personalized presence of some hostile, aggressive spirit—perhaps the mysterious goddesses of the mountain—flooding back in full strength behind us. Glacier, wind and avalanche resumed their absolute and unquestioned rule: they had only tolerated us.

When we were safely back in base camp, we celebrated the success of the expedition, shaved off the beards and moustaches that had protected our faces from the full fierceness of the sun, and began to make preparations for the homeward journey. It was here that Mulai Jan tried to play a remarkably dirty trick on us. We had more or less assumed that our picturesque caravan-leader would go down in the record as a cheerful clown, often extremely useful to us (though on occasion a broken reed), often full of most touching solicitude for our welfare (though on occasion tough and self-centred), and, taken by and large, a tolerably honest man. But one fine day we found we had to revise this verdict drastically. Not to put too fine a point on it, we found that Mulai had organized what amounted to a small private expedition on his own account (he had even hired a couple of clandestine porters from Shagram) and was systematically 'milking' our camp of various useful and expensive items of equipment—ropes, tents, cooking-stoves, high-altitude clothing, and so on.

However, we decided not to have a dramatic show-down. Mulai Jan was confronted with the facts, and made to feel at least a little ashamed of himself. We got back all our equipment, stored it in its proper place, and closed the incident with a drink. But from then on we had to keep our eyes peeled the whole time, and I must confess that most of us were, at heart, a little disillusioned by the whole affair. It genuinely hurt us, because Mulai Jan had been excellent company throughout, and had on countless occasions proved both his usefulness and his intelligence in our service.

The journey back to Chitral passed without any particular incident: we had bright sunshine and clear skies the whole way, though the September air was a shade cooler. From Drasan to Chitral (a stage which had been so laborious on the outward, uphill journey) we got horses, and rode all the way. By so doing, we took only half the time, and had a chance to appreciate the natural beauty of the landscape. On the smallholdings peasants were still gathering their apricots, indifferent alike to heat, fatigue, and thirst. We took advantage of the occasion to improve our own technique of apricot-picking; the fruit hung in generous plenty from branches all along the road, and we collected it standing in our stirrups—at the trot.

CHAPTER NINE

ON THE TRAIL OF DIONYSUS IN ASIA

An Epilogue on the Kalash Kafirs

*And in this most ancient moment at the dawn of time
When Jesus was not yet quick in Mary's womb, I bowed before
God.*

—JALAL-UD-DIN RUMI (1207–1273)
Ode, FROM THE Divan

The rose was plundered, till nothing remained but her thorns . . .
HOSEIN VAEZ KASHEFI (FIFTEENTH CENTURY)

They do not weep for the glories of antiquity . . .
ALTAIF HUSSEIN HALI (1873–1914)

WHEN WE had settled our affairs in Chitral, and paid off the porters, and made courtesy calls on the local V.I.P.'s, we decided to make a trip to visit the Kafirs. Some twelve or fourteen miles south of Chitral city there lies the entry to a gorge, between the high, rocky cliffs that enclose the Kunar River. The spot is naturally camouflaged by the formation of the mountains, and is very hard to find unless you know the local terrain well. The gorge slopes gently upwards, fanning out into five or six smaller valleys; and it is in these valleys—hidden away among the mountains, for the most part mild, fertile, and heavily wooded, and quite cut off from the outside world—that the last surviving Kafirs dwell.

But who, you may well ask, are the Kafirs? Moslems use the term *kafir* to denote 'the infidels who are not of the Book', neither Christian nor Jewish. The small group of Kafirs in Chitral (they number only 2,500 to 3,000) are the last survivors of those archaic mountain tribes who, having retreated to well-nigh inaccessible strongholds, were able to endure the waves of conquest that overtook the peoples of the plain. There are two distinct types of Kafir: the *kati*, or 'Red Kafirs', and the *kalash*, or 'Black Kafirs'. The Chitrali Kafirs are *kalash* ('black', or, to put it in a more plain, straightforward, and etymologically correct way, 'filthy'). Till a few decades ago the Kati formed a large tribal group that occupied the upper valleys of the Hindu Kush, along the Afghan frontier: they seem to have numbered several hundred thousands. In 1895 the Emir of Afghanistan, Abdur Rahman Khan, 'a typical

Oriental despot of the old school',¹ decided, whether for political or strategical motives, that the time had come to subdue these recalcitrant idolaters and convert them to the True Faith of Allah. The Red Kafirs were massacred, broken up, or made slaves for the use of the Emir's troops (who had been trained by the latest Prussian methods and equipped with up-to-date weapons). Those few who survived had no option but to burn their ancient images and outlandish sanctuaries, and lose no time in building mosques instead. The very name of Kafirstan ('the land of the Kafirs') was changed to Nuristan ('the land of light').

We have very scanty evidence, taken all in all, concerning the Red Kafirs. Fortunately Robertson decided to investigate them a short time before Abdur Rahman's purge; and the resultant book² forms a unique testament to an historical-cultural phenomenon (now vanished for ever) and offers precious data concerning the history not only of Asia, but also of the peoples in the Indo-European tradition.

The area occupied by the Kafirs, both Red and Black, consists of those high, remote valleys that lie on the south side of the Hindu Kush, and straddle the Afghan border. As Robertson observed,³ this is one of the most difficult and inaccessible mountain districts in the world, being not only inhospitable but also perilous in the extreme. To begin with there are natural hazards such as precipices, crags, or violent mountain torrents. There are also the numerous hiding-places which such a terrain offers to brigands and cut-throats, especially in the deep, shady forests and narrow gorges. For centuries this region remained utterly isolated, like some impregnable fortress. As a result its inhabitants (not to mention their beliefs, customs, and way of dressing) remained just as they had been hundreds of years before.

From the physical point of view it would seem—on the basis of such evidence as we possess—that we have to do with a highly mixed people. Biasutti defines them as 'Indo-Iranian'.⁴ Robertson offers no measurements or statistics, but his traveller's impressions are nevertheless of great value. He records being struck on more than one occasion at finding a village where tall men with fair or mid-brown hair (and often with pale blue eyes) and a shorter type, with black hair and olive skin, existed side by side. He thought, moreover, that these racial types could be correlated with the social differentiations he observed: headmen, priests, and medicine-men tended to display more markedly European characteristics, while the rest of the population possessed predominantly sub-tropical, Indian features. As Robertson says, it seems likely that the ruling class (which also appears to

¹ L. Petech in *Civiltà dell'Oriente*, Vol. I, p. 588.

² G. Robertson, *The Kafirs of the Hindu Kush*, London, 1896.

³ Article, 'Kafirs', in Hastings' *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*.

⁴ R. Biasutti, *Razze e Popoli della Terra* (Turin, 1954), Vol. 2, p. 440.

have been the more robust physically) consisted of the descendants of Bactrian colonists, no doubt with a certain proportion of Greek blood. At some point during the 9th or 10th century this group, being unwilling to embrace Islam at the point of the sword, was forced to abandon its rich settlements in the plain and take refuge among these high mountain valleys. Here it succeeded in imposing its authority on the local, probably aboriginal, population. The amalgamation of the two has, over the course of centuries, produced the Kafir nation. It would be extremely interesting to know more about the language these people speak; but here we are on almost wholly unexplored ground.

The Kafirs' personal traits are etched in by Robertson with shrewd insight and humour. It is easy, reading between the lines of his book, to sense a continual conflict: on the one hand those instinctive condemnatory reactions bred of his conscious position as Queen Victoria's loyal servant; on the other, the genuine feelings of sympathy aroused in a naturally warm-hearted man, deeply interested in his fellow-men. The portrait of the typical Red Kafir (*kati*), as seen through Robertson's eyes, is that of an unbridled individualist, amenable only to the ties of family, or, at the very most, to tribal law. Beyond these limits he is always prone to regard other men, whether Kafirs or Moslems, as mere 'foreigners', with whom one can (and indeed should) play the great game of best-man-wins, violence by no means being excluded.

On the credit side, he has quite extraordinary courage, an absolute contempt for death, a gay, sociable, pleasure-loving nature, a tradition of magnificent hospitality, strong family loyalties and affections, a wise tolerance in religious matters, and great love for children and animals; on the debit side he displays all the worst characteristics of someone determined to fight—like the proverbial cat on a hot tin roof—with every possible weapon at his disposal. Not only does the typical *kati* slaughter his fellow-men without a second thought; he is also quarrelsome, prone to intrigue, naturally vindictive, and a blackmailer into the bargain. On top of this he always wants to cut an impressive figure, even when the facts are against him; so he also tends to be a liar and a braggart. Where property is concerned, he has scant respect for the rights of others. He lies with astonishing poker-faced facility, and robs with an absolutely easy conscience; indeed, he teaches his children the art of stealing as a normal and respectable means of acquiring this world's goods. Finally—but here we should make allowances for the shadow of Victorian prudery—he appears to have practised obscenities in public.

To be regarded as a proper man by the Kafir community, Robertson concludes, a man who can fundamentally be described as 'a decent sort', worthy of everyone's respect, calls for certain special qualities and achievements. Such a man must have successfully done down (if not done in) several of his fellow-citizens. He must show great powers of endurance in the

mountains, always be ready to accept a challenge to fight, and enjoy a tremendous reputation for sexual prowess. If, in addition to all this, he shows himself a skilled and tireless dancer at religious festivals; if he has a keen eye and a steady trigger-finger; if he plays a good game of skittles: then, and only then, can he be considered truly irresistible. If he is to exercise any serious influence over tribal affairs he must, over and above these personal qualities, either possess considerable wealth or else belong to a powerful family.

The Red Kafirs' religion could be described as a form of polytheism in which a supreme Creator, Imra, was supported by a whole host of lesser deities whom he had personally sired: Moni, Gish, Bagisht, Dizane, Krumai, Nirmali and others. As often tends to happen, Imra himself was accorded notably less enthusiastic veneration than some of his 'prophets', among whom a place of honour was reserved for Gish, a virile and bellicose god presiding over what might be termed the celestial War Ministry. The religious ceremonies practised by the Katis were of two sorts: ritual dances, and the sacrifice of animals (oxen, goats, or rams) which, after they had been killed, were consumed by the worshippers. Each deity had an individual dance, with its own steps, rhythm, and special character—though this branch of folk-culture, which Robertson describes at such length and in such colourful detail, is almost totally forgotten today.

It seems that the Red Kafirs pictured the universe as divided into three worlds. Aloft lay Urdesh, the region of the gods; in the middle was Mirdesh, the home of mankind; the nether realm, Yurdesh, was the rough equivalent of limbo, where souls languished in a kind of larval half-life. As guardian at the gate of Yurdesh, there stood a highly enigmatic figure called Maramalik. The entire folklore of the 'Kati' Kafirs (the same applies today to their 'Kalash' or Chitrali collaterals) was rich in tales concerning fairies, djinn, demons, and a whole host of other spirits, friendly, hostile, or merely capricious. Occasionally it was a good thing to have these beings as friends; often it was more prudent to keep out of their way; but at all times a man was well advised to propitiate them with prayers, sacrifices, dances, offerings and rituals of various kinds.



We left Chitral aboard an ancient, rickety motor-lorry, loaded down with parcels and bundles belonging to a fat gentleman in a shocking-pink shirt. When we reached Ayun we got off, and waved the owner of the parcels a cheerful good-bye. We then crossed the Kunar by a frail and decidedly shaky bridge, and settled down for the night beside a small mosque. The countryside around us was rich and lush. Numerous mountain torrents provided an ample water-supply, which was cleverly conserved and dispersed along endless stepped terraces, each planted with a flourishing, bright green crop of

rice, strip after regular strip. It was a quiet, peaceful evening: somewhere not too far off a stream was chattering down over the rocks.

Next morning we set off early, with Murad, Hakak, and a couple of local porters. In a very short time we reached the entrance to the gorge. The rocks, which were steep and covered with vegetation, here resembled a sort of curving narrow passage between rows of palaces, their balconies wreathed in flowers. Through the bottom of the gorge there flowed a fresh, noisy torrent. One of the first things we noticed, high on our left, was a remarkable example of those primitive aqueducts that have kept so large a proportion of Chitral fertile down the ages. No obstacle could stand in its way: its channel advanced, with equal imperturbability, along a more or less vertical rock-face (supported by towering dry-stone buttresses), or across deep ravines and landslides—the result of untold labour and years of loving and careful maintenance.

On and on we went: the valley seemed as though it would never end. Each bend was succeeded by another in the opposite direction. Every now and again we glimpsed some peaks on the distant horizon, and these gave us an idea of the magnificent landscape towards which we were slowly climbing. Then the gorge widened, and we were faced with the choice of two valleys: Bumboret on the left, and Rumbur on the right. The ideal course would have been to work our way up one of them, traverse into the second across a couple of passes just below the main watershed, and come back the other way. But to do this would have occupied several days, and we had little time at our disposal. We therefore decided to concentrate on the Bumboret valley, where, we were told, the largest Kafir community dwelt, and some of their holiest shrines were to be found.

