THE WAKHIS OF GOJAL (UPPER HUNZA): AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF ISMAILISM IN BADAKHSHAN

Gojal (Yukarı Hunza) Wahileri: Bedahşan İsmaililiği Bağlamında Tarihsel Bir Analiz

Eine historische Analyse der Gojal (Ober Hunzukuc) Wahi im Kontext des Badachschan İsmailitentums

Zahide AY*

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to present an historical analysis of when and how the Wakhis of Upper Hunza became Ismaili. Upper Hunza, known locally as Gojal, is a part of Badakhshan located in the Karakoram Mountains in Pakistan. The Wakhis belong to the Eastern Iranian language group like all the other nations of Badakhshan. This is why we have to consider the Wakhis living in Gojal in the scope of the Central Asian cultural circle, just like the Wakhis of Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Eastern Turkestan of China. Part of their identity stems from the Wakhi culture and the other part from the *Dawat-i Nâsir* tradition which can be defined as the Central Asian interpretation of Ismailism. The peoples of Upper Hunza have been named according to their belief system as Nâsiri, Panjtani, Mawlavi or Agha Khani. However the name they acknowledge and use is *Dawat-i Nâsir*, stemming from Nâsir-i Khusraw. *Dawat-i Nâsir*, their local belief system, which is one of the most prominent characteristics of their identity, now gives way to the *Nizari Khoja* tradition of India. This is the most striking point of conflict among the intellectuals of *Gojal*

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today. Another important characteristic of the region for both Central Asian studies and Ismaili studies is the existence of Turkish speaking Ismaili Kyrgyzs in *Gojal* who have completely converted to Ismailism and adopted Wakhi culture. Unlike the Sunni Kyrgyz who moved to the Ismaili settlements in Tashkurgan (China), Murgab (Tajikistan), and Wakhan (Afghanistan) yet retained their Sunni faith, those who moved to Upper Hunza converted to Ismailism. Their conversion to Ismailism seems to have paved the way for their assimilation into Wakhi culture. The mountainous Tajiks of Badakhshan, and the Wakhi branch of them, have never been central to the main narratives of Central Asian and Iranian political history, and much of it comes down to us only in the form of oral tradition. For this reason, besides few historical sources, this study based largely on fieldwork I carried out in Upper Hunza in 2015.[1]

Keywords: Wakhi, Kyrgyz, Ismaili, Dawat-i Nâsir, Gojal, Hunza, Badakhshan.

1 I would like to extend my thanks to TİKA for supporting this fieldwork and to TÜBİTAK for providing me the funding to carry out research at the Institute of Ismaili Studies(IIS) in London. I would also like to offer my special thanks to Farhad Daftary and everyone else at the IIS for their support during my time there. Two other people without whom my research in Gojal in Pakistan would not have been possible are Ali Qurban Mughani and Azambeg Tacik from Pasu of Gojal, and I am deeply grateful to them both.

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, Yukarı Hunza Wahilerinin ne zaman ve nasıl İsmaili oldukları hakkında tarihsel bir analiz sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Yerel dilde *Gojal* olarak bilinen *Yukarı Hunza*, ortaçağlardan beri Bedehşan olarak adlandırılan bölgenin Pakistan'daki Karakurum dağlarında kalan kısımlarıdır. Wahiler, diğer bütün Bedehşan halkları gibi Doğu İran dil ailesine mensuptur. Bu yönüyle, Gojal'deki Wahileri, tıpkı Afganistan, Tacikistan ve Çin Türkistanı'ndaki Wahiler gibi Orta Asya kültür dairesi içerisinde değerlendirmek gerekmektedir. Kimliklerinin bir yarısını Wahilik oluşturuyorsa, diğer yarısını da, İsmaililiğin Orta Asya yorumu olarak kabul edeceğimiz *Davet-i Nasır* geleneği oluşturmaktadır. Yukarı Hunza'daki halklar, inanç biçimlerine bağlı olarak, farklı adlarla, *Nasıri, Penctani, Mevlevi, Ağa Hani* gibi, adlandırılsalar da, onların bildiği ad, adını Nasır-ı Hüsrev'den alan, *Davet-i Nasır*'dır. Kimliklerinin en belirgin özelliği olan yerel inanç biçimleri *Davet-i Nasır* geleneği, günümüzde yavaş yavaş yerini, daha kurumsal bir örgütlenme biçimi olan Hindistanlı *Nizari Hocalar* geleneğine bırakmaktadır ki, bu durum bugün, Gojal İsmailileri arasındaki en önemli tartışma konusudur. Hem Orta Asya çalışmaları, hem de İsmaililik çalışmaları açısından bölgenin önemli sayılabilecek bir özelliği de, Gojal'deki İsmailileşmiş, bunun sonucu olarak da artık Wahileşmiş, Türk dilli Kırgız kabilelerin varlığıdır. Taşkurgan'daki (Çin), Murgab'taki (Tacikistan), Wahan'daki (Afganistan) İsmaili yerleşim bölgelerine göç eden Sünni Kırgızların aksine, Gojal'e göç etmiş olan Kırgızlar İsmailileşmişlerdir. İsmailileşme aynı zamanda onların Wahileşmesini de beraberinde getirmiş görünmektedir. Orta Asya İran siyasi tarihinin hiçbir zaman merkezinde yer almamış olan bu halkların, dağlı Taciklerin ve onların önemli bir kolu olan Wahilerin, tarihlerinin neredeyse tamamı sözlü geleneğe dayandığını görmekteyiz. Bu nedenledir ki, bu çalışma elimizdeki az sayıdaki tarihi kaynak dışında, büyük ölçüde 2015 yılında Yukarı Hunza'da gerçekleştirdiğimiz saha araştırmasına dayanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Wahi, Kırgız, İsmaili, Davet-i Nasır, Gojal, Hunza, Bedehşan.

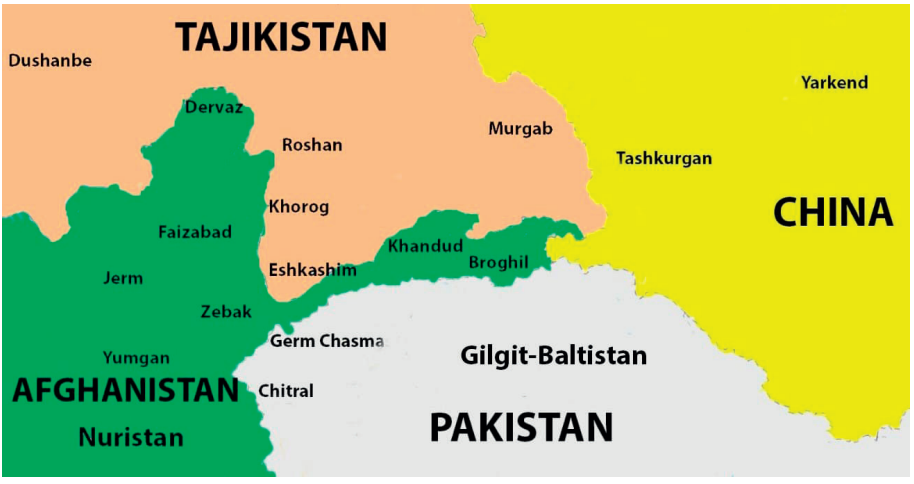
ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Diese Studie bezweckt eine historische Analyse darüber zu liefern, wann und wie die Wahi von Ober Hunzukuc zu Ismailiten geworden sind. Ober Hunzukuc, in der einheimischen Sprache als Gojal bekannt, bezeichnet seit dem Mittelalter den in der Region als Badachschan bekannten Teil des in Pakistan liegenden Karakurum Gebirges. Die Wahi gehören wie alle übrigen Völker aus Badachschan der ostiranischen Sprachfamilie. In dieser Hinsicht sollten die Wahi aus Gojal genauso wie die Wahi aus Afghanistan, Tadschikistan und China-Turkestan im Rahmen des zentralasiatischen Kulturkreises bewertet werden. Wenn ihre Identität zur Hälfte durch das Wahitum gebildet wird, dann wird wohl die andere Hälfe durch die *Tradition der Davet-i Nasır* gebildet, die eine Interpretation des zentralasiatischen Ismailitentums ist. Wenn auch die Völker des Oberen Hunzukuc abhängig von ihrer Glaubensart unter differenzierten Namen wie *Nasıri, Penctani, Mevlevi, Aga Khan* bezeichnet werden, so lautet die Bezeichnung, welche ihnen selbst bekannt ist, Davet-i Nasır, welche auf *Nasır-ı Hüsrev* zurückgeht. Die Tradition von Davet-i Nasır, welche die markanteste Eigenschaft ihrer Glaubensart ist, überlässt in der Gegenwart ihren Platz langsam der *Nizari Hodscha Tradition*, die eine noch institutionalisierte Organisationsform darstellt, welche unter den Ismailiten in Gojal das wichtigste Diskussionsthema bildet. Eines der wichtigen Merkmale der Region, die im Rahmen sowohl der zentralasiatischen als auch der Ismailitischen Studien bildet, betrifft die Existenz der türkischsprachigen kirgisischen Stämme, die in Gojal zu Ismailiten und als Folge davon auch zu Wahi geworden sind. Anders als die sunnitischen Kirgisen, die in die ismailitischen Siedlungsgebiete nach Tasgurkan (China), Murgab (Tadschikistan) und Wahan (Afghanistan) umgezogen sind, wurden die Kirgisen, die nach Gojal umsiedelten, ismailisiert. Es sieht danach aus, als ob ihre Ismailitisierung zugleich auch ihre Wahitisierung mit sich gebracht hätte. Es zeigt sich, dass sich die sämtliche Geschichte dieser Völker sowie der Tadschiken aus den Bergregionen und die der Wahi, die zu keiner Zeit in der zentralasiatischen Politik Persiens eine zentrale Rolle eingenommen haben, fast auf die mündlich überlieferte Tradition stützt. Aus diesem Grunde stützt sich diese Arbeit jenseits von ganz wenigen historischen Quellen größtenteils auf die Feldstudie, die wir im Jahr 2015 in Ober Hunzukuc durchgeführt haben.

