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Ismaili History in Central Asia

Early Ismaili History in Central Asia

This book is a study of Russian, Soviet and post-Soviet scholarship in Ismaili studies and particularly regarding Ismailis in the region presently known as Central Asia, which in modern contexts has been mainly defined as incorporating the five former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Historically, the term Central Asia could also take in other areas, such as those in present-day Afghanistan, northern and western Pakistan, north-eastern Iran, Kashmir and Xinjiang in western China.¹ Central Asia has also been identified by other names such as Khurāsān or more precisely Greater Khurāsān which included the current province of Khurāsān in Iran,² Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, most of Kyrgyzstan, the southern territories of Kazakhstan, and northern and western Pakistan. Khurāsān in its narrow sense comprised the cities of Nishāpūr and Tūs (now in Iran), Balkh and Herat (now in Afghanistan), Marv (now in Turkmenistan), Samarqand and

¹ Yuri Bregel, *An Historical Atlas of Central Asia* (Leiden, 2003), p. vii. See also James A. Millward, 'Positioning Xinjiang in Eurasian and Chinese History: Differing visions of the "Silk Road"', in Colin Mackerras and Michael Clark, ed., *China, Xinjian and Central Asia: History, Transition and Crossborder Interaction into the 21st Century* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 55–74; F. Mayor, 'Foreword', in A.H. Dani and B.A. Litvinsky, ed., *History of Civilizations of Central Asia*, vol. 3, *The Crossroads of Civilizations, A.D. 250 to 750* (Paris: UNESCO, 1992–2005), p. 8.

² 'in pre-Islamic and early Islamic times, the term "Khurāsān" frequently had a much wider denotation, covering also parts of what are now Soviet Central Asia and Afghanistan; early Islamic usage often regarded everywhere east of western Persia, *Djibal* or what was subsequently termed "Irak" *ʿAdjami*, as being included in a vast and ill-defined region of Khurasan, which might even extend to the Indus Valley and Sind', C.E. Bosworth, '*Khurāsān*', *EI2*, vol. 5, pp. 55–59. See also Mir Ghulam Muhammad Ghubar, *Khurasan* (Kabul, 1937), pp. 5–6.

Bukhāra (now in Uzbekistan), and Khujand and Panjakent (now in Tajikistan). However, the name Khurāsān was used to designate an even larger region that encompassed most of Transoxania (Farā-rūd³ in Persian and in Arabic, Mā warā' al-nahr, meaning 'beyond the river') and Sogdiana⁴ in the north, that extended westward to the Caspian Sea, southward to include the Sīstān desert, and eastward to the Hindu Kush mountains in Afghanistan. The toponym Transoxania is also used for the portion of Central Asia that corresponds approximately to modern-day Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, southern Kyrgyzstan and south-west Kazakhstan – in essence the region between the Amū Daryā and the Syr Daryā (the Oxus and Jaxartes rivers of the ancient Greeks).

Thus, some uncertainty exists when it comes to defining the precise borders of this region since this was not an issue in earlier times. However, it is not essential for this study. Firstly, Central Asia has historically been closely tied to its people, both nomadic and settled, and to the Silk Road.⁵ It acted as a crossroads in the movement of people, goods and ideas, and as a conduit for the spread of religions between Europe, West Asia, South Asia and East Asia. During pre-Islamic and early Islamic times, this region was mainly dominated by Iranic peoples including sedentary Sogdians, Khwārazmians, Bactrians, semi-nomadic Scythians (Saka) and Alans.⁶ The ancient sedentary population played an important role in the history of Central Asia. After the expansion of Turkic peoples into these territories in the early medieval era,⁷ Central Asia also became the homeland of many Turkic peoples who, much later, as a result of Soviet

³ Dehkhoda, *Lughat Nāma-i Dihkhudā*, Online Reference. Available online at: <http://parsii.wiki/dehkhodaworddetail-cbe368c6fbcf43b68107af29bc35fb45-fa.html> [Last accessed, 21 December 2015].

⁴ André Wink, *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World, vol. I: Early Medieval India and the Expansion of Islam Seventh to Eleventh Centuries* (Delhi, 1990), p. 109.

⁵ The Silk Road or Silk Route was a network of trade routes that for centuries was central to cultural interactions throughout Asia, connecting China to the Mediterranean region and beyond. See, *Vadime Elisseeff, The Silk Roads: Highways of Culture and Commerce* (New York, 2001).

⁶ V.I. Abaev and H.W. Bailey, 'Alans', *EI*, vol. 1, pp. 801–803; Also, Walter Pohl, 'Conceptions of Ethnicity in Early Medieval Studies', in Lester K. Little and Barbara H. Rosenwein, ed., *Debating the Middle Ages: Issues and Readings* (Malden, MA, 1998), pp. 13–24.

⁷ Richard N. Frye, tr. with commentary, *Ibn Fadlan's Journey to Russia: A Tenth-Century Traveler from Baghdad to the Volga River* (Princeton, NJ, 2005).

national-territorial delimitation policies, emerged with new titular names such as Kazakh, Uzbek, Turkmen, Kyrgyz and Uyghur. From this point of view, Central Asia can be defined as the western, Turko-Iranian, part of the inner-Asian heartland, whose indigenous population comprised various Iranian peoples, most of whom had been Turkicised, and a growing Turkic population who to varying degrees adopted elements of the indigenous Iranian culture.⁸

Toponyms of Badakhshān/Pamir

The earliest surviving designation of Badakhshān as a geopolitical entity dates to late antiquity.⁹ ‘The name Badakhshān occurs first in Hūan ts’ang’s narrative, about 630’ (as the kingdom of Po-to-chang-na).¹⁰ It was attested in the travelogue of the Chinese Buddhist monk and scholar Xuanzang (玄奘, d. 664).¹¹ The area described is small and appeared to have consisted of the lower basin of the Kokcha river and left bank of the upper Oxus. However, the Arabic sources of the classical period designated wider areas as Badakhshān, the extension of which reached to areas east of Balkh generally ending in Ṭokhāristān, thus corresponding to the modern province of Qaṭaghan and districts of Kholm and Baghlān.¹² The Venetian traveller Marco Polo (1254–1324), who passed through these areas on his journey to the court of the Mongol emperor Kublai Khān (r. 1260–1294), employed the toponym Badakhshān in various forms (i.e. Balascian, Baulascia, Baudascia).¹³ There is a difference of opinion

⁸ Yuri Bregel, *An Historical Atlas of Central Asia* (Leiden, 2003), p. vii.

⁹ E. Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches from Eastern Asiatic Sources: Fragments towards the Knowledge of the Geography and History of Central and Western Asia from the 13th to the 17th Century* (London, 1888), vol. 2, p. 66.

¹⁰ Samuel Beal, *Si-Yu-Ki. Buddhist Records of the Western World. Tr. from the Chinese of Hiuen Tsiang (A.D. 629)* (London, 1884), vol. II, p. 291.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² X. de Planhol, D. Balland, W. Eilers, ‘Badaḡšān’, *EIR*, 1988. Available online at: <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/badaksan> [Last accessed, 11 October 2020]; G. Le Strange, *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate: Mesopotamia, Persia and Central Asia; from the Moslem Conquest to the time of Timur* (London, 1966), p. 432; also V. Minorsky, *Hudūd al-‘Ālam, ‘The Regions of the World’: A Persian Geography 372 AH – 982 AD* (London, 1937), p. 439.

¹³ Sir Henry Yule, ed., *The Book of Ser Marco Polo, the Venetian, Concerning the Kingdoms of Marvels of the East* (London, 1871), vol. 1, p. 152.

regarding the meaning of the toponym. Historically, Marco Polo claimed that *Baulacia* referred to *La'l* (ruby or lapis lazuli). Modern scholars, such as the late C.E. Bosworth, have argued that the term *Badakhsh* originally denoted the region, and that only later did it come to mean ruby.¹⁴ On the other hand, the Russian scholar, T.N. Pakhalina, looking at the word from a linguistic perspective, argues that the term originally consisted of two components, *Badakhsh* and *ān*, meaning 'Land of Kings'.¹⁵ The historical region of Badakhshān lies across north-eastern Afghanistan and south-eastern Tajikistan, with some portions now in western regions of China and in northern Pakistan. Badakhshān contains diverse ethno-linguistic and religious communities, the majority being the Farsi-speaking Tajiks and Pamiri-speaking Tajiks along with significant Kyrgyz and Uzbek minorities. The region is also called the Pamir (or Pamirs) after its high mountain range. Although the precise extent of the Pamir range is debatable, it is commonly argued that it largely lies within the Gorno-Badakhshān Autonomous Oblast' (GBO) of Tajikistan. Since the beginning of the last century Russian and Soviet scholars carrying out research on the region have used the term Pamiri to refer to the Tajik people of Gorno-Badakhshān, identifying as Pamiris those who speak East Iranian languages such as Shughnī, Rūshānī, Wakhī, Sarikūlī, Ishkāshimī and Yazgulāmī.¹⁶ The fact that Russian and Soviet academic works referred to the Tajiks of the Pamir region as Pamiri eventually led to the development of a new identity: the Pamiri people of Gorno-Badakhshān.¹⁷

The Pamir range of mountains became known in Persian as 'Bām-i dunyā' ('the Roof of the World') and 'Pā-yi Mihr' ('Feet of the Sun'). A recent study has suggested that in Afghanistan people still write 'Pamir',

¹⁴ V.V. Bartol'd, 'Badakhshan', *EI*, vol. 1, pp. 552–554. [Reprint in *EI2*, vol. 1, pp. 851–855]; C.E. Bosworth, 'Pamirs', *EI2*, vol. 8, p. 245.

