

SERIE ORIENTALE ROMA

n.s. 37

ROOTS OF PERISTAN
THE PRE-ISLAMIC CULTURES
OF THE HINDUKUSH/KARAKORUM

Proceedings of the International
Interdisciplinary Conference
ISMEO, Rome, Palazzo Baleani, 5-7 October, 2022

Part II

edited by Alberto M. Cacopardo & Augusto S. Cacopardo



ROMA
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2023

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FOREWORD

It is with great satisfaction that we are able to present here, within the year immediately following the event, the Proceedings of the International Interdisciplinary Conference “Roots of Peristan: the Pre-Islamic Cultures of the Hindukush-Karakorum.” The Conference was held in Rome on 5-7 October 2022, under the aegis of ISMEO, who provided the venue of the meetings at its headquarters of Palazzo Baleani. The Conference had also the academic patronage of three Universities: Venice Ca’ Foscari, Napoli L’Orientale – the two main academic Italian Institutions for Oriental Studies – and the University of Florence. Over forty leading scholars in Peristani studies from 16 countries and three continents participated in presence or on line. A truly international and interdisciplinary event: anthropologists, archaeologists, historians, geographers and linguists converged in a coordinated effort to advance the understanding of the pre-Islamic world of the Hindukush/Karakorum.

The conference took place after the Covid pandemic had forced us to postpone it, giving up the original intent of holding it in 2020, on the 50th anniversary of the first Hindukush Cultural Conference held at Moesgård in 1970. We had the pleasure of hosting, even if just on line, the only still active scholar who participated in it, the renowned Nuristan specialist Richard Strand. Some of the founding fathers of Peristan studies organized that conference: Georg Buddruss, Lennart Edelberg, Karl Jettmar, Georg Morgenstierne, Peter Snoy. With most of them ISMEO has had long-standing relations of cooperation and exchange that continue to this day with their Institutions. Now they have all passed away, but Georg Buddruss, who died some months before the Rome Conference, had the time to kindly accept the role of Honorary President we had offered him. Unfortunately, he could not honour that commitment. To his memory, and to the memory of his ground-breaking work, we have chosen to dedicate the Conference and the Proceedings we are presenting. A dedication we wish to extend to the memory of Peter Parkes, the brilliant foundational ethnographer of the Kalasha, who left us only a few weeks after the Conference.

After Moesgård, a Second, a Third and a Fourth International Hindukush Cultural Conference were held in Chitral (Pakistan) in 1990, 1995, and, a few

weeks before the one in Rome, in 2022. In the Chitral conferences, which were very fruitful under many respects, the topic of the pre-Islamic cultures, though never completely abandoned, had however gradually slipped to the side to make space for issues perceived as more vital in the present-day Islamic context. The Rome Conference is in fact the first scientific meeting after Moesgård, totally and specifically focused on the pre-Islamic past of the area.

It was the stated intent of the Conference to revitalize Hindukush studies, for they had largely laid dormant since the 1990s, in spite of a few significant steps forward in some disciplines, linguistics maybe above all. The aim was therefore to connect and stimulate efforts in the various disciplines so that each could benefit from the work of all to achieve a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics of the ancient cultural world of Peristan. A world that thrived for centuries, and possibly millennia, in a fairly large area of Central Asia.

The results of the works of the “Roots of Peristan” Conference are presented in the two volumes of these Proceedings. The 41 contributions included are divided in five sections: Ethnography, Linguistics, History, Antiquity, Comparisons. Readers will see that a wealth of new data are made available and are connected in a complex tapestry from which a unifying fil rouge appears however to emerge. It will be appreciated how each discipline offers contributions to the others in an intense and fruitful interdisciplinary dialogue; while the comparisons of the last section aptly broaden the perspective of Peristani scholarship by looking beyond the geographical boundaries of the region, to the great civilizations with which the ancient dwellers of the mountains intermittently came in contact.

To conclude, I want to express our gratitude to the patron Universities, and I wish to congratulate all those who contributed to the success of this ambitious scientific endeavour: the scholars, their Institutions, the Scientific Committee and the ISMEO staff who did the less visible, but essential, job. Their concerted efforts allowed us also to hit the surely unusual target of publication of the Proceedings within a year or so of the Conference and even just before the 50th anniversary of the publication of the Moesgård Proceedings.

