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## Urgent Tasks of Research among the Dardic Peoples of Eastern Afghanistan and Northern Pakistan

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The Kafirs of the Hindukush used to enjoy the reputation of being the classical lost opportunity for anthropological research. R. HEINE-GELDERN, summing up the disappointment of two generations of students, wrote only a few years ago:

"When SIR GEORGE SCOTT ROBERTSON made his daring expedition into Kafiristan, in 1890—91, the population of that region consisted of fierce independent tribes, speaking archaic Indo-Aryan languages, adhering to their ancient pagan religion, using bows and arrows and erecting megalithic monuments to their dead. Today we know that the Kafirs were basically an early offshoot of the Vedic Aryans. One can hardly overestimate the amount of light which a thorough knowledge of Kafir culture might have thrown on the social and religious life of the ancient Aryans of India and Iran. Moreover, the Kafirs had a graded society, combined with degree-taking rites reminiscent of the 'feasts of merit' of the Nagas and Kuki-Chin of Assam and of various Indonesian and Melanesian tribes. Was this a trait of ancient Indo-Aryan culture? In view of certain features of Vedic ritual this does not seem inconceivable. Or had these customs spread from the East along the Himalayas? Impossible to tell on the basis of the scant knowledge we possess. Finally, Kafir culture contained some traits which must have been adopted during the periods of the Greek, Parthian and Kushāna kings of north-western India. The country was a real anthropologists' paradise, but no anthropologist ever visited it until it was too late. A few years after Robertson's visit Kafiristan was conquered by the Afghans who forcibly converted the people to Islam. Later expeditions of European scholars were unable to recover more than fragments of the ancient cultural traditions."<sup>1)</sup>

The grief over this "lost paradise" of anthropology was so deep that we all overlooked the fact that similar pagan beliefs and rites had to a considerable extent been preserved up to the present among

<sup>1)</sup> HEINE-GELDERN, 1957, pp. 281—282, based on ROBERTSON, 1896.





the Kafirs' neighbors and relatives, the other peoples with Dardic, i. e. Northwest Indian languages<sup>2)</sup>). These peoples, no less than one dozen, live in the eastern Hindukush and the westernmost valleys of the Himalaya and Karakorum.

The outermost group in the West are the Pashai, split up into many tribes with as many dialects. MORGENSTIERNE was able to fix their linguistic affinities<sup>3)</sup>. BUDDRUS studied them during his short stay in 1956 and showed that much more research should still be done there<sup>4)</sup>. As regards cultural anthropology, there is a perfect blank. This is the more regrettable since the ancestors of the Pashai tribes lived in the central region of the classic Gandhāra culture before they were expelled to the mountain valleys south of Kafiristan. BUDDRUS noted extremely interesting stories of witches, not unlike those collected by ANDREIEV among the Iranians of the Panjshir<sup>5)</sup>. It must be mentioned that the Pashai area contains the enclaves of the Shumashti<sup>6)</sup> and the Wotapuri<sup>7)</sup>. These are not dialects but separate languages which are almost entirely unknown. We have no idea whether their speakers have special traits of folklore.

According to information collected by MORGENSTIERNE with regard to the speakers of the Dardic Tirahi language, the situation in their case seems perfectly hopeless<sup>8)</sup>. They were assimilated by their Pathan neighbors, when the latter annexed the whole area south of the Khyber.

If we go back to the small inaccessible valleys southeast of Kafiristan, we will find a lot of Dardic tongues, mostly spoken by a few thousand or even a few hundred persons. Gawar-Bati is widespread in the Kunar Valley on both sides of the Afghan-Pakistan border<sup>9)</sup>. In a side-valley of the same river, a little farther toward the Northeast, Dameli is spoken<sup>10)</sup>. The next valleys on the east side of the Lower Chitral (i. e. Kunar) River are inhabited by speakers of Phalura<sup>11)</sup>. They were already mentioned by BIDDULPH under the

<sup>2)</sup> The Kafir and Dard languages form the extreme northwestern branch of the Indo-Aryan language group. Some scholars considered them as a separate group, intermediate between the Indian and Iranian languages. Cf. MORGENSTIERNE, 1926, p. 50.