¹⁵ T.N. Pakhalina, *Pamirskie Yazyki* [Pamiri Languages] (Moscow, 1969), pp. 5–11. See, Nourmamadcho Nourmamadchoev, *The Ismā'īlis of Badakhshan: History, Politics and Religion from 1500 to 1750* (PhD dissertation, SOAS, University of London, 2015), pp. 34–35.

¹⁶ Antje Wendtland, 'The Position of the Pamir Languages within East Iranian', *Orientalia Suecana*, 58 (2009), pp. 172–188.

¹⁷ Dagikhudo Dagiev, 'Pamiri Ethnic Identity and Its Evolution in post-Soviet Tajikistan', in Dagikhudo Dagiev and Carole Faucher, ed., *Identity, History and Trans-Nationality in Central Asia: The Mountain Communities of Pamir* (London, 2018), pp. 23–44.

as ‘Pā-yi Mihr’ or ‘Mitr’ (‘Mithra’).¹⁸ Meanwhile, a local scholar, Abusaid Shokhumorov, in his book *Pamir–Strana Ariev* (Pamir: Land of the Aryan people)¹⁹ disputes the definition of ‘Pamir’ suggested by previous scholars and argues that the term is a highly complex one, consisting of two parts: the first – ‘Pām’ or ‘Bām’, the second – ‘Er’ or ‘Ir’. Both syllables are independent and bear specific meanings. Hence, ‘Pām’ (‘Bām’) is translated as ‘country’, ‘habitat’, and ‘Ir’ (‘Er’) as the self-referential name of those ancient peoples known as the Aryans (later known as the Iranians), which reflects the idea that the name is purely geographical, indicating a certain locality. Therefore, the use of the term Pamiri is problematic, as many of the people covered by this definition consider themselves Tajik, or prefer other local identities, such as Shughnī, Rūshānī, Wakhī, Sarikūlī and Yazgulāmī, instead.²⁰ However, its use has become commonplace and it has been welcomed quite generally as a new and specific reference to the Pamiri-speaking people and the Ismailis of Tajikistan, although this has led scholars sometimes to conflate the terms Pamiri and Ismaili.²¹

In the early 2nd/8th century, Central Asia became gradually incorporated into the expanding Islamic world. This was also the time when, as a result of the Arab conquests, the spread of Islam was accompanied by a simultaneous wave of Arabisation. Then, following the demise of the Umayyad dynasty in 132/750, the Iranian lands came under the rule of the Abbasids who legitimised the use of Persian and Iranian customs within the framework of the religion of Islam. As part of the Islamic lands, the region shared many cultural features with its Muslim neighbours in the south and the west, but combined them with the certain features it shared with the world of the inner-Asian nomads. However, it

¹⁸ Mithra was the second-most important deity for the Zoroastrians and may even have occupied a position of parity with Ahura Mazda. He was associated with the Sun, and in time, the name Mithra [Mihr] became a common word for ‘Sun’, whilst the expression ‘Pa-i Mihr’ – meaning ‘the foot of the sun or sun god’ – indicated a mountainous land in the east where the sun rises. See, Mina Mingaleeva, ed., *Pamir – Krysha Mira. Sbornik proizvedenii o Pamire* (n.p., 2011). Available online at: https://skitalets.ru/information/books/pamir-krysha-mira-2410_4723/ [Last accessed, 11 June 2020].

¹⁹ Abusaid Shokhumorov, *Pamir – Strana Ariev* [Pamir: Land of the Aryan people] (Dushanbe, 1997).

²⁰ Dagiev, ‘Pamiri Ethnic Identity’, p. 25.

²¹ Ibid.

was the Sāmānids in particular, semi-independent governors of Transoxania for the Abbasids between 261 and 395/819 and 999, who promoted the revival of the Persian language, while also continuing to patronise Arabic to a significant degree.²² Indeed they can be said to have done more in this regard than other Persian dynasties of the age, such as the Ṣaffārīds (247–393/861–1003) or the Būyids (334–447/945–1055), who also ruled over parts of the Iranian plateau. It can be argued that the Sāmānid dynasty established the first state after the Arab invasion that was ruled over by indigenous rulers and furthermore brought virtually all of Greater Khurāsān under a unified government. For this reason, it has been judged one of the most effective dynasties in the history of the region and a factor in the renaissance of Persian culture and identity during the Islamic era.²³ Samarqand and Bukhārā, capital cities under the Sāmānids, flourished as centres of the study of poetry, astronomy, mathematics, philosophy, Qurʾān, *ḥadīth* and many other disciplines. It was also during Sāmānid rule that the first Ismaili *dāʿīs* reached the area which is now called Central Asia.²⁴

The Ismailis are one of the main branches of Shiʿi Islam. They emerged in the middle of the 2nd/8th century when the Shiʿi Muslim community split over the question of the succession to Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765). Those Shiʿis who continued to give allegiance to the line of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq through his son Ismāʿīl became known as the Ismailis. In this they differ from the Ithnā ʿasharīs (Twelver Shiʿi) who traced their imamate in the progeny of Mūsā al-Kāẓim (d. 183/799), a younger half-brother of Ismāʿīl b. Jaʿfar.

Following the death of Ismāʿīl b. Jaʿfar's son, Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl, around 179/795, the Ismailis bifurcated. Representatives of one branch, known as the Qarmatīs, believed that Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl would return as the Mahdī (or *qāʾim*). Adherents of the other branch, who became known as the Ismailis, engaged in promoting their own cause while maintaining anonymity to avoid persecution. In the 3rd/9th century they finally surfaced with a sophisticated political and doctrinal structure by which they were able to gain widespread support and political success. As

²² Elton L. Daniel, *The History of Iran* (London, 2001), p. 74.

²³ Richard Foltz, *A History of the Tajiks: Iranians of the East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019), p. 1.

²⁴ The term *dāʿī* (pl., *duʿāt*) refers to a religio-political missionary or propagandist responsible for spreading the Ismaili doctrine and winning followers for the imam. See, F. Daftary, 'Dāʿī', *EIS*, vol. 5, pp. 871–878.

a result, the Fatimid caliphate under the leadership of Imam 'Abd Allāh al-Mahdī was established in Ifrīqiya (present-day Tunisia and Algeria) in 297/909. After the Fatimids moved to Egypt, they established their capital at the newly-founded city on the Nile, which they named al-Qāhira (Cairo), and the influence of Ismaili doctrines spread considerably. The Fatimid empire at its height exerted its influence, through the work of the Ismaili *da'wa*, far beyond Egypt and North Africa, to lands such as Yemen, Iran, Central Asia and Sind. The Ismailis represented one of the largest branches of Shi'ism at the time, with the characteristics of an independent religious community, establishing an extensive network of *dā'īs* who travelled as far as India and the remoter regions of Central Asia.

By the 260s/870s, the *da'wa* had reached the Jibāl in western Persia during the time of the *dā'ī* Khalaf al-Ḥallāj, who established Rayy as his local headquarters. His successors extended the activities of the *da'wa* to Qumm, Iṣfahān, Hamadān and other cities in the region. Ghiyāth, the third *dā'ī* of the Jibāl, succeeded in extending the *da'wa*'s activities even further to Khurāsān on his own initiative. However, the Ismaili *da'wa* was not officially established in Khurāsān until the last decade of the 3rd/early 10th century by the *dā'ī* Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Khādim, who based the mission's headquarters at Nishāpūr.²⁵ Later Abū Sa'īd al-Sha'rānī, the successor of Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Khādim in Nishāpūr, managed to convert several of the province's notable military men. The next local head of the *da'wa*, al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī al-Marvazī, who was converted by Ghiyāth, had commanded the Sāmānid military forces in Sīstān. Al-Marvazī extended the *da'wa*'s activities to Herat, Ghūr, Maymana and other adjacent areas of Badakhshān in eastern Khurāsān, presently located in western Afghanistan. Apparently, there is a shrine in the village of Turbat (*turbat* means 'grave' and the village is named after the shrine) in Ishkāshim of modern Afghanistan that some people associate with al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī al-Marvazī. The shrine is called Mazār-i Sayyid Amīr Ḥusayn Sadād.²⁶ According to some beliefs amongst the Badakhshānī Ismailis, Amīr Ḥusayn was a preacher (*dā'ī*) who came to the region before the 5th/11th century. Although it is not certain whether al-Marvazī sought to promote the *da'wa* in Badakhshān, the association of his name with a shrine would seem to indicate that the earliest activities of the *da'wa* in the region took

²⁵ Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), pp. 112–113.

²⁶ Mir Baiz Khan, 'Living Traditions of Nasir Khusraw: A Study of Ismā'īli practices in Afghan Badakhshān' (Unpublished Fieldwork Report for the IIS, 2004), pp. 215–217.

place around his lifetime.²⁷ However, what is certain is that, despite rebelling against the Sāmānids and being defeated by them in 306/918, al-Marvazī was able to return to Khurāsān and in fact was made chief *dā'i* of Khurāsān, and later was succeeded by al-Nasafi.

