

WORDS FOR MY BROTHER

Travels Between the Hindu Kush and the Himalayas

By

JOHN STALEY

KARACHI

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To

ELIZABETH

Companion on many journeys

People listen to my song,
I have made words for my brother . . .

Kalash song

PREFACE

This book originated in a shared experience. At intervals over several years Elizabeth and I have lived and travelled in some of the most mountainous country in the world. This country, which I have called *Kohistan* (the land of mountains), for want of a familiar inclusive name, is in the extreme north of Pakistan. The people who live there made us welcome, and many of them have become our friends. Anyone who reads the book will realize how much we owe to these friendships.

Our specific purpose was a study of this extraordinary physical environment, and of the kind of life which people have made for themselves there. This was our reason for travelling widely: we walked a thousand miles one summer.

We also had a more personal objective. This was to see man and society from a different viewpoint and with a broader perspective. We had been born and brought up in a particular kind of society: the middle class of Britain. In Kohistan we found a very different society and culture; yet it was one in which we felt at home. Neither of us are the same after the experience of Kohistan, and we are grateful for that.

The book itself is an attempt to convey something of the nature and flavour of the life we found there. In the later chapters I have also traced some of the historical relationships that developed between Kohistan and the surrounding areas, including British India. It may be more usual for the historical setting to come at the beginning; but for Kohistan the mountains themselves must come first. This is terrain in which even birds in flight are seen against a background of mountains.

The book was originally completed in 1972, but was revised in 1980 for publication.

July 1981

J.S.

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Several of our friends in Kohistan who shared their knowledge and insights with us are mentioned in the text, and I shall not repeat their names here. Others are too numerous to be mentioned individually, except for Shahzada Burhanudin, from whom we received much hospitality, and Dr. Sardar-ul-Mulk, who spent many hours with us in illuminating discussion. Shahzada Hussam-ul-Mulk and Wazir Ali Shah generously lent us their own unpublished research material.

There were several people in Britain from whom we also received information and assistance. Among them were former Political Agents in Gilgit and Chitral, including Lt. Col. D.L.R. Lorimer, Lt. Col. E. H. Cobb, and Sir Herbert Todd.

The librarian at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London has given me access to the 'Lorimer Papers'; and the librarian and his colleagues at the Royal Geographical Society have been most helpful. Most of the books and articles that I have consulted are listed in the bibliography. Dr. G.J. Alder has kindly given permission to quote from his book, *British India's Northern Frontier: 1865-95 A Study in Imperial Policy*, Royal Commonwealth Society and Longmans, 1963. John Murray (Publishers) Ltd. have kindly given permission to quote from *The Heart of a Continent* by Francis Younghusband.

Elizabeth has drawn the maps and diagrams and she and I took all except one of the photographs. I also record thanks

to those in various places who have helped with my manuscripts and drafts.

To Janet Pott, my mother-in-law, I owe more than she realizes. She has not only helped with the research and the writing, but has also shown continuous interest and understanding. Most of the book has been written in her house, and it is fitting that it should be finished here.

Elizabeth and I shared the travel and the experience. The book too has been a shared enterprise. It is I who have written it, but I would not have done so without her ideas, her material assistance, her 'judicious but unvexatious' criticism and, above all, her encouragement and support.

J.S.

CHAPTER ONE

PROLOGUE

Below the sources of the Indus are the *Duradrae* and their mountains above.

*Claudius Ptolemy,
Alexandrian geographer, second century A.D.*

In no other part of the world, probably, is there to be found such a large number of lofty mountains within so confined a space.

*John Biddulph,
first British Political Officer in Gilgit, 1877-81¹*

We walked up from Gilgit to Minapin in the company of Ghulam Abbas, whose paternal grandfather had been Wazir of Nagar. It was the end of July, a good time to travel in the upper valleys. Maize and millet were coming up in the fields and people were about their work; melt-water streams had breached the road and closed it to jeeps; and the apricots were still in season in the higher villages.

As we left the village of Chalt the 'lordly apparition' of Rakaposhi came into view: more than three vertical miles of mountain, rising abruptly from a desert, ringed by forest, capped by ice, and omnipresent for days of onward travel thereafter. 'I have never been able to see beauty in mountains,' Ghulam Abbas remarked, reading our thoughts. 'To us, though we know them so well, they are harsh and ugly. If only Rakaposhi was a flat plain where we could make fields, grow crops, and build our houses.' He smiled to excuse his remarks. Manners in Kohistan are faultless.

This was our first journey and we were ignorant of the local conventions. We must have been an embarrassment, though he never gave us the slightest hint of it. By choosing to go on foot ourselves, we had in effect chosen the same for him, as our companion; but as the grandson of a Wazir, even an exiled Wazir, he was expected to ride by horse or jeep wherever practicable. Not that Ghulam Abbas minded walking—and he laughed at the shocked and embarrassed looks along the way—but worse was to follow. On the second day we fell in with two men who were driving

¹ Biddulph, 1880, p. 1.

some unladen donkeys up the valley, and we hired these to carry our packs and also to carry us from time to time to rest our tender plains-dwellers' feet. Elizabeth and I were mounted like this when three tall horsemen on gigantic stallions rounded a blind corner and loomed over us. They looked down at us with such astonishment that we knew something was wrong. Afterwards Ghulam Abbas confessed that only little boys ride donkeys in Kohistan, and then only as a joke. We had much to learn. I learnt a second lesson from that same encounter, when the horsemen dismounted and hospitably offered us bread. Accepting some and breaking it, I carelessly flicked a few crumbs onto the road, and was humiliated at seeing the donkey-men stoop down to pick the crumbs from the dust and eat them.

A little further on, at an especially precipitous place, Ghulam Abbas told us how as a child he had been riding there late one night with his father and some relatives. 'I was so tired that I fell asleep on my horse, and was awakened by a tremendous clout from my father. He was furious that I should have slept and risked falling off into the river. Since then I have slept on a horse only once—and I did fall off too, but fortunately not at a dangerous place.'

We came to the village of Nilt where, for nearly three weeks, the men of Nagar resisted the British-Indian army in 1891. Ghulam Abbas showed us the place below the defences where the besiegers used to play football for recreation, and the ground above where the defenders likewise played polo. Eventually the besiegers took the position. 'It was a pretty fight,' one British officer remarked at the time; 'My maternal grandfather was shot dead,' Ghulam Abbas confided to us. After the battle the valley was incorporated into British India. Indeed, at the time of this first journey, when it seemed already an eternity since imperialism was discredited and British India ceased to be British, it was astonishing to find that there were men still alive who remembered the battle of Nilt and who had lived through the whole process from imperial conquest to independence. Difficulties with perspective are characteristic of history in Kohistan. In the next village we listened to tales of the missionaries who brought Islam to the valley three or four centuries ago, and from the vividness of the telling that too might have happened within living memory. Indeed Saint Shah Wali, a whimsical worker of miracles who is buried nearby, still sometimes appears in old men's dreams.

Perspective and scale constantly bewildered us in Kohistan. Distances are measured in time, time is measured by the importance of events, events are assessed according to the men involved, men are judged by the status of their fathers and grandfathers, and women are remembered by the number of their sons and grandsons.

On the third day we reached the village of Minapin, a fertile triangle in the valley bottom, where five hundred people live. Our destination was an erratic glacier which descends towards the village from the northern slopes of Rakaposhi. We did not foresee then that we should be returning to Kohistan again and again to immerse ourselves in the life we found there.

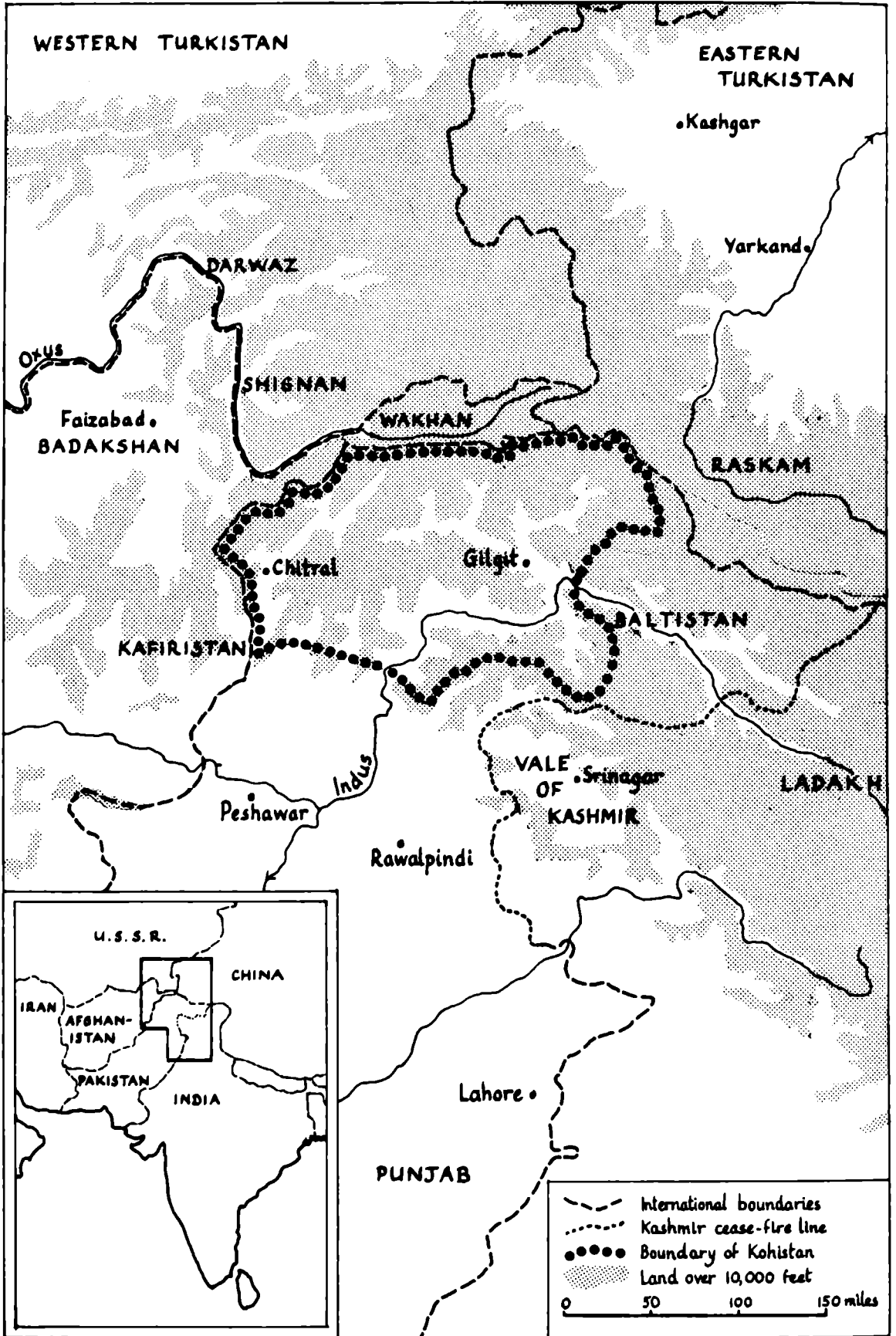
* * *

Kohistan is Persian for 'The Land of Mountains'. The people of the plains use it as a vague but comprehensive term for any nearby mountains, and since there is no general name for the mountains that this book is about we have adopted it. As used in the plains, *Kohistan* carries undertones of mystery and hardship. Although he may live only thirty miles away, the plainsman implies by the word a place remote and foreign, and one that he disapproves of as unpredictable and ungodly. One recent traveller was warned in all seriousness as he left the foothills that he was bound for a country full of 'terrible mountains covered by many-coloured snow . . . poisonous gases causing head and stomach pains . . . and snakes that leap ten feet into the air.'¹

Kohistan, as applied in this book, lies in the north of Pakistan (Map 1). It stretches from the great water divide of Central Asia southwards until the high mountains give way to lower and wetter hills which support an entirely different pattern of settlement. On the one side it includes the western ends of the Himalayas and the Karakoram; on the other it includes the eastern part of the Hindu Kush (Map 2). These ranges are incredibly mountainous: mountains form the background to every view and every activity. The total area is 25,000 square miles, and the total population 350,000.

The earliest evidence of man in Kohistan is three well-designed pots from the Chitral valley. These are now in the

¹ Barth, 1956b, p. 1089n.



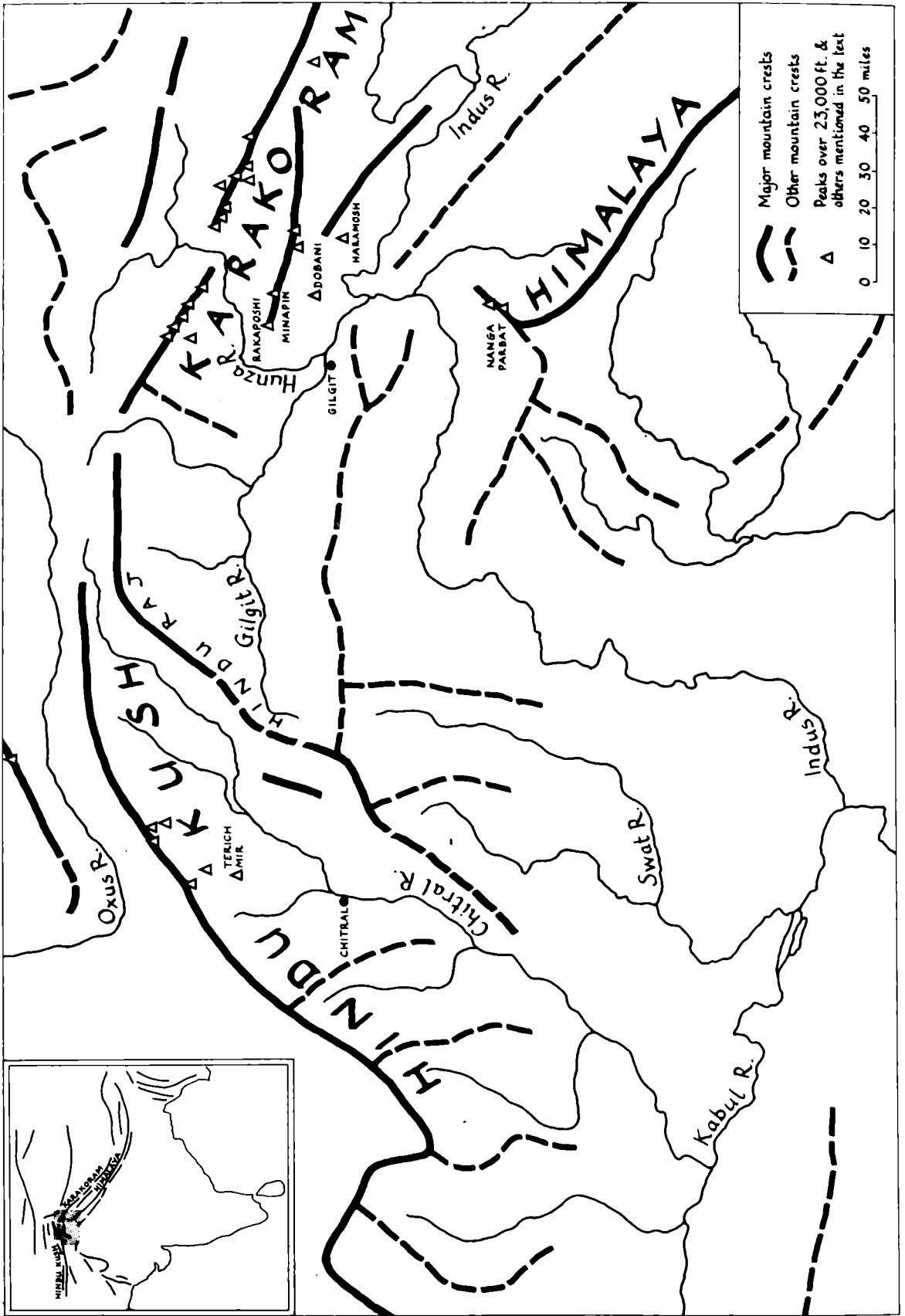
Map 1. The location of Kohistan.

Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and have been tentatively assigned to the end of the second millennium B.C. Nothing is known of their makers except that they probably came from the west during the time of the Aryan migrations. Later on a few ancient writers in Sanskrit, Greek and Latin briefly mentioned the mountains and their inhabitants, using names such as Duradrae or Darada. But it was really not until the nineteenth century A.D., during which most of Kohistan was annexed to British India, that the area became known to the outside world. From early times it seems to have been a 'refuge environment', a final resort for peoples driven off the more productive plains in the south, a place of safety for refugees from Islam, and an alternative territory for pastoralists forced north by the irrigation of the Punjab. Such groups have survived in a bewildering variety of languages—we listed sixteen in Kohistan—but they have reached a homogeneity in their material culture and economy.

Almost all the inhabitants are now Moslems, and almost all are farmers, growing their food in scattered villages along the main valleys. The valley bottoms are rainless and barren, so crops can be raised only where occasional scraps of flat land can be irrigated. The results of this irrigation are patches of vivid green in a brown and arid setting, which have been aptly described as 'horizontal oases in a vertical desert'. Farmers also have animals—two or three cows and bulls, and twenty or more goats and sheep—which are taken up to pastures high on the mountains during the summer and are brought down to the villages in winter for stall-feeding.

A few of the villages have an extra importance because of their strategic positions, or because ancient trickles of commerce passed through them. Two, Gilgit and Chitral, were for centuries the capitals of small eponymous kingdoms.¹ Later they became garrison and administrative centres for the British-Indian and Pakistan Governments. Each is surrounded by some five square miles of cultivation, having swallowed up adjacent villages in the manner of capitals elsewhere. Each contains a bazaar of tiny shops and a small but increasing number of government offices and stores. There is piped water in the houses of a few rich men and the rudiments of electricity for government purposes. In both places there is an airstrip. Many of our journeys in Kohistan have begun at one or other of these 'towns'.

¹ Villages and areas mentioned in the text can be located on Map 6. Rivers, peaks and passes can be located on Map 7.



Map 2. Ranges and peaks.

On our first journey in Kohistan we had a specific objective—to study the glacier at Minapin—but later visits were wider in scope and ambition. Glaciers led our attention to melt-water and thence to irrigation; irrigation led us to farming and farmers; and so we came to people, at first in their physical environment, and then in their historical and cultural setting. The process of learning, a concentric progression of talk, experience, observation, and insight, has been like living second lives.

* * *

So now, when we arrive at Gilgit 'town', we neglect the eccentricities of the glacier, and first climb up to the orchard of Raja Mumtaz, who is descended from the former kings of Gilgit. His orchard stands upon a cliff top, and from it we can survey the valley below and can see most of the Raja's ancestors' kingdom. Behind the orchard the barren hillside rises steeply for another 5,000 feet to a jagged skyline and the silhouettes of a few stunted trees. No one lives on these steep slopes now, but long ago, according to local legend, a Buddhist lama lived there in a monastery and emerged once a year to bless the people in the valley below. On the opposite side of the valley, one and a half miles away, the slopes are equally steep and barren, but occasionally, in the clear light of evening, a white donkey can be seen slowly moving down the long zigzag path from Harelli. The slowness of its progress from zig to zag is a reminder of the distances, both across the valley and from the top of the path to the valley floor. In the early morning some of the men of Gilgit and neighbouring villages take their donkeys, usually an inconspicuous grey but sometimes white, and drive them to Harelli for firewood. If the men work hard they can load two or three donkeys each and still reach home by sunset.

Raja Mumtaz's men irrigate the grass in his orchard with care, and his sheep graze it short. Some of the earliest of the new season's apricots ripen on his trees each spring. As we wander about we envy the Raja's orchard. He himself has not spent much time there recently, having been busy in preparations for taking a second wife. People in Gilgit shake their heads over this, and someone remarks, 'A man with two wives is like a mouse at the entrance of its hole with a cat outside and a snake inside.'

From the orchard we can look north-westward, up the Gilgit valley towards the tiny kingdom of Punial, and we see the valley becoming narrower and darker behind the long blue sunbeams that slant across in late afternoon. We think of the handsome ruler of Punial, perhaps holding informal court in his modest palace, or perhaps inspecting his raspberries, the only ones to be cultivated in Kohistan. We think too of the twenty-five days' journey on foot or horseback through the mountains beyond Punial to Faizabad in Badakshan, and of the high and icy passes by which men on foot may reach the Pamirs in summer.

To the north-east, beyond the green oasis of Gilgit, the valley wall is breached by the mouth of the Hunza valley, through which we had travelled on our way to Minapin. Above and behind stands the snowy triangle of Dobani, white and inconspicuous in the glare of midday, but a soft pink as the sun sinks. Further down the Gilgit valley, near the confluence of the Gilgit river with the Indus, is Haramosh, still strikingly high at a distance of thirty-five miles.

Immediately below us, at the foot of the cliff, is Naikui, 'the new village', a cluster of small, neat, mud-plastered houses and walled courtyards, and a patchwork of fields and fruit trees. By September the second crop is well advanced, and the pale yellow flowers of the maize contrast with the vivid green of rice and the darker green of lucerne. In a few weeks golden maize cobs will be drying on the flat rooftops, and straw will be lodged in branches beyond the reach of hungry animals. Fields will be empty and varying shades of brown, and small boys will climb the trees to shake down the last few autumn leaves for the scavenging goats. We listen to the evening sounds of Naikui—scraps of men's conversations, mothers calling to young children, a donkey braying, some boys playing 'foot-polo', wood being chopped, a young man's name being shouted.

We take care to leave the orchard before dark because the path down is steep and rough. As we start the last of the sun lengthens the shadows behind the poplars along the irrigation channels. There is a special quality about the evening light in Kohistan, a clarity that shrinks space so that the landscape becomes a miniature of itself. The great size of the mountains around add to the deception by minimizing the smaller elements. A hundred-foot cliff to the river is mistaken for a five-foot stone wall, and figures move from field to field like toys. One feels that by stretching out a hand one can

hurry the plodding bullock, or turn the dusty farmer from his evening winnowing to the next field where he must irrigate the maize. Elizabeth and I choose our toys; for me a young wife scurrying home—little risk of her dawdling, and I win a safe move. Elizabeth takes a greater risk with three little girls going out to collect mulberries: one of them climbs the trees and shakes the sticky fruit down into the dark red cloth held underneath by her sisters—but if they eat the fruit instead of carrying it home I win that move too.

As the sun leaves the valley floor and the shade quickly climbs the slopes opposite, a chill falls and we shiver and hurry. The wisp of cloud attached to Dobani turns pink and orange (the evening fire of the fairies, people in Gilgit say), while the free drifting clouds turn red at the edges and then a uniform purple. There are a few moments when the sun remains on Dobani and Haramosh alone, while on all the lesser mountains it is already dark.

Down on to the dusty, narrow track that leads to the bazaar, but soon we leave it and take a short cut through the fields. We turn left at the field of the carpenter who recently brought a *bitan* to exorcize his ill luck. We turn right behind the shrine of the Moslem saint to avoid a five-foot jump from one terraced field to another. We skirt round the group of *purdah* women with the proper mixture of indifference and deference. We pick up stones at the right moment to discourage the ill-tempered dog that lurks near the next orchard. We watch for the friend who may offer a cup of tea. Finally we make our way, to our simple but nonetheless great satisfaction, through a field of tall maize to the exact spot where the upper irrigation channel can be crossed by the only foot-bridge for a quarter of a mile.

By the time we reach the bazaar, the merchants are closing their shops and hurrying away in the gloom to join the second prayers of evening. 'God is most great. I testify that there is no God but Allah. I testify that Mohammed is God's Apostle. Come to prayer, come to security. God is most great.' The call reverberates across the still fields and echoes back from the mosques in every outlying hamlet. But down near the Gilgit river the sound is lost in the waters' roar. Nor has it yet been heard on the snows of Dobani, where Kohistan's oldest inhabitants, the fairies, have taken their final refuge from the new religion that has displaced both them and the Buddhist lama.

CHAPTER TWO

THE MOUNTAINS

Here a tumult of the highest known peaks lift their unscaled pinnacles above the deepest valleys, the most sombre ravines. The longest glaciers on the globe outside the Arctic Circle pour their frozen cataracts down the riven and tortured hollows of the mountains. Great rivers foam and thunder in flood-time along the resounding gorges . . . Avalanches of snow, and—still more remarkable—of mud, come plunging down the long slopes, and distort the face of Nature as though by some lamentable disease. In this great workshop of primeval forces, wherever the imprisoned energies are not still at work, they have left their indelible traces . . .

*George Curzon,
describing his journey through the Hunza valley in 1894.*¹

If you climb up behind Raja Mumtaz's orchard to the top of the ridge—and even if you are young and energetic, it will take you most of a day to do so—you can look around at one of the greatest concentrations of mountains in the world (Map 2). As you face south, with your back to Gilgit, your attention is immediately captured by Nanga Parbat which stands isolated and conspicuous above the lower mountains. More than thirty men died on Nanga Parbat before it was climbed in 1953. The mountain marks the westernmost limit of the Himalayas. From this gigantic bastion the Himalayas stretch away south-eastwards along the whole northern edge of the Indian subcontinent.

Turn slightly eastward, and you face towards the source of the Indus more than six hundred miles away in Tibet. From this remote source the river flows towards you, passing through the once independent kingdoms of Ladakh and Baltistan, and continuing in the same north-westerly direction through a great gorge until it enters Kohistan. South of the mountain Dobani, near its confluence with the Gilgit river, the Indus bends south towards Nanga Parbat. At the foot of that mountain, it turns away and runs west for nearly a hundred miles, and finally turns south again towards the distant plains of the Punjab. All rivers in the eastern part of

¹Curzon, 1926, pp. 195-6.

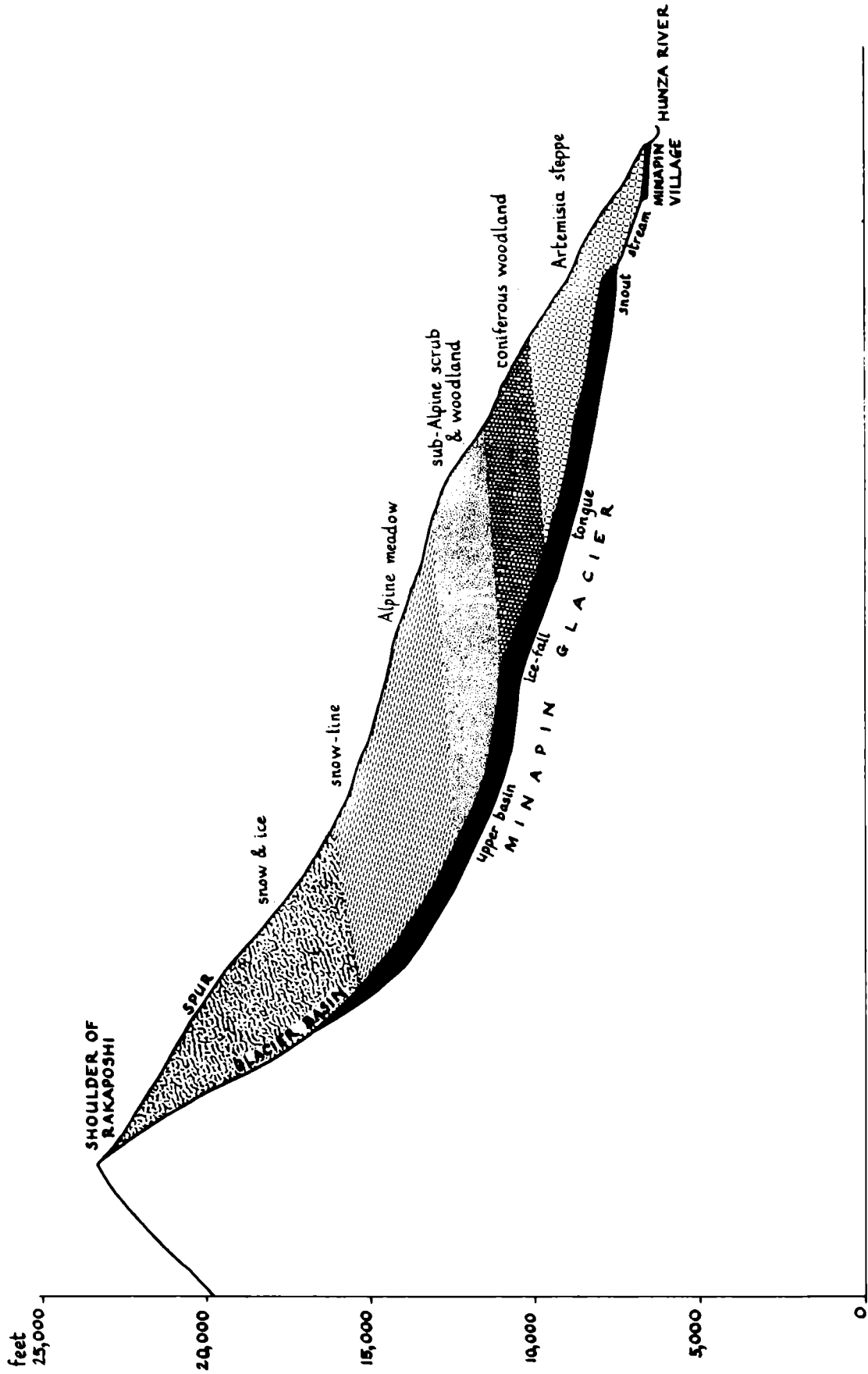
Kohistan drain into the Indus. The rivers of the western part first flow south down to the plains, but eventually they too join the Indus.

Turn further to the left, towards the north-east, and you face the Karakoram, the less accessible and less known sister range of the Himalayas. Here a multitude of high mountains, nineteen of them exceeding 25,000 feet, rise from country where more than a quarter of the surface is permanently covered by ice and snow. In the south-western rank, nearest to Gilgit and visible from the ridge, are Haramosh, Minapin, Dobani and Rakaposhi.¹ Many others, including K2 the world's second highest peak, lie hidden behind. North of the Karakoram is Eastern Turkistan and the desert cities from where came the celebrated goods of Central Asia—carpets from Kashgar, jade from Khotan, bricks of tea blended with the leaves of ten other plants, hashish of the finest quality, the tails of yaks for dusting gods in Hindu temples, silks, sulphur and silver.

Look to the north-west, up the Gilgit valley towards Punial, and you look in the direction of the Hindu Kush, a third range of high and formidable mountains, but too distant to be visible. The Gilgit valley extends for a hundred miles to the Shandur pass, by which the Hindu Raj range, a subsidiary of the Hindu Kush, can be crossed. On the other side of the Hindu Raj are the valleys of the Chitral river and its tributaries. Beyond them is the main crest of the Hindu Kush with its highest peak, Terich Mir, the home of the Chitral fairies (Plate 2). Beyond the Hindu Kush are the open sweeping valleys of Badakshan and, beyond them again, the steppes and deserts of Western Turkistan. The Hindu Kush and the Hindu Raj, together with the rivers that drain them, are oriented north-east south-west. Thus they form the western arm of the great curved mountain system at whose centre is Kohistan, while the Karakoram and Himalayas form the eastern arm (Map 2).

To divide this great curve into ranges and to give each a separate name is a convenience for the map-maker and geogra-

¹ Few mountains in Kohistan have local names. Many of the supposedly local names that are now used by surveyors and mountaineers have been misapplied, as translation shows—'the sheepfold near the ice', 'the valley of the water mills', and even 'a pair of trousers'. Few topographic features of any kind have names unless they are important economically, such as a grazing ground or a source of irrigation water. (Lorimer, 1938, p. 124). The point was made by the answer one linguist got when he asked the name of a particular flower: 'How can we have a name for a thing we do not eat?' Another linguist, enquiring after the local names of small birds such as sparrows, found that they are known only by the crops they eat, e.g. 'barley birds' and 'mulberry birds'.



N.

Approximate horizontal scale: 1 mile Approximate vertical exaggeration X 1.5

Fig. 1. A mountain section showing vegetation zones, glacier, and village site: a sketch section of the western side of the Minapin basin.

pher. To the structural geologist they are all products of an intermittent but continuing upheaval that began a hundred million years or more ago. The Indian subcontinent and a great landmass to the north converged, and the bed of the ocean between them was folded and creased around the triangular northern apex of the subcontinent, so raising up this great curved mountain system. The mountains that now stand so high and steep are not the original upfoldings, but result from continuing uplifts and millennia of carving and cutting by river and ice along the lines of the original folding.

The orientation of the mountains of Kohistan makes them an effective shield against the summer monsoon. Any monsoon moisture that does penetrate so far north falls mainly as snow on the mountains. At Gilgit, in the valley bottom, the average rainfall during the summer is less than two inches, although in the foothills only one hundred and fifty miles further south it is thirty-six inches. However Kohistan is less protected from the westerly depressions that skirt along the southern edge of the mountains during the winter, and so, especially in the south and south-west, both mountains and valleys receive more snow or rain at that season. Even so, taking the whole year, the average precipitation in Gilgit is only five inches (which is the same as in much of the Sahara desert), while further west, in Chitral town, it is still only fifteen inches.

In spring and summer temperatures rise and most of the snow melts, bringing the streams and rivers into spate. But above 17,000 feet some snow survives from year to year, and during late summer the lower edge of this permanent snow, the 'snow-line', becomes a conspicuous feature of distant views. Above the snow-line, wherever thick snow accumulates year after year, it gradually turns into ice. Where this happens on a steep slope, as around a mountain peak, the ice streams imperceptibly away downhill in the form of glaciers (Fig. 1). The glacier ice also melts, though more slowly than snow, and because more ice is continuously flowing down from above the snow-line, an equilibrium is set up, the lower end, or 'snout', of a glacier remaining at the point where the ice melts away at the same rate as it is replenished from above. We discovered that this is of more than academic interest. A melt-water stream that is fed from a glacier can be relied on to flow throughout the summer, so that its water is available for irrigation until the end of the cultivating season. On the other hand a stream that is fed entirely by melting

snow may dry up by July or August, making further irrigation and cultivation for that year impossible. A village that is sited below a glacier and derives water from it is therefore more fortunate.

The transition in climate from desert in the valley bottoms to permanent snow on the mountain tops is gradual. As progressively higher altitudes become wetter and colder they support characteristic combinations of plants (Fig. 1). In the lowest valley bottoms a few desiccated shrubs and wisps of grass only increase the impression of lifelessness, but as you climb upwards more and more of the ground becomes covered by plants, especially artemisia. This is a sprawling aromatic shrub, whose tiny grey-green leaves contain santonin, long known in Kohistan as the cure for intestinal worms. Higher up the first trees appear, evergreen hollyoak and edible pine. The hollyoak forms dense groves in some parts, especially in the south, and its crisp, shiny leaves keep the big goat flocks of the southern valleys fed in winter. The edible pine gets its name from the small resinous nuts that are hidden in its cones. When you are well fed they are hardly worth the trouble of extracting, but ripe cones spotted during a long day's walk are an excellent excuse for a rest.

As you climb further these trees are replaced by a belt of conifers—deodar, fir, spruce or juniper—which, at least in the south, ring the highest mountains and cover the lesser ones. Further up, at 12,000 feet, it becomes too cold for conifers, but just above them there is a narrow strip of deciduous woodland with birch, dog rose, honeysuckle and flowers such as strawberry, aquilegia, willow herb and yellow violet. In summer, as the snow melts, the silver bark and fluttering leaves of the birch bring a touch of gaiety to the most sombre mountain, while in autumn its brilliant yellow foliage sets these higher slopes aflame.

Higher still, stretching up towards the snow-line, is Alpine meadow, which provides the summer pastures. 'Alpine meadow' suggests short crisp grass, weathered boulders encrusted with orange lichen, streams of clear icy water tinkling over brightly coloured pebbles, and a carpet of flowers—buttercup, stitchwort, violet, and forget-me-not in delicate drifts, and scattered among them pink primula, blue gentian, wild iris, and yellow rock-rose. Sometimes we have seen all this and a multitude of other flowers too. More often the goats get there first, following close behind the retreating snow and



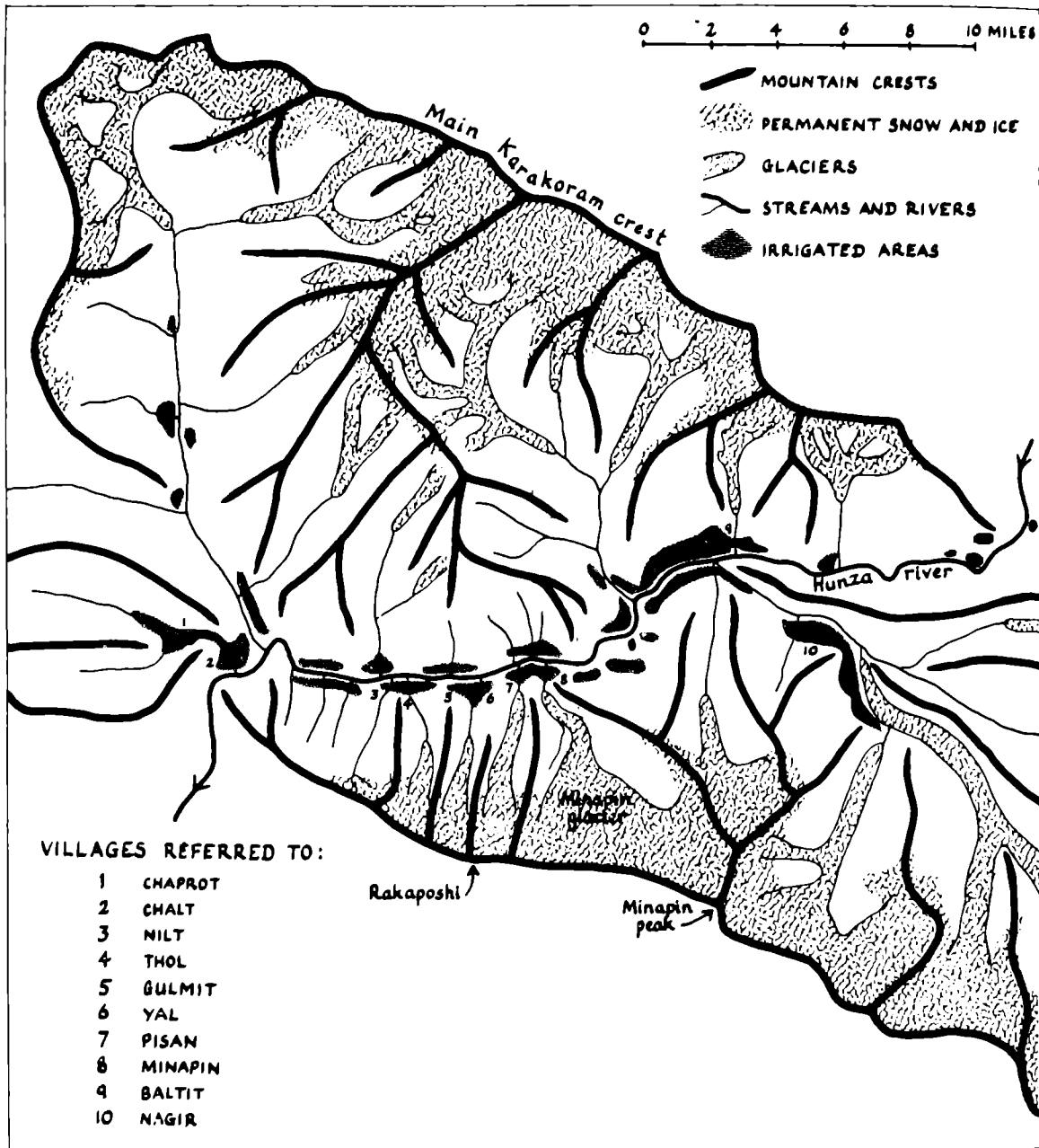
*Minapin peak and the Minapin glacier
(In the background is the ridge that runs from Minapin to Rakaposhi. In the foreground is the ice-fall)*

biting the plants down to the roots, so that by the end of the summer when the snow begins to fall again many pastures appear burnt and desolate. Even so this altitude, between the tree-line and the summer snow-line, is our favourite. We take particular pleasure in climbing up to it through the woodland, and seeing the tops of the last trees sink below our line of vision to reveal unobstructed the immensity of the landscape.

Because the north of Kohistan is slightly drier, the transitions in the vegetation occur at higher altitudes there. For example, plants that grow at 6,000 feet on the slopes of Nanga Parbat find the same conditions at 7,000 feet at Rakaposhi, seventy miles further north. The slightly greater precipitation of the south and south-west is also enough to encourage more plants there, both in total numbers and in variety of species. In the south there are thick stands of conifers, but in the far north the only trees are a few scattered junipers. Similarly the south has richer pasture and, perhaps more important, it alone has the evergreen hollyoak, which provides such valuable winter fodder. This again is of more than academic interest. In an economy where every resource is put to use, a few extra species in the natural vegetation represent a lot of wealth.

* * *

From Minapin village, which we had reached on that first journey, it was a five hour climb alongside the snout and lower reaches of the glacier until we came to the foot of a steep goat-grazed slope (Map 3). In front of me I could see only this slope, but I guessed that from the top we should be able to look across the upper basin of the glacier to the snow peaks beyond. I hurried on, but as always in Kohistan, the distance was greater than it appeared, and I was neither as fit nor as acclimatized to 12,000 feet as longer periods in the mountains were to make me. After half an hour, when I was still only half-way to the top, my legs began to ache and my sense of purpose wavered. Ghulam Abbas caught me up and grinned. 'You will discover, John,' he said, 'that on our mountains it is useless to hurry. They are too high and too steep. You must go slowly and steadily—then you can go anywhere.' Together, slowly and steadily, we went on up, with the glacier remaining hidden until the last few steps carried us onto the rim of the upper basin (Plate 1).



Map 3. Glaciers and village sites in the Hunza valley.

The vista was sudden, complete and stupendous. We looked across a dazzling white lake to a colossal ridge, ten miles long and rising 5,000 feet to form the southern wall of a vast natural arena. At each end of the ridge stood a giant peak, Minapin at the far end, and Rakaposhi at the nearer. Below us, where the glacier flowed out of the upper basin down towards the snout, was an icefall, a chaos of glistening ice, gaping crevasse and tumbling serac. The strain in the glacier as it passed that place was audible. The ice groaned and cracked, melt-water trickled and spurted, seracs fell and splintered, and boulders thudded and boomed as they were released by melting and bounced into the gloomy crevasses. I raised my eyes, and it seemed that every inch of ice between us and Minapin peak was visible. This added to the feeling of being a spectator on the edge of an arena, a feeling that was made complete by the avalanches which peeled off the ridge every few minutes and slumped down onto the glacier in a burst of powdery snow clouds. A deep rumbling announced the beginning of the spectacle, and the slow motion of the whole event reminded me of the distances involved: Minapin peak was ten miles away, the nearest point on the ridge was five miles, and each time I was watching thousands of tons of snow fall nearly a perpendicular mile.

I made some trite remark to Ghulam Abbas about having come from England to see this. He said nothing, but looked across at Minapin peak. Knowing him better now, I can guess that without the slightest envy or malice, he was thinking of the pleasures and absurdities of the rich and foreign, and of the people of Minapin village below, who have neither time nor energy to spend on a view, nor a happy thought to give to a snow peak or an avalanche.¹

Yet, as we discovered, the fortunes of the village are closely tied to those of the glacier. However slowly the ice of any glacier flows (the average speed is perhaps a foot a day), the position of the snout will eventually move if the equilibrium between replenishment and melting is altered. Climatic changes which result in heavier winter snowfall, or in lower summer temperatures and hence slower melting, will cause the snout to 'advance' down the mountain side, and vice versa. Generally such responses, like the changes that cause them, are so slow that they could only be revealed by surveys

¹ The wind from a large avalanche in the upper basin has even been known to blow down the fruit-trees in Minapin village ten miles away.

over decades, if not centuries. Nonetheless we can tell, from empty glacial basins and from glacial debris far below the snouts of present day glaciers, that this is a time of general glacial retreat in Kohistan.

Despite this, the Minapin glacier, which had caught the attention of the Survey of India even before the battle of Nilt, is known to have advanced three quarters of a mile in a single year—1892. After that it advanced further by about thirty yards a year for twenty years, then began to retreat. During the 1940s it seems to have advanced again briefly, but in 1961, at the time of our first visit, we found it back near its 1889 position. More recent observations suggest that it may now be advancing once more. The reasons for such extraordinary behaviour are not clear, but undoubtedly the glacier's large upper basin and small tongue make the snout unusually sensitive to changes occurring in the upper basin. Furthermore the huge weight of ice in the upper basin, the narrow outlet into the tongue, and the steep bed of the tongue encourage the ice to flow relatively fast. We measured rates of flow of almost a yard a day. Because the glacier is partly fed by avalanches, it seems likely that a sudden increase in the number of avalanches, due perhaps to an earthquake, could cause a rapid advance of the kind that happened in 1892. Another suggestion is that an unusually cloudless and hot summer may cause snow on the ridge to become unstable and to avalanche more than usual: thus an increase in temperature would have the paradoxical effect of causing the glacier to advance, at least temporarily.

Again this is of more than academic interest, for a sudden advance may override water channels below the snout and destroy the village's irrigation system. This had actually happened at Minapin in the year of our first visit, though fortunately the channel concerned was only a small one. In 1913, at the point of maximum recorded advance, the snout must have come close to destroying both the main channels upon which the whole village depends. Nor were the villagers indifferent to these movements. They showed us a cairn near the village which contains an inscription to commemorate the renewed retreat during the 1940s, and they also told of another major advance eight generations ago. One farmer showed particular expertise when he pointed out some glacial debris right across the main river in Hunza, where boulders of a characteristic Minapin colour can be seen. 'Those boulders were left there by our glacier before there was a village

here,' he said proudly. But perhaps an earlier glaciologist had told him that.

Despite such eccentricities, Minapin village is fortunate in its glacier, for at least it has never retreated so far as to entirely disappear, as one nearby glacier did during the 1950s. Nor has it advanced so far as to overrun its village, as some other glaciers have. In 1903 a nearby glacier advanced three miles in eight days and overran its village. Kenneth Mason quotes a description of this event by one of the villagers who saw it:

One day when the crops were about a hand's breadth high (i.e. May) we . . . saw the glacier advancing. It came down, like a snake, quite steadily: we could see it moving. There was no noise. When an obstruction got in the way the ice went round it at first and overwhelmed it. All our mills and water channels were destroyed. The ice remained down for fifteen years. All our cultivation was spoilt . . . The Mir (ruler) fed us.¹

In 1953 another glacier advanced by fifteen feet an hour for more than a day, and we heard of similar events elsewhere. One village that we visited had been abandoned twice because of its glacier's advances. There is even a tradition that one glacier ran down two old women fleeing before it.

Such occurrences, though rare, are alarming enough; but advances that take a glacier's snout across a main valley to the other side, and so dam the river into a lake, are potentially more catastrophic. When such an ice dam breaks suddenly the lake is released in a flood which can cause great devastation and loss of life downstream. This has happened several times within living memory. A small number of glaciers are known to cause catastrophes of this kind. Indeed one of them is named in the local language 'There will be a lake'. Nowadays a close watch is kept on them so that any ice dam can be bombed from the air before much water accumulates behind it. The causes of such advances are probably local topographic peculiarities like those at Minapin, but people in Kohistan explain them as attempts by individual glaciers to reach a partner of the opposite sex. They say that glaciers are either male or female—the former have clear ice, and the latter cloudy ice—and naturally they try to get together. People also say that such promiscuous advances can be halted by burying a piece of ice from the prospective partner in the advancing snout. The kiss is enough and the advancing glacier will retreat again, though whether from satisfaction or disappointment is not stated.

¹Mason, 1935, pp. 31-2.

Any element that combines dynamism and sensitivity with mystery and beauty cannot fail to fascinate. I used to feel this fascination whenever we walked across a glacier on our way from one valley to another. Was the glacier in good health, I wondered? Was it prospering, or dwindling? Was it balanced precariously between snout and sun, a helpless product of climate? Or had it a life of its own, with ice-reserves to see it through hard times? How many winters was it since the ice we trod had fallen as snow? And how many more summers before it must, by the nature of glaciers, once again turn to water?

* * *

Minapin village—and a village name in Kohistan includes the fields and trees, the channels and polo-ground as well as the houses—stands on a ‘river terrace’, a triangle of flat land at the confluence of the Minapin stream with the Hunza river. Only in the valley bottoms is there land flat enough for cultivation, and then only in small scattered patches. These patches, which perhaps average a square mile in area, are the results of river action of two kinds. The river terraces have been left over from a time when the mountains were younger and the rivers used to flow at higher levels than they do now. With the passage of millennia the rivers have cut downwards, eroding their own beds, but here and there remnants of former beds have been left stranded on the valley side above the present river level (Plate 6.1). Such remnants, or terraces, are most commonly found where the main valley widens slightly, as at the mouth of a tributary valley such as Minapin. Provided they can be irrigated, they are good sites for cultivation because they are naturally flat or gently sloping, and because the sediments of which they are composed make fine textured soils.

The other land-form on which villages are commonly sited is the ‘fan’ of sediment left where a small tributary stream comes down to join a main river. Where the tributary is steep and flows fast it can, in times of flood, carry downstream heavy boulders and pebbles. But as soon as the tributary reaches the bottom of the main valley its velocity is checked, and it can then carry only lighter sediments. It therefore drops the heavier sediments in a fan shaped slope, whose apex points up the tributary and whose lower edge lies along the main river; and it carries off the finer sands and

silts, and with them their soil-making potential, into the main rivers. So fans are rough and rocky and need much preparation before cultivation is possible, and their soils are poor compared to those of the river terraces. This again is of more than academic interest, and the farmers of Minapin are fortunate because their village is on a river terrace rather than a fan.

The height of terraces and fans, often now a hundred feet or more above the main rivers, makes it difficult to use the water from these rivers for irrigation. Instead, as the terrace or fan is typically at the mouth of a tributary valley, it is generally more feasible to tap the tributary stream at a point behind and above the village site. Some of the water is then diverted in a gently-sloping channel to the village, leaving the remainder of the water to continue in its course down to the confluence with the main river (Fig. 2). The principle—to divert water from a stream and to conduct it to the fields—seems simple, but in practice great skill, a sharp eye and hard work are necessary. The gradients of the channels must be judged exactly. Too gentle, and silt and sand in the sluggish water will fall to the bottom and choke the channel and the water will seep away before it reaches the fields. Too steep, and the water will erode its own bed. Most important, the channel must end up at the right level. If it comes out below the fields it is intended to irrigate, it is useless. It needs an experienced man to align a channel by eye across a mountainside, perhaps with precipices, gullies and loose scree to be negotiated. If a mistake is made then several months' labour by a dozen or more strong men will be wasted, and the elder who supervised will lose his reputation.

A channel is from one to three feet wide, and from a hundred yards to several miles long. Where the soil or rock allows, it is dug into the mountainside, but if the soil is too friable or the rock too steep it may have to be supported by a dry stone retaining wall, up to forty feet high if a rock face is very steep (Plate 7.2). If a face is so steep that there is no means of supporting a wall, the water may be taken across in hollowed logs held up from below on long poles or stone piers (Plate 7.3). In the same way water can be taken over gullies, and even over a river from one side of a valley to the other if the gradients make this necessary. Indeed the feats of construction are as amazing as the surveying, especially when one remembers that the only tools used for most of the channels were wooden shovels and picks with tips of goat-horn. During the present century metal tools and blasting

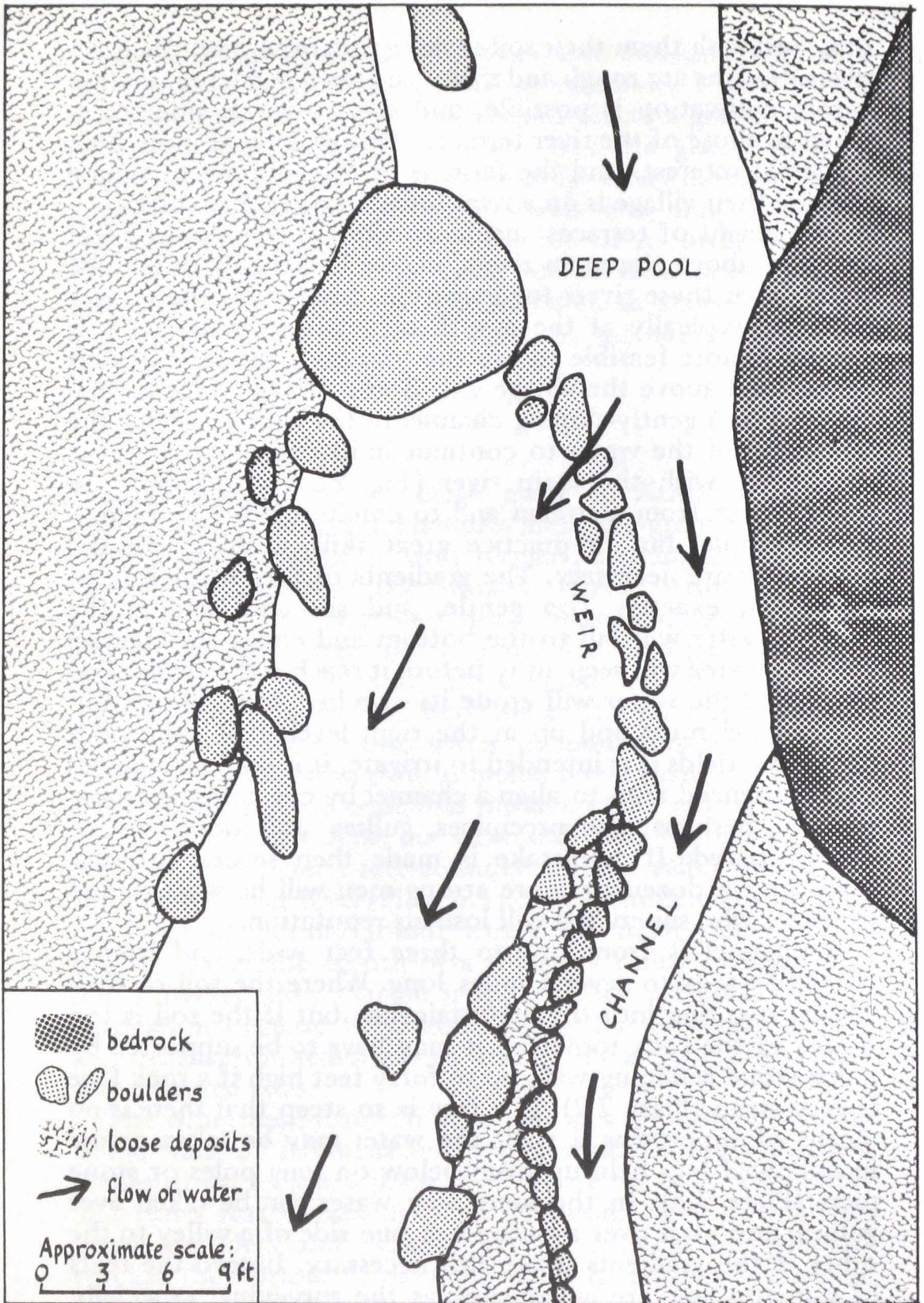


Fig. 2. Sketch of an irrigation channel head-works.

powder have helped a little; but no channel has yet excelled the Berber or the Dala, built in Hunza generations ago, and in the days when men talked of such things, famous throughout Central Asia.

Even trained engineers have not been able to teach the people of Kohistan much about channel building. Instead, as friends scornfully remarked, the engineers might have learnt from them. It has always been an axiom of the local technology that water can seldom be taken conveniently from the main rivers. Moreover these rivers are so unruly, and so variable in their seasonal levels, that it is rarely possible to make channel headworks that will be neither swept away nor left stranded. Yet government engineers have disregarded this axiom and have attempted to divert water out of several main rivers, failing repeatedly. In one attempt more than Rs. 10 lakhs is said to have been spent in making an eight-mile channel from the Hunza river, the most unruly of all, to a large barren river terrace at the confluence of the Hunza and Gilgit rivers. Before a drop of water had reached the terrace, the headworks had been swept away. The channel itself is still there, with artemisia and other plants of the desert growing in it.

A successful channel is a triumph, technically, functionally and aesthetically. The smooth contour curling round the barren hillsides, marked by a thin strip of green grass or perhaps a line of pollarded willows, makes a living rational line across a landscape that often seems sterile and incomprehensible. Some of the most pleasing paths in Kohistan follow the banks of irrigation channels (Plate 7.1). When you come down from a pass by a steep and rocky path, where every footstep needs attention and your knees ache from the steepness, it is a relief to reach the beginning of a channel with its gentle and consistent gradient which will lead you on down into the village. The water dances and darts at your feet, while the stream that has been tapped falls away below, until you feel that you are climbing and that the water in the channel is flowing uphill. It needs a moment's thought to dispel the impression of magic in such a place.

So water is brought to the fans and river terraces along the valley bottoms, and a chain of oases is established (Map 3). Sometimes it is many miles from one to the next, sometimes several are visible one behind the other, and sometimes they coalesce so that the cultivated area may be as large as five square miles. Whatever their size, they are mere specks in the immensity of the landscape.

Where a village is sited at the mouth of a tributary valley, the farmers generally have rights not only to the water, but also to the pasture and trees within the tributary watershed. The farmers are then, in effect, the joint owners of an area of mountainside varying from three square miles to more than thirty. It was while we were at Minapin, camping on the rim of the upper basin, that we began to realize how important these extra resources are for a village and its economy. As the snow retreated the shepherds followed with their flocks and herds. Near our tent was a shepherd's summer settlement from which the goats streamed out every morning, and we often encountered cattle wandering below the snow-line in search of grazing. Once we met a cow a mile out on the ice, being taken for grazing on the far side of the glacier, one man struggling with a rope round her neck and another tugging on her tail. We met men climbing up to the trees to choose timber for the beams of a new house, or to peel bark off the birches for wrapping butter. Others came up to cut grass for winter fodder, or to search for plants and minerals used as medicines. Occasionally we saw a hunter, armed with an antiquated but effective matchlock, hopefully seeking wild goat or red-legged partridge. Traffic up and down from the village was continuous. A man we saw watering his fields one day would be up cutting wood the next. A shepherd we met near the upper basin one week would be down in the following week to deliver butter or goathair and to fetch up flour and apricots. At the end of the summer we used to see men slowly filing down to the village, each carrying a hundredweight of firewood for the winter.

All this activity, which we were to find to a greater or lesser extent in the mountains above each village, made it clear to us that the people of Kohistan do not cling desperately to a few small patches of precarious cultivation, as some writers have implied. To call them 'heroic', as one eminent geographer has done, is something of a backhanded compliment. Nonetheless the visitor from outside can hardly avoid admiration, for there is much to admire. Here are people who can live and thrive in one of the most unpromising places in the world, who draw simultaneously upon the resources of a vertical range of up to four miles and a climate varying from permanent ice to permanent drought, who can raise crops in a desert during summer and survive months of freezing in winter, and who for centuries have provided for themselves without dependence upon the outside world.

CHAPTER THREE

'A DIFFICULT, PRECIPITOUS AND DANGEROUS ROAD'

When the foot itches there will be a journey.

Hunza proverb.

I asked if I could take a horse with me . . . 'No!' 'Could I take my dog?' I received the sinister reply that I could not take a goat by the road by which we should travel.

G.K. Cockerill,

explorer of the northern passes, 1892-4.¹

Away from the rockfall . . . under the avalanche.

Chitral proverb.

Keeping to the range, the party journeyed on in a south-westerly direction for fifteen days over a difficult, precipitous and dangerous road, the side of the mountain being like a stone wall ten thousand feet in height. On nearing the edge, the eye becomes confused; and wishing to advance, the foot finds no resting place. Below there is a river, named Indus. The men of former times had cut away the rock to make a way down, and had placed ladders on the side of the rock. There are seven hundred rock steps in all; and when these and the ladders have been negotiated, the river is crossed by a suspension bridge of ropes . . . ²

This, probably the earliest surviving account of a journey in Kohistan, was written soon after AD. 400. The author was a Chinese Buddhist, Fa-hsien, who had walked across the Gobi desert and Eastern Turkistan on his way to India, where he was going to visit the holy places of Buddhism. His objective in Kohistan was the Darel valley, west of Nanga Parbat, and in the passage quoted he describes the way on from Darel to the Swat valley which lies in the outer mountains to the south-west. Both Darel and Swat at that time contained important Buddhist relics and monasteries. From Swat Fa-hsien journeyed on through India to Sri Lanka and then to Java, eventually arriving back in China in 414. His journal is a comprehensive and detailed account of what he saw and learnt during this remarkable journey. Yet for Kohistan it describes nothing whatever but the hazards and hardships of the road. So preoccupied was this enterprising and indefatigable traveller with the physical obstacles along the way that

¹ Cockerill, 1922, p. 100.

² Quoted by Stein, 1942, p. 54.

he does not mention the inhabitants at all. Fifteen centuries later the main preoccupation of travellers in Kohistan remains the same.

Almost every physical feature contributes to the hazards and hardships: the heights of the mountains, with their coverings of blindingly bright snow and their paralysing cold winds; the great vertical distances between these icy crests and the desert valley bottoms with their breathless summer heat; the steep gradients of many valleys and the precipitous valley sides over which rough footpaths wander, apparently aimlessly, but often following the only feasible alignment; the rivers thundering through their gorges, and even the smallest streams liable to sudden spate; and cliff face, scree, stone-shoot, sharp fractured slate and slippery water-worn granite all within the same mile along the way.

The watersheds between valleys can be crossed here and there by passes at 10-15,000 feet. The ascents are always arduous, though usually safe between the beginning of July and the end of October (Plate 3.1). We ourselves crossed more than twenty passes at this season in different years, some on main routes, and some little used and permanently snow covered. By making it a principle that we would go only where the local people thought it safe, we survived with nothing worse than bad dreams and chattering teeth. Even so, in the normal course of travel during one year, we were the first to cross the Kinejut and to attempt the snow cornices above Khomar, we narrowly escaped a blizzard at 15,000 feet, and we were separated from our porters and benighted at 12,000 feet in our shirt-sleeves without food or shelter. We were also probably the last that year to cross the three unnamed passes between the head of the Laspur valley and Shishi valley:

15 September. Waded river seven times today. Camped at the tree-line, near the last few bushes. Just had the tents pegged before a snowstorm swept up the valley and left a thick layer of snow within an hour. Samad painstakingly made a fire—'the last wood for two days', he kept saying. One of the porters complained of 'heartache': E gave him embrocation.

16 September. E up at 3.30 a.m. to brew tea. Off at dawn in fine weather. A long slog up beside an unnamed glacier. No path, and the going rough and treacherous, with boulders loosely embedded in moraine. Spectacular peaks at the top, and a big icefall which fortunately we didn't have to cross.

Towards the col we came on steep crevassed ice with last night's snow on it. Slippery and dangerous. One porter fell in, but was saved by the load on his back. We should have been roped.

After nine hours we reached the col, (c. 15,500 feet). The wind across the col was paralytically cold, and we ached to the bone in a few seconds—never were so cold. No cairn, and not surprising. Very steep scree descent—glad we didn't come up from this side. Came down into the head of a glacier-filled valley, and camped in a corner of moraine at c. 12,000 feet.

Shivered all night in clothes, anoraks and double sleeping-bags. How do the porters survive with a *choga* only? (A *choga* is the long woollen cloak used in Kohistan during winter). During the night I remembered Abbas telling us that the secret of avoiding frost-bite when benighted is to put your *choga* on and to kneel in the lee of a slope with the top of your head resting on the slope and to tuck your face, arms and legs into the 'tent' underneath.

17 September. E up in the dark again, the tea-pan freezing to her finger-tips. Stiff with cold, and glad to move at dawn. Crossed the glacier—crevassed but not difficult and literally thawed as the sun reached us on the approaches to the next pass. Crossed mid-morning, at c. 14,000 feet, and saw a herd of markhor (wild goats) hesitating on the mountain-side below. Descended on a narrow, winding, rocky path to 11,000 feet and met some shepherds. Then on again to the third pass, c. 13,500 feet, in mid-afternoon. Finally down into the head of Shishi Kuh at sunset . . .

A few passes are dangerous even at the height of summer, especially where the route crosses a snowfield or badly crevassed ice. When they have to cross dangerous crevasses the local people sometimes tie long poles to their waists, so that if they should fall in the poles will bridge the crevasse and enable them to climb out or be lifted out by their companions. Some passes even vary in practicability from one summer to the next depending on glacier movements.

In winter almost all passes are dangerous, if not impassable on account of blizzards, deep snow and bitter cold. When George Curzon crossed the Burzil pass in the winter of 1894 he was shown a boulder under which five men had sat to eat their supper: they had frozen to death while eating. In the south, where the snowfall is greater, the approaches to several of the main passes are swept by avalanches during early spring, and almost every year incautious people are suddenly overwhelmed and beaten to death on the rocks or drowned in the soft snow. When Aurel Stein crossed the Lowarai pass he heard that twenty-four men had just perished in this way.

When the passes have been crossed there still remains the difficulties of travelling in the valleys. There have always been paths of sorts between one village and the next, but in the past these were only as good as the villagers or the ruler chose to make them. Algernon Durand, an early

British Political Agent in Gilgit, described part of the route up the Gilgit valley in the 1880s:

One path is carried across the face of the cliff, a second rises over it. The former, or lower path, is never more than a foot or so wide. Taking advantage of a ledge in the rock here, supported on pegs driven into its face there, carried across a bad place on a single shaky plank or light bundle of tamarisk, ascending fifty feet up a cleft in the rock by a series of small tree trunks notched to give a foothold, and polished by years of use, the lower path is impossible for animals, and is exclusively used by men on foot . . . The upper path toils laboriously up in endless zigzags till it surmounts the cliff, and drops in the same way to meet the lower path on the far side. This is the riding road, and that by which laden animals go; but though you can, and do, ride over these paths, there are very few marches where you can take laden animals along without constant unloading.¹

Curzon, more succinct, wrote that the track was

. . . of the most villainous description, the descent of one very steep place being only accomplished by the aid of a sort of fixed pole with projections, very much like the pole in the bear's den in the Zoological Gardens.²

Such paths could be easily defended, and could be destroyed in a moment by knocking out a few pegs, while travellers upon them could be annihilated with rocks rolled down from above. In some places, booby traps were set for intruders. In Astor rocks used to be placed so that when a stranger stepped on them they tipped over and gave warning of his approach. In other places little stones were so arranged that the moment a stranger stepped on them he was shot into the river below. One early European traveller had a rope bridge burned in his face as he approached it. In such ways the communities of Kohistan protected themselves, whether from raiders from the next valley or from the armies of Russia and British India. Many of the paths have been improved during the twentieth century, but many others have not and remain as narrow, as steep, and as perilous as ever.

Where the valley bottom is at a low altitude, and therefore has a desert climate, the route along it may be hot and barren. The bottom of the Indus valley, at a lower altitude than any other in Kohistan, is a ghastly inferno in summer with shade temperatures rising to 125° F. There is not a flicker of breeze to stir the shimmering heat, not a sound to relieve the tedium, not a leaf to soften the glare. The utter

¹ Durand, 1900, p. 48.

² Curzon, 1926, p. 140.



Terich Mir, the highest mountain in the Hindu Kush, from the north

lifelessness is claustrophobic. The only movement is the quivering of the monstrous grey river, much too big by now for the ripples and sparkles that enliven lesser rivers. The man who goes on foot or horse in this valley is wise, if he knows the paths, to wait for a bright moon and to travel by night. I spent a day in June walking by the river near Chilas, and by the end of it accumulated heat, glare and dehydration had made me wretchedly sick.

Then there are the problems of crossing the streams and rivers. Where wood is plentiful tributary streams are bridged by logs arranged in a cantilever, and even the smallest trickle may have at least a slippery pole thrown across it (Plate 5.1). But where wood is scarce, people do not think of a bridge unless the water in summer is at least thigh-deep in the early mornings. This means that it may be chest-deep and impassable by afternoon, when the melting of snow and ice is at its fastest. Travellers must then wait until the following morning for another chance to cross. For me wading a thigh-deep stream is the worst part of travel in Kohistan. Leaning over against the current, legs numbed by the iciness of the water, ears deafened by its roar, and eyes mesmerized by its speed, one seeks safe footholds on an invisible bed of sharp cutting gravel or rolling crushing boulders. Twice I have stumbled and been swept under. I am always thankful when the local people, immune from such feebleness, nonetheless judge a stream dangerous enough for three or four people to hold hands and cross together, or for a horse to be brought to ferry the party over.

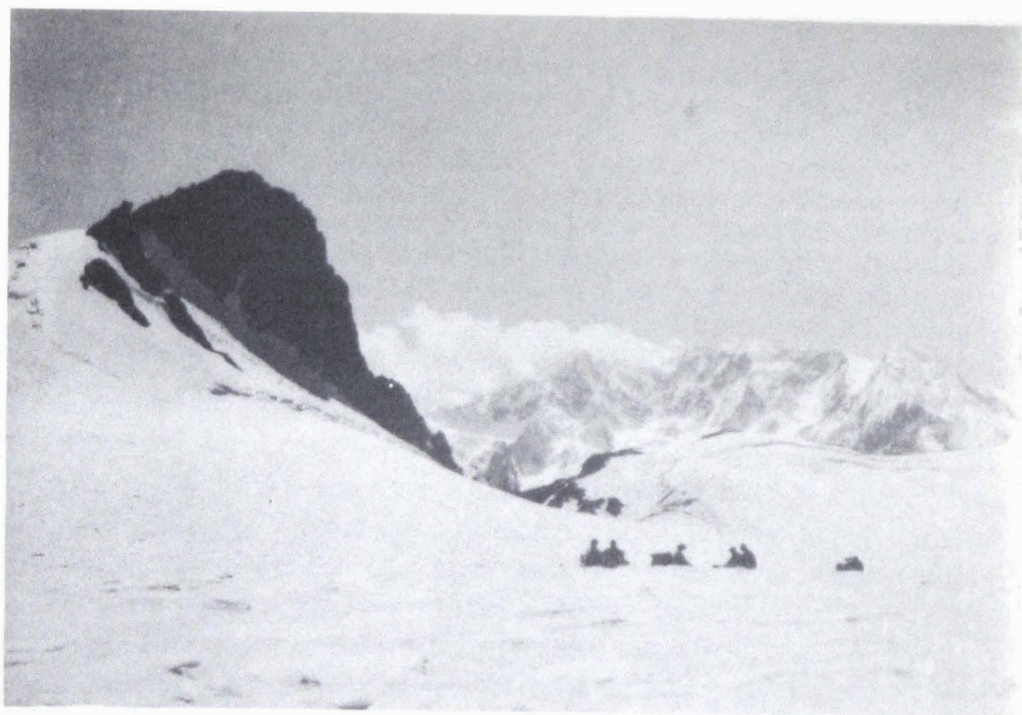
Large rivers, too deep for wading and very rarely practicable for swimming even in winter, have traditionally been crossed here and there by means of locally-engineered rope-bridges. The ropes themselves are made of plaited birch and willow twigs, and are slung across from bank to bank like the cables of a suspension bridge. The middle rope is to walk on. The other two are hand-ropes, which are joined to the foot-rope at intervals by cross-ties (Plate 4.2). When the wind swings the whole contraption, or when half-a-dozen nimble villagers are skipping unconcernedly across and making it buck and shake, crossing becomes another unpleasant balancing feat. There is a further difficulty in that the traveller must look down at his feet for every step along the foot-rope, but must not allow his eye to focus on the water just beneath. If he does focus on the water he has the impression of being swept away upstream at a terrifying rate. He then becomes

dizzy, loses control, and is capable of only one reaction—to cling desperately to the hand-ropes and not to budge. As one victim feelingly put it: 'the deceived eye deluded the imagination, and made believe that the water was standing still, and the bridge itself swinging furiously up-stream'. When this happens the villagers from nearby come to the rescue, generally blindfolding the traveller and carrying him off bodily. Such an experience has befallen a number of people, both local and foreign, including, it is said, a ruler of Chitral and a president of the Alpine Club.

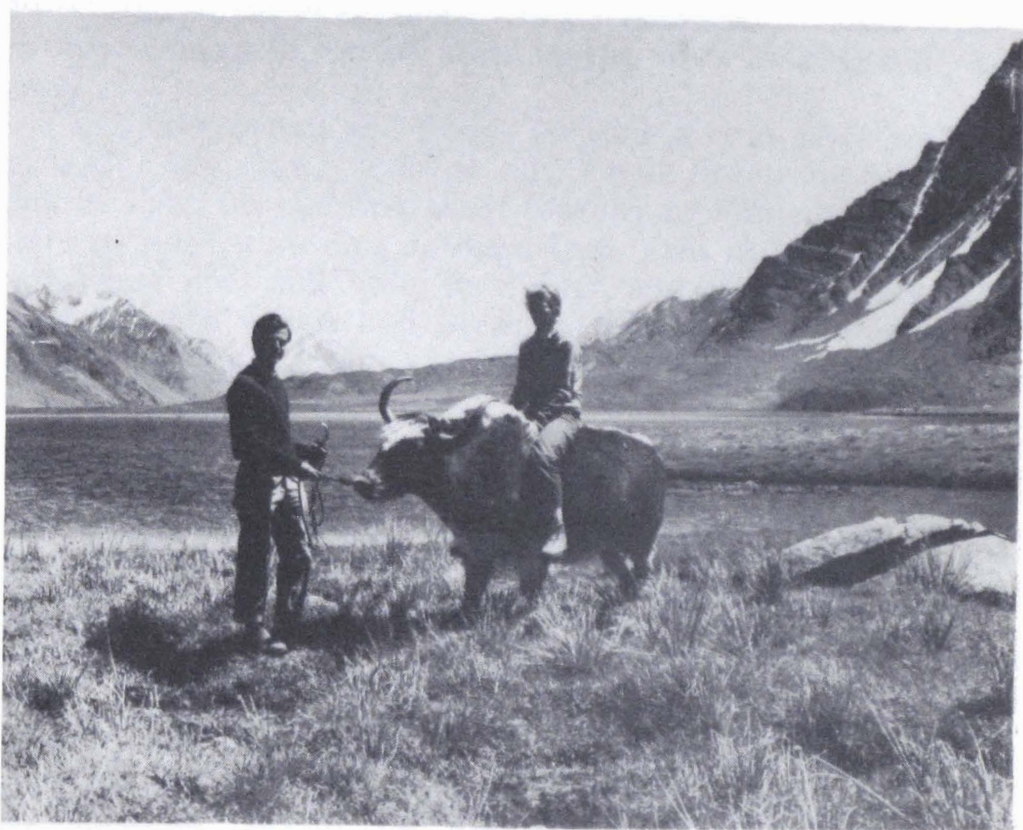
Much labour and many twigs are needed for a bridge, and it is a big call on the resources of the village or villages that make and maintain it. A bridge is reckoned safe for only two or three years, but often it is still being used after five years. By this time many of the twigs have dried and snapped, and broken cross-ropes are trailing in the water. It finally gives way while some unfortunate traveller is crossing so that he is thrown into the river. The chances of this add to the apprehensions of crossing. Four of Durand's men suffered such an accident and were swept away and drowned. Only one of their bodies was recovered, and that forty miles down the river.