I am proud that ISMEO could be the frontline supporter of such an important work that will remain, I believe, as a milestone in Hindukush studies for years to come.

ADRIANO V. ROSSI

PREFACE

From the point of view of the great literate civilizations that surrounded it from all sides, the vast region we call Peristan was, until fairly recent times, an extreme periphery of the world. To their eyes, the heart of the world laid in their capital cities, with their great concentrations of business, of learning, of political power, while the mountains were just a hostile realm of ignorance and darkness, about which the only question was whether or not they could be crossed to reach the light on the other side.

From the point of view of the old cultures that once prevailed in those mountains, it was perhaps the very opposite. The heart of the world was the uncontaminated realm of purity of the lofty peaks and glaciers where humans could not reach and the fairies had their abode: moving further down, the world grew more and more contaminated by the life and death of humans, and reaching down beyond the borders to the plains, there laid a vast, remote periphery thick with the impurity of the cities and shunned by the shamans and the fairies. To the “Kafir” mind, the high civilizations were the low surroundings of their nobler world.

From the point of view of anthropology, and perhaps of human sciences in general, those cultures deserve at least as much attention as their far better known surroundings. This has been the purpose of the “Roots of Peristan” Conference.

As we wrote in the presentation of the initiative:

Recent historical research has established that in the late 1700s “Kafir” cultures still extended in large patches all the way from the Kashmir borders to present-day Nuristan, the remains of a continuous cultural area that only two centuries earlier was about twice the size of Switzerland: a fact that had not been quite realized until the very end of the last century.

We took this recent realization as the starting point of our research, at the same time proposing a basic hypothesis in the following terms:

This vast continuous area looks very much like a long-lasting phenomenon, that can perhaps be understood as a sort of “counter-civilization,” in which populations with different languages and different customs practiced disparate but cognate forms of life, possibly based on a common conception of the world and a common value system, alternative to the ones dominating in the cities

and the plains: perhaps something akin to Pierre Clastres' "societies against the state," versed in "the art of not being governed," recently depicted by James Scott. Societies, to be sure, that were far from static and devoid of history, but which seem to have preserved in time a distinctive flavour of their own, a set of basic traits that, in the face of many variations and mutations, were perpetuated and renewed in the course of the centuries and perhaps the millennia, with roots possibly harking back to the common Indoeuropean substratum of the Iranian and the Indian worlds, to which Morgenstierne's historical linguistics traced the origins of the Nuristani languages.

This hypotheses of a "counter-civilization" has three distinct implications, all of which need to be verified. Firstly, it implies that the cultures of Peristan were "disparate but cognate," being based on "a common conception of the world and a common value system." While this is something we can consider quite certain for such cultures of Western Peristan as those of Nuristan, the Pashai and the Kalasha, to what extent such a common basis of values, norms and conceptions was shared in pre-Islamic Eastern Peristan is more open to question.

A second implication is that those societies were indeed alternative and in opposition vis à vis the hierarchical, centralized structures of the State. Was there ever anything like Scott's "flight to the heights" to escape state control? And what about the "Kafir kingdoms" of the legends? Would they suggest that those cultures were after all compatible with social hierarchy and political domination?

A third aspect in the idea of a (counter-)civilization is that it must have a measure of historical depth. While there is no doubt that Peristan has had a long, dynamic history of migrations, conflicts, negotiations and innovations, how far back in time can we trace the distinct cultural flavour of the pre-Islamic world we know from recent centuries? Does it really have roots in antiquity? Were "proto-Kafir" cultures present in Peristan during the first millennium CE, when Buddhism penetrated the mountains bringing with it literacy, high art, and monarchic polities? Did they pre-exist and succeed that phase?

These were some of the questions on the table when the "Roots of Peristan" Conference was convened. And that is why we emphasized that "many hypotheses need to be verified." Adding:

what is certain is that we are dealing with cultures of great richness as far as cosmological imagination, ritual architectures, socio-economic solutions and relations with the environment. Cultures with a far-reaching background that deserves to be understood in its own right and in its own terms, and not merely in relation to their transactions with the surrounding great civilizations.

But the state of research at the time was not particularly encouraging. As we further noted in the presentation:

After the great wave of studies and research in the second half of the last century, the investigation of the pre-Islamic cultures of the Hindukush/Ka-

rakorum has fallen in recent decades into a phase of comparative quiescence. This has been due both to the well-known security hazards in fieldwork, and to the widespread feeling that those cultures now belong largely to a past whose study must give way to the analysis of change in the Islamized present: a task that, since the days of the “Culture Area Karakorum Project,” has dominated recent research.