<sup>3)</sup> MORGENSTIERNE, 1932, pp. 21—24; 1944/1956.

<sup>4)</sup> BUDDRUS, 1959.

<sup>5)</sup> ANDREIEV, 1927, pp. 91—95.

<sup>6)</sup> MORGENSTIERNE, 1932, pp. 24—25. Its base is connected with Gawar-Bati.

<sup>7)</sup> Letter of Dr. BUDDRUS dated 20th August, 1958.

<sup>8)</sup> MORGENSTIERNE, 1932, p. 20.

<sup>9)</sup> MORGENSTIERNE, 1932, pp. 61—62. 1950, pp. 5—7.

<sup>10)</sup> MORGENSTERNE, 1932, p. 59.

<sup>11)</sup> MORGENSTERNE, 1932, pp. 54—59. 1941, Map. The inhabitants of the village of Sau on the Afghan side speak the same language.





name of "Dangariks". As far as I know, none of these groups has ever aroused the interest of a professional anthropologist or even a traveller.

On the other side of the Chitral River, the valleys of Rumbur, Bumboret and Birir are the home of the Kalash, also called Kalash Kafirs. This people, numbering between three and four thousand, has alone preserved its old pagan religion. Among them many institutions are still alive, the loss of which among the Kafirs proper was so deeply regretted. Up to the last few years we had only a few interesting but unsystematic reports about them<sup>12</sup>). SIIGER, a member of the Third Danish Expedition to Central Asia in 1947/1950, was the first to do ethnographic fieldwork there. He gave a highly promising preliminary report<sup>13</sup>). In 1955/56, the leader of the German Hindukush Expedition, FRIEDRICH, accompanied by SNOY, visited the same area. Because of FRIEDRICH's untimely death at Rawalpindi shortly afterwards, no report is as yet available<sup>14</sup>).

The author, who was a member of the same expedition, but did not work among the Kalash, was able to glance at the diaries left by FRIEDRICH. They contain many observations of extreme importance, e.g. hints on the religious significance of the different patterns used by the carpenters. There are even more mythic traditions than were recorded by Siiger.

Of course, the Kalash were widely influenced by their former pagan neighbors, the "true" Kafirs, but their basic religious structure seems to be different. As far as I can see the Kalash religion is still more archaic than was that of the Kafirs and is closer related to the pre-Islamic survivals among the eastern Dardic peoples. Further investigations among the Kalash will probably bring to light more and new details. But perhaps we should wait for the definite reports of both expeditions, and then fill in the gaps.

The main people of Chitral are the Kho. Their language is Khowar. They are bound up in an intricate feudal system, the higher levels of which are formed by an intrusive population of Iranian origin. BIDDULPH has given a sketch of that system and vividly depicts the atrocities common among the ruling families<sup>15</sup>). SCHOMBERG's book contains some supplementary information<sup>16</sup>). BARTH gives an

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<sup>12</sup>) BIDDULPH, 1880, pp. 127—133. HERRLICH, 1937, 1938, *passim*. SCHOMBERG, 1938, pp. 45—73, 184—194. MORGENSTIERNE, 1947 a, pp. 240—248.

<sup>13</sup>) SIIGER, 1956, pp. 12—35.

<sup>14</sup>) The results of FRIEDRICH's researches will be published by SNOY.

<sup>15</sup>) BIDDULPH, 1880, pp. 55—68; p. 154. MORGENSTIERNE, 1932, pp. 46—54; MORGENSTIERNE, 1947 b.

<sup>16</sup>) SCHOMBERG, 1938, *passim*.



interesting appraisal from the sociological point of view<sup>17)</sup>, but an historical analysis is still lacking. The administrative order was probably introduced from Badakhshan by the invaders and includes traditions going back to Pre-Islamic times, when Eastern Iran was under the sway of feudal lords of Kushāna or Hephtalite descent. It was different from the pattern in the Gilgit-Hunza-Nagir area, which is still more archaic and based on the idea of divine kingship. The folklore of the Kho is completely unknown.