Some of the main rivers that are too wide for bridges can be crossed on the occasional calm stretch by skin-raft. This consists of a light framework, about ten feet by six which is lashed with leather thongs and rests on four or five inflated skins, usually bullocks'. It is manned by two or three local raftsmen, who sit at either end facing towards the centre and row with huge oars. The one or two passengers sit in the middle (Plate 4.1). During a long crossing it is the passengers' responsibility to untie the ends of the bullocks' legs, which stick up through the framework, and to blow down through these to maintain the buoyancy of the skins. A little way out from the bank the passengers and their goods are sprayed and slapped by the rushing water, while the raftsmen choose the moment and rise from their places, grunting encouragement to each other and rowing desperately, eyes bulging and muscles trembling, in their effort to get the raft across within the stretch of relatively safe river. Even in crossing a hundred yards the raft may be swept half-a-mile downstream. The raftsmen have then to pull or paddle it upstream again, along the bank, in readiness for the return journey.

Apart from these more common and predictable hazards, there are occasional events which may endanger even the most cautious and experienced traveller:



1. Travellers resting on the Darkot pass



2. Elizabeth and John Staley with a yak at Baroghil

At night, after all but myself had retired to rest, a flood of mud, trees, and boulders descended like a thunder-clap on our camp . . . we barely had time to rush up the piles of boulders above the torrent when it was on us, and then occurred such a turmoil of the elements as I shall never cease to look back as one of the most awful of my experiences. The vibration . . . was such that we feared rocks might be loosened from the cliffs which towered above us . . . dawn revealed to us a great scene of wreck. Pines of ten feet girth gone; a great boulder as big as a house, under which generations of shepherds had slept, over-turned . . . ¹

Sometimes events in Kohistan may even bring danger and destruction to travellers far beyond the mountains. In the winter of 1840-41 part of a lower slope of Nanga Parbat was thrown into the Indus by an earthquake, completely closing the river, so that by the end of May there was a lake forty miles long and a thousand feet deep. Finally the water cut through the dam and the whole lake emptied within twenty-four hours. The ruler of Gilgit had already despatched warnings, written on birch-bark, down the valley, but a Sikh army which was camped in the river-bed two hundred miles away was caught unawares and completely annihilated. In the words of an eyewitness, 'As a woman with a wet towel sweeps away a legion of ants, so the river blotted out the army . . .'

Earth-movements and floods on such a large scale are fortunately rare, but landslips and small floods are everyday events. Even on our first short journey to Minapin we had a taste of both, tiptoeing across a fresh gash in the mountain-side while dust still hung in the air, and staggering across a sudden spate which had breached the road, ignominiously clinging to Ghulam Abbas and the donkey-men.

* * *

When parts of Kohistan came under the aegis of British India at the end of the nineteenth century the rope-bridge and the skin-raft were the methods by which the big rivers were crossed. Neither is practicable for large numbers of armed troops, nor for the supplies to feed them. So one of the first tasks of the new regime was to throw wire and plank bridges over the rivers at the main crossings. At the same time some of the paths in the main valleys were widened, graded and strengthened so that they could be used by pack animals without unloading.

¹Tanner, 1891, p. 407.

Until this was done the problems of transporting supplies from Kashmir for a garrison at Gilgit were almost insuperable.

From Srinagar to Gilgit was over two hundred and thirty miles . . . of at best rough track, and closed by snow for half the year. The route crossed the Indus at Bunji (at this time all goods and men had to be ferried across) and the forty-yard torrent of the Astor river . . . Two of the passes . . . were both liable to sudden gales of deadly cold so intense that, even in 1892 when the route had been improved, a caravan of three hundred mules and their drivers could be wiped out in a single night. In places the route was so narrow that mules often fell into the torrent below, and in others so bad that supplies could only be carried by impressed coolies . . . Even in summer, when the heat was so pitiless that the route along waterless stretches could be followed by the bleached bones that littered it, communication between Kashmir and Gilgit was often interrupted.¹

Much of the new track-building along the main route was entrusted to the contracting firm of Spedding and Company, whose owner and senior engineers were British. The engineering difficulties were formidable. In the valley bottoms tracks were liable to landslides, rockfalls and under-cutting by the rivers. At the higher altitudes the frosts and snow of winter, followed by the melting and avalanching of spring, obliterated them year after year. The friable conglomerate cliffs above the confluence of the Astor river and the Indus were particularly difficult to traverse, and were still giving trouble forty years later, being by then 'scarred with the remains of many difficultly-aligned and skilfully built paths' most of which had fallen into the river. More than thirty men were killed in making one stretch of this road.

Spedding had other problems besides the engineering. The steel hawsers needed for permanent suspension bridges across the rivers—one bridge across the Indus was to have a span of 327 feet—were ordered from a firm in Britain, but according to a contemporary report, their manufacture and delivery was delayed on account of 'quarrels between the iron-masters and workmen'. When these hawsers, each weighing a ton, eventually did reach Kashmir they were found to be so heavy that at every bridge along the way they had to be unloaded from their carts, uncoiled, carried across, and recoiled on the other side, all in one continuous process. There were other difficulties too: Spedding's operations and the needs of their 5,000 labourers caused an inflation in Gilgit and the Astor valley; and many of their labourers suffered from scurvy,

¹ Alder, 1963, pp. 133-4.

perhaps the least likely disease to expect in Central Asia 1,000 miles from the nearest ocean, and a telling illustration of the barrenness and isolation of the Indus valley in those days.

Despite these setbacks the bridges were built, and the tracks in the main valleys and over the high passes to the south were completed. It then became possible, during the summer, to ride or take a caravan of pack-animals from Srinagar or Peshawar up over the passes and on to the larger villages in the main valleys. But beyond these tracks the older foot-paths, the rope-bridges and the skin-rafts remained, as they still do at the present time, serving the populations of the more remote villages. Many of the paths, especially those leading to infrequently used passes and to summer pastures, were classified in military manuals as 'passable to men and goats only'.

The improvement of communications in the main valleys has continued during the twentieth century, notably with the construction of roads capable of taking jeeps (Plate 5.2). As early as the 1920s a short stretch of road in the Chitral valley was made motorable and a small car belonging to the ruler was driven on it. At that time cars, and subsequently trucks, had to be dismantled and carried in over the Lowarai pass. It was not until 1947 that the road over the pass itself had been widened enough for the first jeep to be driven into Chitral under its own power. Similarly the first jeeps arrived in Gilgit by air, and it was not until the early 1950s that the route over the Babusar pass was opened to traffic. Now there are several hundred miles of jeep-road in the main valleys, and recently a 500 mile all-weather road up the Indus from the south has been completed, at a cost of 500 lives. No doubt the considerations that applied in the 1890s—military, political and administrative—and also mineralogical, have motivated these more recent efforts at road-building by the Government of Pakistan.

Even more striking than the appearance of jeeps in recent years was the establishing of air links between Kohistan and other parts of Pakistan. An aeroplane first landed in Gilgit in 1931, but only since 1947 have there been regular passenger and freight services between there and Rawalpindi, and more recently between Chitral and Peshawar. Regular, that is, so far as the weather permits, for flying is extremely dangerous unless the air is still and the visibility perfect. The planes, mostly DC3 Dakotas and Fokker Friendships, follow

routes between the peaks where their wing-tips almost touch the snow and rock, and they skim over the watersheds so close that the passengers inside can see individual pebbles lying below. Although many flights are cancelled, perhaps for weeks on end, on account of the weather, the planes have provided a quick and effective link to the south. This has been especially important in winter and spring, when the road passes are blocked by snow.

Foolish stories are told in Gilgit of the reactions of the local people when the first planes arrived. Some farmers are said to have come in from the Bagrot valley, which is a day's walk downstream from Gilgit, and to have gathered at the airstrip gaping at the planes in the belief that they were some kind of bird. Their expressions of wonder turned finally into a heated discussion as to whether Islamic law would allow Moslems to eat these strange birds. The Bagroti has been the butt of jokes in the Gilgit area for generations. According to another popular story, some Bagrotis happened to be present when the first jeeps arrived in an aeroplane, and they saw the ramp lowered and the jeeps coming out onto the ground. The Bagrotis, the story goes, believed that the strange bird was giving birth.

'Look,' they cried, 'the baby aeroplanes have no wings yet. They can run about but cannot fly.'

When the drivers, sophisticated Punjabis and Pathans, drove the jeeps across and sounded their horns the Bagrotis were greatly excited.

'What does that mean? What are the children of the aeroplane saying?' they asked.

'They say that they are hungry and that they need food,' replied the drivers.

'What do baby aeroplanes eat?' asked the Bagrotis.

'Oh, that is easy. Baby aeroplanes like meat and wheat bread and butter-milk, and sweet ripe apricots and tea with sugar . . .'

So the Bagrotis brought these things and handed them over, and the drivers and jeeps retired from sight, and the drivers had the biggest feast of their lives. Then they reappeared and again drove across to the Bagrotis and sounded their horns.

'Now what are they saying?' demanded the Bagrotis.

'They are saying, "Thank you very much",' answered the drivers.

Most of the jeeps now in use in Kohistan are for military and official purposes, but a few are owned by the very weal-

thy for their personal use, and others are used by merchants for transporting goods or for hire to mountaineers and other visitors. For the visitor a journey by jeep is likely to be a terrifying experience. Many of the roads are made to measure, with only inches to spare, and the bends are so tight that repeated reversing is often necessary. The jeep may have no brakes, and the driver then relies on an assistant who leaps out to manipulate the chock-stones that lie on every bend. Each irrigation channel that is passed provides a chance to douse down the steaming radiator. On the back there may be twelve or even twenty passengers clinging to a pile of luggage and bulging sacks, and seeming not the least concerned at being periodically swayed over the void. The drivers, now mostly local people, are skilful, but nonetheless there are accidents each year and, like the pack-animals before them, jeeps fall off the roads into the rivers. All the time that we were in Kohistan we were hearing of roads and journeys—of new roads, of damage to roads, of passes closed unusually early, of a friend stuck on the far side of a landslide, of the bad morals of jeep drivers; these are favourite themes for small talk among the rich and educated in Kohistan.

We ourselves have shunned jeeps, partly because they are frightening and expensive, but mainly for aesthetic and emotional reasons. The only time we welcomed a jeep was for the notorious journey through the Indus valley from Gilgit to Chilas, and for this we were glad to sit with five others on the floor in the front of a jeep without seats. In other valleys we caused embarrassment by refusing offers of lifts, or we hid behind a rock when we saw a jeep coming, to the incomprehension and dismay of our companions. We were secretly glad when the roads were damaged and closed to jeeps.

Many of our journeys were anyway on routes where there are no roads, nor are there ever likely to be roads on some of them. Walking to such remote places, visiting villages unmarked on any map, and crossing passes known only to a few dozen people gave us a rare feeling of freedom. Walking also gave us a feeling of belonging to the country we travelled across, the feeling one has—and goes on having for the rest of one's life—about places well known and well loved. Kohistan is a country made for walking and the constant struggle of others to supersede walking seemed to us to emphasize the need to walk. Moreover it was only by walking that we had the leisure and detachment to look at everything

about us, from the texture of the stones underfoot to the form of distant summits. We noticed the differences between one village and the next, instead of only the similarities. As we trudged along the valleys and clambered up the mountains we gradually absorbed the scale of the landscape. We began to understand how it is that distances are measured by the hours or days they take to walk, and why villages have traditionally been so isolated and have needed to be so self-sufficient. While walking we shared the experience of almost everyone who lives in Kohistan, and in this way for once our lives coincided with theirs. And as well as with lives in the present, walking provided a link with those of the past, and we were able to sympathise personally with Fa-hsien on his 'difficult, precipitous and dangerous road' more than fifteen centuries ago.

* * *

Another advantage of walking is meeting other travellers along the way. Sometimes we travelled with others for many miles; and sometimes our paths crossed, so that we met, rested and talked together for only a few minutes. We enjoyed the companionship, however brief, and we learnt something from even the most casual encounter.

We met hundreds of people on the road—the party of traders taking cotton cloth and combs to remote villages to exchange for apricot kernels and walnuts; the speechless youth carrying home a pot of milk from his maternal uncle's; two wild-looking men from Darel with a supercilious goat dyed green and yellow for ceremonial presentation; the old Kalash woman who delved in the recesses of her bosom and brought out a pair of walnuts for Elizabeth; the red-bearded elder who had walked for three days to the bazaar to buy a quilt; the little boys who ran out smiling with bunches of grapes for us; the surly black-bearded *mullah* puffing up the hill; the caravan of pack-animals carrying salt and rice over the southern passes to Gilgit bazaar; the cheerful inefficient old farmer who had let a heifer escape and asked if we had seen it; the hasty traveller in the other direction who stopped for a moment to press on me a hot handful of bruised apples; the official in Chitral who politely dismounted and walked because we were walking; the young man with a yellow rosebud tucked in his cap; the old man who showed us how to bluff a ferocious dog; the beautiful little girl who came tumb-

ling down the valley side in shrill pursuit of a runaway goat, and who saw us and was so intrigued that she let all her other goats escape; the herdsman from the *pamirs* who shared our camp one cold night and who smoked opium in a pipe made from a potato we gave him; the old lady who crept out of her house with a little milk in a bowl as a good luck offering; the boy who had been studying the Koran at the mosque in the next valley; the party of guests going to a circumcision feast; the Gujar shepherd who could keep a hundred voracious goats out of the nearby crops simply by his whistling; the criminal, the *bitan*, the intelligence agent, the homicide—the list is endless.

Along with all other travellers, we were part of life in Kohistan and, as travellers, we had an immediate and well-defined place in the culture. Often we had a place in peoples' homes too. The jeeps have not yet destroyed the old ethos of travel (though they are beginning to in the main valleys), and we benefitted from countless acts of kindness and hospitality. Some of these debts of hospitality have rebounded on our companions, especially Abdul Samad who keeps a teashop in the bazaar at Drosh. We had travelled for several months all over the north of Chitral with him, and he ruefully told us a year later that several of the people who had been hospitable to us and to him had come to Drosh and visited his teashop. He had felt that he must treat them as guests in their turn, and had not charged them for their tea. 'But how am I to make my business pay if I do that?' he asked. Although a shopkeeper, Abdul Samad is enough of a traditionalist to abide by the old values; but bazaars and teashops, like jeeps, are steadily encouraging new attitudes.

Sometimes we met people whom we already knew. In the fields near the shrine of Saint Shah Wali we met Raja Karim Khan, the youngest of the uncles of the ruler of Nagar, striding along in local red leather boots, the tails of his *choga* tucked up round his waist. Men were coming up to exchange greetings as he passed, and one old greybeard who tried to kiss his hand was gently remonstrated with and told, 'That is all finished nowadays, grandfather'. Sometimes we met government officials from Lahore or Karachi cursing their fate in being stationed in what they regard as a dull and barbarous place.

Sometimes people we met asked for medicines. For fever we gave aspirin, for constipation we gave cascara, for 'debility' we gave iron tablets. These were the main complaints,

but Elizabeth dressed axe wounds, a crushed toe, and an eye bruised by a falling walnut, and I was consulted about a hydrocele of the scrotum and a case of possession by the fairies. We were asked by middle-aged men how to regain their sexual powers, and by middle-aged women how to stop having babies. Such faith in the medicines of unqualified foreigners casually met on the road was alarming, but it was difficult to persuade people in the more remote valleys to go to a qualified doctor when this might mean a two week walk.

One year, one journey, one valley, one day. We had spent the night as guests of the ruler of Punial at Cher Kila, and set off on up the Gilgit valley in the company of Hamidullah Beg. It was early summer, the air was keen, and the sun shone brightly. In the villages the channels sparkled and the fields were green, and between the villages the road meandered up and down, distant view alternating with rocky bluff. The Arcadian illusion was completed by the sweet sound of a distant flute coming from across the valley, drowned in the river's roar as our road descended but audible again as we climbed. After a while we spotted the flautist riding a white horse slowly along a path far across on the opposite mountainside. There was no one else in sight and he simply rode on and on, slow, oblivious and tireless. Hamid was beside himself with delight. 'Waaah, horseman,' he cried, 'Peace be on you. You have lightened our way this morning. Would that we could send you thanks.' The spell was broken when the donkey carrying our luggage evaded the donkey-man and began to trot back in the direction from which we had come. By the time we had caught it the horseman and his music had vanished.

Soon afterwards we fell in with a group of shepherds and a large flock of goats travelling down towards Gilgit. The shepherds had unfamiliar features, and were speaking a language that none of us recognised, though they answered our greetings in the usual local way. Then Hamid, after listening carefully, exclaimed, 'They seem to be speaking Persian, but how can it be that shepherds speak Persian?' He was referring to Persian having been the traditional language at the courts of the rulers, the only written language then used in Kohistan, and known only by a literate few. So he questioned the shepherds in his own courtly Persian, and got answers that he at least partly understood. The shepherds, he told us, came from the village of Imit in the upper Ishkoman valley, but



1. Crossing the Gilgit river by skin-raft



2. Rope-bridge across the Gilgit river

their fathers came originally from Wakhan, to the north. They had fled from there with Ali Mardan, their former ruler, when the Afghans seized Badakshan, Wakhan and the other small states north of the Hindu Kush. 'These people speak Wakhi,' explained Hamid, 'a kind of Persian, which is why I can understand some of what they say. They hope to sell these goats in Gilgit.' We exchanged greetings again and parted.

We have never been to Imit, but I remember this encounter whenever, while reading earlier travellers' accounts, I come upon mention of Ali Mardan. The first is of the young prince '... of about twenty-five with fair hair, blue eyes, and pleasing manners' who in 1874 asked for a signet ring engraved in Persian,

By the grace of the Protecting Lord
Ali Mardan, the servant of the king of Men.¹

The last is of the old exile of about 1920, hen-pecked, but still with 'gentle courteous manners', and famous for his love of tea.

Coming next over the crest of a small rise we were suddenly confronted with a scene that again seemed to belong to earlier days. Seated on a gaily caparisoned horse and shaded by an umbrella was an elegant but grave young man, and all around him—leading the horse, clutching its trappings, and registering approval and devotion—were followers and, as we shortly discovered, devotees and pilgrims. For this was the famous Pir of Chatorkhand, the sixth generation of a family of religious leaders who came from Bokhara and settled at Chatorkhand, the other large village in the Ishkoman valley. Hamid went up and paid his respects, and Elizabeth and I were introduced. The Pir explained that he was visiting some of his followers in the Gilgit valley, and could not stop because people would be waiting for him.

After they had gone Hamid explained that the Pir is an Ismaili Moslem, a follower of the Aga Khan, as are many people in the north of Kohistan. 'This Pir is very much respected in Ishkoman and in Punial,' he went on, 'although nowadays our Imam the Aga Khan says we should not follow these hereditary Pirs. This Pir is very rich, and has much land in different villages. He is a good man, and has started many schools. He has organized a community grain bank for the farmers in Chatorkhand. He was educated in Karachi. He is

¹Gordon, 1876, pp. 129-30, 153.

related by marriage with the rulers of Hunza and Punial.' Later, after we had returned to Gilgit, Raja Karim Khan was to tell us the history of the Pirs of Chatorkhand.

Finally that day, after talking to farmers in several villages along the way, we came to Gakuch, which is situated on the top of a terrace above the road. We climbed up a steep path, and as the trees and fields came into view we saw another scene from Arcadia. A young man was sauntering on the grass beneath a grove of mulberry trees, in one hand a fly-whisk and in the other a book of Persian poetry from which he was reading aloud to himself, as oblivious as the flautist of the morning. Eventually he saw us, smiled, and came across to introduce himself as a member of a family that formerly contended for the throne of Punial. 'I have no expectations,' he said, 'so I spend my time here reading Hafiz and drinking mulberry spirit. We have so little water in the village that we cannot grow grapes and make wine, but our mulberry spirit is unsurpassed—try some.' And he handed Hamid and me small bowls filled with a clear harsh smelling liquid, tasting, to my untutored palate, like any other arrack. Hamid battled with his conscience. 'Our Imam the Aga Khan has forbidden us liquor,' he mourned, 'I should not drink this,' but finally his conscience capitulated. Later the young man gave us some of the spirit to take away with us, and it corroded the lining of our water bottle.

'I will tell you the history of the rulers of Punial,' he said. 'At the very beginning this was Yaghistan, "the land of the free". Then two Shouts came. One was big and one was little. After some years the regime of the Shouts finished and other people ruled. Then, after many generations, my ancestor fought the present ruler, and the present ruling family came into power. That is all.' What he meant by 'Shouts' we never discovered for sure—not even Raja Karim Khan knew—but they may have been Islamic missionaries.

Sometimes we engaged a farmer with a horse or donkey to carry our tent and luggage, but more often two or three farmers came to carry it themselves and to act as guides. Sometimes they came from their own village only as far as the next, and sometimes they stayed with us for several weeks. Whoever they were, the routine was the same, framing our daily lives for months on end. During the disorder and scuffle in the morning, while we found porters and packed, and while the porters collected and tied their loads, Elizabeth and I would look forward to the moment when they would

step off and we could finish thanks and goodbyes, and could follow. Then we would be free of complications, and would have the specific task of travelling twelve or twenty miles on our own feet.

Just outside the village we usually caught up with the porters, who had paused to adjust their loads and to gossip about us and the people we had met in the village. As we passed they would get up, one by one, and follow in file, continuing for a while to talk over their shoulders, until all our mouths dried up and silence fell. So it would be for the rest of the day. Sometimes we would stand and talk with travellers, or stop for an hour in a village to question the farmers, and the porters would be ahead. Sometimes the porters would take long rests, or would find some pine-nuts, or would stop for prayers, and then we would be ahead, sitting impatiently on a rock and asking Ghulam Abbas or Abdul Samad or another of our friends interminable questions.

While we were walking, and not talking or thinking about Kohistan, we often thought about food. We ate enormously—I remember eating eighteen apples one afternoon—and the constant hard exercise gave us a craving for sugar. Under the tutelage of Abdul Samad, the professional tea-brewer, we began to take sugar in tea which neither of us had done before. We carried tea, sugar, flour, rice, porridge and jam with us, and were able to buy milk and firewood in most villages. In some we could also buy chickens, eggs, and butter. At higher altitudes we occasionally found wild rhubarb and blackcurrants, which the local people neglect because they cannot afford the sugar needed to make them palatable.

About midday the porters would begin to speculate about how far we could get that day.

'We shall reach Lasht before sunset.'

'No, it's too late, it will be dark before we can reach Lasht; we must stop at Shosht.'

'If this two-legged donkey didn't spend so long saying prayers we'd have plenty of time to reach Lasht.'

'My maternal uncle lives in Lasht, and he would have entertained us.' And a little while later we would ask our companions the inevitable questions:

'Where shall we stop for the night? How long will it take us to get there?'

They were often extraordinarily vague about the answers, even when they had been there before. Abdul Samad's favourite reply was to point ahead and say,

'We can reach a village behind that mountain,' or worse, he would point to the skyline and say,

'There is a shepherd's hut under that cloud.'

Foolish questions . . .

When the dark green smudge of the village—or the slopes where we would camp below the next day's pass—came in sight, then immediately we began to feel tired. However far we had already walked that day, the last hour was always the longest.

CHAPTER FOUR

OASES

'Oasis', I suppose, might be defined as fertility amidst sterility. Normally, it suggests waving palm trees on flat Arabian or African sands. But there seems no reason why it should not also mean clefts of verdure amidst sterile towering wastes of enormous rock. I can think of no better word for the startling, delightful little places, fruitful and green, which the traveller finds strung at intervals of ten miles or so along these arid Karakoram gorges.

*Ian Stephens,
traveller in Nagar and Hunza, 1952.¹*

John: Does the quality of the soil vary from one field to another?

Farmer: Yes, of course. The soil varies like people vary. That is in the nature of things.

After walking for several hours in the valley bottom on a hot summer day it is a revelation to step into a village. It is like passing from one element into another, like diving from air into water. The contrast is more than physical: villages represent life and growth and hospitality in a barren and inhospitable setting. In a landscape whose gigantic proportions are bewildering and often overwhelming, they are reassuring in their human scale and detail.

Inside the village, the greenness and lushness resolves itself into an irregular but harmonious patchwork of fields and trees. The fields are small, often less than a quarter of an acre, and are separated from one another by irrigation channels and ditches, by terraces and banks where the ground slopes, and by little footpaths slightly raised above the tilth and safe from its periodic wetting. During summer the fields are full of crops: sun-coloured barley and wheat, perhaps already cut and tied in sheaves; tall maize with creamy yellow flowers higher than a man's head and a musty smell among its shady stems; dark green millets, panicle and spadix, with catspaws rippling through them; the occasional brilliant green of rice; the bluish-purple of flowering lucerne, smothered with bees and butterflies; and the pink of clover, with its sickly wafting scent. Fruit-trees are filled with fruit: mulberries which

¹ Stephens, 1953, p. 155.

patter down in red and white showers; apricots and apples which bend the branches by their abundance; grapes and walnuts, traditional fruits of Kohistan; and a dozen others here and there—pear, pomegranate, peach, almond, plum, Russian olive, cherry, jujube, fig, and some that have no name in English. Vegetables too are grown in small patches near the houses—tomatoes, radishes, cucumbers, potatoes, pumpkins, marrows, carrots, turnips, a variety of green vegetables and herbs, and perhaps a little tobacco for chewing, and a few sunflowers or cosmos for decoration. Not that we ever saw all these crops and fruits growing together in a single village. Different seasons, different altitudes, different soils, even different farmers, make for variety in crops and fruits. We soon noticed this, although it was many weeks before we began to see the overall patterns.

Depending on the season and the time of day, we would sometimes find the fields dotted about with men, women and children—watering and weeding, cutting and carrying—and sometimes empty and the village apparently deserted. Then we would make for the houses, usually inconspicuous among the trees, where we would find at least a small boy loitering from whom we could enquire for the headman. In Kohistan small boys refer matters to their elder brothers, who consult their fathers, and so we would slowly move up the hierarchy from one doorway to the next. Finally the headman, summoned from work or rest, would appear to see who these unknown and unexpected visitors were, and to offer them the hospitality of his home and foodstore.

We intended most of our daytime halts to be brief, so having refused invitations to stay for the night we would be led among a swelling crowd of men and boys to the cool shade of our host's fruit-trees. Any women sitting there would withdraw, and there would be a few moments of confusion while our host and his relatives rushed about for goat-hair rugs and cotton quilts for us to sit on. The men would then gather in a semicircle on the ground. The younger ones would squat, perhaps tipping their caps forward to shade their eyes and to watch us the more closely. The older ones would sit more deliberately, and were more interested in the prospect of conversation than in our appearance or movements. We too would surreptitiously watch, especially for the gesture from our host that would send a boy scrambling across a festoon of vines to cut bunches of grapes, or shinning up one of the trees to shake the branches and bring the apri-

cots thudding down. Someone would then produce a grubby red handkerchief, and the fruit would be collected in this, washed in icy irrigation water, slowly arranged with much hesitation and fingering on precious aluminium plates, and put before us. When we were full, or felt that we had already eaten as much as we should, the plates would be passed among the audience in order of age and status.

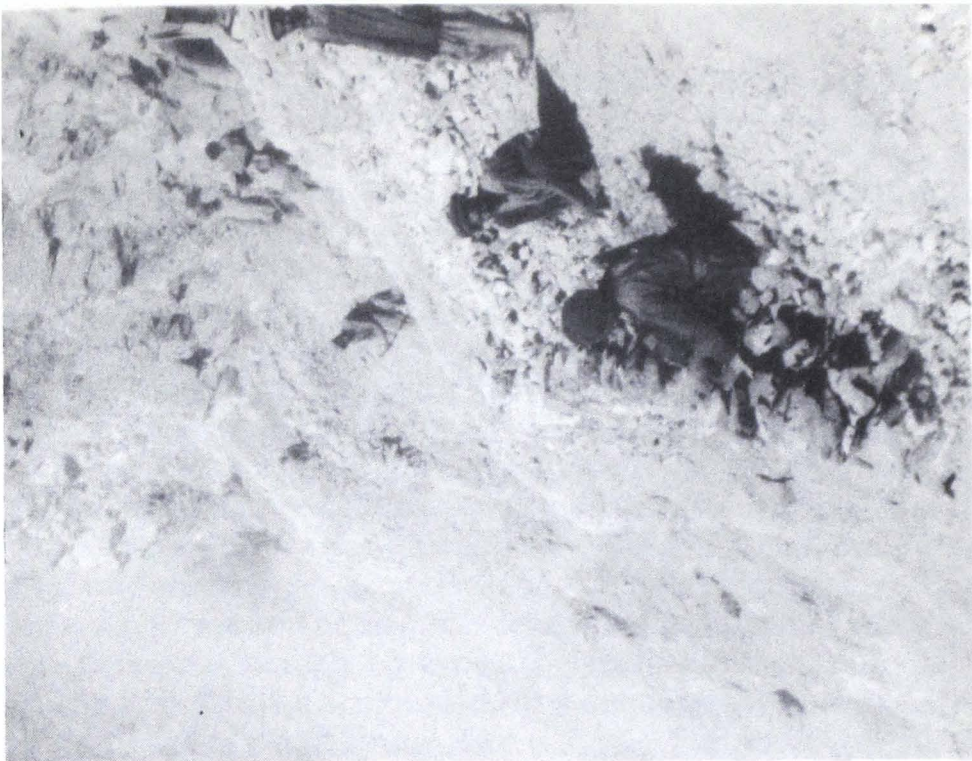
Only then would the headman or one of the elders ask the questions everyone wanted to hear the answers to, and even then he would begin cautiously lest any offence or embarrassment be caused. Where had we come from that day? Where were we going to stay for the night? Which was our country? London? London proper? (Which means Britain, rather than America or Western Europe.) Yes? Sighs of satisfaction—they had known our countrymen and approved of them. ‘And of your countrywomen,’ one gallant remarked, ‘why, your women walk and ride like men.’ Indeed so many were the enquiries after ‘Major White’ and ‘Colonel Aahdams’ and ‘Captain Yenghez Bahn’ (whom we finally identified as Younghusband, and who would have been more than a hundred if he had still been alive), that we realised that as well as enjoying the hospitality due to travellers we were benefiting from a fund of goodwill towards many of the British officers who had served in Kohistan. Very seldom did we meet any hostility among the local people (although officials from ‘down-country’ were another matter), and only twice were headmen unwilling to answer our questions. Once this was on the grounds that no one had ever come to ask such questions before; and once on the more reasonable if priggish grounds that it was not becoming, even for a headman, to answer questions about his fellow villagers’ affairs.

As soon as our bona fides had been established, and we had explained that we wished to learn about the village and its farming, we were free to ask our questions. We learnt much in the asking itself, for every topic had to be approached from an appropriate direction and every question framed in a comprehensible way and phrased in the local idiom. Thus not ‘How many households are there in this village?’ but ‘How many smokes (i.e. fire- and cooking-places) are there?’ Not ‘Thirty years ago . . . ?’ or ‘Before independence . . . ?’, but ‘In your father’s time . . . ?’ or ‘When you were a boy, grandfather . . . ?’ We learnt a dozen scales used in as many localities for measuring the size of a field, some based on the actual area, some on the amount of wheat or barley seed used to sow it, another depending on the length of time a pair of

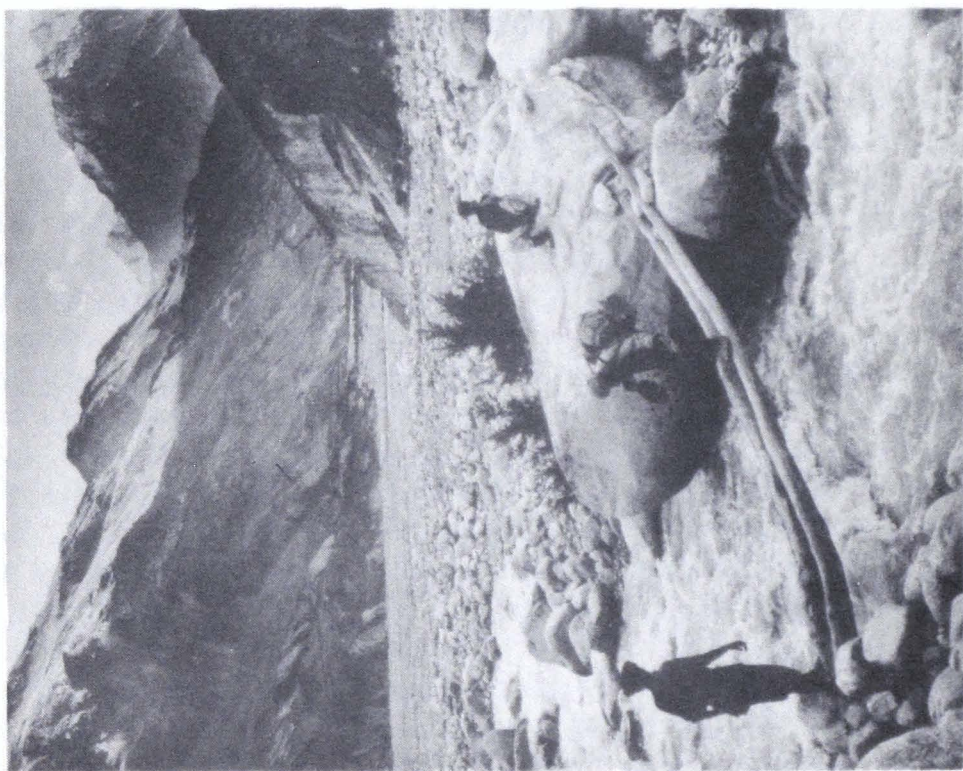
bullocks takes to plough it, and yet others varying with the quality of its soil. We learnt how soils are classified locally. We learnt half a dozen ways of counting the seasons and telling the months. We learnt that similar pastures used at different seasons have different names. We learnt that the basic measure of water in an irrigation channel is the discharge required to turn the mill-wheel in the local style of flour mill. We learnt that it is pointless to ask the price of land because land is seldom sold, but that it is worth asking about the occasional sales and purchases of grain.

In general, hypothetical questions were less successful than questions of fact. Questions about irrigation, glaciers and snow, channels, the rationing of irrigation water, differences in seasonal flow, and the water requirements of different crops were always thought important and were answered clearly and promptly. On the other hand questions about anticipated crop yields and alternative rotations led into circuitous discussion and endless argument. We often had to be content with yields expressed biblically as 'eightfold' or 'tenfold', which we would then try to relate to the amount of seed sown per unit area, only to find that this varied from field to field with the quality of the soil and the availability of manure.

Often, while we sat and listened and the old men talked and nodded agreement, food was brought again. By now the women of the headman's household had had time to cook, and there came a procession of sons and nephews with flaps of bread, thin or thick, hard or soft, according to the local style, with perhaps a bowl of bitter cheese or curried vegetable, more apricots, and a basin of buttermilk or a pot of sweet milky tea. We knew, from the questions we were asking, that food was often scarce, even for headmen, but to have refused food—or to have offered payment—would have caused irretrievable offence. After a while we began to carry packets of tea and soap which could be pressed upon hosts under the pretence that they were 'for the children'. 'It makes us very happy,' one headman remarked during tea and walnuts, 'that you will take what we can offer. We have only our local food, but we offer it gladly to travellers and strangers as is our custom. Some foreigners have refused our hospitality. Some 'Amrikai' once came who brought all their own food with them, and would not take even a cup of water from us. Best of all we liked some Germans—they ate everything.' Thus is the American's concern for his stomach interpreted as unfriendliness.



2. Road-making



1. Porters crossing a stream

Hosts in Kohistan seldom eat with their guests but hover about supervising the serving of the food. Instead some of the old men present—distinguished relatives and anyone held in special esteem—might join us in the meal, while the other men discreetly moved away a little. We learnt much from the meals too. We learnt to tell wheat bread from maize, which is easy, and barley from millet, which is more difficult. Not that we were often given barley or millet for they are considered inferior grains, and a host who serves them to guests is badly thought of. We learnt that in Gilgit we should pick the ripest mulberries from the dish by poking and pricking them out individually with a thorn, but that in Chitral we should take them from the top only and leave those underneath to be ‘cooked’, i.e. shaken, so that ripe ones again come to the top. We learnt to follow fresh apricots with their own kernels to avoid the dangers of gluttony. We learnt that in Chitral we should turn our teacups upside down as a sign that we had drunk enough; and that in Gilgit, when our host proffered his sleeve for us to wipe our greasy fingers on, we should lightly touch it with the back of the hand as a token of acceptance, but wait for the hand basin and hot water to be brought.

After the women of the headman’s household had finished cooking, and our appreciation had been relayed to them, they might be so emboldened as to send a message inviting Elizabeth to visit them. She would do so with great reluctance, complaining that the men’s conversation was always interesting, but that all the women talked of was babies. When it came to babies our prestige suffered. ‘How many children do you have? None?! I have two sons and one daughter. How long have you been married? Three years!’ And then the averted eyes, and the signs of embarrassment and commiseration, mingled with self-satisfaction. One old man, overhearing the sad news, led me aside and gravely advised me to take a second wife. It was something that we could never hope to explain, and finally we avoided the problem by saying that we had been married only six months.

After food the conversation would become reflective, and often turned to local events and personalities. We would ask about the name and founding of the village, about its historical associations, and whether fairies or other phenomena had been heard of locally. Questions such as these would be referred to the oldest man present, or to anyone who took an interest in such matters, or whose father had done so. Almost

every village had some local association that added to our overall picture, whether it was a prehistoric battle with stones and sticks for possession of the site, or one of Saint Shah Wali's whimsicalities, or simply what the ruler's great-grandfather had remarked as he passed by.

Finally, if our onward journey was not too long and our host's work in the fields was not too pressing, someone might be persuaded to bring a sitar or flute, and we would all lean back, idle and appreciative. The shade of huge mulberry trees, a tinkling channel, a crop of wheat—thick, yellow in the sun, and dry-smelling in the gentle breeze—and beyond, the sleepy afternoon village and the purple distance: this was the setting for our first acquaintance with the sitar and with the thin, plaintive, and enchanting melodies of the Chitral love-song.

Oh, alas, O world! Would that I were a spring by the path,
My love would have come there and washed her delicate fingers,
She would have drunk from it, placing her sweet lips there,
And I would no longer wish for death.

* * *

The village of Hakis spreads across two adjoining fans at 7,300 feet in the Gilgit valley. According to their own tradition, the inhabitants came from Darel to the south, but the circumstances are forgotten. The present population is 400, all of whom depend upon the village's resources for their food and livelihood.

Their irrigation water comes from two streams. One is fed by a small glacier in the Hakis valley which gives one 'water-mill' throughout the farming season. The other is fed by snow in the neighbouring valley which gives one watermill in the spring, unless the weather is so cloudy that melting is delayed, but only a quarter of a watermill in summer. Only a third of a square mile altogether can be irrigated, and the otherwise suitable land adjacent has to be left barren. The soil of the fans is naturally stony, and in parts of the village the fields have to be supported by terrace-walls. The village's summer pastures are high up in the same two valleys, and trees for fuel and for building also grow there. These are the basic resources that the 400 people share.

The village headman is old and grey. His memories of the past are clear, and he recalls the passage of the British-Indian army column through the Gilgit valley in 1895 on its way to

relieve the beleaguered garrison in Chitral. But he is beginning to lose his grip on today's affairs, and is giving place to his eldest son. He nodded and dozed while others answered our questions.

Sometimes, after asking about a village as a whole, we asked a sample of the farmers about their individual affairs, and in Hakis we delved into the lives of eleven households which we chose out of the total of forty-four to be representative of the village. Afterwards we found that in composition, resources, and opportunities the household of Jan Khan comes very close to the averages of the sample and so is more or less typical of Hakis.

Jan Khan, who is twenty-seven, lives with his younger brother, an unmarried sister, and their widowed mother. Both the brothers are married, Jan Khan having two young children and his brother one. Such joint households are still common in Hakis, where the average household has nine members. In other villages, although joint households are still thought laudable, they seldom survive the death of the father. As a result the overall average size of a household in Kohistan has declined to 5.5 people. No doubt when Jan Khan's mother dies, or when he and his brother have one or two more children each, or when their wives' quarrels become too violent, Jan Khan and his brother will divide their father's property and separate.

Meanwhile they share three and a half acres of irrigated land divided among seven fields in different parts of the village. Every household in Hakis owns at least some irrigated land: the average in the sample was three acres, the maximum six acres, and the minimum one and a half acres. Like most of the others, Jan Khan and his brother also have a small orchard and a vegetable patch near their house. In the orchard, around the house, and along the edges of their fields they have altogether sixty-seven fruit trees, thirty of which are apricots and the rest mulberries, walnuts, apples, peaches and grape-vines. They also have one bullock, three cows, two calves, and twenty goats and sheep, for which, as landowners, they have a right to the village pasture. This is the property that provides the nine members of Jan Khan's household with almost everything on which they subsist.

Since man needs more carbohydrate in his diet than anything else, Jan Khan uses his fields mostly for growing grains. In November he sows one acre with wheat, and in February one acre with barley. Half an acre is kept for pulses, half an

acre for lucerne, and half an acre is temporarily left fallow. The barley is harvested at the end of June and maize is sown as a second crop in the fallow half-acre. The wheat is harvested in July, but by then it is too late to follow it with maize so those fields are left fallow. Although it would be more productive to raise more barley instead of the wheat and thus to allow more maize to be sown afterwards, barley is considered an inferior grain, and Jan Khan, like other farmers in Hakis, grows at least some wheat for special celebrations and for serving to guests. Only blind Ashraf Khan grows no wheat, expects no guests and celebrates nothing.

From the acre of wheat—if the wheat-rust is not too bad—Jan Khan gets about five quintals of grain, from the acre of barley he gets nearly seven quintals and from the one and a half acres of maize he gets ten quintals making a total of twenty-two quintals per year. Jan Khan's crop yields are a little less than the average yields which we later calculated for the northern valleys of Kohistan. These yields are themselves twice the traditional average for Pakistan as a whole. Here then is an indication of the efficiency of traditional farming in Kohistan, which helps to explain how such small areas of cultivation have supported their inhabitants for so many centuries. The reliability of irrigation compared to the uncertainties of the monsoon, the generally small size of farms and plentiful family labour, and the conscientious use of animal dung as manure probably explain these high yields. Certainly we found in Hakis, and later in other villages, that farmers are well aware of a relationship between the numbers of their animals and the productivity of their fields. If manure is scarce they may even leave one or two fields fallow, as Jan Khan himself does.

Out of his total annual grain production Jan Khan stores two quintals for the next year's seed, pays one quintal in local taxes, repays two quintals to a shopkeeper in a nearby village for tea and cotton cloth bought on credit during the year, gives half a quintal to the Hakis miller for grinding the remainder of the grain into flour, and puts half a quintal of the wheat flour aside for guests and special occasions. This leaves sixteen quintals for the household for their daily bread for the year, and allows nearly two quintals per person per year. This is reckoned in Kohistan as the average quantity needed for a sufficient diet there, and is equivalent to a daily ration of one large loaf of bread per person. Jan Khan seldom sells any grain for cash, but a few of the other farmers with

more land or more animals or with smaller households, may manage to sell two or three quintals at Rs. 30 to 40 per quintal.

During the summer the milch cows stay in the village to be tended and milked by Jan Khan's wife and sister-in-law, while the dry cows and goats and sheep are taken to the pastures by a relative along with his own animals. In winter Jan Khan and his brother look after the animals themselves, stall-feeding the calves and kids on dried lucerne and the full-grown ones on the straw from the grain crops. All the produce from the animals, butter and buttermilk, a little fresh milk for tea, occasional meat in the winter, wool, goathair and leather, is kept for the household's own use, though for some special event Jan Khan may have to sell one of the animals outright. The previous year he had sold a bullock and a calf for Rs. 350 towards the cost of a feast to celebrate his brother's marriage. Some of the other farmers in Hakis have more animals than Jan Khan—up to a hundred goats and sheep, a pair of bullocks, three or four cows and calves, and a donkey or even a horse—and so they are able to sell 100 to 200 rupees worth of butter, wool and goathair every year.

Many of the fruits grown in Hakis are dried in the sun for the winter, especially the white mulberries and certain varieties of apricots. Apricot kernels and walnuts also make a valuable addition to the diet during the winter. The two or three farmers who make wine from their grapes excuse this on the grounds that the wine keeps them warm during the winter. Again most of the fruit grown is consumed, either fresh or dried, within the household itself, but Jan Khan, who has twice as many fruit trees as the average in Hakis, manages to spare a quintal of dried apricots and 10 kilograms of kernels for sale, which brings him about Rs. 60 a year.

But overall more than ninety per cent of Jan Khan's farm production is used by his own household, and to sell even the five or ten per cent is an innovation. As he said himself, 'In my father's time we bought only salt from outside the village. We did not know tea then. Instead of these metal pots from the bazaar we had local stone and wooden ones. We used to pay the carpenter for them in grain. At that time we used our own sheep's wool for clothes instead of this cotton cloth.'

Later in the day, after we had talked to some of the other farmers, Elizabeth watched Jan Khan's wife and sister-in-law prepare the evening meal. It was the month of June and the barley had just been harvested, so the bread was being made of barley flour. A little of the dough from the previous mix-

ing had been kept aside, and was added to make the bread rise slightly and to give it a spongy texture—bread made like this is the speciality of the upper Gilgit valley. Jan Khan's wife was also making a bean curry, soaking dried beans before cooking them with spices and a little clarified butter. Afterwards the men may each have a small bowl of tea, boiled up with a little fresh milk and with salt in place of sugar, and the women would drink up the dregs. Extra bread is cooked in the evening to be eaten cold in the early morning with tea or, in more old fashioned households, with buttermilk. This is all that the household has until the farmer comes in from the fields in the late morning. By that time his wife will have made fresh bread and perhaps cooked a dish of some green vegetables, and put some buttermilk to cool in the shade. Apart from these three meals there may be fruit if it is in season. During the apricot season a fist-sized stone upon every flat rock and a little heap of cracked shells show that the children at least are putting the fruit to good use.

Such a diet reflects the farm's production—the bread made of home-grown grains at every meal, the vegetables that go with it, the milk, butter and buttermilk from the cows and goats, and the local fruits. Only the tea, salt and spices come from elsewhere. For marriages and the Islamic festivals money may be spent on rice, and on sugar for tea, but even then the farmer will rely on his own animals for meat and butter and his own grain for bread. And for the traditional local festivals such as spring sowing and the first barley harvest, the farmer's wife will make traditional local dishes entirely from home produced ingredients. In Hakis Jan Khan's wife makes 'cheese-bread', thin leaves of soft unrisen bread alternating in layers with crumbly curd-cheese mixed with clarified butter.

So we saw something at Hakis of the close relationships that exist throughout Kohistan between the environment and the farming, and of the delicate dependence of the farmer's diet on his resources. And we also began to understand three features that—or so it seemed to us later—characterize the farming there. The first is the traditional self-sufficiency, essential when there were few practical communications and virtually no trade, and still important now because of the high cost of transporting bulky food grains in the mountains. The second is the interdependence of cultivation and livestock husbandry. The farmer depends upon his animals for dung to improve his crop yields, and for power to plough his

fields and thresh his grain; while, in the north of Kohistan at least, the animals depend upon the straw from the crops and upon field grown fodder for their survival during the winter. And the third is the effective use that this mixed farming makes of every altitude level in the extraordinary environment. The highest altitudes provide the 'reservoir' of snow and ice for irrigation, the intermediate levels provide pasture and timber for fuel—without which the animal dung would surely have to be burnt, as elsewhere in Pakistan—and the lowest altitudes provide sites for settlement and cultivation, and a growing season long enough for crops to ripen.

But we learnt more at Hakis than theoretical characteristics of the farming. Each of the other ten farmers we talked to taught us something new, if only some practical detail of everyday life. Roz Ali showed us how he spins goathair on what looks like a cross between a spindle and a top. Tyero told us how the *mullah* breathes prayers over the seed to prevent rust and smut in the crop, and how the rust and smut come just the same. Momin Khan explained that his father had owned six fields and two orchards, that he and his brother had each inherited three fields and one orchard, and that his share would again be divided into halves for his own two sons. The old headman, Duloo, explained how farmers try to avoid growing the same crop in the same field year after year, but rotate their various crops in different fields. He also told us that local rules dictate how near other people's land each kind of fruit-tree can be planted. Mirzan Murad Khan told us how his brother wished to become a blacksmith, there being none in Hakis, and had gone to work with a smith at Gupis in order to learn the craft. Gulsher Khan sold two quintals of grain cheaply in the autumn, and bought back one and a half quintals dearly in the spring, but was unable to explain why. Bombarak Shah's mother remarked that the people of the village have become addicted to tea and spend too much money on it. Blind Ashraf Khan, who has a wife and two daughters but only one cow and five fruit-trees, and who gets only three quintals of grain from his one and a half acres, sorrowfully admitted that he lives mainly on the generosity of his fellow-villagers. Boojaga pursues his ancestral crafts of weaving wool and goathair, and has also set up a watermill. He is now one of the richest men in the village, with a hundred goats and sheep, seven cattle, a horse and a donkey, and fifty-two fruit-trees. And finally there was Neemat Khan, who already had five children of his own when

his brother died, leaving him five more. So now he has six sons and four daughters, all less than ten years old (Plate 12.1). He was surprisingly cheerful, and explained that he looks on the six boys as 'the property of Allah'.

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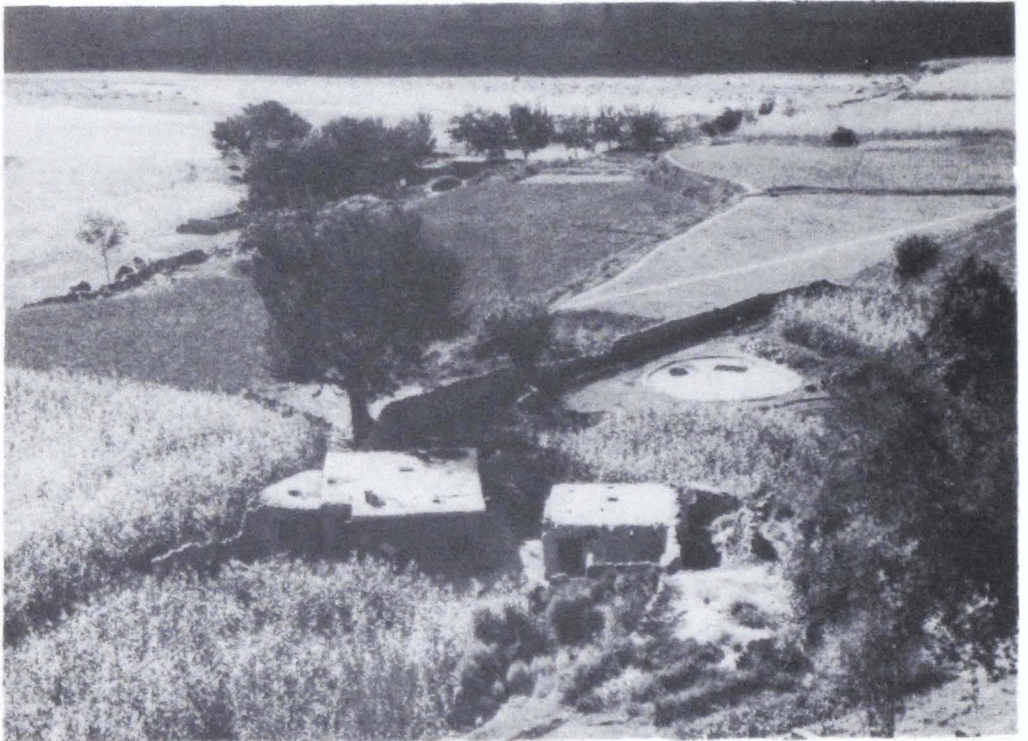
From Hakis we travelled on up the Gilgit valley to Phander, and from there retraced our route through Gupis, Gakuch, Cher Kila and other villages to Gilgit (Map 6). The more villages we visited the more clearly we saw that, although the basic pattern of the farming is everywhere the same, each village has its own problems and opportunities.

In Tingdas, for example, we found that there is ample irrigation water but the area of land suitable for cultivation is extremely small. As a result the average size of farm there is only one acre, a third of the Hakis average, while the largest farm of all is only two and a half acres. All but two or three farmers therefore have to buy extra grain every year in order to feed their families. In Gakuch, on the other hand, there is land suitable for cultivation which cannot be used for want of water. As the poetry-reading prince told us, there is insufficient water for grapes, and we also learnt that during spring one fifth of a watermill has to be shared between 120 households i.e. three times as many households as in Hakis share less than a fifth as much water. Later in the year, if the winter snowfall has been heavy, the flow increases, but farmers still have to take turns to irrigate their fields, each one's turn coming after eighteen days. Some years, if the winter snowfall has been light, there is an even greater shortage of water and the yields of wheat and barley are reduced by half, putting people into great difficulties.

The disadvantage of depending on ephemeral snow as the source of water is well understood locally. In the village of Minawar, where even at the best season there was not enough water to drive a flour mill, we heard that the inhabitants had tried to solve their problem by 'making' themselves a glacier in the hopes of a more plentiful supply. According to local belief if ice from a male and from a female glacier is mixed together and is covered with snow in a suitable site, and if certain ceremonies are gone through, then a baby glacier will grow there. However bizarre and unlikely this may seem, glaciologists have admitted that it might, at least occasionally and in very favourable circumstances,



1. Bagrot valley, showing the sites of several villages on river terraces
(At the end of this stretch of the valley is the snout of the Bagrot glacier. On the valley-side to the right is the line of an irrigation channel; on the valley-side to the left is the track which leads up the valley)



2. House and farm in Dainyor village
(A threshing floor can also be seen)

succeed. And succeed it apparently does, for we found that the Minawar glacier, which was 'planted' twenty-five years before, was thriving, and the farmers convinced that already there is more water than in their fathers' time. Furthermore, according to the independent evidence of people from Bagrot, across the Gilgit valley, the glacier is visibly increasing in area every year. Later on we saw two more such 'artificial' glaciers, one planted only a month before and the other a well established seventy-five year old, and we heard of a dozen others.

We found other villages that have no problem with water, but are short of pasture because the valleys in which they have grazing rights are too small. Pingal, two days walk beyond Hakis, is one such village and consequently farmers there have few animals. Conversely the village of Singal, between Gakuch and Cher Kila, is at the mouth of a tributary valley whose total area is 170 square miles, so it was not surprising to find that farmers in that village have up to 200 goats and sheep. More animals mean more manure and therefore better crops, so the farmers of Singal are doubly fortunate.

Where pasture is rich and plentiful, farmers may go up and cut hay for fodder for the winter. Even better off in this respect are the villages in the southern valleys, because not only are their pastures rich and plentiful, but they also have the evergreen hollyoak for winter fodder. Later we were to find that the hollyoak is such an important resource in the south that the non-Moslem Kalash give it a special place in their ancient ceremonies.

Most villages in the Gilgit valley have access to at least some natural timber for building and fuel, but further north trees are so scarce on the mountains that farmers have to plant what they call 'fruitless trees'. Along the channels above the northern villages we often found the useful willow, pollarded for firewood, slashed of withys for baskets, and stripped of leaves for fodder. Around the edges of the cultivation we found lines of slender poplars, grown for building timber and again for fodder, their tall white trunks and shimmering leaves marking the limit of the irrigated area.

Site, soil, aspect, the quality of water—all those too we found to be taken into account, consciously or unconsciously, in the local details of the farming. Our sense of the fitness and of the high degree of adaptation of what we saw was constantly strengthened. One of the nicest adaptations is the way in which farmers grow different crops according to the

different altitudes of their villages. Elizabeth began to work this out during our journey in the Gilgit valley. We already knew that temperatures vary closely with altitude and that this affects the natural vegetation. So it was not surprising to discover that certain crops and fruits are grown only in villages at certain altitudes. We found, for example, that rice ripens only below 6,000 feet. Similarly grapes ripen only up to 8,000 feet, and maize and apricots up to 9,000 feet. The uppermost limit of permanent settlement is about 10,500 feet. Occasionally we found barley being raised as high as 12,000 feet, but it often fails to ripen at such height. Conversely, apples do not do well below 7,000 feet.

What was more complicated was to find that the common grain crops each require a different number of warm months to grow from germination to maturity. Wheat and maize require four to five months, barley and millets three and a half to four months, and the buckwheats only three to three and a half months. Farmers choose among these crops, and among possible combinations of them, according to the number of warm months, 'the growing season', in their own village.

In Hakis, at 7,300 feet, Jan Khan had told us that he could grow barley followed by maize during one year, but there was not enough time for wheat followed by maize, i.e., the growing season at Hakis allows double cropping only if one of the crops is quick growing. At Pingal, 1,000 feet higher we found the growing season reduced further, and farmers able to raise only a single crop, whether wheat, barley or maize. Higher still, at Phandar (10,000 feet), temperatures are too low for maize at all, and only wheat and barley are grown as single crops. Going back down the valley from Hakis, we came to Tingdas and Singal, at 6,200 feet, with a growing season long enough not only for barley plus maize, but also for wheat plus maize, which we found the dominant crop combination all the way down the valley from there.

So the pattern is double cropping up to at least 6,000 feet, then a transition zone, and then from 8,000 feet single cropping. What happens in the transition zone varies from one valley to another. In some of the southern valleys the change comes as low as 6,000 feet, straight from wheat plus maize to maize alone. In the Gilgit and Chitral valleys the change is pushed up to 7,000 feet by bringing in a quick growing crop, either barley as the first to be followed by maize, or millet as the second following wheat. In the Hunza valley

the uppermost limit is reached at 8,000 feet, by raising two successive quick growing crops, i.e. barley plus millet or barley plus buckwheat.

The quick growing crops are coarser and less liked than the slower growing ones. Bitter buckwheat, the quickest growing of all, is positively disliked. So as far as possible farmers grow the slower growing but more highly esteemed wheat and maize. Yet farmers in Hunza forego the pleasures of the palate and grow barley and buckwheat for the sake of a few extra skins of grain. This suggested to us an extra determination to produce the utmost from the land.

* * *

As we arrived back in Gilgit we were met by Ghulam Abbas. 'Peace be on you. Welcome back.' We shook hands. 'I have been expecting you. I hear you have had a successful journey. How did I hear? Oh—well—gossip, I suppose you would call it. Everyone here knows everyone else's business. As foreigners yours is of special interest. Everything you say and do, even when you are out of Gilgit, is everyday discussed in the bazaar here. You met the Pir of Chatorkhand and talked with the farmers of Hakis and other villages. People say you asked many funny questions. Then you went up to Phandar and have returned from there. What have you found out? Do you know all about our farming now? Are you ready to write a long book about it?'

The gentle mockery was unmistakable, but he listened attentively while we told him what we had heard and seen. 'Yes,' he said, 'that is very fine and all true, no doubt. But then, you see, it is practical everyday knowledge here. Only a foreigner would think of asking about these things and writing them down, and we people think that strange. Did I tell you about the geologists from Italy? The story is that some Italian visitors came to see the mountains and evidently liked them very much, because they took pieces of rock away to Italy with them to show their families. "What a very poor country Italy must be," the people here said, "that these visitors should find our dry and useless rocks worth taking away with them."'

'But you are right about the pastures,' he said, and he went on to explain that the rights of village to pasture are as old as the villages themselves, and that until villages began to

grow it hardly mattered that some had more than others. 'Now we are beginning to have problems. For many years nomadic Gujars have been allowed to bring their animals to pastures near Gilgit, but now the Gilgit people say they need all the pasture themselves, and the Gujars have nowhere else to go. So there have been fights and a case is in the courts. Just below Khomar, where I now live, on the other side of the river, there is a new village with a channel made only a generation ago. That village has no pasture because all the local pastures already belong to other villages. Some people there manage to keep a milch-cow or goat in the village itself, but nothing more.' He paused for a moment, and sipped at a cup of tea.

'Yes, there are things that could be changed for the better. I have seen in Khomar how we waste our irrigation water, although it is so precious. Do you know that if the winter snow on the mountains behind the village is light we have to leave some fields uncultivated in the following summer? We start to ration water at Nauroz, the Islamic New Year for us Shia Moslems—that's 21 March by the European calendar—which is earlier than in any other village you will visit. We even make a sacrifice at the head of the main channel on that day in the hopes of enough water during the summer.'

He explained that because farmers receive the water in turn, and because each farmer's fields are scattered in different parts of the village, the water may be flowing in two or three subchannels at once, and is therefore wasted through evaporation and seepage. The more efficient alternative would be to use the subchannels by turn and to water all the fields along each one, irrespective of the ownership of the fields. 'I've explained this to the headman and my neighbours, but it will not be changed. People's rights to water are as ancient and unchanging as their ownership of land. The headman gets the first turn in Khomar because his ancestor was the first settler there. That was thirty generations ago. Perhaps when I have lived in the village for thirty years they will be more inclined to listen to what I say.'

We questioned him further. 'On Nauroz all the men of Khomar go to the head of the channel where we cut a goat's throat and cook and eat it. It has to be eaten there, and we have to be very careful to clean our fingers and mouths afterwards because no morsel of the meat must be taken back into the village or there will be a very great shortage of water that year. Do I believe this? Well, I probably ought not to believe

in these old customs, but if it makes the fairies happy, and if we get a good meal from it, where is the harm?

‘The headman? He’s a rich old man, of little education but shrewd. He has much land and gives much as alms for feeding the poor. He provides the goat for the sacrifice. I will introduce you to him sometime, and you can try your questions on him.’ He grinned. ‘Actually, I am a puzzle for him because I am a newcomer to the village, an outsider from Nagar, and so I ought to be of little importance. But as a member of a Wazir family, even from outside Gilgit, I am his social superior. And in education too I am more fortunate. But then I have turned all this upside down by cultivating my land with my own hands, instead of employing servants as any Wazir or village headman or educated man should do. What disturbing effects modern ideas and education have on us and our ancient ways!

‘To go back to your studies—I don’t think that you are at the bottom of things yet. You talk of altitude and barley, but do you realise that many people here are faint with hunger by spring-time and grow barley just because it ripens ten days earlier than wheat? Everyone prefers maize to millet, I agree, but farmers also know that if the soil is poor or manure is scarce millet will succeed where maize will fail. You measure seed rates, but have you found out that if pasture is scarce the farmers may sow their crops extra thick so that the plants can be thinned as they grow and the thinnings fed to the cows? And you have to consider the farmer too. You will find that the men and women of Nagar and Hunza work harder and produce more than others. Oh yes, compared to us, even the people of Gilgit here know nothing. They don’t build good channels. They don’t prepare their fields properly. They don’t conserve their manure. They don’t sow and water their crops at the correct time. They have ample fruit and don’t bother to collect it, nor dry it for the winter. We call them “the rich poor” because they waste their chances. It wasn’t Gilgit men who built the channel to that new village I mentioned—it was men from Hunza.

‘But others are worse. If you had gone into Ishkoman instead of on up the main valley you would have found all the men there asleep or smoking opium while their wives were looking after the fields. You are going to Chilas and Tangir later? Yes, well there they are even lazier. They have plenty of water and acres of barren land that they don’t even try to irrigate. We have twenty-nine varieties of apricot in Nagar and

Hunza: I doubt if there are twenty-nine apricot trees in all Chilas. And they have rich pastures too, and lots of goats and manure and milk—but we never see any of their butter in the bazaar here. They melt and clarify it until it remains liquid, and store it underground for twenty years or more until it's needed for a funeral feast. They say of the people of Chilas, "When a Chilasi is up his butter is down: when he goes down his butter comes up". The butter turns red and bitter underground, and the more bitter it becomes the more it is prized. You wouldn't like it. They say there is a headman in Darel who has so much butter hidden away that he could run a flour mill with it. We used to call Chilas and all those places Yaghistan, "the land of the free", because in former times the people there had no rulers or proper government. "The land of anarchy" you would probably call it, because they spent all their time murdering each other. Perhaps they still do.

'Anyway,' he said with a smile, 'these things are for you to find out. Are you free tomorrow evening? My wife is preparing some food, and I have asked Humayun Beg and Raja Karim Khan to join us. Can you find the way to Khomar? Goodnight. Peace be on you.'

We went to Chilas, and four months after that we were in Chitral, again enquiring from the grandson of a Wazir about crops and cultivation. This was Wazir Ali Shah, another of that stratum of aristocratic intellectuals from the north of Kohistan, who seem to look at their own history and culture with such quizzical affection. We were talking about manure. Elizabeth and I had observed the care with which cow and goat dung is collected and hoarded in the north of Kohistan. We had even met some farmers returning from a three-day trek to the pastures to collect and carry it down on their backs. We remarked to Wazir Ali Shah how fortunate it is that in Kohistan farmers do not have to use their cow dung for fuel as they do elsewhere in Pakistan.

He agreed, but went on, 'There may be more to it than anxiety to save the manure for the fields. An aunt of mine went to Peshawar recently to visit her daughter who is married to a Pathan there. The old lady had never been out of Chitral before, and she was horrified to find that in her son-in-law's house all the cooking was done over dung fires. She came back saying she hadn't felt able to take even a cup of tea there, and that she would never have married her daughter among the Pathans if she had known about this.

So you see we may anyway have some cultural aversion to burning manure.'

Later he told us how the old people in Chitral believe it is disrespectful to step over a fire and that doing so brings bad luck. Then we remembered Raja Karim Khan telling us that in Gilgit some old people believe that a flame should be extinguished gently and respectfully by fanning it and never by blowing upon it. What was this, then, that was having an effect on crop yields? Fire worship? Some relic of ancient Zoroastrianism? Or does it tie up with other more local ideas we came across, such as the revulsion among the Shins of Chilas against the cow, and the belief throughout the north of Kohistan that the products of the cow are inimical to the fairies? It was one of many threads that we were to follow, lose, and find again, time and again, during the ensuing months and years. But before we could begin to look into the past, or to see inside people's minds, we had much of present practice to observe and enquire after.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMER: 'WILD DUCKS' TO 'FALLING LEAVES'

In this village the names of the months are Hasan Husain, Safar, First Sister, Second Sister, Third Sister, Fourth Sister, Buzurg Khodai-ta-ala, Lai Latul-qadar . . .

Farmer of Haich village.

Elizabeth: Why do the goats come when you call?

Shepherd: The goats follow their leader, and the leader comes because I give him salt to lick.

Elizabeth: How is a leader of goats chosen?

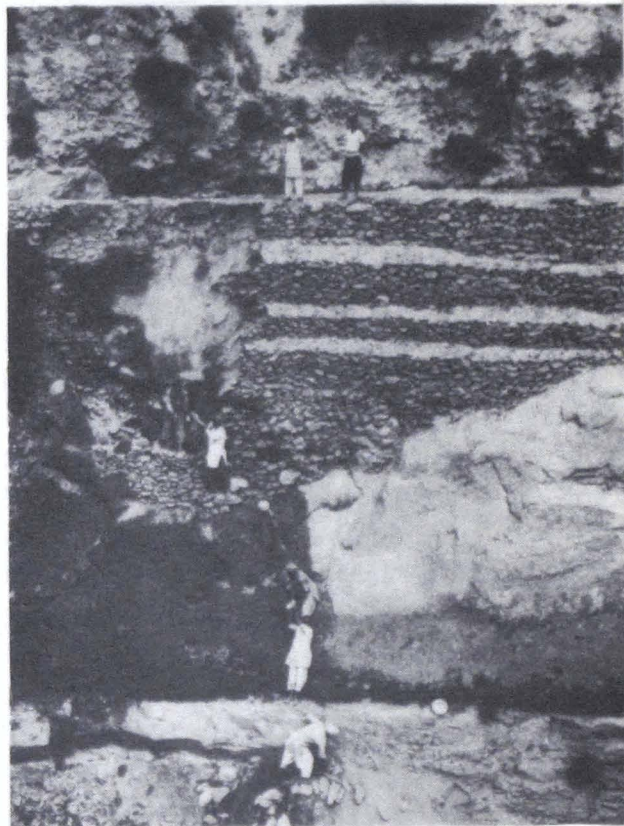
Shepherd: How are the leaders of men chosen?

In Chitral the name for early spring is 'wild ducks'. During this season the mallard and teal which migrate northwards over the mountains can be tempted down onto specially built pools near the riverside. The trapper and the marksman then go out before dawn and add to their food supply, and their wives spin duck-down in with sheep's wool and make themselves warm feathery cloaks. In former times the man who brought the first duck of the year to the ruler was rewarded; perhaps more important, he had the ruler's ear for a moment. 'Wild ducks' is followed by 'black earth', a reference to thawing snow and the sodden ground beneath. Then, as they say in Hunza, 'warmth like the breath of a bullock' descends on the earth.

The year's first important farming operation is the spring sowing. Each village has its own conventional date for beginning the sowing, depending upon its own altitude, aspect and water supply. In some villages, they count the days, and in others they watch the sun. At Kiyar village in Chitral there are two cairns on the skyline above the village, and on the morning when the sun rises between these the villagers begin. In many places there is an initiation ceremony. In Hunza the ruler used to distribute a token quantity of barley seed, to which was added a little gold dust, and he ploughed a furrow or two. The ruler of Yasin used to go to a vantage point from which he could see many fields at once, and he would enquire about any which were not being tended. On being told that the owner was away or ill, or had eaten his seed, the



1. An irrigation channel and a footpath



2. Repairing the retaining wall of an irrigation channel
(The channel is at the level where the two men are standing)



3. Wooden aqueduct for irrigation water

ruler would give seed and make arrangements for a neighbour to cultivate for the owner.

Sowing is a job for the father or grandfather. He carries the seed in his front shirt-tail or in the corner of his long *choga*, and scatters it over the tith with his right hand. He has probably worked the same land for forty years or more, and he knows exactly how much seed of whichever crop should be sown in each field, allowing for its size and the quality of its soil. The seed itself is usually of the farmer's own growing. He chooses the best parts of his crop each year, sees that they are weeded with special care, and, in the case of maize, that the grains are picked off the cobs by hand. The seed is then carefully hoarded through the winter; it is either a foolhardy or an exceptionally hungry farmer who allows his seed to be eaten. Sometimes he may exchange seed with a neighbour or a relative from another village in the hope of improving his yield.

One of the first crops to appear in the fields is the autumn-sown clover, which is grown mainly as fodder for animals but whose young leaves can be cooked and eaten with salt as a green vegetable. Unpopular at other times, it is welcomed as fresh food after the winter diet of bread, dried fruit and occasional meat. In southern Chitral, where it is a common crop in rotation with rice, the girls go out to the fields at the first flush of green, and squatting on their heels, they slowly work their way along collecting the tender leaves. The season for this is jokingly known as 'bottom-dragging'. The girls often crave fresh food so much that they cannot wait for the cooking, but gobble the leaves raw until their mouths are stained bright green.

The first wild flowers to appear in Chitral are as eagerly sought, and the first child to take a posy to the village headman or to one of the local aristocracy is rewarded with sweets or other gifts. In March and April the fruit blossom breaks, first in the lower villages and then, as the season advances up the valleys, in successively higher villages, so that a man in Hunza refers to the apricot blossom as 'coming up' to his village. The greatest concentration of apricot trees is in the main inhabited stretch of the Hunza valley, where, from a vantage point during early April, the villages are almost lost from sight beneath the billowing foaming blossom.

As spring advances people spend more and more time out-of-doors, each day increasing the number of their tasks. When the danger of frost is past the men restore the terrace-walls of

their fields, repair the irrigation channels under the direction of the headman, plant saplings and cuttings, and later, as the sap rises, take buds and graft them. As walls and terraces are restored and as the crops begin to show well above ground, the cattle, freed in the Gilgit valley during winter to wander and graze about the villages, must again be herded. This is often a job for children, who learn which end to whack a cow almost as soon as they can walk, and how to head off an animal with a quickly flung stone before they can talk. The women do any more manuring that may be needed and prepare and sow their vegetable patches, besides continuing their normal domestic and dairy tasks.

The snow and ice on the mountain sides melt faster and faster, channels closed for the winter are reopened, and water begins to sparkle in every part of the village. As the crops grow they are watered from five to twenty times, depending upon the crop, the soil and the supply of water. If water is scarce and strictly rationed a farmer may have to stay up all night to make full use of his turn, diverting the flow from one channel to another with little dams of stone and clod, and guiding it with a hoe from one end of the field to the other so that every plant gets its share. In some villages he waits apprehensively for the local winds that may cause stalks to lodge, and everywhere he anxiously watches the developing ears for signs of rust or smut. As the crops reach full height it is the duty of the women, especially the unmarried girls, to go through each field and thin the crop and weed it. The thinnings are fed to the animals and the weeds, if suitable, are cooked as green vegetables.

In June the mulberries ripen—the first fruit of the year—and soon afterwards in low altitude villages the autumn sown barley turns yellow and is ready for harvest. Harvests are perhaps the most laborious tasks of the year, but they are also the happiest, especially the early barley harvest which means an end to the hunger of spring. The first harvest is celebrated formally in many places, the rulers and members of certain families going through ceremonies and hand selling the first fruits. There may be polo, dancing and other public entertainments.