Meanwhile, the Ismaili *da'wa* was already spreading through Kirmān, Sīstān, Multan, Baluchistān, Gurgān, Ṭabaristān, Rayy and Khwārazm.²⁸ The Sāmānid epoch (3rd–4th/9th–10th centuries), is thus known as the time when the Ismaili *da'wa* spread across Greater Khurāsān. Under the Sāmānids, who were able to create a strong centralised state, trade and commerce developed and flourished, connecting the most important cities and regions of Asia, such as China and India, with the Middle East and Europe. The fact that the Silk Road lay across the region eventually led to the further development of trading centres, a synthesis of cultures and various religions, the flowering of science, music, poetry and the expansion and enhancement of the cities of Khurāsān. The Sāmānids instigated the growth and development of the modern Persian language in the cities of Balkh, Bukhārā and Samarqand, and the language later on spread throughout the lands of what is now Central Asia, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and Azerbaijan. Later, it spread yet further afield into the Indian subcontinent, from about the 5th/11th century onwards.²⁹ As for the province of Badakhshān, one should not forget that it lies between major cities such as Samarqand, Bukhārā, Balkh and Herat which were centres of classical Persian language and culture in the 3rd/9th and 4th/10th centuries.³⁰ The cradle of the Persian literary renaissance lay in the eastern regions of Greater Iran, another term often used to refer to Greater Khurāsān and Transoxiana,³¹ and so the literary traditions of Badakhshān were a part of this. The first poems written in Persian, also known as *Darī*,

²⁷ Shaftolu Gulamadov, *The Hagiography of Nāṣir-i Khusraw and the Ismā'īlīs of Badakhshān* (PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2018), p. 65.

²⁸ Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs Their History and Doctrines* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), pp. 111–113.

²⁹ Lars Johanson and Christiane Bulut, ed., *Turkic-Iranian Contact Areas: Historical and Linguistic Aspects* (Wiesbaden, 2006), pp. 165–208; Muzaffar Alam, 'The Pursuit of Persian: Language in Mughal Politics', *Modern Asian Studies*, 32 (1998), pp. 317–349.

³⁰ Behrooz Mahmoodi-Bakhtiari, 'Planning the Persian Language in the Samanid Period', *Iran and the Caucasus*, 7 (2003), pp. 251–260.

³¹ Richard N. Frye, *The Heritage of Persia* (London, 1976), pp. 286–289; A.V. Williams Jackson, *Early Persian poetry, from the beginnings down to the time of Firdausi* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1920), pp. 17–19.

were composed in Central Asia. The first significant Persian poet was Abū ‘Abd Allāh Rūdakī (d. 330/941), who flourished in the 4th/10th century, when the Sāmānids were at the height of their power.³² By this time, the Persian language was already widespread in the major cities of the province of Badakhshān and even those people who preserved their own eastern Iranian dialects in the most remote valleys of Badakhshān still used Persian as a lingua franca: a language for literature, poetry and science.

It was during the time of the Sāmānid *amīr* Naṣr b. Aḥmad (r. 301–331/914–943) that, as a result of the activities of Ismaili *dā’īs*, the Ismaili Shi’i faith was remarkably successful in Khurāsān. According to Ibn al-Nadīm,³³ Naṣr b. Aḥmad himself was converted to Ismaili Islam by the *dā’ī* Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Nasafī (also known as Nakhshabī, d. 332/943). According to this same source, the Sāmānid *amīr* also recognised the imamate of the Fatimid Imam-caliph al-Qā’im bi-Amr Allāh (r. 322–334/934–946) and paid dues to him.³⁴ As mentioned, Daftary argues that the *da’wa* was officially taken to Khurāsān during the last decade of the 3th/9th century by Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Khādim, who based himself in Nishāpūr.³⁵ As Khurāsān’s chief *dā’ī*, al-Nasafī was one of the first to introduce Neoplatonic philosophy into his thought. His major work, *Kitāb al-Maḥṣūl*, written around 300/912 and summarising his views on prophecy, and no longer extant, was widely circulated and acquired much popularity in Qarmaṭī circles.³⁶ However, al-Nasafī’s views were criticised by Abū Ḥatīm al-Rāzī (d. 322/934) al-Nasafī’s contemporary

³² A. Mirzoev, *Abūabdullo Rūdakī* (Dushanbe, 1958), p. 23; A. Afsahzod, *Odamushshu’aro Rūdakī* (2nd ed., Dushanbe: ‘Adib’, 2008), p. 20; Hokim Qalandarov, *Rudakī va Ismoiliā* [Rūdakī and the Ismailis] (Dushanbe, 2012).

³³ Abu’l-Faraj Muḥammad b. Ishāq al-Nadīm (d. 385/995) was a bibliophile of Baghdad and compiler of the Arabic encyclopaedic bibliographic catalogue known as the *Kitāb al-Fihrist*.

³⁴ A. Sameev, *Somoniën dar oinai ta’rīkh* [Sāmānids in the Mirror of History] (Khujand, 1998), vol. 2, p. 165. F. Daftary, *The Ismā’īlīs: Their History and Doctrines* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), pp. 111–113.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

³⁶ On al-Nasafī and his work, see Daftary, *The Ismā’īlīs* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), p. 29, and the introduction to Abū Tammām, *The “Bāb al-shayṭān” from Abū Tammām’s Kitāb al-shajara*, ed. Wilferd Madelung and Paul E. Walker (Leiden, 1998). Al-Nasafī’s *Kitāb al-Maḥṣūl* can be partly reconstructed through citations in al-Rāzī’s *Kitāb al-Iṣlāḥ*, al-Bustī’s *Kashf asrār al-Bāṭiniyya*, and al-Kirmānī’s *Kitāb al-Riyāḍ*.

dā'ī from Rayy, who in his *Kitāb al-Iṣlāḥ* sought to correct certain aspects of al-Nasafī's teachings.³⁷ Al-Rāzī's corrections were criticised, in due course, by Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī (d. after 361/971), al-Nasafī's student and successor in Khurāsān.³⁸ Al-Nasafī and other early *dā'īs* of the Iranian lands, such as al-Rāzī and al-Sijistānī, through their highly sophisticated works, aimed at attracting the ruling elite and the educated classes to the teachings of the *da'wa*. Their works on *kalām* (speculative theology), revolving around the central Shi'ī doctrine of the imamate, used the most advanced and intellectually fashionable philosophical terminology of the time, without compromising the essence of their religious message.³⁹

Daftary further argues that it was in such circumstances that al-Nasafī, al-Rāzī, and most importantly al-Sijistānī, drawing on a type of Neoplatonism then widespread among the educated circles of Khurāsān, wrote on various philosophical themes that are generally absent in the writings of al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān (d. 363/974) and other contemporary Ismaili authors living in the Arab lands and North Africa. The Iranian *dā'īs* elaborated complex metaphysical systems of thought with a distinct Neoplatonic emanational cosmology, representing the earliest tradition of philosophical theology in Shi'ī Islam.⁴⁰

When Naṣr b. Aḥmad, under the influence of the *dā'ī* al-Nasafī, became an Ismaili he sent dues to the value of 119,000 (Fatimid) *dīnars* to the Fatimid Imam-caliph al-Qā'im, as compensation for the death of al-Nasafī's teacher, the *dā'ī* al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī al-Marvazī (who lived between the second half of the 3th/9th to the first half of the 4th/10th century), and who had been executed by the Sāmānids.⁴¹ According to

³⁷ Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Iṣlāḥ*, ed. Ḥasan Mīnūchihr and Mahdī Muḥaqqiq (Tehran, 1377 Sh./1998), with an English introduction by Shin Nomoto, pp. 1–34. For al-Rāzī's other work on prophetology, *A'lām al-nubuwwa*, which is a record of an open debate with the philosopher Abū Bakr al-Rāzī.

³⁸ Eva-Maria Lika, *Proof of Prophecy and the Refutation of the Ismā'īliyya: The Kitāb Ithbāt Nubuwwat al-Nabī by the Zaydī al-Mu'ayyad bi-llāh al-Hārūnī* (d. 411/1020) (Berlin, 2017), p. 68.

³⁹ Farhad Daftary, 'The Iranian School of Philosophical Ismailism', *Ishrāk* [Illumination], *EIF*, vol. 4, pp. 15–16.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁴¹ B. Dodge, tr., *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm: A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture*, vol. 2 (New York, 1970), p. 467; also translated in Samuel Stern, 'The Early Ismā'īli Missionaries in North-West Persia and in Khurāsān and Transoxania', *BSOAS*, 23 (1960), pp. 56–90; Patricia Crone and Luke Treadwell, 'A New Text on Ismailism at the Samanid Court', pp. 238–261, in Patricia Crone, *The Iranian Reception of Islam: The Non-Traditionalist Strands* (Leiden, 2016), p. 238.

Ibn al-Nadīm, the Fatimid imam-caliph wrote a letter offering blessings and support for the reign of Naṣr b. Aḥmad Sāmānī. However, the sudden conversion of the Sāmānid *amīr* worried the Sunni '*ulamā*' (religious scholars) and the Sunni establishment as a whole, and they responded quickly by instigating his son Nūḥ to rise up against him. The plot against Naṣr b. Aḥmad, hatched by Nūḥ with the support of the Sunni '*ulamā*' and the Turkish soldiery, brought an end to his reign.⁴² The accession of Nūḥ (r. 331–343/943–954) led to the execution of al-Nasafī and most of his associates, which opened the way for the Turkish *amīrs* in the Sāmānid army, backed by the Sunni '*ulamā*', to take over the running of the Sāmānid state.⁴³ However, this military coup not only ended the reign of Naṣr b. Aḥmad, but eventually weakened the Sāmānid state itself and led to the fall of the most successful Persian/Tajik state in Greater Khurāsān since the Arab invasions.