The remoter valleys of Dir, the principality south of Chitral, are the home of another Dardic tribe, the Bashkāris<sup>18)</sup>. In Swat Kohistan, east of the mountain-chain, the same people are called Gawris.

In 1958, Dir was still in the hands of a Pathan ruler, an old and rigid man. Due to him, ethnographic fieldwork in this area was almost impossible. At the moment he is unimpeachable for diplomatic reasons (the Afghan border is very near), but when he dies, the area will be under the normal administration of Pakistan. Then, students will find there an abundance of interesting survivals.

In Upper Swat, beside the Gawris already mentioned, live the Torwalis, another Dardic tribe. The Norwegian, BARTH, visited them on a trip of three weeks in 1954<sup>19)</sup>. In spite of the shortness of the time at his disposal (a few exploratory interviews were held in Lower Swat beforehand), he gives a reliable sketch of their political and social organisation, as well as of their economy. But he says almost nothing about their religion and folklore. My own investigations, still more limited in time and space, but especially directed to these latter matters, showed that most of the old traditions had been suppressed under the influence of zealous Pathans. However, a lot of more or less gloomy tales are still alive, especially about witches. These do not ride on brooms through the air like their sisters in Europe, but on whole trees. In his admirable survey TUCCI indicates that already in Buddhist days Swat was famous for being the home of the *dākinī*, another kind of flying witches, and that the women there had chiefly the monopoly of Tantric revelation and precepts<sup>20)</sup>. It seems that in some way or other the atmosphere of those days is still lingering over the valley.

The products of the woodcarvers in the Gawri and Torwali area also preserve the inheritance of the past. STEIN emphasized already the overwhelming richness of true Gandhāra motifs in this re-

<sup>17)</sup> BARTH, 1956 b, pp. 79—86.

<sup>18)</sup> MORGENSTIERNE, 1932, pp. 28—29.

<sup>19)</sup> BARTH-MORGENSTIERNE, 1957; BARTH, 1956 a; 1956 b, p. 52—76. Sir AUREL STEIN was only interested in archaeological and historical facts. Cf. STEIN, 1930.

<sup>20)</sup> TUCCI, 1958, pp. 283—284.



markable craft and bought some specimens for the museum at Delhi <sup>21</sup>). I took many photographs and got some new information. But there is still a rich field for the student of art history and the collector. In a few years it will be too late, the last masters will have died.

Indus Kohistan, northeast of Swat, is inhabited by Dards who speak their own dialect, called Kohistani or Mayān <sup>22</sup>). Some information was already provided by BIDDULPH, but here also, apart from SIR AUREL STEIN, BARTH was the first scientific traveller <sup>23</sup>). He gave a useful survey of the economic and social structure. Other fields, such as folklore, pre-Islamic survivals, and even material culture, are waiting for their explorer. Beyond doubt, much of the old culture has disintegrated under the influence of orthodox Islam, but the same tradition of woodcarving as in Swat is still alive in this area.

East of the Indus River some valleys are still tribal areas, out of the reach of administration. Murder and private warfare are the order of the day. This region is completely closed to foreigners.

Beyond Indus Kohistan to the north and northeast, Shina is spoken <sup>24</sup>). There is no proper name for the people. "Shin" means only the member of a caste of agriculturists. The explanation lies in the fact that only a part of the population, the Shin caste, is Dardic by descent. Side by side with them live several other groups, partly immigrants from country lower down, partly aboriginals who once spoke Burushaski. This archaic and enigmatic language, unrelated to any of the great families <sup>25</sup>), is still used by almost 50.000 people in Hunza, Nagir and Yasin. In the last the ruling class talks Khowar.

As for the culture and the folklore of the Shina speakers, we have more and better reports than about any other Dardic people <sup>26</sup>), but this comparatively rich and early material is amazingly unsystematic and has never been used for any constructive purpose. Up to 1890, Islam was very lax here, so that the first European travellers were able to note quite a lot of pagan customs and traditions. But the area was given to the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir with British consent, and this Hindu ruler sent Mohammedan officials into his new possessions. These were zealous men who immediately started a great campaign for purification and Islamic orthodoxy.