As we proceeded up the valley it grew narrower, till it was little more than a wild, rocky gorge. Its sides were extremely high: irregular walls of grey rock, dotted with grassy tufts, towered over our heads. Here and there we saw ancient, angrily contorted cypresses, broken but refusing to admit defeat, clinging to their ledges like wild beasts about to be dragged from their lairs. The path was narrow and difficult to negotiate—little more than a goat-track, in fact. Overhead gleamed a deep blue sky, with a few small white virgin clouds drifting across it. The sun filled the air with a generous warmth, in which bees, dragonflies, cicadas and countless unknown insects flourished, all intent on producing their own strange buzz or hum—which would break off for a moment as we passed.

After we had made some two hours' progress, the valley suddenly widened. The flanking walls of rock spread out and were replaced by wooded slopes, which stretched away—getting steeper and rougher as they went—till they reached the mountain-ridges on the horizon. The bottom of the valley looked more or less flat; the path, which stuck closely to the course of the little

stream, appeared to lose itself, a little way ahead of us, in a thicket of willows, mulberries, plane-trees, walnuts, and various other deciduous trees. Their foliage stirred gently in the breeze, and the sunlight, striking through it, left a tremulous dancing pattern of light on ground and water. If the world were not so depressingly well known and mapped out, and it were still possible to use the word 'discovery' of other places besides the ice-caps or some equally uninhabitable region, we might have supposed ourselves to be setting foot in the realm of faëry, where legendary races dwell. Indeed, it was such a valley as those in which Tasso's or Ariosto's characters were always turning up, with the most charming casualness:

*Intanto Erminia infra l'ombrose piante
d'antica selva dal cavallo è scorta . . .*¹

But instead of Herminia, daughter of the King of Antioch, there came out to meet us a couple of Kafir boys, carrying a bucketful of grapes. Who had informed them of our arrival? It was a mystery. But in these remote parts everything is common knowledge, generally a day or two before it happens. I must admit at once, too, that neither the features nor the dress of these two boys differed in any significant respect from those of their Moslem neighbours in the rest of Chitral. It was only their expressions, their smiles, their surreptitious and feline gestures that displayed a certain curious faun-like quality, and put one in mind of gypsies: perhaps such characteristics are typical of people who have long lived as a minority group, and are accustomed to seeking safety through isolation or in a nomadic existence.

The grapes were excellent. Looking round, we noticed, here and there in the woodland, several gigantic vines, twining in exultant freedom round the trunks that supported them. The presence of the vine—the plant that was sacred to Dionysus—at once invested the valley with a subtly mythological atmosphere. Could this be a genuine memento left by the Greek god on his expedition to India—that journey which proved so lyrical an inspiration to Alexander the Great? One thing was certain: here we moved in an isolated pocket of antiquity, among people, objects, beliefs and customs that had escaped the vicissitudes of time. The whole territory of Islam—in which wine has for long been proscribed—lay between the shores of the Mediterranean and these valleys: valleys where the ancient vine still flourished unchecked, its tendrils interwoven with the leaves of plane-trees, holm-oak, ash and elm.

'Do you make wine, too?' we asked the boys, using Murad as our interpreter.

'Of course we do; wait here a moment and we'll bring you some.'

¹ 'Meanwhile Herminia was carried by her horse beneath the shady bosage of an ancient wood.'

At this point we noticed that there were two or three houses close by, half-hidden by the greenery. They were very different from those we had left behind us down the Kunar valley, being far more solidly built, with obvious pride in good craftsmanship. Each one looked like a small independent fortress. The walls were constructed from alternate rows of heavy dressed stone and large transverse beams, which had (in relation to the whole) what I can only describe as a muscular appearance: it was as though they held the whole structure together by the conscious exertion of their wooden fibres. In one sense they were more primitive houses than those in the valley, since they bore witness to a society that was still isolated in small cell-like units, where each had only himself and his own family to think of. But from the technical point of view they were first-class: they displayed most subtle ingenuity, the best possible use of the resources available, and an alert, self-conscious sense of artistry. Throughout the history of human progress it is ever thus: what you gain with one hand you lose with the other. What medieval armourer ever had the skill to split a flake of obsidian with the supreme bravura displayed by the Old Stone Age cave-dwellers? What master builder today, expert though he be at raising houses on pillars of reinforced concrete, would know how to construct an arch or close a vault, using nothing but dressed stone and lime?

The boys came back bearing a syrup-bottle, which was half-filled with a soup-like liquid in which various small black blobs and specks and suspicious-looking filaments were floating. They poured a little of this filthy brew into a cup; and we—wry-mouthed with disgust—were obliged to drink a toast to our generous if insanitary hosts. But it really was wine. Nasty, raw, disgusting stuff, but wine all the same. Since our Kafirs had not learnt the art of wine-making from the Moslems (who had surrounded their enclave for over a millennium), it followed that we were confronted here with a skill surviving from some incredibly remote period—one moreover which in no respect resembled the conditions prevailing today. Could it even be a legacy from the times of those Greek kings I discussed earlier, who established themselves, over twenty centuries ago, in the neighbourhood of the Hindu Kush, in Bactria, Arachosia and Gandhara?

We said good-bye to the boys and went on our way, following the path along the bottom of the valley. The landscape continued extremely beautiful. Isolated groups of trees and wild plants alternated with cultivated fields of maize, potatoes, tomatoes; these in turn gave way to open, sun-dappled glades or broad pastures where goats, sheep, and small mountain cows stood browsing on the grass. This countryside was not exactly woodland and not exactly meadowland: in the strict semantic sense, the word that suggested itself was 'park', but its emotional associations made it quite inappropriate. 'Park' suggests privilege, the upper classes, rulers, an aristocracy. But here



22



23



24

22: A gaudy Kaffir necklace
23-5: Three young Kaffir girls
in traditional costume



25



26



27

26-9: Kaffir funeral totems in the Bumboret Valley



28



the air one breathed was real and basic, the whole scene was eloquent of fundamental realities, of a life that accepted labour and suffering along with love and laughter (see photographs nos. 120, 121 and 123).

The walnut trees were proud, robust, vigorous specimens, clearly the result of careful cultivation. Some of them grew to a size unheard-of in Europe: their upper foliage had the spread and shade of a beach, their trunks at full maturity were as thick as that of a turkey oak. Wind and sunshine lapped us and our surroundings in a mood of mid-day happiness: we wanted to sing, or dance—to weep even, in some way to echo the feeling of pagan abandon that was in the air. Here Dionysus held sway: this was his domain. In the distance, above the tree-tops, we could glimpse woods of tall deodars, and beyond them a crested skyline, rocky mountain peaks with a few streaks of snow still left in the high gorges. Not for nothing did God, according to local legend, create the Valley of Bumboret for His own private delight. But then (they say), when He saw that the Kafirs had nowhere to go, he made them a gift of it: let them live there and prosper.

Farther on we passed through a small village, and beyond it a further tract of woodland and pasturage. Every now and again we noticed curious objects which had a flavour of superstitious practice about them, of nocturnal deities and magical rites: for instance a dead crow, with its head crushed, hanging by one leg from a walnut branch (see photograph no. 141). But such sights were instantly succeeded by others of a more pleasant and less disturbing nature. Round a bend in the valley, under the shade of another gigantic walnut tree, we saw a group of women, with their babies (see photographs nos. 126 and 137). Instead of running away and hiding, as Moslem women had always done, these ladies turned and greeted us, in the most natural and amiable manner imaginable. Not even the children were alarmed by the appearance of these uncouth foreigners, but strained towards us, eyes all agog. Old and young alike were dressed in a sort of Franciscan robe made of brown woollen cloth, tied in at the waist with a sash of the same material. On their heads they wore an embroidered coif, heavily decorated with endless rows of cowrie shells, and assorted metal buttons and trinkets: the whole head-dress was topped by an ornamental tassel made from coffee-coloured wool. Their hair was most elaborately dressed in long, thin plaits (see photograph no. 130). Their feet were bare. The impression made on us by this off-beat and poetical attire merely accentuated our feeling that we had struck a country unmarked on any map—out of this world in a literal sense. Nothing here recalled the artifacts, customs, or common activities prevailing elsewhere today. It looked as though these women—crones and babies included—were attired for some religious dance, in honour, perhaps of the solstice, or the mystical marriage of the meadowland and the dew, or the mythical love between walnut and vine.

A further succession of houses appeared, often set together in groups; at times we passed men busy at work by the threshing-floors, or old women leading goats and cows out to pasture, or girls coming home from the woods with bundles of dry branches on their heads. We also noticed large numbers of children playing along the bank of the stream. One girl stood leaning against a stone wall playing a pipe (see photograph no. 124). She was not in the least disconcerted by our appearance, and continued to fill the air with her soft, delicate music, which formed a perfect comment on all we saw around us. It was virtually impossible for us to avoid using the epithet 'Arcadian'; this seemed (and indeed was) so appropriate both to the valley and to its inhabitants that we worked it to death during the next two or three days, dragging it in on every occasion, whether appropriate or not, till in the end we got heartily sick of it.

It was about here that we had our first glimpse of the strange Kafir effigies—'Arcadian gods', as we called them. After a long sojourn in Moslem countries, we had become accustomed to the total absence of sacred pictures or statues, in town and country alike; and the appearance of these strange idols gave us something of a shock. The oddest example represented a man on horseback, and was carved in old unpolished wood: this specimen stood some eighteen inches high, and was set on top of a post (see photograph no. 140), close to a group of houses. After a long conversation with a local villager, Murad interpreting, we discovered that this was not, in fact, the image of a god at all, but a commemorative monument to some benefactor, who had several times presented the village with gifts of cattle on the occasion of the two great annual feasts: Jyoshi, which is held in May, and Chowmas, which celebrates the winter solstice, in December. There were other statues nearby, less striking as works of folk art, which perhaps represented gods, but no one could recall their names (see photograph no. 121).

However, it required only the slightest perceptiveness in such matters to see that we were confronted here with a very different type of heavenly regime. Man, the child of mystery, is the father of God; father, indeed, of all the gods. While the Great Mystery envelops us all alike without distinction—pygmies and Titans, black and white, analphabetic and nuclear physicists, the most benighted victims of superstition and the most sublime philosophers—what we discern in that Mystery varies from group to group, from one civilization and age to another. Once God (or the gods) has been created, the concept of godhead, in the most subtle fashion, permeates society and the individual members of that society, affects language and landscape, indeed everything that man touches with his hands and eyes and speech and the far-reaching tentacles of his mind.

To say 'Now we are in Christ's territory' or 'Now we are in Allah's (or the Buddha's) sphere of influence' does not merely mean that one is indulging

in a cheap witticism. Rather it implies that the speaker has taken into account certain central, fundamental truths about human society. When we are in Rome we certainly are in Christ's territory—just as we enter the Buddha's at Lhasa or Allah's at Mecca—not because these various divine personages parcel out the invisible world like so many petty barons, but rather because man has permeated every aspect of his grandiose achievements in the secular, social, cultural sphere with these, his personal readings of the Great Mystery.

Now we had passed the woodland frontier, the invisible scrutiny of moss and bracken, and were in the territory of the Kafir deities. What subtle poetry lurked in these wretched, obscure, moribund gods, survivors from the unimaginably ancient catacombs of the past! Gods encrusted and impregnated with primordial fears and elemental hopes; gods that could scarcely speak with sufficient clarity to enunciate ideas, but survived through the communication of basic emotional impulses; gods who understood the fear of the dark, the fierce passions of a vendetta, the pleasures of filling one's belly, or of amorous dalliance in the undergrowth; gods who knew, too, what respect was due to the wisdom of the old, what violent affections men nursed for their children, what joy lay in one's own home.

Such gods were very close to the goat on the upland, the seed sprouting in the field, the great-bellied women who would soon become mothers, the fullness of a good nut-harvest, the exciting scent of wild animals caught in the trap: they were under-gods, workaday deities, a home-made pantheon. Such gods are, inevitably, doomed to die—just as the women's chestnut-brown robes, their intricately worked and shell-embroidered *kupis*, their pipes and all the rest of it will vanish for ever when an asphalted road runs up the Bumboret and Rumbur valleys, and tourists invade the place in droves to enjoy the cool summer and escape from the furnace-like heat of the plains; and when, together with the tourists, men come bearing sacred Books, bringing Allah, Christ, and heaven knows who else in their train—the major, international, irresistible cult-figures.



Eventually we reached a broad, pleasant glade which, the porters told us, would make an excellent camp site. We pitched our tents, and began to cook supper, surrounded by a crowd of curious onlookers, for the most part small boys and girls. The sun was setting behind the mountains, and the sky was a blaze of unbelievable colours. To offset this idyllic scene, the light breeze blowing down the valley carried the disgusting stench of burnt goat-fat. Were they, perhaps, roasting a sacrificial offering up there, some beast that had been slaughtered to placate their forest deities? But in fact this stomach.

turning stench forms a frequent feature of Kafir life: the goat is among their most important animals, both as a mainstay of the indigent Kafir economy and as a prominent element in their circumscribed sylvan view of life. You see goats everywhere, in the fields or along the paths; and so it comes as no surprise to find goats' heads decorating household utensils, or mounting guard over temples (see photographs nos. 127, 128 and 144), or embellishing trees close to the sacrificial sites. The goat dominates everything here, from folk-song to people's most private thoughts and emotions (see photograph no. 139).