It was ironical, however, that this standstill should come about at such a time:

The study of those cultures has thus come to a kind of deadlock just at the time when the mass of data accumulated by research in anthropology, linguistics, archaeology and history was ready to provide a much sounder and documented picture of the vast complex of “Kafir” cultures.

Since the days of Jettmar’s milestone overview in *Die Religionen des Hindukusch* (1975) and his subsequent additions, there had been considerable progress in each of those fields, with new insights gained into many aspects of Peristani cultures, into their pre-colonial and earlier history, their traces in archaeological findings and their languages. It was time to lay the ground for a new approach:

Through the concurrence of these and other disciplines, we can now look at those cultures with a new long-term vision, to trace their historical vicissitudes over the course of some three millennia, as well as to analyze them in their fullness, including a comparative approach. The inquiries and the bold conjectures of Karl Jettmar and his associates opened in their days a path that can now be revisited with a critical and methodologically updated approach.

[...] Without discounting the importance of studying the present, this initiative intends to concentrate in a diachronic framework on the pre-Islamic past of the region, with the intent of mapping the state of research and pointing to further lines of inquiry.

To map the state of research and to point to further directions of inquiry: when we had conceived this program we could hardly have expected the great interest and authentic enthusiasm with which dozens of renowned scholars from three continents and sixteen different countries welcomed the challenge and took part in the endeavour.

When the Conference was held in Rome in October 2022, twenty-nine scholars participated in presence, six had their papers read by colleagues or co-authors, and seven more presented their papers online (see List of Speakers). In addition, five scholars who, for various reasons, could not present their paper in any form, kindly accepted to include it in the present Proceedings.

The results of all this are now in the hands of the reader, who can appreciate at a glance the wide-ranging scope of the various contributions.

We cannot review in detail here the various aspects of the progress that this fine collective endeavour has brought in the different fields. Let us just remark

that we have papers that add to our knowledge even in such fields as the ethnography of the Kalasha, the Nuristani, the Pashai, the pre-Islamic Kho, where new findings would hardly have been expected; we have papers on Eastern Peristan that bring new light on the cultures of that area and to the issue of their affinity with the Western cultures; we have contributions that touch on the key issue of Middle-Indian and Hindu influences on Peristani cultures; we have valuable inquiries into hardly explored historical sources, such as the chronicles of Kashmir and of Timur's Kafiristan inroad; we have new insights on the Buddhist phase and its possible relations with "proto-Kafir" peoples in the first millennium; we have new evidence on the history of the Chitral principality and its relations with the Bashgal "Kafirs," and findings on the Hunza state suggesting "Kafir" roots of key institutions; in linguistics, we have far-reaching investigations into the deep roots of "Dardic" and Nuristani languages or into their synchronic relations, as well as analyses of linguistic evidence about the early history of both Eastern and Western Peristan and, of course, research into little-known languages that add significantly to existing knowledge; and, last but not least, we have valuable comparative investigations on relations between Peristan and the early Iranian, the European and especially the Indian world.

With such a wide variety of approaches and concerns, it is inevitable that some of the arguments and conclusions put forward in some of the papers will be found disputable or objectionable by some: but since debate and controversy are the fuel of advancement in the sciences, we should only be happy if any such issue were to raise a discussion. Research on Peristan is a work in progress, and critical scrutiny is always precious.

At any rate, thanks to the dedication of all our authors, the wealth of new insights and new approaches, not to mention the new iconographic documentation enriching many papers, has indeed surpassed the most optimistic expectations. To be sure, not all the questions on the table have been exhausted. But we trust that this will be only the start of a new phase in Peristan studies that will hopefully be able to shed light on the many aspects that remain obscure in the intriguing past of this intriguing region.

There is enormous scope for further work. There is a large number of sites clearly ascribable to "Kafir" cultures scattered all across Peristan: not one of them has been excavated so far. There is by now a considerable stock of written documents in Persian and other languages, only in small part published, that can shed much light on the history of the region: yet to this day there is no scientifically reliable historical account of any part of Peristan, no reliable history of Chitral, of Hunza, of Gilgit. New sources are emerging on Nuristan and surroundings: the manuscripts of Hajji Allahdad and of Syed Shah will soon be published, and it is likely that more sources will come up.