Harvesting is usually the work of both men and women. It needs to be if the fields are to be ploughed and prepared for a second crop, this time maize or millet or perhaps buckwheat. In low altitude villages other fields need preparation for rice, which means that the clover must be cut, the field ploughed,

flooded, puddled and levelled, and certain wild foliages collected and buried to fertilize the crop and to discourage the frogs. Only then can the rice seedlings be brought from the nursery beds and transplanted. At the same time potatoes have to be hoed, lucerne cut and dried and carried to the fodder store, birds scared out of crops still standing, and a threshing floor prepared for those already cut. Mulberries and apricots have to be shaken down and caught in blankets, the apricots to be halved and laid out for drying on flat rocks and roof-tops, their nuts hammered, and their kernels extracted and strung for drying. Fodder on the mountainsides must be cut and carried down; irrigation channels must be dredged; vegetables must be tended, picked and dried; and at least a little of the new crop must be threshed and taken to the mill for grinding.

Soon afterwards the autumn sown wheat is also ready for harvest. The rush to prepare for the second crop then becomes so urgent in villages near the upper limit of double-cropping that the men may start ploughing up one end of a field while the women are still reaping at the other end. Sometimes they may even have to cut the first crop before it is quite ready, and then they spread it on rocks or stand it in stooks for a few days to ripen off before it is threshed.

* * *

Meanwhile the snow on the mountains retreats higher and higher and the animals are taken further and further from the village each day, until it is no longer worth bringing them back at night. Then the shepherds leave the villages and set off with their flocks towards the high pastures. The shepherds themselves are younger brothers and sons who can be conveniently spared from the work in the fields, and old men who have no fields, in all perhaps a couple of dozen men and boys from an average-sized village. They work in groups of three or four, each group looking after 100 to 150 goats and sheep, some perhaps their own or their fathers', and some belonging to relatives or neighbours. At Minapin a farmer who does not go to the pastures himself pays five kilograms of grain to the shepherd for each goat that is taken to the pastures for the summer, and expects to get back two kilograms of clarified butter for each goat that is in milk. The shepherds may keep any additional butter they can make.

The shepherds take away with them flour, dried apricots, milking pots and one or two aluminium cooking pans, and set up temporary camp at one of the summer settlements that are found in every pasture. These are untidy huddles of little stone huts and pens, timeless in their crudity and, judging from the depth of the accumulated goat-dung, established many centuries ago. They give rough shelter to the men from wind and cold and to the flock from the occasional wolf or snow-leopard. After a month or so the shepherds and flock move on to another settlement, perhaps according to some local convention, perhaps upwards as the season advances, or perhaps in a circle as snowfall, insolation and aspect work their effects on the summer's grazing.

There is much other work for the shepherds besides the daily sortie to find grazing for the flock. She-goats have to be milked, kids and lambs attended to, and butter and cheeses made. Firewood has to be collected, water brought, and daily bread baked. There are sheep and goats to be sheared, sick animals to be cared for, and perhaps a patch of barley to be tried nearby if the settlement is not too high or exposed. Ceremonies have to be gone through, byres have to be purified with juniper smoke, and the local fairies have to be propitiated. Butter, cheese, buttermilk and *kurrut* (a tangy flavouring for winter made by boiling buttermilk with flour and drying the residue) have to be carried down to the village. Fleeces and goathair also have to be carried down, and more food has to be brought up. Even if he has nothing else to bring, a man can carry up only enough flour to last himself and three companions for two weeks.

And there may be guests to feed. If the pasture is rich, farmers come up to cut and carry down wild grasses for the animals for the winter. Hunters may stay for the night. Others, looking for the wild cumin seed or 'the tears of the mountain'¹ may drop in. If the settlement is not too remote relatives may come to talk about family affairs. If it is near a route travellers may halt for a night, perhaps leaving at first light to cross a pass before the snow softens, or coming down late and exhausted after a narrow escape from an avalanche.

The busiest settlement that we stayed in was at 13,000 feet at the foot of a scree on a bleak mountainside far above the

¹'The tears of the mountain' is a pitch-like encrustation ('like the sweepings of a sugar factory' one analyst told us), which is prized as medicine, elixir and aphrodisiac. It occurs on rock-faces, sometimes so inaccessible that it has to be shot down.

trees in southern Chitral. We arrived in late afternoon at the same time as the flocks were returning. Feeling that meat might strengthen our own and our porters' resolve for a high pass on the following day, we bought a goat. Its throat was cut 'In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate', and we watched as it was expertly butchered by its own shepherd. Elizabeth then went up on the scree to make a plan of the place (Fig. 3), while I went to inspect the arrangements for the animals and the evening milking.

On the side nearest the scree was a row of little stone huts, two larger ones for the shepherds, and seven smaller ones for sick animals and newly born kids and lambs. Adjoining the huts was a small enclosure, with a four-foot wall roughly built of slate blocks, into which the kids had been penned. In a larger outer yard were sneezing, snuffling she-goats, which one by one were being seized and milked into wooden bowls. On a rock in this outer yard stood a large wooden pot into which the smaller bowls were emptied. The warm milk in the pot 'steamed' faintly in the cold air. Later it would turn to curd.

I wandered into a smaller yard outside the shepherds' own huts and found a pile of firewood and a row of bulging goat-skins, some filled with buttermilk or clarified butter, others with water from the river for drinking. The skins were complete except for hair, heads and hooves; even the scrotum remained on one, bulging and quivering when anyone drew water from the legs. There was a wooden funnel nearby made to fit into the ends of the legs so that they could be filled with curds or liquids. Its wood was greasy and dark-stained, and it stank pleasantly of sour milk and rancid butter. I also found a pot of crumbly, bitter cheese made by draining curd and to be eaten with bread. (At least ten other varieties of cheese are made in Chitral.) In cavities in the wall I noticed dirty white fleeces and tufts of goathair, and along the top of the wall there was a row of *kurrut* balls put out to dry. I then went outside the main compound, and in the wall I found fireplaces where the fresh butter was being melted and skimmed and the water driven off so that it would remain edible.

Dusk had fallen and the wind was piercingly cold by the time Elizabeth had paced out the lengths of the walls. A few flakes of snow swirled round us as we went to see how the butchering was going, finding two of the shepherds, oblivious of the cold, enthusiastically unravelling yards of small intestine over the rocks and blowing through it to expel the faecal pellets. Perhaps they were going to make strings for a sitar.

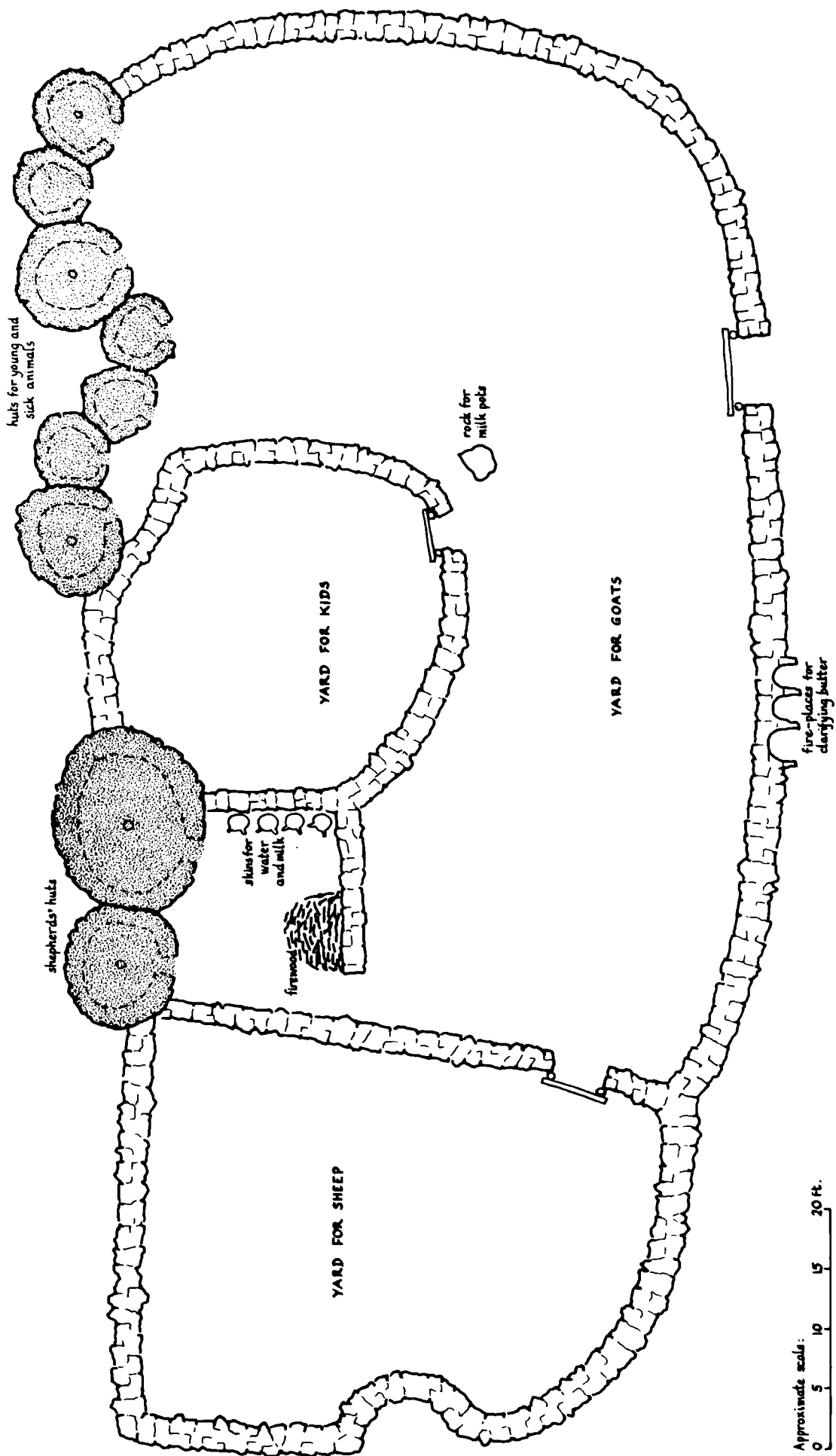


Fig. 3. Sketch of the shepherds' settlement described in Chapter 5.

When they had finished we asked about the calls the shepherds use. We learnt that there are different calls, not only for different kinds of animals—'chikeh-chikih' for goats, 'phruce-phruce' for sheep—but also for different occasions and containing varying instructions. We also asked about names for the goats, but although some were known individually the names given were disappointingly prosaic: 'with many black and white spots', 'with black on the forehead', 'active and surprised-looking', and 'with black around the eyes'.

Later we sat in one of the shepherds' huts which they had given over to our party for the night. It was dome-shaped inside, with slabs of slate overlapping up to a tiny hole in the ceiling, which itself was about four feet six inches high at the centre. In the centre of the floor was a wood fire around which five of us could sit cross-legged. On the floor was dried grass, covered with a goathair rug and a woollen felt. We sat and watched the flames flicker a mosaic of shadows across the dark slaty walls that closed above our heads, and we passed charred lumps of goat liver and a bowl of tough stew around and across the fire, and with them ate the curd and bread that the shepherds brought us. From the next hut we could hear the swishing of a skinful of curd as one of the shepherds, squatting with it across his knees, rocked it to and fro until the butter formed. Through the wall on the other side the goats coughed and sneezed. Afterwards Elizabeth and I left the hut to our companions and stumbled through the dung and falling snow to our tent, where the sheep kept us awake with gurgling noises.

I found myself speculating about the shepherds. If you spend your days with goats on remote mountainsides and your nights in a little hut with goats next door, and if you are the companion, protector and midwife of goats, do you begin to forget the ways of the village? Lack of family life during the summer must dull the social graces: what does the company of goats provide instead? What does the shepherd feel about his goats, with their silky ears and warm enquiring eyes, as they gather round him? In Chitral they sing of a goat that reproaches its shepherd—

I am your goat so you should take care of me,
 You have brought the milk-pot to the goat-house wanting milk
 But you have not brought food for your goat . . .

—but was the song composed by a shepherd, or is it only the poetic extravagance of some dilettante prince? Is there any

regret in the shepherd's heart as he cuts the trusting victim's throat for the wealthy visitors' supper? Idle questions that we never had answers to. Others—less fanciful—also came to mind, though far removed from the lines of our original enquiry. Why do women never milk goats? Why do people say the pastures are 'dangerous' for women? Why are animals sacrificed for the baby glaciers? Why are there no horses in Chilas? Why is it only Gujars who keep buffaloes? These too were threads, a tangle of threads, that we had still to follow and try to unravel.

Only goats and sheep are constantly attended. Other animals are taken up to the pastures for the summer, but are left to fend for themselves. 'Allah looks after them,' farmers used to mutter. A friend explained how bulls form a defensive ring round cows and heifers if a wolf or leopard came, but added that there are few predators left in the mountains around Gilgit now. 'Even so,' he said, 'we never send our donkeys to the pastures. If a donkey sees a wolf coming it rolls over onto its back, waves its feet in the air, and closes its eyes.'¹

Some farmers try to make doubly sure by entrusting their cattle to the fairies. Below the Shah Jinali (the black polo-ground) pastures in north Chitral we passed an isolated juniper tree, whose base was surrounded by stones and whose branches were filled with sticks. Upon enquiry we were told, 'A fairy and her daughter live in this tree. When the farmers bring their cattle to the pasture they only come as far as this tree. They leave the stone or stick that they have used for goading the cattle, and say to the fairy. "Here are my animals, and here is the goad. Please take charge of the animals as long as they are in your pasture." Then the farmers go back to their village until autumn. But the farmers lose many animals every year. Some fall off cliffs and some are eaten by leopards and wolves.'

Such laconic words seemed at the time to characterize the Kohistani attitude towards animals—casual and matter of fact. Like flat land and irrigation channels, animals are part of farming, and the subtle interdependence of cultivation and livestock-husbandry which excited us so much is, again, 'practical everyday knowledge'. But to the visitor from outside, it again seems admirable. Resources, which otherwise would not be used, support a combination of animals which give man

¹That is why people in Gilgit say 'the donkey closes its eyes to hide from the wolf'. cf., 'the ostrich which buries its head in the sand'.

food in the valuable form of milk, butter, cheese and occasional meat; which give him wool for clothing and blankets, and hair for rugs and ropes; which provide power to plough his fields and manure to fertilize his crops; which provide power to thresh his grain, transport to move it, and skins to store it in; and which will even carry him into the bargain.

For us another feeling grew, as we travelled across the pastures, and heard the shepherd's ecstatic pipings on his flute and his earthy familiarities with the flocks. We began to sense that underneath the 'practical everyday knowledge' there survives something of an older and more fundamental relationship between man and his environment, a relationship that has to do with man's earliest ideas about himself and the world. The seasonal and daily patterns that we saw in the pastures—the upward search for grazing across the mountains, the daily milking and churning, the intimacy between shepherds and animals, the inevitable autumnal retreat before the advancing snow—seemed older than anything we saw in the fields. Long before British India impinged on Kohistan things were changing in the fields: maize was replacing millets, apricots were replacing walnuts, threshing with animals was replacing threshing by hand, wheat and barley were being sown in the autumn instead of in the spring, ceremony was replacing ceremony. But in the pastures little can have changed since man first settled in the mountains, so little, indeed, that the old familiar spirits and fairies have stayed on in many places, as at Shah Jinali, still preserved from the exorcizing call to prayer and the binding iron of ploughshare, sickle and jeep.

* * *

The return of animals in the autumn is an important event in the yearly cycle, and is traditionally celebrated in most villages. In former times, when life was less secure, there was a risk that the shepherds themselves would not return, so their safe home-coming was an additional reason to celebrate. One of the most striking of such festivals is that of the Kalash of the Berir valley. The Kalash are a non-Moslem people, now numbering only a thousand or so, who inhabit three tributary valleys in the south of Chitral. They still keep up their polytheistic beliefs and ancient customs, and still wear their distinctive dress.

We arrived in Berir for this *Pul* festival, but had to wait more than a week while it was repeatedly postponed 'until some strangers who might spoil it have left the valley'. The Kalash were also waiting for everyone's grapes and walnuts to ripen, for the harvest of these is now celebrated with *Pul*. Both are important for a people who still make a little wine and for whom walnuts are a staple food, and the first fruit in every part of the small valley is traditionally picked on the same day. Indeed before the week's end we suspected that the Kalash were taking a mischievous pleasure in pretending to keep up the ancient and, to Moslems, shocking practices that used to be part of *Pul*, whereas it is only an emasculated version that survives.

The tradition in Berir is that strong and vigorous young men were chosen each winter to be the following year's high pasture shepherds, or *budalaks*. In the spring they left the villages with the flocks, and stayed away in the pastures throughout the summer, supposedly drinking gallons of butter-milk and gathering their strength for the autumn, as well as fighting off wild animals and raiders from adjacent valleys. During this time they did not come down to the village nor have any contact with women. On the night of *Pul* the inhabitants of the valley gathered together, and the women danced until the *budalaks* made a sudden appearance amongst them. During the next hours the *budalaks* apparently had sexual freedom amongst the women, for whom it was an honour to be chosen.¹ Some of the Berir people insisted that sexual freedom is still given to the *budalaks*, but this was difficult to verify for the Kalash seem extraordinarily secretive and inarticulate about their customs and beliefs. This is a symptom of the growing disintegration of their religion and society, but we guessed that it is also a defence against the prying of the *mullahs*.

Pul is still colourful and bawdy. During the evenings beforehand there was singing and dancing in each village, and during the daytime the women and girls left their work in the fields and wandered in groups on the hillsides collecting flowers and coloured grasses. From down in Biyu village, where we were camping, we could sometimes see them as

¹ Perhaps *Pul* was originally a eugenic practice whose object was to produce fighting men. Certainly the Kalash believe that the children of such unions are particularly strong and brave. There is also a tradition that the Kalash once captured hundreds of girls from the surrounding peoples and mated them with selected young men with the purpose of raising a new army.

they flitted among the hollyoaks. More frequently we heard snatches of the special *Pul* song that they sang interminably during those days of preparation and waiting. It was a simple tune of three notes with a refrain that was translated:

The *budalak* has been in the pasture and has drunk much milk,
Now he is coming to lie among the women.

The *budalak* has come down with the flocks, and the pastures
are empty:

We have put flowers in our hair, and we are ready.

Many of the verses were made up impromptu, often to extol the singer's own beauty, and often with some sexual innuendo.

We are sweetly scented today,
They will enter into a garden of flowers.

When you touch my body you will become faint,
Unable even to brush the fly from your face.

During the dancing one evening a girl mischievously picked a feather from the cap of one of the drummers and ran off with it. He pursued her, shouting. 'If I catch you, I'll *budalak* you,' which caused much laughter. All this, the dancing itself, even the informal mixing of men and women during the dancing, shocked our acquired prejudices, and we began to see why the Kalash had been anxious that unsympathetic visitors should not be present.

On the day of the ceremony the men appeared in new shirts, and with coloured feathers and flowers tucked into their caps. In the afternoon people began to collect at the village dancing place, a mud floored platform beneath a walnut tree. First the younger girls had to be prepared and dressed. Over the top of their usual black woollen robes they wore cotton shirts with brightly coloured floral patterns. Over these they wore their usual white or magenta woollen cummerbunds, but now tied across their bodies from shoulder on one side to waist on the other. One of them had a cross-belt of brass links with little bells, which we were told was one of the few surviving pieces of Kalash jewellery. On their heads each was to have a tall pointed cap of grass, decorated with marigold flowers, red berries, and a plume of feathery grasses. Older sisters and mothers dexterously made these caps, and were not always eager to hand them over. We watched three young women, bedecked in men's long *chogas* with garlands of flowers, as they balanced their handiwork on their own heads and spun round like flaring tops. One of them had blackened her face with burnt goat horn, a

common cosmetic against sunburn in Kohistan, but on this occasion it added an extra dash of ceremonial.

Towards evening everyone moved down the valley to a dancing place that is common to all the Berir villages, and most of the Kalash from the valley gathered there. With visitors from the other Kalash valleys, and some recent converts to Islam (who could now only look on wistfully), there were about three hundred people altogether. The older women started by dancing a common Kalash step, side-by-side in threes, turning about the centre woman like a swinging compass needle. As they shuffled and jiggled the little bells on their head-dresses and sashes tinkled. At intervals they sang, their voices rising and falling in our ears as they pivoted towards us, and then away again. The men meanwhile collected in a group, singing, drumming, talking and joking with the characteristic inattention of Kalash ceremonies.

As it began to get dark the women went away a few hundred yards, and twelve *budalaks* suddenly appeared. Each flourished a short staff or axe, and they danced a lively measure with these held horizontally at arm's length above their heads. At intervals they took the axes in one hand only and pointing the heads to the sky, they bent over and whistled shrilly through the fingers of the other hand. They were smartly dressed, with large feathers in their caps, and black or purple dye round their eyes. Some had a pair of horns painted on their foreheads. As their dance finished, we heard the women singing soberly as they returned. They stopped at the edge of the dancing floor, singing and shaking twigs of hollyoak above their heads. We were told that it was a religious song, but that the audible words were meaningless. In the centre one woman alone was singing the correct words for the private ear of the god concerned, while the other women were drowning her voice so that no man should hear it. We were told later that it was a prayer for the continuing welfare of the livestock.

After this there was more dancing. The men gathered in a big circle in the centre, where one man sang to the others, emphasising the points of his song with taps from his axe on his listeners' shoulders. The women collected in threes, dancing as before, or moving in threes abreast anticlockwise round the men in the centre. The *budalaks* joined in, also dancing in threes, and either pursuing the women round the central circle or, like the women, leaving the main anticlockwise flow from time to time and pivoting in both directions

about the middle man. When two groups of *budalaks* came face to face they let out a great baa-ing laugh, and charged up to each other with shoulders forward and butting motions of their heads.

Later the women formed a circle round the men, who continued to sing at the centre of the floor. With a very simple step—left foot behind right, right to right—the women went round and round, their long black gowns swinging rhythmically. Each woman put her left arm around one partner's shoulders and her right arm around the back of the other's waist. Later still, when the circle had broken up, we saw men and women dancing in pairs using the same hold. This astonished us and our Moslem companions more than anything. Men dance in public throughout Kohistan for the entertainment of other men, but women are seldom present. Women never dance in front of men, and most would not do so even in front of other women, although Elizabeth occasionally saw women dancing together in privacy. Women dancing in public was therefore bad enough. For men and women to dance together, in public, and in physical contact, was unthinkable. I sensed that our companions—tolerant and even enthusiastic spectators of *Pul* though they had been—felt that this was going too far.

Soon afterwards rain began to fall, quickly soaking everyone on the exposed dancing place. Stars and moon disappeared and the rain quickly extinguished the resinous pinewood torches that the Kalash use. People began to be anxious about getting home, not surprisingly with paths to the villages narrow and rocky, and streams that would now be in spate. Ours was the only hurricane lamp and we were the last to leave. As we stumbled back to our tent, I was sad to think that the last autumn festival to survive in Kohistan in its original paganism should now collapse under a fall of rain. A hundred years ago it would have taken more than rain and a dark night to dissuade the *budalaks* from their role, or to have stopped the dancing before dawn.

Five hundred years ago perhaps autumn festivals in other parts of Kohistan were similar to *Pul*, although their present-day participants would be astonished by such a suggestion. Now they are only family reunions and innocuous grape harvests with, at the most, a ceremonial fumigation of the winter goat-stalls with burning juniper. Even on the morning after *Pul*, as the last of the raindrops spangled briefly before the bright sun relentlessly dried them up, I again felt the

omnipresence of Islam and I found the previous day and night difficult to imagine. But as we climbed the hillside behind Biyu on our way to the next valley, I looked back at the village, where farmers had started to knock the walnuts out of the trees with long poles, and I saw a black-robed, black-faced figure slowly pirouette, arms outstretched, oblivious, in the centre of a field of millet.

* * *

In low altitude villages the second grain harvest takes place at about the time that the shepherds and animals return. Though less urgent than the first, the second harvest is no less needed, for there is little surplus production anywhere in Kohistan. We had seen the beginning of the millet harvest in Biyu while we waited for *Pul*, the black-clad women squatting in a line across the bottom of a field and steadily working their way up the slope. From the other side of the valley their progress was imperceptible, but they worked with concentration so that by the end of the morning they were half-way up the field, and by the evening all the crop was cut and tied in neat sheaves.

Exactly a year after that we were a hundred and fifty miles away near Gilgit, watching a family harvest their rice. A young man was cutting the crop with a small metal sickle, but instead of working consistently across the field from one side to the other, he was cutting in the corners and making odd shaped clearings, disappearing from sight as he worked towards us and reappearing as he moved round to the far edge of a growing clearing. We guessed that he was cutting the riper parts and would leave the rest for another day or two. His father was carrying away the already cut crop and laying it out in a flat place for the stalks to dry off in the sun before it was threshed by hand. A girl of about ten was tending two bullocks that had already been brought to graze the stubble and weeds in one corner of the field.

Two weeks earlier we had watched part of another harvest, that time in a single-crop village 3,000 feet higher. Barley and wheat had long since been cut, and now it was the turn of maize. Men were picking the heavy cobs off the stems and carrying them to the roofs of their houses to lie in the sun for final drying. The women were then beating the grain off with sticks, and storing the cores away for winter fuel or throwing them into the cattle shed as litter. The straw, woody and

unappetizing though it seemed, was being cut and kept for winter fodder. Some people were pulling up the root stumps for winter fuel.

After the reaping comes threshing, which is equally hard work. The first stage is to make a threshing floor, which is usually done afresh each year. The farmer floods a corner of a field from the irrigation channel, tramples the mud and smoothes it over to make a flat circular floor, and leaves it to harden in the sun. Then part of a crop—wheat, barley or millet—is loosely spread on the floor. From four to six animals are brought—donkeys, bullocks or dry cows or a mixture, depending on what the farmer owns and what he can borrow—and are roped together in line abreast. They are then driven round over the crop in a radial line, like the hand of a clock, but anticlockwise to allow the driver behind to beat with his right arm the beasts at the outer end of the line. As they go round and round, sometimes for hours and even days, their hooves stamp on the crop and knock the grain out of the ears. The crop is turned periodically by the farmer, who also drives the animals, though his wife, children and sometimes the neighbours help too. It is a tough job, for he has to run now and again to keep the animal on the outside going at a trot, while seeing that the line remains straight and that the inside animal turns about in the centre of the floor.

Experience counts. We saw one Gilgit farmer strolling round his threshing floor at the inner end of a line of no less than fourteen animals (Plate 8.1). I was reminded of a ring-master with a well trained circus act; even the local people watched with admiration. His success seemed to depend mostly on vocal virtuosity, and we could hear his loud 'Heh! brr-rr-rr-rrah! brr-rr-rrah-ha-ha! Hih!' and sudden cracking sounds from many fields away. The driver often carries a bowl to catch the animals' valuable dung before it is lost, and before the grain is fouled. The possibility of also 'anticipating lesser needs' is one reason why, if there is any choice, dry cows are preferred to bullocks in Hunza. In Punial people seem to prefer donkeys, but we never found out why.

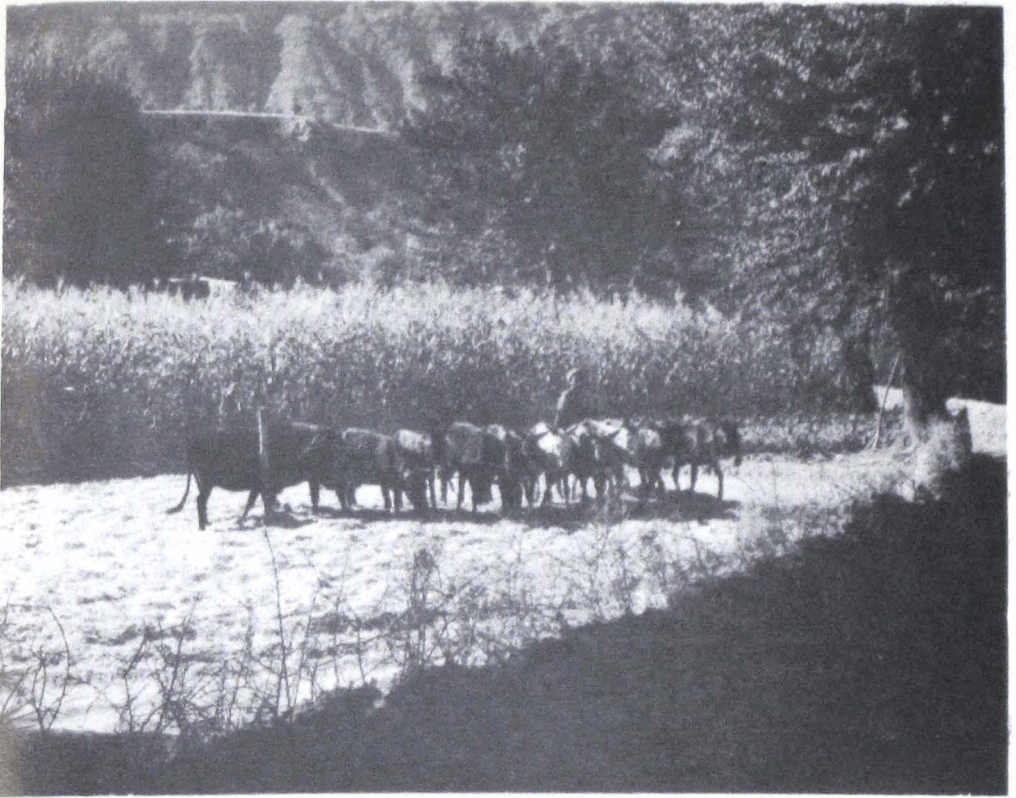
Threshing is hard on the animals too. One day in Gilgit we happened to hear of a young farmer who had woken the Government vet during the night in desperation because his pregnant cow was sick. He had lent it the previous day to a neighbour for threshing, and the poor beast had not been able to stand up to the tough work. It died, despite the vet's efforts, and he berated the boy for his foolishness in

allowing a pregnant cow to be used for such work. The boy declared tearfully that it was the only animal he had, and that he was so indebted to his neighbours for the loan of their animals for threshing and ploughing on previous occasions, that he had not felt able to refuse when they asked him for the loan of one in return.

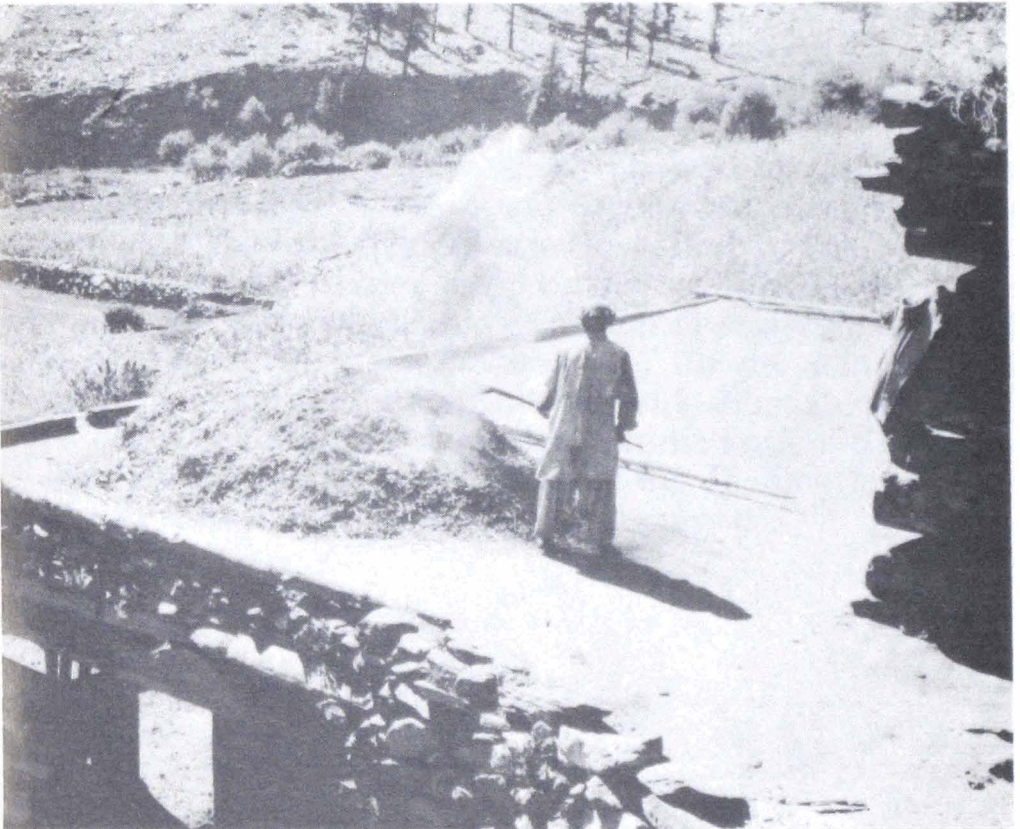
After the grain is threshed it is winnowed by being tossed into a light breeze, first with a pitch-fork and then with a wooden spade (Plate 8.2). Finally it is sieved, first with a coarse sieve to separate the grain from the chaff, and then with a finer one to separate the dust from the grain. Eager goats gather downwind of the threshing floors to lick up the chaff. When all threshing and winnowing is finished, the grain is put into goatskins and carried to the farmer's house or to the watermill for grinding. The straw is stacked out of reach of the cattle on roof tops and in the branches of trees. And once again old men measure out the seed, women carry manure to the fields, and young men harness bullocks to the plough.

Ploughing is a man's job, and is done with a wooden plough that now normally has a metal share-tip, although for light soils the traditional apricot-wood share is still preferred in some places.¹ The plough is drawn by a pair of yoked bullocks, and is attached by a leather thong to the centre of the yoke between the animals. The farmer holds on to the upright part at the rear of the plough and guides the share along a few inches below the ground. The share is not intended to turn deep furrows, but to break and mix the surface soil. The farmer has also to keep the bullocks moving by using a stick and by the appropriate curses or cries. In Hunza he cries 'Hoh, go straight, May the grain be eaten on happy occasions. May the crops be good.' At the end of each furrow he has to lift the plough out of the ground and run round in a semicircle with his end of it, pushing one bullock sideways with the shaft while the other pivots, rolling its eyes. If he is skilled and his bullocks well trained, a farmer can turn at the end of a furrow with hardly a break in the ploughing, but boys who are learning often lose a minute or two in turning and guiding the animals back to the next furrow. Ploughing is another tough job, best left to strong young men, and farmers pass it on to their sons as they grow up.

¹This wooden share is held in position by a wedge and is knocked from the rear as it wears away. Hence the Hunza proverb, 'If the plough is wrong, don't hammer the ploughshare wedge'.



1. Threshing in Gilgit
(The crop behind, and on the terrace above, is maize. The trees are Mulberry)



2. Winnowing beans on the roof of a cattleshed in the Shishi valley

Another common sight in the shortening days of late autumn is women trudging along from the animal sheds with big conical baskets of the previous winter's manure and stall-litter on their shoulders. Gradually the little brown heaps extend across the fields, eventually to be spread and ploughed into the soil. Experience tells how much manure of which kinds is needed for each crop in each field. Basket for basket, goats' manure is considered more efficacious than cows'. If there is not enough, then some of the oncoming winter's will be added as a top dressing in the spring.

Besides manuring and ploughing—and one field may be ploughed eight times if the soil and crop require it and the farmer has the time and the bullocks—the soil is levelled and crushed with a log drawn by bullocks. Then, if the farmer is sowing the field in the autumn rather than in the spring, the seed has to be covered by drawing a bundle of brushwood over the surface. Finally the tilth has to be ridged for the irrigation water. Even the threshing floor disappears beneath the plough, for farmers cannot afford to leave land idle, and the surface would anyway crack with the winter frosts. As snow creeps down the mountainsides the work is ended; the even-textured sown fields, with their ridges in stripes, rectangles or herringbones, already making promise of next year's crops, and contrasting with the occasional stubbled field that is being left until the spring.

The season called 'sowing' is followed by 'falling leaves'. First in the upper villages, and then in successively lower villages, the leaves change colour—the apricot to flaming yellow, the *chenar* to blazing red, others to brown, orange and white—the gathering gloom of winter intensifying their brilliance. Finally they are shaken down for the animals, or fall inedible to crackle underfoot or swirl about in the autumn eddies. The irrigation channels are turned off, and people are seen about the fields less frequently. 'Falling leaves' gives way in turn to the season called 'long nights'.

CHAPTER SIX

WINTER: 'LONG NIGHTS' AND 'EXTREME COLD'

Autumn season has set in and dreary winter season is fast approaching. Mountain tops are covered with white snow. Yellow dried leaves are falling from the trees. We enjoy these days here now because we have stored food against snowy season and no work to do but mere gossips and sitar around the fire . . .

November letter from Abdul Samad.

It is evening and this letter is being written to you by the fire-side. Light from a lantern is falling on the paper. Four friends are sitting with me. At this season friends enjoy invitations very often. The host first arranges to wash our hands, then food on cloth, boiled rice and meat, again hand washing and then hot tea. When the stomach is full there starts singing and clapping of hands . . .

January letter from Abdul Samad.

Autumn in Kohistan is bleak, even in the lowest villages. Snowclouds gather about the peaks and spread heavily downwards, filling up the familiar vistas of warmer months, and sealing over the valleys until one feels trapped inside, as indeed one may be. The colours of the wintry landscape—the gloomy whites of snow under a lowering sky, the gaunt greys of the rocks, and the browns of the empty fields—are repeated in the now ubiquitous woollen *chogas* and caps. Men no longer go about with their usual air of relaxed assurance, but scurry along clutching the empty sleeves and flapping fronts of their *chogas*, or plod along with heads bowed, sleeves curled around their necks, and caps rolled down over their ears. At this season man no longer seems at ease with his environment. The relationship becomes strained and unfruitful, and man himself becomes unobtrusive and furtive.

Then perhaps the clouds lift for a day, the sky clears, the view widens, and the streams—now clear silt-free trickles through their boulder-strewn beds—reflect a brighter blue than ever in summer. The last few yellow leaves on the willow catch the sun, and its shiny red twigs make an unexpected contrast with the wispy pale grey of the poplar. People come out for a while, old men to sit in the warmth, women to tease their wool, and children to play. But each



1. A *budalak* with his axe



2. Kalash Drummers at *Pul*



3. Kalash spectators at *Pul*

time this happens the snow will be a little lower on the valley side. Finally it may reach the valley floor and creep over the village itself.

Throughout the Gilgit valley and its tributaries it is the custom for every household to slaughter an animal at this time. Winter, besides being the season when fodder will be scarce and animals will lose weight, is the only season during which a carcass can be stored long enough for all the meat to be finished by a single household.¹ Almost every farmer kills a goat or a sheep, or, if he is wealthy and hospitable, a bullock or a pair of big he-goats. Even the poorest labourer scrounges a diminutive sheep or a cockerel so that his family can taste meat this once in the year, and he will probably be given joints by his employers and more fortunate relatives. In recent years there has grown up a trade in animals for the slaughter. Men from villages where pasture is plentiful drive flocks and herds, perhaps for days over the mountains, to offer them for sale in Gilgit. Among these animals there are likely to be a couple of dozen yaks, brought down by Wakhi immigrants from the high *pamir* valleys of the north. Only in autumn and winter is Gilgit cold enough for these majestic beasts, but they are a sorry sight as they are herded in slowly diminishing numbers from one group of houses to another.

During the long cold evenings at this time parties of children go around from house to house, reciting a traditional verse for the prosperity of the householder and his guests. We were guests in a house in Gilgit one night, tasting some of the first meat of the season—chunks of rich tough yak meat deliciously fried in butter—when there was a knocking at the outer door, demands for admittance, and in came a party of young girls, a mixture of determination, shyness and giggles. Reactions among the other guests were also mixed. Some were simply pleased that an old custom was being kept up and that we, as strangers, should see it. Some took it more seriously and listened devoutly. Others grumbled cheerfully that it was a racket. The verse the girls chanted ran as follows:

From the mountain comes a river,
The river carries gold,
Gold brings a wife,
A wife bears children.
May the children be noble,
May the door-frame be golden.

¹ At other seasons meat rots, so animals are then slaughtered only if many guests are to be present to eat up the meat immediately. Hence the erroneous idea of some summer travellers that the inhabitants of Kohistan are vegetarians.

May a son be born to my uncle,
 A very fine son indeed,
 With a sword in his hand,
 With a musket in his hand,
 Mounted on a horse . . .
 . . . and let your hand go deep.

‘Those were the best things you could wish for a son in the old days,’ Ghulam Abbas whispered, ‘but nowadays they often add another line, “And may he be educated.”’

The performance ended with the children addressing each man in turn, using the respectful ‘grandfather’, ‘uncle’ or ‘brother’, according to his age and marital status, and wishing him a grandson, son or brother, as appropriate. I was included as an ‘uncle’, and was handed the little bow and arrow that they had somewhat anachronistically flourished during the recitation. ‘That is for your first son,’ Abbas said, and grinned. ‘A manly toy for him to play with.’ Then the householder, mindful of the last line of the verse, gave the children a joint of meat, thanked them, and sent them on to the next house. For us it was like Britain’s Guy Fawkes’s night, with the same cold cheeks and bright eyes, the moral blackmail, and the licence to knock on strange doors and to stay out late on dark evenings.

Early winter is a good season for hunting because the snow drives the markhor, and the snow-leopard that preys on them, down from their inaccessible summer grazing to lower altitudes. In most villages there are a few men who reckon to add to their diet and to their personal prestige by their skills in hunting. Alone or in twos or threes they set off into the mountains, matchlocks or rifles across their shoulders, and the tails of their *chogas* tied up round their waists. Some of them knot the sleeves of their *chogas* to make convenient bags for flour or ‘travelling’ bread (thick loaves baked in the ashes) and perhaps for a few tea-leaves and a blackened old kettle. Thus equipped they stay away for several days, watching and stalking during the short daylight hours, and dozing by night under a rock or in a shepherd’s summer settlement. Imagining this, we realised that it must need determination and stamina as well as skill to be a successful hunter. Only later did we discover that it also needs the somewhat capricious favour of the fairies.

Occasionally, during a severe winter, markhor or leopard come so low that practised eyes spot them from a village. Then the news is shouted from house to house, the half-dozen



1. An informal game of Polo in a village in northern Chitral



2. A band of professional minstrels at Chalt

men with guns drop whatever they are doing and race away up the valley side, and the rest come out and stand in groups shouting unheard encouragement and advice. There are few sportsmen's conventions about hunting, but it is nonetheless a sport, and there was derision in Gilgit when officials from Karachi and Rawalpindi discovered one winter that animals were coming low enough to be shot direct from the warm cushions of a jeep. Whatever their size and sex, ibex and markhor are primarily meat, and in the early winter before the leanest months, their meat is particularly good. Their skins also are prized for sitting and sleeping on, and as leather for fancy items such as gloves for falconry, and waist pouches for matchlock bullets. Leopard meat is forbidden to Moslems, and is left for the jackals and crows, but a skin can be exchanged with a trader for enough grain to feed a household for weeks.

A more popular autumn sport is polo, long established in the northern valleys, where every large village has its own polo ground (Plate 10.1). When flat irrigable land is so precious these grounds are themselves a measure of the attachment to the game. Traditionally they are long and narrow, up to 250 yards long and from 20 to 40 yards across, and are bounded by stone walls from which the ball rebounds into play and on which the spectators sit and offer shrewd comments and encouragement. Formerly any number of men would play, and the game continued without break or change of ponies until one side had scored nine goals. Play was wild and rough, and was accompanied throughout by the music of drums and pipes, with different tunes and tempos according to the state of the game. 'There were only two rules in those days,' Ghulam Abbas used to tell us, 'You were not allowed to bite your opponents, and you were not allowed to poke out their eyes. Otherwise there were no restrictions. One of my grandfathers was a very fine player. He could hurl people right out of the saddle with only one arm.' Under the British some more rules were introduced, and the game is now more like polo in other countries, but it is still furious and the band still plays, and at the end the defeated team must dance for its opponents. Anyone with a pony may play, and tournaments are played off between villages and valleys during the autumn and early winter before the ground freezes too hard.

Early winter is a favourite time to visit relatives in distant villages and to arrange and send marriage parties. So long as

there is no snowfall, journeys along the valleys are often easier and quicker than in summer. Rivers are low and may be forded or temporarily bridged, perhaps saving the traveller a couple of days journey to the summer crossing point, and there may be short cuts along the water's edge which are not possible in the summer months. When we ourselves went up the Hunza valley in late November we were saved several hours climb over the cliffs before Chalt by a fellow-traveller who led us on a frightening path along the water's edge. When we went into the Kalash valleys in December we were able to go up through the gorge in a couple of hours, instead of having to spend all day climbing over the valley wall.

An increasingly common reason for a journey in early winter is to visit the bazaar at Gilgit or Chitral. There the farmer sells what little he can spare from his harvest or his butter-making or his cloth-weaving, and buys with the proceeds—or with the promise of next year's proceeds—the cotton cloth, tea, salt and metal cooking pots that he now finds his household increasingly needs. Nowadays some young men even travel away from Kohistan altogether during the winter, away 'down country' to Rawalpindi or Lahore to find extra work during the months when farming is slack and to earn a little extra money, or at least to reduce the number of hungry mouths at home.

But traditionally autumn and early winter is a time for consolidation at home, for completing the year's work in the fields, and for treating the raw produce of the farm. Farmers who have land uncultivated may dig new fields and build terrace walls. Others may split boulders and remove stones from their fields, empty and rebuild sand-traps, flood sandy soil with silt-laden water, and bring fertilizing minerals from the mountains for the vegetable patch. Women tease and spin the wool, and then summon the weavers, who go from house to house, serving the same families that their fathers served. They carry their looms on their backs, so the cloth of Kohistan is always the width of a man's shoulders (Plate 11.2). Goathair too must be washed and then separated into colours, teased, spun and finally woven into rugs or plaited into ropes. Grain for the winter has to be ground before the water channels are turned off and the mill ceases to grind; grain for the spring has to be stored safely.

Besides the weavers and millers, other craftsmen are busy at this season. Minstrels must tune up their pipes and drums in preparation for polo and marriages, and perhaps to play

home a successful hunter. The raftsmen must practise their second ancestral occupation, taking advantage of low water levels to wash for gold in the river sands. The carpenter must devote his skills to the repair of old houses and the building of new ones.

And then, gradually, the season of 'long nights' gives way to 'extreme cold', the ground freezes, and building and polo stop. Snow falls in many villages, isolating the highest ones for months. With the first flakes men climb on the roofs of their houses to trample the mud firm against leaks, and the few children who have enough warm clothes slide and snow-ball on the first drifts around the houses. Even in the lower villages, where snow does not lie and where the winter is shorter, the nights become bitterly cold. By eight o'clock on a December evening Gilgit bazaar, instead of the familiar relaxed, slightly torpid place of exchange of goods and news, has become bleak and anonymous, with every shop closed and every light hidden. I remember walking through the bazaar on such a night. The cold was intense but so insidious, and the air so still, that I had no sensation of it and felt no shiver to give me warning. For a few moments the physical world seemed to recede, leaving me somehow disembodied in remote Central Asian emptiness. Then I remembered that one does not linger outside on winter nights, whatever the altitude.

Even during 'extreme cold' there is some outdoor work, for the animals have to be driven out to drink wherever a channel still runs or the ice can be broken, and fodder has to be carried to their stalls. In Gilgit, where snow does not lie for long, cattle are turned out each morning in the unlikely hope that they will find a few mouthfuls on a neighbour's land. At dusk they have to be counted and shut up as they return, or called and searched for and enquired after if they are missing. But no one remains outside unless he has to. Social life becomes concentrated indoors, in the farmer's own house, in the houses of relatives and friends, in the mosque, and in the house of the headman. People ebb and flow from one place to another according to social conventions and the rules of hospitality, and in the evenings they gather about the firesides to talk, to listen, to speculate and to recollect.



* * *

Houses in Kohistan are, above all, family homes, especially in winter when a single room serves, perhaps for several

months together, for sitting, sleeping, cooking, eating, entertaining, story-telling, storage, birth, death, festivities and prayers.

Basically the houses are simple boxes, a single room with a flat roof, and made of wood, stone and mud. Those within one village are usually similar, except that the rich sometimes have an extra room for guests, but between one village and another there may be conspicuous differences. Some of the differences are to do with the availability of wood, which in turn depends on the local climate and the natural vegetation. In the north farmers have to rely on home-grown poplar to span their roofs, and otherwise build their homes entirely of stone; whereas in parts of the south timber is so plentiful that stone is scarcely used at all. In one well-wooded valley in the south we slept in a house made simply from a dozen gigantic tree-trunks arranged three-deep in a rectangle and dovetailed at the corners. Superimposed on this variety of materials are variations in style and decoration. Most of the ethnic groups of Kohistan, even the smallest, have retained something of a building tradition of their own. As one would expect, the houses of the nomadic Gujars are the crudest, looking more like shepherds' summer settlements, whilst those of groups longer established in Kohistan, such as the Kho of Chitral, are more sophisticated and comfortable.

We spent one grey November day in the village of Koghozi, in the main Chitral valley, examining a typical Kho house and finding it both a pleasing building, and also a vivid expression of Chitral's culture. We approached through a stone-walled yard which was damp and bleak on that November day, but we could imagine it a delightful place in summer, with shade from its mulberry trees and the cooling of the tiny stream that trickled in under the wall (Fig. 4). Round the walls, which were high enough to shield the yard from the view of passers-by, we found evidence of domestic activities, and we learnt that in the hot weather the family spends much of its time in the yard, cooking, eating and even sleeping there. In one corner was a little stone-covered tank, through which the stream flowed and which made a cool store for butter and buttermilk. In the opposite corner was a rice-husking treadle with a rough shelter over it. Underneath the shelter a dog was curled asleep, and on the top, out of reach of animals, was a heap of maize straw. A plough and yoke were leaning against the wall, and a wheel for spinning wool stood nearby. In another corner was a smooth stone on

 walls of the house itself
 posts supporting the roof of the house

Scale :
 0 2 4 6 8 10 ft.

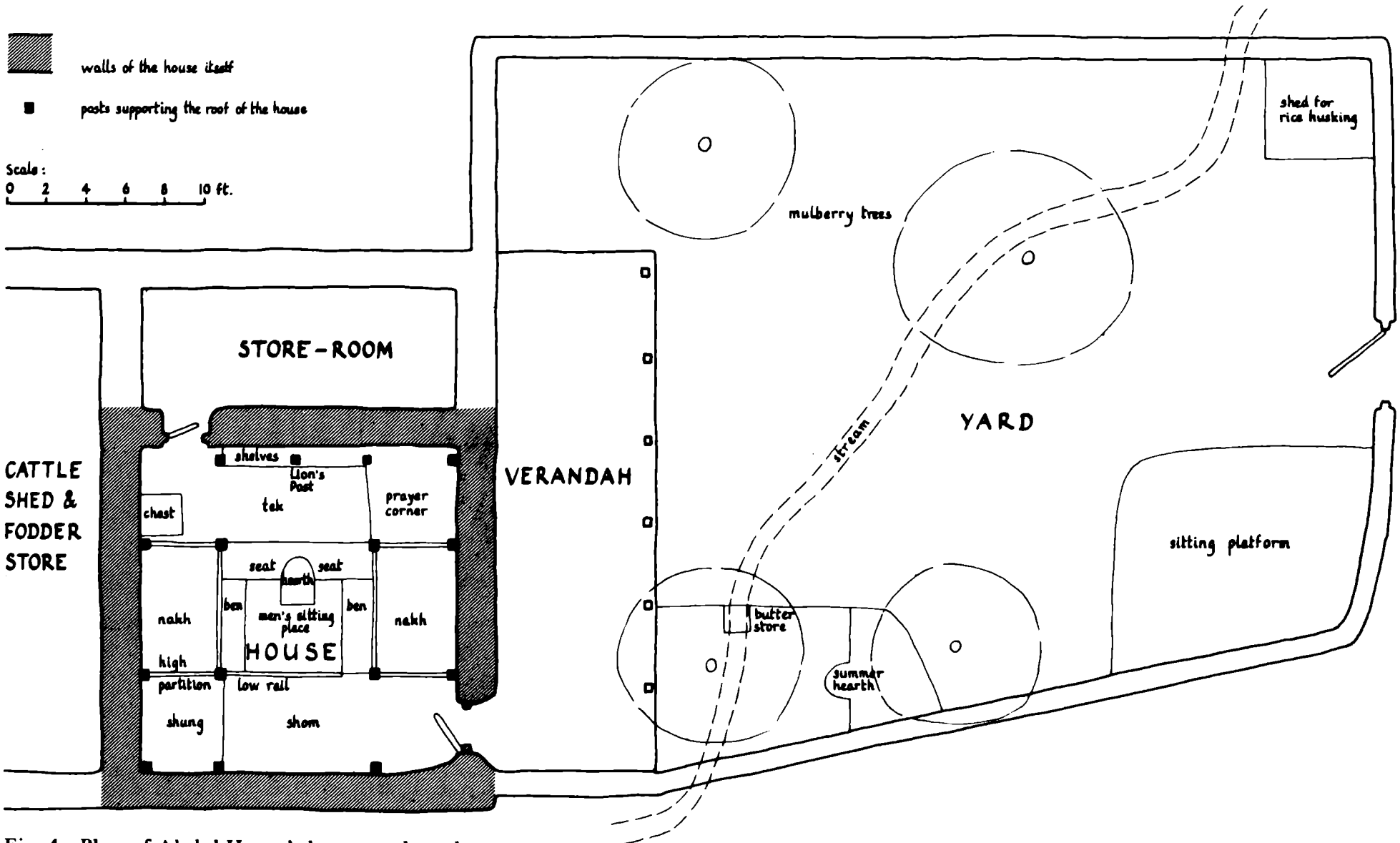


Fig. 4. Plan of Abdul Hayat's house and yard.

which goat skins are kneaded, to make them pliable and suitable for carrying grain in.

We passed from the yard into a shallow verandah where a sling-bow was hanging, which the boys use for shooting at sparrows and mynahs. The owner of the house pushed open the heavy door, and we took off our shoes, stooped, and stepped inside. Our first impression was of eye-stinging darkness, but as our eyes became adjusted to the gloom and the smoke we saw a small and drab but substantially built room, which seemed surprisingly spacious and uncluttered (Plate 11.1). The only light entered by a hole in the ceiling, and was diffused by the smoke from a small fire that was burning in the centre of the beaten-earth floor. The smoke had turned the walls and pillars a dark brown-red and the beams of the ceiling a sooty black. This prevents the wood from rotting, we were told.

The owner of the house, whose name was Abdul Hayat, told us that he had built it eight years previously. He had called his relatives and friends to help, and had employed a carpenter for the skilled work and to supervise. The house was completed within the autumn building season. 'I paid the carpenter four rupees a day,' he said, 'and each day I fed the people who came to help, but I did not pay them any money. Later, of course, when any of them wants to build a house, he calls me to help.'

Abdul Hayat has two and a half acres of land, from which he supports his mother, an unmarried sister, his wife and three children, all of whom live in the house with him. While we measured and noted he stayed with us, watching and answering questions, and apparently pleased that we should be so interested. From time to time he regaled us with walnuts, dried mulberries, and a 'toffee' made of flour boiled in grape juice. The women withdrew, though they came in from time to time, ostensibly to fetch something and actually to see what we were doing, but they did not understand until Elizabeth began to sketch details of the construction. Then they smiled with pleasure and whispered '*taswir, taswir*' to each other, using the Persian word for 'reflection', which is widely used in Kohistan for 'photograph'.

We found that the house is sixteen feet square inside, with walls two feet thick and nearly eight feet high. The walls are built of roughly dressed stone set in a mud mortar, and are bonded at three-foot intervals inside and out with horizontal wooden beams which are linked through the wall by shorter

lengths. The Chitralis claim that this way of combining wood and stone makes their buildings resistant to earthquakes. The walls are plastered on both sides with a mixture of mud and chopped straw.

The weight of the roof is taken, not by the walls, but by four six inch square deodar posts which stand towards the centre of the floor, and by eleven smaller posts which stand against the walls. The posts support a ceiling of beams and joists pegged together. Over the central hearth-area and towards the rear wall the ceiling is raised by criss-cross tiers up to a 'smoke-hole' open to the sky. The smoke-hole is not directly above the hearth, but is slightly to the rear of it, which allows the draught from the door to carry the smoke away through the hole, and prevents rain or snow falling directly on to the fire. In wet weather a flat stone is propped over the smoke-hole. In very cold weather, when cooking is finished so that the fire burns low and without smoke, the smoke-hole can be closed altogether. The roof timbers are covered with brushwood and then with a nine-inch layer of mud, which rises to a low dome around the smoke-hole.

After we had examined the superstructure we began to study the floor, which in traditional Kho houses is conventionally divided into a number of clearly-defined areas by small step-like changes in the floor level. Most of these areas are rectangular, and each has its name and function (Fig. 5). The heart of the plan, and of the house itself, is the hearth, a semi-circular 'bite' out of one of the steps up towards the rear of the house. The hearth is lined with stone, and a fire smoulders in it throughout the winter. If the fire is allowed to go out accidentally Abdul Hayat scolds the woman responsible, for it is taken as a bad omen.

On each side of the fire, on the step into which the hearth is cut, there is a sitting place for one person. These places are reckoned to be the best in the house, being nearest the fire. When the household is gathered together, one is occupied by the owner of the house and the other by his mother while she is alive or by any honoured guest who may come. Occasionally the owner may temporarily promote to the other seat a son or nephew whom he wishes to congratulate, perhaps after the boy has returned from a long absence, or after his wife has given birth to a son.

Behind the hearth is another area, four inches higher, which extends to the rear wall of the house and is called the *tek*. On the *tek*, just behind her husband, sits or squats the

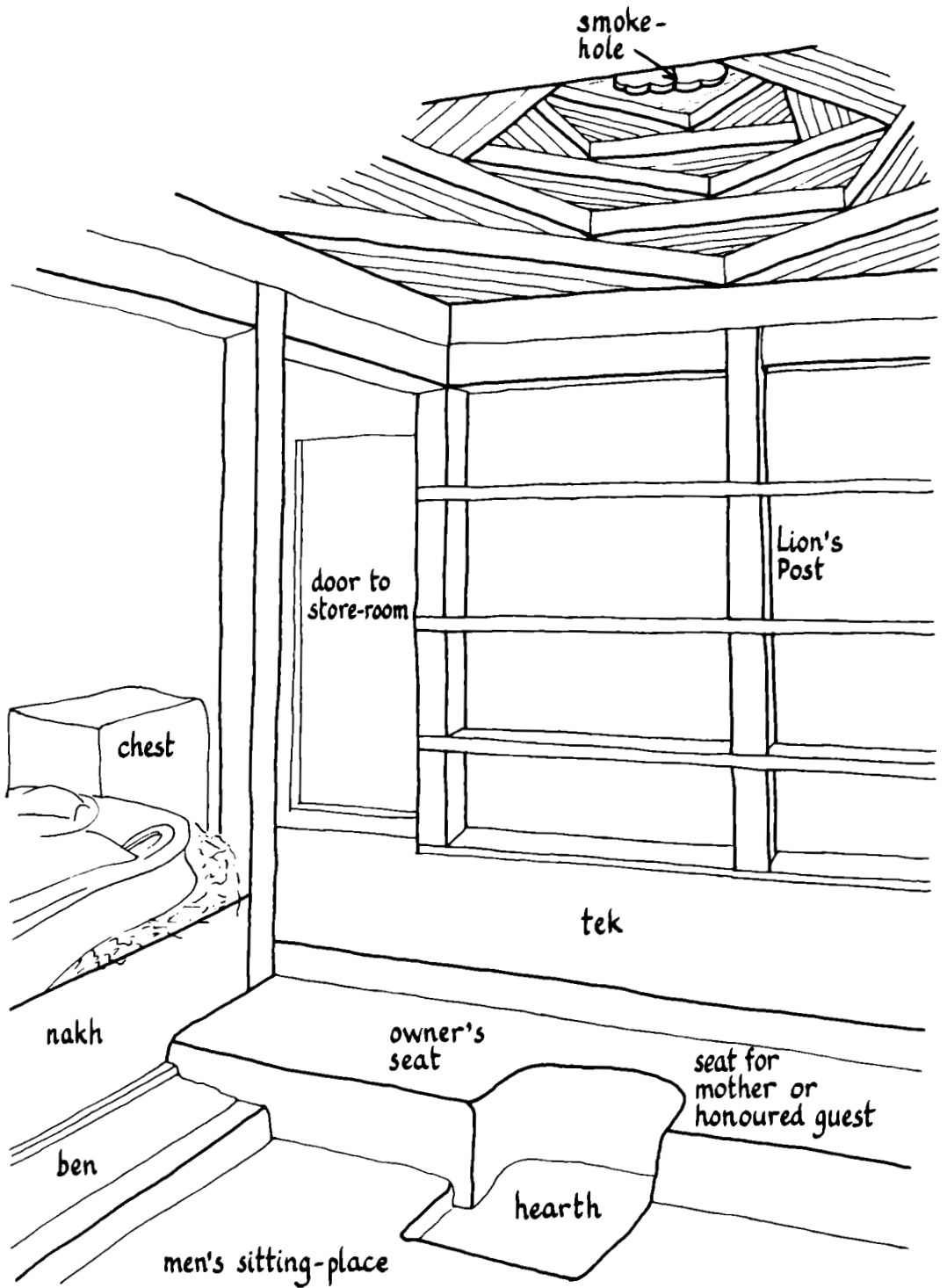
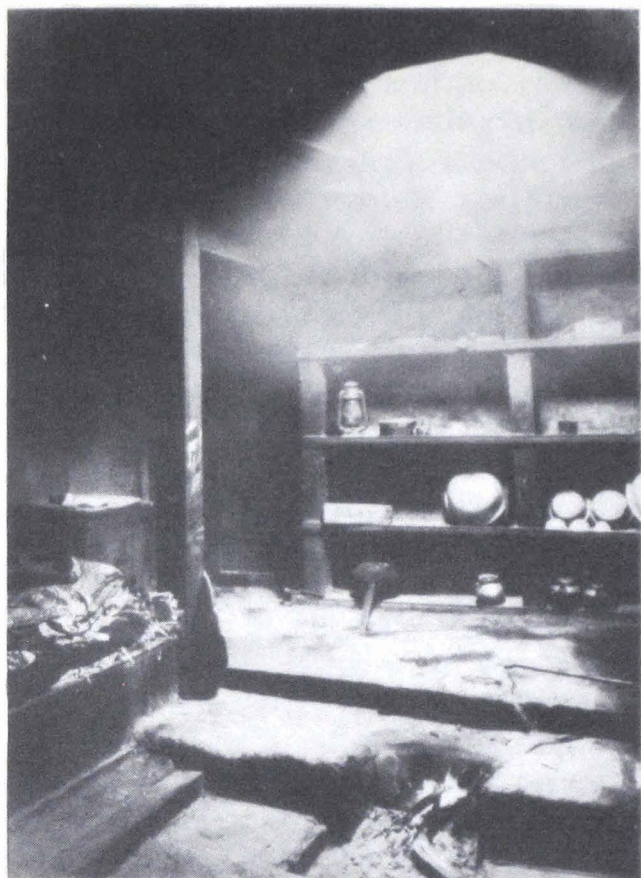


Fig. 5. Key to the photograph (Plate 11.1) of the interior of Abdul Hayat's house.



1. Interior of Abdul Hayat's house



2. A weaver of Hunza making woollen cloth

owner's wife, near at hand to receive his orders and well placed to supervise the cooking at the hearth. The *tek* is the woman's domain, and on it sit the other women—unmarried sisters, unmarried daughters and daughters-in-law—the older ones nearer the fire. Any of the women may help with preparing the meals, so girls learn by experience to cook the varied seasonal dishes, and perhaps more important, learn how to eke out the harvest through the whole year. Meals are served from the *tek*, hence the saying, 'If you have a well-wisher on the *tek*, there will be a big piece of meat in your share.' Another saying refers to the excitement of the children whenever rice is prepared: rice is a luxury, especially in high altitude villages where it cannot be grown, and so they say, 'When there is rice to eat, the *tek* looks more beautiful.'

To the sides of the *tek*, in the rear corners of the house, are square spaces. The one on the side towards Mecca is again raised by a small step and is reserved for prayers. Those who pray there, mostly women and old people, can turn their backs on the activities of the house and are free from the distraction of people moving in front of them. In the other corner stands a wooden chest for clothes, and in the wall is the door to a storeroom which Abdul Hayat has built on to the rear of the house. On a peg in the wall there hung strings of threaded apricot kernels, and he told us that whenever his married sister and her little daughter are departing after a visit, his old mother puts a string of kernels and dried apricots around the child's neck.

At the back of the *tek*, against the rear wall, stand three of the posts that support the roof, the middle one known as the Lion's Post. If there is an earthquake the women on the *tek* cling to the Lion's Post as the safest place in the house, and also as the part that is 'sympathetic' towards the house's inhabitants, especially in times of difficulty. While making a wish or resolution, a woman—or a man if he is starting some dangerous undertaking, and especially if he is going to war—may hold onto this post. The 'sympathy' is extended to those born and brought up in the house but who now live elsewhere. When a married daughter visits her parents after she has given birth she expects to receive a present, perhaps some cooking utensils or even a calf, to take home with her. If she is disappointed she cannot say so of course, but the Lion's Post is said then to creak in sympathy and so reveal her feelings. As Abdul Hayat and other friends were telling us about the Lion's Post, we found ourselves wondering if this might

be a relic of the worship of some ancient household god, the post representing an indoor shrine similar to those of the Kalash (Plate 13.1).

In every house there lives a guardian fairy called Khangī, who protects it from evil spirits. In superstitious households a portion of the evening meal is set aside for her. If this is not done Khangī expresses her displeasure by rattling the utensils, banging the door and making the roof creak. People then laugh and say, 'That's Mother Khangī. She is angry because we forgot her food.'

On either side of the Lion's Post there are shelves for the cooking and serving utensils. We saw a pair of blackened aluminium kettles for boiling up tea, a heavy iron plate for cooking bread and a scraper for easing the bread off if it sticks, a battered pan for cooking vegetables and meat, two large metal bowls for serving food and eating from, a small-spouted water pot, and three china tea bowls from Japan. The few other items on the shelves almost completed the list of goods that the farmers of Chitral now commonly buy: a hurricane lamp, a packet of cheap cigarettes, a few pieces of rock-salt, a handful of tea-leaves tied in a cloth, and some lumps of unrefined sugar. Formerly none of these things, except perhaps salt, were brought from outside the village; even pots and pans were made locally from stone and wood and clay.

In front of the hearth there is a small pit, the lowest level in the house, where the ash (*feru*) collects. In this pit lives a tiny fairy called Feru-tis (-tis is onomatopoeic for the hissing and flaring of wood embers) who is jokingly blamed for the disappearance of small objects such as needles, thimbles and fragments of rock-salt. If the fire burns with a noise it is a sign of an impending quarrel in the house, and in superstitious households the wood is beaten beforehand so that it will burn quietly. Mischievous boys sometimes throw holly-oak acorns into the fire in order to make sudden pops and startle their elders.

In front of the ashpit, below the level of the fireside seats, is a boarded sitting area for the men of the household and male guests, who sit in front of the fire in order of seniority. If the house is unusually full at night, the children may have to sleep in this area, in which case they protest like children anywhere else who are turned out of their beds for their parents' guests. On either side of the men's sitting area there is another level, six inches higher and eighteen inches wide,

which is called the *ben*. The *ben* on the side nearest the door provides access to the sitting area and the *tek*, and the one on the far side serves as an additional seat for distant and 'milk' relatives. A casual owner sometimes leaves his shoes there.

Beyond the *bens*, against the side walls of the house, are two further raised areas whose ends are level with the four main pillars. These are the *nakhs*. They are enclosed by a low board and filled with chaff and straw, on top of which are laid goathair rugs: The members of the family sleep on these, taking care that their feet do not point to Mecca, covered by woollen blankets and imported cotton quilts. Adjustments are made to separate the sexes between the sides of the house, to allow newly-married couples to sleep on their own, and to allow mothers to have their babies and other children near them. On the wall above Abdul Hayat's own sleeping-place hangs his matchlock; and in less peaceful times his grandfather probably kept a sword under the pillow.

At the ends of the *nakhs* nearest to the door are high partitions. The one beside the door prevents draughts, and shields the women on the *tek* from the view of anyone who calls at the door. If the visitor is a relative or friend, and if the owner bids him to come in, he advances into the *shom*, the vestibule which runs across the front of the house. There he greets the household and removes his shoes, and then makes his way along the *ben* into the sitting area. He cannot step directly from the *shom* to his seat, because there is a low rail along the outer edge of the sitting area, and it would be a breach of etiquette to step over this. It is considered ill-mannered to enter a house without sitting down, or to leave almost immediately.

In the *shom* of Abdul Hayat's house we found staffs, sticks for goading cattle, an axe for firewood, a hand basin and water jug which are carried round to guests before and after meals, and the goatskins that he uses to protect his back when carrying firewood and fodder. On top of the partition near the door were lying some goathair ropes and a sickle. They say that a man once visited the house of a friend and saw an axe lying in the *shom*, and announced that he had discovered an axe. His friend tried to convince him that the axe was always kept in the *shom*, but the man would not believe it. So now, when something is found which was not lost, people in Chitral say, 'He has found an axe in the *shom*.' The *shom* is also the place where, on a festive occasion, a man may dance while the company round the fire play, sing and

applaud. As a bad workman blames his tools for shoddy work, so a bad dancer complains, 'The *shom* is sloping'.

The *shom* does not extend right across the front of the house, but leaves another raised square in the corner facing the door. This is the *shung*, and in the Koghozi house it was filled by firewood and a hutch of chickens. In other houses it may be partitioned off and used for bathing, especially by women for ablutions before prayers in the house. In winter men may wash there before they go to pray at the mosque, because at home—if there is enough firewood—they can have hot water whereas the water at the mosque will be icy cold from an irrigation channel. During their menstrual periods and for forty days after childbirth women are not permitted to cook, and are supposedly relegated to the *shom* and *shung*, although this is not strictly observed. Thus 'to go to the *shung*' is a euphemism for menstruation, while 'to return to the *tek*' means that a woman is resuming cooking after menstruation or childbirth.

As we noted these idioms and learnt about the plan of the house and the way it is used, we began to understand what winter in Kohistan must be like for its inhabitants. Even in Koghozi, which is only 5,500 feet high and is accessible throughout the year, the cold is severe and snow may lie for a month or more. The members of Abdul Hayat's household remain indoors, mostly huddled round the fire, for hours and days, and it is easy to see the need for convention and order. Every person has his or her place to sit—even the cat is allotted a seat behind the fire. Likewise every item and activity has its appropriate place, and it is thought inefficient and tiresome if things are misplaced. Our overall impression was of a home remarkably fitted and well-adapted for the many activities that go on in it. Nonetheless to have only the single room for a whole family must sometimes make for unbearable tensions during the long winter weeks. There is a famous story, set in a village near Koghozi, of a man who became so exasperated by the incessant quarrelling between his wife and his mother that he took them outside and cut both their throats—and even then, the story goes, their blood would not mix together.

Abdul Hayat's is typical of farmers' houses in Chitral. There are also the houses of the aristocracy, perhaps two or three in a large village, which are more spacious and more elaborate, though built to the same plan. These houses have another sitting level at the sides of the hearth, and the sitting

places are furnished with goathair rugs over which may be spread ibex skins and knotted rugs from Turkistan. There may also be knotted prayer rugs in the prayer corner. The main posts, the ceiling beams below the smoke-hole, and the rail around the men's sitting area are decorated with carvings, usually floral, and boldly and artistically executed. As well as a separate guestroom, there are separate storerooms and probably a separate kitchen. So the shelves and niches at the rear of the *tek* do not contain pots and pans, but precious china,¹ little baskets of embroidery materials, copies of the Holy Koran and other sacred books, bowls of dried fruits, and perhaps a cage of pet birds. In the *shom* there may sleep a pet dog, most likely a spaniel used for retrieving. A proverb says, 'If you keep a dog in the *shom*, the fox will not come to your smoke-hole.' The falcon, another hunting favourite, has to be kept in the storeroom because smoke harms his eyes.

The rich man's wife and daughters spend much of their time in the house, sitting on the *tek*, gossiping, embroidering their caps and shirts, cooking an occasional delicacy, fussing over their children, receiving visits from other women or close male relatives, praying at great length, and sometimes reading aloud from the Persian poets. These women have leisure, for the rich man usually employs servants to help in the house and outside—to clean and to cook, to bring water from the drinking channel or the spring, to husk rice, to tend the vegetable garden, to dry the fruits, to crack the nuts, to milk the cow and to do the dozens of other tasks that fall to farmers' wives.

The rich man can afford to keep his women in seclusion, and he protects them further by having a separate room for visitors other than close relatives. Such guestrooms are sometimes built to the same traditional plan, but are more often rectangular and plain, warmed when in use with a brazier

¹ Especially 'Gurrdinah' teapots and tea bowls. Francis Gardner was a mysterious Englishman who set up a porcelain factory near Moscow in the middle of the eighteenth century. As well as a 'pseudo-Sevres' style for sale in Europe, his factory developed a 'Central Asian style'. The most characteristic pieces are globular teapots and handle-less tea-bowls, often in a deep red or royal blue, with a white panel on either side decorated with flowers. Underneath they bear both St. George and the Russian eagle, and the name Gardner in Russian and Persian. Their popularity in Central Asia, where they were among the luxuries of the aristocracy, was due both to their beauty and to their strength. We were many times told that the genuine 'Gurrdinah' teapots can be stood in hot embers without cracking. Modern copies, made in Japan, are now on sale in Afghanistan, and still bear the name 'Gardner' in Persian.

of embers from the family fire, and furnished with rugs and bedding. In many such rooms we and other guests have sat in a circle, shoeless and cross-legged, round a cloth spread on the floor to eat the food our host has brought in from the family hearth; and have then moved back against the wall to sip tea and to talk, and finally to sleep soundly on the rich red rugs. The wealthy have long had guestrooms, but they are now the ambition of almost everyone in Chitral, and are much more common than a generation ago. Abdul Hayat was hoping to add one on to his own house when he could afford it. He explained that relatives and friends from villages further north, who nowadays travel more frequently through Koghozi to the bazaar in Chitral expect him to accommodate them for a day or two on their way. 'With my sister and elder daughter at a marriageable age it is not so convenient for visitors to stay in my house,' he said, 'and my family does not think it is respectable.' A guestroom also makes a welcome refuge for the henpecked husband and for the newly-married couple.