Schlüsselwörter: Wahi, Kirgise, İsmailit, Davet-i Nasır, Gojal, Hunzukuc, Badachschan.

Introduction

Until recently, few scholars had ever devoted much attention to the region of Badakhshan[2]. Ismailism too, tends to receive much less scholarly attention than the other branches of Islam. Yet the two together, the region and its major faith, have been the subject of a number of studies[3]. Badakhshan as a geographical region encompasses a wide stretch of mountainous terrain on the borders of Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and China, studies of Ismailism of Badakhshan, however, tend to focus on the particular Badakhshani sub-region of Shugnan, where all of the written source materials relating to Ismailism of Badakhshan used by historians, theologians, and anthropologists are housed. In addition to the Shugni branch of the mountainous Tajiks, however, there is another group of local inhabitants that are much less studies within the context of Ismailism of Badakhshan: the Wakhis. Spread across much of Badakhshan, including the mountainous areas of Pamir (Tashkurgan), the Hindi Kush (the Wakhan Corridor), and Karakoram (Gojal), the Wakhis make for an interesting case study. This paper aims to make an historical analysis of when and how the Wakhi people of Upper Hunza of Pakistan, became Ismaili and of how the Wakhi interpretation of Ismailism is related with their pre-Islamic beliefs and customs.



Map of Badakhshan

2 The few that have include the Russian researchers Ivanow, 1935; 1956; 1959; Bertels, 1959, 1970, 1976; Iskandarov, 1983.

3 See Iloliev, 2008; Ay, 2013; Beben, 2018.

During my fieldwork carried out in 2015 and 2016 in the Hunza region of Pakistan and the Tashkurgan in Eastern Turkestan of China, I observed that the Ismaili traditions of the Chitral region of Pakistan and of the Tashkurgan region of China overlapped with those of Tajikistan and Afghanistan[4]. For the most part, they all shared the same legends and local saints. The one exception was the region of Hunza, where these traditional motifs diverged from those of the other areas I observed during my fieldwork. In Lower Hunza, this divergence might be explained by the fact that the local people do not belong to the ethnic mountainous Tajik peoples. But in Upper Hunza (Gojal), where the locals belong to the Wakhi branch of the mountainous Tajiks and thus are part of the same ethnic group found in Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Chitral of Pakistan, and Tashkurgan of China, the same divergence is apparent, meaning that ethnic difference cannot entirely account for the unique local practices found in the region. Today, the region of Gojal, an extension of Badakhshan's Pamir and Hindu Kush mountains, is predominantly Wakhi, but also contains a mix of other ethnic groups, such as the Brusheskis. It has also incorporated and assimilated the Kyrgyz tribes that have immigrated there, and who have become Ismailis and Wakhis themselves. This distinguishes the area from such other areas as Murgab in Tajikistan, Tashkurgan in China, and Wakhan in Afghanistan, where Kyrgyz immigrants have historically preserved their Sunni and Kyrgyz identity. It is only in Gojal where they embraced local religious and ethnic identities, becoming Ismaili and Wakhi. The question of why this is so will be addressed under its own heading below.

Today, the Wakhis live in the region of Upper Hunza, or Gojal in the local language. Upper Hunza has since the middle ages been that part of Badakhshan running from the Karakoram Mountains in Pakistan to the skirts of the northeastern corner of the Hindu Kush within modern-day Pakistan. Because of its geographical location, it remained on the periphery of Central Asian history throughout most of history. Other than its usefulness as a pathway to India and China, it had little importance until the nineteenth century, when it strategic value rose as part of the

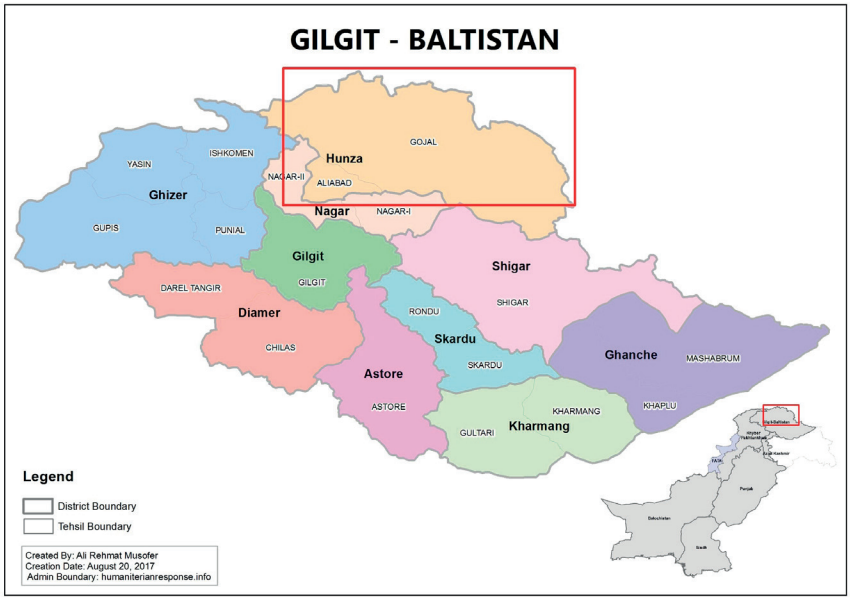
4 My initial interest in this group would ultimately become the subject of my 2013 doctoral dissertation, which was later published as *These sources mostly use the term Wakhi to* (The Ismailis of Badakhshan from Nâsir Khusraw onward). But as I was unable at the time to carry out fieldwork in those parts of Badakhshan lying in Pakistan and China, I did not address them in my dissertation. Aiming to fill in this gap in my research, I carried out fieldwork in 2015 and 2016 in the Hunza-Baltistan region of Pakistan and the Tashkurgan, Yarkend, and Hoten regions in Eastern Turkestan of China. The present study is largely based on this fieldwork.

power struggle between Britain and Russia in Central Asia known as the Great Game. With China's rise as a major power in the region in the twentieth century, Upper Hunza became even more important. Accordingly as its importance increased from the mid-nineteenth century onward, researchers from Britain and Russia began to travel there and to write about the region, supplying modern-day scholars with valuable insights into the history of the region.

These sources mostly use the term *Wakhi* to refer to the peoples of the Wakhan Corridor and the term *Pamiri* for the peoples of the Pamir Mountains. Both the terms associate with the term *Badakhshani*. The sources refer to the Tajik and Afghani portions of Badakhshan by that name, but not to those parts of Pakistan that today count as part of Badakhshan. These regions in Pakistan are Chitral, which includes Germ Chashma on the skirts of the Hindu Kush Mountains, and Hunza, which lies on the skirts of the Karakoram Mountains and includes Gojal.