As dusk began to fall, we gathered round our little brazier, in which a few sticks still burnt cheerfully enough, and ate our supper. The wind, as often happens in mountain districts, having blown down the valley all afternoon, now veered right about and blew away from us, towards the hills. It was scarcely a real wind, more a light breeze; but we noticed its change of direction because of the way our smoke drifted. All the better, we told each other: now at least we'll be spared that appalling stench of burnt goat-fat. But—as we realized after a moment or so—the first smell had vanished only to be replaced by another, decidedly worse one. Franco Lamberti, our doctor, at once exclaimed: 'But that's the stink of corpses!' And indeed, a quick on-the-spot investigation revealed that a part of the hill-side very close to our camp was used as a vast Kafir cemetery.

'What a place to stay,' Murad muttered. 'Goats upwind all day, and corpses downwind all night.'

A little later the moon came up and the wind dropped almost to nothing: the effluvia from the cemetery were forgotten. Meanwhile, as it transpired, one of the local headmen had laid on about forty women and girls to give us a display of dancing. 'Come and look,' he kept repeating, 'come this way, just the other side of this wall.' And indeed, when we had crossed the dry-stone wall we found ourselves in a more or less circular woodland glade, with a level sward beneath our feet. The moon, which was almost full, shone bright and serene above us, with that special clarity to be found in the mountains. The women were standing about in several groups, their shrill, noisy chatter occasionally broken by bursts of nervous laughter. Every age-group was represented, from old crones to mere children. Some of the younger girls had their faces adorned with 'patches' of a paste made from the fruit of a certain plant. This made them look somewhat disconcerting, and at times positively monstrous, though we were told that the idea was simply to 'protect them from the rays of the sun'.

Then, at last, the women began to dance. They formed into groups of five or six, each girl with her left arm round the waist of the girl to her left, and her right arm across the shoulders of her partner on the right. Then the groups began to advance and retire, cross and circle in a series of complicated

figures, displaying a blend of skill and natural elegance that hinted at long practice; and it is true that at every important religious festival the women's dances form one of the principal features. The rhythm was kept by a seemingly wordless song, in which the singers' voices sustained long-drawn-out notes with a monotonous 'oo-o-oh' sound, harmonizing on a scale which dithered delectably among the weirdest sorts of discord. From time to time the sharp, hollow thump of a big drum would reach us from one of the dark recesses between the trees.

At first the women looked as though they were dancing only to satisfy some hypothetical Kafir Tourist Board. The younger girls made suggestive gestures, while the older women had the bored air of a person doing something perforce, even though it is done with ease and grace. We, the audience, who were sitting on some fallen tree-trunks at the edge of the clearing, were on the point of going when, for some inscrutable reason, the Kafir women switched into an altogether different mood. Perhaps they had decided to enter into the fun of the thing, or had got on each others' wavelength, so to speak, or had seen spirits or heard the gods rustling in the black shadows of the moonlit night. The reason remained inscrutable: but beyond any doubt a subtle change took place. The dances did not become more lively: if anything they were rather slower. The accompanying chorus grew quieter rather than noisier. But these groups of barefoot women in their dark robes (the moonlight made them look black) no longer seemed to touch the ground; it was as though they skimmed across the surface of the grass, merely brushing the blades as they passed. On them and us alike there descended the silent blessing of those archaic herdsmen who had lived and loved here, who had seen this same scene by the light of immeasurably distant moons, and who now were earth, bracken, leaves (yes, and the stink of goats), who had gone back into the very soil of these Kafir valleys.



Next morning, when we awoke, the same thought was in all our minds: which would prove stronger today, the smell of dead goat or putrefying man? In our tents we were aware only of the peaceful, familiar rubbery odour which our mattresses exuded. When we poked our heads outside we saw that it was a lovely day. At first we sniffed the air rather suspiciously; then we took deeper, more confident breaths, and still all we could smell was a pleasant aroma of sweet-scented herbs. The sun, by warming the atmosphere, had produced light vertical air-currents, and these had risen skywards, wafting with them every sort of stink, stench, odour and fragrance. A lucky break for us.

After breakfasting (at peace, nasally speaking, with the elements) we felt a considerable curiosity to visit this neighbouring cemetery, called by the

natives *mandao-jao*, or 'the place of many coffins'. When we got there we found a shallow, rocky slope, on which were laid out a series of rough wooden caskets, each with its dear departed inside. The lids of the newer coffins were kept in place by large stones resting on top of them; and it was from these—as may well be imagined—that the less pleasing odours emanated. Many of the older caskets had been opened, either by animals or the elements, and various harmless, homely skeletons lay exposed to view, polished by wind and weather, half-calcined by the sun. Some were still lying in their oak containers, but others had spilt out on the ground, dry bones scattered among the stones and flowers and bushes. A large proportion of the revulsion which we experience at the thought of human bones derives from the fact that, on the rare occasions we happen to see them, we are generally indoors, and very probably in a city—or at least surrounded by objects closely associated with man. In such circumstances all they offer us is a reminder of human transience, a testament to fleshy decomposition. But seen in the sunlight, among the stones and grass, human bones acquire a harmless, curiously consoling quality: they invite us to consider death in its proper perspective, as a normal phase in the august and mysterious cycle of existence (see photograph no. 163).

But the main interest of the *mandao-jao* was not the macabre spectacle, nor yet the point of departure for meditation which it afforded us, but its artistic by-products. Here, as in many similar Kafir cemeteries, there were to be found the most extraordinary 'funerary monuments'. These were life-sized, sometimes larger than life-sized, statues of wood—carved from tree-trunks by blows with a hatchet (see photographs nos. 26, 29 and 142).

Such statues (our native guide explained to us) were erected to commemorate their more distinguished citizens, and were carried to the cemetery—after sacrifices and ritual junketings—when they had been dead for a year. The connection with the festival struck us as both slender and dubious. In ways it looked very much as though the festival was really much more important than the monument. Only a man who offered food and drink to a great number of friends and relatives acquired the right to perpetuate the memory of one of his own ancestors with such a statue; and the more sumptuous the feast, the more impressive the wooden image in tribute to the departed! At one time the valley's Upper Ten, the Top People of the Goatdom of Bumboret, Rumbur and Birir, as it were, lorded it in their cemeteries, among the sorb-apples and butcher's broom, on two-headed horses (see photograph no. 143). But today such monuments were no longer to be seen; what we found instead were a number of serious, dignified old gentlemen on foot, almost all of them beturbaned, and each one carrying on his shoulder the small ceremonial axe that was the symbol of civic freedom and recognized merit. The women—though in fact there was only one, and

she was weatherworn—wore the long robe or gown, with tasselled *kupis* on the head.

The live Kafirs we met did not—at least, not on superficial acquaintance—appear to possess particularly outstanding personalities; but each of these dead Kafirs carved in wood bore long and eloquent witness to human experience. The more you looked at them the more they had to tell you. Their features, crudely chiselled from the tree-trunk with a few strokes of the adze, nevertheless portrayed every type of expression; here was the stoic dignity of a proud man dragged down by circumstance, there the grotesque haughtiness of a small-minded fellow, raised to greatness through the senseless whirligig of fortune. In these faces you could read every sort of emotion: hope, peace, fury, indignation, generosity, repellent egotism, fierce independence, intolerable meanness, magnanimity, fear, serenity. These were not just miserable wooden images of Kafirs lying in a disordered cemetery, overturned by nocturnal foxes, lost in this wooded valley among the wilds of the Hindu Kush: they were Man!



We made enquiries as to whether anyone still carved these statues, but were told that nowadays they were no longer in use, and that the last sculptor had died some years ago. By great good fortune, some of these primitive and magnificent works have been preserved, in the museums of Asia (e.g. at Peshawar and Kabul) and Europe (Florence and Oxford). It is interesting to recall that not dissimilar statues have been found in many remote places, all along the Himalayan chain.¹ It may very well be that these Kafir funerary monuments represent the isolated survival of a practice—and an artistic technique—that was widespread in antiquity.

We know, from ancient accounts of Alexander's expedition, that in the classical period corpses hereabouts were similarly put in wooden coffins and then left above ground. It appears that one evening, while crossing the mountains between Bactria and Gandhara, the Greeks halted in a valley. This valley was so thickly wooded that it was impossible to see through the trees. Since it was cold, the Greeks lit a number of fires. Somehow a spark from one of these fires spread to a nearby cemetery, where the coffins ('of cedarwood', we are told) were lying among the trees, open to the sky. The coffins flared up, and the blaze was sufficient to reveal to the Greeks the presence of a well-fortified stronghold on the nearby hills.

This incident, besides showing how certain customs can be handed down unchanged for thousands of years if circumstances guarantee the survival of some human group in isolated conditions, may also be connected with one of

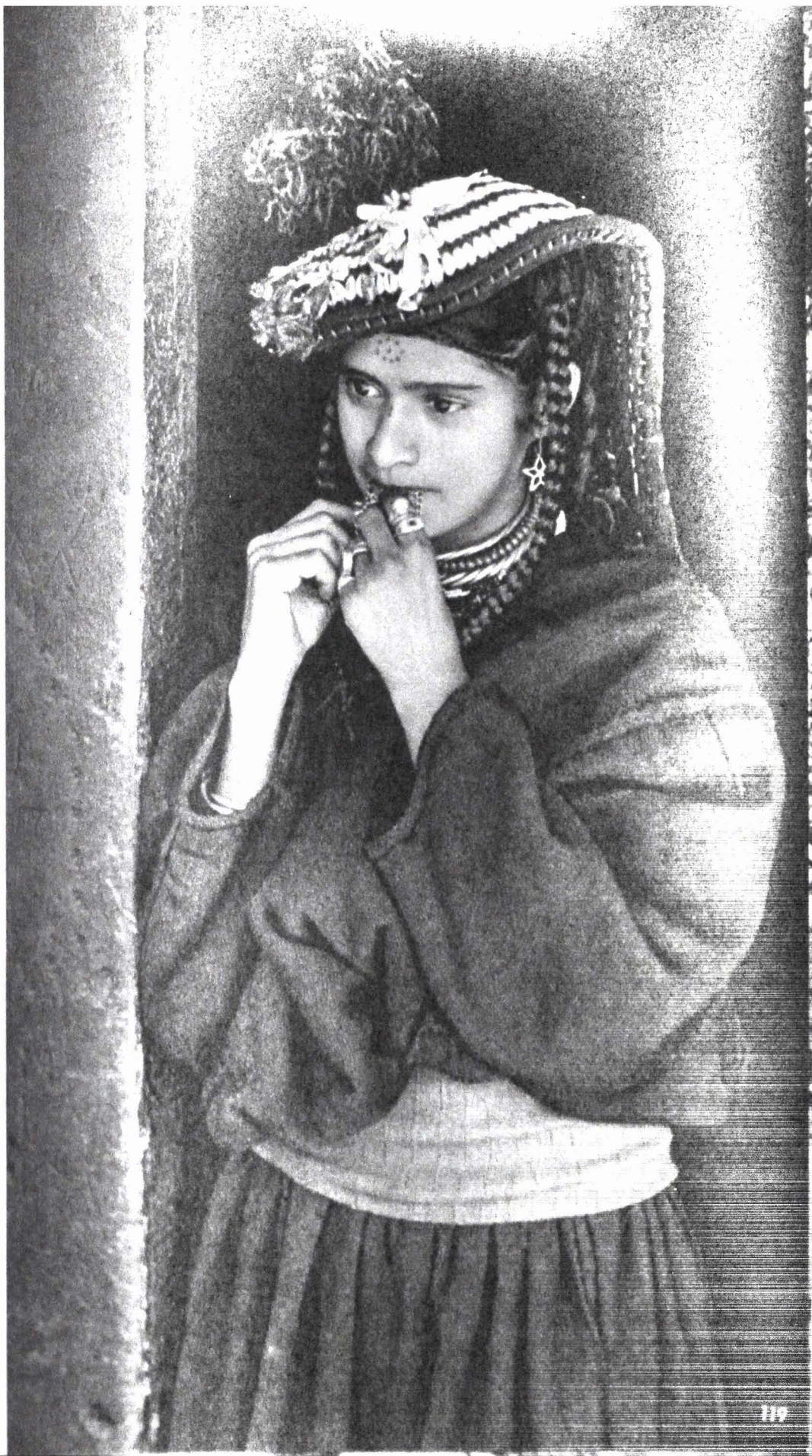
¹ See e.g. G. Tucci's *Nepal* (Bari 1960), plates 28–30.

the most mysterious and fantastic episodes in the whole of Alexander's story. The stronghold thus casually revealed (by what we might jokingly term a case of sarcopyrosis) turned out to be called Nysa. Whether through the artfulness of the local inhabitants or of the interpreters, Alexander was somehow induced to believe that this city was one founded by Dionysus himself, during his legendary progress through India at the head of a drunken, noisy rout of satyrs, Pans, centaurs, maenads, bassarids, and countless other divinities of field and woodland. Was it not called Nysa, like that other Nysa in Thrace where Dionysus had been brought up by the nymphs? The Thracian god (they explained) had founded this farflung outpost among the mountains of the Hindu Kush, and left some of his followers to colonize it, as a memorial of his great expedition. In proof of all this, they cited the facts that the mountain above the town was called Meros (*meros* in Greek means 'thigh', and Dionysus was said to have been born from the thigh of Zeus) and that in the neighbouring forests ivy grew abundantly—a plant sacred to the Greek deity, but otherwise unknown in India.