We found that a few houses in Chitral are now being built to a plain rectangular pattern, with windows on either side of a door, and a fireplace and chimney in the wall opposite. The main reason is the difficulty and expense of getting enough wood for the old style, but also there is—to us—a sad change in taste. Nails, hinges and padlocks are appearing and there is a conspicuous deterioration in craftsmanship. Instead of the flowing floral designs and bold geometrical shapes, decoration is now often a regrettable fret and trellis. Our dismay at the new houses and the new decoration was all the greater on hearing that both are known locally as 'English-style'.

* * *

During winter houses are rarely without life and activity. All day, and especially in the evenings, men visit each other, the poorer going to the guestrooms of the richer, the younger to the houses of the older. The prince and the headman—and nowadays the successful merchant and the aspiring politician—expect to receive and feed many visitors. This is part of their contribution not just to sociability but to the social order and society itself. The poorer, the younger and the socially inferior give in return deference, occasional small services, and perhaps political support. As outsiders we saw only a few aspects of these roles at first, and we tended to

form over-simplified impressions. The relaxed informality of gatherings round the fire looked simple, the young deferring to the old and the rich feeding the poor, and often they seemed to be dictated by no more than good manners. Yet a closer look, for example, at the order of drinking when a dozen men share four tea-bowls, suggests social patterns that are subtle and complex. How does a man know when to eat from the communal dish, and when to wait for the remains? And how can he do either with apparently equal self-respect and equanimity? Certainly we saw nothing assertive, nor obsequious, nor self-conscious about these relationships—and relationships is probably too clumsy a word—they are rather an expression of traditional roles, social, political and economic, that encompass everyone, from the ruler to the poorest labourer.

Subjects for talk vary with the occasion and the participants. In the guestrooms of the leading men where a wide circle of relatives, neighbours and friends have gathered, there are likely to be vigorous discussions of local affairs and events: the plans for a new irrigation channel; the iniquities of the Gujars who hired some pasture last year; successes and failures in hunting and the prospects for duck-trapping in the coming season; the reputation of the Government administrator and whether he is just and polite, and plays a good game of polo. Those who have sold some of their harvest will discuss the current prices of tea and cotton cloth *vis-a-vis* grain and woollen cloth; someone will explain how some 'Amrikai' visitors have paid twice the going rate for everything and are to blame for rising prices; another will describe recent dealings in the bazaar. If any of those present has recently returned from a journey, there may be talk of what he saw; a landslide in the next valley, a double-decker bus in Peshawar, a film (known in Chitral as 'bi-scope') in Lahore. Rumours from elsewhere will be discussed: a good harvest in Badakshan, a new road being built in the Gilgit valley, a marriage between leading families in Chitral village. Talk of elections to local councils has replaced talk of the favour of the ruler, talk of contracts has replaced talk of battles; but other topics never tire. Travellers and outsiders (especially Europeans who are known as *ferengis*) are a never-ending topic for speculation and incredulity.

Such talk flows easily, the 'elders and betters' giving the lead, while the youngest and most humble sit and listen. Perhaps a few stay silent all evening except for greetings and

'salaams', but back at their own firesides they will repeat what they have heard. Even the humblest is then the centre of attention while his wife and children listen—as the proverb has it, 'In his own home the fox becomes a tiger'—and his wife makes comments, penetrating, acid, appreciative or stupid. Not that women left on their own are lacking in topics for talk. Gossip about absent acquaintances, and some of it catty, is probably as common in Kohistan as anywhere else. Nor does their limited knowledge of the outside world prevent women from discussing places and people they have heard of only from their husbands, or innovations and events in other villages that only rumour has brought to their ears.

There seldom seem to be difficulties over conversation in Kohistan, and we used to marvel at the facility with which it flows on every occasion and fills up any period of time, even though much of it is repetitious and trivial. We asked if people are ever bored during the winter, but it seems that boredom is a foreign idea and that people are pleased if there is nothing to do. If he has no one to talk with, a man may sit for hours together playing the sitar to himself, or carving himself a new sitar or a walking-staff, or casting matchlock bullets. Or he may simply go to sleep—and we were equally envious of this ability to sleep anywhere at any time for any length of time.

When most of the visitors to a house have gone home, the men who are left round the fireside probably know each other better. Talk may then become more personal and less discreet: a neighbour's financial troubles, a dispute within the village over inheritance, the shrewishness of someone's wife, the goods that a returning traveller has brought for his family and relations. When the last guests leave, or when only close relatives remain, the men may join the women and pass remarks about those who have been and gone. Talk drifts to family and domestic affairs: marriages, the day's work, the family cow, the crops. Then at last the men yawn and lie down, the women put their wool and their sewing away until the following day, and the household sleeps.

CHAPTER SEVEN

FAMILIES

Conversational model for meeting a woman:

Is all well at home? How many sons have you? Have you arranged wives for them? Have you married them? Have grand-children been born? Do your daughters-in-law cause annoyance to your heart?

*Mrs. E.O. Lorimer,
resident in Hunza, 1934-5¹*

We very eagerly wait for the birth of son of any person. We don't care for any invitation. Son is born and we are present with sitar and tambourine. The host with tears of pleasure in his eyes gladly receives us and presents every kind of food which he has stored for this occasion.

Letter from Abdul Samad.

If my penis dies I may as well make a necklace of your vagina.
Chitral proverb.

A momentous event during almost every lifetime in Kohistan is marriage, yet it seems ordinary because of its very inevitability. From childhood boys and girls are used to the prospect of being married, and furthermore, of being married to some unknown person whom their parents will choose for them. The question is not 'Shall I find someone?' but 'Who is it to be?' It took Elizabeth and me, brought up among ideas of romantic love, physical attraction and personal choice, some time to realise that it is not merely the practice which is different, but that there is another way of looking at marriage and at love.

Inevitably, in a patriarchal society, the question 'Who is it to be?' looms larger for the girl than the boy. For her, marriage means a move from the familiar household of childhood and adolescence into a household of strangers. She is taken from one family into another, and from that time she ranks as a daughter to her parents-in-law, and she is closer to her sisters-in-law than to her own sisters. Indeed at the beginning her mother-in-law may be a more important person than her husband. Another inevitability is children, and

¹ E.O. Lorimer, unpublished notes.

for the girl who thinks ahead to her marriage and future, her babies must often be more imaginable than their father.

Boys are usually married between seventeen and twenty-two, and girls between fifteen and twenty. The son of a wealthy farmer can be married younger because he can support a wife, but the son of a poor man may have to wait until he is older before the family can feed another mouth. Conversely the poor man will try to marry off his daughter soon after she reaches puberty so that he does not have to feed her any longer.

Before marriage comes the betrothal. In Chitral the first step is for the boy's father, with the advice of his wife and other relatives, to pick upon a girl he thinks suitable. He usually chooses from among families of the same ethnic group and equivalent status and wealth, though an exceptionally beautiful girl may be accepted into a family of higher status than her own. Nowadays, with the sanction of Islamic law, he may look first among his son's cousins but in former times marriage within the family was rare. Having decided, he sends an old aunt to the girl's home, ostensibly upon some errand but actually to inspect the girl, to bring back a report of her beauty and accomplishments, and to assess the likely reception of a formal proposal. So the old woman visits the girl's home and gossips with her mother, and casually mentions that she has heard that so-and-so is looking for a wife for his son and so on and so forth, and judges whether she is being received warmly or coldly. The girl meanwhile, if she realises the purpose of the visit, becomes embarrassed at sitting out on the *tek* under the old woman's scrutiny, and may hide away behind one of the pillars to the side.

The requirements for beauty in Chitral are a slim figure, a round face with a clear pale complexion, doe-like eyes, a smooth pale throat, long fingers and toes, and shoulder-length hair, jet black and curling at the ends.¹ Above all the girl must be, and must appear to be, healthy. If the report is favourable, the boy's father then sends a formal proposal with one of the boy's uncles, together with a gift, perhaps some butter, as a token of his goodwill. The intermediary may have to use much eloquence to persuade the girl's father to agree

¹ During childhood and adolescence in Chitral a girl's hair is cut short and is fringed in front. As she approaches marriage, it is allowed to grow longer so that it reaches her shoulders. When it grows longer still, it is plaited, and after the birth of her first baby she abandons the fringe and parts her hair down the centre of her head, plaiting it behind.

to the marriage, not only offering material inducements, but also stressing the qualities and prospects of the boy himself: his appearance and his character, his health and his education, the fact that he does not smoke hashish or have other bad habits, and his expectations at the death of his father. Reassurances about the prospective mother-in-law may also be given—that she is kind and that her other daughters-in-law are happy—and there may be mention of members of the boy's family who are especially distinguished or well-connected. The girl's father listens politely (and his wife will listen too if she can manage to overhear) and then he probably says that he cannot make a decision, or that the terms offered are unsuitable, or that he must consult his relatives, and he asks the boy's uncle to come again. And so the uncle will come again with fresh entreaties and more generous proposals. In fact a decision was probably made when the proposal was first aired, but the girl's father makes a show of hesitation, partly out of reluctance to give away a beloved daughter, and partly to secure the best possible terms for her.

Finally agreement is reached, the size of each family's contribution is settled, and the couple are betrothed. The boy's father promises goods, livestock or cash to the girl's father, generally to a total value of about a thousand rupees but ranging from a few hundred rupees to several thousands, depending on all the circumstances. The girl's father then normally undertakes to settle jewellery, household goods, bedding, clothes and livestock on the young couple to about twice this value, so that in the end each family contributes roughly the same amount towards the couple's future. Provision for the girl should her husband die or divorce her is also agreed upon, as is the disposal of the couple's property if there should be no children by the marriage. Such planning for contingencies indicates how a marriage is seen as an enterprise between two families, rather than a union between two individuals.

There is no 'bride-price' in Chitral. If he is poor, the girl's father may have to use some of the money he receives to pay for the marriage feast, but he does not normally keep any of it for himself. One merchant in Chitral whose daughter was extraordinarily beautiful made himself notorious by giving her in marriage for twelve thousand rupees and keeping the money, but eventually public opinion forced him to return most of it. All the items promised are carefully noted and valued, and allowance is made for any outstanding debts or

favours between the families. Abdul Samad, whose son is betrothed to the daughter of a friend, told us ruefully that the friend had visited him recently and had admired a new radio that Samad had bought for his own family. 'My wife then insisted that I should offer him the radio. She said it would be shameful not to. So I offered it, and he took it away with him. But anyway,' he went on, brightening, 'it will count towards our marriage agreement, so I shall not lose in the end.'

Among the aristocracy, who make marriage alliances over long distances, the whole process of selection, proposal, negotiation, betrothal and marriage may take place without the boy and girl even seeing each other. Among farming families it is more common to arrange marriages within the village, where the prospective partners will at least have glimpsed each other across the fields and heard reports of each other. If the boy can persuade some sympathetic neighbour to help, the couple may even contrive a surreptitious meeting, although discovery can bring disgrace to the girl's family. If the couple take a dislike to each other or object for some other reason—if, for example, the boy has secretly set his heart on another girl—then the match is abandoned. This rarely happens, but in theory, and probably in practice, no one in Chitral is married against his or her will.

At the time of betrothal the date for the marriage may be fixed, as soon as two months, or more than a year ahead. The autumn, after the harvest, is a favourite season because there is time to spare then and plenty of food for the guests. Also, with luck, it will not yet be too cold for guests to sleep outside, which will save the host having to arrange sleeping accommodation for them. On the agreed day the bridegroom and a party of a dozen or so male relatives set off to the bride's house, taking with them the items agreed upon at the betrothal. The groom's father does not go with them, but remains at home to prepare for his part of the celebration. At the bride's house the party is welcomed and the items are handed over. If the families are wealthy the groom may also offer a personal gift to his mother-in-law, and the bride's father may give something to the members of the groom's party. The bride is led in, dressed in marriage clothes, jewelled and garlanded but veiled, and the marriage takes place.

The marriage itself is a simple Islamic ceremony conducted by a *mullah* and witnessed by members of both families. The *mullah* asks the bride who is to speak for her, and she usually

names a maternal uncle. The *mullah* then addresses the groom and the bride separately, asking each one three times if they wish to marry, the groom answering for himself and her uncle for the bride. They are then pronounced married and are given a cup of sherbet over which the *mullah* has breathed prayers and from which they both sip while the *mullah* recites from the Koran. Then, possibly for the first time, they are allowed to look at each other, but they have no opportunity to spend any time together, for there follows a meal at which the bride's father entertains the groom's party and his own relatives. Even if the groom and his party have come a long distance and are to stay for the night before setting off on the return journey, the couple are unlikely to be left alone together. This is in order to spare the feelings of the bride's parents at the possibility of her spending the first night with her husband in their house, although many families are not so fastidious.

The bride cries as she prepares to leave her parents' house, and her parents comfort her, saying that she shall come back soon and stay with them. One of her last duties is to anoint the Lion's Post with malted flour and to kiss the hearth. As she leaves she may not look back, or it is feared that she will keep returning with complaints about her new home. Nor may her parents go with her beyond the centre of the house, or she will have an unhappy marriage and be sent back to them in disgrace. The groom embraces his father-in-law, kisses his mother-in-law's hand and hair, and thanks them for giving him their daughter. Then he sets out for his father's home accompanied by his own party and by a party from the bride's side which includes her maternal uncle and a female companion. The bride herself follows at the rear in *purdah*, usually on horseback or in a litter, in the care of her uncle. She carries with her a handful of millet seeds in the hope that her children will be as numerous as the seeds. The procession is led by minstrels playing the appropriate music. If it rains as they set off, people laugh and say that either the bride or the groom used to lick out the cooking pots when they were children.

As the party arrives at the groom's father's house, where his own remaining relatives will have now gathered, there is music, rejoicing and probably a *feu de joie*. It is then his turn to feast everybody with huge piles of rice, curry, pilau and *halva*, and gallons of sweet tea. The minstrels will play, the male guests will dance, everyone will eat too much—and by

the end the groom's father will have spent at least Rs. 500, and in any case more than he can afford. The bride meanwhile is received by her mother-in-law and the other women of her new family, who make a fuss of her, praising her beauty and her modesty. Caps and embroidery that she and her sisters have made may be brought in as gifts for her husband's mother and sisters. The women, of course, do not join in the men's wedding feast—they either watch or have a separate gathering—but the groom has to attend throughout, and submits to much ribaldry from his friends. Finally when the feast is over, and the guests are dispersed or asleep, perhaps not until 3.00 a.m., the exhausted couple are left alone together, to begin their married life in the seclusion of the guest-room or perhaps in an unused storeroom.

The bride's uncle may stay for another two or three days to give her moral support during this difficult transition and to see her settled in her new home. During this time he is given a place on the far *nakh*, and in this role he is actually known as 'The-man-who-sits-on-the-*nakh*'. Although the conventions are less strictly observed than in the past, it is said that a stranger who visits an old-fashioned household which has just received a bride can tell the relationships of those present simply by where they are sitting. When the-man-who-sits-on-the-*nakh* finally leaves he is given a parting gift, perhaps some clothing, which is known as 'the-gift-for-the-man-who-sits-on-the-*nakh*'. Although he has a continuing duty towards the young couple as counsellor, and if necessary as mediator, his departure for home with the final gift completes the marriage transaction, and the bride is now effectively a member of her husband's family. This she will remain—unless the marriage is a failure for some reason—until she dies, when her body will revert to the family into which she was born for final lowering into her grave.

Marriages in other parts of Kohistan are basically similar but the details vary everywhere, for each group and each family has its own traditions, and the arrangements and scale of the occasion will vary with wealth and other circumstances. In many villages pre-Islamic rituals survive, often mixed up with both the betrothal and the marriage ceremony and sometimes making the whole procedure extraordinarily complicated. In Gilgit and Hunza we recorded long descriptions of the sending and receiving of pats of butter, and of the making of special kinds of bread and the throwing of this up through the smoke-hole. In Gilgit we heard of the slaughter of a goat

at the threshold of a groom's house, the couple touching the carcass with their feet before entering. We asked whether the *mullah* said anything about this, and were told that the actual slaughter was done in the Islamic fashion, and that as the *mullah* ate some of the meat and was given the goat's skin he had nothing to say. Formerly too there was much more horseplay. When the groom's party arrived to collect the bride they used to be pelted with dirty rags by the children of the village 'for taking our dear sister away'. If they had come on horseback they would return from the marriage feast to find their saddles switched round, and tied on upside-down, and perhaps a dead cat under one of them.

Whenever we discussed a marriage in Chitral or Gilgit we tried to imagine it from the bride's point of view. For her it must be a lonely and terrifying experience, however long anticipated and however inevitable. Suddenly she is uprooted from her beloved parents, brothers and sisters and from the only home she has ever known, and is thrust into a new setting to fill a new and demanding role for people she does not know, but among whom will be the man she is married to and his mother. And yet, we felt, there is not a complete lack of consideration and sympathy for her position and feeling. Some measure of practical concern is expressed by having her maternal uncle stay with her for the first few days. Moreover, from what we heard about the process of marital adjustment, it seems that people recognize a woman's need for individual identity as well as for consideration and security.

But not so in Chilas and other southern valleys, where women seem to be allowed little individuality or independence of judgement. Indeed women there are so subordinated to, and dependent on, the men of their households that they are assumed to be socially and morally incompetent, the men taking full responsibility for the behaviour of their women. This perhaps explains why the men of the southern valleys are so jealous of their women's reputation, and why they frequently fight amongst themselves over matters to do with women. Associated with this opinion of women are all sorts of—to us—marital malpractices, including child marriage, age discrepancies between partners, 'bride-prices' of up to ten thousand rupees, and abuses over divorce. Indeed, it seems that in parts of the south some husbands fail to establish any satisfactory mutual relationships with their wives, and instead make homosexual arrangements with boys.

Sexual enjoyment for both the wife and the husband is tacitly recognized as essential for a successful marriage in Chitral, but there is some fastidiousness in talking of such matters. Men or women discuss their marital and sexual experiences, especially their problems, with friends, but they would not think of discussing these, even in general terms, with anyone they did not know well. From what we ourselves heard, it seems that husbands are generally considerate, and are well aware of their wives' needs and how to satisfy them.

For the first few days after her marriage the bride from an upper-class family may have the company of an experienced woman from her own home—probably her 'milk-mother' or 'milk-sister' if she has one—who can offer intimate advice and comfort. The companion helps with the bride's toilet, and may remain within calling distance at night. Here again there seems to be a practical concern for the bride's fears and inexperience, although we gathered that sometimes the woman chosen as companion takes a salacious view of the proceedings and the bride is glad to see her leave. If the bride is timid and shy it may be some days or even weeks before she is ready to respond to her husband's advances. In Hunza in former days they used to distribute special food on the morning after a marriage was consummated. When we heard this we had to remind ourselves that these are all matters of family and not merely individual concern. The bride's first intercourse is generally painful, and if it is not her husband may suspect her of not being a virgin. He may expect to see blood in the morning, and a plain-spoken family may ask the woman attending the bride if she saw the blood. If the marriage cannot be consummated for any reason this is grounds for divorce, though it would be thought shameful for either partner to make the details public.

Pregnancy usually follows soon after the consummation of a marriage. When a woman knows that she is pregnant she reverts to a sleeping place among the women, and the man to one with the men. Thereafter they are supposed to abstain from intercourse not only until the baby is born, but until it is weaned, perhaps two years later. If this is indeed the practice, it may benefit the health of the mother by preventing the physical strain of too frequent child-bearing. It may also benefit the baby by ensuring the continued flow of his mother's milk, and by allowing the mother to give him undivided attention during the first crucial years of life. Furthermore such a two-year abstinence would help to control the

population. No methods of contraception have been used other than extending lactation for a long period. But when I asked men about all this some of them used to laugh and say, 'Who can keep away from his wife so long? For forty days after the birth we do not lie with our wives. After that we again lie with them, although we hope that another baby will not come too soon.'

Inability to have a baby is perhaps the greatest disappointment a couple can experience. Invariably a failure to conceive is attributed to the woman, but if the man takes a second wife, as he may do after some years of childlessness, and if she too does not conceive, people realize that the man is sterile. Then he may find himself cruelly treated as something of a joke by his fellow-villagers. For a husband to take two wives is uncommon, but we did come across a few instances, mostly where the first wife had failed to conceive or where she had given birth only to daughters. A wealthy and understanding husband will give the wives separate houses, perhaps even in different villages, and will try to divide his time between them. But for the first wife of the ordinary farmer, who sees a younger woman usurp her place in the household and in her husband's affection, there can be little comfort. Occasionally it works out—we heard of one family where the first wife had made close friends with the second, and took the leading part in looking after the children of the second marriage. But more often the first wife is unable to overcome her disappointment and jealousy; while the second fails to understand these feelings and exults in what she sees as a victory. Then there are likely to be quarrels and cruel abuse: 'You are without children. Would you compare yourself with me? In front your beak is dried up, and behind your tail is dried up . . .'; and they may even attack each other.

Adultery is rare, though not unknown, especially when a marriage is unhappy.¹ If discovered, as it almost invariably is, it will probably result in divorce, and if there are injured partners it may lead to death or exile. In Lahore we met a Chitrali who had had an affair with another man's wife, had been discovered and attacked by the man, and had killed him in

¹ Adultery is said to be more common among the Kalash and the refugees from Kafiristan. This has to be seen in relation to an older and more relaxed sexual morality, of which *Pul* is an illustration. Some of the more absurd reports which have appeared from time to time in the popular press have led men from Rawalpindi and Peshawar to make the journey to the Kalash valleys expecting to find there a community of prostitutes.

self-defence. He had then fled from Chitral to preserve his own life from the dead man's relatives. He had lived in Lahore for more than twenty years, and it seemed unlikely that he would ever return to his home. We heard of a few other divorces where the marriages had been unsatisfactory, but the difficulty was more often domestic (caused, for example, by the wife's incompetence) than sexual. Even more rare, though not unheard of, is for an unhappy marriage to end with a suicide.

Occasionally a young unmarried couple, betrothed or not, are attracted to each other and meet surreptitiously, probably with the connivance of a neighbour's wife, who may even let them use her house though she shares the risk of social disapproval if found out. If they are both free to be married they will try to persuade their parents to arrange it, but if they are unsuccessful in this—or if one of them is already betrothed to another—they may finally elope and run to a sympathetic *mullah*, probably pursued by the girl's father and brothers. If the marriage is completed before her father can prevent it, then the girl's family considers itself disgraced, and the father may refuse to meet his daughter afterwards and may deny the couple any property. But perhaps a more typical reaction is expressed in the Khowar proverb, 'He who marries my daughter is my son-in-law'. If the girl becomes pregnant before marriage the couple will probably be married very quickly indeed, for an illegitimate baby is one of the greatest social disasters. If marriage is still not possible, then the unfortunate girl is usually hidden away until after her delivery and the baby is secretly murdered and buried. When people in Chitral see a rainbow they say that an illegitimate baby has been born.

Second marriages, divorce and elopements are exceptional. Most marriages are judged a success, and most of what we learned about sexual matters was characterized by good sense and a healthy respect for individual needs and idiosyncracies. It was over the inability to have children, or the inability to have sons, that we found what seemed to us the greatest weakness—sometimes a complete failure of understanding and compassion. Then we had to remind ourselves that whatever its other features, the primary purpose of marriage in Kohistan is the procreation of children, particularly sons. To some extent the preference for sons is economic, for sons work on the farm and will support their parents in old age. At marriage sons will bring another pair of hands

into the household, whereas daughters will be lost at marriage. In Hunza they speak of a man 'wealthy in sons', and an old Hunza incantation goes:

May cows fill the stalls,
May goats and sheep fill the goat-sheds,
May sons fill the blanket.

Nonetheless it would be wrong to infer that children are the only outcome, or that marriage relationships are only physical. What we heard from our friends convinced us that marriage in Chitral or Gilgit can develop into a deeply felt and harmonious understanding between two people. When marriage comes before love, and both husband and wife must then make the effort to love, perhaps they develop a relationship as successful as when marriage follows after love. However that may be, I suspect that Kohistan might provide as good evidence in favour of 'Who is it to be?' as Western society could provide for 'Shall I find someone?'.

What has puzzled us more, given that women are secluded and marriages arranged, is the warmth of the sentiments expressed in the love songs. Some of the songs are probably descended from an older tradition, perhaps from a time before Islam when sexual morality was more relaxed:

Some like to smell the flower
And some like to pluck it . . .

for example, which comes in an old Khowar song, sounds more like a Kalash sentiment from *Pul*. Among recent songs the theme has more often been frustrated love. No doubt this is occasionally the expression of a real experience; but perhaps frustrated love is also a more appropriate idiom when contact between young men and women is limited by Islam, at least in theory, to glimpses across the fields.

Oh my soul, oh my soul,
The red soil of Reshun is the impression of your lips.
Will the hawk come back to my hand or not?
Will my wish come true or not?
You have adorned yourself with yellow roses,
Will you not send me some?
I live for a glance from your eyes,
Yet you look away towards another.

Whatever their origins many of the songs contain beautiful and moving expressions, especially those in Khowar, which is a poetic and musical language. One of my favourite images from a Khowar song is of the man whose love is so

great but so hopeless that he gives up all his worldly goods, and devotes the rest of his days to wandering about the countryside with his sitar, singing the praises of his beloved.

* * *

In Gilgit if a pregnant woman sees apples or cucumbers in a dream she is pleased, thinking that a son will be born to her. If she dreams of a necklace she is unhappy, thinking that it will be a daughter. In Chitral they make such predictions according to the woman's cravings for special foods. We learnt that women usually work through their pregnancies without any sentimental fuss, and without special attention being given them beyond extra nourishing food. As the time approaches, the girl who is expecting her first baby usually returns to her parent's house for the confinement. In Chitral when labour starts, the house is cleared of people except for two or three experienced women, including her own mother, and the girl goes to the place prepared, formerly in the *shom* though nowadays not always so. Indeed 'to go to the *shom*' is the Khowar expression for going into labour, and 'to help at the *shom*' means to attend at a delivery.

Every girl is apprehensive of her labour, especially the first time. As it progresses she becomes increasingly frightened and tired, and moans and prays. The older women do not try to stop her crying but console her by saying that the pain is inevitable and that it will soon be over. If labour is prolonged they may make the girl run, or put her on a frame and drop it, or fire off a gun in her ear. For the delivery itself she kneels with her elbows on the floor, gripping tightly to the arms of one of the other women. Meanwhile her husband has offered prayers, and may have given food for the poor as an intercession for her safety and for an easy delivery. Enough women die in childbirth for it to be a frightening prospect, not only for the girl, but also for her family. During the final stages her husband and her brother may guard the door of the house and the smoke-hole against intruders and evil influences. If the child is a son they announce his birth by firing off their guns. Neighbours and relatives come to congratulate the father, and he arranges food for them, generously if the child is a boy, less generously if it is a girl.

The mother is now put to bed, traditionally in the *shung*, but however exhausted she may be she will not be left alone to sleep for fear that a fairy may enter her or the baby. So

the other women sit around and keep her awake with tea and food, and with talk about her labour and the baby, and with stories and gossip and songs. Only after two or three nights will she be left, and for forty days she must keep some iron article in her bed to ward off the fairies. The baby meanwhile is bathed, wrapped in a cloth, preferably one that has already been used for other babies, and is held by one of the older women who has had many children of her own. If he yawns she will put her fingers over his mouth to prevent a fairy entering it. Then he is put to sleep in a wooden cradle, again preferably one that has been successfully used before. The placenta is buried in some secluded place.

If the mother has previously given birth to babies who died shortly afterwards, people believe that she already had an evil fairy. Then they take the new baby away before she has even seen him and give him to another woman to suckle and care for until he is older and beyond danger. Similarly in Gilgit the deaths of babies are attributed to the influence of an evil eye upon the mother.¹ In an attempt to 'deceive' the evil eye, one of the other women will first put the new-born baby to her own breast saying that he is her child, or they may give him donkey's milk and say that he is the child of a donkey. They may also try to 'disguise' the baby by giving him the name of some young animal, such as 'foal', 'calf' or 'puppy'. We talked with several farmers in Gilgit who have such names. If the baby is a boy they say that whatever length they cut his umbilicus, his penis will be the same length. If his big toe is longer than the second they say that he will have the upper hand in his marriage, but if the second toe is longer his wife will have the upper hand. They say that a newly-delivered mother may develop cravings for certain foods and that if she is not given these her nipples become painful. When a baby cries in its sleep people believe that a fairy is telling the baby that his father has died, and the baby is crying because he has not seen his father. When the baby laughs they believe that the fairy is telling him that his mother is dead, and he laughs because he has just drunk her milk and knows that she is alive.

Breast-feeding is universal, and there is no alternative. If the mother's milk fails, the baby will be given to another who is lactating, but generally women seem to have enough milk. We

¹ There are no figures for child-mortality in Kohistan. Estimates vary between 25 per cent and 50 per cent. Malnutrition, especially at the time of weaning, contributes to this.

heard of one woman who had suckled twins for two years. Feeding is 'on demand', and there are no fixed times. It may continue for two years if another pregnancy does not intervene. One reason for the long period of suckling is the hope of postponing another pregnancy. One result is that children rarely suck their thumbs.

Suckling forms some of the strongest bonds in Kohistan, and what are known locally as 'milk-relationships' are as important as blood relationships, no matter who is concerned. If a husband doubts his wife's fidelity he may make the suspected lover suck at her breast, which irrevocably changes their relationship to mother and son. Any sexual contact between them would then be incestuous and unthinkable. So strong are milk-relationships that formerly, especially among the ruling families and aristocracy, new-born babies were deliberately sent to be brought up in another influential family. This gave the child a second set of relatives and consequently a wider circle of political support in later years. In Chitral a son of the ruler was sometimes fostered with a leading family who would summon the wives of all their own relatives and adherents, so that the child might be suckled by as many as fifty women. All the husbands would then look on the child as their own relative, and could later be counted on to support his claim to the throne and if necessary to fight for him. Those with permanent charge of the child would care for him as if he was one of their own children, 'or even better', as one friend bitterly remarked. Eventually when he was six or more, they would return him to the ruler, no doubt hoping that he would eventually succeed to the throne, in which case his 'milk-father' and 'milk-brothers' would be able to count on their own advancement.

Now that the political system has changed, the custom is being abandoned, but most of our friends from the leading families had been fostered when they were babies thirty or forty years ago. They would speak of their milk-brothers and milk-sisters, and of their milk-uncles and milk-aunts (i.e. their parents' milk-brothers and milk-sisters), in the same way as they spoke of their blood-relations, and we used to find this very confusing. In one family they refer to their several paternal aunts not by their personal names, which would be considered too familiar, nor by the place where they were born, because all were born in the same place, but by the names of the villages where they were fostered as little girls.

Names for babies in Kohistan are usually chosen by the paternal grand-parents; or the *mullah* may offer suggestions culled from his theological studies. We recorded a great variety of names, though within each valley there are certain favourites. If there are universal favourites, they are probably Abdul and Nisa. At about eight months the baby crawls, and then walks, and after the first year he starts to form words. In Chitral people believe that if a baby forms the word for father first the next child will be a son, but if he forms the word for mother first it will be a daughter. In Hunza some of a baby's first words are: mother's nipple, milk, butter-milk, water, food, bread, meat, dried apricots, apricot kernels, walnuts, eating, urinating, lying down, being in cradle, clothes, louse, blood, small boy, up-on-the shoulder, going-out, nice, nasty, a good thing, music, demon, bird and horse. If he was not born in their house, the baby's first major outing is a visit to his maternal grand-parents, where he and his mother may stay for a month or longer, depending partly on how long the grand-parents can afford it. As she departs after this first visit, her parents give their daughter a generous present, perhaps even a goat or a cow, and if the baby is a boy, a *choga* for him later, and if a girl some household utensils.

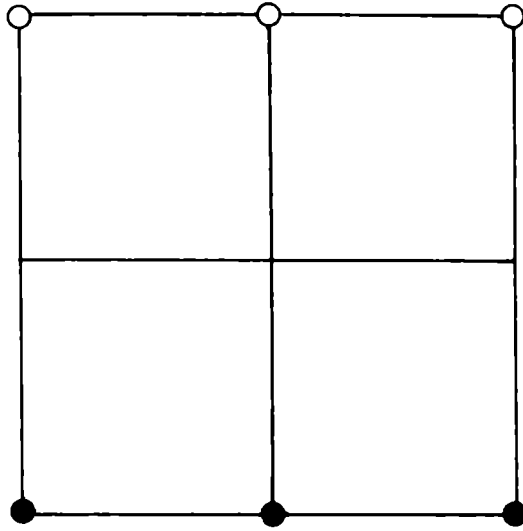
While he is very small and before he can crawl, a baby is given toys, especially something to make a tinkling sound, but by the time he can sit up he begins to be looked after by older sisters and cousins, and does not need special toys. One often sees a little girl of six staggering along with a younger brother or sister of one or two on her hip, or sees these babies dumped in a safe corner where they can watch the play of the older children. From that age children are scarcely ever alone. There is little scolding or fussing by mothers, and children are seldom ill-tempered. If a child does lose patience with his own household he goes off to visit his cousins who probably live nearby. Indeed by the age of five or six it is difficult for a stranger to know which child belongs to which house. Children learn who their more distant relatives are at harvest and threshing, when there is coming and going and borrowing of bullocks and manpower, and by the age of ten they have a wide circle of acquaintances.

Boys and girls play together until they are about ten. A favourite game in Chitral is 'the sheep and the wolf'. One child, usually a boy, plays the wolf and tries to reach the main group, usually girls, who huddle together making sheep-

like noises. Between is the shepherd who has to intercept the wolf. A variation is for the sheep to run in a line behind the shepherd, hands on the hips of the one in front, and for the wolf to stalk and ambush the back of the line before the shepherd has time to turn and defend it. In another game two 'riders' climb on the backs of two 'horses' and throw a cap to and fro, while their horses try to catch it. When a horse catches the cap he or she changes place with the rider. In another, two teams of three or four sit opposite each other, each with its 'mother'. One mother hides a pebble in the clothes of a member of her team, and the other must guess who has it. Children also play at building houses and water-mills with stones. More static games, also enjoyed by adults, are rather like draughts and noughts-and-crosses, and are played with black and white pebbles on 'boards' scratched on the ground (Fig. 6).

Only a few artefacts are used in play. One of these is a small spindle-shaped piece of wood which, when hit on one end with a stick, will jump in the air. The object is then to hit it again before it falls to the ground. In spring the bark can be twisted off a willow-twig to make a hollow tube and plunger. Children use this to squirt each other and even to blow mud at those particular adults who, the world over, seem to invite practical jokes. In summer boys play 'polo' on foot, using L-shaped sticks and a stone wrapped with rags. In winter they throw snowballs (see also Plate 12.3). On the whole games are good-natured but sometimes they deteriorate into chases, fights and tears until an adult comes to restore the peace. Occasionally children's quarrels spread to the parents. 'Your daughter beat my son.' 'Your son abused my daughter.' And then they may rake up old grievances. 'Your daughter took firewood from my house.' 'Your son shouted down through my smoke-hole. He shit on my roof.' And so on.

Girls in some households in Chitral develop their own 'secret' language by turning normal words round and making up nonsensical words. They call this 'keezi-meezi' and giggle over it with their sisters and irritate their brothers. In the early days of the British connection with Chitral some of these inverted words reached the first Political Officers, who were greatly excited to hear of this esoteric language and duly recorded it in their gazetteers. There are also riddles: in Gilgit they say, 'I have a sister who eats with ten and sleeps with twenty'. The answer is 'the ten fingers and the ten toes'.



▲ Played in Chitral. The object in this game is to move one's pieces into another straight line before one's opponent can do so. Single moves along the lines to blank intersections only. No taking.

▼ Played in Hunza. The object in both these games is to take all one's opponent's pieces. Single moves along the lines to blank intersections; taking by jumping single pieces, as in draughts. The same move may be made only twice consecutively.

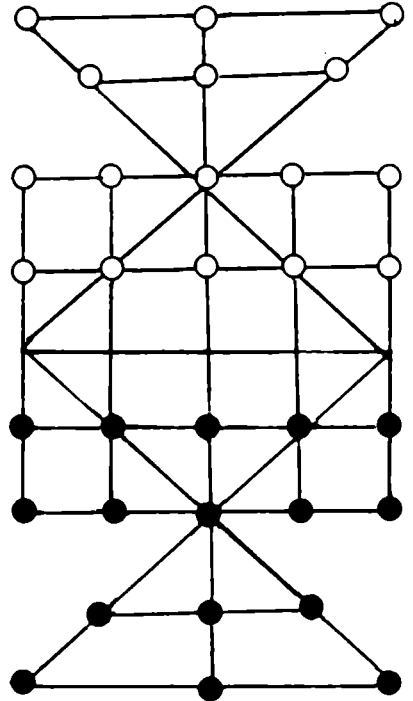
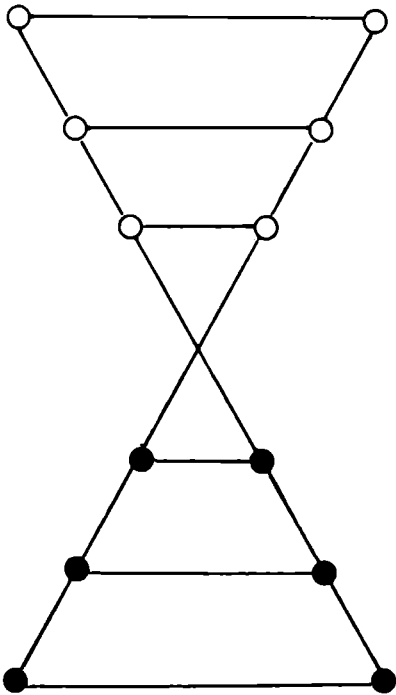


Fig. 6. Some games played in Kohistan

By the age of six or seven children go to bed at the same time as adults, and by nine they say prayers and keep the Ramadhan fast. Nowadays many go to school. By nine or ten they are taking on some of the tasks of the household and farm, and the ways of the sexes are beginning to diverge. Girls spend more of their time at home. They learn to handle needles and sew clothes, and later to spin and cook and ration the year's grain. Boys start to look after the animals grazing about the village, and they milk the goats and go with their fathers to the irrigation channels and to the fields. By the age of fifteen they may go to the pastures. Thus, gradually by imitation, children learn adult work and learn to fill their adult roles.

We found that most of our friends remembered their own childhood with affection but without sentimentality. They found it difficult to talk about those days. 'We were just children then and lived at home like any other children. What is there to talk about?' But in the course of talk on other matters we got glimpses of some of the things that make impressions on children in Kohistan. One day when we were talking about fairies and the supernatural, Hamid told us how, when he was a small boy, his mother used to call her children and those of the neighbours, and would tell them to sit on the roof of the house. Then she would go inside, and in the name of the *rachi* (a kind of fairy) she would make some little cakes of malted flour, and would pass these up through the smoke-hole for the children to eat. On another occasion he told how sometimes, when he was at home, he used to hear the tinkling of bells outside, and would run out to see a caravan of camels and pack horses going by. They would be on their way south from Kashgar and Yarkhand with carpets, silk cloth, brick tea, and iron pots to be sold in Gilgit. 'It was a big day when a caravan went by,' he said.

Ghulam Abbas told us how he had once been sitting in an uncle's house in Nagar at the time of a marriage. The uncle, looking out and seeing a large number of guests coming, had used a colloquial expression, calling out to his wife, 'There is an army of Sikhs coming.' Abbas, who did not know the expression, took it literally and was terrified.

A friend in Chitral described how his father, who was an accomplished sitar player, used to 'hear' (i.e. tune) the instrument before playing it. While he was doing this everyone in the house had to keep absolutely silent, even the babies, or there was trouble. Another friend there told us about a pet

bird he had had as a child. It was small and black with a forked tail (probably a *drongo*) and flew to his bed each morning to be fed. 'It used to come out with me when I was walking. It would fly along catching grasshoppers that jump up when you walk in the fields. Sometimes it would come with me for five miles or more. But if I didn't attend to it and encourage it, and if I didn't raise enough grasshoppers, then it would turn back and go home, like a disappointed dog.' Wazir Ali Shah remembered crossing the Lowarai pass at the age of seven, and how someone had lifted him off his horse, sat him by a fire, and given him a hot drink. 'I remember too that when we went down the other side of the pass and reached the motor road there were lorries. They were the first lorries I had seen because there were none in Chitral in those days. They were painted red and yellow. I remember being absolutely fascinated by them.'

There is much about child rearing in Kohistan that we liked. Most of all, we liked the acceptance that children receive from adults—they are, simply, part of society. Marriage is natural, babies are wanted, motherhood comes gracefully, children are welcome, parents and other adults are accessible—and people grow up with a self-acceptance that seemed admirable.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE ELEPHANT'S EGG

Raskam used to be a very prosperous place. One day a saint came there and saw a woman wiping her baby's bottom with a piece of bread. He was angered by this waste, and he cursed the place, and a landslide broke the irrigation channel. That was the end of the prosperity of Raskam.

Story heard in Gilgit.

Once upon a time a Queen Ant decided that, on the day when no one in her household died, she would give her daughter in marriage. The household was so big that the day never came. Even now ants coming from opposite directions stop and enquire of each other the date when the marriage will take place.

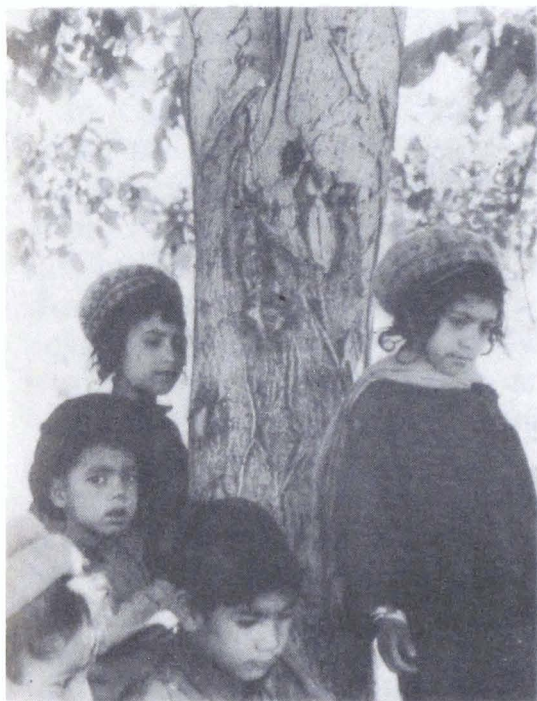
Story heard in Chitral.

Some of our happiest hours in Kohistan have been spent at hospitable firesides after the evening meal. A generation ago this was the time for story-telling, but the art is dying and its practitioners now are few. Ghulam Abbas told us how it used to be in his childhood, when his grandfather was Wazir of Nagar and his own parents still lived there. At that time it was common for story-tellers, old greybeards with the good memory of the illiterate, to be invited to houses at night to tell their tales. In return for a warm fire and a meal, the old man would sit by the hearth and relate the stories learnt in his own childhood—for the stories were not written down—perhaps using the very words of a generation earlier.

Abbas described these winter evenings with affection. 'Sometimes I went to my uncle's house, and sometimes my cousins came to ours. They would each bring a handful of dried apricots for the old man and would stay for the night, so we could fasten the door and close the smoke-hole and put out the light. Then we lay on our beds to listen and to watch the fire until one by one we fell asleep. The stories were fanciful nonsense, and they went on and on, but we loved them. They were all the same really: about a king who wanted to arrange his daughter's marriage and held competitions among the suitors; and how he told his Wazir to fire three arrows, and the third arrow hit a tree; and then a frog jumped out from under the tree and turned into a handsome prince, perhaps so handsome that he had to veil his face; and



1. Some of Neemat Khan's children at Hakis



2. Children under a walnut tree in Chilas



3. Children's game in Gilgit
*(The object is to toss all the walnuts into
the hole in one throw)*

lots of enchanted palaces and magic sandals and fairies bathing in pools of milk; and so they went on and on. Each story always began "Long, long ago . . ." and ended, often an hour or more later, with "The story is finished". So the old man would tell one of these stories, and the fire would die down and we would all feel sleepy. When he had finished one story he would ask, "Is anyone awake?" and if anyone answered, he would begin another, "Long, long ago . . ." And so he would go on, perhaps for hours, until we were all sleeping.' As he talked, Abbas was perhaps regretting that in Gilgit, where he now lives, such story-telling has almost disappeared and his own children will not know it. Even in Nagar and other outlying valleys we heard the same, and we found only a few men who can still remember the whole of one of these ancient and interminable tales.

Stories of this kind seem mostly to have originated in Persia or India, but some of the more popular ones have been adapted to Kohistan geography and custom and have had local episodes and details added. One 'imported' story is the Kisar saga, which was widely known in eastern Kohistan and which, in other versions, has been recorded as far away as Mongolia and Siberia. Kohistan versions are said to take seven nights to relate. In the Astor valley they believe that, if it is told word-perfect, two ibex with their horns interlocked will come to the door of the story-teller on the morning of the eighth day.

In Gilgit it was difficult to find anyone who had even heard the name Kisar. But in Astor they point out a 'wall' on the summit of Nanga Parbat that Kisar built after being ignominiously kicked up there by a colossal bull, and they show the bull's hoofprints astride a nearby river. In Nagar and Hunza people have also heard of him, believing him to have been a 'demon king' from Baltistan who conquered the Hunza valley, married there, and returned eastward when his kingdom in Baltistan was threatened. He is said to have left his bride, Princess Bubuli, on a sheer rock pinnacle behind Baltit, which is known as Bubuli's peak. As he left, Kisar gave Bubuli a stone ball and slab, such as they use for grinding salt in Hunza, saying that he would return before the ball grew hair. He also left her a cock and a goat-skin of millet, telling her that if she fed the cock one grain a year he would be back before the skin was empty. (Using a local table of weight that starts 'eight grains of millet equal one grain of rice' Ghulam Abbas calculated that Kisar will not return for

30 million years.) It is said that during winter blizzards the wailing of the princess and the crowing of the cock are still heard from Bubuli's peak.

We enjoyed tales of enchanted palaces and demons but they did not tell us much about Kohistan. More interesting to us were the local stories which again are told for entertainment—and very entertaining they are—but which contain also a wealth of circumstantial and topographic detail and other clues that make them instructive, and often strangely plausible as well. The subjects are astonishingly varied, ranging from the natural to the supernatural, from common animals to semi-mythical rulers, and from Islamic missionaries to ordinary farmers who did something heroic or foolish but memorable. Such stories are less the stock-in-trade of the old story-teller, and more that of the grandparent at the family hearth. Some are very short, perhaps enshrining a local saying or illustrating a moral. Others seem strangely inconsequential, scraps from once longer and now forgotten tales, but some of the scraps that we heard in particular villages later turned out to be episodes in tales that were continued elsewhere. Then there was the chance that we would pick up the tale again in another village, which was very exciting. What follow in this chapter are a few of the stories we heard.

* * *

The autumn slaughter of animals in Gilgit used to be followed by a festival commemorating the downfall of the last 'Hindu' ruler there, a tyrant named Shiri Badat. His kingdom stretched from the foot of Nanga Parbat to the head of the Gilgit valley. According to the story, Shiri Badat used every day to eat a kid which was provided by each household in turn. One day the kid was particularly tasty, and he learnt that it had belonged to a woman who had suckled it at her own breast. Thereupon Shiri Badat became a cannibal, demanding a baby each day and eating it in place of the kid. His people had to bear even this exaction, hate him though they did, for Shiri Badat was believed invincible. His body, which grew a little bigger every day, was made of iron, and he rode a horse that could gallop up the steepest mountains, so there was little chance of killing him. The hoof prints of his horse can still be seen on a rock-face near Gilgit.

One day three fairy brothers flew over the valley and alighted on the slopes of Rakaposhi, above the village of Dainyor. There they shot arrows at a grazing cow and the arrow of the youngest, whose name was Azur Jamshed, hit the cow and killed it. His brothers then told him to cook some meat and taste it, which he did. Thereupon they burst into laughter and flew off, leaving Azur Jamshed to find that he had lost the power of flight and was unable to follow them. (It seems that he had been rendered impure by his contact with the cow, and so was reduced from the condition of fairy to that of man.)

So Azur Jamshed walked down to Gilgit, and there was seen by Nur Bakht, Shiri Badat's daughter, who fell in love with him and conceived a baby by him. Fearing then that her own baby might become a victim of her father's cruel appetite, she went to him and said, 'Father, the people hate you because you eat their children, and they will kill you if they can. If you tell me the secret of your life, I can protect you better.' But Shiri Badat refused to tell her. She asked again and he again refused. Then she asked a third time, and he told her that his heart was made of butter and that he could be quickly killed by fire. Nur Bakht told the secret to Azur Jamshed, and together with the people they dug a concealed pit outside the palace. At night they raised the alarm and Shiri Badat, running out in the dark to mount his horse, fell into the pit. The people threw burning wood on top of him and he perished. Azur Jamshed succeeded him, with Nur Bakht as queen, and is said to have been the first Moslem to rule Gilgit.

It is a favourite story in Gilgit: we heard it on our first day there. It is also an unconscious example of religious propaganda, for it associates the previous Hinduism (or was it Buddhism?) with a despotic ruler of unnatural tastes, and it presents Islam as the liberating influence. Shiri Badat, who is incorrigible, perishes but Nur Bakht, who accepts the new religion, is saved and marries the new ruler. By this means the dynastic break is not made too great. The new dynasty is given further sanction by being derived from fairy ancestry, which endows it with an authority older in Kohistan than either Hinduism or Islam. It is no coincidence that in most versions of the story told nowadays, when Islam is better established, the fairy origin of Azur Jamshed is forgotten and he is described simply as a refugee prince from Baltistan. Whatever the truth, Shiri Badat probably ruled in Gilgit during the thirteenth or fourteenth century, and was either a Hindu or a Buddhist.

The festival itself is no longer kept up in Gilgit, the place where it is supposed to have originated, but it survives in Hunza with a midnight bonfire and the tossing of burning brands as on the original occasion. And, like so many stories in Kohistan, however great its supernatural content it is finally irresistible in its circumstantial detail. We discovered that the descendants of the man who once used to cook for Shiri Badat still refuse to celebrate his death, but hide away in their houses at the time of the festival and mourn for their old master.

It was Ghulam Abbas, accompanying us on our first journey to Minapin, who introduced us to Shah Buria and Shah Wali, the missionaries who brought Islam to Nagar and Hunza. At the village of Gulmit we passed under an enormous *chenar* tree shading the track. Nearby stood a small stone shrine with two stumpy minarets, dazzling white in the mid-day sun of July. We sat down under the *chenar* and rested—it seemed the natural thing to do—and Abbas mentioned that it was customary for riders to dismount here out of respect for the man buried at the shrine. ‘Who was he?’ we wanted to know. ‘He was a holy man, a saint. His name was Shah Wali. If you want to know about him, we had better find the village headman—he will know.’ So the headman was sought and found, and he and half the village sat with us under the *chenar* to talk about Shah Wali.

It seemed that the first Moslem missionary in the valley had been Shah Buria but he had gone away towards Gilgit, whereas Shah Wali, who had come later, had stayed on there and had settled in the little village of Thol between Nilt and Gulmit. Eventually he died there. As he lay dying, Shah Wali sent a man to the then Mir (ruler) of Nagar to ask for a shroud, telling the man to return by nightfall. But the Mir delayed and the man could not return until the following day. Meanwhile the Mir of Hunza learned that the saint was in need of a shroud and immediately sent one from his own state. When the Mir of Nagar heard this and realized that his shroud had arrived late, he was contrite and sent the saint an apologetic offering of grain and fruits. Shah Wali received this just before he died, and he gave his final blessing in the following way: because the Mir of Hunza had acted so promptly and had sent a shroud, the people of Hunza were to be hardworking and were to have good cloth; whereas the people of Nagar were to be slow and idle, but nonetheless were to have abundant grain and fruit. And so it is today.

The people of Hunza have an enviable reputation for cheerful industry; and their cloth, made from the wool of sheep grazed on the poorest pastures in all Kohistan, is reckoned to be some of the strongest and most hard-wearing in the world. The people of Nagar are considered less skilful and less conscientious, but without loss to themselves, for their side of the valley—which faces north and so has more snow and ice and therefore more irrigation water—produces plentiful fruit and rich harvests.

Then we heard how Shah Wali came to be buried in Gulmit. After his death the people of Thol were preparing to bury him, but before it was done the men of Pisan (the village below Minapin) came to take the body back to their village. They had suffered a series of disasters in Pisan—a flood, bad harvests and a disease among the animals—and they believed that if the saint was to be buried there the village would prosper again. As Pisan was the largest village in Nagar at that time, and Thol one of the smallest, the request could not be refused and so the funeral procession moved up the valley. As the procession passed through Gulmit the people there also claimed a right to bury the saint. The men of Pisan refused to hand over the body, but they agreed to stop and eat. During the meal the people of Gulmit plied the men of Pisan with wine, which was still being made in Nagar at that time, until they became drunk and finally agreed to accept gold instead. So Shah Wali's body remained at Gulmit and was buried there and a shrine was built over his grave. Formerly, they say, only millets used to ripen at Gulmit, but since that time wheat and barley have ripened.

The most recent doings of Shah Wali have been connected with the rebuilding of his shrine, which had become dilapidated. One night the present Mir of Nagar had a dream. What he dreamt he does not tell, but the next morning he gave orders for the immediate rebuilding of the shrine. The villagers of Gulmit were anxious to use a fine white stone which is found only in the neighbouring village of Yal, between Gulmit and Pisan, but the people of Yal refused to provide the stone without payment. So the work had not got far when an old man of Gulmit had a dream which he recounted to his family. He had seen the mountainside behind the villages in his dream, and had seen a landslide falling towards Gulmit. Suddenly Shah Wali had appeared and had stretched out his hand to divert the landslide onto Yal. Three weeks later a devastating landslide fell on Yal, killing many people and

destroying houses, crops and trees. After that the white stone was readily available and the building progressed, though not without further intervention by Shah Wali. An hour or so after hearing this, when we ourselves passed through Yal, we saw the remains of the catastrophe, and it did seem that the scar of the landslide was above Gulmit and that only a miracle could have saved that village from disaster too.

Later Raja Karim Khan told us that Shah Wali had been a Seyed (a descendant of Muhammad) who had travelled from Badakshan up the Oxus valley into Wakhan. From there he had crossed the Karakoram by a route considered impassable, and had come down into Hunza by the Ulter glacier. At that time there was a scarcity of water in the three villages whose supply comes from the Ulter glacier. Shah Wali told the people that a demon was drinking most of the water. He took his gun and fired into the Ulter valley from some high ground above, whereupon a new spring began to flow. 'The demon is still drinking the water,' he explained, 'but I have knocked out one of its front teeth and this spring is coming through the gap.' The spring still flows, but there is only enough water from it to irrigate a large field. The spot where he fired his gun is also pointed out—there is a shepherd's shelter there now. After that Shah Wali had crossed over to Nagar and settled at Thol.

They were good stories, we felt. Again it was the circumstantial detail that particularly delighted and fascinated us. Whatever the supernatural embellishments, how could anyone doubt Shah Wali as a man? His activities before and since his death are so clearly set in the local landscape, and he is so enmeshed in the trivia of daily life there, that he is almost as real as if he was still alive.

Our appetite for saints having been whetted, Abbas told us something of Shah Buria as we walked on up the valley. This touched him more personally, for his paternal grandfather, the Wazir, was believed to have fallen foul of Shah Buria and to have lost the 'wazirship' as a result. Shah Buria, who probably lived sometime in the sixteenth or seventeenth century, came from Persia. According to tradition he travelled first to India, and then north into Kashmir. From Kashmir he reached Baltistan. He then climbed up the Biafo glacier, crossed the 'snow-lake' and the Hispar pass (17,650 feet), and came down the Hispar glacier into Nagar. The last leg of this journey involves ten days' continuous march between the last village on the Baltistan side and the first on the Nagar

side, most of the time on snow and ice—a journey in itself. During the crossing the disciples accompanying him suffered from the cold, so Shah Buria collected some snow in a small heap and set fire to it. Towards the end of the journey one of the disciples fell into a crevasse in the Hispar glacier and disappeared. Shah Buria tossed his staff in after the unfortunate man, and both disciple and staff emerged unharmed from the snout of the glacier.

The first Nagar village below the snout is Hopar. The people there were inattentive to Shah Buria and his teachings, so he cursed them, saying that their grain should never be enough. And so it is today, for although the harvests at Hopar are good, the grain dwindles rapidly away and is exhausted by the end of the winter, when the unfortunate people must go hungry or find food from another village.

Continuing on his way, Shah Buria found himself without the water necessary for his ablutions before prayer. So he struck the ground with his staff and a copious spring of water gushed out, so copious indeed that there was then no dry place for him to kneel. Previously, as he had been crossing the Hispar pass, he had used a large flat rock for praying upon. The same rock had followed him along while he remained on the glacier and had always been present at the time of prayer. As the flood spread one of the disciples thought of that rock, regretting that it no longer came with them. Immediately it appeared, and the saint was able to perform his prayers upon it in comfort. The spring still flows, and the rock is still there. It was over this rock that Abbas's grandfather came to grief. People were coming to pray at it, and were bringing offerings of food. The Wazir felt that this was degenerating into idol worship, so he had the rock moved in order to demonstrate its unimportance. But the next morning he found that it had returned to its previous position. So again he moved it and built a wall around to prevent anyone reaching it, but despite this it moved back again. Then misfortune came to him in the form of the Mir's displeasure, and he was exiled from Nagar.

On a sheer rock face a mile or so beyond Raja Mumtaz's orchard there is carved a standing figure of the Buddha. The figure is twenty feet high and its feet are sixty feet above the present ground level. Nothing is known of its history, though doubtless it was made in the days of the Buddhist lama who emerged once a year from the monastery nearby. Nor is it clear how the carvers reached a site so high above the ground,

though it was an excellent choice, for its inaccessibility has saved the figure from later iconoclasts.

The people of the villages nearby believe that the figure was once a giantess. Whenever people passed on the road, she used to reach out and grab half of the party and devour them. If there were four people, she would eat two; if there were eight, she would eat four. Then one day, according to the story they tell, a wandering Moslem saint came to Gilgit, and the people begged his help. He agreed to do what he could, and went to the giantess and said, 'Oh sister, I have just come from your village, and I have bad news for you. Your father has died.' The giantess was grieved and threw up her hands in dismay, and the saint quickly hammered an iron nail through her right hand and fixed it to her breast. He then said, 'I have further bad news for you. Your brother too has died.' At this the giantess struck her left hand against her thigh in distress, and again the saint quickly hammered in a nail, so that she was unable to move. That is how she comes to be standing in her present position, they say. Then the saint went back to the people and said, 'I have dealt with the giantess and all will be well during my lifetime. But when I die, you must bring my body and bury it below the rock where the giantess stands—otherwise she will break free again.' Then the saint slept, but the people collected together and discussed what he had said. 'How are we to find him when he dies?' they asked. 'He is like a bird and flies over the world. He will leave this valley and we shall never see him again.' So they murdered him as he slept and buried him below the rock there and then. It is said that once a year the giantess struggles to free herself, and then the earth at the foot of the rock heaves a little. Then all is still again for another year.

We walked out to look at the figure, through Raja Mumtaz's orchard and on along an irrigation channel at the foot of the cliff. There she was, right hand on breast and left hand on thigh. While Elizabeth sketched the headworks of the channel, I took a photograph and wondered how the compassionate and contemplative Buddha could have been transformed into a terrorizing monster. Religious propaganda again, I supposed. Later we discovered another twist, for when the story was related to one of the first Europeans to reach Gilgit, the holy hero was not a Moslem at all, but a prophet whose supernatural powers were derived from the fairies.

From Gilgit we made the journey to the Bagrot valley, and here unexpectedly we came upon Shah Buria again. We were sitting outside the mosque in the village of Sinaker, asking our questions about the farming (Plate 14.1). Shading the mosque and half the village too, it seemed, was an enormous *chenar* with five trunks, each as large as a normal tree. We remarked upon its size and grandeur. 'Oh yes,' the villagers told us, 'this is a holy tree. The fortune of our village depends upon it. If irrigation water is scarce we all come and pray here. Gohar Aman destroyed this village once and tried to burn down the tree, but he couldn't. A saint called Shah Buria planted it. At that time, there was no village here. Shah Buria came here from Gilgit in the spring and thrust his staff into the ground. He said that if it was a good place for a village the staff would take root. In the autumn he sent a man to see, and the man reported that the staff was already growing into a *chenar* tree. This is the tree.'

Whenever we mentioned that we were going to Bagrot, or had been there, we were likely to be told a 'Bagroti story'. Thus we heard the story of the baby aeroplanes and many others, including that of the 'elephant's egg'. A man from Bagrot came to Gilgit, and as he was wandering through the bazaar he saw a melon in one of the shops. He had never seen a melon before, and he asked the shopkeeper what it was. 'Ah,' said the shopkeeper, 'that is the egg of an elephant. The elephant is a very fine animal. The whole of your family can ride upon it. This egg is ready to hatch. It costs five rupees.' So the man bought the melon, and set off for his home. When he had passed Dainyor he unfortunately stumbled, and the melon slipped out of his hands and rolled away down the slope until it hit a large rock and burst open. At that moment a hare, which had been sheltering behind the rock, took fright and scurried away across the hillside. It was after dark when the man arrived back at his house, and his wife asked where he had been. He explained that he had purchased an elephant's egg in the bazaar, and that he had dropped it and seen the baby elephant emerge and run off across the hillside. He had spent the rest of the day searching for the baby elephant, but had not been able to find it.

* * *

Another journey from Gilgit took us down the main valley to Minawar. Our special objective was the village's artificial

glacier of which we had heard in Gilgit. It was just another story, we thought at that time, but at least we could hear it from the original source. So the evening found us and Hamidullah Beg sitting under the stars with the villagers, listening to the headman's version of the story. But as he talked, and as others chimed in, we realised that this was more than a pretty story.

In their grandfathers' time, the headman told us, the villagers were already in difficulties due to a rising population and an inadequate supply of snow-fed irrigation water. At that time they had tried to make themselves a glacier, but the attempt had not been successful and the glacier had not grown. Then twenty-five years ago they had again tried, having learnt from 'a wise old man' that the previous attempt had failed because only male ice had been used. The old man advised them to bring female ice from Bagrot and to add it to the male ice that still remained. He also told them that the ice should not touch the ground on its way—good advice, we felt, because it presumably ensured that the ice was kept on the move and that as little as possible was lost through melting. So one day in the month of September, at about 4.00 p.m., ten baskets of ice were broken from the Bagrot glacier and were carried through the night by 120 men in relays, arriving at the Minawar site by 9.00 a.m. the following morning. A goat was slaughtered, and the ice was packed in its skin—even though it had travelled non-stop, there was only enough ice left to fill the one skin—and the skin was placed in a hole in the male ice. It was then covered with charcoal and with brushwood to keep wild animals away. And then, as the headman went on, a sensational detail: the old man had apparently told them that someone would have to sacrifice his own life if the glacier was to live. Hamid gasped, and I held my breath—surely we were not going to hear of a human sacrifice among these gentle and civilized people? 'Whatever did you do?' asked Hamid. The headman grinned. 'While we younger men were all up at the glacier, we chose the oldest man in the village as the one who should die for the glacier. Nobody ever told him, and a month afterwards he died. Then we slaughtered a bullock.' I suppose we should have known—it was a typical Kohistan solution.¹ Even so,

¹ Later we heard of other compromises whereby a human sacrifice had been made symbolic only. In one place a man's arm had been cut and some of his blood had been mixed with the blood of a sacrificed animal; in another, a volunteer with several children had been found who was willing to 'surrender' his sexual potency in favour of the glacier.

the occasion must have been weird enough, with gangs of men running through the night with their dripping loads, their future prosperity depending on their stamina and sure-footedness and on their adherence to the wise old man's instructions. Anyway it worked, they told us. 'Now the glacier is growing and we have more water, though not yet enough.'

We decided that we must see this glacier. It might look like any other small glacier, but at least we could observe the site and estimate the altitude. Besides, we might meet the fairies up there—anything seemed possible. So the following morning we set off with two of the villagers to guide us. The valley behind the village is steep and narrow—a small catchment basin, we realized, and hence the inadequate supply of snow and the limited pasture and wood that the villagers complained of. As we climbed we saw flowers in crevices and on little grassy patches among the rocks, for it was the month of May and we were ahead of the goats for once. Hamid pointed to a little blue flower. 'In Hunza we believe this flower is sacred to the fairies. If you pick seven bunches of it,' he went on vaguely, 'the fairies throw you off the mountain.' We watched him pick three bunches and tuck them into his cap.

After climbing for most of the day up the steep ravine we made camp in a high and wide but shallow cave which overlooked a widening of the ravine. The ravine was here still filled with the previous winter's snow, and the older of the men showed us the footprints of an ibex in the snow. The cave was used as a byre in summer and in another month it would again be filled with bleating flocks. Originally its floor must have been a tumbled chaos of gigantic boulders which had fallen from the void above, but centuries of goat dung had filled in the gaps and buried all but the tops of the largest boulders making a flat floor that was smooth, dry and springy. As soon as the sun left the ravine it became bitterly cold, and the older man quickly gathered what wood the shepherds had left and lit a fire which we all crouched round. While Elizabeth melted snow and brewed tea, the younger man mixed a flour paste, flattened lumps of it between his hands, and put them to cook on a flat stone. I watched him and his companion rearrange the fire, picking up red-hot embers with their fingers and turning their faces away when the flames flared. Later they drank their tea and ate the bread with the ease and economy of movement that comes to people who frequently eat out of doors.

Elizabeth, Hamid and I retreated to our warm sleeping bags, but the two men murmured on over the fire, the popping of the burning wood echoing quietly and a trail of blue smoke curling up and out of the cave and across the ravine. From my sleeping-bag I considered the *choga*-wrapped shapes hunched over the fire, feeling that there was an alertness and receptivity about them. We were in the fairies' territory, after all, and we were the first visitors of the year. Then I wondered whether I would have been frightened to have been there on my own, but decided probably not. There was too strong a sense of natural harmony about the place and the use to which it had been put for so long. When I woke in the morning this feeling was reinforced by the trilling and whistling of a tireless bird that flew up and down the ravine outside the cave. I lay on my back in ecstasy, on the goat dung of a thousand years, watching the amphitheatre of rock and snow slowly brighten as the sun rose and listening to that superb sound. It conveyed the very essence of the natural.

We climbed on up the snow for another two hours until, from a sheltering thicket of willow and birch half buried in snow, we could look across to the site of the glacier. The glacier itself was covered by snow, but we could see enough to understand the men's description of its planting and subsequent growth. By now we were above 14,000 feet, and could see that the site was a small cirque, obviously glacial in origin, with aretes rising behind to the main watershed at about 15,000 feet. The ice had been planted at the rear of the cirque, and had grown across to the lip which it now overhung slightly. 'It's an ideal site,' Elizabeth remarked. 'Obviously there was a glacier here once before. It must have been retreating until a series of unusually hot summers finished it off. The crest behind is too low for it to have been a big glacier, at least in recent centuries—there would never have been much snow. After that I suppose it never got started again on its own. The villagers may have put just enough ice and snow to lower the temperature in that immediate part of the cirque, so that more snow than usual was left unmelted at the end of summer. Then the thing started again. It seems fantastic, but it just might be possible if they were lucky with the weather in the early years.' No glaciologist has yet produced a better explanation.

As we finished talking about the glacier the old man pointed to a curved stone pillar on a ridge far to the east, and said casually, 'There is Miropee.' 'Who is Miropee?' Hamid

asked. 'She is a fairy who used to live in this valley,' he replied. We estimated the distance to the pillar; it would have taken all day to reach it. Hamid hailed it, and his 'Wa-aa-ah Miropee' echoed over the snow and rocks. On the way down the old man told us what he knew of Miropee. 'Long, long ago' it seems that a farmer from Minawar had come up to hunt ibex and had met Miropee. She asked him not to come again on the following day, and having promised, he went away. But he was curious and the next day he did go back, surprising Miropee naked and milking an ibex. Miropee was so distressed at this that she upset her milk-pail, poured the milk over the rocks—the old man showed us her milk-pail and the spilt milk petrified in the walls of the ravine—and went away to the top of the ridge where she turned herself into the pillar we had seen. The hunter survived to tell the tale. That was all the old man knew, but anything still seemed possible. As we descended to the village again, we looked back and could see Miropee, now silhouetted as a tiny spike against a cloud, even more aloof and remote. Wa-aa-ah Miropee.

* * *

A few days later we were slogging up the Thak valley from Chilas. None of us had slept on account of the heat and the swarms of biting insects. We had started out late, and it had been very hot in the Indus valley. Now, towards midday, the Thak valley was hot too; and it must have been in an attempt to cheer us up that the Chilas pony-man, hitherto silent, suddenly said, 'I heard a story from Darel.' This is the story he told. A carpenter was working in the forest, and had cut down a tree. One night a bear accidentally trapped his paw under one of the fallen branches so that he could not escape. When the carpenter came in the morning, he found the bear and released him. The bear was very happy and they became good friends. The following year the carpenter was ill with a fever, and the bear came to see if he could do anything for his friend. He helped the carpenter to sit up on the bed, and provided himself as a support for the carpenter to lean back on. The carpenter said, 'My friend, I am grateful for your help, but your breath stinks too much.' The bear was upset and went away. The next year the carpenter met the bear in the forest. The bear said, 'Either you must kill me with your axe, or I shall kill you.' The carpenter did not want to die, so

he hit the bear on the head with his axe, but he could not strike hard enough to kill the bear. The fourth year they again met in the forest, and the bear said, 'Examine my head and see if the wound has healed.' The carpenter looked and saw that the wound had quite healed. 'You see,' said the bear, 'how bodily wounds heal, but wounds made with words do not heal.'

We had failed to find any further traces of Shah Buria in the Gilgit valley, and thought that we had heard the last of him. So it was a surprise when he turned up again in Chitral. Indeed, we were told, he was buried there, and we were taken to see his shrine, an unobtrusive wooden hut near the Political Agent's house. The Chitral traditions tell nothing about his earlier life, but begin with his coming over the Shandur pass and making his way to Chitral village. Apparently Chitral was already Moslem by that time, and Shah Buria is said to have devoted himself to the breeding of horses. No doubt, as a sixteenth or seventeenth century Persian, he was an expert with horses, but for a miracle-working holy man it seemed to us a little incongruous.

A year after he had died and been buried, a traveller reported that he had met Shah Buria on the Dorah pass. Shah Buria handed him two apples telling him to give one to Reis, then the ruler of Chitral, and the other to Sangin Ali, who was a follower of Reis and a member of the court. When the man reached Chitral, he handed over the apples and told his story. Sangin Ali who had been a devotee of Shah Buria, ate his apple, but Reis scoffed at the man saying that they had buried Shah Buria a year before, and he gave his apple to Sangin Ali. When the man persisted in his tale, Reis ordered Shah Buria's grave to be opened, and they found the body gone and the shroud neatly folded. After this the fortunes of the Reis dynasty declined, and they lost the throne to Sangin Ali, who founded the present ruling dynasty. Shah Buria himself was not seen again in Chitral, but it is said that he died again in Badakshan and has another grave there.

As Sangin Ali stood at the side of the empty grave with Reis, some of the seeds from the apples fell into the grave. From them there grew a tree which bore fruit believed to have magic properties. Then the people who lived near the shrine began to quarrel over the fruit. One morning when they went to the shrine they were astonished to find that the apple tree had gone and in its place stood a *binjou* tree, whose only useful product is seeds which can be strung as

beads for the recitation of prayers. Thus the people were admonished for their greed. We had already heard this story, in more or less the same version, from several people when we met the *mullah* whose family had looked after Shah Buria's shrine. He too told of Reis and Sangin Ali and the apples, but when it came to the apple tree being changed into a *binjou* he demurred. 'I remember the apple tree myself,' he said. 'It was still there when I was a boy. Whenever the main trunk died new shoots would come up from the roots. I remember eating the apples too. They were small, white ones and very sweet. But eventually the tree died naturally and the *binjou* grew up much later.' So here we had found a miracle in the making, and the legend about it already living.

We soon learnt that the equivalent of the 'Bagroti story' exists in Chitral, the role of the butts being taken by the people of Ojhor, a small valley that runs south from Terich Mir. Once upon a time, they say, 'in that place of two-legged donkeys' a four-legged donkey put its head into an earthenware jar and could not get it out. The people gathered but could not think what to do, so they sent for the wisest man in Ojhor. He came and examined all the circumstances and finally advised that they should cut the donkey's head off. When they had done this, the head still remained in the jar, and he now advised them to break the jar. So they broke the jar and took out the donkey's head. Then the wise man said, 'If I had not been here, how could you ever have solved this problem?' This view was approved by all, even by the owner of the donkey.

We heard a number of other stories about animals from Shahzada Hussam-ul-Mulk of Drosh, who had made a collection to tell to his grandchildren. Some of the parallels with Aesop are so remarkable that we felt there must be a common origin. Others are either Persian or local. The stories reveal a slightly macabre humour and, to us at least, a strange inconsequential charm. The following are among his collection.