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<sup>21</sup>) STEIN, 1930, pp. 63—64.

<sup>22</sup>) BARTH-MORGENSTIERNE, 1957.

<sup>23</sup>) BARTH, 1956 b, pp. 15—49. STEIN, 1942.

<sup>24</sup>) For this language cf. BAILEY, 1924.

<sup>25</sup>) Cf. LORIMER, 1935 a, 1935 b and 1938.

<sup>26</sup>) LEITNER, 1876, 1894. BIDDULPH, 1880, pp. 1—125. GHULAM MUHAMMAD, 1907. LORIMER, 1929. SCHOMBERG, 1935, 1936.

The situation is particularly hopeful in Baltistan<sup>27</sup>). Here, the frontier between the Shina-speaking Dards (Brokpas) and the Tibetan speakers (Baltis) is much entangled and intricate. Many Dardic villages are completely isolated or connected only by difficult foot-paths with the compact settlement area of the rest of their people. Some of them are the remnants of a powerful wave of immigration which took place almost a thousand years ago and have preserved peculiarities which have been lost in the main area.

This applies even more so to the easternmost Dardic spearheads, the villages of Dah and Hanu, which actually belong to Ladakh. Here, in a Buddhist area protected from Islamic fanatics, the first European travellers found a Dardic population still possessing their ancient pagan customs. They had only a superficial veneer of Buddhism<sup>28</sup>). When Francke visited them 30 years later, the situation had not much changed. He recorded the songs of the Bonona festival, depicting a ceremonial chase, the welcome of the visiting gods (or their representatives) by the villagers, and what probably was a feast of merit<sup>29</sup>). Dainelli, a member of the Filippi Expedition in 1913/14, was primarily interested in questions of the material culture of the region<sup>30</sup>). Since then, no further attempt was made to collect informations or to check the previous results. This is hard to understand, since we have here in fact the "Kafirs of the Karakorum", i.e. "Unbelievers" with their old inherited religion, comparable only to the Kalash and to the "Kafirs of the Hindukush" in former days.

In the central area of Shina, around Gilgit, new efforts were made during the last few years. The members of the above-mentioned German Hindukush Expedition of 1955/56, FRIEDRICH, SNOY, BUDD-RUSS and the author, studied the valleys of Tangir, Darel, Hunza, Naltar, Bagrot and Haramosh, and some places in the upper Gilgit valley<sup>31</sup>). In 1953 the author visited Haramosh, Tangir and Darel once more, as well as Gor and Gupis in the Gilgit valley<sup>32</sup>). In 1959 the linguist BERGER was working in the Gilgit Agency, collecting folkloristic material in Shina.

As far as I can judge from the results, not too much Dardic lore has been destroyed since the days when the first Europeans entered this area. In spite of the efforts of Islamic officials and mullahs, under the Mohammedan veneer a pagan religious system is almost intact in remote valleys such as Haramosh and Gor. This means that we find here the fourth starting point for the reconstruc-

27) BIDDULPH, 1880, pp. 46—54. CUNNINGHAM, 1854, *passim*.

28) SHAW, 1878. BIDDULPH, 1880, p. 51.

29) FRANCKE, 1904 and 1905; 1906; 1907, p. 28.

30) DAINELLI, 1924; 1925, pp. 77—104.

31) JETTMAR, 1957 a; 1957 b.

32) JETTMAR, 1958 a; 1958 b.



tion of the original Dardic religion, the other three being the religious systems of the (former) Kafirs, the Kalash and the people of Dah and Hanu. This is a situation unequalled in the whole area. We find here hunting magic, rituals and beliefs related to northern Asia, and even more so to Caucasia<sup>33</sup>). Head-hunting and feasts of merit were once important. The Kalash, too, have Shamanistic traits, but in the Gilgit Agency the parallels to northern Asia are really striking.

We must on no account believe that the picture is as yet complete. I shall cite a single example in order to show what we still may expect from future researches.