According to the historian Arrian's version of the incident, Alexander was highly pleased by this discovery. Not only did he do no harm to the city, but he decided to let his army have a few days' rest in order to celebrate the occasion with the appropriate festival. There were sacrifices and banquets, libations and hymns. Then, as Radet¹ says, 'the king and his retinue went up from Nysa to the green, woody slopes of Meros, where, sure enough, they found the type of vegetation common on their own native mountains. Fired with divine *enthousiasmos*, they fell to plucking leaves from laurel and vine with which they wove themselves garlands; and then, in a kind of religious intoxication, like the maenads on Mt. Olympus in Thessaly, they ran hither and thither through the woods, consumed by the true Dionysiac frenzy. The mountainside re-echoed to the chanting of thousands of men, from generals to common soldiers, praising and giving thanks to the Lord of the Forest, and expressing their adoration with the litany specially prescribed in his honour.'

Turning our eyes upon the woodlands of Bumboret (which certainly differed very little from those of the mysterious Nysa that had once flourished either in these valleys or the nearby ones of Choaspes—i.e. Kunar), it was easy enough to recapture the same feeling of passionate excitement as the Greeks must have experienced, on discovering up here, at the farthest boundaries of their known and imagined world, on the very threshold of the unknown, a natural enclave so akin to their own native land. The luxuriant vines, heavy with grape-clusters, that entwined the trees (they seem to have grown wild, without any human cultivation); the magnificent walnuts, so massy and sun-dappled; the peaceful, delicate-patterned plane-trees;

¹ G. Radet, *Alessandro il Grande* (Turin 1947).

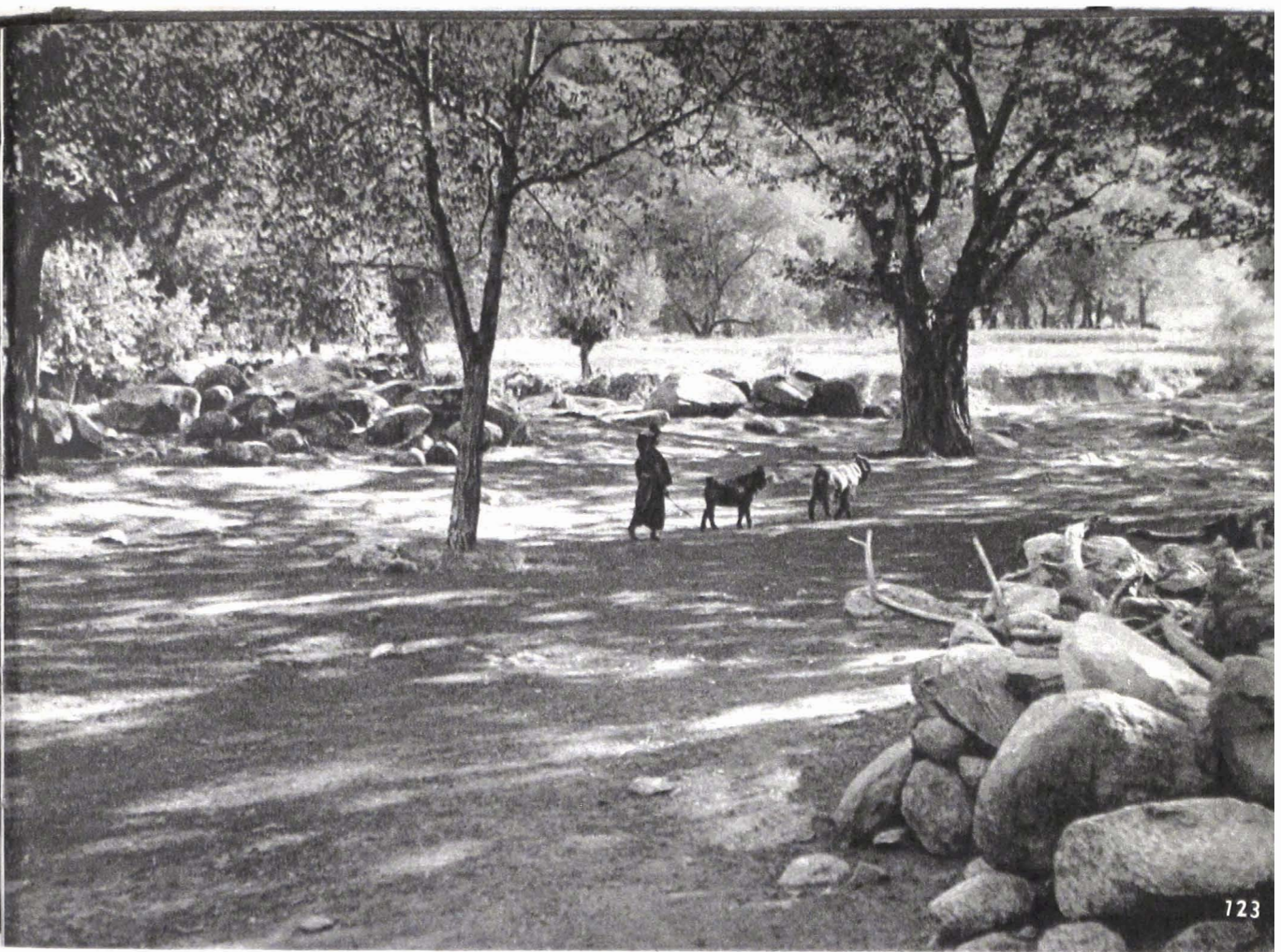


119: Bumboret: girl
in her doorway





121



123

120-1, 123: The valley of the Kaffirs; an idyllic and timeless Arcadia



122

122, 124: Ancestors are commemorated by small wooden images; shepherd-girl passing the time by playing her flute



124



125



127



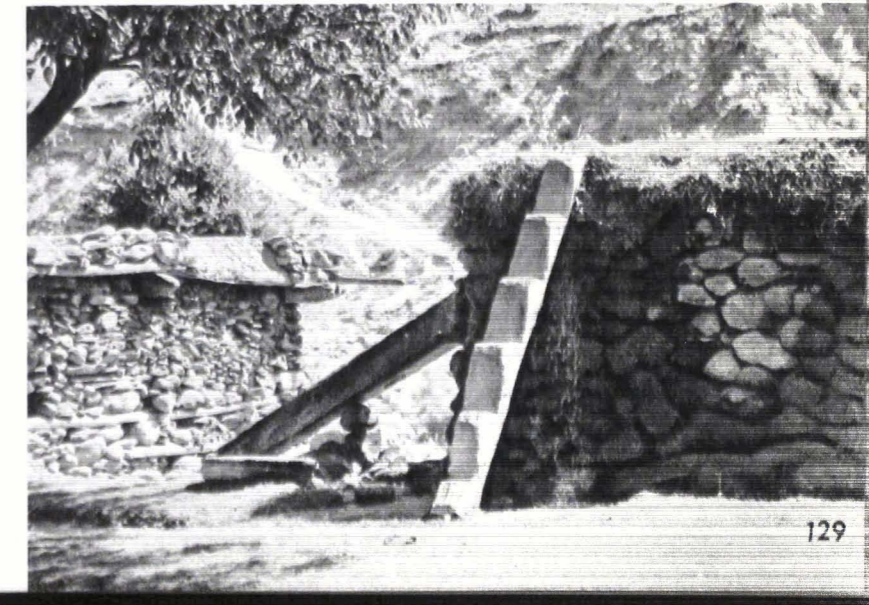
128

127-9: — as well as for various domestic utensils, and their curious step-ladders

125-6: The wood of the walnut-tree and the Turkey green oak is much treasured by the Kaffirs, who use it in the construction of their houses —



126



129



130-I: Young Kaffirs





132-6: No Kaffir party is complete without a women's dance, in which old and young, even children, all take part





1858 Grandmother and granddaughter





139: Everywhere in these valleys you find goats

140: Silent totems commemorate forgotten ancestors

141: A dead bird, strung up from the branch of a tree, hints at magical practices





142



143

142-3: Once the most distinguished members of the community were commemorated by large equestrian figures, carved out of wood, and riding a two-headed horse; but nowadays the images in the Kaffiri cemetery are all pedestrian

the mulberries, so smothered with fruit that they resembled nursing mothers, rich in purple milk; the cheerful, well-pruned apricots that filled the orchards; the turkey oaks, the holm-oaks, the hornbeams, the maples and ashes deep in the shadiest part of the forest; the ilex, juniper and holly that flourished on those sun-drenched, stony slopes; the pines and cedars and firs that grew high up near the mountain's summit—every tree and plant here breathed the word 'home' to us. Here we found the same light and colouring, the same heady scent of tree-sap or herbs trampled underfoot; dead leaves and upturned soil smelled here as they did in Italy. Only the echo of piping, flowing on more or less continuously, near or far, made one feel, vaguely, that the whole thing might be some fabulous dream. But any oddity in the people or their customs hinted at antiquity rather than mere exoticism.

*

Some boys came to our camp with the message that the women had assembled to give us a further exhibition of their dancing. Having earned a few rupees for their previous performance, they were only too ready to abandon their cooking-pots and babies in order to gambol on the greensward for our benefit. But this *matinée* failed to arouse the slightest *scintilla* of the peculiar entrancement that had caught us the previous evening, a mood kindled—just how I do not know—in that magic pool of moonlight under the trees, between the wall and the dark shadows that lay beyond (see photographs nos. 132, 133, 134).

Nevertheless, these new dances were extremely interesting, though for quite different reasons. This time we were able to watch every detail of their evolution, besides having a clear view of the performers, and the little crowd of men and boys who accompanied them. Someone made the comment that these people bore no resemblance whatever to the other *Chitralis*, that they were a race apart. In fact it is extremely difficult to express an unbiased opinion on racial differentiations between groups that are neighbours, but have separate cultural traditions. One always tends to forget that racial characteristics, in the strict sense, deal exclusively with anatomical and physiological features, the biological heritage, as it were, with which man is born, which he cannot modify in any essential, and which he must, in part, transmit to his descendants. His gestures, his vocal modulations, the way he cuts his hair or wears his clothes, the decorations he chooses, the tongue he speaks, even the expressions that flit across his face—all these are acquired characteristics, the fruit of assimilated knowledge, ethnic rather than racial qualities. But these two distinct types of attribute (which themselves allow a considerable degree of variation from one individual to the next) are constantly being confused with one another, a process which tends to darken counsel.

At first sight it certainly looked as though we had strayed on to some

alien planet. The women of the surrounding Moslem communities remained permanently shut up at home; and on the rare occasions when they appeared on the street or had to work in the fields, they covered up their faces the moment they saw any man who was not a close personal acquaintance. But these women exposed their faces freely, and dressed in a wholly different fashion; their movements, expressions, even their way of laughing were characteristic of a society in which the sexes are not separated by a series of rigid taboos. Lastly, they danced and sang. The purely racial characteristics involved—the shape of the skull, distribution of bodily hair, height and proportions of body, skin-pigmentation, predominant colour of eyes and hair, and so on—were lost sight of in this avalanche of cultural evidence. I thought I detected a remarkable proportion of women with chestnut hair, some even verging on blonde, and a high percentage of clear blue or hazel eyes, with a facial structure that would not have been out of place in the Ukraine; there were others who had the colouring and characteristics appropriate to Iranian or Mediterranean types; but these were only fleeting and superficial impressions.

As for the men—culturally assimilated to their neighbours at least in such matters as dress, headgear, and hair style—it seemed rather easier to identify them, racially speaking, with the Chitralis. Only accurate measurements could have revealed the differences, if any. In the sphere of psychological characteristics, on the other hand, I always felt there was a striking contrast between the self-confidence (amounting at times to braggartry) of speech and action which marked the Chitralis of the Islamic majority, and the vague, somewhat insinuating friendliness (on occasion concealing devious or downright treacherous motives) that was apparent in the expressions and movements of the Kalash Kafirs. These characteristics are very different, it will be seen, from those so vividly drawn by Robertson when discussing the Red Kafirs, the 'Kati'. Has there always been this contrast between the 'Kalash' and the 'Kati'? Or—and this seems more likely to me—have we to do here with the instinctive reaction of a social group now reduced to an extreme plight, surrounded on every side by alien-thinking 'foreigners', and clinging to the remains of a tradition which they know is doomed to perish in the near future? The collective expression of ethnic distress, so to speak? Certainly my brief experience among the Kafirs brought back—often in the most pungently vivid fashion—memories of the time I spent studying the Ainu, in Hokkaido in north Japan. There, too, one found a few thousand men and women whose ancestors had once been proud and free, mighty hunters and ballad-singers, now reduced to pitiful shadows of this former glory. The mind and destiny of each individual seems to reflect the history—and ultimate fate—of the race as a whole.