Regarding these events Abusaid Shokhumorov (1955–1999), a leading Tajik scholar in the study of the Central Asian Ismailis, says that following the massacre of Ismailis during the reign of the later Sāmānid *amīrs*, the creative movement of the Tajik (Iranian) people, which had developed within the framework of Ismaili Islam, was suppressed in Central Asia and control of the Sāmānid state was seized by *amīrs* such as Sebūktigin (r. 367–387/977–997), the founder of the Ghaznavid dynasty.⁴⁴ This was a period of dramatic change in the history of the region. Previously, movements such as those of the Qarmaṭīs, the

⁴² Nūḥ I (r. 331–343/943–954), called for a *jihād* (or religious war) against the Qarmaṭī 'heretics' and many Ismailis were persecuted all over eastern Khurāsān and Transoxania. Nevertheless, there is some evidence that neither Ismaili propaganda nor the *da'wa* disappeared as the Ismailis changed from promoting the *da'wa* overtly and made it a covert activity. *Da'wa* activities continued in Khurāsān under the leadership of *dā'īs* such as al-Nasafī's son Maṣ'ūd, nicknamed 'Dihqān' (landowner), and Abū Ya'qūb Ishāq b. Aḥmad al-Sijistānī (d. after 361/971). Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), p. 113. Also Stern, 'The Early Ismā'īlī Missionaries, pp. 59–60; reprinted in his *Studies in Early Ismā'īlism* (Jerusalem and Leiden, 1983), pp. 189–233.

⁴³ Rashīd al-Dīn Faḡl Allāh Hamadānī, *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh: qismat-i Ismā'īliyan*, ed. Muḥammad Taqī Dānīshpazhūh and Muḥammad Mudarrisī Zanjānī (Tehran, 1338 Sh./1959), p. 13.

⁴⁴ Abusaid Shokhumorov, 'Somonien va junbishi Ismoilīā' [The Sāmānids and the Ismaili Movement], in A. Muhammadkhojaev and M. Mahmadjonov ed., *Falsafa dar ahdi Somoniēn* [Philosophy during the Sāmānid Era] (Dushanbe, 1999), p. 168.

Shu'ūbiyya⁴⁵ and the Mu'tazila had enjoyed considerable success.⁴⁶ Reasoning and rational thought, incorporating Greek philosophy, became fused with and synthesised by these new movements. Now, the Ismaili *da'wa* was considered a direct threat to the Sunni establishment and their protectors the Ghaznavid sultans, since the Ismaili *dā'īs* and their sympathisers were supported by the Fatimids in Egypt, whose spiritual authority they acknowledged rather than that of the Abbasid caliph and the Sunni establishment.

The Ismaili *Da'wa* in Central Asia

However, with regard to the spread of the Ismaili *da'wa* in Central Asia, Daftary says that in fact it seems to have met with greater success there after the demise of the Sāmānids.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, it could still face tough resistance from the authorities. As such the Ismailis, who were leaning towards rational thought and philosophy and had endeavoured to bring both intellectual traditions into religious discourse, were accused by Sunni '*ulamā*' of being *kāfirs* (unbelievers) and *thānāwiyyūn* (dualists).⁴⁸

However, since the Ismaili *da'wa* was propagated in Khurāsān by *dā'īs* who were well-informed people, religious activists, poets, philosophers and writers such as al-Nasafi, Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, al-Sijistānī and Nāṣir-i Khusraw, a large volume of literature was produced on Ismaili theology and philosophy.⁴⁹ Hence one can say that the Ismaili *da'wa* never diminished completely but continued through many agencies including *dā'īs* and the newly converted Ismailis who had fled from the Sāmānid

⁴⁵ The Shu'ūbiyya was a movement in early Muslim society which rejected the privileged status that the Arabs had hitherto enjoyed. Most of the Shu'ūbīs were Persians, although references to Aramaeans, Copts and Berbers, among others, are also found in the literature. See, S. Enderwitz, 'Shu'ūbiyya', *EI2*, vol. 9, pp. 513–516.

⁴⁶ Mu'tazila is the name given to a religious movement founded in Basra in the first half of the 2nd/8th century by Wāṣib b. 'Aṭā' (d. 131/748), subsequently becoming one of the most important theological schools of Islam. See, D. Gimaret, 'Mu'tazila', *EI2*, vol. 7, pp. 783–793.

⁴⁷ Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs* (2nd ed. Cambridge, 2007), p. 203.

⁴⁸ Muḥammad Riḍā Nāṣirī, *Farhang va tamadduni Islāmī dar Qalamru-yi Sāmāniyān* (Tehran, 1342 Sh./1963), p. 77; Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), pp. 112–113.

⁴⁹ Muḥammad Riḍā Nāṣirī, *Farhang va tamadduni Islāmī dar Qalamru-yi Sāmāniyān*, p. 77; Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), pp. 112–113.

court to the mountainous areas of Khurāsān where they were able to maintain their religious life.

One such region was Badakhshān, which is characterised by its high mountains and harsh environment, making this region a safe haven for the Ismailis in times of turmoil, as when they fled from persecution in the cities of the Sāmānid state.⁵⁰ Even though some scholars have argued that Shi‘i and Ismaili ideas and teachings spread into Khurāsān and its mountainous regions such as Badakhshān long before the establishment of the Sāmānid state,⁵¹ others are of the opinion that the Ismaili *da‘wa* initially reached Badakhshān during the Sāmānid period, since the Ismaili *dā‘īs* were operating more or less openly in the territories under Sāmānid control.

The region of Badakhshān, and, in particular, the far-flung mountainous districts, became vital for the survival of the Ismailis and people associated with them, acting as a shield against persecution instigated by the Sunni Ghaznavids who brought the reign of the Sāmānids to an end, and then by their successors, the Saljūqs (5th–6th/11th–12th centuries). The persecution of the Ismailis continued, however. In 436/1044–1045, a large number of Ismailis, who had recognised the imamate of the Fatimid Imam-caliph al-Mustanṣir bi’llāh (r. 427–487/1036–1094) as a result of the activities of the Fatimid *dā‘īs*, were massacred in Khurāsān on the orders of the local Qarakhānid ruler, Bughrā Khān (r. 409–423/1018–1051). Conversely, despite such events, the Ismailis in the region survived, and in 488/1095 Aḥmad b. Khidr, another Qarakhānid who ruled over Bukhārā, Samarqand and western Farghāna,⁵² was accused by the local Sunni ‘*ulamā*’ of having converted to Ismailism and was executed.⁵³

This persecution is reflected in the poetry of Nāṣir-i Khusraw where he mentions the Turkic rulers in general, and the Saljūqs in particular, who

⁵⁰ Abusaid Shokhumorov, *Razdelenie Badakhshana i sud’by Ismailizma* [The Delimitation of Badakhshān and the Fate of Ismailism] (Dushanbe, 2008), p. 26.

⁵¹ Yahia Baiza, ‘The Shi‘a Isma‘ili *Da‘wat* in Khurasan: From its Early Beginning to the Ghaznawid Era’, *Journal of Shi‘a Islamic Studies*, 8 (2015), pp. 37–59; David Morgan, *Medieval Persia, 1040–1797* (London, 1988), pp. 19–20; Elton L. Daniel, *The History of Iran* (London, 2001), pp. 73–75.

⁵² On the history and topography of Farghāna, see M. Zoolshoev, ‘Farghāna’, *EIS*, vol. 5, pp. 748–782.

⁵³ Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, vol. 9, pp. 180–181 and vol. 10, pp. 58–59; al-Maqrīzī, *Itti‘āz*, vol. 2, pp. 191–192; and V.V. Barthold, *Turkestan: Down to the Mongol Invasion* (London, 1928), pp. 251, 304–305 and 316–318. In Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), p. 203.

dominated the eastern Islamic lands and persecuted the Ismailis of Khurāsān. For Nāṣir-i Khusraw, Khurāsān was the land in which the *āzādmard*, the free-spirited and creative men, lived and built wonderful cities and culture, giving rise to science, religion, poetry and philosophy. However, with the rule of the foreign invaders, the Saljūqs, all these achievements were destroyed:

The land of Khurāsān, once the home of culture,
Has now become a mine rich in barbarian demons.
Wisdom once had a home in Balkh, but its house
Now lies in ruins, its fortune overturned.
If the kingdom of Khurāsān was once like Solomon's,
How has it now become the kingdom of the cursed devil?
The land of Khurāsān once feasted on religion,
Now religion has become the companion of avaricious Qarun.
The house of Qarun has now made all Khurāsān
A model for the world entire of how sinister fate unfolds.
Their slaves at one time were the Turks.
But sometimes things turn this way and sometimes that,
So now they themselves are slaves to the Turks.
Has not that star of Khurāsān turned sinister and dark?
Even the servant of the Qipchāq is now a lord
And the free-born wife willingly a handmaid.
Consequently, if the deficient man becomes a lord,
Learning declines and vice increases.
I shall not give my heart to the slaves of the world,
Even though you have pledged your heart to Fate,
You might place your trust in the sinister wolf,
But the wise consider the wolf as not to be trusted.⁵⁴
(Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Dīvān*, 37: 16–26)

While in exile in Badakhshān as a result of the persecution of the Saljūqs, Nāṣir-i Khusraw recalled his homeland of Khurāsān with nostalgia, sorrow and bitterness:

Pass by, sweet breeze of Khurāsān,
To one imprisoned deep in the valley of Yumgān,

⁵⁴ Cited and tr., in Alice C. Hunsberger, *Nasir Khusraw, The Ruby of Badakhshan: A Portrait of the Persian Poet, Traveller and Philosopher* (London, 2000), pp. 44–45. For the original Persian version see Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Dīvān*, ed. M. Mīnuvī and M. Muḥaqqiq (Tehran, 1388 Sh./2009).