Two major groups of people live in the Hunza region today. One are the people of Upper Hunza, most of whom are Wakhis who originally immigrated from Wakhan Corridor. These include the Kyrgyz tribes who adopted the Wakhi culture after immigrating to the region nearly three centuries ago. The other is the people of the Baltistan region in lower Hunza. Their language is closely related to Indian languages, whereas that of the Wakhis belongs to the Eastern Iranian language family, as do those of the other peoples of Badakhshan. Considered from this point of view, we should keep in mind that the Wakhis of Upper Hunza are part of a broader Central Asian cultural circle that includes the Wakhis of Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Eastern Turkestan of China. Apart from these two major groups, Brusho (Brusheski) and Shina speakers and the Dom ethnicities are also smaller groups living in Hunza. Today, 95 percent of the population of Hunza is Ismaili. (Kreutzmann, 1991: 730) The people of the Gojal region are all Ismaili, whether they are Wakhi, Kyrgyz, Brusho, Shina, or Dom. The population of Karimabad (Baltit) is composed mostly of Ismaili and Twelver Shiites. The people of the nearby Nagar region, which is separated from Karimabad by the Hunza River, are all Twelver Shiites. The only place around Hunza where Sunnis predominate is Gilgit[5].

5 I would like to offer my thanks to Ali Rehmat Musofer for the maps below.


GILGIT - BALTISTAN
Hunza
GOJAL
ISHKOMEN
YASIN
Ghizer
NAGAR-II
ALIABAD
Nagar
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GUPIS
PUNIAL
Gilgit
GILGIT
Shigar
SHIGAR
DAREL TANGIR
Diamer
RONDU
Skardu
CHILAS
SKARDU
Ghanche
MASHABRUM
Astore
ASTORE
KHARMANG
KHAPLU
GULTARI
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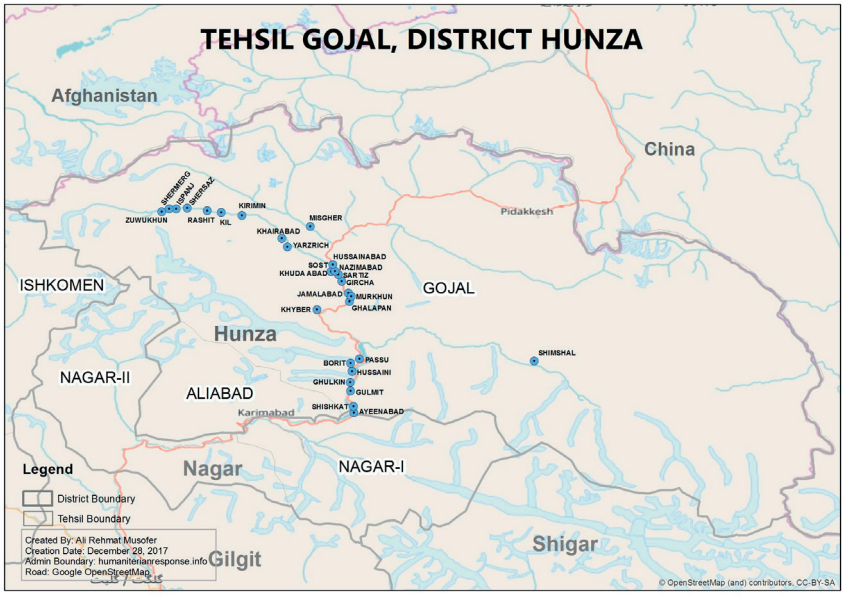
Legend
District Boundary
Tehsil Boundary
Created By: Ali Rehmat Musofer
Creation Date: August 20, 2017
Admin Boundary: humaniterianresponse.info


TEHSIL GOJAL, DISTRICT HUNZA
Afghanistan
China
Pidakkesh
SHERMERG
OPAU
SHERBAZ
ZUWUKHUN
RASHIT
KIL
KIRIMIN
MISGHER
KHAIRABAD
YARZRICH
HUSSAINABAD
SOST
NAZIMABAD
KHUDA ABAD
SAR TIZ
GIRCHA
ISHKOMEN
GOJAL
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KHYBER
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Hunza
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GHULKIN
ALIABAD
GULMIT
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AYEENABAD
Karimabad
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Nagar
NAGAR-I
District Boundary
Tehsil Boundary
Created By: Ali Rehmat Musofer
Creation Date: December 28, 2017
Admin Boundary: humaniterianresponse.info
Road: Google OpenStreetMap
Gilgit
Shigar
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Even though the settlements in the lower parts of Hunza date back to very early times, like the two-thousand-year-old city of *Ganish* in Karimabad, it is not possible to make the same assumption about the Gojal region of Upper Hunza. The primary difference of the Gojal region from lower Hunza and the other regions of Badakhshan is that it was never cited in the sources dating back to antiquity or the medieval Islamic period, which makes it difficult to analyze the region from a historical point of view. It seems likely that the migrations from Wakhan to Gojal began after the Mongol invasions and that the Wakhis had already begun to convert to Ismailism while still in Wakhan, a process which perhaps continued through ongoing ties between Gojal and Wakhan after the migrations had commenced.

Historical Background of the Wakhis

The Wakhis may be the oldest surviving community who belong to Eastern Iranian language family. While the other Iranian people of Central Asia have reformed under Persianate influence as a result of the Persian migrations caused by the Arab invasions in the seventh century, the harsh geographical conditions of Badakhshan meant that its people were left relatively unaffected. They have therefore continued to exist as a homogeneous community. Yet their physical resemblance to Europeans, as opposed to Asians, has led some to conclude that they were affected by an earlier wave of migration, namely, the arrival of the soldiers of Alexander the Great and the intermarriage with local women. Indeed, the memory of Alexander the Great is the most important element in the collective memory of the local people. Unlike the Tajiks, who have adopted the Sunni culture and attribute their roots to Adam, and thus to Muhammed, the mountainous Tajiks—that is, the people of Badakhshan—have preserved the heritage of antiquity and Alexander the Great by calling him *Skander Zulkarneyn* by means of making him Ali (the first Imam of the Ismailis and the Twelver Shiites). (Wood, 1971: 155)

The first information about the beginnings of Ismailism in Wakhan comes from documents dating to the eleventh century, to the time of Fatimid missioner (dâi) Nâsir-i Khusraw (1004-after 1070). However, the oral tradition dates it back to first Ismaili imam Ali (d. 661). There is a famous story in the Namadgut village of Wakhan, in Tajikistan, about the war between Ali and Qahkaha, the king of the *Siyahpooshes* (the black-robed infidels). According to archeological researchs carried on the ruins of the castle in Namadgut, the castle was built in the first century BC and it was renovated in the sixth and seventh centuries AD. (Iloliev, 2008: 65) The

site also houses a symbolic sepulture (*qadamgoh mazar*) attributed to Ali, called the *Mazar-i Shah-i Merdan*. (Iloliev, 2008: 65) In parts of Wakhan in Afghanistan, it is also possible to find various castle ruins attributed to the *atashperests* (fire worshippers) and Siyahpooshes. (Shahrani, 1979: 45) The keystone of the story is the Islamization of the local people in Wakhan, who used to be infidels (*kâfiran*), by Ali. (Iskandarov, 1983: 30; Iloliev, 2008a: 30) However, taking into consideration Chinese sources, Islamic sources, archaeological remains, etc., one sees that the local pagan rulers of Wakhan were still in power until the late middle ages[6]. These rulers are said to have dressed in black and worshipped fire. Indeed, the legends about this period give the name of the people living in the area as the Siyahpooshes. On the other hand, in towns like Rumbur and Bumberet in the Kafiristan region in Chitral of modern Pakistan, the people who have never converted to Islam are called the Qalashi, meaning "black-robed". Their physical appearance is the same as that of the Ismailis of Badakhshan. They also trace their roots to Alexander the Great. This shows that the region called Kafiristan in Pakistan today used to cover a much larger area, which was known as Badakhshan.

6 Historical sources describe the local residents of this region as *gabrakan* and *atashperest*, and refer to the region as *Kafiristan*. For example, according to Mesudi's *Muruc ez-Zeheb*, heretics lived in Wakhan (Mes'ûdî: 69). Istahri also mentions these regions as the "land of the Kafirs" (Istahri, 1967: 279). According to the author of *Hudud el-Âlem*, "The center of Wakhan is Eshkashim and the people of this town are gabrakan and Muslim" (*Hudûd al-'Âlem*, 1937: 120-121).