Once upon a time an owl had its nest in a big tree. There were twelve chicks in the nest. One day a fox passed by and asked how many chicks there were. The owl replied, 'There are twelve.' The fox then growled, 'Drop one down to me, or I shall kick the trunk of the tree and bring all of you down, and the nest too.' The owl reluctantly dropped one chick, and the fox ate it up and went away. After this the fox came every other day and ate a chick, until only one was left. Then

a partridge, who was a friend of the owl, came by and hearing what had happened explained to the owl what she ought to say to the fox. So when the fox came the next time and demanded a chick the owl said to him, 'Kick the trunk of this tree as many times as you like. It will not harm us. Your own leg will be broken.' When the fox heard this reply from the owl he enquired who had taught it to her, and the timid owl disclosed the name of the partridge. Ever since then foxes have been the enemies of partridges, and they search for the nests of partridges in revenge.

Once a cat became too old to catch mice, so he announced that he repented of hunting mice, and took up his abode in the mosque. The mice were very happy to hear this, and they carried a feast to the cat, but when they came within reach he sprang and caught many of them.

Once a crow was sitting in a willow tree. Another crow came and asked him why he was sitting in a fruitless tree? 'In the likelihood of sitting one day in a mulberry tree, I am sitting in a willow,' replied the crow.

A man learnt the language of animals, but he was told that he would die if he disclosed this secret. One day, as the man was eating with his wife, a male fly took a crystal of sugar from the lip of the woman and offered it to a female fly. The female fly refused it saying, 'You have kissed the woman and now you dare to bring me this from her lips!' The man laughed on hearing this conversation. His wife then asked why he was laughing, and would accept no excuses, saying, 'There must be something about my way of eating that made you laugh. If not, tell me the truth.' At last the man said, 'I shall die if I tell you.' This sounded absurd to the woman and she kept on asking and nagging. Finally the man decided to disclose the secret and die rather than put up with the nagging of his wife, and he began to make arrangements for his funeral. Then he heard a cock telling a hen what a fool their master was: if he looked under the bed he would find a cure for his predicament. So the man looked under the bed, and found a stick. Then he beat his wife for being so troublesome and his life was saved.

Best of all we liked stories about ordinary people—farmers and their wives—for these, more than any number of questions and discussions, told us something of personalities and relationships in Kohistan.¹

¹The stories of Dola Shah, Sultan Khuja and Yar Beg are adapted from D.L.R. Lorimer's unpublished notes.

Some Hunza women were sitting in a sunny place one spring, chattering idly. One of them said, 'Wouldn't you like to eat cakes of malted-wheat and butter?' Another said, 'There is plenty of malted wheat but no powder,' ('powder' being an idiomatic expression for 'butter'). And a third said, 'What about gunpowder?' (meaning very old butter). Among them was the wife of Dola Shah, a simple-minded woman. She said to herself, 'There is plenty of gunpowder in my house and I have malted-wheat flour. I will make malted-wheat cakes.' So she mixed the flour, took the powder-horn, sprinkled on them some gunpowder, and kneaded the dough. Then she put it on the griddle, and at once there was a sparkling and crackling. Realising that something had gone wrong, she said to herself, 'I must hide this from my husband,' and she threw the dough into the stall under the cow. But the cow found it and mouthed it, and it started sparkling on the cow's muzzle. Then the cow ran from one corner of the stall to another bellowing, and Dola Shah came in and found everything plastered with sparkling dough, from the griddle to the cow to the corners of the stall. At first he flew in a rage and shouted, 'I'll divorce her,' but afterwards he was ashamed and kept quiet.

A young man was travelling from his home to Peshawar for theological studies, and stopped for the night in Ayun mosque. An Ayuni came in and asked if he knew how an aeroplane flies. 'No,' he replied. 'Give me your *choga* and I will show you,' said the Ayuni. Putting on the *choga*, the Ayuni ran round the mosque flapping his arms, and then he dashed out of the door with the *choga* and disappeared. In the course of time the young man finished his studies as a *mullah*, and he has since gone in for business and has become one of the richest men in Chitral. But everyone still knows him as 'the aeroplane *mullah*'.

When Sultan Khuja's adze was stolen he went to the centre of the village and told the people, 'One of you has stolen my adze. I am not going to name you here, but I know who you are. Your height is three times the length of your arm. Measure yourself, say nothing and put the adze back in my house.' The thief measured himself that night and thought to himself, 'Alas for my dead father, Sultan Khuja has put me to shame.' Then he thought, 'But at least he did not put me to shame in front of the people,' and he took back the adze.

In the village of Drosh there is a man addicted to opium who sold all his property to buy the drug. Now that he has

nothing of his own left, he steals chickens and sells them. He puts a maize grain on one end of a thread and hides behind a wall with the other end. As soon as a chicken pecks up the grain he hauls it in. So now, whenever a chicken is missing, people say, 'It's that so-and-so again,' and they curse him.

Yar Beg of Hunza was a practical joker. He arranged with a neighbouring family that they should come at dawn, before it got hot, to help with some threshing. During the night he put a goathair rug over their smoke-hole and a blanket over their door, and when dawn came they slept on. After a while the mother said, 'Our cow has urinated five times. Usually dawn comes after the cow has urinated three times.' Then from outside a voice called, 'Aunt, have you fire (i.e. glowing embers) to spare?' and they answered, 'What is wrong that you need fire at this time?' Then the voice outside said, 'We finished the threshing this morning, and drove the cows out at midday, and now it is time to prepare the food. What are you people doing that you ask whether it is time for fire?' Then the family looked and saw the rug over the smoke-hole, and at last they got up.

Some stories are told in the form of songs. At the spring festival in the Rumbor valley, the Kalash sing of Dagainai, a beautiful girl with a tragic story. Dagainai and a young man are in love, but Dagainai's sister is jealous of her. While the young man is away in the pasture, the sister poisons her. The young man, fearing that something is wrong when Dagainai fails to answer his smoke signal from the pasture, returns to the village to find her already lying in her coffin in the graveyard.¹ Broken-hearted, he arranges a knife, point uppermost, upon her breast. Then he goes to the dancing place where he composes and sings the song. Finally he returns to the graveyard to fall into the arms of his beloved, the knife piercing his heart.

It is the springtime, the beautiful time, Dagainai,
I am going with the flocks to the pastures.

Dagainai, I have started this morning for the pastures,
My flock is resting under the deodar trees.

The bear made a noise in the mountains, Dagainai,
I learnt that noise from the bear.

Dagainai, the leopard stalked in this fashion,
I learnt stalking from the leopard.

The frogs were swimming in the stream, Dagainai,
I learnt swimming from the frogs.

¹The Kalash do not bury their dead as Moslems do, but place them in wooden coffins above ground in the graveyard.

Daginai, I am milking the goats this morning,
 When I drink the milk I smell the fragrance of the *kamma* grass.
 When I eat the cheese I shall smell the juniper, Daginai,
 When I eat the butter I shall smell the birch-tree.¹

Daginai, whose flocks are those across the valley?
 Perhaps they are the flocks of the *mullah* of Orgutch
 Daginai, the smoke from my juniper fire has gone up to the sky
 Daginai, the smoke from your fire is failing—what has
 happened to you?

Daginai, I reach the valley with my flock . . .
 Oh Daginai, Daginai. My heart must break: my broken heart.
 Daginai, your breast turns yellow like the *beshu* flower,
 Daginai, my horse will gallop to your coffin in the graveyard,
 Daginai, my horse will raise the dust as it gallops to the graveyard,
 Daginai, the white-handled knife shall enter my heart, Oh
 Daginai, Daginai.

¹He is referring to the wrapping of butter in the papery bark of the high altitude birch. The cheese will smell of juniper because juniper foliage is used to 'stopper' the necks of the skins in which the milk is stored, in order to keep out flies etc. *Kamma* is a fragrant grass that grows in some pastures and flavours the milk. The reference to the *mullah* of Orgutch which follows is obscure, but it comes in every version of the song we heard, however incomplete the song is otherwise. Orgutch is a small village in the main valley north of Ayun.

CHAPTER NINE

'FROM NORTH, SOUTH, EAST AND WEST'

'Two brothers quarrelled in Bashkar, so one of them came to Kalam. His name was Kal. His brother's name was Bal.'

*Villager of Kalam,
at the head of the Swat valley.*

The Shins . . . look upon themselves as the *creme de la creme*.

*H.C. Marsh,
traveller in Gilgit and Punial, 1875.*

Vestiges of dead faiths meet you at every turn.

*Algernon Durand,
Political Agent in Gilgit, 1889-93.*

From earliest times the history of Kohistan is of people coming in from adjoining regions. From north, south, east and west they have come; as single individuals, in tens, in hundreds, and in thousands; as pilgrims, as missionaries, as ambassadors, as soldiers-of-fortune, as administrators, as merchants, as nomadic pastoralists, as refugees, as invading armies (though only occasionally), and as migrating tribes. Because of the difficulties of travel and the mutual isolation of even neighbouring valleys, many of these historical movements have been confined geographically and 'frozen' linguistically. With a map of languages one can still follow their outlines, and on the ground they can still be traced in scraps of tradition and in social conventions.

Although little direct evidence remains, it is clear, for example, that a thousand or more years ago, a powerful tribe moved north up the Indus valley and its tributaries, conquering and settling among the previous inhabitants. These invaders brought their own language, Shina, which they established to the exclusion of other languages wherever they settled. A map of the present-day distribution of Shina shows the course and extent of this invasion: up the Indus into the Gilgit valley, into the smaller valleys to the east of Gilgit including Bagrot, into the lower end of the Hunza valley as far up as Minapin, and up the main Gilgit valley through Punial and beyond the Yasin confluence. On the map these 'high-tide marks' coincide roughly with the 8,000 feet contour. That the Shins (as the descendants of this tribe are

known) came as invaders is borne out by their own view of themselves as conquerors. They refuse to give their daughters in marriage to descendants of the previous inhabitants, but are willing to take daughters from them, which also indicates their supremacy. The descendants of the people whom the Shins conquered still live on in the same valleys and in the same villages as the Shins, but we could not find any tradition among them of the days before the Shins, nor of any local language before Shina. Indeed they seem to be ignorant of the Shin conquest altogether, but subconsciously they still respond to it by being ready to give their daughters in marriage to Shins.

We used to ask in the villages we visited whether anything was known about the founding of the village and its earliest inhabitants. Usually the old men could tell us something at least, if only an odd name or episode from a larger historical event, and so it was for the Shin invasion. At Minawar (the village whose artificial glacier we had inspected) we heard how two brothers had come over the mountains from the south and had found the place uninhabited but suitable for irrigation. They began to build an irrigation channel with the intention of settling but they quarrelled, and one of them, whose name was Kino, chased out the other, whose name was Shal. After twelve years Shal returned, killed Kino, and settled in his place to become the ancestor of the present Shin inhabitants of the village.

At nearby Khomar, where Ghulam Abbas introduced us to the old headman, we heard a similar story with the additional fact that the brothers were twins who at birth had been joined back-to-back. The headman could even point out two rocks known as Domo and Chocho where the brothers stood to throw stones at each other. He himself claims direct descent from Domo, who was the victor. In themselves the stories are scarcely history, but put together with the language map and with the Shins's social attitudes they tell us something about the Shin invasion. They confirm the coming of the Shins from the south. The names they preserve suggest that the Shins were not Moslem at that time. They tell that neither Minawar nor Khomar were previously inhabited. And they show how the headman of Khomar and his ancestors got their position and why, thirty generations later, that family has first claim to Khomar's irrigation water.

In Chilas we came across another scrap. 'Long, long ago,' we were told, three Shin brothers came to Chilas and

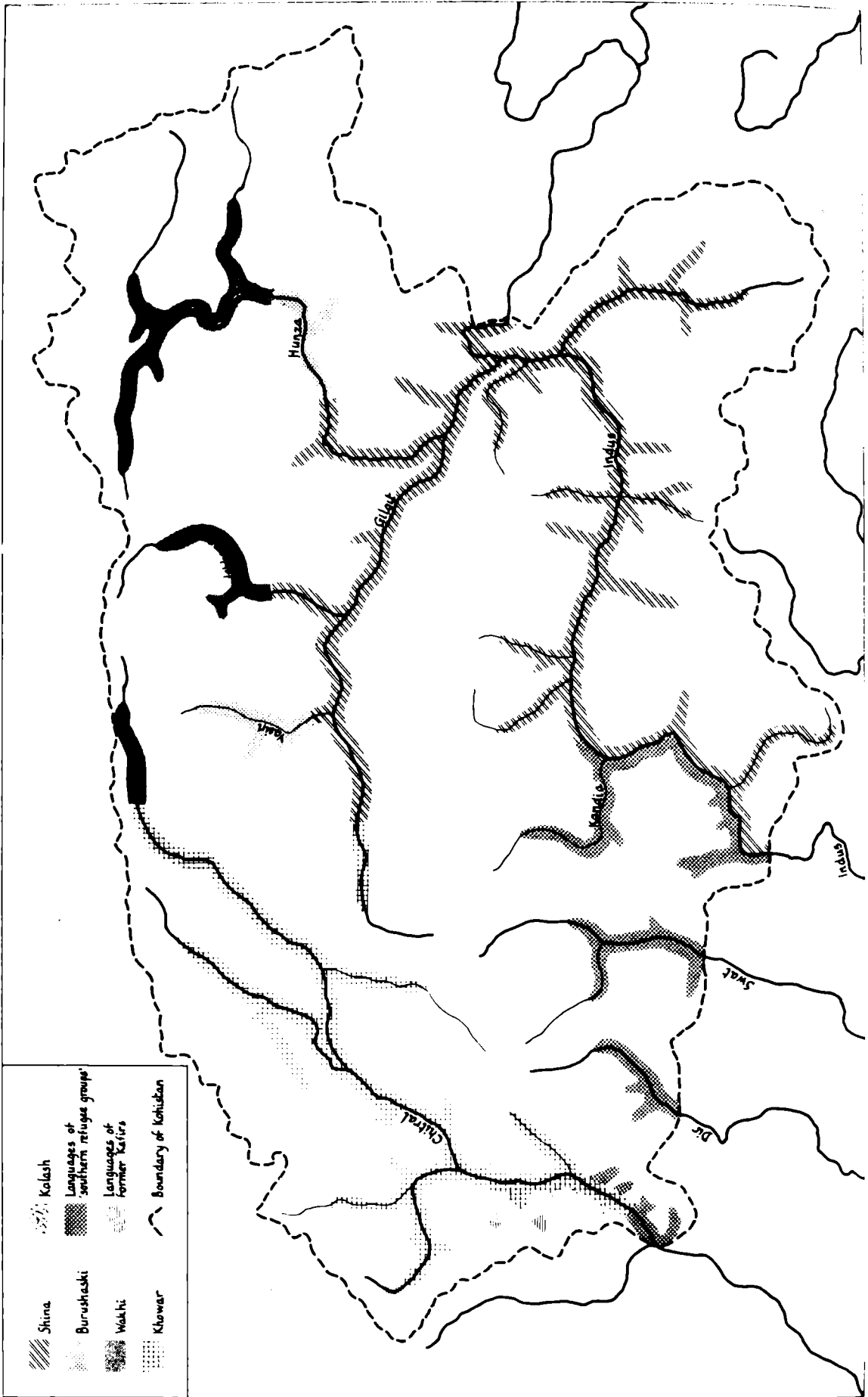
conquered the previous inhabitants. The eldest, Boto, settled in Chilas village. The second, Machuq, went across the Indus and settled there. The third, Kanon, settled in a valley west of Nanga Parbat. This was apparently all that was known, and we found ourselves wondering by what strange chance these three names had been preserved for a thousand years when everything else about them was forgotten. What sort of men were they? Did they find the mountains cold after the southern plains? Did they hunt with bows and arrows? How did Machuq cross the Indus—were there skinrafts in those days? Did they bring shields of rhinoceros hide with them, and is this how there comes to be a word in Shina for ‘rhinoceros’ when no present-day Shin has seen one? Indeed it seems surprising how much has been forgotten about the Shin invasion, considering what an important event it must have been. A thousand years is not so long for illiterate memories: we met one old man who could recite the names of his ancestors since the seventh century.

In the Hunza and Yasin valleys, above the limits of the Shin invasion, the previous inhabitants remained independent of the Shins. Consequently their descendants, the present-day inhabitants of Hunza, Nagar and Yasin, continue to speak their own ancient language. This is Burushaski, which Colonel Lorimer pictured as ‘standing at bay’, a language that once covered a wider area but has now been displaced in all except its most inaccessible territory. It is an extraordinary language—one of its peculiarities is thirty-eight forms of the plural—and according to Mrs. Lorimer it is ‘unrelated to any other known forms of human speech, alive or dead’. No one knows where the Burushaski-speakers came from originally, though they have probably been established in Kohistan for thousands of years. Some writers have suggested they may be a pre-Aryan relic.

In contrast, there are members of another ethnic group settled in the upper Hunza valley who have been there for only a century or two. These are Wakhis, whose forefathers came over the northern passes from Wakhan and found this high country uninhabited. Subsequently there have been two other infiltrations from Wakhan into Kohistan: one into the head of the Ishkoman valley with Ali Mardan in the 1880s; and the other, which started within living memory and is still slowly continuing, into the open *pamir* country in the far north of Chitral.

So far in this chapter I have mentioned only three peoples—the Shins, the Burushaski-speakers and the Wakhis—but already one can see the diversity of Kohistan's population. For the anthropologist and the linguist it can be a puzzle. If the anthropologist tries to distinguish between even these three peoples by physical characteristics, he will find that the Burushaski speakers and the Wakhis of Hunza are indistinguishable, although they differ widely in origin and language. On the other hand the linguist will not be able to distinguish the Shins from other people who now speak Shina. We struggled with these and other inconsistencies in an effort to understand the composition of the population, but finally we abandoned scholarship and consistency in favour of the more convenient distinctions that the local people use among themselves. The total population of 350,000 then falls into a couple of dozen groups, the more important of which have already been mentioned (Map 4). As well as the Shins, the Burushaski-speakers, and the Wakhis, there are the Kho of Chitral, whose houses we examined and whose songs we heard, the non-Moslem Kalash, the nomadic Gujars, and the industrious craftsmen and minstrels. Some of the groups are large—the Kho are 100,000 or more strong—but others number only a thousand or two. Some of them have been in Kohistan for centuries and some for only a generation. Some are concentrated in certain valleys while others are scattered in small numbers throughout Kohistan. Some are found only in Kohistan while others have kinsmen in the neighbouring regions. Some are of royal or saintly descent and some have been menials. Yet despite this original rich diversity the overall impression continues to be one of unity because all these people have had to make the same sorts of adaptations in order to live in their extraordinary environment.

The origins of the Kho are not known, beyond a vague tradition that they come from the north. For several centuries they have been the dominant group in the Chitral valley and its tributaries, and they have also penetrated the head of the Gilgit valley. They have established their Khowar language as a lingua franca, and wherever they have settled their sub-culture is dominant. The Kalash, now confined to three small valleys in the south of Chitral, still sing about ancient exploits further north, making it clear that their territory once extended up to Reshun. Between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries they were slowly overcome by the Kho and then converted to Islam, a process which is



Map 4. Distribution of main languages. (Continuous shading does not mean continuous settlement. Small language groups and intermingling of languages are not shown.)

continuing even now. Only two generations ago there were five Kalash valleys, and there are villages in the main valley that still retain Kalash names, Kalash customs, and the Kalash language. Now only a thousand people adhere to the old religion, and gradually they too are turning Moslem.

In other valleys in the south-west of Kohistan there are a number of small groups. According to their own traditions they were driven north into the mountains in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when the Pathans overran the plains and foothills to the south. Such 'southern refugee groups' are found at the heads of the Swat and Dir valleys, in Kandia and adjacent valleys and in southernmost Chitral. Apparently they were not Moslems at the time of their migration, although all have since become Moslem. Between them they retain half a dozen languages, at least one of which is spoken by less than five hundred people. Two or three of these groups live in southern Chitral, and what with them, the Kalash, refugees from Kafiristan, some Persian-speaking gunsmiths in the Shishi valley, some stray Shins, the Gujars, and the Kho, southern Chitral is one of the most polyglot places in Asia.

Two other refugee groups have settled in Kohistan more recently. One represents those who fled across the border from Kafiristan in 1895-6 to escape forcible conversion to Islam by the Afghans, but all of whom had become Moslem voluntarily by 1940. They live at the heads of three or four valleys in the south-west, adjacent to their homeland across the Afghan border. The second group is made up of a small number of Turki caravan drivers from Kashgar and Yarkhand who happened to be trading in Gilgit when the Chinese closed the East Turkistan border during the 1950s. Some of these unfortunate men have been separated from their wives and families ever since, and although most of them manage to make a living from shops in Gilgit bazaar, they are sad and demoralized people.

Another important category of people, well-established in Kohistan, is the craftsmen. In most valleys there are small numbers of people who provide certain traditional services, in addition to farming on their own account. The blacksmiths, the minstrels, the gold-washers and raftsmen, the leather-workers, and the professional weavers are all from one or other of half a dozen craft groups. Generally they speak the local language, whatever it is, but in the Shishi valley the gunsmiths have retained a dialect of Persian, and in Hunza

the women of one group have retained an obscure language which Colonel Lorimer identified as being of Indian origin—perhaps they found Burushaski too difficult. Tradition tells that most of these craft groups came from the south, which is supported by this linguistic relic and by their being more numerous towards the south. In parts of upper Chitral there are no craft groups at all, and people have to manage without their services.

Then there are the Gujars, who were turned off their former grazing places in the Punjab to make way for irrigation. They are comparative newcomers to Kohistan and, like the Wakhis, slipped in to use pasture which was not otherwise used at that time. A few have settled in small untidy villages here and there in the south, but the majority remain nomadic, grazing their animals on the plentiful pastures of the south in summer and retreating beyond the mountains in winter. Gujars are found leading similar nomadic lives in Kafiristan to the west and around the Vale of Kashmir to the south-east.

It took us many months to sort out these groups and to learn something of their special characteristics, but in time we could often place a man according to his features and the details of his dress, and even by his bearing and his gestures. We also learnt that the movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, though remembered in more detail, are less important than the earlier ones. It was the ancient distribution of the Burushaski-speakers and the Kalash, and the migrations of the Shins and the Kho, that decided how flat land and irrigation water and pasture were to be divided among the present-day inhabitants of Kohistan. When Boto, Machuq and Kanon divided the Chilas area between them, and when Shal and Domo built their irrigation channels and took their flocks to graze, they established a pattern which persists to this day.

* * *

Our friends assisted us in making distinctions between the groups, sometimes deliberately with perceptive and shrewd observations, but more often by casual remarks and the tones of their voices.

‘Did you notice the man we passed just now? He must be a Shin from Bagrot. I can guess it from the way his shirt

fastens to the side instead of in the centre. Everyone used to wear shirts like that once, but now it is only in Bagrot . . .'

'Look at those lazy fellows beating their donkeys. And they haven't even tied the loads properly. They must be Wakhis from Ishkoman. Opium eaters!'

A slight man with a scanty beard, small sallow features, an unobtrusive feline manner and a dark cap: 'He's from down the Indus—Kandia probably. I wonder where he left his rifle.'

'Can we talk to some Gujars about those special Gujar goats?' we would ask one of our friends. 'Gujars? I don't know any Gujars,' he would reply, 'I saw one in the bazaar this morning. I will go and see if he is still there.' And he would come back with the bewildered Gujar, a tall man with a long nose, an untidy beard and a dark *choga*, whom we would ply with tea and questions. The poor man would become more and more confused and uneasy, until the friend would say, 'Shall we let him go? He doesn't seem to be very well informed.' It was always kindly said, and the victim was always treated with the dignified courtesy so characteristic of Kohistan, but underneath was the unspoken comment, 'What else can you expect from a Gujar?'

And so we began to see something of the attitudes and prejudices that the members of one group have towards those of another. The nomadic Gujars are constantly on the move in search of the best grazing. Consequently they are known by sight to many and personally to few, and have a poor reputation throughout Kohistan. As one friend put it, 'There is always some secret about their lives.' They are said to steal cattle left to graze in the pastures, and to disappear before they have paid for the grazing their own animals have consumed. They are also said to stink of butter: 'He stinks like a Gujar' is a common simile in Gilgit, and 'He swears like a Gujar' is another. Gujars rank low socially, and no Shin or Kho farmer would think of giving his daughter in marriage to one. In any case the nomadic life would be improper for a 'respectable' girl. But Gujar girls occasionally make acceptable wives for over-worked farmers because they are brought up to walk long distances and carry heavy loads, and so they are strong and can do a man's work in the fields. And whatever their other prejudices, we found people ready to admit to the Gujars' skill with animals, especially with the buffalo which the Gujars brought with them from the plains. 'Buffaloes are very difficult animals to keep in these mountains,' one farmer remarked. 'During the winter the Gujars burn a fire in

the stalls specially to keep the animals warm. That is an amazing thing. No one else would think of going to such trouble.'

The Wakhis too are recognized as skilled herdsmen who make the most of their animals, especially their yaks. We saw this ourselves in the far north of Chitral, where we lived on barley bread with yak milk, yak cream, yak butter, yak buttermilk, yak curd, yak cheese and yak *kurrut*, slept on yak hair rugs, tied our baggage onto yaks' backs with yak hair ropes, wore yak leather boots, and rode through the *pamirs* upon the backs of yaks. Generally the Wakhis are thought by their neighbours to be amiable, indolent and rather slow-witted. They also come in for censure because of their habit of taking opium. We asked one of them about this. He retorted that people who live at lower altitudes may not need opium, but if they were to live on the *pamirs* at 12,000 feet, where snow lies for more than half the year, and temperatures remain below freezing for weeks on end, they would find that opium was the only thing that would keep them going through the winter.¹

Other groups that rank low socially, though for entirely different reasons, are the craftsmen. Here it is a prejudice to do with fears of pollution, though these fears must be irrational because there is nothing to justify them in Islam, nor in the crafts themselves as practised in Kohistan. Indeed if there are no craftsmen living nearby, farmers tan their own leather and weave their own cloth. Similarly it is not the making of music that contaminates the minstrels for, although no one else would touch the pipe and drum which are professional 'tools of the trade', anyone musically inclined may play the sitar or flute or tambourine. So it seems that it is the persons of the craftsmen rather than their crafts that are taboo. Such a suggestion is contrary to Islamic teaching, according to which all men are considered equal, but it is substantiated by the segregation of craftsmen in separate hamlets and by the refusal, until a generation or so ago, of farmers in some valleys to eat together with them.

There seems little doubt that the prejudice is foreign, and is derived from the caste system of ancient India. There are even similarities with ancient Indian practice in the method of paying the craftsmen. Formerly they were not paid piecemeal for jobs done, but received a fixed amount of grain

¹When Cockerill camped on the *pamirs* at the head of the Chitral valley in November the cold was so intense that the ink froze in his pen. For each word written in his diary he had first to hold the nib over a candle flame.

from each of their client households every year, and in return provided their special services whenever needed. Now, under the influence of Islam, and with a growing market economy, this practice is breaking down, and so is the prejudice. Anyone with access to a suitable head of water can build a mill, anyone who is skilled with his hands can become a weaver, and anyone can try his hand at gold-washing.¹ In Hakis we had even heard of a Kho farmer who was learning to be a blacksmith. 'Would I marry my daughter to a minstrel?' a friend repeated the ultimate question. 'Well, not from choice. But if they eloped together, I would have to make the most of it now, I suppose. But not in the old days. In my grandfather's time we would have killed them both.'

More regrettable, we felt, is the way that the Kalash are discriminated against, for this is conscious and deliberate. For example shopkeepers exploit them and try to seize their land for unsettled and even fabricated debts. They say in Chitral that a Kalash loan is never settled. Then a bland *mullah* may come along and offer to put things right—'but only for a convert of course'. The Kalash are seldom physically persecuted now, but there are other subtle difficulties. 'Sometimes one or two Kalash come to Drosh to go to the hospital,' a friend told us, 'but they can't stay in the mosque like other travellers, so they find themselves in trouble. People in Drosh are quite friendly towards them, but they don't think of offering food or hospitality to them. I don't understand it myself. They are people like you and me, and they need food and shelter. Many times they have stayed in my guest-room,' he added simply, 'Where else are they to go?'

People who become Moslem before others always seem to gain a social advantage. In the Kandia valley there are two lineages of the same group, apparently similar in all respects, but one lineage will not give its daughters in marriage to the other. The explanation seems to be that when the first lineage accepted Islam, it became impossible for it to continue giving daughters to the other. From this a convention grew

¹Occasionally a farmer of another group who has suffered a sudden disaster, perhaps having lost his fields in a flood, tries his hand at gold-washing, but he generally finds that he lacks the necessary skills to make even a bare living. Occasionally, however, a gold-washer finds a nugget worth several hundred rupees, and if this should happen to the 'amateur' then, so people say, he is lost. The hereditary goldwasher can take such sudden wealth in his stride, and does not allow it to interrupt the pattern of his life; but the amateur is easily demoralized by it, and becomes obsessed by gold-washing and by the chance of further riches. Stories are told of men in this predicament who have neglected their farms, sold their possessions, and left their families destitute.

up which is still being observed ten generations later, even though the second lineage followed suit and has been Moslem almost as long as the first. Similarly descendants of the Islamic missionaries to Kohistan are held in esteem, although the present generation may make no pretensions to sanctity or learning whatever. In some valleys these descendants are excused taxes by virtue of their ancestry, and in some they even expect certain gifts every year from the rest of the population.

It did not do, we soon realized, to take the ideas and comments of one group about another too literally or seriously. Not that there was antagonism involved, nor indeed strong feelings of any kind, except for the occasional clash of economic interest over pasture or irrigation water. These were simply the kinds of ideas, right and wrong, that people collectively have about other people collectively. In any case the differences between the groups seemed small compared to the differences between the people of the mountains and those of the plains. This was brought home to us on one of our journeys, and we then realized that the boundaries of Kohistan are more than topographical. From southern Chitral we crossed the Lowarai pass on our way to the Kohistan villages at the head of the Swat valley, and we met the first Pathans for many months. After so long in Kohistan we were immediately struck by the physical differences, but more particularly by the truculence, the grim expressions, and the noisy bad manners. 'They look at me as though I don't belong on this earth,' remarked Elizabeth; and Abdul Samad complained, 'Whenever I get among these Pathans my head starts to go round and round.' None of us felt at ease on that journey until we reached northern Swat and the territory of those whom Samad called 'our people again', although ironically he could converse with them only in the language of the Pathans. For us it was a lesson in the affinity that the peoples of Kohistan have—and what is more, feel—for each other, even though they are of such different origins.

It puzzled us to find that the events of the distant past are still considered so important today. It seemed strange that the military advantages, the spiritual qualities, the virtue and the opprobrium that accrued to certain people centuries ago should remain attached to their descendants now. The Shins's claim to superiority, the Khomar headman's first turn at the irrigation water, the ancient and increasingly inequitable divisions of pastures, the status of the missionaries'

descendants—even the fact that Ghulam Abbas may be politely addressed as 'Wazir' although he is not a Wazir—at first all this seemed anomalous and irrational. Later we realized that, in personal relationships at least, the past and its associations, though not forgotten, are readily transcended. One simply includes a man's ancestry, with all the associations involved, as one of his personal qualities in the same way that one is aware of his age or his appearance or his reputation. A 'good man' in Kohistan is a man of integrity who conforms to the ethos, but above all he is a man who is courteous, generous and humble, greeting and acknowledging greetings from everyone, and willing to give and receive hospitality from anyone.

Sometimes we used to sit in the doorway of a shop in Gilgit bazaar and gossip with friends about the people who passed by. Some would be their friends and acquaintances. 'There goes Mustan from Yasin,' Hamid would say. 'He is a very knowledgeable farmer. We had better catch him one day and ask him those questions about the new maize seed.' 'This is Mustafa Shah. You can call him an honorary inhabitant of Nagar,' Abbas would say, as a large perspiring man came within earshot. 'His grandfather was a Seyed from Persia, a very holy man. About this fellow we have our doubts. . . ' and Mustafa Shah would smile shyly, cuff Abbas gently, and flop down beside us. 'Oh look, here comes Daulat Shah. He was a companion of Colonel Lorimer and Colonel Schomberg. You must meet him. Uncle, uncle, here are two friends from England, who knew Colonel Lorimer . . . ' and another friendship was sealed.

Friends, talk, the warm sun, time to linger, to reminisce, time for people, gossip, enquiries, answers, handshakes, smiles. Finally Abbas, getting hungry, would introduce us to someone else, perhaps Haji Mahmud Bhai, one of the unfortunate Turkis, who has consoled himself during his exile by making the pilgrimage to Mecca (Plate 16.3). And then, by means known only to Abbas, talk about Mahmud Bhai's shop would be turned into an invitation for us all to visit his house to try the famous mutton dumplings of Kashgar. It was obvious, from the casual familiarity with which they greeted each other and sat down together, that these men were friends, irrespective of ancestry, language and any other differences between them. And as far as language is concerned, Ghulam Abbas speaks eight, and Hamid seven, so that is no problem.

The ethnic movements that I have mentioned in the first section of this chapter, and others like them, have given the population of Kohistan a 'layered' structure, the older groups forming the substrata, and the newer ones distributed on top. Such stratification is typical of Kohistan: religious beliefs, political and social organization, music and dancing, and material culture all show traces of early patterns which have been overlain by later ones. This is found in any society, but in Kohistan the effect is unusually pronounced. One reason is the exceptional variety of peoples and ideas that have met in Kohistan. And another is the peculiar geographical environment which tends to isolate and preserve whatever takes refuge in it, whether men themselves or their ideas.

An example that interested us was religious belief and its manifestations. The 'indigenous' beliefs of Kohistan seem to have been shamanistic and polytheistic. On these, at different times, were superimposed Zoroastrian, Hindu, and Buddhist ideas and practices, although we may suppose that for most of the population, hidden away in their valleys, such influences were weak and fragmentary. Last of all, and more profound in its influence, came Islam. Even within Islam there are traces of stratification, the Ismaili heresy succeeding the Shia in one valley, and being succeeded by Sunni orthodoxy in another.

We soon recognised traces of popular Hinduism and Zoroastrianism in the names of places and people, in the prejudices against the craftsmen, in occasional traditions of cremation and exposure of the dead, in stories such as Shiri Badat, and in the superstitions about fire. How or when Hindu ideas first reached Kohistan we do not know, though we can guess that it was a very long time ago. Some of the beliefs of the Kalash and of the former Kafirs are similar to popular Hindu beliefs, and some of the Kalash and Kafir gods have names similar to Vedic gods. The first contact may have preceded the emergence of Hinduism as it is today, but in any case there must have been later infusions of Hindu related ideas, caste among them. The aversion among the Kalash towards menstruation may have had the same source, although it is a common aversion in many parts of the world. As for Zoroastrianism, there is a tradition that the prophet Zarathustra himself taught in the Oxus valley during the sixth century B.C., and his teachings certainly flourished in Badakshan and Wakhan until Buddhism displaced them, so it is hardly surprising that traces survive in Kohistan.

The traces of Buddhism are more tangible: the figure on the rock-face beyond Raja Mumtaz's orchard near Gilgit; a stupa at Thol; engravings of stupas on rocks in the Chitral valley; copies of some Buddhist texts written on birch-bark which were dug up near Gilgit, and so on. We may guess that Buddhism was filtering into Kohistan during the second century A.D. during its long and circuitous passage from India via Afghanistan and Turkistan to China and Tibet. Certainly by A.D. 403, when the Chinese pilgrim Fa-Hsien travelled through Kohistan with such difficulty, Buddhism was well established, with many monasteries in Darel and Swat. Two hundred years later his compatriot, Huen Tsang, reported that Buddhism was still the predominant religion, although by then many monasteries were in ruins, and the monks incapable of understanding their own texts.

Islam seems to have first come near to Kohistan in the eighth century, during one of the Arab excursions across Afghanistan from the newly conquered Persia. Aurel Stein has described how, for a few years, Kohistan became the unlikely scene of imperial manoeuvring between the Arabs, their allies the Tibetans, and the Chinese. At one point, in an attempt to drive a wedge between the Tibetans and the Arabs, a Chinese army of three thousand succeeded in crossing the 15,000 feet Darkot pass into Yasin. This was a remarkable achievement which, as Stein remarks, deserves to rank with the great Alpine feats of Hannibal and Napoleon. It evidently impressed the people of Central Asia, for Chinese annals record that 'seventy-two kingdoms of divers barbarian peoples were all seized with fear and made their submission.' Chinese garrisons were established in Yasin and Gilgit, although food for them had to be imported from Kashmir, as another imperial garrison was to find out a thousand years later. The Chinese also occupied Chitral. But only a few years later their main force was defeated north of the Pamirs, and they withdrew to Chinese Turkistan. According to tradition, it was the provincial governors whom the Chinese left behind in Chitral who then established themselves as the Reis dynasty, the predecessors of the Kator. There are still a few members of the Reis family living in Chitral now: one of them is a truck driver.

The presence of the Arabs to the north-west can probably be connected with another tradition that tells of an Arab invasion of Chitral that took place at this time, and of the resistance by the Chitralis under their semi-mythical king,

Bahman.¹ This was probably the first contact between Kohistan and Islam, but it can have been only a fleeting one. After this there are vague local traditions of incursions by Yengez Khan and Timur, but it is doubtful whether these had much effect on the introduction of Islam. Nonetheless the various forms of Islam, first the Ismaili and Shia, and then the Sunni, seem to have become established in Kohistan some time after the thirteenth century. Typically for Kohistan, the process of conversion was very slow, and even now it remains incomplete, with a thousand Kalash still to go.

Most of the prescribed observances of Islam can be clearly seen in Kohistan, as everywhere else in the Moslem world. The orthodox pray five times a day, they fast during the month of Ramadhan, they revere the Koran as the word of God, they have their sons circumcised, they celebrate the Islamic festivals, and they abstain from 'unclean' foods. However it is one thing to introduce new observances, and another to eliminate old customs. It is only within the present century that the Islamic laws of inheritance have begun to succeed the older 'customary' laws, and only recently that Islamic sanction for the marriage of cousins has become effective. The focus of a marriage is now the Islamic ceremony, but much remains that is non-Islamic. Several of the old non-Islamic festivals have gone, but several still remain. Wine is still made, at least by the Ismailis, and hashish is widely smoked in Chitral: both are forbidden in orthodox Islam. The older 'Ju Na' is still heard in Nagar and Hunza as well as 'Salaam Aleikum'.

The early missionaries and their disciples followed Muhammed's own example by desecrating or destroying the tangible relics of the older gods. But again it is one thing to destroy shrines, and another to change peoples' ideas. In this aspect of the conversion the missionaries were less efficient, and beneath the new layer of observance and rule many of the older ideas persist, as we were to discover for ourselves.

For non-believers from a different culture, Islam can sometimes seem strict and austere. We felt something of this in the

¹ Bahman seems to have been a remarkable man, and his reign is still spoken of as a 'golden age'. They say that places now barren and unirrigable used to be irrigated in his time by water brought in pipes made of the horns of markhors. When the invasion came, he proposed that instead of fighting between the two armies, with all the consequent loss of life, the outcome should be decided by single combat. He himself represented his people, and at the end of the first day it seems that neither he nor his Arab opponent had secured an advantage. Then the Arabs put forward another champion for the second day, and Bahman, already tired by his previous exertions, was overcome.

more orthodox south, but in the northern valleys men do not take religion more seriously than they take themselves.¹ Nor do they always take their *mullahs* seriously either. *Mullahs* in Kohistan are respected for their personal qualities, and for their learning if they have any, but not because they are *mullahs*. When a group of *mullahs* recently started to call for a holy war in Kashmir a man in the crowd objected, saying that the people of Gilgit and Chitral had fought in Kashmir in 1948 and had never seen a single *mullah* anywhere near the fighting. 'When you *mullahs* lead us in the fighting then we will listen to you,' he said. The crowd assented and the *mullahs* went away abashed.

One consequence of the spread of Islam in Kohistan was the strengthening of the cultural links with the Moslem countries to the west and north. There had been trade and other contacts with these countries, as much as the mountains allowed, since long before Islam—even the early Kalash hero Lulio sang of bringing 'the seven-eared kettle' from Badakshan—but now the common religion was to serve as a ready vehicle for cultural influences, particularly those of Persia. Persian features and styles which were already established in Badakshan and Turkistan seeped into the western and northern valleys of Kohistan to overlay the older and more local ideas. We noticed the Persian influence in arts such as singing and dancing. The older style in songs is represented by Burushaski and Kafir songs, the imagery of which is mostly pastoral, hunting or military, and they seem rustic and unsophisticated when compared with the elegances and airs of the Khowar love song. When the Kho singer describes his beloved as a bulbul, and compares her lips with rubies and her teeth with pearls, and when he sings of himself as a moth burning its wings in the flame of love, he is using Persian imagery. Even in recent years, when the poets of Chitral gathered to celebrate Pakistan's Independence Day by reciting their compositions in Khowar, Shahzada Hussam-ul-Mulk, who presided, used to offer his praises and comments

¹The Ismaili influence in the northern valleys has probably contributed to this. The Ismailis originated in a succession dispute. They follow the Aga Khans, descendants of Ismail, the elder son of the sixth Shia Imam. Their beliefs and laws differ from those of both Sunnis and Shias, and their prescribed observances are different. Until the present Aga Khan discouraged it, Ismailis in Kohistan did not hesitate to make wine and spirit—both local practices before Islam—and in Chitral we traced an association between Ismailism and the growing of hashish. The seclusion of women is less strict; Haj is a visit to the Aga Khan instead of the pilgrimage to Mecca; and holy war is interpreted as the personal struggle against one's own wrong tendencies.

in Persian. Wazir Ali Shah gave us another contemporary, though more homely, example. He told us how his grandmother saw a Persian embroidery pattern that she liked and copied, and how it has since spread through the whole of Chitral.

Many words used in Khowar are Persian, and some of the legends and fables we heard were originally Persian, though like the songs, they are now set in the Kohistan landscape. Much of the court life that used to revolve around the rulers of Chitral and Gilgit, with its regalia and recreations, was Persian in style and inspiration. Much of the traditional administration of these states was based on Persian practice, and the titles for some of the officials were Persian and Turki. Even the Khowar word for the ruler of Chitral, Mehtar, is a Persian word for prince. The only written language used was Persian. Perhaps a vague awareness of this debt to Persia is expressed in the answer so often given in Chitral to the question, 'Where did this come from?' Whether 'this' referred to a turn of phrase or a matchlock gun, the answer would be 'from Badakshan', which itself is Persian-speaking and which has been the main route into Kohistan for the Persian influences.

The same question in Astor, Nagar or Hunza may be answered 'from Baltistan'. In Hunza they say that many of their customs and ceremonial dances came from Baltistan, and they regard Baltistan as their spiritual home. They say that the apricot originally came from there. Several genealogies of the ruling families of Kohistan can be traced to Baltistan; and Astor has both ruled, and been ruled by, Baltistan. In former times, when the Hispar route was more used, there was contact each summer between Nagar and Baltistan. We again find words, stories and practices which have come via the neighbouring region, but which originated further away: for example, the story of Kisar, which was described to us as having come from Baltistan, was originally a Tibetan myth. For us these eastern influences are exemplified by the 'Tibetan' tea that Ghulam Abbas's wife prepares for his breakfast each morning. The basic recipe is the same as the Tibetans', although on its passage through Ladakh and Baltistan it has been so elaborated that a Tibetan would hardly recognize the final brew.¹ Such borrowings from the east probably belong

¹ Take a level tablespoonful of green tea leaves and $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoonful of sodium bicarbonate. Add to 2 pints of cold water and boil until nearly dry. Add 2 pints of water, and again boil until nearly dry. Crush the tea leaves, add $\frac{3}{4}$ pint of milk until the colour is a pinkish-brown, add $\frac{3}{4}$ pint of water, and boil again. When boiling whisk vigorously. Then add a lump of butter the size of a walnut, and after five minutes add $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoonful of ground pepper and $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoonful of salt (or more to taste). Boil again and serve. Allow three hours for making.

to the time before Islam. Now Persian borrowings and Persian words are being laid on top. The Burushaski word for ruler is even being replaced by the Persian 'Mir'.

One cannot live for long in Kohistan without hearing about the 'Greek influence' and Alexander the Great. Everyone would like to be associated with 'Sikander', and most of the ruling families of Kohistan, as well as those of Wakhan, Shignan and Darwaz have claimed descent from him. One of the former rulers of Hunza claimed descent from a union between Alexander and one of the Rakaposhi fairies. However that may be, there are plenty of people, both in Kohistan and outside, ready to advance the theory that the people of Nagar and Hunza are the descendants of Greek soldiers who accompanied Alexander from Macedonia. Similar claims have been made independently for the people of Kafiristan to the west and Baltistan to the east. Yet there is little to support any of these ideas beyond a few blue and grey eyes and a Shina variation of the story of King Midas and his donkey's ears.¹

Perhaps the nearest connection with ancient Greece—and it is a very remote one—is the decorative wood-carving of the southern valleys. We found that the pillars of some of the mosques and some of the old wooden grave markers are elaborately carved with motifs derived from the Graeco-Buddhist religious art that evolved in Gandhara more than four centuries after Alexander (Plate 14.3). These motifs, which already represent one eclectic tradition, are often combined with simple geometric patterns, similar to those of Kafiristan, which Professor Jettmar has suggested represent the Kohistan tradition. The overall effect is rich and pleasing, and it is again typical of Kohistan that a more sophisticated style from outside has not been allowed to supercede a local style, but has been laid over it. How these Gandharan motifs

¹ Another historic figure said to have travelled to Kohistan is Jesus Christ. Some people believe that Christ survived his crucifixion, made the overland journey, and died later in Kashmir. Some say that he crossed present day Iran and Afghanistan and went up the Kunar valley into Chitral with two disciples. At Kesu, between Drosh and Ayun, one of the disciples died and was buried, and his grave is still to be seen. Christ and the other disciple carried on up the Chitral valley to Mastuj, where they turned east and crossed the Shandur pass into the Gilgit valley. From Gilgit they went on to Kashmir. The evidence for this is as remarkable as the theory itself. First, the grave at Kesu, which in other respects is similar to nearby graves, has been constructed so close to the edge of a sheer drop to the river that it cannot be aligned towards Mecca, as Islamic graves should be. Instead it points roughly towards Jerusalem, 'and therefore must be a Jewish grave'. Secondly, the name Kesu 'must be a corruption of Christ'. But local tradition has it that the village, which was formerly Kalash, was named after a man called Kes.

reached Kohistan we do not know. Perhaps they came with Buddhism; perhaps the Shins brought them; or perhaps they came with Islam and the builders of the mosques, paradox though that would be. However it was, they rarely reached beyond the southern valleys. Again we noticed the beginning of a modern deterioration, both in taste and in craftsmanship. When Gyebullah of Niat village proudly showed us the structure he had recently put over the grave of his murdered brother, we found it hard to express any enthusiasm.

It is scarcely surprising that some of the influences and ideas reaching Kohistan should have been adapted there. The physical environment demands a response from man himself if he is to survive. The reinterpretation of foreign ideas against this physical setting was inevitable, considering that only a hundred years ago many of the inhabitants of Kohistan thought of the whole world as made up of mountains and valleys like their own. What is surprising is the variety of influences and ideas that have survived in a recognizable form. It is as though the Kohistani is always ready to try a new idea, provided it can be adapted to life in the mountains, but is never ready to give up any of his older ideas. This makes for a situation that has been described as 'an anthropologist's dream'. Without being anthropologists, Elizabeth and I were to find ourselves delving into several aspects of life in Kohistan. One of these was traditional political organization. Another was a group of ancient religious beliefs that still outlived the whole succession of 'imported' religions.

CHAPTER TEN

A COLLEGE OF SOOTHSAYERS

Every woman has traces of the *ruī* in her.

D.L.R. Lorimer

*Political Agent in Gilgit, 1920-24,
in an unpublished note.*

Bitan Bato of Yasin knew the secrets of peoples' hearts. One day a man went to consult him, taking an offering of salt. On the way he thought, 'Why take the salt? I'll hide it here and go on,' and he hid the salt and went on. Reaching the *bitan*, he said, 'You are a *bitan*, so you know what is in my heart. Accomplish my wish.' Then the *bitan* replied, 'If I am a *bitan*, would you come to me leaving salt on the road?' At these words the man was overcome with shame, and returned to his home.

Story from Yasin, recorded by Lorimer.¹

We were sitting with friends in a house in Gilgit when the subject of *ruis* first came up. A *ruī* is an evil spirit which inhabits a woman, Abbas explained. Most of the time the woman lives a normal life—she marries, has children, and does her work—but from time to time, especially at night when she is sleeping, the *ruī* spirit leaves her body and flies off to join other *ruis* at one of their feasts. While the spirit is away the woman sleeps on, apparently without knowing that her spirit is elsewhere. The *ruis* gather at certain meeting places where they feast upon the spirit form of some normal person, man, woman or child, each *ruī* taking her turn to bring the victim. A day or so afterwards the still unsuspecting victim in normal life will die, apparently from natural causes.

We asked if people believe this. Oh yes, we were assured, certainly people believe it. If the deaths appear natural, how are *ruis* known about? There are some who have the ability to detect *ruis*, and others who have been chosen as victims, but who have escaped and told of their experience. Then is it known who are *ruis*? Oh yes, certainly. Is anything done about them? No, nothing. This puzzled us, and the more *ruī* stories we heard the more puzzling it became. Indeed, considering how dangerous *ruis* are said to be, the treatment of them, both in practice and in conversation, seemed casual.

¹ D.L.R. Lorimer, unpublished notes.

They are regarded more as victims of misfortune than as objects of hatred, a most enlightened attitude it seemed to us.

Sometimes a *rui's* intended victim realises his danger and escapes, or happens to be away from home so that the *rui* cannot find him. Then she takes a substitute for the feast, probably his cow or bullock. Long, long ago, Abbas told us, a man and a *rui* were lovers. She warned him that another *rui* was planning to catch him on a certain day and that he must escape. So on that day she took him to the very place where the *ruis* were going to have their feast, and hid him in an overhanging tree. The other *ruis* searched for him in vain, and finally took both his bullocks instead. During the feast the man's beloved managed to slip a couple of ribs up into the foliage of the tree where he was hiding for him to eat. At the end of the feast, when the *ruis* came to put the bones back in the skins and restore the bodies of the bullocks, they found there were two rib bones missing. Then there was a great argument about who was responsible, but no one would accept the blame, so they decided to make two substitute ribs out of the branches of the tree. The next day the man called his neighbours together and told them that his bullocks had already been eaten by *ruis*, so he was going to slaughter them. He also said that two ribs would be different, and when they opened the second bullock they found that two of its ribs were quite different in colour and texture.

We all expressed our appreciation of this story, and the talk then drifted away to other phenomena, and it was not until later that we again heard of *ruis*. On this occasion we learnt how a *rui* may appear to her intended victim as the woman she normally is, or in the form of certain animals. If her victim realises his danger but cannot escape he may try to make a fight of it. Normally the *rui* will win a fight, but if the victim manages to get an effective blow in first then the *rui* will die or will suffer a corresponding injury soon after. We were told another story, this time more circumstantial, which illustrated the point. One evening Darwesh, the son of Ali Rezar of Murtazabad in Hunza, was lying on his bed gazing up at the smoke-hole. He saw two locks of female hair appear and then they turned into a cat. He jumped up, grabbed the shovel that was used for the fire, and swiped at the cat, which fell down through the hole dead. In the middle of the night all the people in Murtazabad heard a woman's voice sobbing and crying out, 'Darwesh, the son of Ali Rezar, has killed my daughter.' The next day the woman's daughter fell out of the

tree where she was picking fruit, and died. 'Darwesh's grandson is in Gilgit now,' our informant added, 'He works as a carpenter. We all know him.'

We listened to such stories with interest, but as no one seemed to take them seriously, we thought at first that they were merely some strange superstition. But then we noticed that gradually the stories were becoming more circumstantial and personal. Instead of the *ruis* and her lover of 'long long ago', we heard from Daulat Shah of his brother's experience and from Jemadar Salim of his own experiences. Then we began to put all the stories together, eventually realising that we had stumbled on part of a whole supernatural system. Our excitement at this was only slightly diminished later when we learnt that others had discovered it too, notably Colonel Lorimer and Professor Jettmar.

From Jemadar Salim we learnt that there are certain people, mostly men, who have the ability to recognize *ruis* in their spirit form. Such men are called *pashus* and are naturally opposed to *ruis*. If a *pashu* sees a *ruis* making off with a victim's spirit, he will rush after her and try to persuade her to give it up. If he is successful, he will have to promise the *ruis* a substitute on behalf of the victim—perhaps a cow or a goat—and the victim should then give away the animal to be slaughtered and cooked for the poor. If he does not give it away willingly, he will lose it anyway. If the *pashu* is unable to persuade the *ruis* to give up her victim, he will beat her with whatever weapon comes to hand. If he injures her she will give up her victim, and will suffer a corresponding injury the following day, but if he fails to overcome her he returns and predicts the death of the victim. Since the *ruis* and her victim are both in invisible form, and the *pashu* in his normal bodily form, a fight between a *ruis* and a *pashu* can be a strange sight. The Jemadar had been making camp one night with the local militia when an orderly dashed out of his tent with the pole of his mosquito net and started to swing it as though beating someone. Apparently a *ruis* had come for the Jemadar himself, and was being driven off.

We heard more fanciful stories too. In Hunza they tell of a time when there were a great many *ruis* in a certain village who were eating up all the children. A *pashu* told the people that he would drive all the *ruis* away and instructed everyone to shut their doors. But one man left his door open and all the *ruis* fled into his house. After that his family died out one by one, and the house now stands empty. More recently a

pashu claimed to have seen a 'European *ruis*', presumably the wife of one of the British officers stationed in Kohistan. All *pashus* describe *ruis* in their spirit form as having hideous faces, hair on end, mouths blood-red, and feet turned backwards.

To begin with we were sceptical about *pashus*. Who knew that they really saw *ruis* as they claimed? It would be easy for an orderly to seek favour with his officer by claiming to have saved him from the *ruis*. It was an experience of Ghulam Abbas that made us think again. When we first discussed *ruis* and *pashus* with him, he too was sceptical. 'What am I, as an educated man and a Moslem, to think of these tales?' he asked. 'How can I believe in such things?' But when we saw him again a few months later he told us that he had meanwhile had a strange experience. A man known to be a *pashu* had come one day, and had told him that the *ruis* had tried to carry off his wife the previous night. The *pashu* had intercepted them and had persuaded them to take Abbas's cow instead. This cow was famous in Gilgit, known to everyone because it gave so much milk. Abbas had only recently bought it from the schoolmaster for the unprecedented price of three hundred rupees. The *pashu* asked him to slaughter this cow, but Abbas did not believe his story and refused. Three days later the cow sickened and had to be slaughtered anyway. 'Now what am I to think?' asked Abbas. 'No one came near the cow during those three days. It seems a strange coincidence that it should have become sick just then.'

Others too have been puzzled. Raja Akbar Khan, the former ruler of Punial, used to take an interest in *ruis*, and once asked a *ruis* how they can eat the spirit of a person and still leave the body intact. The *ruis* took an unblemished pomegranate and asked them to weigh it. Then she squeezed it between her hands, and they weighed it again and found the weight the same, but when they opened it there were no seeds inside. 'That is how we do it,' she said, 'we eat the essence of the creature.'

* * *

Another person with psychic powers is the *bitan*. This is a man or woman who has the ability, after inhaling the smoke of burning juniper foliage, to achieve a state of ecstasy and commune with the fairies. In this state he is able to prophesy and divine, and to describe current events in distant countries that he would not otherwise know about.

We already knew something of these oracles from descriptions in the books of travellers and mountaineers, most of whom take a sceptical view of them. Strangely enough, we found our Kohistan informants also sceptical, not so much about the phenomenon itself, but about its present day practitioners. 'Most of the so-called *bitans* nowadays are fakes,' Hamid would say. 'There are none like the great *bitans* of the past. What about Kimeeto of Chaprot, who predicted long before British times that men would come mounted on "iron-horses" (motor vehicles), that they would "build roads through the sky" (aeroplanes), and that there would be "roofs over the rivers" (wide bridges in place of rope bridges)? What about the famous argument between Shon Gokur and Huke Mamo? Haven't you heard that story? Shon Gokur and Huke Mamo were talking together when they saw a pregnant cow passing by. Huke Mamo said, "There is a white patch on the calf's forehead," and Shon Gokur replied, "I see it too, but you are confused. The white patch is the tassle of the calf's tail, which is hanging down over its forehead." Then after a few days the calf was born, and they found that Shon Gokur was absolutely right.' Our Chitrali friends too used to acclaim the old *bitans*. They told us how, in 1892 on the very night that the Mehtar Afzal-ul-Mulk was shot down and hacked to pieces in the fort at Chitral, a *bitan* told Nizam-ul-Mulk, the dead man's brother who was then one hundred and fifty miles away in Gilgit, that a bull had been slaughtered in Chitral fort and was being skinned there.

Perhaps such flights of insight and imagination are less common now, but there is still plenty of demand for *bitans'* services over more mundane problems. While we were in Gilgit a *bitan* from Dainyor was brought to help in the case of a young man who had divorced his wife two years before but had been unable to find another wife. Near the man's house a fire was lit and juniper foliage was put on it. The *bitan* inhaled the heavy scented smoke and passed into a trance. He did not dance or become violent as they often do, but walked about picking up handfuls of earth and smelling them, swaying to and fro, and looking upwards. Finally he pointed to the doorstep and told the man to dig there. At a depth of eighteen inches they found a small packet of unlucky charms, presumably buried by the divorced wife's family. The charms were burnt, and the *bitan* predicted that the man would marry again within four months.

When a *bitan* is going to be 'put on', i.e. made to give a public performance, as is still sometimes done in Hunza (but

not on a Friday), men gather in a big circle, and a fire with juniper is lit. The *bitan* is brought in and held over the smoke by three or four men until he passes into a trance. Then he may become convulsive and violent, and with more than his normal strength throw the men off. The minstrels beat their drums and play their pipes, and the *bitan* begins to run and dance and whirl, all the time staring upwards. After a while he runs to the drums and listens intently to each in turn until the fairies speak to him. Then the music softens, and he begins to chant, normally using Shina but with archaic forms that are no longer current. Sometimes he also speaks in Persian or other languages that he cannot have learnt in his everyday life. In former days, in his capacity as oracle, a *bitan* might tell the local ruler a few home truths that no one else would dare to mention. Nowadays his prophesies are more likely to concern contemporary politics in Kashmir or Turkistan; or perhaps he tells of a visit to the plains and of a drought there, or of a rebellion in China.

Bitans are usually recognized in childhood by their irritability and tendency to dreams. Cow's milk and beef do not agree with them. At some point during childhood or adolescence they experience a trance and the fairies reveal themselves. Ghulam Muhammad, who was chief clerk to the early Political Agents in Gilgit, was told by a female *bitan* how, one day at the age of seven when she was out with the flocks, she saw a fairy sitting in a juniper tree. She described the fairy as having large and brilliant eyes, and thick eyebrows 'high above the eyes, and almost joining the hair of her head'. The fairy invited the girl to go with her, but the girl fainted and tumbled down into a stream, injuring her leg. Fortunately some shepherds saw her fall and carried her back to her father's house, where she remained oblivious to the world for ten days. During this time other fairies appeared to her and taught her to dance and to recite certain incantations.

The final test and initiation comes when the young *bitan* is in such a trance and a grey goat is decapitated. If he (or she) is a true *bitan*, he will drink the blood as it spurts from the severed neck. After that he is formally adopted by his 'familiar' fairies, usually seven in number, and it is to these that he looks upward when he is in trance.

In everyday life a *bitan* appears to be an ordinary person who goes about his farming and family affairs like anyone else, except that he cannot tolerate cows or cow dung. If he is a farmer he neither gains nor loses social status by being a

bitan, although others may regard him as being a bit 'odd'. However, for a member of a ruling family or the aristocracy to become a *bitan* is more serious—indeed it is undesirable. The members of leading families do not make public exhibitions of themselves, nor do they dabble in matters that Islamic teaching disapproves of. So when Raja Karim Khan heard one day that his nephew, then a schoolboy in Gilgit, was showing signs of becoming a *bitan* he was naturally concerned. He told us how he had gone to the school hostel and found his nephew lying on a bed, having apparently had a violent fit. He took the boy home with him and watched him to see that he did himself no harm, until the government doctor came and gave the boy sedatives, but these were ineffective. Then Raja Karim decided to invoke the aid of an old man called Asgar, a powerful and experienced *bitan* who lived in a village beyond Chalt. So he sent a message to Asgar, but when the messenger reached Asgar's village he found that the old man knew what had happened, and was already preparing to come. Meanwhile Raja Karim was careful to give the boy only goats' milk and goats' meat to drink and eat.

As soon as Asgar arrived at Raja Karim's house the boy began to feel better, and Asgar set about arranging a 'binding'. He asked Raja Karim to send for fresh juniper foliage from the mountains, and to have twenty-one iron nails made, and also an iron rod, thinner than a pencil and a foot long. These were not to be bought in the bazaar ready-made, presumably because they might be alloyed with other metals; iron was to be bought and taken to a blacksmith for preparation. When everything was ready the party went into the garden and Asgar told the boy, now quite conscious and normal, to pace slowly up and down. As he did so, Asgar came behind and pushed a nail into each of his foot-prints. Then they lit the juniper fire, and at once the boy rushed to it and began to inhale the smoke. Three men tried to hold him, but although he was only a boy he threw them off and began to run about. Then Asgar touched him lightly on the shoulder and he fell down unconscious. Asgar then took the iron rod and held it in the smoke, blowing on it and muttering in a strange language and repeating the names of hundreds of prophets, some Islamic and some non-Islamic. The name of King Solomon occurred repeatedly. Then he put one end of the rod between his teeth, and bent it as though it was soft into a bracelet, and put it on the boy's wrist. After that the boy recovered, and since then he has had no more *bitan*-like

experiences. He wore the bracelet for a time, but now he just keeps it in his school locker.¹

Both he and Asgar told Raja Karim that before he had run to the smoke his fairies had been far away, but that as he inhaled they had been rallying to him. His struggle with the men and the intervention of Asgar had reflected a struggle between his fairies and those of Asgar, but finally the old man's fairies had proved more powerful, and the boy's fairies had given up their claim on him. We found this an astonishing episode, all the more so because we knew both Raja Karim and his nephew. Again, as Raja Karim himself said, 'What is one to think? These things happened exactly as I have described them. How can we ignore them?' *Bitans* may have lost much of their old spiritual authority, but clearly they still have a place in Kohistan.

We learnt that *ruis* and *pashus* are commonly encountered in the Gilgit valley and in Hunza and Nagar, but that they are less common nowadays in Chitral. *Bitans*, though formerly widespread, seem now to be associated with particular places, especially the Chaprot and Bagrot valleys and the Kalash valleys in the south of Chitral. In other parts of Chitral their role is filled by the *peri-khan*, another class of seer, whose powers are acquired more by study and self-discipline than by supernatural endowment, but some of whose techniques are similar.

* * *

Fairies are ubiquitous in Kohistan. Nanga Parbat, Rakaposhi and Terich Mir are their citadels, the lesser peaks their fortresses, and the high altitudes their territory, but there is scarcely a village or a riverside where they are not known. 'Fairy' is perhaps an unfortunate word to use, for as Kipling's Puck complained, nowadays it suggests 'little buzzflies with butterfly wings and gauze petticoats'. When the Kohistani speaks of fairies he means anthropomorphic supernatural beings, mostly female and beautiful, but invisible for much of the time, who exhibit a wide range of activity; and whose behaviour towards man is, to say the least, capricious.

¹Lorimer mentions a more drastic method of 'binding' a *bitan* by putting cow's milk, meat and blood in his mouth and holding him over the smoke of burning cow-dung.

In many villages we were told that people have simply been taken away by the fairies without explanation. Sometimes these people have never been seen again, and sometimes they have reappeared with stories of being presented with a bowl of milk and a bowl of blood to choose between. Those who choose milk are rejected and sent back but those who choose blood are kept by the fairies. The father of one of the Kalash *budalaks* disappeared while we ourselves were in Kohistan. Another person who was taken within living memory was an 'aunt' in Chitral's ruling family. She now lives high on Terich Mir with the fairies, who can be heard playing the appropriate ceremonial music for her whenever there is an event in that family. In several villages around the foot of Terich Mir we were told of the drumming and piping that the villagers hear from time to time.

When men go up to the pastures, the fairies there demand certain standards of behaviour from them. In one pasture they are known to shoot at any man who has not washed himself since sexual intercourse. In others they resent the picking of certain flowers. No wise shepherd thinks of starting a new season without first burning juniper foliage to purify the settlement and protect his animals. In certain remote valleys every passer-by should tie a scrap of cloth to a particular tree and leave an offering to propitiate the fairy who lives in the valley—the leaving of sticks and stones in the Shah Jinali juniper is presumably a variation of this. Shepherds and hunters tell of mountain lakes where the fairies bathe and wash their clothes. To look down into the water is to infuriate them and risk death. Foreigners are not excepted. One young British officer reported his experience of a fairy lake in Chitral as follows:

This tarn was nearly the cause of my undoing. I lingered and looked down into it. Hardly had I gone a hundred yards beyond it when I had a mild heart attack . . . My (guide) knew exactly what had happened . . .¹

Another officer had the temerity to try a punt with an out-board motor on a fairies' lake on Nanga Parbat: he was drowned in the Indus soon afterwards.

Yet the advantage is not always to the fairies. Their lakes can be defiled by throwing in cow dung, or by stepping in the water's edge with a cow leather shoe. *Bitans* and *perikhans* can sometimes use their special powers to charm

¹Ottley, 1936, pp. 49-50.

fairies. Even ordinary men can sometimes gain an upper hand by employing trickery. Miropee was tricked by a man who broke his promise. Others have 'grounded' fairies by throwing cow dung at them. Azur Jamshed was the victim of a similar trick. In former days it was even possible for a man to marry a fairy, though if the marriage was to be a success it was supposed to be kept secret. Kator, the grandson of Sangin Ali, is said to have had a fairy wife, and their descendants still live with the fairies of Terich Mir—if so, the 'aunt' who joined them more recently renewed an older relationship.

Another story tells of a hunter who was sitting by a lake in the Ziwar valley when he heard the rumbles of an earthquake and saw a flock of fairies alight on the water. He marvelled at them, and then choosing one that he specially liked, he threw cow dung at her. The others flew off, but she remained and he caught and married her and had four sons and three daughters by her. Another man who had a fairy wife offended her in some way. According to the story she was so furious that she stranded him on a cliff face so that he could get neither up nor down. The villagers also failed to get him down, but she relented the next day. Afterwards the same man married a woman, but his fairy wife emasculated him so that he could never consummate this marriage. Marriages to fairies are not entirely unknown in the twentieth century. The maternal grandfather of one of our Kalash informants had surprised a party of fairies bathing and had taken the clothes of one of them so that she could not fly away. He persuaded her to marry him, and they had two children. He died in 1952. At least two men now living in the Kandia valley claim to be married to fairies, and there must be others.

From these and other stories it seems that in former days fairies were as much at home in the valleys and villages as on the mountains. Then they used to be visible more of the time and their relationships with men were closer and more continuous. People told us that the Moslem call to prayer and the introduction of iron have been the main reasons for their retreat from the valley bottoms. But on the mountains they are still in control and are believed to be ready to defend themselves and their territory against further encroachments. This belief, reinforced by the many fatal accidents on Kohistan's mountains in the early decades of the century, accounts for the reluctance of villagers to work as porters for mountaineering expeditions. They even rationalize this further, saying that because European mountaineers are fair

skinned, like the fairies themselves, they may be acceptable to the fairies, but that local people are not acceptable and are sure to be prevented from climbing beyond a certain point, if not thrown off the mountain bodily.

During the 1950 Norwegian expedition to Terich Mir, a Chitrali porter had what one of the mountaineers described as 'an acute mental aberration' in camp V at nearly nineteen thousand feet. He became violent, tore his tent and clothes to bits, and had to be tied with a rope, given sedatives, and carried down to lower altitudes. He explained that some fairies had appeared and prevented him from going higher. When we visited his village we made a point of finding the man and asking exactly what had happened. He told us that he had been climbing steadily when suddenly about fifty fairies blocked the way ahead of him. They looked like women, he said, and were about the same size. All were dressed alike in Moslem style shirt and trousers, with green and white head-cloths, and each carried a drum. They indicated that he was to go no further, and he passed out and saw no more. This was our first eyewitness account of the fairies, but there were to be others. Our Kalash informant, whose grandfather had been married to a fairy, described them as a beautiful fair skinned people, with long shiny black hair. According to his grandfather they dress in sky-blue shirts coming down to their knees, with soft leather socks over their ankles and feet. On their heads they wear turban-caps embroidered with gold thread. They fly by means of head-cloths, and it was by stealing one of these that the grandfather had caught his fairy. One of the refugees from Kafiristan described them in much the same way; another old man had seen a fairy 'dressed in white and very beautiful'; a third had seen a fairy 'like a European woman' floating in a 'cradle' over the Otak pass.

Such revelations were puzzling enough, but we were non-plussed when a little girl was brought to us in a village at the foot of Terich Mir and we were asked if we could cure her of 'possession by a fairy'. Apparently she was subject to fits, and would throw herself in the fire and off the rooftops if not restrained. Later one of the Kafiristan refugees told us that his own adult son had been 'possessed' by a fairy who used to carry him off at night. All the villagers would look for him, and in the morning they would find him stuck on the roof or in some inaccessible place. At times he became so violent that four men could not hold him. After about two months of this the father called in a *peri-khan* who made

contact with the fairy and exorcized her.¹ She told the *peri-khan* that two months previously the son had unknowingly trodden on her child while it slept under a tree and had killed it, so she had been taking revenge. As with the *ruis*, we were beginning by now to wonder what we had found—a natural phenomenon, common hysteria, or an extraordinary religious survival.

Naturally enough it is shepherds and hunters who have the most encounters with fairies. Talking with friends who hunt, we learnt that many hunters in different parts of Kohistan have a strange dream relationship with another kind of fairy which appears in the form of a small girl. It is known in Hunza as *rachi*, and it was in the name of this fairy that Hamid's mother used to make the malted flour cakes when he was a small boy. The typical experience is for the hunter to set off into the mountains, and to camp for the night with the intention of stalking ibex or markhor early in the morning. During the night a small group of *rachi* appear to him in a dream and indicate which animals, if any, he will be able to shoot the following day. One of Raja Karim's brothers, who used to have such experiences, was sometimes given flowers by these little fairies, each flower representing one animal. At other times he was not given any flowers, and then he would fail to shoot anything. Their father, the former Mir of Nagar, had similar experiences, and was sometimes told that he might shoot certain of the animals he would see the following day but not others. Nothing would then induce him to try to shoot the forbidden animals.

The old headman of Chalt told us that he dreams of little girls, three or five or seven in number, who are fair in colour and dressed in red. They play with him, and give him apples or grapes. He dreams of them only when he is out in the mountains intending to hunt and he has not been able to recognize them as the same little girls in subsequent dreams. Other hunters, who have unwittingly or deliberately aimed their gun at a forbidden animal, have looked along the barrel and seen a fairy in place of the animal; but when they have

¹ We heard how in such cases the *peri-khan* (who may be a man or a woman) throws the 'patient' into a fit and tries to find out the identity and religion of the fairy and the reason for her presence. If there is a grievance that can be put right, well and good, but otherwise she must be charmed away. An uncooperative fairy will resist and curse through the patient's mouth, and swear false oaths, even in the name of God, though never apparently in the name of Solomon. Finally the *peri-khan* may make a drawing on the ground and after recitation will cut at it with red-hot irons to the shrieks of the fairy. The usual fee paid to a *peri-khan* is a goat or a sheep.

lowered the gun the animal has reappeared. Others have reported that while camping at night after killing an ibex or markhor they heard a sound like shepherds calling their flocks, and that on throwing the head of the animal out into the darkness, the sound stopped.

This was all strange too, but later Shahzada Hussam-ul-Mulk explained something of the relationship between fairies and the wild goats, of which we had had a hint in the story of Miropee. Ibex and markhor, he told us, belong to the fairies in the same way that goats belong to man. They are the 'domestic' animals of the fairies, and provide the fairies with milk and occasional meat. This explains the fairies' concern that the hunter should not shoot certain valued animals, nor too many animals altogether. Conversely those animals that the fairies themselves are ready to slaughter and eat may be shot with impunity.

Fairies of another kind, smaller in numbers and loosely described as 'bad fairies', were also described by a number of people. These fairies appear naked, and are hideous in appearance. Their faces are red, their eyes are set vertically, their breasts are long and pendulous and their feet are turned backwards. Their breasts are so long that they usually sling them over their shoulders out of the way. Men who encounter these fairies usually come to harm, but if a man can creep up behind one of them and suck at her breast before she sees him, then he is safe, for she will look on him as a son. Such fairies do not seem common, and we suspected some confusion with *ruis*. We heard of other kinds of fairies and supernatural beings: of kindly Khangis and mischievous Ferutis, who inhabit Kho houses in Chitral; of a white bird-like fairy who flies around men and twists their testicles; of dwarfs who take goitres from their own necks and throw them onto the necks of passers-by, and whose lights can be seen moving in hundreds across the mountainsides on autumn evenings; of a monster who carries off hawk trappers in winter and whose penis is so long that he winds it round his waist; of poltergeists, and of many others. On the whole though, these subsidiary phenomena are seldom seen and are not much taken into account.

It would be easy to dismiss much of this as superstition among uneducated people. Noises in a wooden house are caused by beams creaking and not by Khangis cracking apricot shells. Goitres are caused by lack of iodine and not by dwarfs. A sound on a deserted mountainside is the wind and

not voices. We had only to go out in the dark, even along a track we thought we knew, to realise how things go bump in the night. The members of the Norwegian expedition to Terich Mir reported what they called 'explosion avalanches', which make a booming sound followed by an increasingly rapid throbbing—here is even a natural explanation of the fairies' drumming. One can guess that it suited Sangin Ali and his descendants, as they struggled to establish themselves on the throne of Chitral, to spread a tale of relationship with the fairies. One can guess also that it suited a man who was impotent to invent a fairy wife for himself. And one can apply the ideas of western medicine and psychology, and explain 'possession by fairies' as epilepsy and hysteria.