Who sits huddled in comfortless tight straits,
 Robbed of all wealth, all goods, all hope.
 Cruel fate has rudely stolen away by force
 All peace from his heart, all rest from his body.
 His heart swells more full of sorrow than a pomegranate
 bursting with seed,
 His body shrinks, more consumed than a shrivelled winter reed.
 That beautiful face and that handsome figure
 Are now fallen into weakness, ugliness and ruin.
 That face, once bright as spring's anemones,
 Crackles now like autumn leaves from exile's miseries.
 Even family turn away from him like strangers.
 None can help him now, save the mercy of God.⁵⁵

(Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Divān*, 208: 1–7)

Nāṣir-i Khusraw and the Ismailis of Badakhshān

The revival of the Ismaili *da'wa* in Khurāsān after the fall of the Sāmānids is associated with the activities of the most famous Ismaili *dā'i*, poet, traveller and philosopher, Nāṣir-i Khusraw. As he says in his *Safar-nāma* ('Travelogue'), Abū Mu'īn Nāṣir b. Khusraw b. Ḥārith al-Qubādiyānī was born in 394/1004 in the Marv district of north-eastern Khurāsān, modern-day Qubādiyān in present Tajikistan. In the past, it lay in the province of Balkh whose capital is now in Afghanistan. Little is known of his childhood and early years except for a few references in his own poems, and other works. Although his works clearly show that he became an Ismaili, it is not quite clear how and when this happened. With reference to his *Safar-nāma* where he describes his conversion symbolically as an 'awakening dream' or 'mid-life crisis', it seems that perhaps sometime after his 'dream', which is regarded as his spiritual journey, he set out on the *hāj*j (pilgrimage) and ultimately reaching Cairo the capital of the Fatimid caliphate and the centre of their *da'wa*. Daftary states that '[d]espite the opinion of earlier scholars, it is almost certain, as Ivanow and Corbin had perviously argued, that Nāṣir-i Khusraw had already become an Ismaili, probably having previously been an adherent of Twelver Shi'ism, prior to his departure for Egypt'.⁵⁶

Nāṣir thus embarked on a seven-year journey, intending to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, going from Marv towards Nishāpūr, which at the

⁵⁵ Hunsberger, *Nasir Khusraw*, pp. 228–229.

⁵⁶ Daftary, *The Ismā'ilīs* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), p. 206.

time was one of the cultural centres of Khurāsān. However, he took a less direct route for the pilgrimage, as he then headed towards the Caspian coast in northern Iran, into eastern Anatolia, and down through Syria and Palestine. Although he did make the pilgrimage to Mecca from Jerusalem, he did not go back to his native Khurāsān but on returning to Jerusalem made his way to Cairo. On the return journey from Egypt, he made his way to the Hijaz, across the Arabian Peninsula, and through Iran, some seven years after his departure, to his home in Balkh. Throughout his travels he kept a detailed journal, on which the *Safar-nāma* is based.

In the *Safar-nāma*, we are informed that he visited the Fatimid court in Cairo and from his *Divān* of poetry we learn that there he met and studied with the important Fatimid *dā'ī* al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shirāzī (d. 470/1078).⁵⁷

The restored mausoleum of Nāṣir-i Khusraw in Yumgān

⁵⁷ Al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shirāzī was a prominent *dā'ī*, who belonged to an Ismaili family from Daylam. Al-Mu'ayyad's growing influence in Fārs resulted in court intrigues and Sunni reaction against him. In 438/1046, he was obliged to leave for Cairo, where he arrived in 439/1047. In 450/1058, he was appointed *dā'ī al-du'āt*, a post he held for almost 20 years until shortly before his death in 470/1078. As chief *dā'ī*, al-Mu'ayyad delivered the weekly lectures, known as the *majālis al-ḥikma*; these lectures, entitled *al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya*, were compiled in due course. See, Daftary, *Historical Dictionary*, p. 177.

He became thoroughly imbued with the Shi'ī Ismaili doctrine of the Fatimids, and was appointed as the *ḥujja* or chief *dā'ī* of Khurāsān by the Fatimid Imam-caliph al-Mustanṣir bi'llāh (r. 427–487/1036–1094). On returning to his native Khurāsān, Nāṣir was confronted with enormous challenges, as recounted in his *Dīvān*, facing danger and death threats while trying to spread the Ismaili *da'wa* in Balkh and in Māzandarān in northern Iran. In due course, Nāṣir was subjected to yet more severe persecution by the Sunni authorities, being accused as irreligious (Persian, *baddīn*), heretic (*mulhid*), Qarmaṭī and Rāfiḍī.⁵⁸ His house was destroyed, and there was even an attempt on his life, forcing him to flee.⁵⁹ Nāṣir-i Khusraw eventually ended up living in exile in the valley of Yumgān, a district which is now in modern-day Badakhshān of Afghanistan. There, he found refuge in a land ruled by an Ismaili *amīr*, Abu'l-Ma'ālī 'Alī b. al-Asad, whom he praised in his *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*:

Because these would-be scholars have branded anyone who studies the science of creation as a *kāfir*, those who do seek out the 'how' and the 'why' have been struck dumb. Those who expound this knowledge have fallen speechless; ignorance has taken over people's minds, and especially the people of our land of Khurāsān and the realms of the East. The *amīr* of Badakhshān 'Ayn al-Dawla wa'l-Dīn, Zayn al-Milla, Shams al-A'lā, Abu'l-Ma'ālī 'Alī b. al-Asad,⁶⁰ says in this sense:

The learned man's glory lies in his knowledge and culture.
 The ignorant man's glory lies in gowns and stolen finery.
 The learning and refinement of the scholar have now become
 Contemptible – how many men possess culture today?
 Nobodies are at the forefront while the delighting
 Superior men are shoved to a far remove – an astonishment!
 No one knows the cause of this, apart from Him
 Who is the cause of all causes.

⁵⁸ Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Zād al-musāfirīn*, pp. 3, 402, also his *Dīvān*, ed. Taqavī, pp. 110, 217, 430, 448; ed. Mīnuvī, pp. 162, 234, 287, 436; tr. Wilson and Aavani, pp. 73, 113. See, Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), p. 206.

⁵⁹ Nāṣir-i Khusraw refers to these unhappy events in many of his odes; see his *Dīvān*, ed. Taqavī, pp. 110, 217, 430, 448; ed. Mīnuvī, pp. 162, 234, 287, 436; tr. Wilson and Aavani, pp. 73, 113. See, Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), p. 206.

⁶⁰ Little is known of this Ismaili ruler; cf. Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), pp. 206–207, where he is described as 'the autonomous *amīr* of Badakhshān'.

‘Alī b. al-Asad says so: From top to bottom
The world is pain and toilsomeness (*ta‘ab*).⁶¹

Thus, it appears that ‘Alī b. al-Asad, the *amīr* of Badakhshān, was an educated man, and a poet who wrote in Persian, some of his verses being cited in the *Jāmi‘ al-ḥikmatayn*. He also asked Nāṣir-i Khusraw to elucidate a long philosophical poem written in Persian a century earlier by Abu’l-Haytham Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan al-Jurjānī (4th/10th century).⁶² The evidence in *Jāmi‘ al-ḥikmatayn* indicates that ‘Alī b. al-Asad either was an Ismaili himself or had a strong interest in Ismaili beliefs, which clearly shows not only the spread of Ismailism in Badakhshān prior to Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s arrival, but also the pervasiveness of the Persian language and admiration for the Persian language and poetry in the region. ‘Alī b. al-Asad was also an independent ruler whose dynasty survived in Khurāsān under Saljūq dominion, doubtless due in part to the inhospitable mountain terrain of his kingdom making it difficult to invade. Nāṣir-i Khusraw called him ‘vigilant, astute, brilliant, incisive of intellect, far-sighted, subtle in reflection, correct in his opinions, possessed of a powerful memory, pure of heart, utterly praiseworthy and yet, alongside all these virtues and merits, a religious man’.⁶³ Beben says that despite the fact that ‘there is no documented evidence’, ‘[i]t is [still] possible that one of ‘Alī b. al-Asad ancestors may have been among the converts at the Sāmānid court in the previous century and that the remote corner of Badakhshān could have served as a place of refuge for Ismaili sympathisers fleeing from the persecution unleashed by the Amīr Nūḥ and his successors.’⁶⁴ Certainly the fact that Nāṣir-i Khusraw sought refuge in Badakhshān would seem to corroborate the idea that it was known as a haven for Ismailis.