Namadgut Fortress

Mazar-i Shah-i Merdan in Namadgut

Undoubtedly, these legends related to Ali do not reflect the historical truth. In reality, Islam spread to these highland areas much later, largely because of their inaccessibility. The Arab caliphs never successfully dominated the region, and the local people maintained their own systems of belief for a long time, well into the eleventh century. The rulers of Central Asia, like the Tahirids and the Samanids, eventually accepted Arab hegemony, converted to Islam, and remained on as rulers. During the tenth century, regions like Wakhan and Shugnan were taxed by these Muslim rulers, although the locals were still pagans. (*Hudud el-Âlem*, 1937: 120-121; Istahri, 1967: 279) Their Islamization seems to have happened with their conversion to Ismailism.

Even though the beginning of the conversion of the people of Badakhshan to Ismailism is traditionally associated with Nâsir-i Khusraw in the eleventh century, its roots can be traced back about a century earlier, to developments within the Samanid court in the tenth century. Conversion to Ismailism first began among the ruling classes, with widespread popular conversions following with the spread of sufism in the aftermath of the Mongol invasions. This process likely accelerated during the period of the 13th Muhammadshahi Imam Shah Raziyuddin II, who immigrated to Badakhshan from Iran in the fifteenth century, and his son, the 14th Muhammadshahi Imam, Shah Tahir Deccanî. (Daftary, 2005: 395-406) With the arrival of the Twelver Shiite influences upon the Ismailism of Badakhshan as a result of the propaganda activities carried by the Safavids in Central Asia during sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the local belief system took its present character, which is based on oral tradition and has a heterodox structure.

The Kyrgyzs (assimilated into Wakhi culture) of Upper Hunza

Following the Wakhis who immigrated to Upper Hunza from Wakhan, some Kyrgyz tribes from the Alai Mountains settled in the region in the late seventeenth century. The Islamization of the Kyrgyz who immigrated to the Alai Mountains area took place during the sixteenth century. This period, which was marked by tribal wars between the Kyrgyzs and the Qalmuks, is narrated in the Kyrgyz epic *Manas* as a time of holy war against the infidel Qalmuks. The wars against the Qalmuks led to waves of migration beginning from the seventeenth century. Some of the Kyrgyz moved south, to Fergana and Karategin lands and the Pamirs (including Murgab in Tajikistan), to Karakul in Tashkurgan of China, and probably to Upper

Hunza in Pakistan[7]. Unlike the Sunni Kyrgyz who moved to the Ismaili settlements in Tashkurgan, Murgab, and Wakhan yet retained their Sunni faith, those who moved to Upper Hunza converted to Ismailism. Their conversion to Ismailism seems to have paved the way for their assimilation into Wakhi culture.

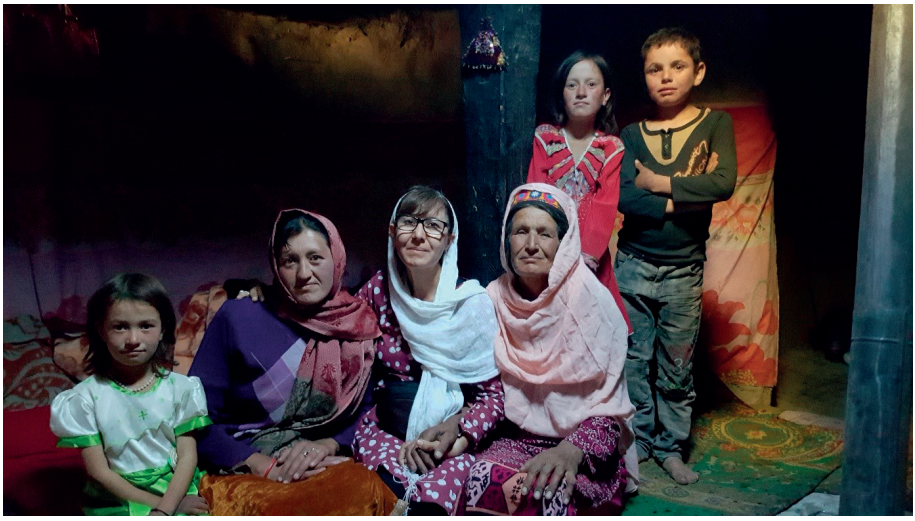
One of the surest ways to research the history of the Kyrgyzs in Upper Hunza is to analyze the genealogy of the Kyrgyz tribes living in the region. Kyrgyz immigration to the Gojal region goes back twelve generations, to the late seventeenth century. The current generations of the *Qulikutz* tribe, one of the first tribes to immigrate to the region at the end of the seventeenth century, are composed of family members living in the region from Chiporsan to Gilgit. The name of the tribal leader who emigrated from Central Asia to Gojal with his entourage is *Hâce* Ilyas. The Hâce title points out two important facts with regards to Central Asian studies. First, the Kyrgyz tribes who immigrated to Gojal were already Muslim. The second fact is more complicated. On the Islamization process of the current Sunni people of Central Asia, the *Hâcegani* Sufi tradition, which adopted the *Naqshbandi* sufi tradition from the late fifteenth century, plays a major role.

Ali Qurban Mughani from Pasu of Gojal, of the eleventh generation of the *Qulikutz* family, claims that the family converted to Ismailism during the times of Qul Muhammed, who ruled the community following Hâce Ilyas. It is interesting that one of the four important *pirs* of the Ismailism of Badakhshan is *Hâce Ahmed-i Yesevi*, who is titled as *Pir-i Rukn-i Ser-i Turkistan* in oral sources produced in Badakhshan, like the *Cheraghname*. (Ivanow, 1959: 13-17, 53-70; Bertels, 1976: 105) Several scholars claim that *Hâce Ahmed-i Yesevi* was the single most important factor in the Islamization of the Turkish-speaking peoples of Central Asia[8]. His poems in Turkish in his *Divan* narrate Islam as a simplified and an adapted version of Islam in line with nomadic traditions. When coming to Gojal, Hâce Ilyas and his entourage probably knew about *Hâce Ahmed-i Yesevi*. The influence of *Hâce Ahmed-i Yesevi*, who is also well respected in the Ismailism of Badakhshan, might be the common ground of the conversion to Ismailism of the Kyrgyzs of Gojal.

7 For Kyrgyz migrations see Golden, 1992: 343-345.

8 See Köprülü, 2006; Ocak, 2006: 119-154; Deweese, 1996: 180-207; 2006: vii-xxvii; Karamustafa, 1993: 175-198; 2005: 61-88.

According to Mughani, the *Qulikutz* family line began with Hâce Ilyas (1) and Qul Muhammed (2), then continued with Serang Muhammed (3)[9], Speasher (4),[10] Mahmud Maagh (5),[11] Speasher (6), Muhammed Qasim (7), Din Ali (8), Nigahban (9), Speasher (10), Ali Qurban Mughani (11), Muhammed Qasım (12), and Speasher (13), the last of whom was twelve years old in 2015 at the time of my fieldwork. They still preserve their physical Kyrgyz features. Mughani also stated that until Nigahban (9) and Speasher (10), they kept their Kyrgyz language.