But such explanations did not satisfy us altogether. There seemed to be a pattern and a consistency about what we had learnt that raised it above the level of mere superstition and neurosis. And how was one to explain away the personal experiences that our friends had had? It was when we travelled in the Kalash valleys that we began to see what that pattern might be, or might have been.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

'THEY BEGAN AS GODS'

Oh Mahandeo, at apple blossom time we approach you . . .

Fairies' invocation to the Kalash god Mahandeo.

What subtle poetry lurked in these wretched, obscure, moribund gods . . . 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 . . .

*Fosco Maraini,
mountaineer and traveller in Chitral, 1959,
writing of the Kalash gods.¹*

The story is that years ago, during the month of December the time of his cult, when he is honoured by all, the god came to bless the fields . . . Unfortunately, the people heard him moving about at night, thought that he was a robber, and set the dogs on him . . .

*R.C.F. Schomberg,
traveller in the Kalash valleys, 1935,
writing of the god Balamahin.²*

It was autumn and the Bumboret river was low enough for us to go up through the gorge. The gorge turned this way and that, and we crossed and recrossed the river, in and out of the sun, alternately sweating and shivering. At one point some stones fell from the top of a cliff, and the porters muttered about fairies and hurried on. Then the gorge widened out, the valley sides sloped less steeply, and we saw ahead the cultivation of the first village. We approached through a grassy grove of walnut trees. No one was in sight, but when one of our porters stooped to pick up some walnuts there were cries of protest and a young Kalash woman appeared and scolded him in fluent Khowar. He grinned and dropped the walnuts, and the woman came across and smiled and greeted us. How different it seemed from entering a Moslem village.

We made our way to the houses which stood on the sloping valley side, one above the other in tiers, so that the roof of one served as the terrace for another. We noticed how different they were from Kho houses—large, dark, roughly

¹ Maraini, 1964, p. 251.

² Schomberg, 1938, p. 184.

finished and roughly decorated, but strong enough to support half a dozen cattle threshing on the roof. Men shouted cheerful remarks as we passed, and sounds of laughter floated up from the fields. Women were gathered at the watermill to grind the day's grain and to gossip. Later we saw them sitting in the sun weaving, or washing and anointing their long black hair at the river banks. After the reticence of Moslem women we enjoyed seeing these women take an active part in social life. We were happy to see the exuberance with which his sister greeted and kissed one of our porters when he visited her house. And I, at least, enjoyed simply being able to look at the women without feeling that I was prying and causing embarrassment. Many of them were worth looking at.

We found the Kalash valleys idyllically beautiful, their sides well-wooded with hollyoak and conifer, and their floors flat and fertile. Sunlight filtered through the apricot trees and dappled the turf beneath. The rivers foamed around the rocks or sparkled between grassy banks. Stately walnut trees stood among neat fields and carefully engineered aqueducts, and well tended millets waved in the breeze.

We knew that in every Kalash village there are what one anthropologist has called 'Places of an Extraordinary Character' and we made a point of enquiring about these. In the first village in Bumboret we were told that there was an altar to the god Mahandeo, so we went to see it. 'Women have to stop here. No woman should go closer than this,' our Kalash guide said. Elizabeth waited, while Abdul Samad and I stepped up to a rough stone altar which stood in the open, at the foot of the valley side. The front of the altar was about five feet square, its upper part covered by a horizontal wooden board. In the centre of the board was a geometrical design, and in the centre of that was a diamond shaped hole. This hole seemed to be the focus of the altar, and the board around it was stained with light and dark blotches. 'That is where they throw flour and clarified butter and some of the blood whenever they sacrifice a goat here,' Samad explained. From behind the upper edge of the board protruded four horses' heads roughly carved in wood and very weather-beaten. Tucked in around the bases of these heads was withered hollyoak foliage. It was simple and rough, yet curiously moving. The suggestive stains, the cracked and weather-beaten heads, and the withered foliage seemed so appropriate for the ancient rituals and oblations still enacted there.

The Kalash worship a number of gods and goddesses, each with a particular sphere of activity and influence, and each has to be propitiated if all is to be well in his or her sphere. This is typically achieved by sacrificing an animal at an altar consecrated to that god, and by performing the appropriate rites, recitations and circumambulations there. Some gods are associated with seasonal events and ceremonies, and are worshipped at those times. Others, such as Mahandeo, may be worshipped at any time. Some have personalities. Verin, for example, is a dangerous and tyrannical god. Some are widely worshipped—Mahandeo is a very popular god, and has an altar in almost every village—but others are associated only with one village or one valley, and have only the one shrine. The god Sajigor has his only shrine in a hollyoak grove in the Rumbor valley, where people from all three valleys have to go for the particular ceremonies associated with him.

Each Kalash clan has a common building, constructed in the same style as their houses, in which there is an altar to the goddess Jestak (Plate 13.1). Jestak is worshipped on family occasions, and hers are the only altars at which women are permitted. In the Bumboret valley we found that the rear pillar of the building serves as the altar, and we were immediately reminded of the Lion's Post in Kho houses. We also noticed the design of the pillars, the drawings of ibex and markhor on the rear wall, and the decoration of hollyoak leaves. In Rumbor we found an altar to Jestak made of a board with horses' heads, but were sad to see that the roof of the building had collapsed and no one was bothering to repair it.

We asked Samad why women are not allowed near the other shrines. 'The Kalash believe that women are impure because of their menstruation,' he explained. 'They think that if women go near the shrines they will pollute them, and then the gods will not accept the sacrifices. They don't allow women in the goat-houses either, nor on the threshing-floor. Kalash women even have to be careful about where they step in their own houses. There is a part of the house where they are not supposed to step.' These feelings are still strong. Only a day or two afterwards one of the 'down-country' officials posted to Chitral brought some visitors to see the Kalash. The party included a woman, and they strayed near a shrine. When the Kalash saw this they began to protest, saying that now they would have to go through ceremonies to purify the shrine, and who was to pay for the

goat to be sacrificed? Dumbfounded, the official agreed to pay for it. Later Samad showed us the small building outside the village to which women must resort during their menstrual periods and during pregnancy and childbirth. While there, women have no contact with the rest of the village. Their food is left outside by their families, and before they emerge they have to go through purification ceremonies. Men are not allowed near these places of isolation; and when we passed near one in another village a woman sitting outside waved us away.

We asked about the sacrifices, and learnt that ideally they are performed under the guidance of a *bitan*. It is normally a goat or goats that is sacrificed, though sometimes a cow or a bull. A fire is lit below the altar, juniper foliage is burnt for purification, and the goat is brought in. If the goat quivers before being killed it is believed that the god will accept the sacrifice, so if the goat fails to quiver a little water is thrown in its ear to make it quiver. Its throat is then cut and the spurting blood is collected in the hands of unmarried boys and thrown on the altar and into the fire, while the celebrant lifts his hands and invokes the god, and the other men present pray. If a *bitan* is there he may go into a trance, chanting and trembling as the divine afflatus takes hold of him, until he leaps and whirls in an ecstatic frenzy among those present, finally collapsing semiconscious. Afterwards the sacrificial goat is roasted and eaten on the spot, or the meat is distributed for the men to take home to their families.

Why unmarried boys? we wanted to know. Because they have not had any sexual contact with women, and are therefore unpolluted, was the answer. And the *bitans*? 'Kalash *bitans* are rather important,' Samad explained. 'When they go into a trance they can see the gods. They tell the people what sacrifices to make to please the gods. If anyone is sick they arrange a sacrifice and ask the gods what must be done if the sickness is to be cured. Yes, when he is in a trance the *bitan* actually sees the god. A *bitan* told me once that the god Balamahin appears riding on a horse, and with attendants on horses too.'¹

As elsewhere, *bitans* are not what they were. The *bitan* in the Bumboret valley was sick at the time of our visit, and

¹ Later an informant whispered in my ear that the god Mahandeo himself appears as a horse. Horses thus appear in direct association with Kalash gods, as heads on the gods' altars and in some wooden graveyard effigies that the Kalash used to make for their great men. This is all the more intriguing because the Kalash, now at least, do not use horses.

neither the Berir nor the Rumbor valley seemed to have one at all. Indeed it seems that the Kalash *bitans* have been steadily declining in numbers and powers for some years. This is mainly because, with the influx of Kho and other Moslems to the three valleys and with conversions among the Kalash themselves, many of the rules about ritual pollution are being ignored and broken by a growing proportion of the population. The valleys, the shrines, and the remaining Kalash are thus being continuously polluted by outside influences, and this is steadily weakening the divine powers of the *bitans*. Since the *bitans* alone carry the religious traditions of the Kalash, and since they alone are in communication with the gods, the future seems bleak.

The difficulty became apparent when we were called one evening to a house in Rumbor where a young man was seriously ill. We saw that his family had gone through the traditional rituals. The freshly severed head of a goat lay on the floor, eyes open and staring. Four hooves lay nearby. The carcass hung from a beam and a man squatted in front of it, pulling out sinews from the gaping abdomen and draping them over a jutting hind leg, like stockings over a rail. Outside on the ground the juniper fire was still burning. But who was to interpret the young man's misfortune? Who was to say whether the gods had accepted the sacrifice?

We asked some of the Kalash about the decline in their numbers and the degeneration of their religion, and found them very matter-of-fact about it. One old lady whose son had become Moslem said simply, 'If it is his fate to become Moslem, let him become Moslem. If it is my fate to remain Kalash, let me remain Kalash. He is still my son.' A man said, 'My brother became Moslem and then his son died. Does that suggest it is better to become Moslem?' Another asked, 'Do the Moslems have more to eat?' One Kalash man had trouble in controlling his wife, so became Moslem simply to acquire the greater authority that Moslems have over their wives. This particular ruse misfired because his wife refused to become Moslem too, but instead sought to dissolve the marriage on the grounds that the man had changed the terms of contract.

But, sometimes at least, there is a touch of pathos about the conversions. When the last remaining Kalash in the Shishi valley were about to become Moslems it was time for the Kalash spring festival. So they celebrated the festival first, and sang a song whose words are still remembered:

Oh Festival of Spring, now you must go away to another place,
The Festival of Spring is finishing in our valley for ever.¹

At *Pul* we watched the wistful expressions of girls who had been recently converted while their cousins and neighbours were dressing up in bright new shirts and flower caps. Our tape-recording of the *Pul* music reduced people in the adjacent Jingeret valley—now all Moslem—to tears.

Once, perhaps, the Kalash religion incorporated a philosophy and a view of the world, but now all that survives is a superstitious concern with the problems of everyday life—health, prosperity and the avoidance of calamity. It was difficult enough to find anyone who could explain even these concerns coherently. There are many other signs of degeneration. Jestak buildings are collapsing, graveyard effigies are being stolen at night and sold to foreign tourists, and sham '*bitan-shows*' are being put on for visitors. But something characteristic still remains. Perhaps it is the physical setting; perhaps it is the cheerful nonchalance of the people; or perhaps it is the brooding omnipresence of the gods, even though they are not worshipped as of old.

As we digested what we were learning from the Kalash, we began to see that it might have wider implications. Perhaps the *bitans* of Chaprot and Bagrot and other places used originally to communicate with gods rather than with fairies. Perhaps, as Kipling wrote of another country, the fairies themselves 'began as gods', but were 'down-graded' with the succession of new religions. Perhaps the whole of Kohistan used to be dotted about with little altars, where juniper was burnt and *bitans* went into ecstatic trances and goats were sacrificed. Such an interpretation would help to explain much of what we had heard. In fact it would mean postulating another religion or religions, similar in character to those of the Kalash and the Kafirs, and complete with gods, *bitans*, rituals and beliefs.

* * *

It was at about this time that we heard of the work of Professor Jettmar, the German ethnologist who had studied the social and religious culture of parts of Kohistan, and who has published some fascinating and—to us—extremely revealing papers. With the help of these we were able to clarify many of our ideas and to fit parts of the jigsaw together.

¹ Wazir Ali Shah, unpublished notes.



1. Building for the Kalash goddess Jestak in the Bumboret valley
(The post against the middle of the rear wall is the altar. Graffiti of wild goats and hunters have been drawn on it and the other posts. Above the altar hangs hollyoak foliage, Sun light is streaming through the smoke-hole)



2. A Kalash effigy standing under a hollyoak tree



3. A Kalash woman

Jettmar confirms the former existence of indigenous religions, similar to those of the Kalash and Kafirs, but different in some respects. In the Haramosh valley, beyond Bagrot from Gilgit, he was able to reconstruct parts of ancient rituals abandoned for Islam long ago, but still remembered. In a remote pasture there he even found the stone altar of the goddess Murkum, who used to be worshipped by the women of the valley. Even now her altar is still surreptitiously visited, and Jettmar found it decorated with fresh juniper leaves. Jettmar describes the ceremonies and feasts that used to be conducted by the Haramosh women in honour of Murkum, and notes the parallels between these and the feasts of the *ruis*. He goes on to suggest that the *ruis* can be compared with witches and that they are the infernal counterpart of the worship of gods.

Armed now with the appropriate questions, we too were able to hear of former altars, and of once sanctified boulders where people used to worship and sacrifice. They were reported from many places. Most of them have long since been abandoned and are now little more than local curiosities, but it was hinted that one or two might still be in occasional use. Others have apparently been converted into Islamic shrines. Perhaps even Shah Buria's prayer stone in Nagar was originally consecrated to another god? We also heard the names of some of the old gods: Taiban, for whom the women of Gor used to dance around a sacred hollyoak tree; and Boin, a 'puppy-like' divinity, for whom people in Hunza and Nagar used to sacrifice goats. And now we could understand the annual slaughter of a goat by the men of Khomar: clearly this is a relic of ceremonies to propitiate the god responsible for the village's irrigation water. The name of the god—indeed his very existence—is forgotten now, but Domo and Chocho must have known it.

What astonished us most was hearing that only recently the young men of Chaprot, before setting out for a polo tournament, had gone in procession to an altar and had sacrificed a goat 'as our ancestors used to do for victory in battle'. Blood was thrown in the fire, butter and bread offered, and the meat half-roasted and eaten on the spot by those present. Furthermore, the polo team went on to win the tournament, and the *bitans* and *pashus* of Chaprot are saying that the fairies advise the people to keep up such old customs if they want continued good fortune.

One of the subsidiary questions that intrigued us is the role of the goat. As an agricultural asset the goat is clearly valuable: it is hardy and can survive on poor pasture during summer and on a diet of hollyoak leaves during winter; it is agile and reaches steep patches of grazing without falling; it provides its owners with milk, meat, hair and skins; and its dung makes good manure. Small wonder that the Kalash and the people of the other southern valleys reckon their wealth by the numbers of goats they possess. But this did not account for the recurrence of the goat theme in so many non-agricultural contexts. Hussam-ul-Mulk's mention of the association between wild goats and fairies seemed a possible explanation. If ibex and markhor become sacred by this association, then domestic goats might share this sacredness simply through generic relationship. This would help to explain why goats generally make the most acceptable sacrifices, and why a *bitan* is initiated by drinking the blood of a goat.

It might also explain why the horns of goats, domestic and wild, are used in decoration and to adorn shrines, graves and even mosques. Whenever we saw an Islamic grave, sometimes even the grave of a Seyed or saint, which was adorned with goats' horns we used to ask the reason. 'It is something pure,' was the usual reply, 'people leave the horns as an act of respect.' Our informants were staunch Moslems and seemed quite unconscious that they were following a pre-Islamic religious practice. We also saw stylized goats' horns in the decorative wood-carving of the former Kafirs, although we were told that they were just a pattern. On journeys in the Gilgit valley we found boulders with graffiti of goats roughly chipped on them, and we recognized the exaggerated horns as those of ibex and markhor (Plate 14.2). Again the answers to our questions were innocent: 'It is the work of idle shepherd boys,' and no doubt it was, but we suspected there was more to it than that. The suspicion was confirmed when we saw similar graffiti, executed in soot on clay, decorating the inside walls of the Jestak buildings in Bum-boret (Plate 13.1).

Jettmar confirms the role of ibex and markhor as the goats of the fairies. He also describes how hunters see the *rachi* in their dreams, adding an important fact that had escaped us: in order to dream of the *rachi* and be successful in the hunt, the hunter must be in a state of ritual purity and free of any sexual contamination by his wife. So here was confirmation of further pieces in the jigsaw. The fairies and the goats, wild

and domestic, are sacred. Women, on account of menstruation, are impure. For success, these two—representing the extremes in the scale of ritual purity—must be kept apart, both spatially, and by purification ceremonies when necessary.

We had already seen the application of these ideas among the Kalash in the isolation of women during their menstrual periods, and in the separate housing given to goats. We could now recognize similar ideas in the Kho woman's monthly relegation to the *shung*; in the custom in Hunza of purifying goat houses before the goats are installed for the winter by the burning of juniper; and in the idea that the pastures—territory of the fairies—are 'dangerous' to women. Further confirmation came when we learnt that formerly in Hunza there used to be a separate building in each village to which menstruating women were banished. Another expression of these ideas, which we came across during our agricultural enquiries is that only men should milk domestic goats. When we asked the reason we were told simply, 'Milking goats is men's work. It is not the work of women.' In such ways the ancient sacredness of goats and the ancient anxiety about menstrual pollution are still being expressed in everyday customs, although their meanings are now largely unconscious or forgotten.

Another question that intrigued us is the role of the cow. When the people of Hindi in Hunza became Moslem the missionary responsible is said to have chopped down Boin's juniper trees, poured cows' milk over their roots, and burnt cows' dung there. Similar stories—the descent of Azur Jamshed, the grounding of fairies with cow-dung, and the defiling of their lakes—make it clear that the cow has been considered impure and inimical to gods and fairies. Nowadays it is only *bitans* who are obviously allergic to the cow, but in former days such feelings were held more widely. Frederic Drew commented in 1875 upon 'a peculiarity of manners most strange and curious' among the Shins who, he had found, held the cow 'in abhorrence'. Orthodox Shins would not eat beef, drink cow's milk or touch a vessel containing it. They kept cattle for ploughing, but had as little as possible to do with them, and would use a forked stick for putting a sucking calf to the udder. Even at that time the 'abhorrence' was dying out, but it is still expressed in a reluctance on the part of men to milk cows. This prohibition too has now lost its meaning. 'Milking cows is women's work,' the men would say to us, 'if I milk the cow all the neighbours will laugh at me.'

So again we had to add a footnote to our earlier description of the division of farm tasks between farmers and their wives. The Kalash and Kafirs have not shared the prejudice against the cow, a point that is nicely illustrated in the tale of the Kalash man who caught his fairy, not by throwing cow-dung at her, but by stealing her head-cloth. Indeed the Kafirs gave cows as sacrifice to their gods.

In mentioning the Kalash, Jettmar draws attention to the place of the hollyoak in their ceremonies and as decoration for their altars. This tree, as we had already discovered in Chilas, is a very important economic resource for the southern valleys of Kohistan. Without it there would be insufficient fodder to keep the huge flocks fed in winter, so it is scarcely surprising that it occupied a place in the old religious ceremonies of those valleys.

For the rest of Kohistan there remains much room for speculation. Jettmar concludes his paper by discussing possible connections between the pre-Islamic beliefs and practices of Kohistan and those of other mountain regions to the west and east. The belief that the hunter must be favoured by the 'owner' of the wild goats is found in the Caucasus. Goats were worshipped by people in the mountains of Iran, as the bronzes of Luristan testify. Towards the east, similar ideas about *bitans* apparently influenced the development of Lamaism in Tibet. In western Nepal some wooden effigies have been found that are astonishingly like those of the Kalash of Berir. We ourselves have noted other wider parallels. The belief that iron 'binds' the supernatural extends to Europe: in Scotland iron nails used to be driven into the ground where an epileptic had fallen in a fit. The tying of scraps of cloth to a tree is found in areas as far distant as Turkey and South India. Identical graffiti of goats, supposedly three thousand years old, have been found in Russian Turkistan. The smoke of burning juniper foliage is known as a fumigant in many parts of Europe.

Perhaps some of these ancient religious ideas that we encountered in Kohistan were once common over a much wider area. In the wider area such ideas have been obliterated by later beliefs and by indoctrination, leaving only disconnected scraps of superstition. But in Kohistan, characteristically, they have survived, at least in part; although, again characteristically, they have been modified to fit the mountains and life there. Whether such speculations are valid or not, it is clear that many of the ideas of pre-Islamic Kohistan are very

ancient. Elizabeth and I had already felt this strongly when we lived with the shepherds and the goats in the pastures. There we were witnessing something of 'the fundamental relationship between man and his environment'; we were, as Jettmar puts it, 'near the roots of agriculture and husbandry'.

At a more individual level, we found people as varied in their attitudes to the supernatural as in other societies. Many accept an entirely Islamic view of the world and, consciously at least, reject every other belief. Some feel a need to be openly scornful of the old beliefs, like the young man in Chitral who boasted that he had looked into a forbidden lake on three separate occasions and was still alive. Others are excessively credulous, like the two men who walked into each other on Chalt bridge in the dark, and each thinking the other to be a fairy, knocked each other down. Whatever the intellectual attitude, the old heritage has been closely interwoven with everyday life for so long that it is hard to escape. One day the son of the headman of Khomar was telling me about a tractor that he and his father were considering buying for hauling building stones from the quarry to Gilgit—what it would cost, what the return would be per haul, how long it might take before the investment would pay off, and so on. As he finished with the topic of the tractor he passed straight on to the next that entered his head, saying without the least sense of incongruity, 'Last night we heard some fairies outside our house. My father told us to be sure to stay indoors. . .'

I see no reason to doubt that experiences of fairies and *ruis* are authentic, nor that the ecstasies of the *bitans* are genuine. Indeed, knowing people who have had such experiences, I cannot doubt it. In the last analysis, any psychic or spiritual experience is both intensely personal and largely incommunicable. The experience of people in Kohistan must be as valid as those of the believers in other religions. As always, it is a question of interpretation.

CHAPTER TWELVE

PRACTICAL POLITICS

'We are the descendant of King Nausherwan of Iran.'

*The Mir of Nagar,
relating the history of his dynasty.*

... one of the points which I most carefully observed was their system of government. This system is absolutely despotic. There could scarcely be a greater despot than a Mehtar of Chitral. Nominally, everything in the country—man, woman, child, and beast—belongs to him, and the whole of the land, and every house as well.

*Francis Younghusband,
Political Officer in Chitral, 1893-4.¹*

... they had, in fact, no leading spirits of importance, for their tribes are almost ideal socialists . . .

*Charles Bruce,
Acting Political Agent in Gilgit, 1894,
writing about the people of Chilas.²*

Travellers from Europe who began to reach Kohistan during the nineteenth century reported a number of independent states there. They reported that these were of two widely differing kinds, which they described as 'princely' and 'republican'.

The central and northern valleys were divided between seven 'princely' states, each governed by a hereditary ruler—'king' seems too pretentious a word for such small areas—who was supported by a landed aristocracy. Below the aristocracy came a class of self-employed farmers, who formed the bulk of the population. At the bottom of the social scale came landless labourers, craftsmen, and some of the smaller ethnic groups. The populations of these states in the nineteenth century ranged from less than ten thousand to more than thirty thousand. The two most important were Gilgit and what is now southern Chitral. The latter, which included the Chitral river's western tributaries was ruled by the Kator dynasty, descended from Sangin Ali. The other five were Astor, Nagar, Hunza, Punial, and a state comprising the upper Chitral and upper Gilgit valleys including Yasin, which was ruled by the

¹ Younghusband, 1896, p. 362.

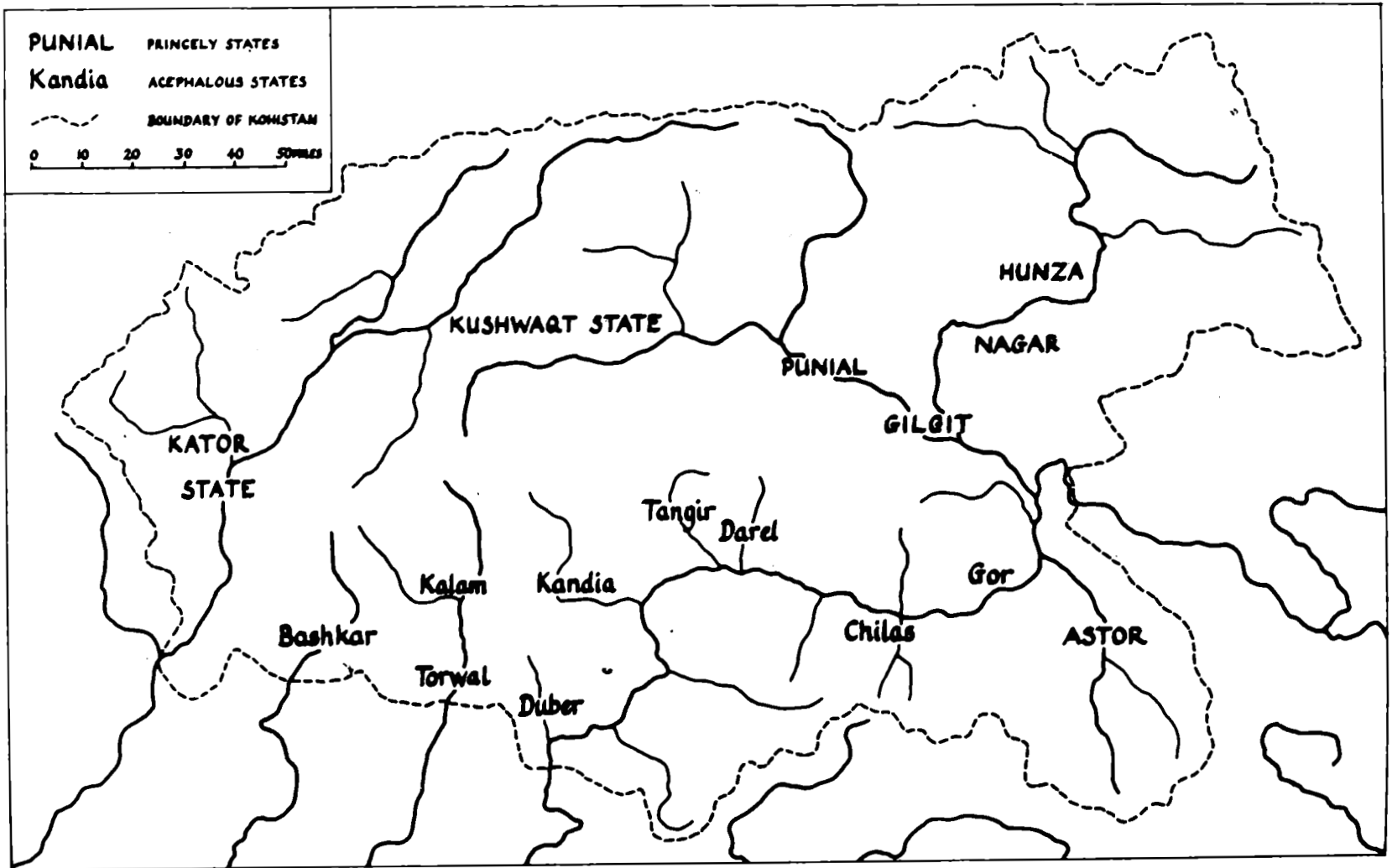
² Bruce, 1910, pp. 197-8.

Kushwaqt dynasty. The Ishkoman valley was a bone of contention between the Kushwaqt and the rulers of Punial. These seven states were autonomous and self-supporting, and were frequently involved in internecine war with each other. Altogether they accounted for more than two thirds of Kohistan's area and population (Map 5).

Although the early travellers were more interested in the northern valleys which lead up to the watersheds of the Karakoram and Hindu Kush—the 'natural boundary' of British India, as they saw it—they also described the political organization of the southern valleys. They called this 'republican' because there were no ruling dynasties or hereditary aristocracies. Instead there were assemblies of the people's elected representatives which met at different levels, for a village, for a group of villages, or for a whole valley. The highest level of assembly, typically for a large valley, constituted the government of an independent state. In theory these assemblies worked democratically. The dozen or so members were supposed to represent all sections of the population, they were supposed to sit in equality, and they were supposed to settle disputes and make decisions for the common good. In practice membership was restricted to the dominant groups, while subordinate groups, craftsmen, and landless labourers were not represented. Furthermore those elected tended to speak for particular factions rather than their 'constituents' as a whole. Perhaps the system had worked at one time, but by the nineteenth century it was riddled with factions and feuds and had become little more than anarchy. The Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth calls the system 'acephalous', i.e. headless, which seems a useful and descriptive term.¹ There were eight larger acephalous states during the nineteenth century—Gor, Chilas, Darel, Tangir, Kandia, Kalam, Torwal, and Bashkar—and several smaller ones. The smallest of all comprised only seven households, and was probably the smallest independent state in the world.

The early travellers recorded traditions that several of the acephalous states were formerly governed by rulers. At first sight this seems unlikely, for it reverses the usual direction of political evolution, which is from clan and tribe towards centralized rule. But the traditions are explicit: in Darel people point out 'the ruler's polo ground'; in Chilas they have preserved the name of a ruler; and in Kandia they still tell

¹ Barth, 1956, p. 79ff.



Map 5. Princely and acephalous states in the 19th century.

stories of Kandi, the last ruler of that valley.¹ Various explanations for the reversal have been offered, but we found these unconvincing. There is also the question of why some princely states reverted and not others. The more we studied it, the more certain we became that the divergence started with the conversion to Islam. But why should the acceptance of a new religion lead to political changes? Why should it lead to the continuation of centralized rule in some states and to a reversion to anarchy in others?

Once again we were thankful for the 'stories' that we had collected, for they provided some answers. For example the story of Shiri Badat suggests that the coming of Islam to Gilgit did not mean the end of centralized rule there: Shiri Badat was immediately succeeded by Azur Jamshed, and the latter's marriage to Nur Bakht even provided a dynastic link. The stories about Shah Buria tell that in Nagar and Hunza the rulers themselves were converted—indeed they were the first—and their subjects followed suit afterwards. The present Mir of Nagar confirmed this. 'At that time,' he told us, 'the people were worshipping trees and stones. The missionary came, and went direct to the Mir and said, "Look here. You must not worship trees and stones. There is a God. You must worship God who has created all these trees and stones."' Then he showed some miracles. So first the Mir, and afterwards all the people, became Moslem.' We did not hear any details of the conversion of the Gilgit and Chitral valleys, except that a missionary from Yarkand is said to have had a hand in it, but it too seems to have been peaceful.

It seems then that the conversions in the northern valleys did not cause much political disruption. The missionaries came alone or with a few disciples, and relied upon teaching and miracles to spread their message. Those who came afterwards to consolidate the work—Seyed Shah Wali and Jalali Shah, the first Pir of Chatorkhand—followed the same pattern.²

¹ Kandi won his throne from a rival contender by trickery. The two had agreed to fight for the throne in single combat 'as soon as the apricot begins to flower'. It was then winter, but Kandi poured hot water over the roots of an apricot tree so that it came into flower before its time. Thereupon he took his rival by surprise and fatally wounded him.

² Raja Karam Khan had told us something more of the Pirs of Chatorkhand:

'Jalali Shah was an Ismaili who came to Yasin from Bokhara. He came over the Darkot pass and settled in the village of Buringdas. It was in the days of the Kushwaqt rulers. In those days there were two demons in the village who used to terrorize the people. Jalali Shah expelled one of these demons, whose name was Yarmuk, and sent him over the pass into the Chitral valley. But Yarmuk began to go into people's houses on that side, so the people from there came to Jalali Shah

(Continued on p. 186)

Furthermore these missionaries and religious leaders came from countries to the north and west where Islam was well established under centralized rule—Shah Buria came from Persia, Shah Wali from Badakshan, and Pir Jalali Shah from Bokhara—and so they would not have thought it necessary to make political changes.

On the other hand the southern valleys were converted by missionaries who came from further south, from the territories occupied by the Pathans. Indeed most of these missionaries were Pathans, and they approached their task in a different way, using force rather than teaching and miracles. In Kandia people tell how Kandi and his people defended themselves against a Moslem army led by the Pathan zealot Akhund Baba, until Kandi was finally killed and his kingdom overthrown.¹ Other traditions that we heard were less detailed, but equally explicit about the use of force. 'Nine generations ago the people of Kalam were infidels. An *akhund* came from Dir and attacked them. Some were killed and the others became Moslem.' 'Twelve generations ago Mir Kasim Baba brought soldiers and attacked the people of this place and

(Continued from p. 185)

and complained. "Go back to your villages," he said to them, "and whenever Yarmuk comes to your house tell him that Pir Jalali Shah sends his greetings." So the people did this. Yarmuk was perplexed, thinking, "Jalali Shah turned me out of Yasin, so why does he now send greetings to me here in Chitral?" Then Yarmuk stopped annoying people in Chitral. The other demon was called Mirza Katchat. Jalali Shah kept him in Buringdas, and put him to work at moving boulders and preparing fields.

'The people of those valleys were very impressed by such powers over demons, and many of them became Ismailis. They began to have more respect for Jalali Shah, and for his son, Shahi Kalan, than for their own Kushwaqt rulers. Then the Kushwaqt made trouble, and so Shahi Kalan fled from Yasin over the pass into Ishkoman, intending to take refuge with the ruler of Punial. But when he reached Chatorkhand, which was then part of Punial, he liked it so much that the ruler of Punial allowed him to settle there. So that is how this family of Pirs came to Chatorkhand. As he fled from Yasin, Shahi Kalan cursed the Kushwaqt family. Ever since then Kushwaqt fortunes have been very low, and the family has become scattered.

'The present Pir, who is the great-great grandson of Shahi Kalan, is still thought to have powers over demons by people in Ishkoman and Punial. Actually he is a young man with modern ideas.'

¹ According to the story, after several unsuccessful attacks on Kandi's fort, Akhund Baba went down to the river and found a boy absorbed in building a bridge for some ants. Evidently struck by this, Akhund Baba questioned him and learned that he was from Kandi's fort. He asked the boy to show a way into the fort, but the boy refused, saying that Kandi was kind to him and gave him three eggs every day. 'But I shall give you the mother of eggs,' said Akhund Baba, and he gave the boy a hen. Then the boy told Akhund Baba how to enter the fort and take Kandi unawares.

made them Moslems.' 'Sandaqi Baba came from Swat and forced all the people of Matiltan to become Moslems.' No doubt there were other rulers who suffered the same fate as Kandi. No doubt their thrones and administrations were destroyed too, for these Pathan missionaries, as well as introducing a more orthodox form of Islam, seem to have imposed wholesale the institutions and practices that they were familiar with in the Pathan territories further south.

They started by changing the settlement pattern. Previously people had built houses up on the valley sides, as the Kalash still do. Now they were encouraged to move down to the valley floors, around the newly constructed mosques, and near the flowing water necessary for ablutions. The missionaries encouraged the subordination and seclusion of women, and the Pathan code of 'honour' associated with women. They introduced the peculiar land-holding system of the Pathans of Swat and Dir. And they tried to establish the tribal form of government which the Pathans had at that time. They did not realise that they were trying to reverse an evolutionary process, that while tribal government may work for an integral tribe it will not do for a decapitated kingdom. 'Acephalous' seems indeed the right term. Nor was the new land-holding system a success, as we were to find out later. For us, the most tangible achievement of these southern missionaries was their mosques. Many are still standing, solid, simple and dignified. The dimensions are impressive: the front beam of the Kalam mosque is more than eighty feet long and some of the pillar capitals are twenty-five feet in span. The pillars have been boldly yet sparingly decorated with the combination of Gandharan and geometrical motifs.

If some of this still seemed a bit speculative, we were finally convinced when we studied the sectarian affiliations of the missionaries. The Pathans belong to the orthodox Sunni sect of Islam, and so do the people of the acephalous states. The Yarkand missionary and Pir Jalali Shah were Ismailis, and so are the people of the upper Chitral and upper Gilgit valleys. Shah Buria came from Persia and so must have been a Shia; the people of Nagar are Shias, and so were those of Hunza until the middle of the nineteenth century, when they became Ismailis.

Most of the states that came through the Islamic conversion underwent further changes during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Some of these changes were also profound. Gilgit and Astor were invaded by armies from

Kashmir which displaced the local rulers and set up new provincial administrations. The Kushwaqt were ousted by the Kator, and their territory was subsequently dismembered. Hunza, Nagar and Chilas were subdued by the British-Indian army in short though sharp campaigns. Torwal, Kandia and Duber were annexed by Swat state. Nonetheless the Kator administration survived in Chitral, more or less intact, until well into the twentieth century; and in Hunza, Nagar, Punial and most of the acephalous states the traditional administrations, though modified and no longer autonomous, still functioned into the 1970s.

* * *

Chitral has a long history of centralized rule—indeed, if the story of Bahman can be believed, there have been rulers in the valley for more than a thousand years. Like most of the ruling dynasties of Kohistan, the Kator are of foreign origin: through Sangin Ali, they trace a relationship with the Timurids and the Moghuls. After Sangin Ali, who died about 1600, little is remembered of succeeding Mehtars until 1857, when Aman-ul-Mulk ascended the throne. Something is recorded of him, both because he ruled for the remarkable period of thirty-five years, and because towards the end of his reign parts of Kohistan began to come into contact with British India. Several British political officers mention him in reports and memoirs and there are even photographs taken in his old age. Besides ruling for thirty-five years, Aman-ul-Mulk was remarkable for dying of natural causes. Very few Mehtars achieved this, for traditionally there were no laws of succession to the throne. As soon as each Mehtar could be assassinated, his surviving brothers and sons used to fight among themselves until all but one were killed or forced into exile. Aman-ul-Mulk himself had climbed to the throne ‘by steps slippery with the blood he had shed’, and after his death at least five of his legitimate sons were killed in the struggles to succeed him.

Below the Mehtars in the social scale came the aristocracy, forming perhaps fifteen per cent of the population. Like the Kator many of them were descended from foreigners who settled in the state and adopted Khowar as their language. They were—and still are—owners of irrigated land—sometimes as much as fifty acres—which has been cultivated by servants or tenants. In the old days, and even now, members

of the aristocracy would not work with their own hands, which in itself distinguished them from the rest of the population. The aristocracy provided the hierarchy of officials who administered the state, from the Wazirs and provincial governors down to the village headmen. They also filled posts such as envoys to neighbouring rulers and officers of the Mehtar's bodyguard. All such appointments were in the hands of the Mehtar, who would dismiss any one thought to be unreliable and replace them with his own supporters and milk-relations. On the whole though, most appointments remained within the families traditionally associated with them, and so in practice were virtually hereditary. Furthermore, although officials had to be loyal while a Mehtar was alive, immediately he died they were expected to transfer their allegiance to his successor. This is the explanation of the apparently cynical Khowar proverb, 'He who rules my country is my king'. Such transfers of allegiance gave continuity to the administration, and helped to confine the succession struggles to the ruling family.

Political power, like social status, was closely linked with the possession of irrigated land, which was almost the only source of wealth. In various parts of the state there was irrigated land which was in the Mehtar's gift. By distributing this land the Mehtar could reward officials and supporters, and indeed anyone else who took his fancy. Conversely he could take back the land if the recipient fell out of favour or died. By such manoeuvres the Mehtar could advance or retard the fortunes and standing of particular families. As with state appointments, precedent and tradition usually prevailed in the long run. Nonetheless a few farming families have, in time, succeeded in climbing into the aristocracy; while a few aristocratic families have come down in the world until they have been forced to work with their own hands. They have a proverb in Khowar for this too: 'Stones roll from the mountain to the valley, but stones also roll from the valley to the mountain'. As elsewhere such movements have been accompanied by a great deal of jealousy, snobbishness and face-saving.

The relationship between the Mehtar and the aristocracy was given formal expression at the daily receptions, or *mahrekas*, which were held either in the audience room of the Mehtar's fort, or under the *chenar* trees outside. Twice a day, in the morning and in the evening, the Mehtar would appear and would receive senior officials, visiting dignitaries

and the members of influential families. The business of state would be transacted and the Mehtar would announce his decisions. If the occasion was a special one, formal robes were worn, and a brilliant scene they made (Plate 15.2). Algernon Durand described *chogas* of gold brocade and the 'gorgeous silks of Bokhara', with breeches of 'green and blue velvets', the whole assembly 'ablaze with colour'. *Mahrekas* were conducted with much etiquette and formality. No one would sit until the Mehtar himself had come in and sat. He would sit or recline upon a dais covered with carpets and cushions, while others would sit on carpets on the floor. His relatives, senior officials, and his special confidantes would sit near him, and those of lower status would sit further away. The order of seating was a complicated business in itself, and there was a court official to see that people sat in the appropriate places. In the background there was a crowd of minor officials, servants, minstrels, petitioners and spectators. Most people would speak only when bidden by the Mehtar.

If anyone had come to the capital from the provinces the Mehtar would ask him for the news, which he would discuss with the leading men. Then perhaps a headman had to be appointed, or some state land allocated. Then some provincial officials, who had made their annual visit to the capital and had attended on the Mehtar for the customary two or three months, had to be suitably rewarded and sent home. Then a petitioner might come forward, kiss the Mehtar's hand and present his case—a dispute over irrigation water perhaps—and the Mehtar would consult anyone present who knew the circumstances, and would pass judgement. When any important matter was to be decided the leading men would give their opinions, and there would be argument to and fro. George Curzon, who attended a *mahreka* and who was presumably a judge of speeches, was surprised by the width of vision and the *savoir faire* exhibited. 'I have rarely heard an argument more fluently expressed or more cogently sustained,' he commented. Although the Mehtar made the final decisions, such discussion in public helped to keep him within the bounds of precedent and convention. The ebb and flow of people between the capital and the provinces meant that the whole population was kept constantly informed of events at court. It also meant that the Mehtar knew many of his subjects personally—indeed, as one British officer remarked, he ruled his country 'face to face with his people'.

An important feature of the *mahrekas* was the distribution of rewards to state officials and others who had earned them. Such rewards had to be carefully matched to the status of the recipient. Members of the aristocracy expected the traditional luxuries of Central Asia—Bokhara silks and brocade *chogas*, precious stones, knotted carpets, 'Gurrdinah' china, weapons and horse-trappings—or local luxuries such as hawks, hunting-dogs and horses. Such items could be shown off and their display was part of the traditional ostentation of the court. But the occasional farmer who had earned a reward—perhaps he had guided the Mehtar when hunting, or brought the first ducks of the season—received much less, probably a woollen *choga* or a cap, however great his services might have been. This used to confuse some of the British officers, one of whom wrote petulantly, 'It is a country where one rewards a man for what he is and not for what he does.' Each *mahreka* ended with a lavish meal of rice, meat curry and wheat bread. As a mark of special favour for a protégé, the Mehtar would send a portion of food from his own serving. As at every court, personal qualities counted for much. A handsome man who was an amusing talker, a clever poet, and a good horseman was certain to be a favourite.

After the *mahreka* there would be recreation—polo, exhibitions of horsemanship, and hawking—when again the costly apparel and trappings would be displayed, and the triumphs of men and animals would be praised and rewarded. There was much formality and flattery: if the Mehtar dismounted, everyone dismounted; if he fell off his horse, everyone fell off theirs. If he played polo, four bands would play in his support; and his side would always win, if only because he picked the teams, although many of the Mehtars were extremely fine players. There was also much light-heartedness and careless generosity. Wazir Ali Shah remembers how a tribute of sixty horses arrived one afternoon, and how the Mehtar made his courtiers and servants mount these horses bareback and play polo on them. When he had had his fun from this, he simply gave the horses away to whoever was riding them.

Below the aristocracy came a large class of farmers, mostly with less than five acres of irrigated land each, which they worked with their own hands. In Chitral the majority of this class were Kho. Traditionally, as the owners of land, they have been respected members of society, entitled to consideration by the Mehtar but liable to have to fight for him. Nor

were their rights to land absolute, for each plot carried certain obligations that its owner had to fulfil. These involved the giving of goods or services which were specified in great detail: to provide certain items of food at certain intervals for certain officials who toured in the locality, to catch and train so many hawks for the Mehtar, to scare birds off crops on the Mehtar's own land nearby, and so on. Such a system allowed a complex administration to function without the use of currency. It was, in effect, a well adapted system of taxation and finance.

Below came the lowest class, consisting of craftsmen and had other groups who had a little land, and of individuals—some of them Kho—who had lost their land through some natural disaster or personal misfortune. Those with land again had to fulfil obligations appropriate to their status. The Kalash, who were treated as menials, had to send one man from each household to carry firewood for the Mehtar's kitchens. The minstrels had to perform for the court or the public on special occasions. The raftsmen had to ply their ferries and produce a certain quantity of gold-dust for the Mehtar's coffers. Others had to carry the luggage of touring officials, or maintain the local tracks and rope-bridges. By such means something at least was provided in the way of public services. Those without any land worked for the aristocracy as servants or tenants, and if they worked well there was a chance that they would be given a piece of land by their employer.

Barren but irrigable land was in the gift of the Mehtar, and sometimes he would grant such land to a nearby village for distribution among those, including the landless, who helped to build a channel. Other barren land was given to immigrants in return for some service, or the practice of a special skill. Recent Mehtars have secured their remote borders by allocating land there to immigrants from the neighbouring area on condition that they prevent their kinsmen across the border from raiding and stealing livestock. In this way the Wakhis were encouraged to settle in the north and the Kafir refugees were given land at the heads of the Kalash valleys. The irrigation of barren land and the settlement of immigrants was clearly in the interests of the Mehtars, increasing both their revenue and their political and military strength, as well as adding to the versatility of the population. Thus many immigrants—refugees, pastoralists, exiles and craftsmen—have been able to find a home in Chitral. The Mehtar's paramount

powers, despotic though they were, at least worked towards the maximum use of land by the maximum number of people.

The position in the other princely states was much the same. Everyone depended on land as the main source of income. Rights to land, social status, and obligations to the state were again closely interwoven; and the irrigation and allotment of land, and the integration of immigrants, worked in the same fashion. In Hunza traditions tell that the craftsmen were introduced by the Mirs for the sake of their skills. Indeed, according to one tradition, the first craftsmen came as the dowry of a princess of Baltistan who married into the Hunza ruling family.

On the other hand the relationship between the Kator Mehtars and their people sometimes took a less benign form. The costly court luxuries were imported from Turkistan and Badakshan, and they had to be paid for. The chief importers were the Mehtars themselves, and they financed the trade by selling into slavery people captured in the constant wars between the princely states. But if the captives were not enough, the Mehtars simply enslaved some of their own subjects and sold them as well. Men, women and children were in fact a major export, with the great advantage that they could be easily moved over difficult terrain. The subjects most liable for this treatment were members of the lower classes who had somehow offended the Mehtar or had committed some crime, but blameless labourers, craftsmen and Kalash were also occasional grist to the mill. The practice of the Kator Mehtars in using their subjects in this way seems to have been well established. A secret agent of the British-Indian Government, who visited Chitral in 1870, reported that Aman-ul-Mulk had recently sent a consignment of twenty-one slaves to Badakshan and had received in return sixty silk robes, two swords and a horse. At that time the value of a handsome Kalash woman used to be quoted at up to three hundred rupees, and that of a man at about two hundred. An old man was worth a donkey.

Even in Hunza and Nagar, where the Mirs' own subjects were usually spared, prisoners of war were sold into slavery. The Mirs of Hunza further augmented their revenues by organizing raids upon the trade caravans that passed to the north-east of Hunza between Eastern Turkistan and Ladakh. Five hundred laden ponies were once captured in a single raid. Plundered goods and captives became the property of the Mir, who distributed some of the goods among his

officials and courtiers, and sold the remainder and the captives in Yarkand and Kashgar.

To export slaves was expedient, for there was little else to export. Woollen cloth, dried apricots and kernels, a few falcons and a little gold-dust did not balance payments. Nor did every slave meet a cruel fate. Some rose to high positions in the kingdoms of Turkistan. One became an envoy for the Amir of Afghanistan and was even received in state by the Mehtar of Chitral. But many never even reached the markets; they died of cold and exhaustion on the passes. One of the first things that the British and the Russians did on taking over any part of Central Asia was to prohibit slavery, and at the end of the nineteenth century the governments of Eastern Turkistan and Afghanistan also prohibited it and closed the slave-markets. At one time there were more than two thousand slaves in Kashgar alone, and the trade extended as far as Bokhara. Now the whole business is practically forgotten.

Two contrasted tendencies seem to emerge from nineteenth century Kator rule. On the one hand there was the genuine effort to govern the state in the light of experience and convention, to encourage settlement and irrigation, and to provide for law, order and social harmony. Along with this went the court with its regalia and recreations and an attitude to life that seemed cheerful and carefree. George Robertson, another early political officer, caught this mood in the following words:

For the rest, all was gaiety and bright raiment, picturesque polo games, hunting parties, polite discourse, with prayers at orthodox times, and the music of tabor and pipe, giving a dancing measure to unspeakable but beautiful boys.¹

On the other hand there was the tendency that prompted the same officer to write of 'a wonderful capacity for cold-blooded cruelty', and 'a crimson-stained record, a monstrous tale of murder and perfidy'. The ruthless murder of contenders for the throne was one expression of this. The selling of subjects into slavery was another. How to reconcile these tendencies?

The answer seems to be that there was universal attachment and loyalty to traditional 'institutions'—to the system of social classes with their privileges and obligations, to the ruling dynasty as such, and to the conventions of government

¹ Robertson, 1899, p. 30.

and court—but simultaneously a disregard for individual life or personal loyalties. Wazir Ali Shah gave us a macabre illustration. When the Mehtar Nizam-ul-Mulk was murdered by his brother Amir-ul-Mulk, one of the latter's supporters was sent to Shogor to kill the headman who was opposed to the new Mehtar. His instructions were explicit: first, he was to kill the headman's sons, one by one in front of their father, and then kill the headman himself; second, he was to throw the bodies into the river so that the Mehtar, who was waiting downstream, should see them float by. The executioner seems to have had little compunction about obeying the first part of his instructions; it was the second part that he objected to. 'They were of an old and honourable family,' he complained, 'and the father was much respected in Shogor. Tell the Mehtar it is not right to throw the bodies of such men in the river. We shall bury them here in a proper manner.'

For many rulers in Kohistan possession of a throne seems to have been a demoralizing experience, and the result was often a bizarre mixture of savage cruelty and feckless gaiety within the same man. Yet some were competent and far-sighted men—Aman-ul-Mulk for one—and a few were even benign. And whatever criticisms were made of them as individuals, the fact remains that their form of government did give some people in Kohistan what the early travellers used to describe as 'a secure state of society'.

* * *

From the time of our first talks with Ghulam Abbas, when he told us about the 'laziness' of the farmers of Chilas and their refusal to sell butter or grow apricots, we were curious about the difference in the farming between the southern and northern valleys. Later, when we visited the south, we saw the difference for ourselves and were surprised by the 'slovenly' cultivation, the monotony of the crops, the paucity of vegetables and fruit, and the wasted land and water. I then found myself wondering if the political differences could have anything to do with it. Clearly the conditions for acquiring land had been different. So had the reception of foreigners: xenophobia and what the early travellers called 'the unsettled state of affairs' discouraged even traders from visiting the acephalous states, let alone would-be immigrants.

Like representation in the assemblies, the right to own land whether irrigated or barren, has belonged almost exclusively

to the dominant groups. In Chilas and the neighbouring valleys these have been the Shins and the Shins's predecessors. Furthermore since members of the dominant groups hold this right in common, there have been few of the convenient adjustments of the princely states. Even now there is little hope of the landless being given barren land to irrigate, nor is it possible for a member of a land-owning group to give away one of his fields to a friend or to a servant. Meanwhile much irrigable land remains barren: yet there are many people without land. We estimated in one valley that the irrigated area could be extended in three-quarters of the villages, yet nearly half the inhabitants of some of these villages have no land at all. If any land should be given outside the dominant groups it follows that every member of those groups must suffer a cut in his own share, and there is no effective authority to override objections to this. The only immigrants to be allotted land have been the Pathan missionaries themselves and a small number of craftsmen. The missionaries—and their descendants—have been admitted in recognition of their religious services to the whole community (Plate 16.1). The craftsmen have been tolerated on account of their special skills, but even after generations of residence on a plot of land they may still have no permanent rights to it.

Paradoxically this inflexibility was strengthened by the missionaries' attempt to distribute resources more equitably. Like the assemblies this was modelled on a system operating among the Pathans of Swat and Dir. The aim was to achieve an absolutely equitable distribution of land among all the families of the land-owning groups. Since no two plots of land are identical, families used to move round from one plot to another after every five years. When all the plots had been occupied by all the families, absolute equality was theoretically achieved. Such redistribution took place at different levels, mostly within villages, but sometimes between villages and occasionally between valleys. At one time the land-owners of Kandia used to shift wholesale to Duber and vice versa. Redistribution has now ceased, but it continued in Kandia until the end of the nineteenth century, and in Darel until the 1930s.

Although this land-holding system cannot have functioned for more than eight or ten generations, it had an effect on the farming of the southern valleys. The effect was bad, mainly because landowners were discouraged from improving their plots. Planting trees was not worthwhile if a man knew that

he would move on before they bore any fruit. Such attitudes persist even now. After the abundant fruit trees in Nagar and Hunza and in the Kalash villages, the bleakness of many of the acephalous villages is striking. Others had realized this before us: when the first ruler emerged to control the Swat valley, one of his reforms was to prohibit redistribution for the sake of the farming. One anomaly puzzled us for a while; some of those same tree-less southern villages exhibit the most elaborate and extensive terracing. If it was not worth planting trees, how could it be worth terracing fields? Barth gave us an answer to this, for he had recorded a tradition in Kandia that most of the terracing was done in the days of Kandi and his predecessors, before redistribution was started.¹ So here was the exception that proved the rule.

As far as the early writers were concerned the outstanding feature of the acephalous states was their lethal feuds, and they expended a good deal of moral indignation on these. Even now, when the whole area is under the aegis of Pakistan, the feuds continue. We had to get used to men answering our questions with a rifle or shotgun across knees, while their brothers and cousins stood guard behind them. In Matiltan village we talked with an old man who claimed that his cousin had killed nearly twenty men in feuds. He himself had an old leg wound from an axe, a six-inch bullet scar along his arm and another on his head. One of the Kandia men let us examine his rifle. It was a .303, marked 'Mauser Espanol 1893'. 'It has killed many men,' he said, 'I have many enemies.'

We talked to an informal group in a Chilas village and found that every man present was involved in a feud. Hamid, who was with us, was horrified, and he gave them a lecture. They listened politely, and cordially agreed with what he said—that it is wrong to seek to kill, that it is uncivilized, that it is unpatriotic, that it is forbidden by Islam, that it is forbidden by Government—but at the end they regretfully explained that their honour and reputations were involved in pursuing the feuds. What were the feuds about, we asked? None of them knew how they had originated: all they knew was that someone from another family had shot their father or their brother, and now it was their turn to shoot back, or vice versa. Thus the feuds pass from one generation to the next, long after the original cause is forgotten or irrelevant. Such a blind pursuit of inherited feuds is typical of the Pathans, and

¹ Barth, 1956a, p. 190.

there is little doubt that the code of 'honour' involved has been acquired from the Pathans since the Islamic conversion.

One common starting point for feuds is disputes over land: quarrels over rightful shares in land which is owned in common, or over the boundaries of plots and turns for irrigation water—matters that were quickly settled by the local officials in a princely state—soon turn into feuds. Another starting point is quarrels over women. This is encouraged by the view of women as subordinate creatures scarcely responsible for their own actions. Husbands and fathers keep wives and daughters in much greater seclusion than in the princely states, and make themselves responsible for their behaviour and reputations. The slightest aspersion or impropriety, as they see it, can lead to a quarrel and killing.

Feuds are further exacerbated by competition for election to the assemblies. A man who pursues his feuds actively demonstrates his ability to look after the interests of his own faction in the assembly. A man who does not pursue feuds will lose the support of his faction, for no one will have confidence in him. Moreover the 'honour' and 'shame' involved are not so much individual as family matters. If a man is shamed by an insult or by an unavenged murder the shame reflects on his relatives, while any honour he acquires by taking revenge is likewise reflected. He is therefore under pressure from his relatives to pursue a feud, and they share the responsibility of doing so with him. Indeed feuds are inherited just like property: when a man is killed the right and responsibility to take revenge falls first on his sons, then on his grandsons. Conversely, if a murderer cannot be reached because he has run away, then his brother, his father, or his father's brother may be killed in his place.

One consequence of feuds has been a failure to co-operate in enterprises for the common good. The princely states, with their disciplined populations and their hierarchies of officials, were well equipped to organize channel-building. Some of the Hunza channels, which are technically the most difficult of all, are associated with the names of the Wazirs who personally supervised the work. The wonder in the acephalous states is that any channels got built at all. Probably those we saw were mostly finished in more peaceful times when government in the southern valleys was more effective.

We spent some time in the Niat valley, south of Chilas, where we fell in with one of the leading men, whose name

was Gyebullah. He was a natural leader—thirty-two years old, tall, handsome, athletic, authoritative and knowledgeable. He was a Shin, he had attended primary school, and he represented Niat village in the Chilas assembly. He told us jokingly that his ambition was to take his family to England. Altogether he was a very attractive person and he was extremely kind and helpful to us. He was involved in a feud. His older brother had already been killed, and evidently Gyebullah had taken his revenge, for he told us that he hoped he would at least be spared until his little son, then aged five, was old enough to carry a rifle. He never went out without two of his cousins, and the three of them would escort us on our visits to the nearby villages. Not that Elizabeth or Hamid or I were in any danger, they explained—these were private quarrels that did not involve outsiders. We learnt a lot from Gyebullah, and hoped to meet him again, but the following year we heard that he had been shot in the back and was dead. His son is probably carrying his rifle by now.

There is no finesse about the killings themselves, no question of who is quickest on the draw. The object is to catch the enemy unawares and shoot him before he can retaliate. For a man who is heavily committed to a feud the only safe places are his own house and the mosque. We found that houses in the southern valleys do not have smoke-holes for fear that enemies will climb on the roof and shoot down through them. In Tangir, where feuds are at their worst, many houses are fortified; and many man-hours are spent sitting in the sanctuary of the mosque. Despite such precautions and despite heavy fines and long prison sentences imposed by the Pakistan Government, the killings continue. A government officer reckoned that there are altogether about forty each year in Chilas, Tangir, Darel and Gor. If so, there are probably as many again in Kandia and the other acephalous states.

Another consequence of feuds is that the men involved can scarcely manage to work in their fields, for as soon as they put down their rifle and take up the plough they are both defenceless and exposed. Gyebullah did not even attempt it, and left all the work to landless labourers. The labourers are seldom involved in the feuds around them, if only because they cannot afford rifles and ammunition. Some of them belong to the subordinate and craftsmen groups, some are Gujars, and some are destitute fugitives from feuds in other valleys (Plate 16.4). Such fugitives, who come without

resources and without any claim on those among whom they take refuge, have to make do as best they can. Most start by borrowing grain from a landowner, but without land of their own they have little chance of paying it back. It is more likely that the debt will increase until they find themselves and even their children compelled to work for the land owner in lieu of paying the interest, let alone the capital. They are then virtually slaves, and can be transferred from one landowner to another for the amount of the debt. People in such a predicament have little incentive to work hard. So this is another reason why crop yields are low in the southern valleys. There is none of the Chitral farmer's hoarding of manure, none of the Gilgit family's careful thinning and weeding. Double-cropping gives way to single-cropping as low as 6,000 feet.

In addition to pursuing feuds and being a good speaker, a landowner who seeks popularity and influence must be wealthy, and he must disburse his wealth in the form of feasts for the community. The most lavish expenditure is seen at funerals, when the whole community is entertained to a sumptuous meal of meat, rice, bread and the famous buried butter. Gyebullah had spent Rs. 1,500 for his brother's funeral feast, but that was nothing compared to the twelve bullocks and three tons of wheat consumed at a funeral in Tangir. Feasting on this scale may make a man popular and increase his influence, but it is unlikely to leave him any grain or butter to sell in Gilgit bazaar. If he does have a surplus he will simply hoard it for the next funeral. So here was an answer to another riddle.

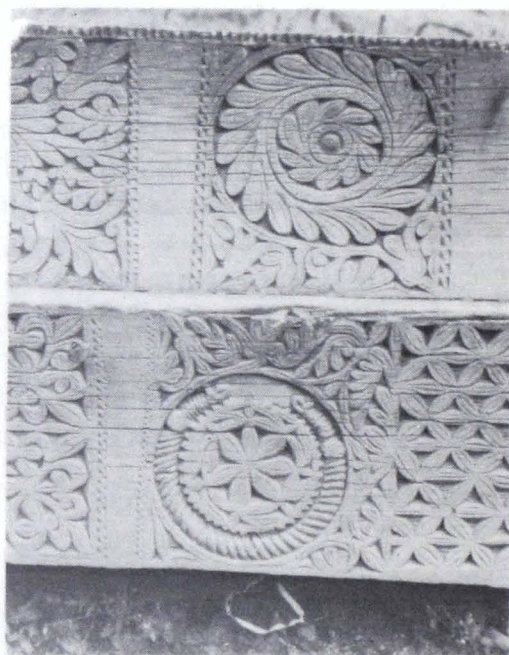
Feasts are almost the only personal ostentation seen in the acephalous states. There are none of the costly luxuries of the principalities, no brocades, no jewels, no 'Gurrdinah' china. For a man to ride a horse or wear a silk robe would be regarded as a provocation, besides making him a conspicuous target. Indeed the material and cultural sides of life in the acephalous states are relatively frugal. There is none of the Chitrali's pleasure in a beautiful carpet, nor the Hunza farmer's enjoyment of the seasonal dishes his wife prepares, nor the Gilgiti's appreciation of a game of polo. Apart from his rifle, the only other visible expression of a man's wealth and aesthetic feeling is the wooden 'fence' he puts around a grave after the funeral feast. Many graves are marked simply with a pair of roughly shaped planks at the head and the foot, but those of the leading men and the wealthy are surrounded



1. Men of Sinaker village sit outside the mosque under Shah Buria's *chenar* tree



2. Ibex graffiti recently chipped on a rock-face in the Gilgit valley



3. Carving on a grave in Kalam (Gandharan and geometrical patterns are combined)

by more elaborate structures (Plate 14.3). Some have vertical planks like a stockade; others are shallower, with horizontal planks exquisitely carved with Gandharan motifs, sometimes with two S-shaped curlicues standing inside the grave itself.¹

The coming of Islam, an event which has given unity to disparate peoples in many countries, can seldom have had such diverse consequences as in Kohistan. When missionaries attempt social and economic reform the results are often incongruous. A comparison with Christian missionary endeavour seems appropriate, for foreign (in this case, Pathan) ideas were introduced, no doubt with the best of intentions, but without any thought for their suitability to local circumstances. Centralized rule in Kohistan, for all its faults, has provided the flexibility necessary for effective government. This was sacrificed for a theoretical democracy that never worked democratically. A social system which allowed at least some mobility was replaced by a rigid caste-like hierarchy—no stones rolled to or from the mountains in the acephalous states. A landowning system which, although discriminatory, gave a chance to everyone was replaced by a theoretically equitable system that was grossly inequitable. And the result for the farming has been low investment, poor cultivation, and low production.

Not that we found all the answers to our questions about differences in the farming. We still need to know much more. How far, for example, are irrigation and cultivation affected by the ratios of people to land in different valleys? What effect does the length of time that snow lies on the fields have on the possibilities for double-cropping? How far do the richer pastures and abundant hollyoak of the south allow a greater dependence on livestock husbandry? But we are convinced that we found some of the answers. I felt this most strongly when I asked Gyebullah why some farmers are more successful than others. He replied, 'No man is better at farming than another. If he does better, it is just his good luck.' A friend of Hamid's in Hunza had answered the same question by saying, 'Some farmers are more skilful than others, and some farmers work harder than others.'

¹ We wondered about parallels with the Kalash, who used to carve wooden funeral effigies, some of them equestrian, in honour of their leading men (Plate 14.3). Some of the shaped planks on graves in the Niat valley resembled horses' heads, and others reminded us of the effigies of Berir; while the box-like structures around graves in Kalam reminded us of the open-air coffins of the graveyard in Bumboret.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

'THE SHADOW OF THE BEAR'

... the shadow of the Bear, rampant, loomed large on the political horizon.

*From a book by Maud Diver,
a novelist of 'the Great Game'.*

Mr. Hayward lies cold in death: not on the battle-field, not in Christian or hallowed soil, but under a heap of stones, on the bleak hill-side, near the crests of the Indian Caucasus, the victim of a barbarous, cold-blooded murder. It is hard to speak coolly on a subject of this sort . . .

*Vice-President of the Royal Geographical Society,
speaking upon the death of the explorer,
George Hayward, in Yasin in 1870.¹*

The connection between Kohistan and British India grew during the second half of the nineteenth century. This growth was prompted on the British side more by fears of the Russian advance into Central Asia than by territorial ambitions. One by one the ancient Kingdoms of Turkistan were falling to Russia—Tashkent in 1865, Bokhara in 1886, Samarkand in 1868, Kokand in 1876—the final objective of this advance could only be India. The absorption of Kohistan into British India at the end of the century, piecemeal and vacillating though the process seemed, was due to this Russophobia. Only when British Indian power extended to the northern watersheds was India felt to be safe. In the end British India and Russia never quite met. In 1895 their spheres of influence were defined, and it was agreed that a strip of Afghan territory should extend between them up to the border of Eastern Turkistan. This is the origin of the Wakhan 'pan-handle'. Less than twenty years afterwards British and Russian surveyors were meeting as friends on the *pamirs* north of Hunza to link together their respective triangulation frameworks.

In fact, as Dr. Alder has shown in his study of British Indian policy during the period, the fears of Russian advance through the mountains were exaggerated. Geographical ignorance was responsible for this. It was only towards

¹ Rawlinson, 1870-71, pp. 18-19.

the end of the century, after the British had begun to extend their influence in Kohistan, that the difficulties for an invading army became apparent. But as the risk of invasion was discounted, the fears of political intrigue and military diversions grew. These fears were much more realistic. In 1878 Russian explorers reached Badakshan; and in the following year a Russian force marched towards Badakshan until their orders were countermanded. During 1881-2 Russians visited Shignan and Darwaz, and in 1883 there were Russian surveyors in Wakhan. In 1888 a Russian officer visited Hunza. In 1891 another Russian party reached the summit of the Darkot pass at the head of the Yasin valley. In 1895 there existed plans for a Russian occupation of Chitral.

Information about routes through the mountains was slowly, and sometimes painfully, gathered by the British. Some of it came from official missions to the rulers of Kohistan and Turkistan. Some of it came from travellers and explorers, not all of whom had the blessing of the British Indian Government, and not all of whom returned to tell their tales. Some of it came from the operations of the Indian Survey, at least two of whose officers slipped into forbidden territory across the watersheds and mapped large areas of unknown country. Some of it came from secret agents who, with false names and in disguise, penetrated the mountains and the regions beyond where no European could go, and brought back a mass of information.

All this was the stuff of 'the Great Game', that celebrated contest in imperial espionage and intrigue which was played the length and breadth of Central Asia through the nineteenth century. This is the setting for Kipling's *Kim*, and for the heroes of John Buchan, Maud Diver and John Masters, as they struggled with the representatives of Russia for strategic advantage and the allegiance of the states of Central Asia.

Even in the first part of the nineteenth century, before the Great Game had begun in earnest, the little states of Kohistan were being drawn into contact with neighbouring countries, especially Kashmir. At that time Kashmir was itself a possession of the Sikh empire of Ranjit Singh, which was centred upon Lahore in the Punjab. In 1841 a Sikh force from Kashmir had occupied Astor, and shortly afterwards a dynastic dispute gave them the opportunity of advancing to Gilgit. Then in 1846 came the First Sikh War, and the defeat of the Sikh army in the Punjab by British India. In the treaty that followed, the Sikhs were allowed to retain their government

at Lahore under the surveillance of a British representative, but were required to pay an indemnity of a million pounds. There was no money in Lahore to pay the indemnity, so when Gulab Singh, the Raja of Jammu, offered the money in return for Kashmir, his offer was accepted. Thus Gulab Singh, of Hindu Rajput descent, came into the possession of Kashmir, and with it both Astor and Gilgit. From that time until the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947, the State of Jammu and Kashmir remained one of the largest and most important of the Indian 'native states'. Gulab Singh and his successors were given the title of Maharaja.

As far as Kohistan was concerned, the policy of the British Indian Government in the forty years that followed 1846 was to try to use Kashmir as a watch-dog over the frontier without going to all the expense, trouble and political upheaval that annexation would have entailed. It was a difficult policy. For one thing, Kashmir had her own ambitions, which were sometimes at variance with British India. For another, Kashmir's grip on this inaccessible mountainous area remained very weak. In the end the British were forced to take a more active role there themselves.

The British representative appointed at Lahore in 1846 was Henry Lawrence, who was assisted by his famous 'young men'. Two of these visited Kashmir and Kohistan the following year and were the first Europeans to reach Gilgit. Before this a few European travellers had reached only the fringes of Kohistan. The first to describe any part of it had been William Moorcroft, a surgeon and veterinarian, who in 1811 became superintendent of the military stud farm of the East India Company. Ostensibly seeking horses for the stud, but mainly with the idea of promoting British trade in Central Asia, Moorcroft made a daring journey into Tibet in 1812. On another journey he explored parts of Ladakh, which was still independent at the time. From Ladakh he travelled through Kashmir to Peshawar, and from there on to Kabul and Bokhara; but on the return journey in 1825, at the age of fifty-eight, he died of fever. His companions succumbed on the same journey, and his baggage was looted, but his papers were later salvaged. When they were eventually published in 1841 they added much to the knowledge of the Karakoram and Hindu Kush.

Moorcroft did not reach even the borders of Kohistan, but he recorded whatever he heard about it. He wrote that 'the town of Hasora' (Astor) contained about three hundred

houses, and that some trade from Eastern Turkistan passed through Astor to Kashmir. Of Gilgit he reported that cotton and silk were raised for local use, that gold-dust formed the only currency, and that wine was drunk in 'considerable quantity'. He went on:

Westward from Gilgit is the country of Chitral, distinguished as Upper and Lower . . . Some traffic takes place with Badakshan and Yarkand, whence pearls, coral, cotton baftas, and chintzes, boots and shoes, and metals are imported: horses are also brought, and tea, but the latter is not much in use. The chief return is in slaves . . .¹

Moorcroft was the first to point to the dangers of Russian infiltration along the ancient trade route between Eastern Turkistan and Ladakh, and thence into Kashmir. He even got wind of a Russian agent who had crossed the mountains with presents for Ranjit Singh; and he urged British intervention in Ladakh before the Sikhs took it and opened it to the Russians. But British policy then was one of friendliness towards Ranjit Singh, and the warnings were ignored. Moorcroft's journeys were remarkable for the time, and had he survived he would have become a celebrated figure in the exploration of Central Asia. As it was, he incurred the disapproval of the East India Company for his unauthorized meddling in foreign politics, and for his long absence from his stud.

Better known, at least in his own lifetime, was Alexander Gardner, a soldier of fortune whose extraordinary travels and adventures during the 1820s later became the object of much acclaim. In 1831, at the end of his travels, Gardner entered Ranjit Singh's service as an instructor in artillery. After the transfer of Kashmir in 1846 he served Gulab Singh, and it was as a pensioner of the Kashmir army that he was found living in Srinagar during the 1860s and his story was first pieced together and published. Gardner himself bewailed the loss of a diary which he had carried throughout his travels disguised as a Koran. He had lent this diary to Alexander Burnes, with whom it had unfortunately perished in Kabul in 1841. Nonetheless by piecing together his recollections, intermittent and confusing though they were, his biographers could make out some remarkable achievements. He had been the first European to penetrate Kafiristan; the first since Marco Polo to ascend the Oxus valley and cross the Pamirs into Eastern Turkistan; and the first to cross the Karakoram to

¹ Moorcroft, 1841, p. 268-70.

Ladakh. From Ladakh he had followed Moorcroft into Kashmir, thus making an almost complete circle around Kohistan. From Kashmir he again struck off on unknown routes, passing right through the middle of Kohistan, through Chilas, the Gilgit valley and Chitral, whence he again crossed into Kafiristan and Afghanistan. All this was by 1830, a 'monumental journey' indeed, and one that should have earned him a prominent place in the history of exploration. As it was, a senior British official in India recommended Gardner's life history to 'the attention of our rising manhood in the British Isles'.

But the unfortunate fact remained that, for the geographer and the student of Central Asia, Gardner's information was confusing. In 1872 Henry Yule, the authority on the journeys of Marco Polo, wrote despairingly of Gardner's narrative:

I have read it some half-dozen times at considerable intervals, on each occasion hoping that increased acquaintance with the topography would at least enable me to trace some fraction of the writer's journeys . . . But every trial has ended in disappointment and mystification . . . well-known names now and then occur . . . But amid the phantasmagoria of antres vast and deserts idle, of weird scenery and uncouth nomenclature, which flashes past us . . . till our heads go round, we alight on those familiar names as if from the clouds; they link to nothing before or behind . . .¹

Gardner died in 1877 at a ripe age. A photograph of him survives, and shows him dressed in a suit of the tartan of the 79th Highlanders. On his head is a turban of the same material, topped by a white feather plume. His whiskers sprout belligerently and his hand rests on the hilt of his sword. The editor of his memoirs commented that the photograph gave 'but a dim idea of the vivacity of expression, the play of feature, the humour of the mouth, and the energy of character portrayed by the whole aspect of the man as he described the arduous and terrible incidents of a long life of romance and vicissitude'. As though to round off this compelling picture of the old hero, we are further told that Gardner had suffered a wound in his neck, and as a result had to clutch his throat with an iron pincer whenever he wanted to drink.

Anyone who now reads the story of Gardner's travels finds himself in the realms of romantic fiction: shipwrecked in the Aral Sea . . . sold as a slave . . . becomes a robber chief . . . raids a caravan . . . captures a beautiful maiden . . . a castle in the Hindu Kush . . . buried treasure . . . dervishes . . . attack

¹ Yule, 1872, pp. lvii-lviii.

by wolves . . . battle against overwhelming odds . . . witches . . . cannibals . . . ruby mines . . . ransom . . . And indeed it is romantic fiction, for it seems that Alexander Gardner was a deserter from a British ship who had never travelled further north than Peshawar or Srinagar. His knowledge of the regions he claimed to have explored was, at best, derived from traders and caravan leaders whom he met in the bazaars of Lahore and Srinagar, or was compounded from the tales of other mercenaries in the Sikh and Kashmir services. It was a splendid hoax.