Nāṣir spent the rest of his life in exile in Badakhshān, championing the Ismaili cause and teachings. There he achieved some peace and tranquility and produced some of his major philosophical and theological works. He was also successful in spreading the Ismaili *da‘wa* and gaining supporters and followers, both among the ordinary people and the ruling elite. The success of his work in Badakhshān can still be seen in his legacy

⁶¹ Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Kitāb-i jāmi‘ al-ḥikmatayn*, tr. Ormsby, *Between Reason and Revelation*, pp. 30–31.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁶⁴ Beben, *The Legendary Biographies*, p. 68.

there where he is regarded as a *sayyid*, *pīr*, *shāh*, *ḥaḍrat* and *ḥujjat*.⁶⁵ As Eric Ormsby puts it: 'Though his work proved influential, often in surreptitious ways, Nāṣir himself remained a puzzle to later writers, and legends, often fabulous, sprouted up about his name'.⁶⁶ However, there were also people who branded him a 'heretic'. For example, a little-known heresiographer Ibn al-Dā'ī al-Rāzī regarded Nāṣir-i Khusraw as the founder of a heretical sect known as 'the Nāṣiriyya', also stating that 'he was a cursed poet who led many people astray'.⁶⁷

As regards his poetry, Wladimir Ivanow, a pioneer of modern Ismaili studies, wrote: 'A tall, robust, rustic looking man, Nasir brings into his works the rustic, primitive atmosphere . . . Nasir was not a pioneer in writing on philosophical matters in Persian, but his style is extremely unartistic, dull, full of unnecessary repetitions . . .'.⁶⁸ However the general consensus, both among Persian as well as Western scholars, is that Nāṣir-i Khusraw is a vital figure in the history of Persian literature, a master of both poetry and prose and a profound thinker. Shibli Nu'mānī, a 20th-century scholar of Persian literature who wrote a history of poets and literature of Iran, stated: 'Before everyone else, Nāṣir-i Khusraw inserted philosophical ideas and concepts into poetry'.⁶⁹ Further, Badi' al-Zamān Furūzānfar asserts that 'Nāṣir-i Khusraw is a master with a powerful poetic nature and a rare style. His poetry is profound and meaningful, and his manner of expression reaches the highest degree of solidity and strength. The versification of scientific laws and arguments that Khusrawī Sarakhsī initiated, Nāṣir-i Khusraw carried to its perfection'.⁷⁰ Eric Ormsby also points out that, 'As his works have been

⁶⁵ All these titles are discussed in the section on the Ismaili history in Badakhshān.

⁶⁶ Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Kitāb-i jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*, tr. Eric Ormsby as *Between Reason and Revelation: Twin Wisdoms Reconciled* (London, 2012), p. 6.

⁶⁷ Ibn al-Dā'ī, *Kitāb Tabṣirat al-'awāmm*, ed. A. Iqbāl (Tehran, 1313 Sh./1934), p. 184. In, Ormsby, *Between Reason and Revelation*, p. 6.

⁶⁸ W. Ivanow, *Nasir-i Khusraw and Ismailism* (Bombay, 1948), p. 11, in Ormsby, *Between Reason and Revelation*, p. 7.

⁶⁹ Shibli Nu'mānī, *Shi'r al-'ajam ya tārikh-i shi'r va adabiyāt-i Īrān*, tr. Muḥammad Taqī Fakhr Dā'ī Gilānī (2nd ed., Tehran, 1365 Sh./1986), vol. 5, pp. 177–179. See also, Alice C. Hunsberger, ed., *Pearls of Persia: Philosophical Poetry of Nāṣir-i Khusraw* (London, 2012), p. xviii.

⁷⁰ Badi' al-Zamān Furūzānfar, *Sukhan va sukhavarān* (4th ed., Tehran, 1369 Sh./1990), p. 154, note 1. Quoted in Hunsberger, *Pearls of Persia*, p. xxi.

published and studied, his originality as a thinker as well as an early master of Persian prose and poetry has been recognised and acclaimed.⁷¹

While in exile, Nāṣir-i Khusraw completed a number of treatises including *Gushāyish va rahāyish*, *Khawān al-ikhwān*, the *Shish faṣl*, *Wajh-i dīn*, and *Zād al-musāfirīn*, probably his greatest philosophical and theological works, as well as a portion of his *Dīvān* of poetry, while also spreading the *da'wa* and the Ismaili interpretation of Shi'ī Islam among the inhabitants of Badakhshān and surrounding areas. However, in this context, one should not forget that the philosophical works written by Nāṣir-i Khusraw and other Ismaili *dā'īs* were never meant to be understood by the majority in any age, and it was always the case that only a minority of educated individuals (later designated by terms such as *pīr* and *khalīfa*) were able to read and understand this literature, and so interpret it for ordinary believers, the *mustajīb*s. But it is unlikely that someone such as Nāṣir-i Khusraw, who had committed his life to the Ismaili *da'wa*, having gone to Badakhshān would not have sought to propagate the faith there.

Whether Nāṣir-i Khusraw was the first to convert the local people is unknown, but as an ardent Ismaili missionary he certainly preached and taught Ismailism in the region. According to his own testimony, he sent one book with missionary purposes (*yakī kitāb-i da'wat*) to all parts of the world (*aṭrāf-i jahān*) every year and was the commander of the *shī'at* in Yumgān.⁷²

One of the most important of the works Nāṣir-i Khusraw wrote in Badakhshān is his *Wajh-i dīn*, a masterpiece of *ta'wīl*, remarkable for its succinctness and clarity, which was evidently designed to address certain matters concerning Ismaili beliefs in the Persian language and which served subsequently as the main source of religious knowledge for the Ismaili *khalīfas* in Badakhshān. As Daftary puts it, 'Nāṣir simply and masterfully applies his esoteric exegesis to the system of ideas, concepts, doctrines and methods of interpretation propounded in the Ismā'īlī works

⁷¹ Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Kitāb-i jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*, tr. Ormsby as *Between Reason and Revelation*, p. 7.

⁷² Gulamadov, *The Hagiography of Nāṣir-i Khusraw*, p. 7. 'Gratitude to God because of Whose grace I have become the commander over the soul and property of the Shī'at in Yamgān' (*shukr an khudāy-ra kih bih Yumgān zi faẓl-i ū, bar jān-u māl-i shī'at farmān ravā shudam*) in Ḥakīm Abū Mu'īn Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Dīvān*, ed. Naṣr Allāh Taqavī (Tehran: Kitābkhānah-i Tihrān, 1304-7/1925-28), p. 283, line 19. *Dīvān-i ash'ār*, ed. Mujtabā Mīnuvī and Mahdī Muḥaqqiq (Tehran, 1353 Sh./1974), p. 140, line 36.

of an earlier period, works that the exile in Yumgān took as a representation of the ideally valid and sacred truth'.⁷³

The date of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's death is not known, but some sources indicate that it occurred in the year 470/1077, while other accounts mention the year 481/1088, and that it happened in Yumgān, where his tomb is still a popular place for pilgrimage, as that of a great Ismaili philosopher or indeed as a Sufi master whose fame has spread throughout the region.⁷⁴ Over the years Nāṣir-i Khusraw acquired the reputation of a miracle-worker. Many stories have been narrated and recorded about him and some of these have been published.⁷⁵ Abdulmamad Iloliev has argued that one cannot underestimate their importance for the study of Ismailism in Badakhshān: 'where the gap between the oral and written traditions was not filled until the 19th and early 20th century, oral materials are considerably important in understanding and interpretation of the events in the past'.⁷⁶ What is more, the sorts of legends that came to surround his persona were of the kind that have always been associated with famous persons, historical figures, religious authorities or heroes. They come to form part of the biographies of these prominent individuals and play an important part in the life, history and beliefs of a given group of people, a community or nation, and the legacies of these religious and heroic persons live on in the memories of the people who honour and revere them. So, fabrications and narrations of legends once again exhibit Nāṣir-i Khusraw's significant role in the history of the Ismaili religious community, as well as the identity and traditions of the Ismailis of Central Asia. Alice Hunsberger in her biography of Nāṣir-i Khusraw concluded that these narratives, 'reveal clues of the popular conception of this man; that is, what is remembered of the man can give us an inkling of the powerful effect he had on the public consciousness'.⁷⁷

As regards the later medieval history of the Ismailis in Iran, after the establishment of the Nizārī Ismaili *da'wa* at Alamūt in the late 5th/11th

⁷³ Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), p. 209.

⁷⁴ Mehdi Aminrazvi, 'Nāṣir-i Khusraw', *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Science, and Technology in Islam*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 2014), pp. 71–74.

⁷⁵ Saidjalol Badakhshi, *Bahr ul-akhbor: silsilai hikoia tho doir ba ha'eti Nosiri Khusraw va sa'hati u ba Badakhshonzamin* [Ocean of News: A Sequence of Legends about the Life and the Journey of Nāṣir-i Khusraw in Badakhshān] (Khārūgh, 1992).

⁷⁶ Abdulmamad Iloliev, *The Ismā'īlī-Sufī Sage of Pamir: Mubarak-i Wakhani and the Esoteric Tradition of the Pamir Muslims* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2008), p. 31.