●

When the dance was over, and we had distributed some rupees among the women (they gathered in little groups immediately afterwards, handing the flimsy notes round and poring over them as though they were rare jewels, or horoscopes), we made our way up to the village. A lanky local youth, with melancholy eyes and a high forehead, insisted that we must come and visit his grandparents. He was the same intelligent, sensitive young man—his dreams of escape always stronger than his will to break free—who is to be found in poor, futureless villages everywhere, from Calabria to Bhutan. The visiting foreigner seems, for a brief moment, someone who can 'open the door for him', and indeed the foreigner would genuinely like to do what he could; but, for countless reasons, it is impossible. The foreigner departs, and the boy remains what he was.

The path wound upwards through the trees: the houses were built slightly higher here, on a pleasant sunny slope.

'It gets very cold here in winter,' our guide explained, 'but it's warmer up on the hill.'

The more important houses struck us at once by their grandiose and massive simplicity. They were veritable mansions in wood. The main walls, built with alternating layers of stone and walnut beams, supported an ample, complex timber superstructure, which covered the whole of the first floor, spilling over in a series of colonnades, verandahs and porches. Everything was thick and strong and built to last for centuries. Those beams could have been obtained only by felling magnificent trees such as grew down in the plain. The minimum thickness of the planks was that of an adult man's clenched fist. No detail revealed any trace of niggardly calculations or suggested the slightest concern for economy. These houses expressed nothing but barbaric opulence, temporal security, and an enormous zest for living. Some of them were adorned with sturdy vertical struts, on which geometrical patterns were carved in low relief (see photograph no. 125).

From such houses one might have expected to see big, ruddy-complexioned, genial toughs emerge—men equally ready, at a pinch, to slaughter big game or beat up their enemies: in other words, people very like those described by Robertson, the Kafirs of the *belle époque* before 1895. But the reality was very different: pale, snivelling infants sitting on doorsteps, or old women whom much suffering had refined in the oddest way, so that they looked like raddled countesses, expiating their sins by gathering firewood in the grounds of some remote nunnery (see photograph no. 138). From the balconies overhead, young men looked down, in appearance even more timid and pathetic than our guide. Furtive whispering suddenly began on all sides. It was clear that the past—as hinted at by the architecture—spoke of a very different people from these creatures of flesh and blood who represented the present. But then, as though challenging so hasty a judgement,

from an open doorway there stepped a tall, strapping young girl, barefoot, wearing the usual brown robe, but with no *kupis* on her head: a great tumbling cascade of near-blonde hair fell over her shoulders in wild disorder as she ran off down the street; she looked like the daughter of some barbarian king.

We would dearly have loved to follow her, but were sidetracked by our young friend's grandmother who leant out of a nearby window and invited us to come up. In Kafir houses the ground floor is generally used as a store-room for supplies and various implements: the living-quarters consist of two or three rooms on the upper floor, looking out on a balcony or large sun-verandah. We climbed up to this balcony by a wooden ladder. The kitchen-cum-living-room was spacious enough, but very poorly lit, since all it had was one window overlooking the balcony, and a hole in the roof which, among other things, served as a chimney for smoke. In the middle of the room stood a square box-like structure, its walls formed by stones set on edge against one another. This 'box', the Kafir equivalent of a hearth, was some six inches deep, and full of ashes. Furniture was represented by one or two rough chests of what looked like quite prodigious antiquity (falling to pieces through latter-day carelessness) and a couple of chairs. These were interesting, since it appears that in a country where the normal custom is for people to sit on the ground (or at best on rugs, matting, quilts and cushions) only the Kafirs know about chairs. Nothing, absolutely nothing, recalled the 'outside world': one looked in vain for the usual plastic bucket or cheap tawdry looking-glass which tends to turn up in the steadings of even the most remote herdsmen. What little furniture there was had been hand-made from the raw material available in the valley—wood, tree-bark, lianas, wool, leather. One of the first things we noticed was the way they had of decorating the handles of their cauldrons with tiny goats'-heads; the sculptor had clearly enjoyed himself, and the result displayed a certain undeniable style. Needless to say, every visible surface had been blackened by smoke, and in some corners of the ceiling soot and spiders' webs combined to form mysterious, rather dismal hangings which could not have been disturbed for years.

Our young friend's name, it transpired, was Mating. His grandmother welcomed us, smiling amiably. She was a small, thin, bent woman, whose hands were almost transparent, and whose eyes expressed the most extraordinary peace and serenity. Though we had no language in common, she invited us to sit down with the cheerful, well-bred unself-consciousness of a lady who finds herself constrained to entertain distinguished guests in a garret. Mating's grandfather then appeared in the doorway, stripped to the waist and carrying a large bundle of herbs, which he had clearly just cut in the fields. He smiled in the same calm, tranquil way as his wife, and greeted us with the courtesy appropriate to some sylvan prince.

Mating's grandmother seemed anxious to tell us something, and we called in Murad to help the conversation forward. The gist of her remarks was predictable enough: 'Why don't you take Mating with you? You could make him your bearer, and he'd have a chance to learn something, really get ahead. He's wasted here. There's no future for our valley. My husband and I have lived here all our lives, and we want to die here. But he's young and intelligent—he could learn something useful. . . .' We should have been only too pleased to oblige her, we said, but we were just about to return to Italy. If we had met Mating two months earlier, we might have taken him on as Murad's assistant. We were really terribly sorry.

Meanwhile, during this speech, the old lady was very carefully bringing some fruit out from what might be termed the 'sacred area' between the central hearth and the far wall of the living-room. This space was used to store food and cooking utensils, and no one could sleep there or even walk across it without committing a serious infringement of religious taboo. If such contamination took place, a goat had to be sacrificed to the gods immediately, to restore the taboo area to its condition of ritual purity, and once more guarantee the safety of the house. When the mistress needed any object from the 'pure' area in the morning, she had first to wash her hands and forearms carefully in running water.

Mating's pride as he explained all this to us was extremely touching.

*

When we left the house of these two old people, we proceeded to visit the Jestak-kan, or principle village temple. I must emphasize at the outset that very little is known about the Kafir religion. It may well be in the last stages of decadence and disorganization, and thus present an appearance to the outside observer not only of complexity, but also of baffling confusion. During our short stay I reached the conclusion that the Kafirs have lost contact to a considerable extent with the spiritual elements of their faith, and rely more on a mish-mash of peasant superstition and pastoral magic. Among their somewhat nebulous throng of *bahuk*, *shawan*, goddesses, fairies, demons, saints, and vague holy powers hovering on the fringes of personalized reality, there stand out (at least in the Bumboret valley) two particular divinities who enjoy special veneration: Mahandeo and Jestak. Mahandeo (perhaps a form of *Maha-deva*, or Great God?) has a clearly-marked character as the virile warrior-god, the protector of crops, herds, and hunting, indeed of the village and Kafir territory as a whole. He corresponds fairly closely to the terrible Red Kafir deity, Gish. Jestak, on the other hand, has a feminine personality, and presides over all to do with the home, the family, and the biological events of private life: pregnancy, birth, children, household affairs, love, marriage, sickness and, finally, death.

In the neighbouring valley of Rumbur, and the slightly more distant one of Birir, other deities predominate (e.g. Sajigor, Jatzh, Prebal, and Verin) but it seems that there, too, Mahandeo and Jestak occupy a prominent position in the pantheon. The Sanctuary of Verin, dedicated to a divinity no less emphatically masculine than Mahandeo, is famous throughout the Kafir valleys. Verin is credited with a fearsome character, full of choler and vindictiveness. When any Kafir is required to take a solemn oath he does so before Verin's altar—a powerful and dangerous focal point for demonic forces. These forces should never be offended in any way, and to treat them lightly would be utter madness. The goddess Jestak, it is interesting to recall, has a temple in the form of a house as her sanctuary; while the male deities, and Jatzh, the goddess of the harvest, are worshipped in the open air. The major gods are associated with one of those characteristic altars (see photograph no. 150) built on a plinth of dressed stones, more or less square and decorated above with rough wooden (or, very exceptionally, stone) carvings of horses' heads.

The fundamental ritual act in their worship is the sacrifice of domestic animals. Formerly, on the more solemn feast-days, score upon score of oxen would be sacrificed, and the occasion turned into a kind of fearful mass-slaughter. But today the most they do is slit the throats of a few wretched goats. In order to perform the sacrifice properly, a fire must first be lit before the place where the divinity resides. A few branches of sacred juniper are thrown into the flames, and occasionally those of other specially venerated trees such as the holly, the walnut, or the almond. Then the beast has its throat cut, and its blood is poured out on the altar, often mingled with milk or rennet. It seems very likely that in antiquity the head of the sacrificed animal was burnt on the sacred fire; today it is passed through the flames two or three times symbolically, after which head and carcass alike are divided amongst the worshippers and consigned to the cooking-pot.

Every important religious ceremony is accompanied by dancing and rhythmical incantations, to the beat of a drum. As we have seen, there are two main yearly festivals: Chowmas, which takes place at the winter solstice, shortly before Christmas; and Jyoshi, which is held in the spring, about the middle of May, and lasts for three days. Both can be regarded as fundamental offshoots of the annual vegetation-cycle.

One most important concept, which appears in every manifestation of the Kafirs' religious practice, is that of ritual purity. I have already referred to the significant taboo concerning a special area in the kitchen, between the central hearth and the wall at the far end of the room. The Kafir house and its immediate surroundings are thick with such taboos, in much the same way as a modern city centre is a mass of one-way streets, no-parking signs, and roundabouts. Some places are pure, others impure; just as some persons are in a state of ritual purity, whilst others are ritually defiled. Every contact

between the two conditions constitutes an infraction of religious law, and is regarded as a grave sin which requires sacrifices—often highly costly—before the offender can be restored to a state of official grace. Certain birds and animals (e.g. hens) are impure by definition, and it is better to have no truck with them.

Women are to be avoided for at least six days every month, throughout their menstrual period, and whenever they are pregnant. During these 'periods of defilement' they must be shut up in a special house called a *bashali*: every fair-sized village has one. The *bashali* is something very like a quarantine station. Anyone who enters it incurs serious contamination. Food (uncooked) is left on a stone opposite the *bashali*, and one of the inmates comes out and collects it. If for any reason it is essential for a woman to come into the *bashali* 'from outside' (e.g. the midwife, to attend a birth), she must take off all her clothes before crossing the threshold, and leave them outside. Only then, when she is naked, may she set foot inside the place. On coming out again she must take a complete bath before resuming her clothes: this holds good even if the air is frosty and the water frozen.

Women are also debarred from entering the sanctuaries of the gods, except in certain special circumstances. During the major events of the religious calendar there is always an initial (and, as we would deem it, more sacred) part of the ceremony which is reserved exclusively for men, followed by another, more in the nature of a celebratory feast, to which women are admitted, and where they have their own role to perform. Numerous other taboos circumscribe a woman's activities severely: for instance, they are forbidden to eat the flesh of a male animal. Yet despite all this, their general position in Kafir society (whether from the economic point of view, in the running of the home, or parental authority) does not compare at all badly with that of their menfolk.

Such assumptions, which serve to emphasize the fundamental ritual impurity of women at the precise moments when they are most truly female, make it all the easier to understand why the very acme of ritual purity is embodied in the persons of the *On-jesta-mosh*, or boy-virgins. These adolescents, who have had no intercourse with women, play a vital part in every religious ceremony among the Kafirs. It is they who burn the branches of sacred juniper; it is they who cut the throat of the sacrificial victim and sprinkle its blood upon the altar; it is they who tread the first grapes at vintage-time; it is they who consecrate various special plants to protect the herds from season to season.

In addition to blood, milk, juniper, and holly some importance attaches in Kafir cult-practices to wine, which is sometimes sprinkled on the altar, and to bread, which is cut up small and thrown into the fire as an offering to the gods.

The Jestak-kan consisted of a building which differed from ordinary dwelling houses in two respects: it had no upper storey, and in consequence no balconies or colonnade; and the entrance was through an ornate portal, decorated with inlaid panels carved in intricate geometrical patterns, and flanked by ancient sculptures of goats' heads, also in wood (see photograph no. 145). After pushing open this extremely heavy door (it creaked like the door of a hayloft or farm stable) we found ourselves in a low room, windowless and almost completely dark, its stale air redolent of goat-fat, decomposing rennet, and dried blood. The ceiling was supported on a number of wooden pillars; their capitals had an extremely interesting shape (see photographs nos. 148, 149). Here, too, as in Mating's grandmother's kitchen, everything was soot-blackened.

The blackest of all these sooty objects was also the most sacred. This was 'the great Jestak', a heavy wooden plank about six feet high and a little over eighteen inches across, covered with an incrustated layer of age-old ritual filth. The Kafirs regarded it as the physical habitat of the goddess after whom it was named. It was certainly very old: it stood propped up in one corner of the temple, and was decorated with sprigs of the usual sacred plants, now withered and dry. It was plain that Mating, and the two or three other Kafirs attached to our little group, though they might in other respects be fairly tepid about their faith, nevertheless were struck with a feeling of great awe when face to face with this holy-of-holies.

I asked Mating why the temple was so soot-blackened.