When I visited Gupis in 1958, the governor and other people told me that in Punyal and Yasin there existed houses for the dead called "*gumbád*". They were described as follows: A *gumbád* is flat-roofed, one-storeyed, but has a large cellar. In the cellar is a platform built of stones and clay for the dead bodies to lie on. In the center of the platform there is a pit, and here the bones of the rotten corpses were swept together. Similar structures are said to exist in the Pamirs, where their outer walls are decorated with ibex-horns and yak-tails.

When I saw the diaries of FRIEDRICH, a few months ago, I found that he had got similar information and even visited such structures at Gakuch. But in the older books of LEITNER, BIDDULPH and LORIMER not even a word of all this is mentioned.

Beyond doubt, we have here, in the heart of an Islamic area, an institution related to an ancient Iranian practice<sup>34</sup>). Moreover, it is clear that this burial custom is in accordance with the common Dardic belief that the bones are the seat of the soul and their preservation is necessary for the resurrection of the individual. It seems that similar beliefs were wide-spread in the mountains west of Tibet and had a considerable influence on the evolution of the Bon religion<sup>35</sup>).

I think I may stop here<sup>36</sup>). We have seen how much research is still to be done in this area, and that it may yield quite unexpected discoveries. This may eventually enable us to fill, to some extent at least, the gap caused by the conversion to Islam of the Kafirs of the Hindukush.

We have found a tradition which may go back to the time when

<sup>33</sup>) JETTMAR, 1957 a; 1957 b; 1957 c.

<sup>34</sup>) Similar rituals during medieval times are described by RAPOPORT, 1958. P. SNOY informed me that SCHOMBERG gave some hints concerning similar customs in Chitral.

<sup>35</sup>) HUMMEL, 1959, pp. 200—202. HOFFMANN, 1956.

<sup>36</sup>) The last and most numerous Dardic people, the Kashmiri, are so much influenced by Hindu and Islamic civilization that they cannot be treated together with their more primitive brothers in the mountains.



Parthian, Kushāna and Hephtalite princes ruled over the mountain valleys, spreading Iranian ideas and customs. One of HEINE-GELDERN's suppositions, quoted at the beginning of this paper, has thus been confirmed.

Are we to expect new light also on the religious and social life of the ancient Aryans of India? In this respect I am not too optimistic. In the Pantheon of the Dardic peoples of the Karakorum there is no god comparable to the Imra (i.e. Indra) of the Kafirs of the Hindukush. The most pronounced spiritual complex of the Dards, their hunting beliefs, is intimately connected with a sort of ibex or goat worship which is totally foreign to Aryan ideas. May not the culture of aboriginal tribes, with an economy based on hunting, goat-breeding and rather primitive agriculture, burst through here, triumphing over the traditions of the Aryan invaders, even though the latter's language was taken over?

We know that all Dardic and Kafir languages contain a considerable foreign, non-Aryan element. Moreover, the people of the famous Prasun tribe in the very heart of Kafiristan, dark-skinned, with very broad faces and heavy features, differ racially from the rest of the Kafirs. There can be little doubt that old, non-Aryan elements, perhaps related to the Burushaski speakers of the remotest valleys of the Karakorum, can be traced among the other Dardic peoples, too. This may enable us to establish, by careful analysis, traits antedating the immigration of the Aryans, more than three thousand years ago, traits which to-day are still alive. Or may, perhaps, some at least of these non-Aryan elements have been introduced by later immigrations from the north or the west? As long as no archaeological excavations have been made we cannot hope for a definite answer.

An enormous amount of research is still to be done in the area in question — and it must be done soon if it is not to be too late. Every year counts. Up to 1947 the access to the region was very difficult, only by the long and dangerous Gilgit road from Srinagar which was completely barricaded during the winter months. At present one can reach Gilgit by plane from Rawalpindi in little more than an hour. To-morrow, an easy road will be built along the Indus River, a road open the whole year. This means that the last dam protecting the old Dardic cultures will break down. Acculturation and orthodox Islam, helped by an improved educational system, will destroy the huge "ethnographical museum" still present in the valleys of Dardistan.

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