⁷⁷ Hunsberger, *Nasir Khusraw*, p. 18.

century, it might be argued that they knew nothing of Nāṣir-i Khusraw and his writings.⁷⁸ One might potentially agree with Daniel Beben's statement that this is the case since there is no direct reference to Nāṣir-i Khusraw or his work in known Nizārī writings.⁷⁹ However, there are several studies that present evidence to show that the Nizārī Ismailis were aware of Nāṣir-i Khusraw. One such by Daryoush Mohammad Poor has identified a particular tradition attributed to the Prophet, cited by Nāṣir-i Khusraw in the *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*, and later to be found in the works of two important Ismaili thinkers, al-Shahrastānī's *Majlis* written in the 6th/12th century and in al-Ṭūsī's *Rawḍa-yi taslīm* written in the 7th/13th century.⁸⁰ 'God the Exalted established His religion on the analogy with His creation of the world so that one might be guided from His creation to His religion and from there be led to His Oneness (*yegānegī*).'⁸¹ It is possible that all three scholars had access to the same source which is yet unknown but equally that al-Shahrastānī had read Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*, and possibly al-Ṭūsī also, which would indicate the continuity of an intellectual tradition. In addition, both Hermann Landolt and Daryoush Mohammad Poor have pointed out that the Sufi 'Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī (492–526/1098–1131) is held to have cited verses from one of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's poems;⁸² he lived at the height of the Alamūt era and was aware of Ismaili beliefs, examining the Nizārī doctrine of *ta'lim* and challenging al-Ghazālī's polemical account of their thinking.⁸³ If

⁷⁸ Beben, *The Legendary Biographies*, p. 114.

⁷⁹ Apparently, it was in the tradition of philosophy to not follow a strict regime of referencing.

⁸⁰ Daryoush Mohammad Poor, 'Extra-Ismaili Sources and a Shift of Paradigm in Nizārī Ismailism', in Orkhan Mir-Kasimov ed., *Intellectual Interactions in the Islamic World: the Ismaili Thread* (London, 2020), p. 235.

⁸¹ Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Kitāb-i jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*, tr. Ormsby, *Between Reason and Revelation*, p. 145.

⁸² 'In this short notice on Nāṣir-i Khusraw, Jāmī (d. 898/1492) cites six verses which, he says, were quoted by 'Ayn al-Quḍāt in his *Zubdat al-ḥaqā'iq* from a poem by Nāṣir-i Khusraw', in Hermann Landolt, 'Early Evidence for the Reception of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Poetry in Sufism: 'Ayn al-Quḍāt's Letter on the Ta'limis', in Omar Alī-de-Unzaga, ed., *Fortresses of the Intellect: Ismaili and other Islamic Studies in Honour of Farhad Daftary* (London, 2011), pp. 369–386.

⁸³ Daryoush Mohammad Poor, 'Extra-Ismaili Sources and a Shift of Paradigm in Nizārī Ismailism', pp. 219–245. See also his *Command and Creation: A Cosmological Treatise*, a Persian edition and English translation of Muḥammad al-Shahrastānī's *Majlis-i maktūb* (London, 2021), Introduction.

Nāṣir-i Khusraw was known to other people who lived and wrote at the time when Nizārī Ismailis had their state in the land of Iran then surely, with their admiration for knowledge and science, and their use of Persian as opposed to Arabic, the Nizārīs would have been aware of the existence of Nāṣir-i Khusraw, the only Ismaili *dā'ī* of Fatimid times who wrote his works, prose and poetry, in Persian.

The Badakhshānī Ismailis during the Alamūt period

Following the death of the Fatimid Imam-caliph al-Mustanṣir in 487/1094, the dispute over his succession led to a major split in the Ismaili community, dividing the Ismailis into Nizārī and Musta'li branches. Al-Mustanṣir had initially designated his eldest son Abū Maṣṣūr Nizār (437–488/1045–1095) as his successor. However, al-Afḍal as the all-powerful vizier and 'commander of the armies', whose sister was married to Nizār's younger half-brother Abu'l-Qāsim Aḥmad (467–495/1074–1101), moved swiftly and placed Aḥmad on the Fatimid throne with the title of al-Musta'li bi'llāh.⁸⁴ There is little in the literature regarding this particular period of the Ismaili *dā'wa* in Badakhshān, and indeed it is one of the most obscure periods in the history of the Ismailis of that region. However, according to oral tradition, being devoted to Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *dā'wa* they continued with his teaching until contact was made with the Nizārī Ismailis during the late Alamūt period. Meanwhile, only a few sources have been identified from the Alamūt period, such as *Haft bāb-i Bābā Sayyidnā*, by Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd-i Kātib, wrongly attributed to Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ, who was designated as Bābā and Sayyidnā (our master) by the contemporary Nizārīs. The treatise was composed around 596/1200 and contains an account of the declaration of the *qiyāma* in 559/1164 at Alamūt⁸⁵ by Ḥasan II 'alā dhikrihi al-salām, acknowledged as the 23rd Nizārī Ismaili imam. The treatise generally deals with the Nizārī teachings of the Alamūt period after the declaration of the *qiyāma*. With the recent publication of Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd-i Kātib's

⁸⁴ Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), p. 241.

⁸⁵ *Qiyāma* or resurrection, in Islamic eschatology is used as a reference to the Last Day or Day of Judgment. However, in Ismaili thought, *qiyāma* is used in reference to the end of any partial cycle (*dawr*) in the history of mankind, and the declaration of *qiyāma* at Alamūt for the Nizārī community was understood spiritually and symbolically to mean the manifestation of the unveiled truth, or *ḥaqīqa*. See, Daftary, *Historical Dictionary*, p. 140.

Dīvān-i Qā'imīyyāt, which consists of Ismaili religious poems from the 7th/13th century, new light has been shed on the *Haft bāb* and the analysis of this treatise, which has a remarkable value from historical, social, political and religious perspectives. As a result, it has been suggested that Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd-i Kātib also wrote *Haft bāb-i Bābā Sayyidnā*,⁸⁶ one of the few surviving books from the Alamūt period discovered in Badakhshān. Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd-i Kātib was also known as Ḥasan-i Ṣalāḥ-i Munshī and was a contemporary of four imams of the Alamūt period, from Ḥasan II 'alā dhikrihi al-salām (d. 561/1166) to 'Alā' al-Dīn Muḥammad (d. 653/1255). It is almost certain that he witnessed the declaration of the *qiyāma* as he refers to this in the *Haft Bāb*.⁸⁷ Therefore, one can assume that he was born at the end of the 6th/12th century. As Badakhchani says, Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd-i Kātib was probably born in northwestern Iran, in the region of Qazwīn and joined the Ismaili community at a young age. For a long period, he acted as a scribe in the court of the Ismaili rulers of Quhistān in south-eastern Khurāsān. He moved to Alamūt, the centre of the Nizārī Ismaili state, around 637/1240 and died there in 644/1247.⁸⁸

The author of a later Ismaili treatise, *Sīlk-i gawhar-rīz*, records among the Ismaili religious authorities in Badakhshān a certain Shaykh Zayd, who went to the court of Imam Ḥasan II 'alā dhikrihi al-salām. He remained there for seven years and received a *farmān* of appointment as a religious authority for the Ismaili community of Badakhshān.⁸⁹ However, there is little other evidence about Shaykh Zayd. In this regard Marshall

⁸⁶ Hasan-i Mahmud Kotib [Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd-i Kātib], *Devoni Qoimiēt [Dīvān-i Qā'imīyyāt]*, ed. Jalal Badakhchani and Ato Mirkhoja (Dushanbe, 2015). Also Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd-i Kātib, *Dīvān-i Qā'imīyyāt*, intr. M.R. Shafī'ī Kadkanī, Persian ed. and English intr. Jalal Badakhchani (Tehran, 2011).

⁸⁷ Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd-i Kātib, *Haft bāb*, ed. and tr. S.J. Badakhchani as *Spiritual Resurrection in Shi'ī Islam: An Early Ismaili Treatise on the Doctrine of Qiyāmat* (London, 2017), p. 68, n. 194. Also Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd-i Kātib, *Dīvān-i Qā'imīyyāt*, intr. M.R. Shafī'ī Kadkanī, Persian ed. and English intr. Jalal Badakhchani (Tehran, 2011), Persian text, introd. p. 107, n. 1, English tr., p. 11.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 2.

⁸⁹ Kuchāk [Gawhar Rīz], *Sīlk-i gawhar-rīz*, ed. K. Ēl'chibekov, Photostat version (Dushanbe, n.d.), p. 36. Also, Kudratbek Ēl'chibekov, *Ierarkhiā Dukhovenstva v Ismailizme Badakhshana (na osnove rukopisi 'Sīlk-i gawhar-riz')* [The Religious Hierarchy among the Ismailis of Badakhshān (based on the manuscript *Sīlk-i gawhar-rīz*)] (Dushanbe, 2016), p. 168.

Hodgson has also argued that '[t]he Ismā'īlīs of the upper Oxus valleys, beyond the Saljūq presence, had, at least at one time, a local *dā'ī* independently responsible to Cairo; at any rate they do not seem to have been involved, at least at first, in the movements which took place among the Ismā'īlīs in the Saljūq lands'.⁹⁰ Similarly Daftary says, '[i]t was much later, in the Alamūt period of Nizārī history, that the Ismā'īlīs of Badakhshān and adjacent regions accorded their allegiance to the Nizārī *da'wa*'.⁹¹ But he maintains that by the 7th/13th century the Nizārī Ismailis were actively propagating their *da'wa* in Badakhshān.⁹² Maryam Mu'izzī in a recent work argues that the Nizārīs of Quhistān apparently remained in contact with their co-religionists in Badakhshān following the destruction of Alamūt.⁹³ When the Nizārī Ismaili poet Nizārī Quhistānī (645–720/1247–1320) refers in one of his poems to 'the provinces that are under the authority of the imam', and lists Tūrān, Āmu [Daryā], the Orient and China it seems that he is referring to Badakhshān.