There is a host of unpublished works by Western scholars. Peter Parkes, the greatest student of the Kalasha, who sadly departed only weeks after our conference, has left unpublished much of his most important writings: their publication would be not only a rightful homage to his memory, but a precious

disclosure of data recorded in the last days when the old way of life was still thriving. There are still unpublished works by Jettmar, Grjunberg, David Katz, Palwal, and the field notes of Alfred Friedrich from 1955-1956 are a precious 900-page manuscript that deserves to be published in a critical edition. There is a mass of unpublished photos by Herrlich, Schomberg, Schuyler Jones and other travellers and British officers, that could yield valuable information if critically examined.

And fifty years after Jettmar's opus magnum, we need a new comprehensive treatment of Peristani cultures based on the new evidence available: this would be the indispensable pathfinder for comparative analyses and for the work of indologists, iranists, Central Asia scholars, sinologists, who could bring new light on Peristan from the point of view of their fields of study. There is ground for hope that our conference will help to pave the way to this kind of developments.

One last word. The "Roots of Peristan" Conference has been a truly interdisciplinary endeavour. In fact, the cross-fertilization between disciplines has been so intense that we have often had a hard time classifying papers into the different sections of the Conference and of the volume. Where is the exact boundary between ethnography and ethnohistory, ethnohistory and history, history and historical linguistics, linguistics and ethnography, archaeology and history? We have the linguist who deals with ancient history, the archaeologist who trespasses into ethnohistorical fieldwork, the indologist drawing on ethnographies, the geographer writing history, the ethnographer digging into archives, the linguist digging into his texts to produce most significant ethnographic knowledge.

The reader should not be scandalized if we have given up disciplinary boundaries in the arrangement of the sections in these volumes. We have adopted a loose chronological classification, in which "Ethnography" includes studies mostly based on fieldwork and referring to recent times from the 20th century on; "History" deals largely with the second millennium CE until the 19th century; "Antiquity" refers to the first millennium CE and earlier times; and "Linguistics" includes the papers by linguists unless, due to their subject matter, they have been classified under "Antiquity" or "Comparisons," the last and most eclectic division that groups scholars from four or five different disciplines.

The classification has no pretense of rigour or coherence, it is just an extemporary practical solution. It does however testify to an important point: that the present partitions of the social sciences, as Lévi-Strauss lamented many decades ago, are based much more on arbitrary academic traditions than on sound epistemological foundations. So many decades later, we are still in need of a new vision that may inspire a regeneration of the whole field of human sciences with a novel and more appropriate arrangement of their specializations. Or perhaps our muddy experiment in interdisciplinary cooperation might even turn out to be a tiny harbinger of the future kind of science that the French

scholar, at the end of a speech in 1952, envisaged in a sudden flash that sounds a bit like the prophecy of a Peristani shaman: “an anthropology conceived in a broader way—that is, a knowledge of man that incorporates all the different approaches which can be used and that will provide a clue to the way according to which our uninvited guest, the human mind, works.”

ALBERTO M. CACOPARDO



Georg Buddruss (1929-2021) with Abdur Rahim, malik of Pashki village. Parun valley, spring of 1956. Courtesy Dr. Karin Buddruss.

**International Interdisciplinary Conference
ISMEO, Rome, Palazzo Baleani, 5-7 October, 2022**

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Adriano V. Rossi, President

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Michele Bernardini
Alberto M. Cacopardo
Augusto S. Cacopardo
Max Klimburg
Luca Maria Olivieri
Stefano Pellò
Irmtraud Stellrecht
Claus Peter Zoller

List of Speakers

5 October 2022

Adriano V. Rossi – President ISMEO

Morning – Chair Almuth Degener

Alberto M. Cacopardo

Max Klimburg

Tatch Sharakat Kalasha

Karl Wutt

Homayun Sidky

Augusto S. Cacopardo

Afternoon – Chair Anna Filigenzi

Michele Bernardini

Luca M. Olivieri & Matteo Sesana (paper read by Sesana)

Wolfgang Holzwarth

Stefano Pellò

Nile Green & Nurshin Arbabzada (on line)

Paul Bucherer-Dietschi (not present, paper read by A.M. Cacopardo)

6 October 2022

Morning – Chair Elena Bashir

Bernard Sergent

Claus Peter Zoller

Sergey A. Yatsenko & Sviatoslav I. Kaverin/ (on line)

Marcello De Martino

Jadwiga Pstrusińska (Bydgoszcz) (not present, paper read by A.S. Cacopardo)

Afternoon – Chair Claus Peter Zoller

Elena Bashir

Almuth Degener & Irén Hegedüs

Henrik Liljegren

Jakob Halfmann

Ian Heegård Petersen

Richard F. Strand (on line)



Some participants at the Conference.