'Because every time any rite is celebrated a fire must be lit—and when you have fires day after day, the whole place gradually gets covered with soot. Who knows how many centuries old this Jestak-kan is! At Chowmas, when the sun sinks beneath the crest of the mountains, we light a fire in the middle there—' he pointed to a rough hearth-square—'and we put a cauldron on it. Then we sacrifice a goat and pour some of its blood on Jestak. The rest goes into the pot. In spring, when the Jyoshi festival comes round, the women sprinkle Jestak with milk. Jestak protects our children and our homes, so we must honour her frequently.'

'Is it true that you also celebrate marriages here?'

'Certainly. The bride and bridegroom arrive leading a goat. The usual fire is lit. A boy-virgin sacrifices the goat and sprinkles some of its blood on Jestak, some on the couple to be married. Then the bride takes five little cakes in her hand. The boy-virgin puts some branches of juniper on the fire, then douses them in a bucket of water to put out the flames, after which he carries them behind the bride's back and throws them away, in such a manner that they pass over her head. Finally the bride eats the five cakes.'

'All most odd: why the five cakes, for instance? Why throw juniper branches over the bride's head?'



144: Ancient goat's head, carved in wood, at the entrance to a temple of the goddess Jestak



145



146

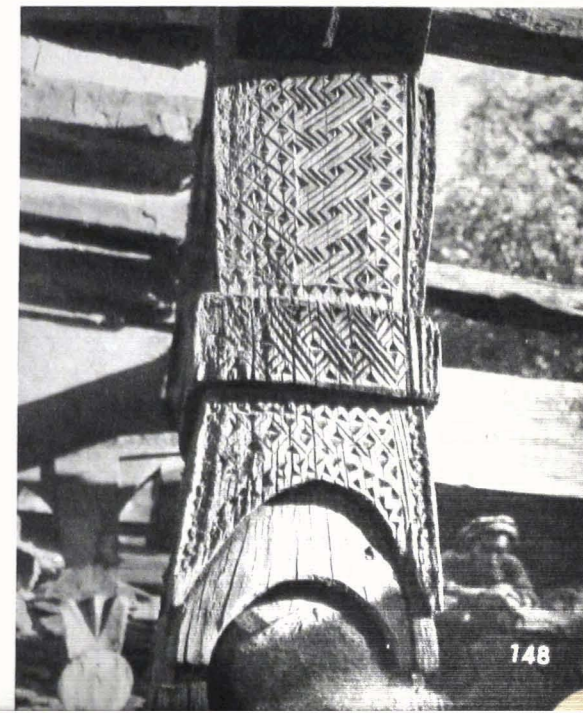
145: Doorway of an abandoned temple

146: In this crude fresco inside a Kaffir temple the goats are far more important than the men hunting them

147-8: Details of wood-carvings in a temple



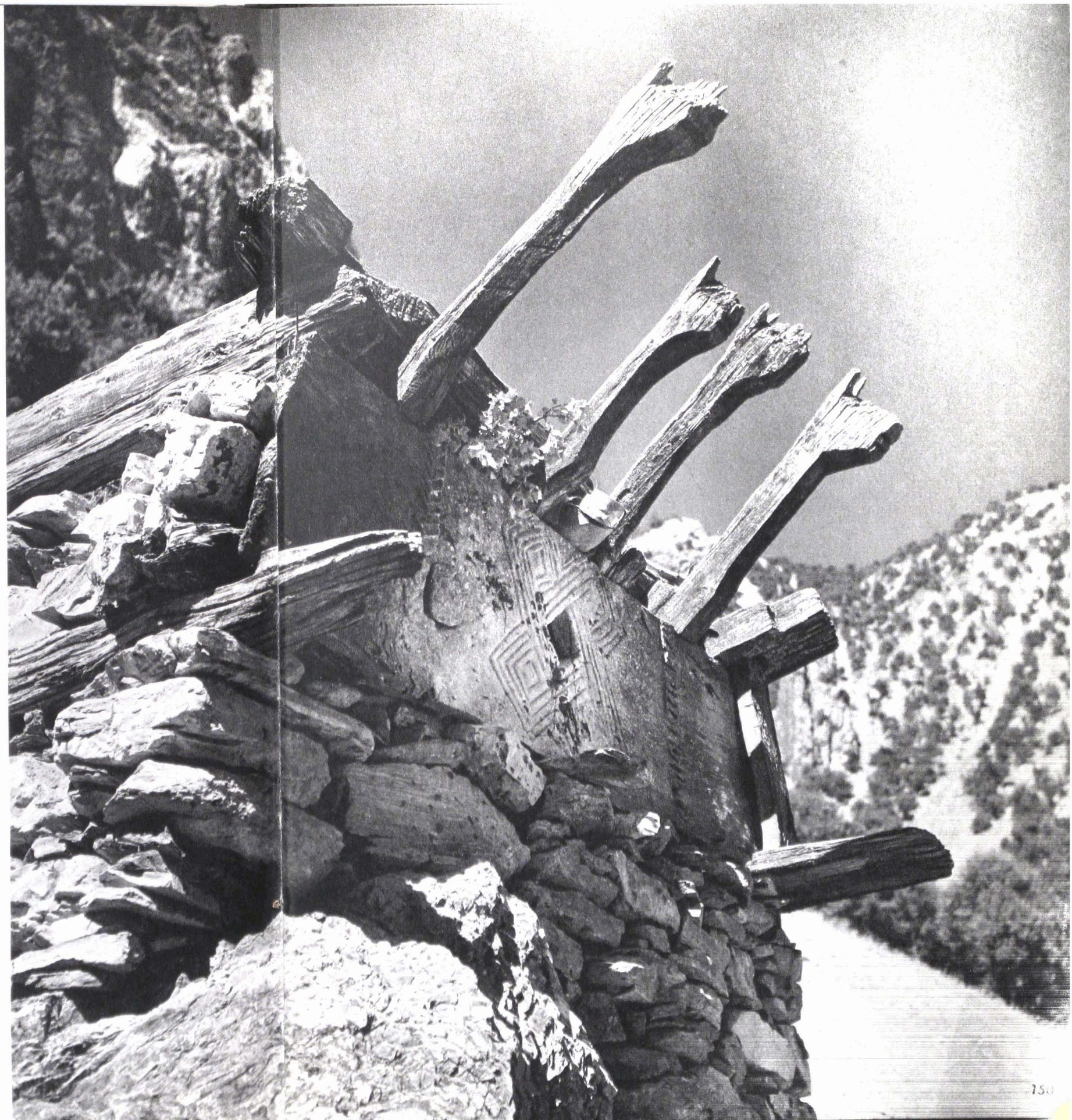
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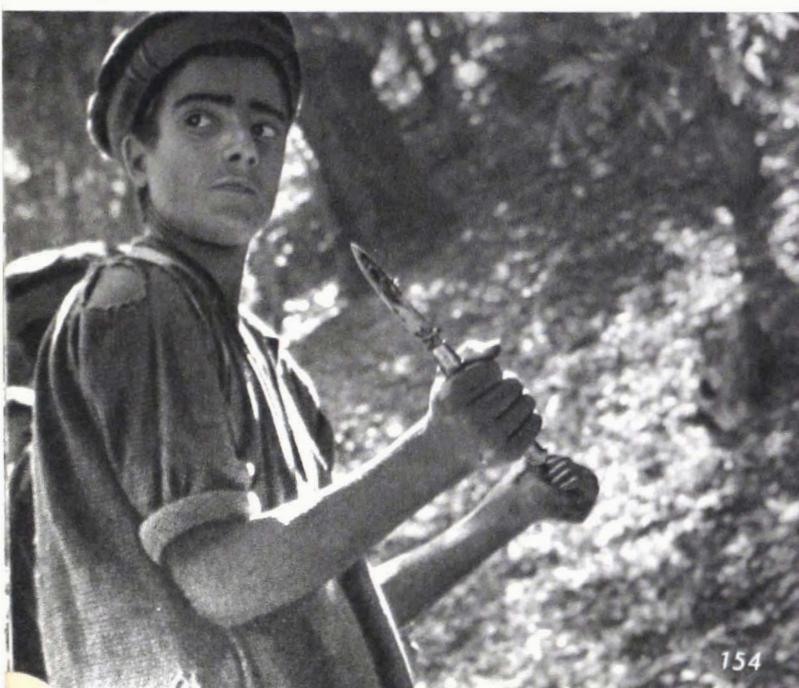
149: Carved wooden capital (detail)

150: A Kaffir altar, with roughly carved images of horses. A little below, on the wooden table with the square hole in the middle, can be seen bloodstains of she-goats sacrificed to the 'all-powerful God'





151-2: The sacred grove of Mohandeo Dur, where the Kaffirs gather for religious ceremonies and to sacrifice she-goats to the gods



153-4: An 'on-jesta-mosh', or young male virgin, raises his arms aloft (having purified them in the torrent) and brandishes the knife that will be used to slaughter the sacrificial goat

155: Another on-jesta-mosh runs round the altar several times, with a flaming juniper-branch in his hand; the scented smoke of this sacred tree is particularly pleasing to the gods





157

156: The goat has been ritually slain and beheaded, and its blood poured out over the altar. Now a shaman invokes the Shawan, or Fates, and passes into a hypnotic trance

157-60: The shaman in hypnosis: he walks on hot coals without feeling pain, and declares, on interrogation, that he can see the Shawan



158



159



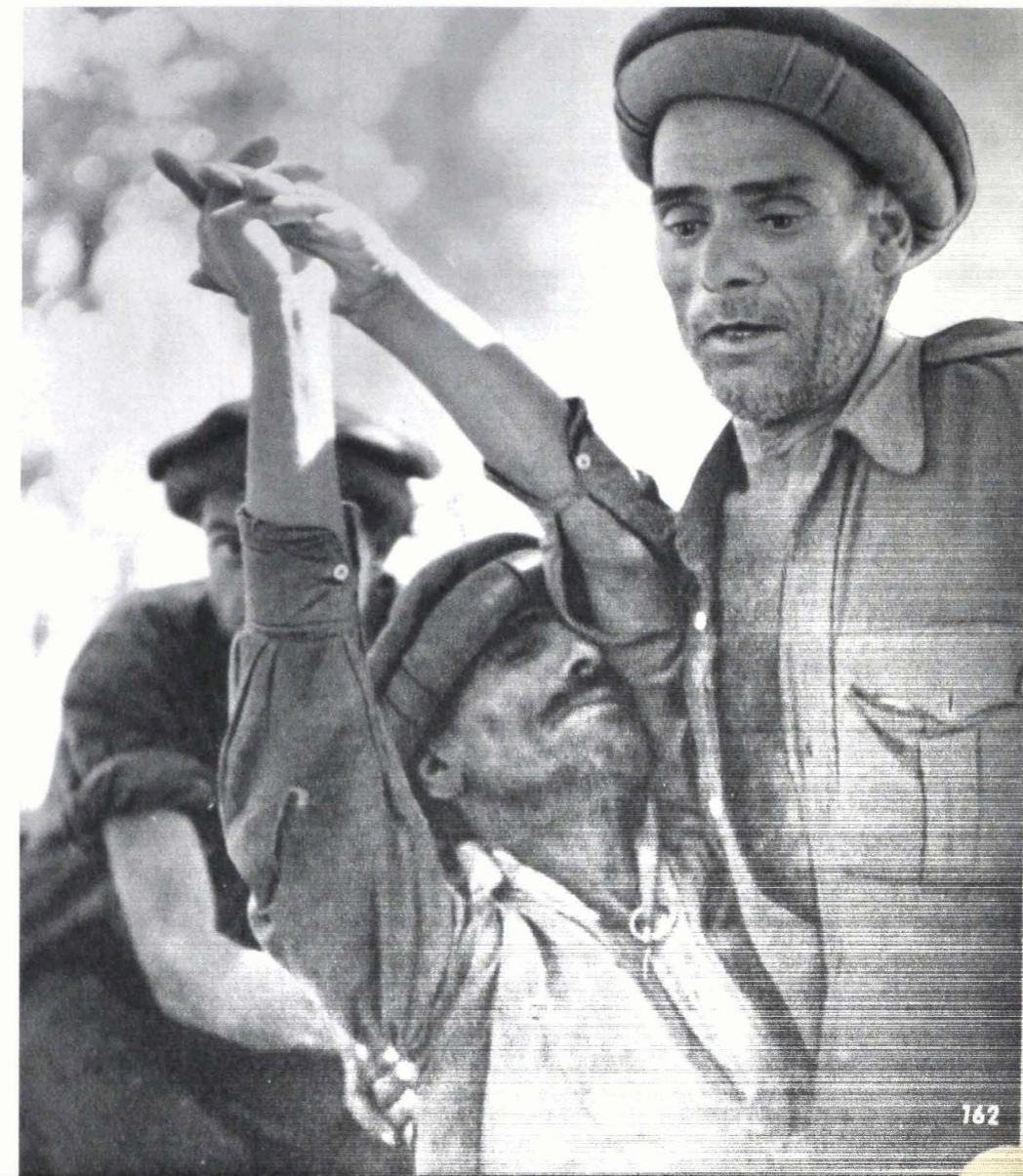
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161

161: The shaman's psychic condition reaches a moment of high tension —

162: — and when, a few minutes later, he comes to himself, he is in a state of collapse



162



163: Bones with totem: a philosopher in wood

‘Who knows? That’s the way our ancestors did it.’