A genuine traveller of the period was G.T. Vigne, a barrister with an interest in geology, botany and architecture. He had already travelled in the United States, and was later to visit Mexico and Central America. During the mid-1830s he travelled extensively in Kashmir, and also visited Ladakh, Baltistan and Astor. Baltistan and Astor were still independent at the time, and his was to be the first (and only) eyewitness account by a foreign traveller of the traditional regimes there. From Astor he tried to go on to Gilgit, but the ruler of Gilgit was suspicious and ordered the rope-bridge across the Indus to be burned. Like Moorcroft, Vigne recorded information about neighbouring countries which he could not visit. This included the remarkable fact that the women of Nagar were so fair that water could be perceived in their throats as they drank. He mentions an altar near Haramosh upon which 'they burn goats' fat and juniper branches' and 'eat the meat of the wild goat'. He also met some Chilasis, who took him for a wizard.

Thus in 1846, when the British began to establish themselves in the Punjab and Gulab Singh became the first Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, scarcely anything was yet known to the outside world of either the mountains or their inhabitants.

* * *

The first Europeans to reach Gilgit were Lieutenants Patrick Vans Agnew and Ralph Young, who spent three months in the area during 1847. As well as Astor and Gilgit, they visited the Bagrot valley and they went up the Hunza valley as far as Chalt, but the Mir of Hunza refused to allow them to go further. By this time Astor and Gilgit had come under Kashmir control, although the old rulers still had limited powers. In Astor Vans Agnew and Young saw signs of

Kashmir oppression, and they recorded that the number of houses had shrunk to one hundred and twenty. In Gilgit they found that the Kashmir garrison had not been paid for two years, so it was scarcely surprising if the sepoys oppressed the local population. Near Gilgit they observed the carved figure of the Buddha, 'corpulent and placid'. They had crossed the Astor river by rope-bridge and the Indus by skinraft; now they crossed the Gilgit and Hunza rivers to Dainyor by two more rope-bridges, each nearly a hundred yards long. While ascending the Bagrot valley they stopped under Shah Buria's *chenar* at Sinaker, and they observed a recent glacier advance at the head of the valley. Near Chalt they recorded another glacier advance, which had put back the harvest by eighteen days. They remark how little communication there is between one valley and the next, and how utterly ignorant people are 'of any form of society but their own'.

Considering the circumstances, their report is disappointingly aloof, and one feels a lack of the sympathy and interest in local matters that is so obvious in Moorcroft and Vigne. Henry Lawrence and his young men had an Empire to build and they went about it single-mindedly. They had little interest in the society and culture of those they worked among. So this opportunity of observing life in Gilgit within only six years of the Sikh conquest seems to have been largely wasted. However, they do give some account of political affairs there, and for the first time we can fit such recorded information together with the older oral traditions that Elizabeth and I collected more than a century later.

In 1841 the ruler (in Shina, the Ra) of Gilgit, Sekander Khan, had been driven out of his state by Gohar Aman, the new ruler of the Kushwaqt state. Sekander took refuge in the fort at Sinaker, in the Bagrot valley; while his brother, Karim Khan, fled to the Sikhs and Kashmiris who were already in Astor. Gohar Aman besieged Sekander in Sinaker fort and laid the Bagrot valley waste. Finally, after many months of siege, the defenders' food began to run short. As they emptied the last skinfuls of grain they filled them with hay and displayed them, so that the besiegers might think they still had ample food. But the besiegers were not deceived, and one night they flourished bread at a sentry who had not eaten for two days, and tempted him down from his post. Then Sekander realised that the end was near, so he had the gates of the fort opened and he walked out alone. He was captured and taken to Gilgit, but was soon put to death, for Gohar

Aman seldom spared a life. Most of those who had been with him in the fort were sold into slavery. Nearly fifty years afterwards Durand found that the Bagrot valley still bore the physical scars of Gohar Aman's depredations—channels unused, fields untilled, vineyards abandoned—and more than a hundred years later we ourselves found his name still execrated in Sinaker.

A few months after Sekander's death a Kashmir force pushed Gohar Aman back into Punial and installed Karim Khan on the throne of Gilgit. But it was really the end of the Ras of Gilgit, for a Kashmir Governor was appointed too, and Gilgit was never again to be an independent state for more than brief interludes. The position of the Ra there slowly deteriorated until, by the end of the century, the title had become nominal. Nonetheless, the title is still in use; and the holder of it enjoys the compensation of owning much of the land that Gilgit bazaar stands on.

In 1848 Gohar Aman was back in Gilgit, but was successfully driven out. In 1852 he came yet again, and besieged the garrison. Kashmir reinforcements were sent from Astor, but their commander allowed them to be trapped between the Gilgit river on one side and cliffs on the other. From above Gohar Aman's men rolled boulders down on them, while from across the river the men of Hunza shot at them and cut off escape along the river. More than a thousand Kashmir sepoy were killed, the garrison at Gilgit was overcome, and all the survivors were sold into slavery. Kashmir did not manage to take Gilgit again until 1860, after Gohar Aman had died.

Apart from Mehtar Aman-ul-Mulk, whose aunt and whose sister he married, Gohar Aman was perhaps the most remarkable ruler in Kohistan during the nineteenth century. He was remarkable chiefly for his restless energy and his savage cruelty. Every source of information about him, British and local, contemporary and retrospective, vilifies him for his cruelty. Biddulph describes the misery he inflicted as 'almost beyond belief'. Schomberg remarks that he could not be happy unless he arranged for someone's death each day. Leitner was told that he had dipped his bread in the blood of one of his victims. He was known in Kohistan as 'the man-eater', and early travellers used to be shown piles of the skulls of his victims, and the great cliff in Punial from which he used to cast prisoners. He was especially given to executions when in pain or trouble. Perhaps there was something sacrificial

about this although he professed to be a strictly orthodox Sunni. Indeed it was his intolerance of other Moslem sects that was said to have been the cause of his death.

By 1857 Gohar Aman held the whole of the country from the border with the Kator in Chitral to the Astor confluence with the Indus. In that year he launched an attack up the Hunza valley and took Chalt and Chaprot. As he returned to Gilgit, he passed opposite a famous shrine in Dainyor. This shrine was of a Shia saint (one of Shah Wali's disciples, we were told), and Gohar Aman had already cast his baleful eye on it. Elated by his new victories, he now crossed the river, forced an entry into the shrine with his dogs, and opened and desecrated the sarcophagus. He then gave orders that the shrine was to be demolished and the place made into a polo ground. But as he reached Gilgit his stomach began to swell and he found himself unable to urinate. He immediately sent orders to halt the demolition, but already it was done. Schomberg records that he then had his bed carried to a place where he could see the track from the Hunza valley. As each of the prisoners taken at Chalt came opposite, Gohar Aman had him executed. But still he grew no better, and on the way back to Yasin he died. In 1860 Kashmir retook Gilgit, and in 1863 a Kashmir force destroyed Yasin. More than twelve hundred inhabitants of Yasin—men, women and children—were slaughtered in reprisals. According to contemporary accounts, babies were thrown in the air and sliced in two as they fell, and pregnant women were ripped open and their unborn babies hacked to pieces. Thus retribution for Gohar Aman's depravities fell on his unfortunate people, and the memories of it still rankle.

Caught between the Kashmiris at the lower end of the valley and Gohar Aman at its head, the people of Gilgit and Punial led a miserable life during the nineteenth century. Those whom Gohar Aman did not execute he sold into slavery. While Sekander was besieged at Sinaker, Gohar Aman sold everyone he could lay hands on in Gilgit. It was reckoned during this period that 40 per cent of the inhabitants of Gilgit area had spent part of their lives in slavery. Ironic though it seems—for Gohar Aman was the bitterest opponent of Kashmir—he, more than anyone, cleared the way for Kashmir encroachments. He destroyed the state of Gilgit, he unseated the Ras of Punial, he depopulated and demoralized the entire length of the Gilgit valley, and he left chaos in his own Kushwaqt state. In the twenty years after his

death there were more than twelve successions there, and one remembers the curse that the Pirs of Chatorkhand had put on the Kushwaqt family. Finally in 1880, as a result of adroit manoeuvring by Aman-ul-Mulk, the Kushwaqt state fell into Kator hands. Soon afterwards Aman-ul-Mulk appointed his sons Nizam-ul-Mulk and Afzal-ul-Mulk as governors in Yasin and Mastuj respectively. Members of the Kushwaqt family are now scattered about Kohistan, and with one exception they have never again sat on a throne.

After Gohar Aman's death the Kashmir grip on Gilgit, though weak, was not lost again until 1947. From 1860 no one ruled Punial without Kashmir's approval. Chilas had been paying nominal allegiance since 1855, and in 1866 Darel was also coerced. In 1868 the Mir of Nagar recognized Kashmir suzerainty and accepted a subsidy, and in 1869 Hunza followed suit. In 1878 even Aman-ul-Mulk was persuaded to make a treaty with Kashmir.¹ Yet when they were united and effectively led, the local people had enormous advantages over an invading force, as the massacre of 1852 had showed. Any determined offensive by Nagar and Hunza at this time would have threatened Gilgit—and indeed did so on more than one occasion later—and the subsidies paid to the Mirs were little more than bribes to discourage this.

The Kashmir forces were badly organized and badly supplied. For the sepoy to be two years in arrears of pay was common. Many were too old for active service; many had deserted and were names on paper only. Sometimes the officers did not know where their men were camped; and at least one officer was later found to be selling his men into slavery. One observer described them as being 'without a semblance of organisation', and another remarked sarcastically that their flint muskets would take about five minutes to

¹ Alder (1963, p. 829) quotes Article 1 of this treaty as follows:

I agree that I will always sincerely endeavour to be in submission and obedience to His Highness the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir. I will inwardly and openly consider the friend of the Maharaja as my own friend, and the enemy of His Highness as my own ill-wisher. In recognition of the superiority and greatness of His said Highness I will present annually the following articles as *nuzzerana*:

Horses	2
Hawks	2
Hunting-dogs	2

The Mir of Nagar's tribute was a little gold-dust and two baskets of apricots. The Mir of Hunza's was gold-dust, two hunting-dogs and two horses.

In his turn, the Maharaja of Kashmir used to send annually to the British Government a horse, a dozen goats and six Kashmir shawls. Queen Victoria used to receive the shawls; what happened to the goats is not recorded.

load 'if the bullet with its inequalities did not happen to stick in the barrel'. The basic problem, of course, was the remoteness of Gilgit and the appalling difficulties of communications. Every sack of grain and every round of ammunition had to be carried up by coolies or pack animals from Srinagar, itself three weeks journey from Gilgit, during the four or five months when the passes were practicable. At other seasons small well-equipped parties might get across, but for animals or laden men it was out of the question. It was this ineffectiveness of Kashmir, both military and political, that finally decided the British Indian Government to station its own representative in Gilgit. In 1877 Captain John Biddulph took up his post as 'officer on special duty' in Gilgit.

Meanwhile there had been several more European visitors to Kohistan. In 1866 Dr. G.W. Leitner, a professor from Lahore, turned up in Gilgit disguised as a *mullah* from Bokhara. He stayed in Gilgit for a few days, collecting linguistic and other information, and then returned to Lahore where he published a mass of confused material. He incurred the wrath of the Government because he travelled without its permission, because he publicly criticized its ally, Kashmir, for maladministration in Gilgit, and because he gave away information thought to be useful to Russia. The last was a needless fear, for Leitner's writings could only confuse an enemy. Leitner, who seems to have had a chip on his shoulder, retaliated with self-justification in later publications.

Those few days in Gilgit occupied Leitner for the rest of his life, for he published and republished various versions of his findings, using the same material under a different title, and vice versa. I have read his books several times, and have found the occasional scrap that enlightens, but the general result has been only 'disappointment and mystification'. During the 1880s and 1890s we find his letters in the correspondence column of *The Times*, and he often appears at the meetings of learned societies to belittle the discoveries and opinions of later travellers. Leitner undoubtedly had a warm interest in language and people, and he might have achieved much as one of the first oriental philologists. As it is he is remarkable mainly for having founded the first mosque in England.

The next European in Gilgit was George Hayward, an Indian army subaltern who had resigned his commission to become an explorer. In 1868, with the backing of the Royal Geographical Society, he proposed to travel from Peshawar through the independent Pathan country into Kohistan and

then on to the Pamirs, but the Government refused permission on account of the danger to his life. Thereupon he changed his plans, and made an equally daring journey across the Karakoram to Kashgar. In Kashgar he was imprisoned for some time, and from his prison he prophesied in a letter:

I shall wander about the wilds of Central Asia, still possessed with an insane desire to try the effects of cold steel across my throat . . .¹

He failed to reach the Pamirs, but the Royal Geographical Society nonetheless awarded him a Gold Medal for his endeavours. In 1869 he was off again, this time to try a route through Gilgit and Yasin. Again he had the backing of the Royal Geographical Society; and again he incurred the disapproval of the Government, being told that he made the journey entirely at his own risk. Early in 1870 he passed through Gilgit and reached Yasin, the first European to do so. He was well received by Mir Wali, the son of Gohar Aman who happened to be in power at that time. He then travelled on to the head of the valley, but finding the Darkot pass still closed by snow, he decided to return to India and try again later in the year.

In June he again passed through Kashmir, and by the beginning of July he was in Gilgit on the way to Yasin. After that he disappeared, and there were no more letters from him. A rumour began to spread that he had been murdered by Mir Wali. Slowly the story was pieced together. Hayward had reached Yasin ten days after leaving Gilgit, and had immediately quarrelled furiously with Mir Wali about the arrangements for continuing the journey. Then he had gone on to the village of Darkot at the foot of the pass, arriving there on 17 July. That evening he was joined by a party of men whom Mir Wali had sent 'to escort him over the pass'. Hayward must have suspected something, for he sat up in a chair the whole night with guns and pistols ready. But in the early morning he fell asleep, and was seized and bound. He was taken some distance from the village, the ring was taken from his finger, and he was felled with the single blow of a sword. His five servants were also killed. Many picturesque details were added by later travellers, but this is the story as it was told at the time. Later Hayward's body was brought back to Gilgit and buried in what was to become the Christian cemetery, now in the garden of the Public Works

¹ Shaw, 1871, p 335.

Department Rest House. His gravestone, 'erected to a gallant officer and accomplished traveller by His Highness the Maharaja of Kashmeer at the instance of The Royal Geographical Society', is still there.

Meanwhile the Government was trying to catch up with Mir Wali. Soon after Hayward's death he had been driven off the Kushwaqt throne in a characteristic course of events, and had taken refuge with Aman-ul-Mulk in Chitral. In September a secret agent of the Indian Government disguised as a *mullah* sat between Aman-ul-Mulk and Mir Wali in a *mahreka* and listened to Mir Wali's version of what had happened. But Aman-ul-Mulk refused to give Mir Wali up, and five years later he met a violent death at the hands of one of his half-brothers. No one has ever been sure of the reason for Hayward's murder. Perhaps Mir Wali coveted his baggage—there were thirty-three man-loads, and it must have been a tempting sight. Perhaps he wanted revenge for the insults Hayward used in their quarrel. Perhaps—as we ourselves were told—Mir Wali suspected Hayward's motives and good faith. Years later Henry Newbolt based the poem 'He Fell Among Thieves' upon the story. The poem is far from an accurate account of Hayward's death, but it made a strong impression. Elizabeth's mother remembers as a child hearing Newbolt himself recite it and being greatly moved by it.

And now it was dawn. He rose strong on his feet,
 And strode to his ruin'd camp below the wood;
 He drank the breath of the morning cool and sweet,
 His murderers round him stood.

Light on the Laspur hills was broadening fast,
 The blood-red snow peaks chill'd to a dazzling white;
 He turn'd, and saw the golden circle at last,
 Cut by the Eastern height.

'O glorious Life, Who dwellest in earth and sun,
 I have lived, I praise and adore Thee'.

A sword swept.

Over the pass the voices one by one
 Faded, and the hill slept.¹

The man who buried Hayward's body in Gilgit was Frederic Drew. He was a British geologist who was employed by the Maharaja of Kashmir to search for minerals, and who was later appointed Kashmir's Governor in Ladakh. Between 1862 and 1871 he travelled extensively in Kashmir, Ladakh, Baltistan and Kohistan and collected much information which he published in 1875 in a book entitled *The Jummoo*

¹ Newbolt, 1955, p. 841.

and Kashmir Territories. Compared with the wild speculations of Biddulph's book, published a few years later, and the confusion of Leitner's, it is a pleasure to read Drew. Here, for the first time in Kohistan, is a shrewd systematic mind. Climate, topography, vegetation, glaciology, settlement patterns, local history, ethnology, agriculture etc., are critically treated. Observation is clearly distinguished from hearsay and conclusions are cautious but well founded.

Ever since 1846 the British had been frustrated by a lack of reliable information, geographical, political, and more especially strategic, about the country beyond the Kashmir frontier. Yet it was dangerous to send British explorers and surveyors beyond the limits of British influence because they could not be effectively protected. Hayward was not the only one who failed to come back. Adolphe Schlagintweit was murdered in Yarkand. Stoddart and Conolly were executed in Bokhara. Lieutenant Wyburd disappeared in the western Turkistan desert. Andrew Dagleish, the only British merchant in Eastern Turkistan, was murdered on the Karakoram. There were also the risks of political repercussions. Kashmir was quick to resent any interference, and to use it as a means to further her own ambitions; while Russia might use any activity in the mountains as a justification for further advances.

All this favoured the employment of 'native secret agents'. Kenneth Mason has described how these men, mostly employed by the Survey of India and known by initials or nicknames, managed to penetrate the remotest corners of Central Asia. Some were disguised as holy men, some as pilgrims, some as traders. The 'lamas' who travelled in the Buddhist areas to the east carried rosaries, but instead of the usual Buddhist one hundred and eight beads, these had one hundred beads, and every tenth bead was a little larger. The 'lamas' travelled along from place to place, reciting their prayers, moving their beads—and measuring the distance. The 'mullahs' who travelled in the Moslem areas further west used to carry special compasses 'that pointed to Mecca', and were often given to solitary contemplation on mountain-tops.

Almost the first description of the Swat valley was made by a native agent in the 1850s. In 1865 another, known as 'PM', travelled through Gilgit and Chitral and collected information on trade and local affairs. In 1868 'the Mirza' crossed the Pamirs and made the first rough map. He also brought back information on the Russian posts in Western Turkistan. In 1870 'the Havildar' penetrated Swat, Dir and

Chitral disguised as a *mullah* and brought back valuable information about the passes into Badakshan. In the same year 'IK' followed Hayward's tracks up the Gilgit valley into Yasin and then went on to Yarkand. In the early 1870s, 'the Mullah' visited and reported on northern Chitral and Wakhan. During 1878 the same man, now disguised as a timber merchant, travelled up the Swat valley to Kalam, crossed a pass into the Kandia valley, and then went on up the Indus. His was the first eyewitness account of the acephalous states, and his map was not superseded until the 1920s. Not all the agents returned either: one died 'under very suspicious circumstances' in Ladakh, one was killed in Swat, three were recognized in Chitral and were left to die in the snow, 'the Mirza' was murdered in Bokhara, another was sold into slavery . . .

Such men added much to knowledge of the northern frontier regions during the three decades before British India established direct contacts there. Even so in 1879 the Viceroy could still refer to Kohistan and the adjoining territories as 'a broad belt of independent barbarism', and a few years later a senior official could describe it as being still 'in outer geographical darkness'.

* * *

John Biddulph took up his post in Gilgit at the end of 1877. His task was to collect information about what was happening beyond the Kashmir frontier, to keep an eye on the northern passes, and in consultation with the Kashmir authorities to cultivate friendly relations with the states of Kohistan and the upper Oxus. From the moment of his arrival, he faced the hostility of the Kashmir officials, who saw him as a threat to Kashmir's own ambitions, and also no doubt as a threat to their own misgovernment and embezzlements. His baggage was looted, false reports of him were put about, and there was even talk of a plot to kill him. Biddulph, who was an impetuous and hot tempered man, retaliated with wild accusations against the Kashmir Governor. He was no more successful in his relationships with the local rulers, for he had no powers, and nothing to offer them. When they complained about Kashmir oppression he could only refer them back to the Kashmir authorities. In 1880 there was a rising in the Gilgit valley and down the Indus, and if Amanul-Mulk had not adroitly stepped into Yasin to seize the



1. Algernon Durand, P.A. in Gilgit,
1889-93

2. Raja Karim Khan in
traditional court robes



Kushwaqt territory, Gilgit might have been lost and Biddulph with it. The Government then realized that British influence in this remote border area was not strong enough: Biddulph could neither influence Kashmir, nor could he impress the local rulers, nor could he be effectively protected. Accordingly he was withdrawn in 1881.

For all his ability and enthusiasm, Biddulph must have had an unhappy time in Kohistan. By the end of it his dearest wish, he wrote, was to drive all the 'tribes of the Hindoo Koosh' into the Oxus. Although he was the first European to visit Hunza and Chitral his name seems to be forgotten there now. The only recollection that we were able to find was an autobiographical scrap by Nazim Khan, who later became Mir of Hunza. He remembered visiting Biddulph in Gilgit and finding him laying out the garden for his house. He recorded that Biddulph was very pleasant to him and played him a gramophone record. Biddulph's tennis court in Gilgit is still in use, and part of the house where he lived is still standing, the enormous latticed bay window with its magnificent view across the valley still incongruously British. The house later became the British 'Club', and is now the Gilgit Public Library.

After Biddulph's departure there followed another eight years of frustrating and futile attempts to influence affairs in Kohistan and beyond through the agency of Kashmir, but without a British representative in Gilgit. Increased Russian activity north of the Hindu Kush led to the sending of several political missions and geographical expeditions, although the most informative, and certainly the most daring, journey was made in direct defiance of Government instructions. In 1883 William McNair, an officer of the Indian Survey, disguised himself as a Moslem physician, crossed the Lowarai pass, and, with the aid of a plane-table camouflaged with astrological designs, mapped a large area of the borderland between Chitral, Kafirstan and Badakshan. When he returned to India McNair was officially reprimanded, but in private the Viceroy congratulated him on his daring and enterprise.

In 1885 'an imposing mission', which included an Indian Survey officer and an intelligence officer, set off under Colonel Lockhart, once more to examine the passes and assess the vulnerability of India to attack from the north. The mission travelled through Gilgit to Chitral, where they collected much information about the Kator administration, and where they negotiated a defensive agreement with

Aman-ul-Mulk and arranged for two of his sons, Nizam and Afzal, to visit India. The wording of Aman-ul-Mulk's part in the agreement was as follows:

I, an eater of the salt of the English, will serve them soul and body. Should any enemy of theirs attempt to pass through this quarter, I will hold the roads and passes with my loins girt until they send me help . . .¹

In return he was given rifles, most of which were used against the British ten years later in the siege of Chitral. The mission also visited the borders of Kafiristan.

After wintering in Gilgit, they set off again in April 1886 through Hunza—where one of the party painted the Mir's portrait—and on to Wakhan, surveying the Baroghil and Darkot passes, and returning to Chitral via the Dorah pass from Badakshan. On their return to India, in the first accurate appreciation of the strategic situation, Lockhart concluded that no major invasion across the mountains was to be feared, but that small lightly armed forces might cross some of the passes in the Hindu Kush. Lockhart declared himself in favour of reviving British representation in Gilgit, and events soon afterwards encouraged this view.

In 1886 the Mir of Hunza was killed with the connivance of one of his sons, Safdar Ali. Safdar Ali, though illiterate, had a great gift of expression, and he announced his succession in the following message:

By the will of God and the decree of fate my late father and I recently fell out: I took the initiative and settled the matter, and have placed myself on the throne of my ancestors.²

He then murdered three of his brothers, and entered into an alliance with Nagar, and in 1888 a combined force advanced towards Gilgit. Although this crisis was averted by negotiation, it again showed up the inadequacy of the Kashmir garrisons and of the arrangements for bringing up supplies from Kashmir. Only a few months later Safdar Ali received a Russian officer, Captain Grombchevsky, in Hunza, and—though this was not generally known at the time—discussed with him the setting up of a Russian military post at Baltit. At the same time the question of Hunza's relationship with China came to a head. Since 1847, when the Mir of Hunza had helped the Chinese to put down a rebellion in Eastern Turkistan, Hunza had received a subsidy from China in return

¹ Lockhart and Woodthorpe, 1889, p. 310.

² Curzon, 1926, p. 184.

for nominal allegiance. The British Indian Government had not taken this very seriously, even when the Mir had made a similar arrangement with Kashmir. But after the events in the Hunza valley during 1888, the Chinese Government in Peking asked the British ambassador for an explanation.

So in that year Captain Algernon Durand was given the task of securing Gilgit for Kashmir, and of extending Kashmir's control—and so, vicariously, British India's—up to the watersheds. After studying the situation Durand recommended that a British Political Agent be permanently established in Gilgit; that a small number of British officers should be stationed there to command and train the Kashmir sepoy; that the paramount problem of supplies should be attended to; that roads and bridges should be made practicable for pack animals and guns; that a telegraph line should be installed; and that forces of local irregular soldiers should be raised. In 1889 Durand returned to Gilgit, this time as the first Political Agent (Plate 15.1). He was just in time, for the next six years saw the Hunza campaign, the battles at Chilas, and the siege of Chitral. British India was about to make her first—and last—territorial acquisitions in Kohistan.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

TOM TIDDLER'S GROUND

. . . if we resolve that no foreign interference can be permitted on this side of the mountains . . . we shall have laid down a natural line of frontier which is distinct, intelligible, and likely to be respected.

*Viceroy of India,
in a letter to the Secretary of State for India, 1879.*

. . . on the frontier you must deal with men as you find them: half of my most intimate friends were murderers . . .

*Algernon Durand,
Political Agent in Gilgit, 1889-93.*

'Some very unkind things have been written about my grandfather.'

Grandson of Mehtar Aman-ul-Mulk.

When Durand rode into Gilgit on his first mission in 1888, he was accompanied by George Robertson, a doctor in the Indian Medical Service. They were close friends, and when Durand subsequently became Political Agent, Robertson was appointed Agency Surgeon. Later he was transferred to the Political Service. One or other of them was to play a leading part in nearly all the events of the next six years.

They found Gilgit and Astor in confusion. The condition of the Kashmir garrisons was as bad as ever, and the Kashmir civilian officials were corrupt and inefficient. Furthermore these officials used to force the men of Gilgit and Astor to work without pay at carrying up grain and stores from Kashmir over tracks that were still atrocious. Overloaded, badly fed, without protection from the cold on the passes or the heat in the valley bottoms, many of the porters were either worked to death, or they died of dysentery or cholera. On the way to Gilgit, Durand and Robertson had themselves met a party of fifty-three porters who had started out a hundred strong only six months before. Again the Kashmir officials resented the arrival of an outsider and resisted his attempts to improve things. But Durand was a different man from Biddulph—bold and decisive in action, but cautious and patient in his dealings with people—and slowly, in the years that followed, things began to improve.

After a few weeks in Gilgit, Durand and Robertson set off with a small escort to visit Aman-ul-Mulk, the Kator Mehtar, in his capital in Chitral. In those days, before the tracks had been improved, the journey normally took at least two weeks. First they passed through Punial, where the Ra was then Raja Akbar Khan, who was later of great assistance to the British. From Punial they crossed into part of the former Kushwaqt state, now governed by Aman-ul-Mulk's eldest son, Nizam-ul-Mulk, who met them at the border and accompanied them. Robertson describes him as handsome and debonair, a keen sportsman and a fine polo player, but 'an utter coward'. Durand remarks that he had a prominent mouth and underlip, a Kator family feature that is still seen in members of the family today. Durand goes on to complain of the troupe of dancing and singing boys who used to accompany Nizam everywhere and who were 'an intolerable nuisance on the march, as they kept up their music right through the night'. As governor in Yasin, and later as Mehtar of Chitral, Nizam displayed the bizarre mixture of good nature and cruelty that I have already mentioned.

Nizam presented Durand with a Badakshani horse, a breed popular on both sides of the Hindu Kush for its stamina and surefootedness. Durand had reason to be grateful for this as he travelled on up the Gilgit valley with Nizam and his retinue:

... nowhere in the world, I should think, do men habitually ride over such awful ground ... I used to get off the first few days after leaving Gilgit at particularly vile places, but when I found that this entailed every one doing the same, and that the men of the country would not have thought of dismounting, I saw this would never do, and I put a horseman in front to show the way, and followed till he got off. It was a liberal education, and my heart used to be in my mouth when my inner leg would be brushing the cliff and the outer hanging over eternity. The only time a native ever got off was to use the short cut ... or to get round some corner where the road ran over polished rock, and where it was considered advisable to hang on to the horse's tail to prevent his quarters going over the edge.¹

On the 12,200 feet Shandur pass, at the head of the valley, about ten days after leaving Gilgit, they crossed into another part of the Kushwaqt state, now governed by Nizam's brother, Afzal-ul-Mulk. He was less handsome than Nizam, but more capable. Already Nizam and Afzal were intriguing against each other in the hope of securing the succession

¹ Durand, 1900, p. 54.

when Aman-ul-Mulk died. Since both sought the support of the Government of British India, Durand had to be careful not to seem to favour one against the other.

After a ceremonial exchange of presents with Afzal, and a few days' hunting in the Mastuj area, Durand and Robertson moved on down the Chitral valley into the Kator state.

As we neared Chitral we were met by an increasing number of *grandees*, of regularly increasing rank. Eight miles from Chitral itself . . . the Mehtar's half-brother met me. Half a mile further on . . . a mass of armed men met us. One of them presented me from the Mehtar with a horse most gorgeously caparisoned with gold embossed head-stall, high demi-pique saddle . . . and prettily embroidered and spangled body-cloth. Another half-mile and . . . two hundred men . . . fired a wild *feu de joie* as we passed. A mile or so further we emerged into the plain, and saw the Mehtar sitting surrounded by a brilliant crowd. Dismounting when about one hundred and fifty yards from him, I walked forward, the Mehtar walking to meet me half way. It was an interesting moment for both of us, as we shook hands and looked into each other's eyes . . .

. . . The scene was one of the most brilliant and striking it is possible to imagine. The Mehtar, dressed in green silk, riding a big horse covered with brilliant silver trappings, moved off with me on his right hand, the centre of a crowd of hundreds of horsemen and footmen in the brightest array. Cloth of gold, the rich silks of Central Asia, the most superb velvet coats, the colour almost hidden by the gold embroidery, the brightest English and Chinese silks in all colours, scarlets and blues, crimsons and purple, plain and brocaded . . .

. . . He was a fine old man, a striking figure as he rode along, sitting his horse upright and well; and had the history of his forty years of rule been unknown, there was that in him which attracted your attention at once. I felt instinctively that I was face to face with a ruler of men.¹

Aman-ul-Mulk certainly ruled, and the fact that he did so for thirty-five years is testimony to his energy, his insight, and his ruthlessness. By the time of Durand and Robertson's visit, he controlled all the territory from the border of Kafiristan to the edge of the Pamirs, and from Terich Mir to the border of Punial. The total population of this area was about 50,000. He had also extended his influence into eastern Kafiristan, from which he received an annual tribute of butter, honey and children, and into the acephalous states at the heads of the Dir and Swat valleys, which paid tributes of sheep and horses respectively. His photograph shows a large man with a strong and shrewd face: 'A very fine face, stem

¹Durand, 1900, pp. 71-3.

and bold, but with a charming expression when he smiled', wrote Durand, adding that 'his bearing was royal, his courtesy simple and perfect'. But Durand had no illusions about him, describing him also as 'steeped to the lips in treachery', his hands 'crimson with blood'. Robertson wrote simply that he was 'a terrible old man'. He is said to have fathered more than sixty children by nearly as many women, and altogether seems to have been the epitome of despotism.

The purpose of Durand and Robertson's visit was to renew the contacts made earlier by Biddulph and Lockhart, and to discuss with Aman-ul-Mulk his relationship with Kashmir and British India. Another matter discussed was the establishment of a hospital, and Durand was able to arrange for an Indian doctor to be stationed in Chitral from the following year. Apart from formal meetings, their time in Chitral was occupied with polo and other recreations, hunting, displays of dancing and singing, and endless discussion with Aman-ul-Mulk on all kinds of subjects. They also attended a state banquet, and Durand comments warmly on 'bread full of minced meat and sweet omelettes made with honey'. Before they left there was the usual exchange of presents. Durand gave the Mehtar a double-barrel express rifle, a pair of shotguns, gold and silk cloth, and silver cups and goblets. For the Mehtar's wives he sent brocades, silks, looking-glasses, scented soaps and perfume, all carefully graded according to advice given on the status of each wife. The Mehtar gave Durand some horses and a Bokhara silk coat lined with fur. Durand and Robertson then returned to Gilgit, where the first news they heard was that the Russian, Captain Grombchevsky, had been in Hunza.

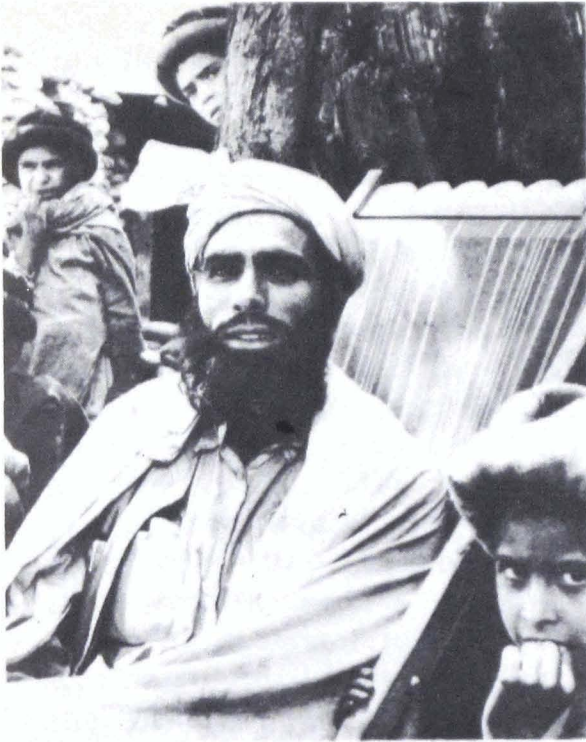
The following year Durand, now permanent Political Agent in Gilgit, made a visit to Nagar and Hunza. He was accompanied by Robertson, by Lieutenant John Manners-Smith, Assistant Political Agent, and by Raja Akbar Khan, Ra of Punial, and Raja Bahadur Khan, the nominal Ra of Astor. Their small party, which consisted otherwise of porters, personal servants, a surveyor, and an escort of only a dozen sepoy, was to find itself in difficulties, and to be grateful for the help of these two allies. At Chalt they received a letter of welcome from Safdar Ali, the new Mir of Hunza, dictated in his best epistolary style and written in Persian, to say that they were free to wander anywhere they liked in Hunza 'like camels without nose-ropes'. From Chalt they crossed the river by rope-bridge, and were the first

Europeans in Nagar. After admiring the views of Rakaposhi and noting the ravine above Nilt, they passed on through Gulmit, Yal, Pisan and Minapin. As they passed through Minapin Durand's surveyor must have plotted the position of the glacier snout, for the first record dates from that year. From Minapin the party continued to Nagar village. The Mir at that time was Jafer Khan, but he was sick, so his eldest son, Uzar Khan, met them and conducted them to a camp on the polo ground.

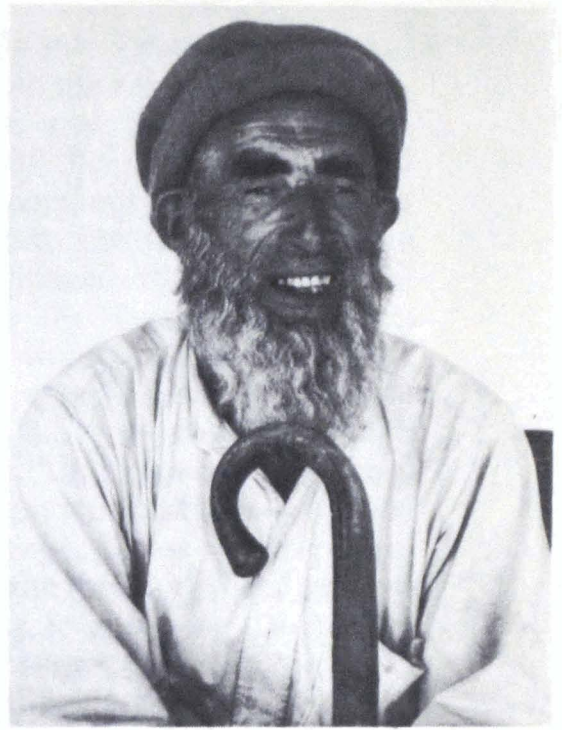
The next morning they visited Jafer Khan in his palace, finding that the palace stairway consisted of a notched tree-trunk which led up through a trapdoor. The rooms above were connected by very small doorways set at right-angles, so that only one man could go through at a time and then only when bent almost double. The object was to prevent a rush on the Mir, and to prevent an assassin using his sword as he came into a room; but for Durand and Robertson in the 'discomfortable splendour' of full-dress uniform, with frock coats, spiked helmets, spurred boots, swords and satchels, it was an awkward business. A few days were spent in Nagar on negotiations with Jafer Khan, who was amenable, and Uzar Khan, who was hostile. Then, after exchanging presents, they crossed to Hunza, again by rope-bridge, to visit Safdar Ali at Baltit.

Safdar Ali's father had been done to death by Tara Beg, generally known as 'Dadu', who was a half-brother of the Wazir of Hunza. The Wazir, whose name was Humayun Beg, was away from home with a marriage party at the time and when he heard the news he fled straight to Chitral and took refuge with Aman-ul-Mulk. Dadu then took his place as Wazir, and it was obvious to Durand that he had become the most important man in Hunza. Indeed he was considered one of the most competent people in the area, but was known to be implacably hostile to the British. Safdar Ali, whom Durand described as 'a delicate-looking young man . . . with shifty Mongolian eyes', had meanwhile secured his own position as Mir by having two of his brothers strangled and a third thrown off a cliff.

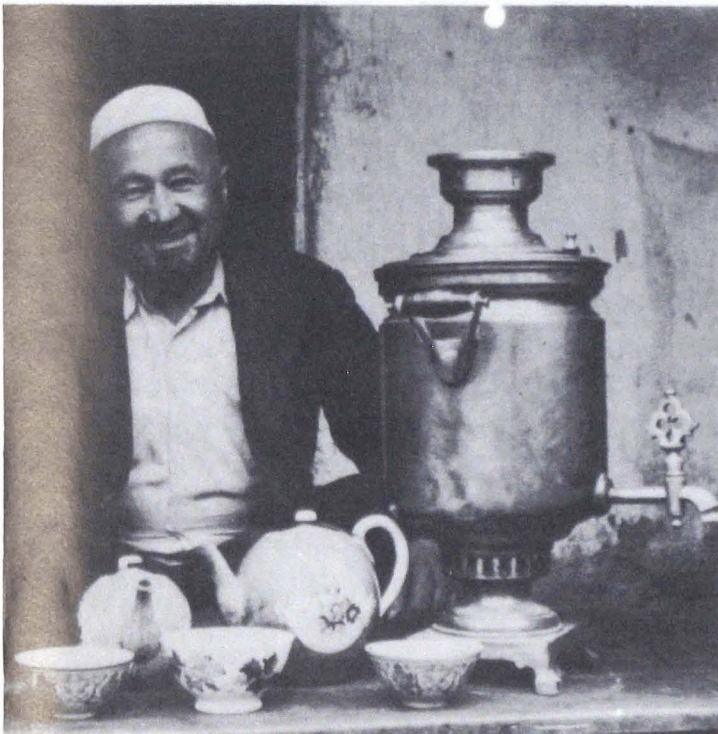
Durand's party was subjected to some insolence, but in formal meetings Safdar Ali agreed not to enter into any alliance without approval of the Government of British India, and to allow Captain Younghusband, who was then in Turkistan, to return to India through Hunza later in the year. The size of Safdar Ali's subsidy from the Maharaja of Kashmir,



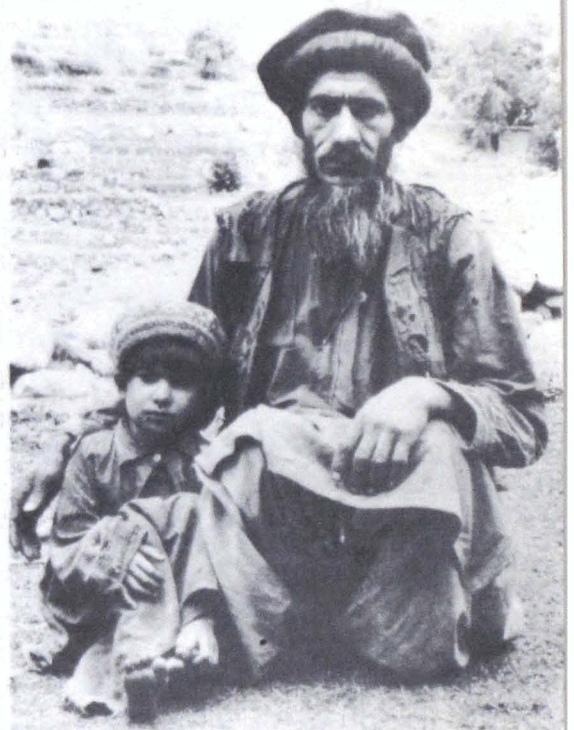
1. A mullah in Chilas
(A descendant of the Pathan
missionaries.)



2. A farmer in Chitral



3. Mahmud Bhai, with 'Gurrdinah'
tea-pots



4. Fugitives from a blood-feud in
Kandia

and the question of the Hunza raids into Eastern Turkistan, were also discussed. Dadu argued that the raids were a necessary source of income for the state, and that if the British wanted them stopped for the sake of the trade, they would have to supplement the subsidy accordingly. The following day Durand sent Safdar Ali his presents, but the servant came back to say that the Mir had compared the presents unfavourably with those given him by the Russian, had fallen into a tantrum, and had thrown them about the room. Durand was alarmed and, fearing an attack, he sent Bahadur Khan, who was related to Safdar Ali by marriage, to try to put things right. If they were attacked there was no hope that any of them would survive: they were camped below a slope from which they could be fired on, beyond was the river, and they were three days' march over the most difficult tracks from the nearest reinforcements. As it grew dark the camp was surrounded by Hunza men, but since there was nothing the British officers could do they 'had dinner, and went quietly to bed'.

For half the night a furious debate went on in the Mir's court, but finally Safdar Ali took the advice of the older men and decided not to attack. Early the following morning Durand and his party set off unhindered towards Gilgit, Durand with the feeling that sooner or later Safdar Ali would have to be dealt with. Local recollections of this episode have it that Durand was forced to leave his tent behind, which Safdar Ali appropriated. If so, Safdar Ali made a clean sweep of the envoys of his three great neighbours, for he had earlier sent a Chinese envoy away practically naked, and he had not let Grombchevsky go until the Russian had given him everything, including even the rifles of his Cossack escort.

While they had been in Chitral, Robertson had conceived the idea of exploring Kafiristan, and now he heard that the Government had approved his proposals. Durand was understandably annoyed. In his new capacity as Political Agent, he felt more directly responsible for the administration of Gilgit and the welfare of the Kashmir sepoy, and Robertson's departure would leave him without a doctor. One also suspects that he disapproved of the idea anyway. Perhaps he felt that Robertson's inclination to adopt the customs of the country—notably eating with his fingers—was becoming a little unhealthy. He certainly disapproved of the Kafirs, some of whom he had met in Chitral and who, out of sheer unaffected curiosity, had started to finger the fastenings of his uniform.

Since Kafiristan lies outside Kohistan, as we have used the name, this is not the place to describe Robertson's adventures. Suffice it to say that he spent more than a year in Kafiristan during 1890-91, leaving only when the Hunza campaign demanded his return to Gilgit. His courage in travelling alone among people who had never seen a European, and whose attitude to strangers was at best capricious, was very great. In retrospect, it was probably the greatest individual achievement of these years on the northern frontier, for it was one of the first occasions when an educated man deliberately visited a traditional society in order to observe and learn. Robertson's account of the Kafirs represents one of the earliest efforts in the field of anthropology. He was only just in time. Four years later the British gave up their last claim to any part of Kafiristan, and the Amir of Afghanistan conquered and forcibly converted its inhabitants to Islam. A few fled into Chitral, but for the rest it was the end of that hitherto 'impregnable island of paganism'.

* * *

Meanwhile, during the summer of 1889, Captain Francis Younghusband was exploring the country to the north of Hunza, particularly the passes across the Karakoram from Eastern Turkistan. He had also been ordered to report on the Hunza raids, and to find out what the Russians were doing. It may seem strange that yet another explorer had to be sent to survey the northern passes, but it must be remembered how stupendous the mountains are, and what a small area of them any one man can see during the few months when travel at high altitudes is practicable. There were also the immense and varied difficulties of travel, even on the main routes. Biddulph had reported with great satisfaction when it became possible for a man to walk to Chaprot 'without using his hands'. The track between Astor and Gilgit was variously described by travellers at this time as 'awful', 'ghastly', 'vile', 'execrable', and 'infernal'. One particular stretch of it was so hot that it later became known among British subalterns as 'The Devil's Stoke-hole'. Several travellers, including both Lockhart and Durand, lost horses and pack-animals over precipices or into rivers, or had them die of exhaustion on the passes. During the Hunza campaign the British-Indian troops suffered more casualties from frost-bite on the passes than in all the fighting. When the pursuit party in that campaign

reached the top of the Hunza valley in midwinter the cold was so intense that their breath froze in icicles on their moustaches. In addition there were man-made hazards on many routes. Little wonder that each traveller filled in only a small part of the blanks on the map. Furthermore opinions on the practicability of each route varied, depending on the season at which it was seen, and whether the observer was a surveyor, a soldier or a mountaineer. For one traveller a pass might be a 'death-trap for invading armies', while for another it was 'the vulnerable gate of India'. Second, and even third, visits were made, and the advantages and disadvantages of each route for an invading force were hotly debated.

After exploring the passes—one of which he described as 'fit only for acrobats'—Younghusband and his escort of six Gurkhas travelled on towards the Pamirs. One day he received a message from the same Russian officer who had been in Hunza the previous year, and who was now travelling towards Ladakh. He cordially invited Younghusband to visit him at his camp, and Younghusband did so:

Rounding a spur, we saw ahead of us the little Russian camp, and on riding up to it a fine looking man dressed in the Russian uniform came out of one of the tents and introduced himself as Captain Grombchevsky. He was about thirty-six years, tall, and well built, and with a pleasant, genial manner . . . We had a short talk, and he then asked me to have dinner with him. This was a very substantial repast of soup and stews, washed down with a plentiful supply of vodka.¹

This was the first meeting of British and Russian explorers on the northern frontier of India, and they had much to talk about. Grombchevsky talked freely, discussing the rivalry between Russia and Britain, and assuring Younghusband that the Russian army thought of nothing else but invading British India. He also gave Younghusband some useful advice about dealing with Safdar Ali, warning him against the Mir's insatiable appetite for 'presents'. Younghusband returned the hospitality, and when they parted two days later Grombchevsky expressed the hope that they might meet again, either in peace at St. Petersburg, or in war on the frontier. In either case, he said, Younghusband could be sure of a warm welcome. His parting present to Younghusband was a Pamir sheep, one of a flock that he was driving along with him for meat on his journey.

¹ Younghusband, 1896, p. 268.

After this Younghusband crossed the Mintaka Pass and started down the Hunza valley, where he was met by Wazir Dadu and Mohammed Nazim Khan, one of Safdar Ali's surviving half-brothers. Younghusband described Nazim Khan as 'a friendly, agreeable, but very timid young man who went about in fear of his life', as well he might have done. Hearing that Safdar Ali was going to receive him in state at the next village, Younghusband put on his full-dress scarlet Dragoon uniform. Then he found that they still had a big glacier to cross, and he remarks ruefully that he did not find spurs and gold lace very appropriate for this. But, as the following episode shows, Younghusband was not to be outmatched in protocol which in those days was so important. Safdar Ali met and greeted him, and then led him into a tent in which there stood

... a chair covered with fine gold-embroidered velvet cloth. This was the only chair the chief possessed, or rather had in Gulmit, and it was evident that he intended to sit in it himself, and let me kneel upon the ground with the headmen of the country. I had, however, foreseen such an eventuality, and had brought a chair with me on the march, ahead of the baggage. So now I sidled in between Safdar Ali and his chair, and whispered to my orderly to get mine, which, when produced, I placed alongside his, and we then sat down together.¹

The following morning they had another meeting and discussed the question of the raids. Younghusband recorded that Safdar Ali had no idea of 'his real position in the universe'. He imagined that the Czar of Russia and the Empress of India were the rulers of neighbouring tribes, each clamouring for an alliance with him. When asked whether he had been outside Hunza he replied that great emperors such as himself and Alexander the Great never left their empires. Younghusband was puzzled to know how to deal with such a man, but thought that some target-shooting by his escort might make an impression. So he had the Gurkhas give a display of marksmanship, which caused a sensation. But Safdar Ali found shooting at targets dull, and asked Younghusband to order the Gurkhas to fire at a man on the path opposite. Younghusband laughed, saying he could not do that, as the Gurkhas would be sure to hit the man. 'What does it matter if they do?' asked Safdar Ali. 'He belongs to me.' Before parting company with Safdar Ali, Younghusband had reason to be thankful for Grombchevsky's advice. Like Durand, he came

¹ Younghusband, 1896, p. 284.

away from Hunza feeling that Safdar Ali would get into trouble. The following year Safdar Ali started raiding caravans again.

In the spring of 1891 news reached Gilgit that Uzar Khan had displaced his father, seized the throne of Nagar and murdered two of his half-brothers. A third brother, Sekander Khan, escaped to Gilgit. At the same time came news that Uzar Khan was collecting armed men and was in touch with Safdar Ali with plans for an advance down the valley. Durand now showed his ability to act quickly and decisively, and on the same day two hundred Kashmir sepoy's clambered over the rope-bridge at Gilgit and raced for Chalt, normally a two day journey. This took Uzar Khan by surprise, and after some hesitation he abandoned his plans, at least for the time being. Safdar Ali's contribution was a letter warning Durand that Chalt and Chaprot were 'more precious to us than the strings of our wives' pyjamas'. Meanwhile the road from Gilgit to Chalt, in many places not practicable for pack animals, was improved.

The respite was only temporary. A few months later came the news that Russia claimed to have annexed the Pamirs, and that Younghusband, while on a second visit there, had been expelled by a party of Russian soldiers. At the same time some Russians crossed Wakhan, climbed a pass into the head of the Ishkoman valley, and from there crossed into the head of the Chitral valley. Then they climbed the Darkot pass, and asked questions about routes on the other side. All this had a most disturbing effect throughout Kohistan. Safdar Ali's reaction was to send a mission to Western Turkistan, ostensibly to buy hawks, but actually to meet the Russian Governor-General and to ask for the military assistance that Grombchevsky had promised. The British representative in Kashgar got wind of this, and wrote to Durand to report it, but Safdar Ali intercepted the letter, as he had earlier intercepted letters being sent up to Younghusband.

The Government of British India took a serious view of these events. In reaching the Darkot pass the Russians had violated both Afghan territory in Wakhan and Kushwaqt territory in the Chitral valley. Furthermore they had crossed the main Hindu Kush watershed. If they were now to seize the Pamirs, they would have access into the Hunza valley from the north, which, as Younghusband had discovered, was an easier route than from the south. Safdar Ali had broken all the promises he had made to Durand, and was now actively

intriguing with the Russians. While the passes from Kashmir were still open, Durand was reinforced with two hundred Gurkhas of the British-Indian army, two seven-pounder mountain guns, and a dozen British officers. Small armed parties were sent up the Yasin and Ishkoman valleys with orders to resist any Russian infiltration; and at the end of the year Durand was ordered to force a showdown with Safdar Ali and Uzar Khan. The two rulers were sent an ultimatum saying that they should adhere to the previous arrangements they had made, and should also permit tracks to be made through their states. Safdar Ali replied that 'he cared nothing for the womanly English, as he hung upon the skirts of the manly Russians'. He rather spoilt the effect by adding, 'we will cut off your head, Colonel Durand, and then report you to the Government of India.'

On 1st December 1891, a force of nine hundred Gurkhas and Kashmir sepoy, with seventeen British officers and two seven-pounder guns, crossed the river at Chalt and advanced on the Nagar side towards Nilt. They were supported by a hundred and fifty irregulars from Punial under Raja Akbar Khan, and by two hundred Pathans who had been working for Spedding and Company, the contractors for the new Astor-Gilgit road. Charles Spedding himself and several of his engineers accompanied the force, and they did most of the road building and engineering that was required. Two thousand porters, mostly from Baltistan, carried grain and other supplies. Durand was in overall command, combining both political and military duties.

The first obstacle was the fort at Nilt, which stood on the down-valley side of a deep ravine, and which was strongly fortified and defended. Attempts to breach the wall with the guns failed, so, under covering rifle fire, Captain Fenton Aylmer with a few sappers made a dash for the gate with gun-cotton. Despite heavy fire from the defenders, they succeeded in finding their way through a labyrinth of felled tree-trunks, reached the gate and laid the gun-cotton—but the fuse went out. By this time they were under very heavy fire, and Aylmer had been shot in the leg and also badly injured by a rock which was dropped on him, but he managed to re-light the fuse and the resulting explosion blew the gate in. The tiny advance party was immediately set upon in furious hand-to-hand fighting, while most of the supporting troops got lost in the dust and smoke among the tree-trunks outside. Their officer, Lieutenant Guy Boisragon, then rushed back,

exposed to fire from both sides, to show them the way in. After that the fort soon fell, although most of the garrison escaped across the ravine behind it. The defenders' losses were estimated at about eighty, including Ghulam Abbas's grandfather who was killed by one of the British officers while he was defending the gate. The attackers lost six men killed. Two British officers were very severely wounded.

More serious for the British was the wounding of Durand at this point. He was hit in the groin by a stray matchlock bullet made of a garnet wrapped in lead, and was out of action for the rest of the campaign. With his departure much of the steam seems to have gone out of the attack. His plan had been that as soon as the fort fell a part of his force should advance across the ravine, cut off the garrison's retreat, and storm the defences on the other side. This was not done, and the defenders were given time to reorganize themselves and to destroy the last of the paths that led up the side of the ravine.

The defenders, almost all from Nagar, were now in a very strong position. The ravine extends from the snout of one of the heavily crevassed Rakaposhi glaciers down to the Hunza river, cutting sheer and deep through the river terrace on which Nilt village stands. The people of Nagar had added to these natural defences with great skill. They had cut the fruit-trees on the down valley side so that advancing troops had no cover. They had destroyed the paths on both sides of the ravine. Wherever there might have been a practicable route up to the terrace above, either from the bed of the ravine or from the bed of the main river, they had diverted irrigation water over the terrace-edge, and the freezing weather of December had produced an unscaleable slope of ice. And the whole of the edge of the ravine, from glacier to river, was lined with stone fortifications and breastworks, behind which were several thousand determined men, many of them good marksmen, and all experts in the art of rolling stones down on enemies below. Besides their own matchlocks, which fired lead balls or the garnets found in the rocks nearby, the defenders had many rifles, British and Russian, and plenty of ammunition.

For eighteen days it was stalemate. The British guns made little impression on the breastworks, and the fire returned from them was so heavy that there was no hope of advancing across the ravine in daytime. Attempts to build tracks in the ravine during the night were soon stopped by avalanches of

stones, or by fire-balls of resinous wood which exposed those working to gun-fire. A dawn frontal attack with scaling ladders was prepared for, but was anticipated by the defenders and abandoned. An attempt was made on a fort on the Hunza side of the river, but the approach was too difficult. Another plan was made to move troops up the river-bed and outflank the defences, but the ice slopes, the fire-balls, and concentrated fire from both sides of the river made that equally impracticable. Meanwhile Durand was lying helpless in Gilgit, consumed with anxiety. Probably only he and Robertson, who had succeeded him as Political Officer in the campaign, understood how precarious the position was. The acephalous states down the Indus were already restive, and any setback would encourage them to attack the Kashmir positions in Gilgit and Astor. If Aman-ul-Mulk saw a chance to further his own ambitions, he would also join in, for all his promises of friendship. The whole frontier would be up in arms, and there was no chance of getting any reinforcements for another six months until the passes reopened.

Finally the opportunity came and was taken. Under cover of dark one of the sepoy, whose name was Nagdu, found a way across the ravine below the glacier snout and up the cliffs at the mouth of the Nilt valley. On the night of 19 December, Durand's Assistant, Manners-Smith, who was something of a mountaineer, led a hundred Gurkhas and sepoy up this cliff, which was more than a thousand feet high. The cliff was so steep that when dawn broke the defenders could not see the attacking party, and it was only when their allies across the river gave warning that they realised an attack was coming and started to roll stones down. By that time the attackers were under the lee of the cliff, and most of the stones bounded harmlessly behind them. At last they reached the breastworks, ran round behind and quickly cleared them of defenders. Soon the other defences on the higher slopes were overrun, and the men on the terrace below began to retreat. At the same time the remaining forts on both sides of the valley were abandoned, and the attackers could see streams of men fleeing up the valley on both sides of the river, among them Safdar Ali, Dadu and Uzar Khan.

This rout was quickly pursued and all resistance collapsed. Seldom indeed can fraternization have followed a campaign so quickly—within a day livestock and women returned to the villages, and it was possible for British officers to move about the country unescorted and in complete safety. Scarcely

more than a week later British officers were celebrating New Year's Eve by sharing hot whisky and water with their late enemies and applauding their music and dance. Probably the defenders were glad to be allowed to return to the autumn sowing, already overdue. In any case, once Safdar Ali and Uzar Khan had fled, they no longer commanded the loyalty of their people. Robertson accepted the submission of a deputation from Hunza led by Mohammed Reza Beg, Hamid-ullah Beg's grandfather, and annexed both states in the name of the Government of British India until it was decided what should be done with them.

A pursuit force pushed on up to the head of the valley, but failed to catch the fugitive leaders who had fled over the passes to seek protection from the Chinese. In Nagar the victors found old Jafer Khan wandering about in his palace with very little idea of what had been happening. In Hunza they ransacked the palace for the treasures supposedly hoarded there. A correspondent of *The Times*, who was present throughout the campaign, describes how he and two officers took up their quarters in the room where Safdar Ali's wives had lived. He lists the 'little feminine belongings' that they found there, abandoned when Safdar Ali carried his family off into exile; little Chinese workboxes, needles from Birmingham and Manchester, scissors, artificial flowers, bits of unfinished needlework, cosmetics from St. Petersburg, children's toys, and two handsome but forlorn cats 'mewing in dismay at the disappearance of all their friends'.

So ended the Hunza campaign, which should really be called the Nagar campaign because the men of Nagar did most of the fighting while those of Hunza looked on from across the river. Aylmer, Boisragon, and Manners-Smith were awarded the Victoria Cross. Nazim Khan abandoned Safdar Ali in Yarkand and returned to Hunza, where Robertson later installed him on the throne in the presence of envoys from China. Humayun was reinstated as Wazir of Hunza. Jafer Khan was allowed to continue as Mir of Nagar, with Sekander Khan as his heir. Both states came under the suzerainty of British India. Uzar Khan was sent back from Kashgar under escort by the Chinese, and was deported to Srinagar, where his descendants still live. Dadu died in exile not long after the campaign, but Safdar Ali lived on in Yarkand in ever-increasing poverty. Schomberg used to see him in the bazaar, an old man dressed in a tattered coat and long cracked boots, driving along a little donkey laden with wood. He died in 1930,

but his descendants are said to be living in Kashgar still. It has not escaped notice in Gilgit that although the Chinese communists expelled many people of Kohistan descent, they have kept Safdar Ali's descendants, who could perhaps one day be used to support a Chinese claim to Hunza. For a similar reason Uzar Khan's descendants are said to be kept in hand by the present Kashmir authorities.

Attempts have been made since the campaign to paint Safdar Ali as an unnatural monster, but the picture of him that emerges from contemporary accounts is of a foolish person who was easily influenced. In condoning the murder of his father and brothers he was acting in accordance with local custom. His defiance of the British arose from his ignorance of their real strength and from his naive expectations of assistance from Russia. If there was a villain, it was Dadu, who used Safdar Ali to further his own ambitions, and who overrode all the counsels of moderation in both Hunza and Nagar. The Russian reaction to the campaign was perhaps summarized by the Russian statesman who exclaimed on hearing the news, 'They have slammed the door in our face'.

* * *

Durand had scarcely recovered from his wound when the news came in September 1892 that Aman-ul-Mulk had died of heart failure in a *mahreka*, that Afzal-ul-Mulk had seized the Kator throne, and that Nizam was fleeing to Gilgit. Shortly after this the Chilas assembly turned out a Kashmir envoy with a bullet through his shoulder, raids from Chilas into Kashmir territory began again, and rumours spread that the *mullahs* of the acephalous states were calling for a combined rising against the Kashmir forces in Astor and Gilgit. A deputation from Gor arrived in Gilgit begging for protection from the Chilasis. Durand and Robertson were in the thick of it again.

Afzal-ul-Mulk started his reign with the murder of three of his half-brothers as they left a *mahreka*, and the wholesale slaughter of Nizam's supporters. Then, just after he had written to the Viceroy that he had succeeded to the throne with the 'unanimous consent' of his brothers, there came further startling news. Aman-ul-Mulk's brother, Sher Afzal, who had been an exile in Afghanistan for many years, had crossed the border with a following disguised as a Badakshani trade caravan. The Chitralis, already sickened by Afzal-ul-Mulk's

cruelties, had welcomed him and had allowed him to reach Chitral fort by night before Afzal-ul-Mulk even knew he was in the country. Afzal-ul-Mulk, hearing a disturbance, went out onto the wall of the fort to see what was happening, and was recognized and shot down. Now it was the turn of his supporters to flee, and Durand soon found that he had nearly all the leading men of the old regime camped outside his house in Gilgit.

Nizam-ul-Mulk who had not dared to attack his brother, now began to think of a bid for power. This put Durand in a dilemma. The Kator succession was nothing to do with the Government of British India, and Durand could not restrain Nizam if he decided to fight Sher Afzal. On the other hand, if Nizam was defeated, he would come flying back over the Shandur pass, pursued by Sher Afzal, and with the probability of Chilas, Darel and Tangir joining in to make a general attack on Gilgit. So Durand decided to take two hundred and fifty sepoy as far as the mouth of the Yasin valley, so that he could at least block off the route to Gilgit. He also took Younghusband, now Political Officer in Hunza, and fifty of the irregulars newly raised in Nagar and Hunza. Thus in less than a year, British India's former enemies were being employed in her support. The irregulars were commanded by Wazir Humayun, who knew Chitral from his days of exile there.

Durand describes a curious incident that occurred as he and his force advanced up the Gilgit valley. Someone presented his 'confidential Persian-writing clerk' with a gift of grain and a water-melon. The next morning, as they moved off from camp, the gift was forgotten. Later it was found, and was sent on by runner, but without proper instructions. The runner handed it over at the next village, simply saying that it was to go up the valley—and so it went from village to village, somehow missing Durand's camp, until it crossed the Shandur pass and reached Sher Afzal's camp in Chitral. There the interpretation of this strange message was discussed at great length. Eventually it was decided that the message came from Durand himself, and that it meant that his army was as numerous as the grains, and that anyone who opposed him would be cut to pieces like a water-melon. The result was that many of the leading men who had been hesitating now came down on Nizam's side. It also confirmed the general impression that the British were supporting Nizam as their candidate for the throne.

Meanwhile, knowing nothing of all this, Robertson had set off with a small escort to visit Gor. In Gor itself he got wind of Chilasi plans for an ambush, and since he could not hope to regain Astor before being caught, he immediately pushed on down the Indus, where there was a fort which could be defended. He then sent a skin-raft across the river to fetch a deputation of Chilasis to discuss terms, but the raft was fired on and three men were killed. There followed an attack on the fort by overwhelming numbers which was beaten off, and Robertson followed this up with a daring counter-attack which routed the opposition. He then managed to shift his men across the river to a stronger position in Chilas village, and reinforcements were sent down the left bank of the Indus as quickly as an appallingly bad route allowed.

Durand, faced with problems on both sides, decided to hold on to Chilas for the time being, and he established a garrison of three hundred sepoys there under two British officers. Robertson himself returned to Gilgit, and almost immediately left with Younghusband on a mission to Nizam-ul-Mulk, who by now, with the help of Humayun and the irregulars from Hunza, had successfully expelled Sher Afzal and recovered his kingdom. Early the following year, 1893, the garrison at Chilas was surprised one night by a combined force from the acephalous states, and was nearly overrun. The following day two sorties were made against the attackers, estimated at 1,500, but both failed. Twenty-eight of the garrison were killed, including a British officer. But now the garrison was to benefit from the lack of cohesion in the acephalous states, for during the following night the attackers disappeared. They too had lost heavily in the fighting, and were unable to agree on whether to continue or not, and so hostilities petered out. As a subsequent visitor to Chilas put it, 'the chaotic republicanism' of the acephalous states prevented any 'concerted plan of action'. To have cut the vulnerable supply-line from Astor along the precipitous cliffs in the Indus valley would have been the first step in any effective plan against the garrison in Chilas, but there was no one with the overall authority to make such a plan or to see that it was carried out.

Durand was in hot water over Chilas. Several members of the Viceroy's Council criticized him for what was described as a 'policy of conquest and military occupation of fresh territory'. In the end Chilas was 'retained', mainly because it commanded an alternative route from the plains to Gilgit

over the Babusar pass. This in itself was useful, but its special significance at the time was that the Babusar pass became practicable for troops and supplies in mid-May, earlier than any possible Russian advance across the Pamirs, whereas the passes on the route from Kashmir to Astor were not practicable for troops until a month or so later. In the years that followed the Babusar route was widened for pack-animals, but it did not become as important as the Astor route until after 1947.

By May 1893 all seemed quiet in Chitral, so Robertson returned to Gilgit, leaving Younghusband behind with a small escort of Sikhs to provide moral support for Nizam-ul-Mulk. Durand now handed over the Agency to Robertson, and went to England on leave. He expected to return to Gilgit later in the year, but instead he was appointed Military Secretary to the Viceroy and so he passes out of this story. Later he was to write:

Several officers have watched over the Gilgit Agency since my day . . . (but) . . . to none can have been given the stern joy of evolving order out of chaos, of inception and creation, which fell to my lot as first Warden of the Marches.¹

Younghusband spent nearly two years in Chitral as Political Officer, and came to know Nizam-ul-Mulk well. Nizam was at that time thirty-four, and Younghusband found him an intelligent and entertaining companion. They used to meet three or four times a week, when the Mehtar and his courtiers would sit on carpets under the *chenars* in Younghusband's garden, consume tea and sweets, and discuss with Younghusband any subject that happened to arise. Younghusband often showed them magazines, and although none of them could read, they enjoyed the pictures. They especially liked any pictures of princesses or actresses, and Younghusband found that their choice for the most beautiful was in line with European taste of the time. The Mehtar himself had been to Calcutta during his father's time, and so had some idea of the outside world, but he had found on his return that people would not believe what he told them. Aman-ul-Mulk had been ready to believe in railways, thinking that since the British made good rifles, they might well make a machine for sending men along. But when Nizam told him that the British could make ice in hot weather, he asserted that only God could do such a thing and told Nizam not to relate any more tall stories.

¹Durand, 1900 p. 292.

Younghusband described a tour of the state that he made with Nizam. They used to enliven their way with hawking for quail and pigeon, and the Mehtar would reminisce about previous hunting exploits as the slopes of this mountain or that came into view. Sometimes news was brought of ibex or markhor, and the whole party would shout with excitement and rush off to the hunt.

No man could more thoroughly enjoy himself than Nizam-ul-Mulk. . . I picture him now riding along on a comfortable, easy-going pony, with his leg thrown lazily over the high peak of the saddle, as he grew tired of riding astride, his falconers all about him ready to fly a hawk at anything that might appear . . .¹

At each village they were welcomed with a *feu de joie*, and there would be shooting from the backs of galloping horses at a mark on the top of a pole, and polo and dancing. Nizam was one of the best polo players in the state, and he and Younghusband would often play. In the evenings they would sit and talk until midnight upon every conceivable subject, for it was only by talking that people could acquire knowledge and pass it on from man to man. Sometimes Younghusband would serve the Mehtar with sherbet, 'and he liked a little essence of peppermint in it to give it a nip. But for the unfortunate nobles he would give a double dose, and roar with laughter as the tears streamed down their faces'.

Younghusband's picture of Nizam-ul-Mulk is sympathetic, and as he was not required to interfere in the internal affairs of the state, he kept free of the local politics. However he does mention that Nizam felt that his position was precarious, and that he tried to strengthen it

. . . by having noble after noble assassinated. This I knew would never do. So one day when he said to me how sad it was that a certain noble had died the previous night, I replied, 'Yes, it is most sad, and I have noticed that the rate of mortality among the aristocracy has been rapidly rising; the Government of India would be sure to notice it too and be asking me to enquire into its cause.' He took the hint.

In fact Nizam commanded little of the respect his subjects had given his father. For one thing he had failed to recover a fort in the south of the state that had been seized by a neighbouring Pathan chief on the very pretext of supporting Nizam against Afzal-ul-Mulk. For another he was fond of both alcohol and boys 'whereby he shocked a not too

¹ Younghusband, 1896, p. 370-1.

sensitive public opinion'. He also suffered from being thought of as a British protégé who had been foisted on the state in place of the more popular Sher Afzal.

In October 1894, just before Younghusband was due to leave Chitral, he had a visitor. This was George Curzon, then a politician whose party was out of power, and who was seeing for himself that part of Asia which he felt to be so closely linked with Britain's imperial destiny. In 1888 he had visited parts of the Russian empire in Western Turkistan; now—after difficulty in getting official approval—he was inspecting what he referred to as 'the extreme ramparts of our Indian Empire'. He was also, characteristically, rectifying the 'imperfect information' and 'erroneous hypotheses' of previous travellers. He had travelled up the Hunza valley, traversed the Pamirs, traced the source of the Oxus (for which the Royal Geographical Society awarded him a Gold Medal), crossed the Hindu Kush, and was now on his way back to Gilgit via Chitral. He and Younghusband travelled down the Chitral valley together to meet Nizam at the capital. Outside Barenis village they were met by 'young Shuja-ul-Mulk, a good-looking boy of about twelve years . . . clad in a green velvet tunic'. He was a half-brother of Nizam, and was then living with his milk-father at Barenis.

His long black hair hung in ringlets on either side of his face, and was matched in colour by a pair of very large and piercing eyes, the lower eyelids of which were pencilled with henna. His mouth and teeth were prominent . . . The lad wore an intelligent expression, but had nothing to say. We consumed apricots and pears together in an orchard . . .¹

This is almost the first mention of Shuja-ul-Mulk, who only six months later was to become the new Mehtar.

Curzon spent some days in Chitral watching polo, inspecting the fort, attending a *mahreka*, and discussing the state's problems with Nizam and the leading men. One night he and Younghusband gave a dinner, at which they and the Mehtar sat at a table, and the courtiers squatted on the floor below. The food—tinned soup and army rations, with pilau and chicken—went down well, and whisky and ginger-wine went down even better. An exiled prince of Badakshan played the sitar, and Nizam's troupe of singing boys performed. Curzon recalls another of Nizam's half-brothers, Amir-ul-Mulk, generally thought to be half-witted, who stood in the background,

¹Curzon, 1926, p. 121.

'a sullen and repulsive figure, with long black locks and a look of gloom'. As Curzon left Chitral, Nizam gave him a silk-faced *choga* which he used as a dressing-gown for many years.

* * *

Only three months later, while out hawking, Nizam was shot from behind at the order of Amir-ul-Mulk, and was left to die. Amir-ul-Mulk was thereupon proclaimed Mehtar. Younghusband had been replaced as Political Officer by Lieutenant B.E.M. Gurdon, whose first step was to review the instructions already given by Robertson for just such an eventuality. An additional complication now was Umra Khan, the Pathan chief who had earlier taken the fort in the south of the state. He had been an old rival of Aman-ul-Mulk, and was known to have territorial ambitions in the Chitral valley.

From Gilgit the situation looked bad. The British protégé had been murdered, Amir-ul-Mulk was considered incompetent to rule an important frontier state, Umra Khan was already regarded as a danger to stability on the frontier, and there was the risk of interference by Afghanistan and Russia. Moreover the lives of Gurdon and his small escort might be in danger. Troops were pushed up the Gilgit valley, and on 15 January 1895 Robertson, now Political Agent in Gilgit, set out once more for Chitral. A few days later he and three or four other British officers, together with 250 sepoy, crossed the Shandur pass in sub-zero temperatures. Robertson records that within a yard of a red-hot camp stove water was freezing solid. After a terrible journey, the tracks covered with ice in some places and broken away in others, they reached the capital on 1 February. On the way they picked up Shuja-ul-Mulk.

They found Gurdon safe, but the situation very confused. Umra Khan had moved up the Chitral valley and was threatening the fort at Drosh. There was talk of the return of Sher Afzal, the old pretender. Amir-ul-Mulk was dithering between making peace with Umra Khan and throwing in his lot with the British. Feeling that nothing but trouble could come anyway, Robertson had his men surreptitiously occupy the fort in Chitral and begin to bring in supplies. A few days later, when the fort at Drosh was handed over to Umra Khan without opposition, Robertson moved the whole of his force into Chitral fort. The defences were quickly put in order, and a covered passage made down to the Chitral river on whose

bank the fort stood. Then Sher Afzal turned up in Drosh, and Robertson, knowing that he was a popular choice for Mehtar, wrote that he was ready to receive him and to recommend him to the Government of British India as the new Mehtar. Sher Afzal replied only that Robertson should evacuate the fort and retreat—otherwise Umra Khan's forces would advance. So now it was clear that Sher Afzal, as well as having the support of most of the leading men of the state, also had the support of Umra Khan. On 1 March a message was sent by Gurdon from Chitral to the officer commanding at Mastuj—and that was the last that was heard from Robertson's force for seven weeks.