7 October 2022

Morning – Chair Alberto M. Cacopardo

Ruth Young & Abdul Samad

Jason Neelis

John Mock, 1

Jürgen Wasim Frembgen

Anna Filigenzi & Cristiano Moscatelli (paper read by Moscatelli)

Hidayat ur Rahman

Afternoon – Chair Augusto S. Cacopardo

Jakob Halfmann

John Mock, 2

Birgitte Glavind Sperber (paper and film)

Wynne Maggi (not present only film)

Thomas Crowley (on line)

Sviatoslav I. Kaverin & Robert C. Tegethoff (on line)

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Ruth Young – University of Leicester. UK
Claus Peter Zoller – University of Oslo. Norway

Timur and the *Siyāhpūšān* (1398-1399)

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SUMMARY. The paper is devoted to the analysis of Timur's passage across Kafiristan (in present day Northwestern Afghanistan), during the year 801h./1398. The examination of several sources shows various discrepancies in the description of the s.c. *Siyāhpūšān* ("wearers of black" = the Kafirs). While some sources neglect mentioning this population making only few allusions to them, other chronicles, in particular the *Zafarnāme* of Sharaf al-Dīn 'Alī Yazdī and the *Zobdat ot-tavārīḥ* of Ḥāfīz-e Abrū, offer an extensive mass of data that certainly represent an interesting object of study. On the basis of these sources, the paper traces the sequence of the events during the passage of Timur across Kafiristan. The great difficulties encountered by the Timurid army are described, as well as the complex relations with some other local populations.

This paper is the result of a research on Persian sources about the invasion of India by Timur in 1398-1399. Since 2000, three major research projects have been developed. The first one was a series of conferences for the Conférences d'études iraniennes Ehsan et Latifeh Yarshater held in Paris at the Collège de France in 2005, and later published in 2008 under the title *Mémoire et propagande à l'époque timouride* (Bernardini 2008). In this book, I studied the nature of the *Ġazavāt-e Hendustān*, a chronicle of the Indian Invasion written by Ġiyāšoddīn 'Alī Yazdī and devoted to an extensive jihad campaign against infidels, as the name *Ġazavāt* (ar. sing. *Ġazā* or *Ġazw*, religious war) explicitly states (Bernardini 2008: 91-93).¹ Such source, written probably in 1416, dates back to eleven years after Timur's death. It is generally considered the more accurate source on the Timurid invasion of Northern India.² Nevertheless the very detailed text of Ġiyāšoddīn never mentions Kāfiristān and the so-called

¹ About this source see the first edition by L. Zimin e V.V. Bartol'd (Ġiyāšoddīn 1915) and the recent edition by Īraj Afšār (Ġiyāšoddīn 2000). A.A. Semenov published in 1958 a Russian translation (Ġiyāšoddīn 1958) and in 2009 I published an Italian one (Ġiyāšoddīn 2009). See also Bernardini 2022: 198-202.

² On this chronicle see Woods 1987: 93-96.

Siyāhpūšān, the “wearers of black.” The site of Ketvar (Kator), and an allusion to the Kāfirs (Ġiyāšoddīn 2000: 58) is mentioned just once in a very short passage that seems to be a late insertion within the work. Ġiyāšoddīn gives an approximate date (*Ramādan* 800/May-June 1398) and no specific reference to the route followed by the Timurid army.³