‘Are there any other important facts you could tell us about the Jestak-kan?’

‘One most important thing—as soon as anyone in the village dies, the body is laid out on a *charpoy* and brought here. For two days and nights the neighbours, friends and relatives of the departed stay in the Jestak-kan, eating and drinking, to keep the dead company. If the dead person is a man, there is chanting and dancing; people form up in a circle and go round the corpse very slowly, chanting all the time. If it’s a woman there is chanting, but no dancing.’

We came out into the open again. It was a delicious relief to get a breath of fresh mountain air after the stale, stuffy atmosphere inside the Jestak-kan, the nasty odours of blood and burnt fat and bad rennet and sour bread, the musty stench of sweat and decomposing food, the faint, fetid flavour of death. This was a side of primitive religious belief where the poetic spark kindled by such sacred themes as birth and life and death was drowned in a flood of excretions and obscurities, all big tits and cooking-pots: one felt oneself transported into a grotesque, disgusting world, a butcher’s hairy, dung-ridden abattoir dominated, to the exclusion of all else, by the biology of copulation. The universe as one great bed. Great events reduced to nothing but a phosphorescent glow in the breasts, genitals, or digestive tract, or the cold, congealed sweat of dead flesh.

Close to the ancient Jestak-kan there stood another, newer temple, roofless at present because of a fire which had more or less gutted it. But we were able to photograph several surviving capitals in the typical Kafir style, not to mention a small fresco which portrayed various horned animals—ibex and mountain goat—leaping about in the most vigorous way, while beside them stood a homunculus, looking not at all like the king of creation, but like a serf, subject to the arbitrary authority of the sacred animals (see photograph no. 146).

A little farther on, towards the outskirts of the village, we were taken to see a typical open-air altar, the kind with which most Kafir divinities are associated. It consisted of a box-shaped pile of stones, held together by wooden beams, and topped (by way of decoration) with four primitive horses’ heads, carved in wood. The large altar-slab was engraved with geometrical designs: it also bore traces of rennet, and the blood of some recently sacrificed animal.

I must confess that we returned to the valley feeling a little saddened, as though our romantic expectations had somehow been betrayed. To restore our previous mood, there came the music of a flute (who was piping? and where?) drifting down from the woods above us: a patternless melody, without beginning or end, wandering through the tree-tops like a soft summer breeze.

'Look!' someone shouted suddenly. 'Look—over there!'

Standing among the stones in a mountain torrent was the barbarian king's daughter, washing that fabulous gold-glinting chestnut hair of hers. Now we really had caught her unawares. But she made no attempt to escape: we hailed her amiably as we passed by, like troubadours travelling from one castle to the next, and she simply ignored us—not so much as a glance our way. Her face was hidden behind the tumbling cataract of her hair. Defeated a second time, we made our way back to camp, and consoled ourselves with a dish of eggplants and squash.

*

By now our little camp had become a part of the village. People came and went, or sat down and chatted to us, in the most charmingly unself-conscious way. When holding a conversation with the Kafirs, we were instantly aware of that characteristic lessening of tension in human relationships which is almost always found on passing from an Islamic to a non-Islamic society. Here men and women mingled in the circle around us, without the crushing weight of taboo to keep them apart; and it was pleasant to feel, for once, that the concept 'foreigner' was not exclusively and passionately identified with that of 'infidel'.

The best friend we made was the *pshe*, or *rebun*, the local shaman, a lean, agile, unwashed character of about fifty. His tense, drawn features were characteristic of the man who lives on his nerves, and his great, dark, glowing eyes seemed to be looking inwards, absorbed in self-contemplation. He always carried the little ceremonial axe with the long thin handle—the badge of the Kafir elder, the man of property and consequence, with the privilege of sitting in any council where important matters are being debated. He went about with the axe on his right shoulder—exactly as we had seen it carried by those wooden images in the cemetery, set up to perpetuate the memory of outstandingly worthy citizens.

The *rebun* would rattle on to Murad at breathless speed, telling strange, barely credible (and sometimes quite incredible) stories which Murad then proceeded to translate for our benefit. Soon the valleys became legend-haunted for us too, the scene of grotesque happenings, the home of occult powers, a background for endless chatter in which the sublime and the trivial were inextricably confused. The *bahuk* and *shawan*, and all those other beings whom (for want of a better name) we call spirits or demons, haunted every spot where the forces of nature were liable to surprise or intimidate human beings: high mountains, upland pastures beneath glaciers, lakes, sacred groves, and even—during the silent night watches—ordinary fields.

While the *rebun* and Murad gossiped to one another, I was reading—with huge delight and fascination—a book by Schomberg, the Scotsman who

explored this whole area most thoroughly about 1935.¹ The dry wit of the Highlander might have been specially designed for the task he set himself, which was to retell, in bare, pithy prose, a whole series of fables and sagas from the Kafir valleys. Did the *rebun*, I wonder, tell Murad the story of 'The Stone Man of the Utsui Pass', who was turned into a statue by the gods for his temerity in supposing that he could 'see the whole world' from the top of a mountain? Or the tale of the footprints left along the mountain peaks by Asp-i-duldul, the Horse of Ali? Or the other story about the Iron Bamboo in the Grotto of Mahandelhan? Or the long and curious rigmarole about the seven soothsayers who beat their heads against the Rock of Shidi?

One rather different tale was that concerning the Jestak-kan at Batrik. This temple had to be rebuilt, and many men were sent up into the mountains to fell trees for the beams. When the beams were ready, however, they proved so heavy that not even a hundred men could lift them. A *pshé*, or soothsayer, announced that the solution was clear enough: human blood must be shed to consecrate the new edifice. Only thus could the goddess Jestak be placated, and the tree-trunks 'lightened' again. At once large numbers of volunteers offered themselves as victim. By a curious stroke of chance one of the tree-trunks toppled over on a herdsman, killing him instantly. His death was clearly regarded as a sufficient sacrifice to the goddess, since from that moment the tree-trunks returned to their normal weight, and it was possible to transport them down into the valley . . .

This narrative showed how even here, among the remote fastnesses of the Hindu Kush, it was still possible to find an example of the so-called 'foundation sacrifice', an extremely well-documented phenomenon that has turned up all over the world, from the *hito-bashira* ('foundation-men') of ancient Japanese castles to the ceremonies connected with medieval bridge-building and fortification-work in northern Europe. Schomberg records a popular belief that had wide currency in India, towards the end of the nineteenth century; when British engineers had to construct a railway bridge across a river, they would (it was alleged) secretly murder a native and bury his corpse under the foundations. In this particular instance, we must no doubt make allowances for anti-British propagand; but the slander would never have occurred to even the most acidulous or ingenious critic of the Raj unless the idea of a 'human foundation sacrifice' had been there already.

On a quite different topic, here are some interesting details I discovered about the ceremonies connected with the grape-harvest. When the grapes have all been piled up in the vats, a goat is sacrificed, and its blood sprinkled over them. At this point the boy-virgins come on the scene: it is they who begin the grape-treading, jumping into the vats with bare feet, as is the custom in wine-producing countries the world over. When the wine is ready,

¹ R. F. Schomberg: *Kafirs and Glaciers* (London 1936).

they take a few cupfuls of it and pour a libation on the temple altars, in honour of the gods.

After some time we managed to persuade the *rebun* to sacrifice a goat on Mahandeo's altar for our especial benefit, 'for the good of our health and welfare'. So about 8 o'clock one morning we set out from camp, complete with a wretched goat that cheerfully cropped the grass as it went along, in blithe ignorance of its imminent fate. We passed beyond the village, and walked for some three or four hundred yards through fields and thickets before turning off up a steep path that led to a well-wooded hillside. We eventually reached an extra-dense group of trees, a true sacred grove. Here the branches of holm-oak, walnut, plane and other trees had formed a kind of living grotto, a secret, whispering cave where the sun penetrated only in sharp-dappled points of light. The wind rustling through the foliage overhead sounded like the echo of a storm-tossed sea. Far away, on the other side of the valley, some shepherd was piping to himself: that familiar, mysterious enchanting ripple of notes.

'This,' the shaman explained to us, 'is the real Mahandeo Dur.' It was, indeed, quite apparent that the sanctuary here enjoyed far greater importance than the one on the edge of the village. The altar proper was smaller (it had only two carved horses), but close to it lay a wide dancing-floor, and we also saw several long, sturdy wooden benches, large enough to accommodate a great many people (see photographs nos. 151 and 152). There were the usual wooden columns covered with the same intricate geometrical designs. On the branches of a nearby plane-tree numerous pairs of goats'-horns had been nailed up—presumably after previous sacrifices.

The setting, the characters, the atmosphere, all took me back with irresistible force to those stupendous opening pages of Sir James Frazer's *Golden Bough*, the description of the wood on the Alban Hills near Nemi, where, in the ancient thickets by the lakeside the *Rex Nemorensis* enjoyed a brief hour of uneasy glory—the priest-king who sat on his rustic throne only till another man dispossessed and slew him, and took his place.

Besides the shaman and his assistant, and two or three casual spectators, there were also several *On-jesta-mosh*, boys of fifteen or sixteen who had never been with a woman. Kafir standards of ritual purity seem to place far greater importance on male, rather than female, virginity. Two of the *On-jesta-mosh*, after carefully washing their hands and forearms in a nearby stream, were now standing by, rather like surgeons who have scrubbed up before operating on a patient, and are taking great care not to touch anything that might even slightly contaminate them. One of them held a sharp knife, ready to sacrifice the goat (see photographs nos. 153 and 154).

We were all ready, and the ceremony could begin. Someone lit a small fire of sticks, and juniper-branches (whose scent is pleasing to the Invisible

Powers) were burnt on it. One of the *On-jesta-mosh* took a pair of these flaming branches and circled several times round Mahandeo's altar, spreading the blue, heavily-scented smoke about rather like an altar-boy producing clouds of incense in church (see photograph no. 155). There were two principal celebrants, the shaman himself and his assistant—another thin, sickly-looking man. To begin with, they stood on one side, muttering prayers or sacred formulas in a low, continuous gabble. The goat seemed not in the least alarmed: a precious attribute in the animal kingdom—only dogs seem to sense what is going to happen if someone is about to kill them. One of the *On-jesta-mosh* gripped the poor beast by one horn and swiftly slit its throat: in a few seconds it was dead. He caught the blood in the hollow of his cupped hands and splashed it over the altar. The goat's head was then passed through the flames, backwards and forwards, perhaps to symbolize the destruction of the offering to Mahandeo. In fact, of course, the whole carcass, body and head alike, would very shortly be cut up and divided between those taking part in the sacrifice.

Then came the second part of the ceremony (see photographs nos. 156, 157, 158, 159, 160). The shaman began to whirl back and forth, uttering his invocations in a progressively louder and sharper voice. His assistant made the appropriate responses. Their dialogue became a fast, dramatic exchange. Every now and again a shaft of sunlight contrived to penetrate the dense arch of leaves and branches overhead, and shone straight on the shaman's face (see photograph no. 161). He had his arms raised as he circled round, and very soon he was twisting and writhing like one possessed. Several times he trod in the still-glowing fire, without any apparent ill-effects. He gibbered and foamed at the mouth. His eyes stared sightlessly in front of him. His breast rose and fell in time with his laboured breathing.

'Now he is in communication with the spirits,' his assistant told us, gesturing nervously in his direction. 'Is there anything you would like to ask them?'

Caught thus unprepared, we asked a banal enough question (though since we had been travelling for several months, it was probably a fair pointer to our state of mind): 'Will all go well on our trip home?' we enquired. The assistant asked this question in a long monotonous chant. It would have been interesting to follow it in the original language: probably the idea was embodied in some ritual formula. The shaman whirled round several more times, and trod on the fire again. He waved his arms about, and gazed into space with wide, staring eyes, as though he really saw someone there. Laboriously, almost as though he were vomiting up undigested fragments of food, he muttered a few incoherent phrases. A moment later he collapsed unconscious into the arms of his assistant (see photograph no. 162). Immediately after the embarrassing business of his coming round again,

the assistant announced: 'He says all will go very well with you.' Dr. Lamberti then made a summary medical examination of the shaman, checking his pulse and some of his reflexes: he came to the conclusion that this 'awakening' from a state of self-induced hypnosis—like the hypnosis itself—was perfectly genuine.



We collected our last few belongings and began the descent towards Ayun. By the end of any expedition one is, almost inevitably, reduced to the condition of a wandering beggar. A cooking-pot lost yesterday, a pair of socks today, a pocket-knife tomorrow (always giving the word 'lost' a wide and subtle range of possible meanings)—you end up by living rather as do those Indian *sadhus* whose only possession is a begging-bowl. What is more, this progressive liberation from the burden of objects leaves one with a great sense of calm relief, a kind of cosmic buoyancy.

Yet—despite the stench of goat-fat and the fetid odour of death, despite the melancholy spectacle of a world near its end, despite the bloody, stale-milk, grease-caked horrors of the Jestak-kan—it was a sad wrench leaving the valley of the Kafirs; saying good-bye to Mating and his grandparents depressed us, and we even felt a tug of regret for the neurotic *rebun*. We should have liked to get to know them all far better, and help them overcome the state of chronic frustration in which they lived. A pity, too, that we were not able to investigate more aspects of this fossil existence of theirs, which looked a promising field for many lines of research.