Kyrgyz existence in Zuwudkhun village, Chiporsan

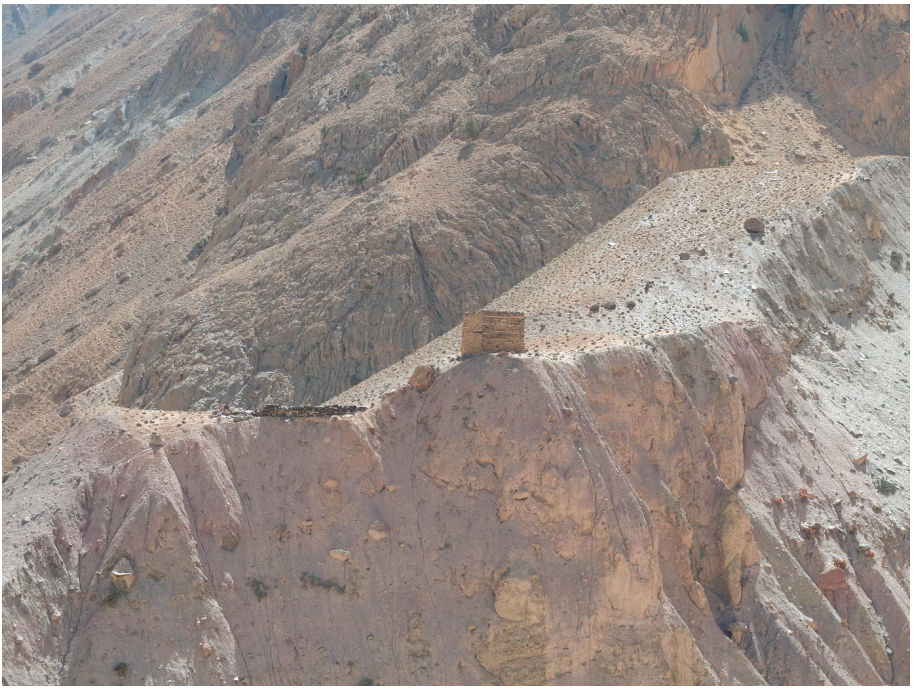
The Kyrgyz entity in Upper Hunza is also supported by archaeological remains. For example, the remains of a castle at Yazrich of Chiporsan is called "Kutluk," which is a Turkish name. The Kutluk fortress, which was named after a local ruler, is probably no more than three hundred years old. It means that there were other Kyrgyz tribes that migrated to this area apart from the *Qulikutz* tribe. The local people claim that Mir Kutluk also built a fortress at Gulmit, but no trace of that remains. Today, boys are still being named after him[12].

9 They are two brothers: Serang Muhammed and Serang Qamut.

10 Speacher can mean "sufi sher(ullah)". "Sher" means "lion".

11 He has four sons: Muhammed Reza, Muhammed Ruzi, Shembi, Speacher.

12 The Turkic signs in Upper Hunza are related to the Kyrgyz by the local people; however, it is possible to date this process back to the fifth and sixth centuries, to the arrival of the White Huns to the lower parts of Hunza. The Ephtalites, one of these tribes, established a state



Kutluk Fortress

Common Identity: The Dawat-i Nâsir Tradition

The most important common characteristic of the people of Gojal is their belief system, named the *Dawat-i Nâsir*, which is the Ismailism of Badakhshan. Nâsir-i

which was the equivalent of the neighboring Kokturk and Sasanid dynasties. As a matter of fact, the name of the region, "Hunza," might be a combination of "Hun" and "za," which would mean "the land of the Huns." Another word related to the Turks is "Hunzakut," a combination of the words "Hunza" and "kut," meaning "the people of Hunza." "Kut" is the word used for the ruling class in ancient Turkish. It is remarkable that Quli-kut(z), the leading family of the Kyrgyz tribes that immigrated to Gojal, bears the same title.

Another remarkable name is the local name of Upper Hunza itself: Gojal. Although the origin of the word is not known, according to Azambeg Tacik from Pasu, two words are mentioned: *guzel* and *gocher*, which are both Turkish words. *Guzel* means "beautiful," while *gocher* means "nomad." Other Tukish words used by the Wakhis in the region include the following: *butun* (whole), *cigher* (liver), *ozum* (myself), *gir* (enter or hold, capture), *alt* (low), *beg* (used as a suffix in male names; for example, Azambeg, Pamirbeg).

Khusraw (1004-after 1070) was a eleventh-century Fatimid *dâi* who was sent to Khorasan by Fatimid caliph-imam Mustansir Billah. The Ismailis of Badakhshan consider Nâsir-i Khusraw *Qutb-i Quhistan*, while other holy leaders are accepted as only pir. (Ivanow, 1959 : 13-17, 53-70; Bertels, 1976: 105) (According to Sufi philosophy, *Qutb* means like pir-i pirs). He brought with him Fatimid doctrines that appealed to the ruling class of Badakhshan. Following his death, his ideas popularized and transformed into a folkloric form, blending with local beliefs and rituals, sufi traditions, and Twelver Shiite influences to become what is today called the *Dawat-i Nâsir*. The ritual that best displays this tradition is the funeral ceremony called *Cheraghrushan* or *Sheb-i Dawat-i Shah Nâsir*. The prayers read at *Cheraghrushan* are called *Cheraghname*.

Both *Cheraghrushen* and *Cheraghname* recall pre-Islamic belief systems. Cheragh means "light" or "fire" in Persian. It seems likely that fire worship (i.e., Zoroastrianism) was the predominant faith before the people of the region converted to Islam. Even though some scholars have stated that Buddhism had an effect on the region, there is no convincing evidence that it was widely practiced among the local people. Gafurov claims that the majority of the people of Toharistan from the fifth through the seventh centuries were Zoroastrians, (Gafurov, 1997: 376) and Bertels states that elements of Zoroastrianism remain evident in the literature of the Ismailis of Badakhshan. (Bertels (ed.), 1970: 41, 63) Geiger believed that the people of the region were the descendants of ancient Zoroastrians. (Geiger: 9) He also wrote that the first holy book of the Iranic peoples, the *Avesta*, still existed in this region and that the locals still sustained these cults. (Geiger: 9-10)

However, it seems that Zoroastrianism in Badakhshan was not as sophisticated as that in western Iran. Fire, which is considered a mystic purifier in literate Zoroastrianism, was a more absolute figure and a real cult among these mountainous cultures. This is why locals' traditional practices relating to fire led their Muslim neighbors to call them *kâfiri* (infidel). (Mes'ûdî: 69; Istahri, 1967: 279; *Hudud el-Âlem*, 1937: 120-121) It is interesting that the local people, especially those living in Tashkurgan of China, still refer to their past beliefs as *atashperest* (fire-worshiper), not Zoroastrian. The Wakhis still have a traditional furnace corner known as an *atashgir* in their houses, and it is considered the most respectable part of their homes.

On the other hand, it cannot be denied that there are remains of Buddhist temples in the region. Although some such temples exist in Wakhan, it is unclear

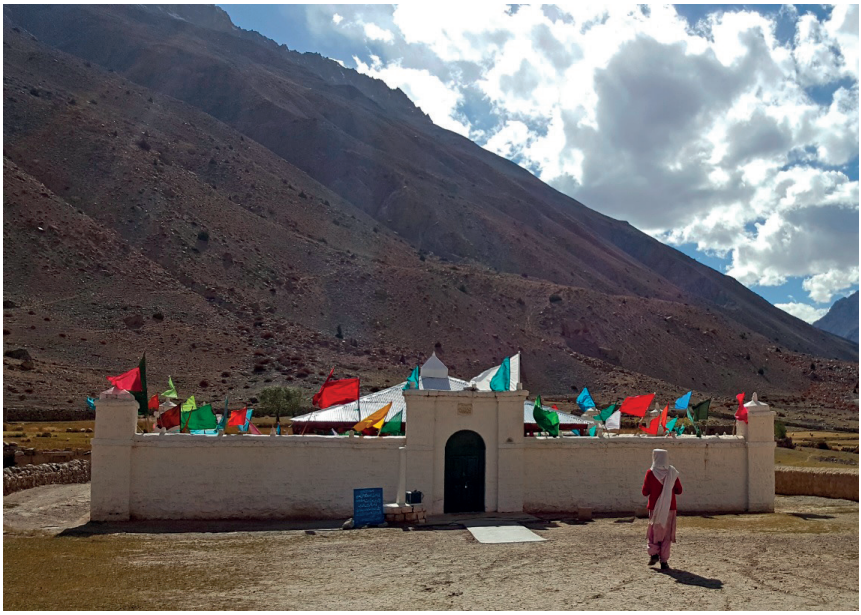
whether they were built for the locals or for the Chinese pilgrims and merchants who used the Wakhan Corridor to go to India. (Iloliev, 2008: 64) Hsuan-Tzang from the seventh century writes about Buddhist temples in Khandut (Hun-t'uo-tuo) on the Wakhan corridor. (Ekrem, 2003: 193) He states that there were two Buddhist temples and several Buddhist priests in the region from Wakhan to Chitral (Shang-mi), (Ekrem, 2003: 199) as well as a dozen Buddhist temples and nearly five hundred Buddhist priests in Tashkurgan (Ch'ieh-p'an-t'uo). (Ekrem, 2003: 204) The information Hsuan-Tzang gives us about the number of Buddhist temples and priests in Badakhshan proves that Buddhism existed in the region, but says nothing about how widely it was accepted among the local people. Taking into consideration the current traditions of the locals today, it can be said that Buddhism has left relatively little impact upon local beliefs in comparison with Zoroastrianism and therefore was likely not as widely embraced. It is not mentioned in the folkloric tradition either. Therefore, it can be said that the interpretation of Ismailism in the region has been shaped based on Zoroastrian influences rather than Buddhist.