Nezāmoddīn Šāmī’s Account

More information concerning the Kāfirs can be found in the *Zafarnāme* by Nezāmoddīn Šāmī, the ancient chronicle on Timur (completed in 807/1404),⁴ which mentions again the site of Ketvar and describes the inhabitants of Ketvar as *koffār-e fujjār* (infidel fornicators) and *gebrān-e bīsāmān* (stupid pagans). Their country is the *kešvar-e koffār* (the land of the *kāfirs*, i.e. the Kāfiristān). In that region (*velāyat*), the local population is described as Muslim. They complained to Timur that the *koffār* had been appropriating large amounts of their property, they exacted from them the *bāj* (tribute) and the *ḥarāj* (capitation-tax) and then they killed them even though they had paid, taking their children prisoners. This request was the main reason for a campaign of religious war by Timur (*ġazw*). It was led by the emirs Rostam [Bahādur b. ‘Omar Šayḥ] and Borhān Oġlān [Qiyat] and, despite the snow, they reached the slopes of a very high mountain, while Timur remained behind them. When the vanguard of the army got to the mountain, they found the Kāfirs “young and adult (*ḥord-o bozorg*)” completely naked. And as they had been informed of the arrival of the main part of the army, they took their belongings and retreated to the top of the mountain. The Timurids seized their rams and had their houses burnt, while the Kāfirs fled, thanks to the knowledge of those impassable mountains, convinced that they would never be caught up. However, the left wing (*qanbūl-e javāngar*) led by the *yargūjī* Šayḥ Arslān on one side, and ‘Alī Solṭān on the other, defeated the Kāfirs (*Kāfirān*) and seized their positions. Nevertheless, the Kāfirs put up a fierce resistance and went into hiding in a fortification (*ḥešār-e koffār*) conquered after a three-day siege, with a massacre of the infidels (*bīdīnān*), but probably also with numerous losses among the Timurids. At this point their elders demanded surrender with an act of submission. According to Šāmī, Timur granted their salvation and the preservation of their property in exchange for their conversion to Islam. They agreed to convert and Timur honoured them with gifts, giving their leaders gala robes. The Kāfirs, however, had remained in their faith, and during the night they attacked the emir Šāhmalik who had been asked to attend to them. Timur carried

³ Ġiyāšoddīn (2000: 58) mentions the overturning of the flags of infidelity and politeism (*rāyat-e kofr va šerk*) after setting Ketvar on fire.

⁴ On this chronicle see Woods 1987: 85-87.

out a further attack and enslaved all the women and children and had the others beheaded. He built towers piling up their cut off heads (Nezāmoddīn Šāmī 1937: 172-173).

Later Sources: the Ghaznavid Memory

Later authors devoted large sections of their works to the crossing of the *Avġān* countries and the encounter with the *Siyāhpūšān*. Two authors in particular need to be mentioned for their supplements to Šāmī's account: Ḥāfez-e Abrū who first wrote a large commentary to the *Ẓafarnāme* by Nezāmoddīn Šāmī (814/1412; Nezāmoddīn Šāmī 1956) and then his *Zobdat ot-tavāriḡ* (830/1427; Ḥāfīz-e Abrū 2001),⁵ and Šarafoddīn 'Alī Yazdī, author of a second and more famous *Ẓafarnāme*, who introduced a wide description of the *Siyāhpūšān* people (832/1428; Šarafoddīn 'Alī Yazdī 1958). These two authors bore certainly some relation to each other, being Ḥāfez-e Abrū in 1427 the first to provide various addenda to the account of this campaign. The text by Šarafoddīn (1430) makes wide use of data of the former, with various encyclopaedic additions. These two chronicles are the more extensive ones on the subject.

The late appearance of information on the *Siyāhpūšān* in the Timurid sources raises a first puzzling question about the authenticity of the outlined events: as Sir Edmund Bosworth showed (Bosworth 1997: 409-410), the Kāfīrs were probably already well-known in the Ghaznavid period. Apparently, all the conquests of land in the Avghāns and Hendustān Lands are described by the Timurid authors making wide reference to various expeditions led in the region by Maḥmūd of Ghazna: frequently Ghaznavid authors are mentioned in the chronicles (Bernardini 2008: 99-100; Anooshahr 2009: 39, 58-59). The Ghaznavid historian Bayhaqī, referring in particular to the time of Mas'ūd b. Maḥmūd, first mentioned the name Ketvar/Katur which is largely mentioned by all the Timurid chronicles (Bayhaqī 2011: II, 59; III, 236 n. 30). Various allusions to them were made during the period of Maḥmūd who was the leader in 417/1020 of an expedition against the lion-worshipping infidels of what Gardīzī calls Nūr and Qirāṭ valleys, probably in southern Kāfiristān. Also in this case, the ruler of Qirāṭ offered his submission and became Muslim (Gardīzī 2011: 91). No direct reference is made to the *Siyāhpūšān*. The first reference to the *Siyāhpūšān* is recorded in the Timurid period and from this time forth, it would indeed be used, not systematically though, by various historical chroniclers and travellers in the area.