As we trudged down the path through the fields, one of my companions asked me: 'Who do you think the Kafirs really are?'

'Just who they are,' I replied, 'is a question the anthropologists will be able to answer only when they have finished their present investigations: which, I may say, are barely begun, and will probably take a long while yet. The problem is altogether too vast. But the culture of the Kafirs—especially their religion—opens up the most fascinating horizons in one's mind. Did you notice those carvings of horses on Mahandeo's altars? They instantly recall the great horse-sacrifice, the Ashvamedha, from the Vedic period in India—and don't forget that at this sacrifice a horse and a goat were immolated together! Look at the Kafir obsession with ritual purity—don't all those taboos and purificatory rites at once remind you of Indo-Ariyan cult-practices? Even the composition of the Kafir pantheon (leaving aside the gods' individual personalities) is very reminiscent of that other pantheon worshipped by the invaders who spoke an Indo-European tongue, and who overran Europe, Iran and India during the second millennium B.C.'

'You think, then, that the Kafir religion may contain faint surviving traces of the cults practised by our far-off cousins during the Vedic period in India,

the Aryan invasions of Iran, and the Achaean invasion of Greece? Or perhaps even by our immediate Italian ancestors?’

‘Indirectly, and as the faintest of remote echoes, why not? But these are all matters which must be gone into much more thoroughly before we can speak with any degree of confidence. It is true that if this theory proves correct, you and I have witnessed the last blurred, semi-fossilized memory of a dispensation which held sway for thousands of years, in the most civilized area of the known world. The last living survivals of pre-Christian paganism vanished from Barbagia in Sardinia as late as Dante’s time,¹ and later still from certain remote districts of northern Europe. In Asia the Vedic religion was transformed into Brahminism, while the Iranian faith was supplanted first by Zoroastrianism, later by Islam. It may well be that we have here the one true surviving link with the original religion of the Indo-European peoples—here, in these few hundred wretched herdsmen and peasants, these faithful adherents of a dead creed, stuck away among the high valleys of the Hindu Kush.’

We walked on for a little in silence, perhaps thinking of the wives and families with whom we would soon be reunited, of the streets of Rome, of our own houses—for one of us, a flat in the most ancient quarter, right at the heart of the city; for another, a new and gleaming flat in the ‘ferro-concrete skyscraper belt’; for a third, a penthouse overlooking the Tiber.

‘I’ll tell you one thing, though,’ I said, in conclusion. ‘I think, when we return to Italy, we shall look at a great deal in Rome with quite different eyes, simply because of this brief sojourn of ours among the remote Kafirs. There was a time—partly because of one’s schooling, which can flatten even the grandest concept, partly through the critical strictures of Christianity, and partly as a result of the rhetorical dead weight of Fascism—when anything to do with the ancient Romans seemed terribly boring and oppressive, utterly lacking in even the slightest human interest or significance. But who, after this, will be able to climb the Alban Hills without thrilling at the thought that he is walking over the remains of what, once upon a time, was the grove sacred to Diana of Nemi? And when we read of lustrations, and sacrifices to the gods, of priests and flamens, these will no longer be mere tedious academic terms to us: we know them from our own personal experience.’

As we came down the valley, we saw the barbarian king’s daughter sitting on a rock, with several children round her. Her rich, new-washed cascade of hair gleamed in the sun. Once more we turned and waved in her direction, but to no avail: she simply refused to acknowledge our existence.

¹ The reference is to *Purgatorio* 23.94–6; Barbagia is a mountainous region in the Monti del Gennargentu, central Sardinia. (Trs.)

*Essential data on the Italian Expedition
to Mt. Saraghrar, 1959*

June 18-21	Arrival at Karachi.
June 24	Arrival at Peshawar.
July 2	Departure by lorry for Dir.
July 3	Arrival of first group at Dir.
July 5	Arrival of second group at Dir.
July 7	Dir—Gujur Fort.
July 8	Gujur—Lowarai Pass—Ashiret—Chitral.
July 11	Chitral—Koghozi (first group).
July 12	Koghozi—Barennis (second group follows one day's march later).
July 13	Barennis—Charun.
July 14	Charun—Drasan.
July 15	Stop at Drasan. Joined by second group.
July 16	Drasan—Shagram (advance patrol).
July 17	Shagram—Ziwar Uts (advance patrol). Drasan—Warkup (caravan).
July 18	Ziwar Uts—Gram Shal (advance patrol). Warkup—Shagram—Washish (caravan).
July 19-21	Exploration of Ushko and Niroghi glaciers (advance patrol). Washish—Dukadak Pass (15,000 feet)—Gram Shal (caravan).
July 22	Gram Shal—Base Camp (Niroghia: 13,750 feet).
July 24	Exploration of Rome glacier.
July 25	Exploration of Upper Niroghi glacier.
July 28-29	Further exploration of Rome and Sorlawi glaciers. Climb to Mt. Paola (18,370 feet; Castelli and Pinelli) and to Red Peak (18,800 feet; Consiglio).

First Attempt

- August 1 Camp 1 on Sorlawi glacier (16,400 feet).
 August 2 First attempt on Silvio's Couloir.
 August 3 Second attempt on Silvio's Couloir.
 August 4 Return to Base Camp.

Second Attempt

- August 6 Camp 1 on Rome Glacier (16,700 feet).
 August 8 Camp 2 (18,300 feet).
 August 14 Camp 3 (19,100 feet).
 August 18 Camp 4 (20,500 feet).
 August 21 Camp 5 (21,650 feet).
 August 23 Camp 6 (23,000 feet).
 August 24 Saraghrar Peak (24,110 feet) reached by Alletto,
 Castelli, Consiglio, Pinelli.
 August 28 Return to Base Camp.
 September 3 Departure from Base Camp.
 September 9 Return to Chitral.
 September 11-15 Visit to the valleys of the *Kafirs*.
 September 25 Return to Italy.

Various items

Weight of baggage	About 4 tons.
Number of bearers	170
Number of high altitude porters	7

*Photographs in the book**(references are to plate numbers)*

- Alletto 2, 20, 21, 32, 67, 113, 118.
 Castelli 7, 19, 31, 33, 51, 63, 90, 91, 143.
 Consiglio 1.
 Iovane 12.
 Lamberti 30, 34, 35, 116, 119, 123, 138, 139, 151, 153, 155-157.
 Leone 43-45, 47, 65, 74, 124, 134, 136.
 Maraini 4-6, 8-11, 13-18, 22-29, 36-42, 46, 48-50, 52-62, 64, 66,
 68-73, 75-89, 92-112, 114, 115, 120-122, 125-133, 135, 137,
 140-142, 144-150, 152, 154, 158-163.
 Pinelli 3, 117.

Errata

In the caption to Plate 4, for 'pose' read 'drapery', and in the caption to Plate 21, for '22,050 ft.' read '24,170 ft.'

A Note on the British Expedition, Saraghrar, 1958

THE following appeared in the *Alpine Journal*, May 1959 (No. 298, page 116) and is reprinted here by kind permission of the Alpine Society:

This peak was attempted by the Oxford Chitral Expedition. Base Camp, at 13,800 ft. beneath the West wall of Saraghrar, was reached on August 8. After about ten days it was decided that although there was no obviously easy route, the North Cwm offered the best prospect. It was hoped that a way could be made up a steep snow couloir at the head of the glacier (19,000 ft.) to the summit ridge (c. 22,500 ft.) and thence about three-quarters of a mile along the easily inclined ridge to the summit.

The succeeding days were occupied in achieving a build-up of supplies and camps. Upper Camp I was pitched at 17,500 ft. on August 12, an intermediate Lower Camp I at 16,000 ft. on August 18, and Camp II at 18,500 ft. on August 19.

On August 24 the assault was prepared by which it was proposed that two assault parties, at an interval of two days, should each climb to the summit, the whole operation to take eight days. The plan involved the establishment of two, and possibly three, more camps. The first assault party was composed of P. S. Nelson and F. S. Plumpton; the second of E. W. Norrish, W. G. Roberts, and N. A. J. Rogers.

On August 27 there occurred an accident which resulted in the death of Nelson. He and Plumpton were returning from an unsuccessful attempt to reach the summit ridge from Camp III. The highest point they reached was about 21,700 ft. In retracing their footsteps to Camp III they had to recross the steep snow couloir. While doing this Nelson dropped his axe and overbalanced as he tried to regain it. Without his axe, he fell out of control for about 1,000 ft. and was killed instantly. He was not roped; having decided to cross the gully first he was of the opinion that the rope would not provide much more security after a few yards than was already provided by his ice-axe. Furthermore, he was wearing crampons and had already been over this section once during the day.

In the light of this accident it was decided unanimously to give up the attempt on the mountain. Several factors contributed to this decision. In

the first place, such an accident was very distressing to the whole party, but especially to the porters who witnessed it from close quarters and who were much demoralized by it. Secondly, in these circumstances the route was adjudged too formidable. Although quite steep, the couloir was not in fact of excessive difficulty; the accident which occurred in it was of a kind that could have occurred on any hard snow or ice slope in any range of mountains; the party now considered it their duty to avoid all further risks of any kind, even such as would normally have been called justifiable.

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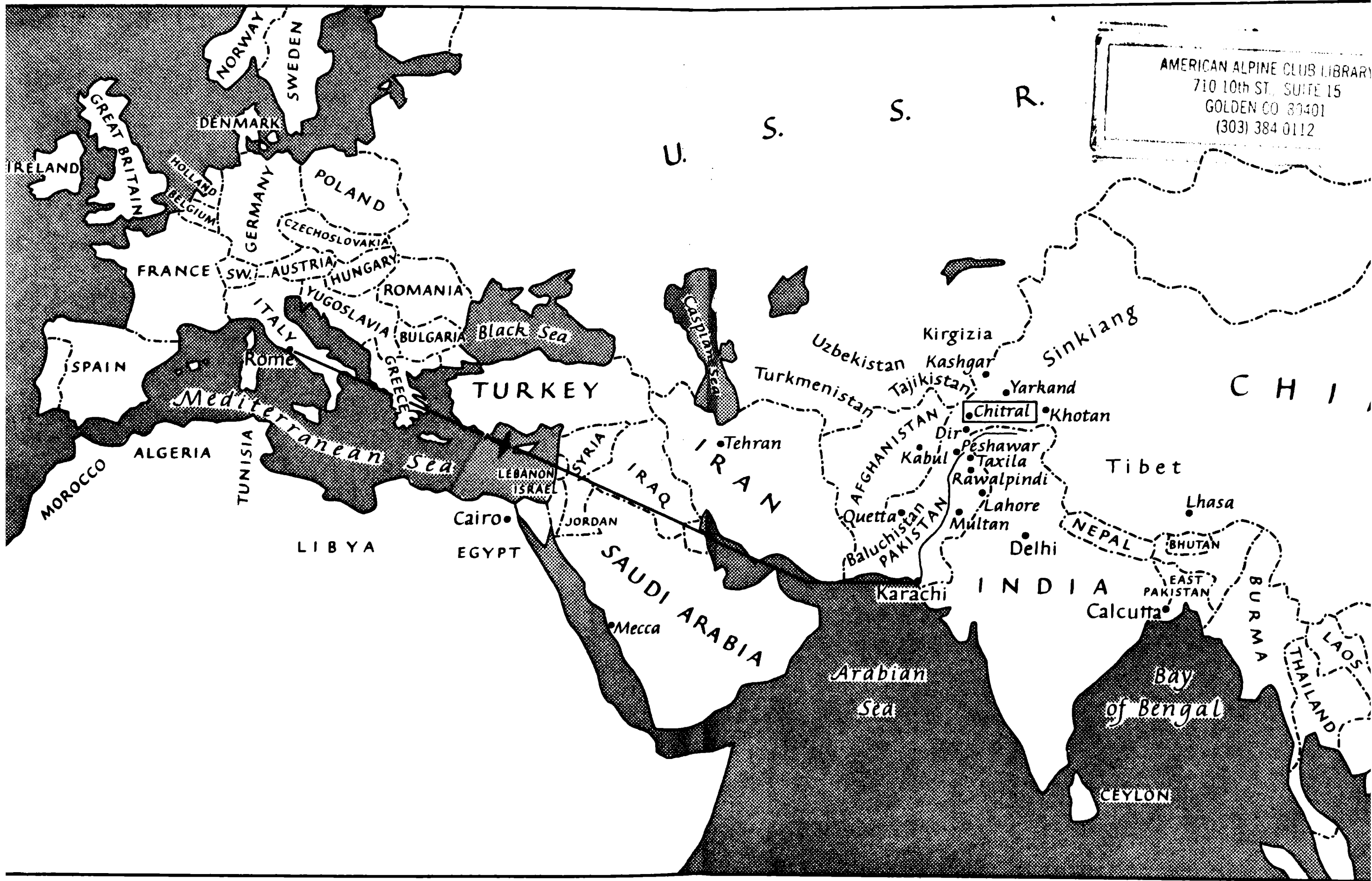
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