Atashgir in Khandut, Wakhan of Afghanistan

The custom of local visits and pilgrimage to tombs, known as *mazars*, in Gojal is the most common tradition coming from the pre-Islamic life of the local people. The characters of the saints, which are partially hagiographic and partially historical, and the visits and pilgrimages to their tombs are part of the local interpretation of Ismailism. Each region has famous characters who are locally well known. Some of the tombs are famous throughout Badakhshan, such as the *Baba-i Ghundi Mazar* in Istiman of Chiporsan, Gojal[13].

13 There are no written sources about the Baba-i Ghundi Mazar. According to the version told by Mughani: There was a big dragon who had nine heads. When the big dragon appeared, threatened the people to give food daily. Dragon said "If you do not follow this threat, I will come to swallow you". This was very threaten for the people, even for the king. And the king ordered each house to give food. Dragon appeared and swallowed them every day from each house one by one. Then it was a turn to a poor person. He said "what should I keep for that dragon?" He thought "I should keep some chapatti(bread) along with my daughter". So he kept chapati along with his daughter on the dragon's point. Helpless girl was crying. All of sudden a white bearded Saint appeared. The Saint asked the girl what she was doing there. She said "I am here for dragon. My father kept me here for dragon. You leave this area. It will swallow you, too. Don't stay with me here. Leave here". The Saint said "don't worry about this. I will help you". Then Dragon appeared. The Saint stood up and pulled his sword. He cut the one head. Dragon cried "what about the other eight heads?" The Saint replied "you have eight heads, and I have eight swords." He cuts entire the heads of dragon one by one. Then the Saint disappeared. Before disappeared, he told the girl, "any problem you have, just say 'Ya Ali!'. Then I will appear".

Another day, the same white bearded Saint appeared at Ishkuk. Ishkuk, which is rocky region near Zoodkon of Chiporsan was once a properous place. It was a settlement with huge edifices like a castle with 12-15 gates. The people of the town were rich but uncivilised. There was a person. One night he saw the white-bearded Saint in his dream. He advised that person "tell the people they became very uncivilized. They lost their values and ethics. Tell the people that this is not the proper life". He got and assembled the people and told them everything. People thought that he was funny. So they didn't follow the instructions which were told by the Saint. And the second night, he saw the same dream. The third night, the Saint said "if the people do not follow my instructions, please get up early morning, and collect all your goats, ships and yaks, and go to somewhere else to Istiman (where Baba-i Ghundi is located)". He did all. And he told the people to do the same. Some of them joined to him and went up to Istiman. But the rest didn't follow him. After they leaving, suddenly a big storm, an explosive earthquake happened, and the rocks from mountain drifting down and crashed entire Ishkuk along with the gates. The Saint was riding on the flying horse to South, to North, and came to Panjashah (another *qadamgoh mazar* on the way of Baba-i Ghundi Mazar in Chiporsan. The fingers' mark can be observed inside). The old man was watching him. He said "I will put a sign for those people who live like that". And with his five fingers of his hand he left his mark on the rock. Then he flew away. He went to Shah-i Sebz (another *qadamgoh mazar* on the way of Baba-i Ghundi Mazar in where the mark left with the horse can be seen). There he

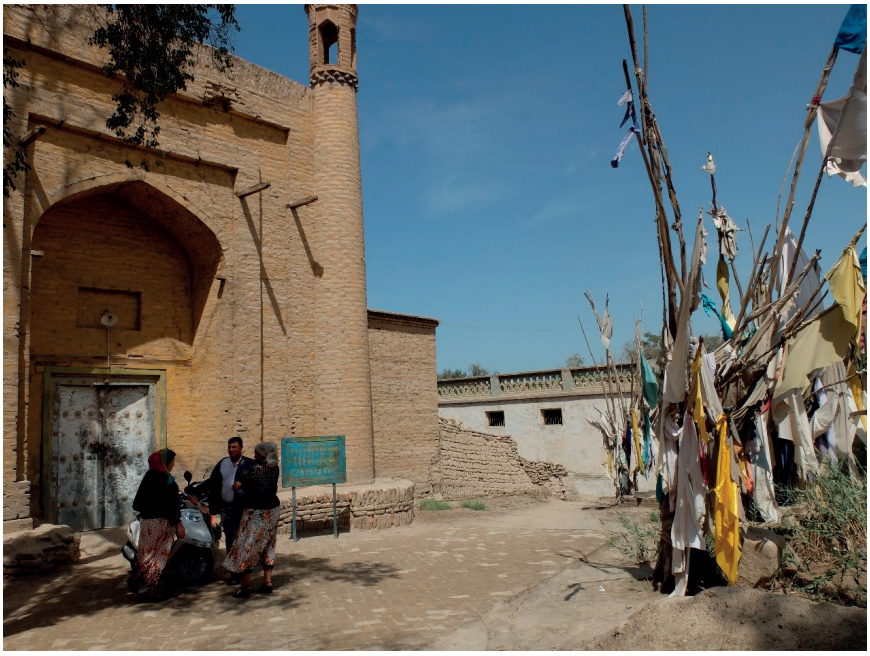


Baba-i Ghundi Mazar

While most of the tombs of Gojal are visited only by locals, the Baba-i Gundhi Mazar attracts people from across Hunza, including Ismailis, Shiites, and Sunnis, for a ceremony held there each October. Even visitors from across the border, the Sunni Kyrgyz from Afghanistan, come to this ceremony. The Baba-i Gundhi Mazar is also known in Tashkurgan of China. An old man I interviewed in 2016 in Tashkurgan told me about the tombs around Tashkurgan and said that they are all the tombs of *Chiltens* (the Forties), including Baba-i Ghundi. He also added that seven of these Chiltens were buried in the *Chilten Mazar*[14] in Yarkend in Eastern Turkestan of China which, along with Osh in the Fergana Valley of Kyrgyzstan, are the only large, nearby urban centers accessible to the mountanious people of Badakhshan. As a result, Yarkend figures prominently in the collective memory of the Ismailis of Gojal, who believe that their community is linked with the Yarkendî *pirs* (local Ismaili religious leaders).

leaves a mark with his horse. And he went to Istiman. He put his sword, grasp and knife there. And he disappeared. People constructed the Baba-i Ghundi shrine with all these staff there.