The subjugation of the area of Ketvar in May 800/1398 and the description of the *Siyāhpūšān* show various pieces of evidence of a genuine report, even

⁵ See on Ḥāfez-e Abrū, Woods 1987: 96-99.

though it thoroughly used Šāmī's version as a model. Ḥāfiẓ-e Abrū and Šarafoddīn were not direct witnesses of the campaign. They certainly included some fantasy elements: Šarafoddīn makes reference to the huge size of people, "giants" (Šarafoddīn 'Alī Yazdī 1958: II, 24), and Ḥāfiẓ-e Abrū calls them *nās-nās* (half-man),⁶ with specific reference to the traditional Islamic teratology of his time (Ḥāfiẓ-e Abrū 2001: II, 826). Both Ḥāfiẓ-e Abrū and Šarafoddīn located in Andarāb the first meeting with the local Muslim population.

Their *kalantārs* (the elders) were called *a'dā* (اعدا) and *a'dāšū* (اعداشو), they spoke a different language which was neither Persian nor Turkish nor Indian. However, they could not speak other languages and only the people in the neighbouring countries were able to talk to them (Šarafoddīn 'Alī Yazdī 1958: II, 24). According to Ḥāfiẓ-e Abrū and Šarafoddīn, the Timurid army reached a small town where the *Siyāhpūšān* used to live by the banks of a river, but when the Timurid army got there, the people of the town fled to the nearby mountains leaving the town empty. Someone managed to find them and after three days of bitter fighting, the *Siyāhpūšān* surrendered. Timur compelled them to convert to Islam in return for their life. They accepted, but all of a sudden they attacked the Timurid garrison in which they had been held as captives, killing all the soldiers. The reaction was violent, all the people were massacred, and several minarets piled of human heads were erected. As Šarafoddīn notes the heads were "those of people who had never kissed the earth for a prayer."

On this occasion, Timur ordered to engrave a marble inscription to celebrate his conquest, an epigraphic evidence (Šarafoddīn 'Alī Yazdī 1958: II, 26) which was later in several occasions mentioned and identified by travellers and scholars. Walter Lentz in 1939, has clearly summarised some of the evidence related to the Ketvar inscription and another one found in Kulum, which also mentions Timur's name.⁷ A photographic report was already made by the German expedition in Hindukush in 1935, where two stone walls are reproduced in which it is very difficult to recognise any inscription.⁸ The inscription was apparently newly identified by Samī' Allāh Tāza in a publication with several photos which are very difficult to interpret without the transcription of the text (Tāza 2017: 136-144).⁹ However, the practice of leaving inscriptions in conquered places was not new. The most famous case is the Karsakpay inscription (Kazakhstan), or the Tire inscription in Turkey.¹⁰ Šarafoddīn adds that not even Alexander the Great was able to subdue these people.

According to Šarafoddīn and Ḥāfiẓ-e Abrū, the expedition against the *Siyāhpūšān* seems, in any case, to have not been particularly easy. The great

⁶ Concerning this term see Tornesello 2002: 174-175.

⁷ Lentz 1978: 167-168. I thank Alberto Cacopardo who gave me this information.

⁸ Scheibe 1937: pls. 115 and 116.

⁹ These photos, are placed among other sources with the title: *Taṣāviyī az katībe-ye pačā ke yādgār-e janghā-ye Amīr Timūr va fath-e Amīr 'Abd ar-Raḥmān mibāšad* (Tāza 2017: 136).