A week later sixty Sikhs and two British officers on their way to Chitral as reinforcements were ambushed in a gorge near Reshun. Forty-six Sikhs and one officer were killed. Once again the fighting skills of the local people had been greatly underestimated. At the same time sixty Kashmir sepoy and two British officers were besieged in a house near Reshun polo ground. They held out for five days with great gallantry, but then the two officers, still uncertain of the political situation, were tricked into coming out to watch a game of polo and were captured. The sepoy were overwhelmed, only twelve surviving to be taken prisoner. The fort at Mastuj, with a garrison of nearly three hundred sepoy, was then surrounded; and rumours began to come in of a rising in Darel and Tangir and an attempt to cut off the line of communications in the Gilgit valley.

Meanwhile a relief column of 15,000 was being mobilized near Peshawar with orders to force a passage through independent Pathan territory, and enter the Dir and Chitral valleys from the south. Except for McNair's incognito journey, this was to be the first time that the British reached Chitral by the Lowarai pass. The relief column included the East Kent Regiment and a detachment of Seaforth Highlanders, the only British troops ever employed in Kohistan.

On 23 March another force of six hundred men, including irregulars from Punial, Nagar and Hunza, with two seven-pounder guns, started from Gilgit under the command of Colonel Kelly. On 1 April they tried to cross the Shandur pass but were hampered by freshly fallen snow and had to turn back. Two or three days of snowfall held them up, but eventually, despite much suffering from frost-bite and snow-blindness, they managed to cross, carrying the guns with them. It was a great achievement, for the local people had not

believed that regular troops could cross the Shandur at that season, let alone with guns. Four days later Kelly attacked a defensive position in the Laspur valley, and after the irregulars had taken the slopes above and the guns had fired a few shells, the defenders retreated. The same day Mastuj was relieved. On 13 April Kelly advanced to attack a strongly defended position below Mastuj. The defenders, who numbered 1,500 were mostly local men, and were commanded by Sher Afzal's milk-brother, a renowned strategist. The position had seen many battles in earlier days, and was generally thought to be impregnable. Again the irregulars scaled the heights above and outflanked the defences, while the guns shelled the breastworks. Again the defenders fled.

Meanwhile Robertson was, in the words of a contemporary Khowar song, 'shut in the fort' with one hundred Sikhs, three hundred Kashmir sepoy, five British officers, a hundred servants, clerks, messengers and camp-followers, and fifty more or less well-disposed Chitralis. Among these were Amir-ul-Mulk, Shuja-ul-Mulk and half a dozen other important men including Wafadar Khan a milk-brother of Nizam-ul-Mulk, and Futteh Ali Shah, great-grandfather of Wazir Ali Shah. Once again the advantage of having local allies who knew the local methods of assaulting a fort was to prove very great.

On 3 March, at a *mahreka* in the fort, Robertson announced that Amir-ul-Mulk was not acceptable as Mehtar and that he was going to enthrone the boy, Shuja-ul-Mulk, subject to the Government of India's approval. Amir-ul-Mulk was moved out of the Mehtar's place and Robertson ceremoniously installed Shuja-ul-Mulk on it. The Chitralis present were astonished, but eventually offered homage to their new Mehtar, and Amir-ul-Mulk himself arose and timidly saluted his brother. Shuja's first test of his unexpected powers was to order the execution of the man who had shot Nizam-ul-Mulk.

The Khowar song mentioned above goes on, 'Infidel, come forth! Outside thy slaughter is a-doing'. That afternoon Robertson asked his military commander to make a reconnaissance. It was a disaster. Sher Afzal's forces were encountered, orders were confused and misunderstood, 16,000 rounds of ammunition were expended, mostly dropped, and there were nearly sixty casualties, including two British officers who were badly wounded. One of these was the military commander himself. The other, who was heroically carried back to the fort by Surgeon-Captain Harry Whitchurch, died the following day. Now the siege began in earnest. At the rate

of only one pound of flour per man per day, there was food for three months; and there were three hundred rounds of ammunition per rifle. The fort itself was eighty yards square, with walls twenty-five feet high and towers rising another twenty feet or more at the corners. Provided the garrison held the covered passage down to the Chitral river about forty yards away, and a fifth tower that protected the passage, they would have water.

During the next seven weeks the defenders went through most of the experiences that attend sieges. Barricades and loopholes were made around the parapets, and buildings outside were demolished to give clear fields of fire. A flag—in this case a Union Jack—was patched up and hoisted. A general assault was faced and repulsed. There was constant sniping, day and night. Attempts were made to subvert the garrison, especially the Chitralis. Two attempts were made to set the fort on fire, one of which was nearly successful. A mine was dug to within twelve feet of the wall, was detected, and was blown up after a brilliant sortie by the Sikhs. Fireballs of resinous wood, a technique that Robertson had learnt from the defenders at Nilt, were burnt at night. There was a truce with unsuccessful negotiations under white flags. The garrison developed its own antipathies, jokes and superstitions. The officers ate Nizam-ul-Mulk's collection of ornamental birds, and then started on their own ponies. Cloves, chopped straw and *chenar* bark were tried as substitutes for tobacco, and there was a great deal of talk among the officers of the restaurant at the Savoy. Decaying bodies, inadequate sanitation and poor food caused illnesses. But the physical hardships were not too great, and provided Robertson could save the military officers from any ruses by Sher Afzal or escapades of their own, there was good chance of their surviving the three months. Robertson, at least, occasionally found time to observe the copper tints on Terich Mir as the last rays of the setting sun struck the mountain and faded.

Apart from lack of sleep, what preyed most upon the garrison was not knowing if help was coming. In fact, had they but known it, the relief of Chitral—a name that was scarcely known a month before—had become a matter of widespread concern. A 'thrill of apprehension' was passing through the imperial world as the garrison went through its ordeal which was soon to be acclaimed as a 'glorious episode in the history of the Indian Empire'.

On 18 April a voice was heard in the night calling out that Sher Afzal had fled and the siege was lifted. Nonetheless the defenders decided to wait until morning and to keep up all precautions. But sleep was impossible,

... and so we sat over the small fire, quietly happy, for we were all too played out for boisterous joy, talking of our people at home, and wondering, surmising, and guessing until daylight.¹

With the daylight they found that the news was true, and a message came from Kelly to say that he would be arriving the next day. They were able to obtain fresh food, and Robertson observed that 'the sky was blue, the breezes cool, and the valley waving with barley and wheat'. The next day for breakfast they had 'eggs and fresh milk and a skinny chicken, and could hardly eat for admiration of such delicacies'. In the afternoon Kelly's force arrived:

... we all went outside to see them arrive. There were no extravagant greetings; I, for my part, welcomed them mechanically ... My mind was weary, and my life seemed fatigued also. I felt, by anticipation, what it must be to attain a great age and feel a listlessness about all things.²

A few days later the southern relief column reached them, the first man to arrive being Younghusband, who had ridden ahead without permission.

And so ended the siege of Chitral. The garrison emerged to find themselves imperial heroes. Queen-Empress Victoria, the Viceroy, and the Commander-in-Chief sent messages of congratulation which were read out to the sepoys. Robertson was knighted. Whitchurch was awarded the Victoria Cross. The other officers were decorated. Later in the year, when they were all in England, Curzon gave a dinner party in their honour at Carlton House Terrace. Among the other guests on what must have been a memorable evening were John Biddulph and Algernon Durand. Perhaps the congratulations were over-done; it was, as Robertson himself said, only a minor siege.

It was Curzon who helped to tidy up the loose ends. His party returned to power the same year, and on his recommendation it was decided to 'retain' Chitral under British-Indian suzerainty. Amir-ul-Mulk was exiled to India and Shuja-ul-Mulk was recognized as Mehtar. He was given a council of ministers—including Futteh Ali Shah and Wafadar

¹ Robertson, 1900, p. 356.

² Robertson, 1900, p. 359.

Khan—to advise him during his minority. A British Political Officer was permanently appointed to the state, the first being Gurdon. A garrison of British-Indian troops was stationed at Drosh; and a force of irregulars was raised and trained. The southern route through Dir and over the Lowarai pass was kept open and made practicable for pack-animals during the summer months, which greatly reduced the distance and difficulty of communications between British India and Chitral.

It was the end for Chitral of the old political association with Kashmir and the Political Agent at Gilgit, such as that had been, and the beginning of a new association with the North-West Frontier. Strategic considerations demanded this, but it cut right across the traditional links between the Chitral and Gilgit valleys. The former Kushwaqt territories were separated from the Kator for some years, but in 1914 those valleys on the Chitral side of the watershed were again attached to make up what became Chitral State. Yasin, the head of the Gilgit valley, and Ishkoman remained separate, each under a non-hereditary governor chosen from members of the various ruling families of Kohistan and responsible to the Political Agent at Gilgit.

From this time onwards—following the agreement with Afghanistan over the western border, the agreement with Russia over the Pamir borders, and the internal settlements described—Kohistan was to enjoy a period of political stability that was interrupted only in 1947. From the wider point of view Britain had succeeded in keeping Russia north of the main watersheds. Whether, if the chance had come, Russia would have annexed Kohistan, we shall never know, but it is clear that after 1895 she had no chance of doing so. There was still some life in the Great Game, but the high stakes were finished.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

FIFTY YEARS: 1897-1947

Mehtar Aman-ul-Mulk was drinking from a wooden bowl. One of his courtiers said, 'O Great King, what do you have in your hand?' Aman-ul-Mulk replied, 'The name of this drink is tea.'

Story heard in Chitral.

'Our people used to like Edward silver rupees. We had them made into jewellery for our wives. We didn't like George rupees. They were no good at all.'

Villager of Kalam.

'We British wives in Gilgit had to be careful never to quarrel. Apart from the unpleasantness, it would have been so bad for British prestige. There was one lady during our time who was inclined to be "difficult", but by being tactful we managed to get through those years without a single quarrel.'

Wife of Political Agent.

In May 1892, only five months after the Hunza campaign, the first mountaineering expedition arrived in Gilgit. The expedition was supported by the Royal Society and the Royal Geographical Society, and was led by Martin Conway, a well-known traveller and climber, less respectfully described as 'a darling of the Alpine Club'. After exploring the Bagrot valley, the expedition went up the Hunza valley and surveyed some of the glaciers on the northern flanks of Rakaposhi including the Minapin glacier. July was spent in surveying the Hispar and Biafo glaciers, and in crossing the Hispar and other passes. After this the expedition went on to climb a peak of 22,600 feet in Baltistan. Although by modern standards the climbing was not very ambitious, Conway's expedition is important in the history of mountaineering. It represented the first attempt in the Karakoram at mountaineering for its own sake, and it was one of the first expeditions to keep detailed records. It produced the first maps of parts of the Karakoram, and it yielded valuable information and experience for later expeditions.

The pacification of Chilas shortly afterward opened the way for the first attempt on Nanga Parbat. A small party of British mountaineers and Gurkhas reached a height of 20,000 feet during the summer of 1895, but at the end of August A.F. Mummery and two Gurkhas disappeared while crossing

a col, and were never seen again. The local people believed that they had been carried off by the fairies; probably they were engulfed in an avalanche. These were the first of many deaths on Nanga Parbat.

Meanwhile the strategic exploration of the northern and north-western passes—work begun by Lockhart, Younghusband and others—had been taken up again by Lieutenant George Cockerill. Between 1892 and 1894 Cockerill explored and surveyed about 12,000 square miles of some of the most difficult country in the world. Another achievement followed in 1913, when the triangulation framework of the Survey of India, which had been extended through the Hunza valley to the Pamirs, was formally joined with the triangulation framework of Russia in Asia. The difference in the length of the junction line between the two surveys was found to be less than five feet. The officer in charge of the British party at the time was Kenneth Mason.

Another category of European traveller who appears during and after the 1890s is the hunter. Army officers and others roamed the mountains below the snow-line in search of game, and contributed to a decline both in numbers and number of species. 'I soon bagged several of medium size without much difficulty' epitomizes a prolific literature that tells us little about Kohistan. No British hunter reported an experience with the *rachi* fairies.

The first European woman to travel in Kohistan was Mrs. Littledale. In 1890 she and her husband set off for Western Turkistan, intending to cross the Pamirs from the north to south. The ostensible object of this ambitious journey was to shoot 'Marco Polo sheep'. After many adventures and hardships, the Littledales crossed the Darkot pass into Yasin. Mrs. Littledale, who must have been a most remarkable and courageous woman to have even attempted such a journey in those days, was now faced with a rope-bridge. Her husband later described the difficulty to the Royal Geographical Society:

Mrs. Littledale had always announced that she was ready to go anywhere or do anything except cross a rope-bridge, and how I was to get her over in the morning I did not know. We selected a strong man, and she got on his back, and they started off across the bridge. I had previously arranged my camera to photograph her in the act of crossing. She had got one-third of the way across and I climbed down to pull the shutter thinking all was right, but she had opened her eyes, and the height, the rushing water underneath, and the swaying of the bridge had frightened her, and she

was telling them to take her back . . . I shouted to them in Hindustani, in Russian, and in Kirghiz, to go on quickly and take no notice, but they did not understand me, and thought I was telling them to return, and back they came. Mrs. Littledale said she was ready to try again if we would tie her on, so that if she fainted she would not fall, but it could not be arranged.¹

He goes on to describe how eventually they made a raft out of a camp-bed and inflated sheepskins. His wife was lashed down, and with five men swimming at her side, the raft was pushed out into the river. Even before starting she was half under the water, and during the crossing the raft disappeared completely in the rapids and spray. Eventually it arrived at the other side, a quarter of a mile further downstream, by which time Mrs. Littledale was half-drowned.

Another indefatigable traveller was Sir Aurel Stein, the Anglo-Hungarian archaeologist, who passed through Kohistan on three of his great Central Asian expeditions. In 1900 he passed north through Astor, Gilgit and Hunza. In 1906 he travelled the length of Chitral from the Lowarai pass to the Pamirs, again on his way to Eastern Turkistan. In 1913 he passed through Chilas, became the first European to visit Darel and Tangir (and the only one until the 1950s), crossed the watershed of the Gilgit river, ascended the Yasin valley, and crossed the Darkot pass. In 1926 he was the first European to visit the acephalous state of Torwal in the upper Swat valley. At the end of 1941—at the age of 79—he was the first to travel in the Kandia and Duber valleys. Stein was more interested in men than mountains, and his keen observations and meticulous accounts of people and their immediate surroundings, though brief, are among the most illuminating of all writings on Kohistan.

Most of the non-official travellers were gladly offered hospitality by the British officers stationed in Gilgit and elsewhere. Conway dined with Robertson, the Littledales stayed with Manners-Smith, Curzon breakfasted with Young-husband. Many interesting hours must have been spent in exchanging experiences, and in discussing the mountains and their peoples. Other non-official travellers followed during the 1930s and 1940s, an increasing number of them scientists and scholars—geologists, glaciologists, botanists, linguists and anthropologists.

Meanwhile the mountaineers and surveyors continued climbing, exploring, and filling in the gradually decreasing

¹Littledale, 1892, p. 26.

blanks on the map. Among those from Europe who were most active in the 1920s and 1930s were Kenneth Mason, D.M. Burn, Dr. and Mrs. Ph. C. Visser from Holland, Eric Shipton and H.W. Tilman. From 1909 onwards a series of Italian expeditions to K2 (28,250 feet), just beyond Kohistan, yielded much miscellaneous information. They culminated in the successful assault of 1954, in which 500 porters were employed, probably the largest number to assemble since the Hunza campaign. The 1950s also saw mountaineers reach the top of each of the great mountains within Kohistan. In 1950 itself the Norwegians defied the fairies and climbed Terich Mir (25,260 feet). Nanga Parbat (26,660 feet) which, with the European nationalism of the 1930s, had come to be associated with the Germans, was finally climbed by Hermann Buhl in 1953. Rakaposhi (25,550 feet) was climbed by a combined Pakistani and British expedition in 1958. Many of the other mountains have been climbed subsequently.

More memorials have appeared alongside Hayward's in Gilgit. Mountaineers have died on most of the mountains. Other travellers have fallen from cliffs or drowned in the rivers—a British Political Agent and his wife, a Pakistani geologist, a German surveyor, an American photographer—with all the improvements, the roads remain 'difficult, precipitous and dangerous'.

Despite what Mason describes as 'the new era of mountaineering', in which men fly in, climb and make their maps, and fly back, all within a couple of months, there is still scope for the future mountaineer and traveller. There are even some blanks on the map. Meanwhile the traditions of hospitality in the Political Agents' houses are maintained; and the heads of ibex, markhor and Marco Polo sheep that first adorned their walls more than fifty years ago still look down upon the newly arrived guest.

* * *

When Curzon reached the head of the Hunza valley in 1894, on his way to the source of the Oxus, he gave a feast for his companions and porters. With him were Nazim Khan, newly installed as Mir, Humayun Beg, reinstated as Wazir, and Gurdon, who had then succeeded Younghusband as Political Officer in Hunza. Nazim Khan recalls Curzon sitting happily by the fire, saying to everyone *khaile khub, khaile khub* (very good, very good), the only Persian he knew.

That evening Curzon predicted that within three years he would return to British India as Viceroy.

Actually it was four years later, but one of his first thoughts as Viceroy was to arrange for a party of rulers and leading men from Kohistan to visit him in Calcutta. The object, of course, was more than to return hospitality. Curzon intended that when his visitors went home to their own states they should take with them an impression of the benefits of British rule in India, and a proper appreciation of the strength of the British-Indian army. The party included Nazim Khan, Humayun Beg, Sekander Khan of Nagar, Shuja-ul-Mulk of Chitral, Raja Akbar Khan of Punial, and Bahadur Khan, the old Ra of Astor who had accompanied Durand to Hunza. Their 'courier' for the journey was Gurdon, who must have had some uncomfortable moments, what with Humayun Beg absent-mindedly spitting inside the Golden Temple at Amritsar, and the whole party bursting into irreverent laughter at the sight of a Sikh religious procession. In Calcutta Curzon gave them a banquet which they enjoyed, especially the icecream which they had not tasted before. Curzon recalls old Bahadur Khan sitting on the marble floor and stuffing strawberry icecream into his mouth with his fingers. From Calcutta they were taken out to sea on a ship for a couple of days, which they all enjoyed except for Bahadur Khan 'who feared that alligators might come up out of the water and devour him'.

Nazim Khan and Shuja-ul-Mulk, the two rulers whom Robertson had installed personally, together with Sekander Khan who succeeded his father in 1904, lived for many years. All three died natural deaths, and Nazim Khan used to reckon that he was the first Mir of Hunza ever to see a grandson married. They proved loyal friends of the British, and each of them was knighted. Shuja-ul-Mulk, with the largest state, was awarded the official title of 'His Highness', with a salute of eleven guns. Compared with that of their predecessors, their rule was moderate, although Shuja-ul-Mulk went through a phase of discriminating against the Ismailis, and people in Hunza used to complain that Nazim Khan's spies 'reported every fart'.

Nazim Khan died in 1938 and was succeeded by his son, and then his grandson, who remained Mir until 1974, when Hunza lost the last of its autonomy. Sekander Khan died during the 1940s, and as his eldest son had already died, there was some uncertainty about who should succeed. The

British, applying the principle of primogeniture, favoured Sekander's grandson, but Sekander's sons, particularly the second, did not see it in this new light. There was unrest and fear for the life of the grandson. Eventually the second brother was exiled from Nagar by the British but was made Governor of Yasin in compensation, and the grandson succeeded. He was Mir at the time of our journeys, a shy, rotund and conscientious man, aged about forty-five. He claims to be the twenty-first of his dynasty. Among Sekander's other sons are our friends Baber Khan and Raja Karim Khan.

Mehtar Shuja-ul-Mulk died in 1936, and was succeeded first by his eldest son, who died leaving two daughters, and then by his second son. On the latter's death there was again a struggle for the throne, one of the claimants being Hussam-ul-Mulk, another of Shuja's sons. The British exiled him to Baluchistan for some years. Between 1943 and 1954 three successive Mehtars were installed in Chitral, the last a small boy, and the way was paved for later control over the state by the Government of Pakistan. Raja Akbar Khan also got into trouble with the British. He was implicated in political murders in Punial, and was exiled to Kashmir for some years. His grandson is now the nominal Ra of Punial. But by and large, when compared with the events of the previous half century, the internal affairs of Kohistan remained quiet until 1947.

The exception was an episode in Darel and Tangir. When Robertson travelled to Chitral in 1893, he made the acquaintance of one of the Kushwaqt family, a young son of Mir Wali, Hayward's murderer. His name was Wali Khan, and at that time, at the age of seventeen, he was exercising his pretensions to the Kushwaqt throne. Robertson describes him as 'a picturesque prince', 'slight and graceful, but with 'a temper like flame'. In support of Nizam-ul-Mulk the British subsequently removed Wali Khan to Gilgit, but he slipped away and disappeared into Tangir. There, by political acumen and sheer ability to dominate, he succeeded in establishing himself as ruler, and founded a combined state of Tangir and Darel which he presided over for more than a decade. He must have been the last prince in the subcontinent, if not in Asia, to carve out a kingdom for himself in this way.

Not surprisingly, Wali Khan turned hostile to the British, and he carefully maintained the independence of his new state. At the same time he recognized its problems very clearly. One of his first reforms was to discourage the periodic

redistribution of land. Another was to allocate barren land to the landless. A third was the making of tracks and bridges. He established some degree of law and order, he encouraged traders to visit the valleys, and he made agreements with Pathan timber merchants for the sale of trees. It was only during his reign that it became feasible for a European to visit these valleys: Aurel Stein travelled as Wali Khan's personal guest.

But it was inevitable that anyone who tried to rule Tangir and Darel would meet a violent death sooner or later. It finally came in 1917. 'Pakhtun' Wali, as he was now known, used to wear a very powerful amulet which was believed to make him invincible. People used to say that whenever a bullet hit him it dropped harmlessly to the ground. Unless he took the amulet off, there seemed little hope of killing him. However this amulet was so powerful that the barber was unable to cut his hair while he wore it, so one day, when Pakhtun Wali had taken the amulet off for the barber, an enemy seized the chance and struck him down with an axe. After this Darel and Tangir relapsed once more into acephalous anarchy.

Kohistan's external affairs were also mostly quiet. There were brief Russian scares now and then. In 1916 some Hunza men captured two German officers who were crossing Central Asia to Turkey with a load of Chinese gold ingots. In 1918 a party of White Russian refugees escaped into Chitral, where one of them died and was buried. In 1919, during the Third Afghan War, the Chitral Scouts, supported by the British-Indian army garrison at Drosh, repulsed Afghan incursions at the southern end of the state. The Mir of Hunza went on paying his annual tribute to the Chinese.

For the British this was a time of consolidation after the rapid events of the 1890s. Tracks on more of the main routes were widened and more rope-bridges were replaced by suspension bridges. The arrangements for bringing up supplies for the garrisons were efficiently organized, and those employed were paid for their labour. The irregulars of the princely states were reorganized into the Gilgit Scouts and the Chitral Scouts, which were put under the command of British officers. The cultivation in Gilgit and Astor was surveyed for land revenue according to the British-Indian pattern. A small hospital was opened in Gilgit, with dispensaries in some of the larger outlying villages. Primary, and later secondary, schools for boys were started in a few places in the princely states. When necessary, abuses of power by the rulers were checked; and they were encouraged to send their

sons away to public schools in Kashmir or India for a wider education suited to future responsibilities. But on the whole the British policy was to avoid interfering in the domestic affairs of the states, princely or acephalous.

More embarrassing was the relationship between the representatives of British India and of Kashmir in Gilgit, a relationship that had been ambiguous ever since the first quarrel between Biddulph and the Kashmir Governor of that time. The Governor was responsible for the administration of Gilgit and Astor, but had no effective contact with any of the other states; while the Political Agent was in direct contact with these states on behalf of the overall suzerain power, but had no administrative powers in Gilgit or Astor. In practice, following Durand's example, most Political Agents seem to have maintained a political ascendancy over the Governors and made the relationship work to British India's advantage. The situation was perhaps characterized in the words of one Political Agent's wife, who remarked that the Governor of their time had been 'quite a nice little man'. In 1935 the problem was ameliorated when British India made a new arrangement with Kashmir. Gilgit and Astor were 'leased' to British India for sixty years, the Political Agent taking over responsibility for their administration, and the Governor being withdrawn. At the same time the Kashmir garrisons at Gilgit and Chilas were removed to Astor and replaced by Gilgit Scouts. This had the incidental effect among the local people of making the British seem to grow further in strength, whereas by 1935 the British position in India was already weakening. It was only in 1947 that Kashmir tried to reassert any ambitions of her own in Kohistan, when she was to regret the arrangements of 1935.

A power that was growing in strength during the early decades of the century was Swat, which was rapidly evolving from Pathan tribal organization into a new centralized state. In 1922 the ruler of Swat, having consolidated his control over the lower parts of the valley, invaded the acephalous state of Torwal. He was prevented from taking Kalam at the same time only because the Mehtar of Chitral claimed it too. In 1939, after bitter fighting, Swat also took Kandia and Duber.¹ In 1948, among adjustments that followed the independence of Pakistan, the Mehtar of Chitral gave up his claims to Kalam. The ruler of Swat was then allowed by the

¹ These annexations gave Stein the opportunities to make his journeys. He was a personal friend of the ruler of Swat, and was quick off the mark on both occasions.

new Government to administer the area, although strictly speaking it never became a part of Swat.

Darel, Tangir and some small neighbouring communities remained independent throughout the whole of the British period, and acceded directly and voluntarily to Pakistan only in 1952.

* * *

It is obvious from their own accounts, factual and guarded though these are, that Durand, Robertson, Younghusband and those who succeeded them regarded it as a privilege to be posted to Kohistan. There were many reasons for this. They found the climate stimulating, especially after the hot weather of the plains; and the scenery is unsurpassed. The fruit blossom in spring and the brilliant colour of the leaves in autumn make an irresistible appeal to the British. The posts themselves, both political and military, were responsible ones, yet the difficulties of communications gave their holders unusual freedom of action. Because the traditional administrations were largely preserved, the political officers escaped the routine and office work that now went with district administration 'down country'. Moreover they found the local people 'capital companions', and it was part of an officer's duties to travel about and to strengthen friendly relations by joining in hunting expeditions and games of polo. Those with scholarly interests also found plenty to occupy them. Robertson's work in Kafiristan has already been mentioned. Lorimer pursued his lifelong linguistic studies as Political Agent in Gilgit. One of the early Agency Surgeons, Robert McCarrison, earned world-wide recognition for his research on goitre.

Few of these men would have questioned the principle of autocratic rule, even if they had occasionally to moderate its practice. Monarchy was familiar from their own country, it was something they understood, and it was something they could deal with. The difficulties of dealing with the acephalous states, where there was no one in authority and no one ready to accept responsibility, showed them what could happen if the rulers were not supported. One former Political Agent told us that wherever he used to travel he invited the local people to sit with him in camp in the evening. 'I used to do a lot of business at that time of day. We would sit round the fire and share a meal and watch some dancing. It was a

chance to talk with people at leisure and get to know them. But in Chilas and those places no one would come. They said that the light of the fire would make them conspicuous, and an enemy might shoot at them.'

It was of course the rulers and aristocracy of the princely states with whom the British officers had most in common—the privileges of class, wealth and leisure, a shared love of sport and games, an appreciation of local song and dance, an easy understanding of the role of ceremonial, and a taste for the same jokes. But the British did not fail to respect the dignity of the farmer and craftsman, nor to notice the beauty of his children or grandchildren. They admired the skill of the shepherd on the mountainsides and the ingenuity of the channel builder. And they approved of people's attachment to their land, and to their own traditions and customs.

Many of the feelings were reciprocated. To their fellow polo players, the British officers' social backgrounds, and many of their social values and attitudes seemed familiar. Those who travelled down country and met other Europeans felt that the frontier officers were picked men—as indeed they were—and this encouraged a further elitism to develop on both sides. Informants in Chitral and Gilgit would express this by saying, 'The officers sent to our people were always from the best families,' while a former Political Agent wrote in a letter, 'Only specially selected officers went to these posts, and if they were not up to the mark they were soon sent back to India.' To the farming and lower classes the British at least brought an end to slavery, forced labour, and the worst tyrannies of their rulers.

What is also evident is the personal warmth and friendship. A few months after the Hunza campaign Durand visited Nagar again and met Jafer Khan. The old man had smallpox at the time, but Durand was ready to sit with him, hand-in-hand according to local custom, for more than an hour to exchange news and ideas. It was an act of more than official courtesy. Aman-ul-Mulk was another whom Durand always counted among his personal friends, 'whatever snares he laid for me, however much he plotted to my annoyance and sometimes to my anger'. Robertson had friends from Punial and Gilgit with him through the fighting in Chilas (where one of them saved his life) and in the siege of Chitral. More than thirty years after Younghusband had left Hunza a small gift arrived in England for him from Nazim Khan, a token of continuing friendship.

This is not to say that everything always went smoothly, nor is it intended as a defence of British imperialism or of paternalism. But the fact remains that the relationship continued warm from the 1890s until 1947. It was never affected, as in other parts of British India, by rising political aspirations and the struggle for independence.

The tangible relics of the British period are characteristic: the officers' mess at Drosh, with its bogus half-timbering and inside the hunting trophies and the billiard table; the clock-tower in Gilgit bazaar which commemorates King George V; the collections of early twentieth century novels left behind by successions of British readers; the parade of the Scouts' band before polo tournaments with drum and bagpipe and 'Bonnie Scotland' (a nice contrast with the throb and wail of the traditional band which accompanies the match itself); the trout in some of the rivers; and British graves in Gilgit and Chitral, Astor, Chilas and Drosh.

Then there are the intangible relics, often enshrined in stories that are still part of the local repertoire. 'Look at that graveyard. Do you see the hole in one of the grave-markers? A British officer urinated against the wall there, without realising that it was a graveyard. While he was there someone kicked him from behind. He turned round but could see no one. Then he was kicked again, and again he could see no one. So he got in a panic and drew his revolver and fired off a shot, which hit the grave-marker. Then he ran away, but he had hardly gone a hundred yards before he fell down and broke a leg.' Some officers' names have passed into local idiom. In Gilgit they say, 'I would rather be a donkey and carry wood from Harelli than play number one on Cobb Sahib's polo team.' Others have passed into the time-scale: 'In the time of Gurdön Sahib . . .' We found one of the strangest linguistic survivals by chance, having asked a Chitrali friend whether people give names to pets. 'Oh yes,' he said, 'for example, nearly all dogs in Chitral are called Come-on.' 'Come-on?' 'Yes. You see, when the British officers were here, they all had good dogs, and we used to hear them calling "Come-on" all the time, so we thought Come-on must be the proper name for a good dog.'

The older generation remember personal encounters: a discussion with 'Cobbe Sahib' about fishing, a meeting with Schomberg on the road, the day when Colonel Lockhart rode by. Ghulam Mohammed, a Hunza friend, remembers as a small boy visiting Colonel and Mrs. Lorimer. 'One day my

father took me to the Lorimer house. I was about eight years old. I sat on the rug and Mrs. Lorimer gave me some sweets. I ate some of them and took some home in my cap for my sisters. Mrs. Lorimer knew our language and asked, "How are you?" and "What is your name?" I stayed for half an hour, and then I went home. I couldn't walk all the way, and someone carried me on his shoulders. I was very happy about the sweets.' Daulat Shah has many tales of the officers and the wives he worked with. Often they are of domestic trivialities—of Mrs. Lorimer's lost penknife, of Colonel Schomberg's jam, of Mrs. Gillan's recipe for making coffee from barley—but such tales have a place in the folklore of many households in Kohistan.

Apart from the British-Indian army garrison in Drosh, the greatest concentration of British residents was at Gilgit. Here, between 1889 and 1947, lived a succession of twenty-four Political Agents, each known as the P.A., and each with one or more British assistants. In addition there was a doctor, known as the Agency Surgeon, one or two officers in command of the Kashmir garrison and another in charge of supplies, and one or two in command of the Gilgit Scouts. With families, the number sometimes swelled to twenty or more British residents. The first British wife seems to have appeared in Gilgit in 1895, and by the turn of the century there were two or three. Family houses, unpretentious but comfortable, were built, and were furnished with armchairs, coffee tables, and chintz. They were adorned with hunting trophies, Turkistan carpets, and flowers from the garden outside.

By the 1920s and 1930s the pattern of British social life in Gilgit was well established, especially in the winter when the passes were closed and the little community was cut off from the outside world. The men went out hunting, fishing, and shooting duck or partridge together; and there was polo several times a week in spring and autumn. The wives called on each other, supervised their servants, competed at gardening, and made exchanges from their precious stores of coffee and toilet paper, all brought over the passes the preceding summer. The younger children went for decorous walks in the charge of English nannies. The older children were sent away to school. In the evenings there were bridge parties, charades, musical evenings with songs of the period accompanied by piano and banjo, dancing, and resort to the 'Club' and its library. For special occasions other officers would come in from Chilas and Astor. In summer, during the hottest

months, the wives and children would camp up in one of the side valleys, or would cross the passes to Kashmir for the sake of greater social opportunities. During the summer there were visitors: the British Resident from Kashmir, some senior officers inspecting the northern frontier, a party of mountaineers, or a perennial wanderer such as Stein or Schomberg. The King's Birthday was celebrated with a gathering of the leading men of the princely states, and once a year the P.A. held a formal reception for the rulers. They also used to be invited to occasional dinner parties, but great care had to be taken to avoid any apparent favouritism over the invitations. Sometimes the Kashmir Governor came to tea and tennis.

For us two of the most interesting among the British officers of this period are Lorimer and Schomberg. David Lorimer, who had served in Persia and become an authority on certain Persian dialects, first went to Kohistan in 1915 as Political Officer in Chitral. In 1920 he and his wife, herself a philologist, returned when Lorimer was appointed P.A. in Gilgit. He is remembered there for having spoken a new language each year of his appointment, first Shina, then Khowar, and finally Burushaski, which he was the first (and almost the only) European to master. Lorimer's linguistic work of those years, all done in odd moments between his official duties, resulted in a paper on Shina, a paper on the Persian-speaking gunsmiths of the Shishi valley, and three volumes on Burushaski. He also wrote an account of supernatural beliefs in the Gilgit area. After he had retired, he and his wife obtained permission to return to Hunza for a year during 1934-5 for further researches. They lived in the village of Aliabad, in the former Political Officer's house, the post having been abolished by then. From this second period there resulted a study of the language of the minstrels of Hunza, another on Wakhi, and Mrs. Lorimer's famous book *Language Hunting in the Karakoram*. Mrs. Lorimer died in 1949, but Colonel Lorimer was still working on his material when we visited him at Welwyn Garden City in 1960. He was then 83. His name is much respected in Kohistan.

Reginald Schomberg, on the other hand, had held no official position in Kohistan. He had had a distinguished army career, commanding a battalion during the 1914-18 war and winning the DSO and Bar. During the 1920s and 1930s he made a number of lengthy journeys in Central Asia, including Kohistan, which he described in a series of characteristic books. One of the P.A.s of the time has described how he

would suddenly appear at Gilgit 'unheralded and undemanding' and would prove 'a highly entertaining companion until he disappeared once more' on the next stage of his journey. No one seems to know the purpose of these journeys. Judging from the books, he did not even enjoy them, although there is a certain zest in some of his more bitter strictures against the local people; for example, '... decidedly the Punyali, though no blot on the landscape, like the people of Nagar and Ishkoman, is less pleasing than he should be ...' Indeed one wonders if a man who can write of others as Schomberg sometimes did expects or deserves to be taken seriously.

Daulat Shah, who was Schomberg's factotum, confirmed the impression of a solitary and unsociable man. He also suggested that Schomberg may have been engaged in some sort of espionage, though he was unable or unwilling to say more. Others have hinted the same, and a contemporary told us that Schomberg was mainly concerned with countering Bolshevik infiltration. Absurd though this sounded, there may be something in it. Stories are told of other Europeans who moved about Central Asia in disguise during the 1920s and 1930s. One of them is even supposed to have led the prayers in the main mosque in Chitral village. Another traveller records meeting an Englishman (not Schomberg) whom he memorably, if ludicrously, describes as 'the unknown one of the Foreign Office'. Perhaps Schomberg was another of these, the last generation of British players in the Great Game.

* * *

For the people of Kohistan themselves the twentieth century has accelerated rates of change, both economic and social. The end to the internecine wars and the slave trade, coupled with the new health services introduced by the British, led to a rapid rise in population. Already in the nineteenth century, the pressure of population upon the irrigated land was rising in some states, especially in Hunza where it had been made a justification for the caravan raids. By the 1930s and 1940s the problem was becoming acute, and not only in Hunza. Scarcity of food, especially grain, began to drive younger sons and brothers off their fathers' land, at least for a few years, to serve with the Gilgit Scouts, or to take employment with the new administrations as clerks, servants and porters, or simply as labourers on the new roads.

The new roads, especially those on the three southern routes—over the Burzil pass to Astor, over the Babusar pass to Chilas, and over the Lowarai pass to Drosh—now made it possible for merchants to bring pack animals up from Srinagar and Peshawar, and to start trading in the main valleys. Most of the merchants who followed the Burzil route were Kashmiris; most of those who crossed the Lowarai were Pathans, although Sikhs and Hindus also came. In Astor and Gilgit, and in Drosh and Chitral, some of them began to settle down and open permanent shops, and in this way the bazaars developed. Until 1947 the bazaars remained almost entirely in the hands of these down country merchants: the local people had no experience of trade, no contacts with down country markets, and seldom any capital to invest in stock.

The goods the merchants brought were the new manufactures of British India—cotton cloth, soap, matches, kerosene lamps, metal utensils, cigarettes, Indian-grown tea—and salt. Their first customers were the sepoy of the Kashmir and British-Indian army garrisons, but gradually the leading men of the princely states took to the new goods too. Lorimer relates how Wazir Humayun Beg was the first in Hunza to use cotton cloth, beginning rather gingerly with cotton extremities attached to his traditional woollen shirt at the points where they showed. Today cotton has replaced wool for both shirts and trousers for most people in the princely states. Another new product that was taken up, at first by the aristocracy, and then by successively lower classes, was Indian grown tea; while sugar has followed a stage behind. The position in the princely states now is roughly that members of the aristocracy drink tea with sugar as a matter of course; that farmers drink tea with salt as a matter of course, but use sugar for special occasions and for guests; while labourers and craftsmen drink tea on special occasions only. The new products, moving as they have down the social scale, have led to some strange pretensions. We met one old farmer who for years had cut and bruised his bare feet on tough mountain paths. Now at last he had got himself a pair of stout down country shoes. We saw him carry them in his hand over the mountains, but pause to put them on before walking along the smooth road through the bazaar.

The corollary of the import of manufactured goods from down country was the export from Kohistan of what little surplus production there was—woollen cloth, butter, dried apricots, kernels and nuts, cumin seed, goat-hair and hashish—

all of which found a ready market down country. With the sale of butter and nuts went a deterioration of local diets, a fact that several old men mentioned and lamented. More recently, with further improvements in communications, it has become possible to export even fresh fruit. This has cut right across a traditional convention which allowed neighbours and travellers to pick and eat fruit from any tree. Colonel Lockhart had written in his report that it was 'a churl' who fenced his fruit trees. Even at the time of our journey to Minapin Elizabeth and I, following Ghulam Abbas's example, helped ourselves generously to the apricots that grew along the way. But now, as Raja Karim put it, 'We have to stop even our own children touching the fruit because it is to go to the bazaar.' The old headman of Khomar used to give his surplus fruit away to the poor, but his sons sell it and buy themselves cigarettes instead.

Such changes in taste and diet have affected mainly the princely states. In the acephalous states xenophobia and violence have discouraged even itinerant merchants, let alone shopkeepers. Moreover landholders in the acephalous states prefer to hoard any surplus production for the next funeral. Cotton cloth is widely used, but even now tea and kerosene lamps are seldom seen.

The strengthening of political links between the princely states and British India, and the improvement of communications, as well as encouraging this new trade from the south, helped to undermine the ancient trade with Turkistan and Badakshan. Gradually tastes changed too, and the rulers and their courtiers came to prefer Birmingham shotguns to silk gowns and knotted carpets. In recent decades the Central Asian trade has suffered from political difficulties and sealed borders. Very little now reaches Kohistan from Western Turkistan beyond a few felts and saddle-cloths and an occasional bale of 'Roosi' cotton cloth. For many years after the communist take over nothing came from Eastern Turkistan either. More recently the Chinese Government has again allowed trade through Hunza, though oddly enough, and despite the new Gilgit-Kashgar motor road, the goods are reported to have been carried by pack-animals and to have consisted of traditional items such as carpets and silks.

Another result of the improvement in roads to the south was an increase in travel by Kohistanis. Again this began in the early decades with the rulers themselves. They went on pilgrimages and attended *durbars* at Calcutta and Delhi, they

sent their sons down country to school, and their agents went staggering back over the passes with pianos and chandeliers to adorn their modest but increasingly cluttered palaces. At the schools their sons, and the sons of the Wazirs and other leading men, acquired an education and knowledge of the outside world that their grandfathers had never had. Raja Karim Khan told us how he, Ghulam Abbas, and the present Mir of Nagar used to make a two week journey to the Christian Mission School at Srinagar. The headmaster was the famous Canon Tyndale Biscoe, author of the book, *Character Building in Kashmir*. Raja Karim told us how his sisters had tearfully embroidered him a beautiful shirt to take away to school with him, and how the Canon would order him to put it on, together with his embroidered *choga* and other traditional regalia, whenever visitors came to the school. 'How pretty, how quaint,' the visitors would exclaim. Ghulam Abbas described to us the ordeal of tea on a Sunday afternoon with the Canon and his wife, and strange questions such as, 'One or two lumps of sugar?'

But already by the 1930s it seemed an eternity since the first deputation from Kohistan had accompanied Robertson down country in 1892 and had expressed their greatest astonishment, on reaching the edge of the plains, at seeing a flat landscape for the first time in their lives.

* * *

The events of the 1890s had already shaken the traditional social order, especially in Chitral, where the reversal of fortunes in the siege elevated Shuja-ul-Mulk's few supporters above many of the former leading families. As usual, a characteristic—if facetious—example is enshrined in a story. Wafadar Khan had become an influential man after 1895, and naturally tended to favour the village where he had been fostered, which happened to be a village where there was clay suitable for making pots. One day he was riding past a house near Chitral and asked an old woman for a drink of water. 'I can give you no water,' she replied, 'for I have no pot. The curse of Wafadar Khan is upon us.' He replied, much astonished, 'I am that Wafadar Khan of whom you speak, O mother. You should pray for me, not curse me. What is the difficulty?' Then the old woman explained that all the potters had been given state appointments, and were riding

about on horses and playing polo, while no one was making the poor people their clay pots.

In the decades that followed, it was the rulers themselves who unwittingly did most to undermine the traditional order—and hence, in the long run, their own pre-eminence. Lorimer has recorded how, when men from Hunza began to take jobs and earn wages, Nazim Khan favoured them for the sake of what they would give him in return for a state appointment or a foster-relationship. Such posts were given to Gilgit Scouts who returned to Hunza, and to the servants of British officers, instead of being given to the members of the aristocracy who traditionally expected them. The servant of one British officer is said to have approached Nazim Khan openly with robes, carpets, and jewels in an explicit bid for the foster-fatherhood of one of the Mir's sons—a nice illustration of conservative social aspirations despite growing economic freedom.

The rulers further undermined tradition by ignoring, and even forbidding, ancient customs and conventions. At one point Shuja-ul-Mulk promoted *mullahs* to the top in the order of seating (i.e. nearest himself) at *mahrekas*. This disenchanted every class in Chitral. Sekander Khan forbade the people of Nagar to celebrate Shiri Badat's death on the grounds that it was un-Islamic. Nazim Khan began to economize on some of the rewards traditionally disbursed by the Mirs at festivals in Hunza, and did not bother to attend the festivals himself—and so the people stopped coming.

The aristocracy began in turn to ignore some of their traditional roles and responsibilities. They began to think how they could invest their wealth profitably, instead of spending it locally for the sake of social returns. At the same time the social commitments remained, as they still do. One friend expressed this confusion when he called on us one day and mentioned that an old cousin had arrived the previous evening. 'In the old days,' he said, 'if any member of our family got a state appointment or state land, or was becoming rich in some way, he expected his relatives to share the wealth, and the responsibility and work. That was one reason why no one in our country used to get much richer than everyone else. But now, with other kinds of jobs and with new expenditures like educating our children, it is different. We don't want to work for all our relatives any more. But this old cousin is hard up, so he has come and still expects me to let him share my income. What am I to say to him? I can't tell him to go away.'

The old class distinctions were relaxing and blurring a little at all levels, and occasional symptoms appeared on the surface. We were told another story. One day during the early 1940s the minstrels of Gilgit announced that they were fed up with being regarded as inferior. Henceforth they were not going to play music for polo or on any other occasion, but were going to cultivate their land and were to be treated as farmers. There was dismay in Gilgit. How could there be polo without a band, leave alone marriages and festivals? The P.A. at the time happened to be Colonel Cobb, who was as keen on polo as anyone. The difficulty was explained to him—and the minstrels duly appeared with pipe and drum for the next polo match. By this time the British were probably the most conservative influence in the whole of Kohistan. One officer even issued orders that an abandoned festival was to be celebrated again.

Following the breakdown in social commitments to the extended family, comes the breakdown between brothers within the immediate family. Abdul Samad told us how he and his three brothers had shared the work and the income from their shop in Drosh bazaar. 'But when my son was ill, and I took him down country for treatment,' he told us sadly, 'my brothers complained that I was spending too much of our money on the boy. So I told them that I had to do what I thought right. If they did not agree we would have to divide the property. So now we have divided the property. But it would not have happened like this in the old days.'

Then comes the breakdown between generations. In a way of life that does not change (or changes little in a life-span) the old are appreciated for their ever-increasing experience; but once the young feel that this experience is no longer relevant, the old can be ignored. This has not gone far in Kohistan but—*pace* Mrs. Lorimer—it had already appeared in Hunza by the 1930s. Colonel Lorimer recorded how a few of the young men who went away in search of jobs were coming back with a contempt for their old fathers who had never been out of the valley and who knew nothing of the outside world.

This is not the place to discuss the social costs of accelerating change. Nor do I want to discuss social disintegration itself in more detail. Compared with the massive weight of tradition the changes of this kind that have occurred so far—and indeed the economic changes too—are small and superficial. But they are a sign of things to come, and come they

undoubtedly will. It would be unrealistic to imagine otherwise. One can only hope that the social costs will be minimized by those peculiar Kohistan talents for retaining while adding, and for self-examination with humour.

Some of our friends chuckled over recent contretemps. Ghulam Abbas had decided that, Wazir or not, he is going to cultivate his land himself. But he finds that farmers come to him in the fields and say in a shocked voice, 'It is not right for a man of your rank to do such work. You should leave it to humble folk such as us.' Even his own friend Raja Karim Khan has not really accepted the idea, and tells Abbas that if he must cultivate his land he should at least build a wall round it so that no one else will see him working. 'I got into trouble over another matter,' Abbas told us. 'I decided it was an unnecessary expense to celebrate both the birth of a son and his circumcision, especially nowadays when boys are circumcised so much younger. So I combined both celebrations and gave only one feast. Everyone was furious. My family thought I had disgraced them, and my neighbours said I was mean. But now I have done it three times, and I think they are beginning to see that it is sensible to cut down on these wasteful ceremonies.'

Another friend, a grandson of Aman-ul-Mulk, was proudly demonstrating his latest acquisition, a tape-recorder, to a group of villagers. 'Ah,' said one old man, 'new things are very fine, no doubt. I remember when a man who had been down country brought a box of matches to the *mahreka* and presented it to your grandfather. They were the first matches your grandfather had ever seen. He gave that man a *choga* worth hundreds of rupees for that box of matches.'

Raja Karim Khan's marriage ceremony itself would have satisfied the strictest *mullah* in its orthodoxy. But as Raja Karim himself put it, 'As well as being Moslems, we are the people of this place too—why should we forget that? It was the custom among our forefathers at the time of marriage for two men to stand at the doorway when the guests passed through. One man carried burning juniper for purification. The other carried a bowl of flour, and put a pinch of flour on each guest's shoulder for good auspices. If these customs are part of the culture of our people, why should we give them up?' And he made sure that on the day of his marriage the man with the burning juniper and the man with the bowl of flour both stood at the doorway.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE END AND THE BEGINNING

There was and there was not. It was so and it was not so. It may have been or it may not have been. Either way, it is past.

Traditional beginning to stories told in Chitral.

There are no nervous gestures, twitching faces, bitten fingernails or haunted eyes, and no irritable words snap to and fro.

Mrs. Lorimer, in an article about Hunza.¹

Once water flows in a channel it will always flow there.

Chitral proverb.

On 14 and 15 August 1947 Pakistan and India gained independence as two separate nations. Religion was the dividing factor: the Moslem majority areas of British India were awarded to Pakistan and the Hindu majority areas to the new India. The Maharajas and Nizams were advised to accede to one or other of the new nations, depending on the location of their states and the inclinations of the majority of their subjects. Since Gilgit and Astor were, nominally at least, Kashmir territory the British Indian Government arranged to hand them back to Kashmir, together with the office of P.A. and the conduct of relations with Hunza, Nagar, Punial and the other states of the 'Gilgit Agency'. On 31 July a senior Kashmir officer flew into Gilgit as the new Governor, and on the following day the last British Political Agent handed over charge of the Agency to him.

The local people were stunned by this return to direct Kashmir administration, the more so because the British withdrawal took them by surprise. Government employees and Gilgit Scouts suddenly realised that their employer and commander would no longer be British India, but their traditional enemy, Kashmir. However as they believed that the Maharaja would accede to Pakistan when the time came, they were not too worried about the eventual outcome.

With control of the Agency went command of the Gilgit Scouts, two of whose British officers were kept on by the Kashmir Government after 15 August. The senior of these

¹E.O. Lorimer, 1936, p. 254.

was Major Brown, who commanded the garrison at Gilgit; the other was Captain Mathieson, who commanded at Chilas. Most of the Kashmir state forces in the area remained in the Astor valley, where they had been since 1935.

Even before 15 August the Mehtar of Chitral had acceded to Pakistan, and the rulers of Swat and Dir followed suit. But the Maharaja of Kashmir, who was the descendant of the Hindu Gulab Singh but whose subjects were mostly Moslem, was still hesitating more than two months after independence. Then on 26 October came the news that he had acceded to India. This caused increasing anxiety in Gilgit, which was hardly surprising. The horrors and abuses of Kashmir administration in the old days were not yet forgotten, and in local eyes had been closely associated with Hindu rule. The religious question, as such, may not have been important for the tolerant people of the princely states, but even the existing Kashmir regime—mild though it had become under British surveillance—had its irritations. The local people were all Moslems, but Hindu laws were nonetheless applied: for example, it was forbidden to slaughter cows, a traditional source of winter food in Gilgit. All the best posts in the administration were given to Kashmiris, while the Kashmir merchants, protected by a sympathetic administration, were often rapacious in collecting debts. For the less tolerant people of the acephalous states it was simpler: Hindus were greater infidels even than the British, and any attempt at Kashmir rule would be resisted. The *mullahs* of Darel and Tangir began to call for a religious war.

Unrest spread. The Scouts in Chilas wanted to declare for Pakistan immediately. Reports began to come in that men from the Gilgit valley were advancing on Gilgit town. Brown warned the Governor that he had insufficient troops to handle the situation and that in any case the Scouts would probably refuse to fight their own people. By the end of the month Gilgit town was surrounded, and Brown told the Governor he proposed acting to prevent bloodshed. That evening he sent a platoon of Scouts under Baber Khan to escort the Governor from the P.A.'s house into safe custody in the Scouts' camp. Baber Khan halted his men in the P.A.'s garden, and called on the Governor to come out. Receiving no reply, he went into the house and began to search it, but when he entered the Governor's bedroom the Governor opened fire with a rifle. The Governor and two servants then fired on the Scouts from the window and killed one of them,

which infuriated local tempers far and wide. A mob of armed men gathered to rush the house and slaughter the Governor, but Baber Khan persuaded them to move peacefully down to the polo ground, where Shah Reis Khan, descendant of the old Ras of Gilgit, managed to pacify them. Meanwhile Baber Khan deployed his men round the house, and firing continued through the night. At dawn the Governor finally came out, and he and other non-Moslems in Gilgit, mostly officials, and shopkeepers, were taken into protective custody by the Scouts.

In Chilas Mathieson prevented violence by gathering all the non-Moslems in the fort. He sent messages to Darel and Tangir begging the people to remain calm. He also sent some Scouts to hold the bridge over the Indus and prevent any Kashmir sepoys from advancing across the river. When a force of hostile Sikhs appeared from the direction of Astor, the Scouts simply burned the bridge. This prevented the loss of life that would have followed if the Sikhs had crossed. The Kashmir garrison in Astor subsequently disintegrated and retreated over the Burzil pass.

Brown now called a meeting in Gilgit, at which the popular demand was for the slaughter of all non-Moslems up to the Burzil pass and a declaration for Pakistan. The most that Brown could do was advise against violence, in which he was supported by the leading men. A provincial government of Gilgit was formed, with Shah Reis Khan as its president. Shah Reis sent a message of accession to Pakistan; and on 2 November the Pakistan flag was raised, followed by general festivities and dancing. After this life returned to normal in Gilgit, and a few days later the Kashmir Governor was watching polo with his guards. The Mirs of Nagar and Hunza, the Ra of Punial, and the Governors of Yasin, Ishkoman and Gupis all sent messages of accession to Pakistan. On 14 November the first Pakistan Political Agent flew into Gilgit and took over from Shah Reis Khan. The following year the men of Kohistan joined the general fighting in Kashmir: during the summer the Indian air force bombed Gilgit.

I do not intend to comment on the controversial political issues involved. What is remarkable is the way in which the members of the ruling families and the two British officers minimized the unrest and bloodshed. People in Gilgit are now very proud of this.

One of the consequences of the fighting during 1948 was the cutting of the important route from Kashmir to Gilgit via Astor. The cease-fire line fell on the Kashmir side of the Burzil pass, and the route has remained unused ever since. Meanwhile the route over the Babusar pass enjoyed a new lease of life, until the new road to Gilgit via Swat and the Indus valley was completed.

Another consequence of the fighting was the departure of the Kashmir shopkeepers from Gilgit bazaar. Their place was taken by local people from the princely states, most of whom were trying their hands at trade for the first time, but who have proved very successful at it. All the bazaars in Kohistan have grown greatly since 1947. In Gilgit alone the number of shops is more than four hundred.

The Kashmir officials also departed. Many of their posts—and senior posts in the services which were introduced by the Pakistan Government—were filled by members of the old ruling families. Baber Khan became Superintendent of Police. Another of Sekander Khan's sons became governor of Gilgit jail. Raja Karim Khan took charge of part of the village development programme. Humayun Beg, grandson of the Wazir, became personal assistant to the new succession of Pakistani P.A.s. Ghulam Abbas was responsible for tourism in Gilgit. Under a re-constituted administration for Chitral one of Hussam-ul-Mulk's son became the first doctor to qualify from the state, and took charge of the Government hospital in Chitral town. Another son was in charge of trade and revenue. Wazir Ali Shah held an important treasury post. Other leading men have made the most of their influence by taking on Government contracts. Mustafa Shah and his brother have built jeep roads. A grandson of Aman-ul-Mulk has bituminized Chitral's airstrip. Thus the old leading families of the princely states, though their roles have changed, still have an important part in what happens in Kohistan.

Medical and educational services have been greatly expanded since 1947. There is now a dispensary and a primary school in all the larger villages of the princely states, and some in the acephalous states too. In one village we found that of forty-two farmers with sons or grandsons of school-going age, only four had themselves been to school, but thirty-six had sons or grandsons regularly attending school. More than a hundred men from Kohistan have already completed degree courses at universities in Peshawar and Lahore. This expansion of education will lead to changes in the future.

The population has gone on increasing, and this perhaps is the most significant change of all. The first census of some of the princely states was taken in 1911. In the fifty years that followed the populations of these states doubled. During the same period, the total cultivated area in Gilgit—the only state for which we have reliable data—could be increased by only 50 per cent. This figure is probably typical, at least of the princely states. There is just not enough flat land that can be economically irrigated. The result has been that the traditional self-sufficiency of the farming, already threatened in the 1930s, has broken down in some valleys. During the 1950s Kohistan began, quite simply, to run out of grain, the staple food. The Kashmir and British-Indian army garrisons had always been supplied from down country—there had never been enough food grown locally for them, and this had been the cause of half of Durand's problems. Now there was not enough for the local inhabitants either, and the Pakistan Government began to fly in grain for sale at subsidized prices.

The corollary of the import of grain—whether into a village, a valley, or a state—has been the 'export' of labour. But the jobs available within Kohistan, in the Scouts and in the administration and services, are now too few for the increased numbers seeking them. As a result many men from the princely states have taken to travelling down to Peshawar or Lahore in the autumn in search of three or four months work for the winter. In spring they return to their villages in time to attend to their farming. In this way a man earns enough money to buy the extra food his family needs. By going away he also reduces the number of hungry mouths at home during the winter. In some villages we found that one man from every second household now makes this seasonal migration, many of them, as before, the younger brothers and sons. The steady improvement in communication to the south has helped to make it possible: a journey that used to take weeks now takes only days. A period of building down country at Mangla, Tarbela, Islamabad and elsewhere, with a demand for unskilled labour, has also helped. If one wanders about such building sites on a winter evening one sometimes hears the twang of the sitar from a watchman's hut, and the familiar strains of a Khowar love song or the clatter of Burushaski. Such winter migration is a contemporary illustration of the shortage of exportable products in Kohistan, the same shortage that was illustrated in earlier centuries by the slave trade.

The search for additional income has been further encouraged by an increasing demand among the people of the princely states for the new manufactured goods. Farmers who hitherto had no surplus to give to a shopkeeper in exchange for tea or cotton cloth now have the opportunity to pay for it from another source of income. When the family is fed, and these newer demands are also satisfied, there may be something to put by for the children's education or for a new guest-room. There may even be something left over that can be invested—but where and how to invest it? There is no more irrigated land to be had, and there is seldom pasture for more animals. The number of shops in the bazaars—and increasingly now in the more remote villages too—is already sufficient, if not excessive.

A new tendency in recent years, which perhaps suggests the future also, is for those who have earned and saved down country to invest down country. Several men from the princely states have settled with their wives and opened tea-shops in Lahore and Peshawar. With the greater employment and investment opportunities down country, and the increasing search for such opportunities, it is possible that the present pattern of temporary winter migration may change to longer-term and permanent migration. Such a process occurred in the Alps during the nineteenth century, and the parallels are striking. There too it started with the migration of young men in winter and their return in spring to farm. Then came the taking away of wives and children, and the failure to return for the farming, but an annual visit for festivals and family celebrations. Then came the failure to return even for these, but the occasional visit to find a wife or husband for one of the children. And all the time there was talk of a permanent return that never materialized. Finally came the dropping of the last pretences and the last links, and the growing up of a new generation that had never seen its ancestral homeland. By this progression some of the high valleys in the Alps became depopulated during the nineteenth century.

It would be easy to predict this for Kohistan during the twentieth century, but such parallels are often misleading. For one thing there was little idea in the nineteenth century of Government responsibility for such a situation; whereas in Kohistan the Government of Pakistan is playing an ever increasing part. The subsidies for imported grain, the road-building, the air services, and the plans for international tourist hotels in Gilgit and Hunza are only a few examples.

It is easy for the foreigner to be stirred by Kohistan—the magnificent scenery, the cheerful charm of the people, their agricultural and other skills all combine to make a deep and favourable impression. That is what this book is about.

But this does not explain the nature of what has been written and believed about Kohistan, particularly Hunza, in recent years. In its extreme form what Colonel Lorimer called the 'exuberant Hunza-myth literature' presents a picture of a hidden terrestrial paradise where an age-old way of life, serene and idyllic, has been preserved, undefiled by the 'modern' world. Man lives in a perfect and perpetual harmony with nature; sickness, crime and selfishness are unknown; and the life expectancy exceeds a hundred years. Thrown in for good measure are vegetarianism, fragrant orchids, esoteric elixirs, and painless childbirth. One can soon see that here is a fantasy of Western society rather than something real from Kohistan.

The most persistent falsification is the alleged immunity to disease, especially among the people of Hunza. This was given its most absurd expression in the refrain to the Cinerama film *In Search of Paradise*: 'You need no pills to cure your ills in happy happy Hunza.' Such statements are repudiated by every doctor who has worked there. Undoubtedly the people of Kohistan show fine physique and stamina, but this is to be expected among people who farm by traditional methods in such a demanding environment. But in reality, as one of the earliest British travellers remarked, 'every disease flesh is heir to here finds its representative'. Among the diseases most frequently mentioned by doctors who have worked in Hunza, Gilgit and Chitral are dysentery, intestinal worms, sores, cataract, trachoma and other eye diseases, malaria, rheumatic and other fevers, dental caries, tuberculosis and leprosy—very much what anyone familiar with disease in Asia might expect to find. But by now the process of falsification has gone so far that the people of Hunza will themselves assert what they know to be untrue for fear of disappointing their hearers.

Where did such myths originate? Perhaps in Mrs. Lorimer's own book, *Language Hunting in the Karakoram*, where the sentimentality, perhaps typical of the period, can be mistaken for objectivity. Hamid's comment on the book was simply to quote a Burushaski proverb, 'The pungency of the smoke is known to the smoke-hole', i.e. the condition of the country is known to those who live there. Mrs. Lorimer certainly

coined the unfortunate phrase 'the land of just enough', although she did make it clear in the smaller print that even in her time many people in Hunza used to go hungry, if not starve, in the late spring before the barley ripened.

The question remains: apart from the delights of tourism to come, does Kohistan have anything to offer the modern world? Does this 'Shangrila of the Himalayas' contain esoteric answers to the mysteries and problems of life? Does it offer some ancient wisdom which can be applied to modern man's predicaments? I hope that this book has already dispelled any such notions.

As for the conventional wisdom of daily life and society, this can be readily expressed in proverbs: A man who has been bitten by a snake is afraid of a rope. The wind catches the high tree. If you serve the falcon you will get meat; if you serve the crow you will get filth. The dead man is happy in his shroud: what does he know of the curse of the grave? Stretch your legs according to the length of your blanket. Don't fart and there'll be no smell. These are pairs from Shina, Khowar and Burushaski respectively. They are strikingly like proverbs elsewhere, commonplace conclusions from common human experience. One does not find profound new truths in Kohistan, and the inhabitants themselves would laugh at such an extravagant suggestion.

What Kohistan gave Elizabeth and me was the different viewpoint: the viewpoint one has while 'living second lives' in a different environment, society and culture. But any insights we may have gained have to be integrated into our own lives, and not attributed to the lives of others.

I suppose we might have found our different viewpoint in any society sufficiently unlike our own, but in few societies would we have enjoyed the finding so much.

* * *

We sat with friends in a garden, drinking tea and eating 'travelling bread' stuffed with mint and chopped walnuts. Talk was desultory, and one of the friends picked white clover flowers from the grass around him and made a chain of them. When it was finished he passed it to me for Elizabeth. As it got dark the frogs set up a subdued croaking, accompanying the deep murmur of a melt-water stream and the cheerful gurgles of an irrigation channel. Stars shone in every part of the sky, except to the north where the great bulk of Terich

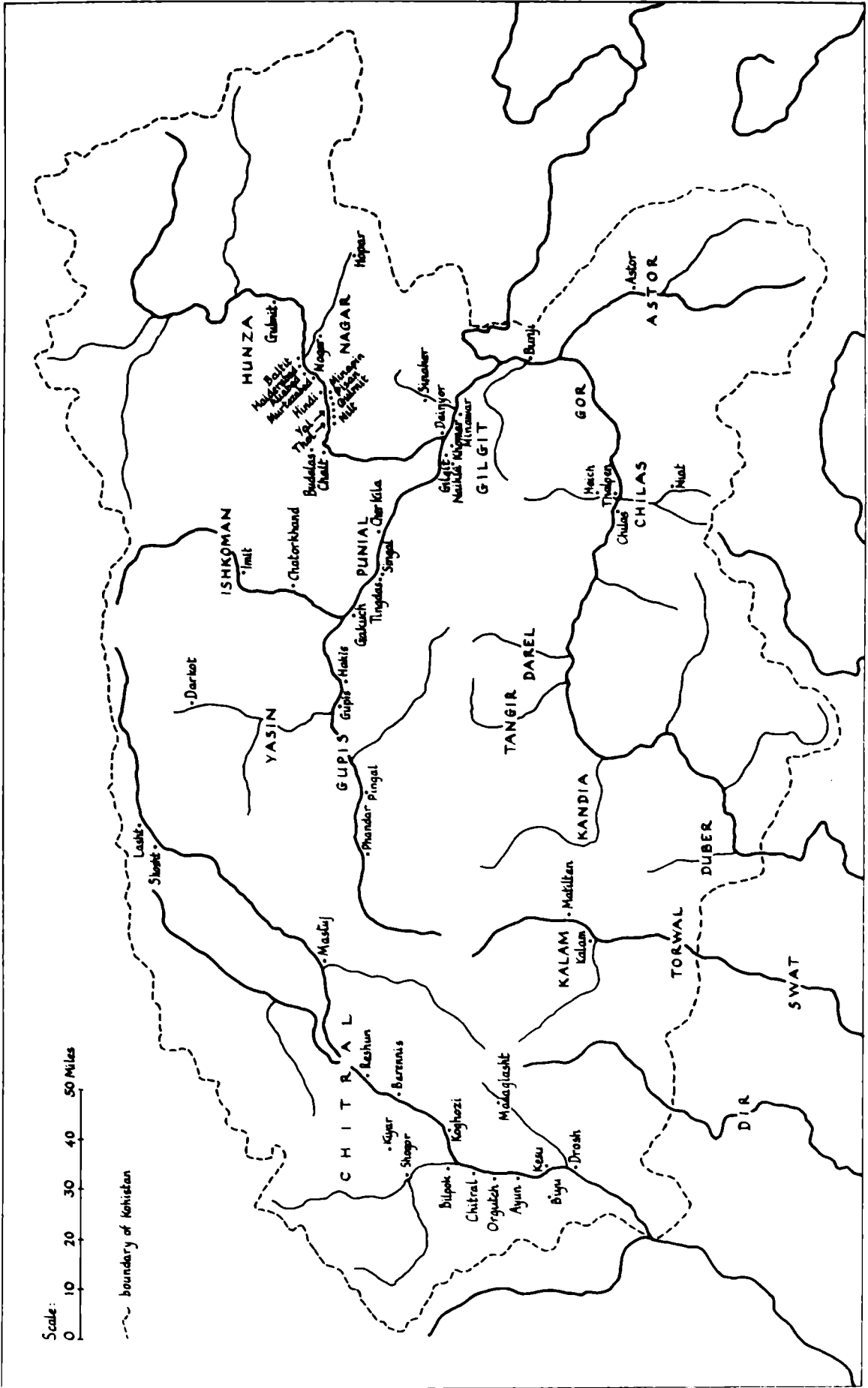
Mir was dimly silhouetted. We watched the Great Bear disappear behind one mountain, then saw a shooting star whose head disappeared behind another mountain while the blazing tail was left behind to fade. It was our last evening in Chitral.

It was still dark when we woke next morning. We watched as the first glimmer of sun reddened the uppermost snows of Terich Mir. The mountain floated like a rosy cloud above a world that was still in darkness. Slowly the sunlight spread lower and lower, changing the snows from rose to pink to white. Eventually it struck barren rock, and then spread down the valley towards us in a golden-brown haze.

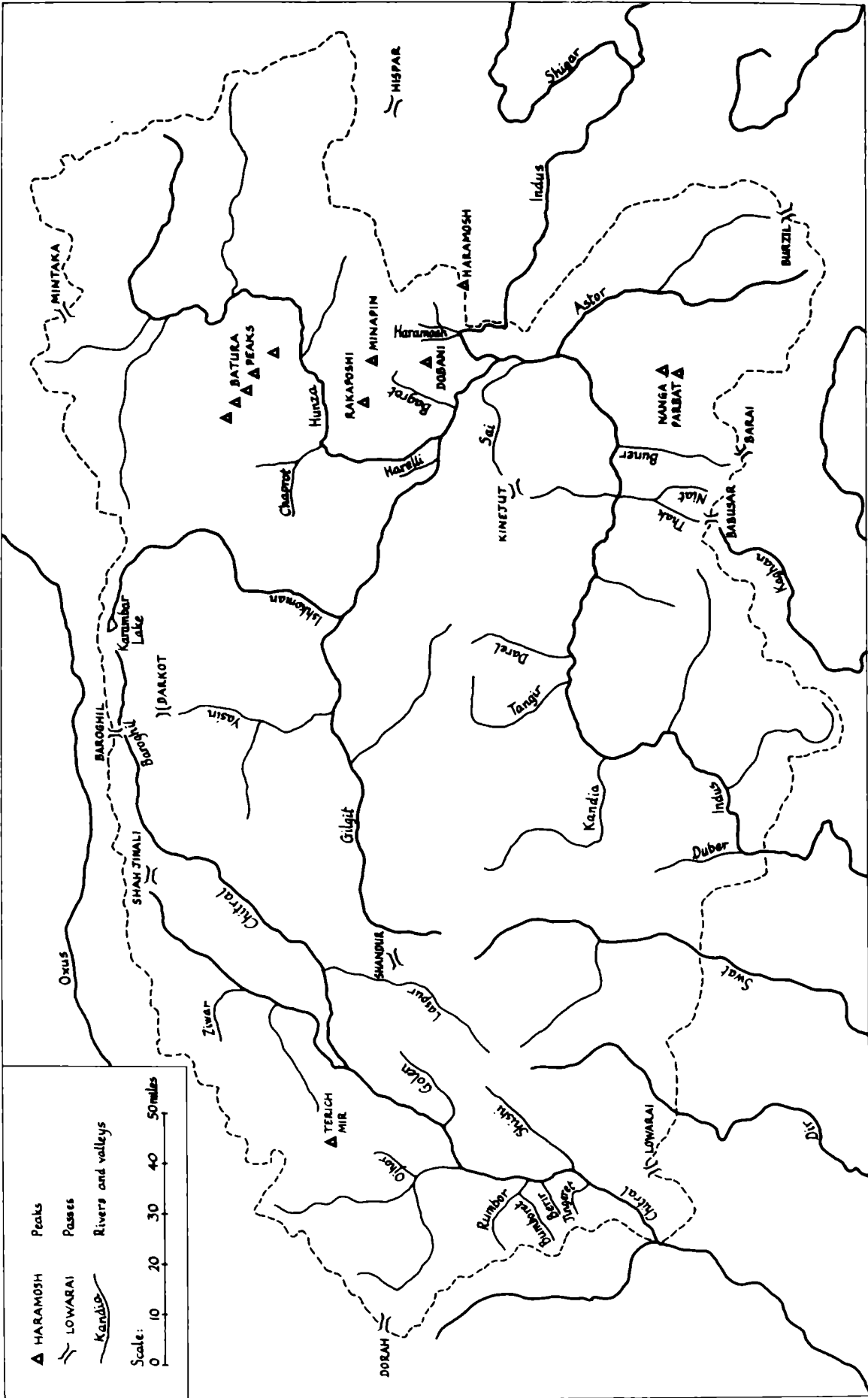
We looked down to the fields immediately below. Two dogs were copulating. A man appeared, barefooted, with a skin of grain on his back—the first to the mill that day. The sun reached the fields and slanted into the maize. A woman dressed in red began some weeding. A flock of goats pattered by. Some little boys ran to the school with their slates. How reassuring the continuity of daily life seemed.

The end of every flower:
the wind will carry away its fragrance,
and its petals will fall among the thorns . . .

So runs the Khowar song: but the memory of the flower is imperishable.



Map 6. Villages and areas mentioned in the text.



Map 7. Rivers, peaks, and passes mentioned in the text.

GLOSSARY

- akhund* a Moslem religious leader.
ben narrow raised levels to sides of main sitting area in Kho houses in Chitral.
- beshu* a small tree with yellow flowers.
binjou a kind of fruitless tree.
bitan a shaman or oracle who can go into 'trance' and communicate with gods and fairies.
- budalak* Kalash shepherd who returns at *Pul* after a summer spent in the pastures.
- chenar* the oriental plane tree.
choga a long woollen cloak of the kind worn in Kohistan.
drongo a small black bird also known as King Crow.
kamma a kind of grass.
kurru a strong flavouring obtained by boiling buttermilk with flour and drying the residue.
- mahreka* a reception or durbar held by the Mehtars of Chitral.
- mullah* one who is learned in Islamic theology and religious law.
- nakh* raised areas to sides of Kho houses in Chitral, used for sitting and sleeping.
- pamir* an open grassy high altitude valley. There are *pamirs* around Baroghil, in the far north of Chitral, and other adjoining regions to the north. The word is also used, in the form of The Pamirs, as the name for the mountain range in the south-eastern corner of Western Turkistan.
- pashu* a man with the power to see *ruis* and to protect other people from them.
- peri-khan* a person with supernatural power who can communicate with fairies and exorcise them.
- Pul* autumn festival of the Kalash which celebrates the return of the shepherds from the summer pastures.
- purdah* literally a curtain or veil, it refers to the seclusion of Moslem women.
- rachi* small fairies associated with the dreaming of hunters.
- ru* an evil spirit which inhabits a woman.
shom area just inside main door of Kho houses in Chitral.

- shung* raised corner beyond *shom* in Kho houses in Chitral, used for bathing, etc.
- stupa* a Buddhist relic; shrine.
- tek* raised level at the rear of Kho houses in Chitral, used for cooking, etc.

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