14 There are seven tombs at Chilten Mazar in Yarkend. Seven of them are called Muhammed.



Chilten Mazar in Yarkend

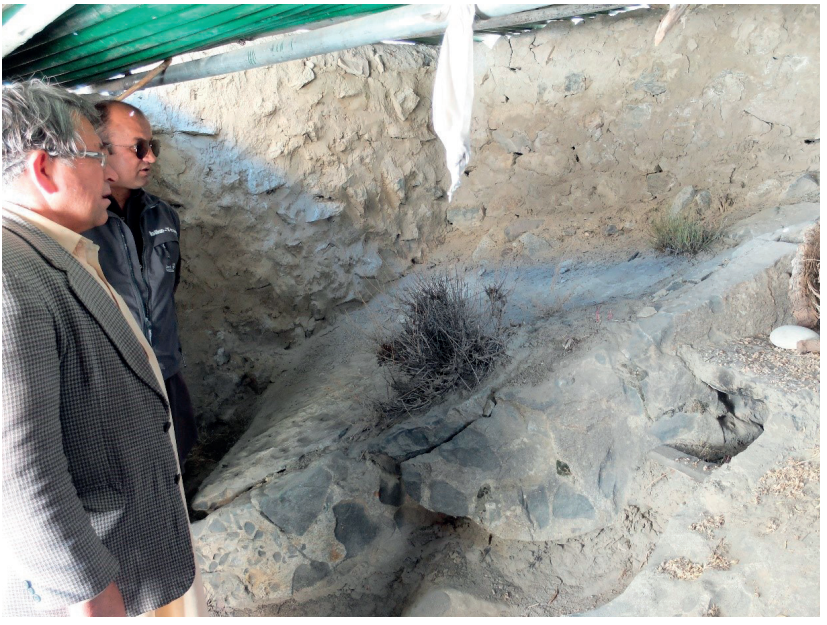
Chilten Mazar in Yarkend

The stories about Baba-i Ghundi and the Chiltens reveal the cultural connections between Central Asia and Gojal. Other *mazars* and *ziyarats/qadamgohs* (footprints or landmarks where an imam or a saint met with and blessed his followers) in Gojal include the following: the Shah Talib Mazar in Huseyni, the Shah Sahtiyan-i Veli Qadamgoh in Pasu, and the Shah-i Sebz and Panjashah *qadamgohs* in Chiporsan. Shah Talib is the second most visited tomb in Gojal after the Baba-i Ghundi Mazar. It is not certain if this is the Shah Talib-i Sermest who is believed to have come from Central Asia. *Guharrîz*, a local text written by the Shugni Ismailis living around the West Pamirs, bears the names Shah Tâlib-i Sermest, Seyyid Suhrâb-i Veli, Ahmad-i Diwâna, and Baba Omer-i Yumgi, but these saints are not known to the Ismailis of Gojal. They are, however, popular among the Ismailis of Germ Cheshma in Chitral of Pakistan. The shrine of Ahmed-i Diwâna is also at Germ Cheshma. The descendants of Baba Omer-i Yumgi still live in Germ Cheshma and have a voice in traditional rituals like marriage and funeral ceremonies[15]. Another figure who has a *qadamgoh* in Gojal is Shemsi Tebrizi, the most-acknowledged Iranian sufi after Nâsir-i Khusraw among the Ismailis of Badakhshan. The local people believe that he was an Ismaili and that he passed through Shimshal during his visit to Badakhshan.

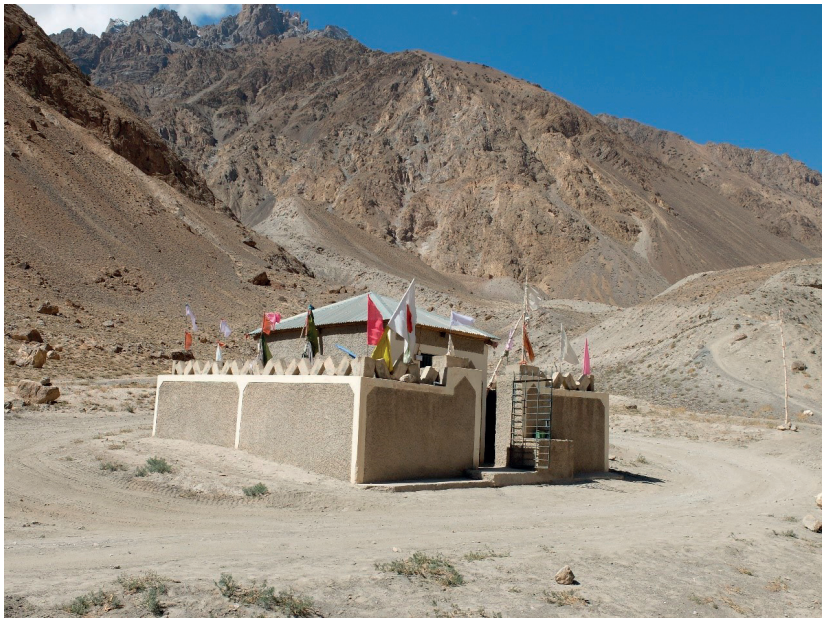
The tomb of Ahmed-i Diwâna in Germ Cheshma

15 The present descendant of Yumgi, Ali Ekber Qazi, was serving as the waiz (preacher) of Chitral region when I carried out fieldwork in the area in September 2015.