¹⁰ Poppe 1940 and Aka 1994.

deployment of Timurid forces, in particular the military vanguard led by the emirs Rostam and Borhān Oġlān, was dispersed by the enemies. Borhān Oġlān is even described as the protagonist of high treason: receiving no news on the two emirs, Timur sent in search of them a group of four hundred soldiers (300 Turks and 100 Tajiks) led by a “court infant” (*az ḥāne baččegān*) Moḥammad Āzād, and the other commanders Dowlatšāh, Šayḥ ‘Alī Vā’ed Kūčqarā, and Yaġūr, helped by local Ketvar guides (*ġajarjī*).¹¹ With great difficulty and walking on rough paths covered in snow and “the shield on their backs,” this army reached the top of the mountain. Šarafoddīn also recalls what had happened to the army of the emirs Rostam and Borhān Oġlān in previous time. When they reached the top of the mountain, the *Siyāhpūšān* knew they were coming and they laid an ambush. Borhān Oġlān fled by removing his armour, while many Timurid soldiers died as “martirs” (*šahīd*), killed by the battle-axes (*tabarzīn*) and the hoes (*mītīn*) of the *Siyāhpūšān*. The *Siyāhpūšān* were later defeated by Moḥammad Āzād and Borhān Oġlān was arrested and brought before Timur, who tried him, pointing out that that was the second time he had betrayed his army (Šarafoddīn ‘Alī Yazdī 1958: II, 28-30).

Hāfez-e Abrū and Šarafoddīn ‘Alī Yazdī first used the word *Siyāhpūšān*. A number of Timurids who later mentioned the Kāfirs gave up this word for some time: the Timurid Maḥmud Mirza b. Abi Sa’id is said to have campaigned twice in Kāfiristān, which is located in the Boluristān. The same terms *Siyāhpūšān* and the later *Sefīdpūšān* disappear also from the *Šefatnāme* by Darvīš Moḥammad Ḥān Ġāzī which reports a *ġazā* expedition against the Kāfirs of Laġmān in 1582, and was also the subject of an excellent monography by Gianroberto Scarcia in 1965: the author considers “da lasciarsi da parte l’unico pseudoscientifico tentativo di differenziazione di fonte afghana compiuto in base al colore delle vesti delle popolazioni interessate” adding further names such as *Siyāh-pūš*, *Torkāfir*, *Saftīd-pūš*, *Spīn-kāfir* (introduction to Darvīš Moḥammad Ḥān Ġāzī 1965, CIX).

For a better understanding of the Timurid sources, and in particular those of Hāfez-e Abrū and Šarafoddīn ‘Alī Yazdī, we may consider also some further “ethnic” interpretations made by the chronicles regarding the journey of the Timurid army across present-day Afghanistan. This is the case of the people who “protested” against some Afghans: the Varakzāy/Barakzāy, plunderers in the area of Iryāb (Ġiyāšoddīn 2000: 69). Felix Tauer identified them, also agreeing with Nezāmoddīn Šāmī (1937: I, 175), with the *Varkuni* (*Varkoni* or *Varkuyi*) in Hāfez-e Abrū 2000: II, 831). We can add that Šarafoddīn ‘Alī Yazdī considered these peoples as *Kirgis* (Kirgiz?), a quite uncertain identification from several points of view (Šarafoddīn ‘Alī Yazdī, 1958: II, 24-25).

¹¹ This is what Šarafoddīn reports (Šarafoddīn ‘Alī Yazdī 1958: II, 26-27). Concerning Moḥammad Āzād see Ando 1992: 249. Concerning the *ġajarjīs* (local guides) see Doerfer 1963: I, 376-377, par. 253. Hāfez-e Abrū mentions other participants to this raid: Esmā’īl and Allāhdād [Barlās], Sevinč Tīmūr, Ādīne Šayḥ, Šayḥ Hasan Qawčīn, Šā’in Tīmūr Šams Ordūšāh, Harī Malek (Hāfez-e Abrū 2001: II, 828).

In conclusion, we can observe that only two sources mention the *Siyāhpūšān*. This word is not mentioned in the early Timurid sources. It could be interesting to note that the campaign against the *Siyāhpūšān* was led in the frame of an extensive *ġazā* feat and even though Ġiyāṣoddīn ‘Alī Yazdī does not mention this episode in detail, the war against the Kāfirs seems one of the aims of this first leg of the Indian campaign. We can also recall that before Timur quit the area, crossing the Indus River, on the site of Nagar he met the Sayyid Moḥammad Madanī, who was coming directly from Mecca. He asked Timur to visit the Holy Lands with the plausible aim to offer the assumption of a role in the Caliph succession, at that time held by the Mamluks. On this occasion, Moḥammad Madanī was accompanied by Sikandar the Šāh of Kashmir, who was well-known as *botšekan*, “the idols breaker” (Bernardini 2022: 202).

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