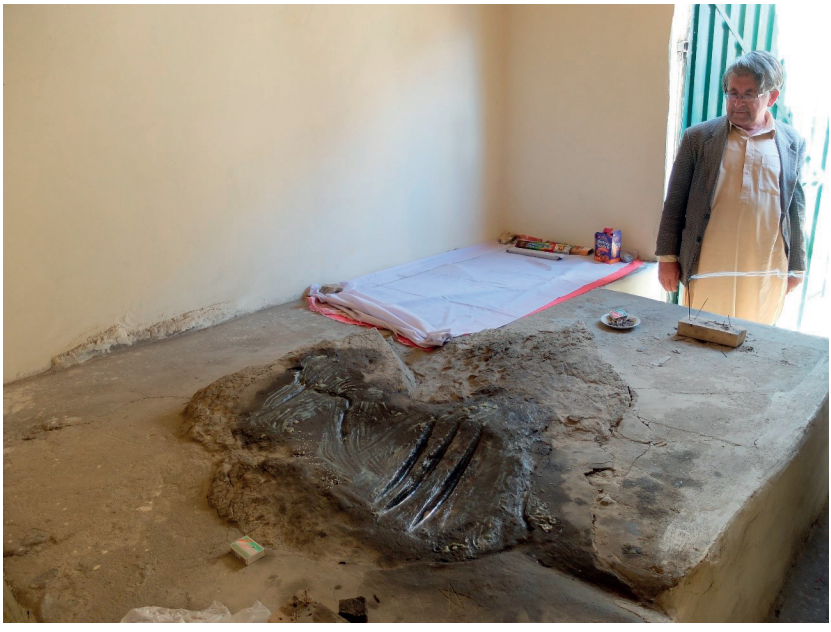
Shah-i Sebz Qadamgah



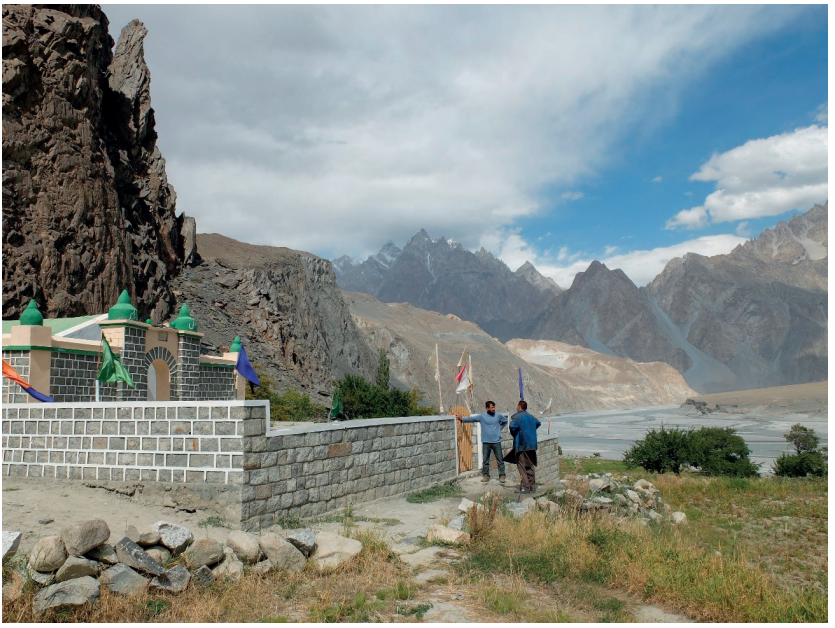
Shah-i Sebz Qadamgah



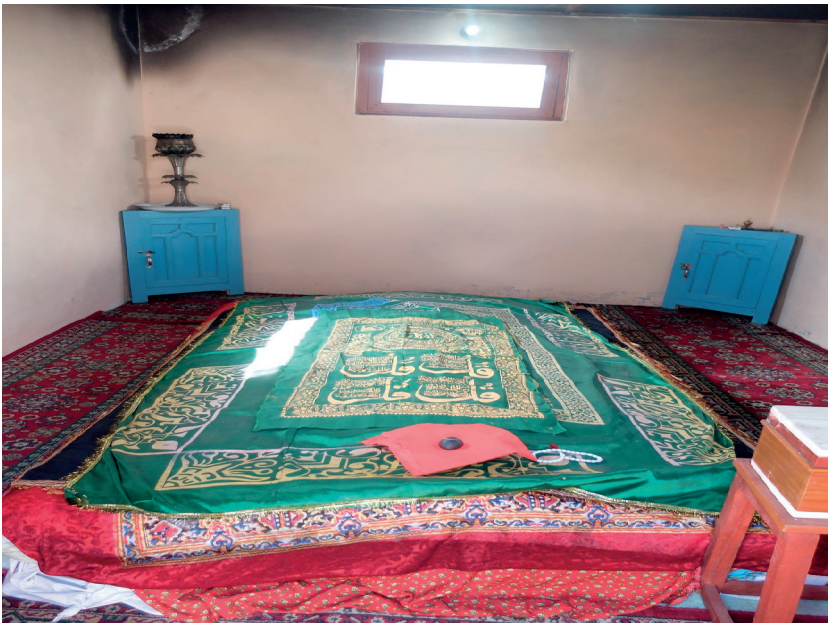
Panjashah Qadamgah



Panjashah Qadamgah



Shah Talib Mazar



Shah Talib Mazar

Shah Sahtiyan-i Veli Qadamgah

The expeditions made in the region during the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century show that the Ismaili peoples living in Hunza were not aware of their own Ismailism even at the beginning of the twentieth century, mostly because they considered their belief system as a form of sufi order rather than a distinct sect. Earlier diplomats and explorers, too, were not aware that they were Ismaili. For example, in the second half of the nineteenth century, Biddulp and Leitner described the local people as Shiite and *Maulai* (*Mawlâî*), an that they had replaced the Koran with *Kelâm-i Pîr*. (Biddulph, 1977: 118-121; Leitner, 1893: 420-424) Indeed *Kelâm-i Pîr* is one of the principal books of the Ismailis of Badakhshan. It is a version of the sermons of the Kasimshahi Nizari imam Mustansır Billah III that was recorded by the Persian *dâi* Khayrkhwâh Herâtî in the first half of the sixteenth century[16]. The reason why it is so well known among the Ismailis of Badakhshan is that it includes the biography of Nâsir-i Khusraw, unlike the *Heft Bâb* versions written in Iran. Biddulph also mentions that these Maulais in Baltistan greets each other by saying "*Aliyyun Veliyy Allah*" instead of "*Aliyyun Vasiyyu Resul*

16 For *Kelâm-i Pîr* see Herâtî, 1935. Also see Beben, 2018: 1-38.

Allah". (Biddulp, 1977: 125) This might be associated with Ismailism(pre-Fatimid) rather than Twelver Shiism[17].

After the visit of the envoy of the Agha Khan III (the 48th Nizari imam Sultan Muhammed Shah), *Pir Sebz Ali*, to Badakhshan to announce the new community organizations, their identity began to be more well known[18]. As a result, the Ismailis of the region were directly connected to their imam and from then on, they were also called *Agha Khanîs*. However, until then, they were referred to as *Maulai* (because they used the title *Mawlana* for their imams) or *Nasrî* (because of the *Dawat-i Nâsir* tradition).

The Wakhis of Gojal believe that they were converted to Ismailism by the Yarkendî *pirs* of Eastern Turkestan. Mughani names the Yarkendî *pirs* of the Wakhis of Gojal as Pir Fath Ali Shah, Pir Bulbul, Pir Kerim, Pir Hasan Ali Shah, and Mushfik Yarkendî. According to Mughani, *Abdussamed Shah* (it is not clear that he is the same person with *Pir Sebz Ali*) on his visit to Yarkend asked Mushfik Yarkendi to influence the Ismailis of Yarkend to side with Britain against Russia. When I tried to confirm this information, I did not come across the name of Mushfik Yarkendî, but I did find *Abdussamed Shah* named in a Chinese source, *Tashkurgan Xianzhi*[19]. He is mentioned here as *Sametshah*, who was sent to Chinese Turkistan by the British ruler in 1921.

For centuries, these *pirs* played an important role among the Ismailis. Apart from their religious status, they have also been political leaders. Their religious status came from the fact that they represented the Ismaili Imam. Starting from the early 1900s, as a result of the reforms realized by the 48th Nizari imam Agha Khan III, their political authority ended, but they kept their respectable positions in the society. The religious affairs of the community began to be organized by the *khalife*.

The envoy of Agha Khan III, Pir Sebz Ali, announced the establishment of *jamaathanes* in 1923. The first *jamaathane* in Gojal was built next to the great mosque of Pasu. According to Azambag Tacik from the *Qulikutz* family, this mosque was built under the sponsorship of the *Quilikutz* family in the 1850s and 1860s. The

17 For the development of Ismaili theology see Daftary, 2007: 87-136 (especially chapter 3: Early Ismailism).

18 For Pir Sebz Ali see, Virani, 2008: 77-81; Mastibekov, 2014: 75-79.

19 See *Tashkurgan Xianzhi*, 2009: 16-17. I thank Dr. Amier Saidulla from the Institute of Ismaili Studies for telling me about this information in Tashkurgan Xianzhi.

architect of the mosque was master Kutluk the carpenter. The mosque did not have minarets, and it thus resembled a masjid, a smaller house of prayer, but was the biggest mosque in Gojal. Thanks to the support provided by its strong wooden pillars, it was able to weather a number of natural disasters undamaged. In the the early 1980s, the notables of Pasu had thought that the Shiites or the Sunnis of Hunza might want to come to pray there and that this might cause trouble, so they had decided to demolish the mosque. Today only the inlaid garden door remains.

The garden door of the big mosque in Passu

Conclusion

Today, the Wakhis of Gojal are very successful in preserving their identity. Their Wakhi identity is so closely bound with the *Dawat-i Nâsir* tradition that even the Kyrgyz tribes who immigrated to the region comparatively recently have forgotten their Kyrgyz identity and assimilated into Wakhi culture. The biggest factor in their assimilation into Wakhi culture is their conversion to Ismailism. The *Dawat-i Nâsir* tradition, which is a Central Asian interpretation of Ismailism, is the most prominent common point of the Wakhis and the Kyrgyz assimilated into Wakhi

culture; however, it is not clear how long the current and future Wakhi generations will be able to maintain this belief system.

Nearly one and a half centuries ago, Agha Khan I (the 46th Nizari Ismaili imam) had to leave Iran. He settled in India under British rule, and India became the center of Nizari Ismailism. From then on, the institutional line of Nizari Ismailism was dominated by the Nizari Khojas of India. It seems likely that the abolition of the pirship system accelerated this process. Conversion from mosque to *jamaathane* was not the only innovation. Instead of the *pirs, khalifes* began to organize religious affairs. Their assignment was no longer made by the *pir* but the Imam Agha Khan. Moreover, those who were assigned to this position began to be assigned for only three years, and their official title was *mukhi* (an Indian word), not *khalife*. The duties of former *khalifes* were divided between three people: the *mukhi*, the *kamaria* (another Indian word), and the *waiz*. In Badakhshan of Tajikistan, which is spread across a part of the Russian hinterland and Tashkurgan in Eastern Turkestan of China, a part of Chinese hinterland, the term *khalife* is still used. However, in Afghanistan and Pakistan, which were under British rule, the terms *mukhi* and *kameria* are more frequently used.

Consequently, we can say that the Mountanious Tajiks and the Wakhis, or at least one of their most populous branches, have always been on the periphery of both the history of Ismaili Studies and the history of Central Asian Studies. The Ismaili movement, which first began among a group named the Qarmatis during the early Islamic period in the Middle East, went through two important institutionalization periods: first under the Fatimid dynasty (899–1171) and second under the Nizari Ismaili state of Alamut (1090–1256). From the collapse of Alamut due to the Mongol invasions in 1256 until the reforms of the 48th Nizari imam, Agha Khan III, at the beginning of the last century, the Nizari Ismailis existed as decentralized local administrations that were largely unsuccessful in preserving their identities. Even in Iran, most of their members became Twelver Shiites. The major exception to this was the Nizari Khojas of India, the only Ismaili organization to institutionalize successfully in the modern period, thanks largely to their urban character and the fact that the Imam himself lived in Bombay, India. This increased the power of the Khoja tradition over Ismaili groups, assimilating them in a process that can be read as the third institutionalization period of Ismailism, starting in the 1920s with the Agha Khan III. During this process, the Ismailis of Badakhshan, who for centuries

developed and maintained their own unique Ismaili belief system in isolation from the rest of the Islamic world, have been absorbed into a centralized Ismailism represented by the Nizari Khojas and organized by the Nizari Imam himself. This is the most striking point of conflict among all intellectual Ismailis of Badakhshan tied to the *Dawat-i Nâsir* tradition, including the Wakhis of Gojal, today.

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