خوشم لایست که در تحت لواء او لاسیت
مهرست غنادر و زخم و بند و زمامیت
نخس ایران قمر شرقی قمر تۆران شمع تل
در میان آموئی حکمت هم لادن هم کرامیت
هم خراسان سلامت هم عراق عقیبت
این کنی ای آفتاب ان کنی ای انعامیت
در میان شرقی افکاس من کنی که حصیت
چهر بل و صبح انصاف و فوج و جویخت
پیش شاد بیت مردان طینت کی گداست
ملک بهجت ایم عالم شریست جهان کاست
مار با جلال کین من حضرت یاد کرامت
ما بری القیصر ز من معرفت و قطع کاس

⁹⁰ Marshall Hodgson, 'The Ismā'īlī State', in J.A. Boyle, ed., *The Cambridge History of Iran*: vol. 5 (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 427–428.

⁹¹ Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), p. 243.

⁹² Daftary, 'The Medieval Ismā'īlīs of the Iranian Lands', in C. Hillenbrand, ed., *Studies in Honour of Clifford Edmund Bosworth*, vol. II: *The Sultan's Turret: Studies in Persian and Turkish Culture* (Leiden, 2000), pp. 43–81.

⁹³ Maryam Mu'izzī, *Ismā'īliyya-yi Badakhshān* (Tehran, 1395 Sh./2017), p. 148.

[No wonder there are], so many sweet countries under the dominion of the Friends of God (*awliyā*); [namely] an Egypt of sufficiency, a Rome of renunciation, and a Baghdad of security.

The Iranian provinces represent love, while the Tūrānian provinces represent intellect; and in between them, the Oxus of wisdom flows befittingly.

Prosperous Khurāsān and blissful 'Irāq are both [in this dominion]; the latter is a house of contentment, and the former a home of convalescence.

Do you know what lies within the Orient of insolvency? It is the China of justice, peace, equity, splendour, dignity and purity.

In the presence of the King of the beneficent men, the dominion of all seven climes of the world and the totality of the universe, are all like the poor child (*tufayl*) of a beggar.

Well, to put it in a nutshell, His Command is the jewel of the seal of Unity; and to make this story short, the land of Gnosis is, indeed, in our hands.⁹⁴

In this poem the 'Āmū' of Nizārī Quhistānī is clearly the Āmū Daryā, which rises in the mountains of Badakhshān and flows throughout the region, a region which borders China. Tūrān was an ancient name for the region which encompasses Badakhshān and the poet regards Tūrān as a place of joy, love, justice, peace and harmony which is significant for Ismailis. In fact, these kinds of allusions are common in Ismaili poetry, particularly when they refer to places where their imam or his followers reside.⁹⁵ This shows that Badakhshān, like the Alamūt mountain fortresses, had become a haven for the Ismailis over several centuries.

However, in the post-Alamūt period, another schism occurred following the death of the Nizārī Imam Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad (d. ca. 710/1310) that split the community once again, into the Muḥammad-Shāhī and Qāsim-Shāhī branches. There is very little information regarding this event but what is clear is that the succession was disputed by Shams al-Dīn's sons, 'Alā' al-Dīn Mu'min-Shāh and Qāsim-Shāh. The Muḥammad-Shāhī (or Mu'minī) imams, who were engaged in religious and political life, initially seem to have acquired numerous followers in certain regions, notably northern Persia, Badakhshān and Syria.⁹⁶ However, this line became extinct by the end of the 12th/18th century.

⁹⁴ The poem has been kindly translated from Persian into English for this work by Rahim Ghulami.

⁹⁵ Mu'izzī, *Ismā'īliyya-yi Badakhshān*, p. 148.

⁹⁶ Daftary, *The Ismā'ilīs* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), p. 414.

The Qāsim-Shāhī imams, who were mainly based in Iran, lived a clandestine life, mostly in hiding, although they made systematic efforts to extend their influence over the various Nizārī communities.⁹⁷ Maryam Mu'izzī argues that it was only at the end of the 9th/15th and the beginning of the 10th/16th century that the Qāsim-Shāhī imams re-established contact with their followers in Badakhshān and were able to bring the Ismaili community there under their authority.⁹⁸ One of the sources regarding the Muḥammad-Shāhī and the Qāsim-Shāh split is an early 10th/16th-century text from Badakhshān entitled *Irshād al-ṭālibīn fi dhikr a'immat al-Ismā'īliyya*. Even though the work advocates the Muḥammad-Shāhī lineage, it is the most complete account available of this schism.⁹⁹

At any event, according to both oral tradition and certain historical sources, *dā'īs* were sent to Badakhshān during the late Alamūt period by the Nizārī imams.¹⁰⁰ Mīrzā Sang Muḥammad Badakhshī, in his *Tārīkh-i Badakhshān* (13th/19th and early 14th/20th centuries), using oral traditions, provides some details about the arrival of Persian *dā'īs*, suggesting that as early as 481/1088 and 490/1096,¹⁰¹ a *darvīsh* arrived in Shughnān, Badakhshān, but does not refer to him as a Nizārī Ismaili *dā'ī* sent from Alamūt. Professors Bosworth and Madelung name two persons, Shāh Khāmūsh and Shāh Malang, as *dā'īs* who were sent by the Nizārī imams.¹⁰² The former, initially called Sayyid Mīr Ḥasan Shāh, later became known as Sayyid Shāh Khāmūsh. He was a Husaynid 'Alid, tracing his descent to Mūsā al-Kāẓim (d. 183/799), the seventh imam of the Twelver Shi'is. Much later, in the 10th/16th century, he was followed by Shāh

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Mu'izzī, *Ismā'īliyya-yi Badakhshān*, p. 205.

⁹⁹ Daniel Beben, 'The Ismaili of Central Asia', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, Online Publication Date: Apr 2018. Available online at: <http://oxfordre.com/asianhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727-e-316> [last accessed, 11 June 2019].

¹⁰⁰ Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), pp. 451–452.

¹⁰¹ However, Daftary dates the first arrival of Nizārī *dā'īs* to the late Alamūt period, and Bosworth and Madelung say Shāh Malang and Shāh Khāmūsh arrived in Badakhshān in the 7th/13th century. See, Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), p. 452; Bosworth, 'Shughnān', *EI2*, vol. 9, pp. 459–460 and Madelung, 'Ismā'īliya', *EI2*, vol. 4, pp. 198–206. For more details see, Gulamadov, *The Hagiography of Nāṣir-i Khusraw*, p. 134.

¹⁰² Madelung, 'Ismā'īliya', *EI2*, vol. 4, p. 198. Bosworth, 'Shughnān', *EI2*, vol. 9, pp. 495–496.

Malang. Daftary writes that according to the tradition preserved in Badakhshān, the first of these Nizārī *dā'īs* was a certain Sayyid Shāh Malang, who was followed by a second Nizārī *dā'ī*, Mīr Sayyid Ḥasan Shāh Khāmūsh. However, it has to be noted that the historical sources and oral tradition with regard to the arrival of the Nizārī *dā'īs* in Badakhshān contradict each other. Shaftalou Gulamadov has identified five versions of the Badakhshānī tradition about the identity, place of origin and time of arrival of these *dā'īs*.¹⁰³

Both Mīrzā Sang Muḥammad Badakhshī in his *Tārīkh-i Badakhshān* and Sayyid Ḥaydar Shāh Mubārak Shāhzāda (d. 1363/1943) in his *Tārīkh-i Mulk-i Shughnān* indicate that Sayyid Shāh Khāmūsh and Shāh Malang came from the province of Khurāsān in present-day Iran although they give different cities there as their points of origin or departure,¹⁰⁴ and they go on to say that these *dā'īs* were the ancestors of dynasties of *pīrs* and *mīrs* who ruled in Badakhshān for centuries. However, although the Nizārī state in Iran had been destroyed by the Mongols, protected by the mountains of the Pamir and the Hindu Kush, Badakhshān largely escaped the cataclysm of the Mongol invasions.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, Bartol'd argued that 'Badakhshān was not affected by the Mongol conquests and remained till the 9th/15th century under the rule of [a local] dynasty'.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, a recent study by A.B. Petrov has shown that the Badakhshān region did not completely escape the Mongol assault, but it had not been conquered when Chingiz Khan laid siege to Tirmiz in 617/1220-21.¹⁰⁷

However, he further concludes that:

¹⁰³ Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), p. 452; however, see Shaftolu Gulamadov, *The Hagiography of Nāṣir-i Khusraw* (PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2018), pp. 129–142.

¹⁰⁴ Sayyid Ḥaīdarshoh Muborakshohzoda, *Ta'rikh-i Mulki Shughnān* (Khārūgh, 1992), pp. 6–9.

¹⁰⁵ Ḥaīdarsho S. Pirumshoev, 'The Pamirs and Badakhshan', in Chahryar Adle, Irfan Habib and Karl M. Baipakov, ed., *History of Civilizations of Central Asia, vol. 5: Development in Contrast: from the Sixteenth to the mid-Nineteenth century* (Paris, 2003), pp. 225–228.

¹⁰⁶ V.V. Bartol'd, 'Badakhshan', *EI*, vol. 1, pp. 552–554. [Reprint in *EI2*, vol. 1, pp. 851–855].

¹⁰⁷ A.B. Petrov, 'Badakhshan XIII–XIV vv. pod Vlast'iu Mongol'skikh Khanov' [Badakhshān 13th–14th Centuries under the Rule of the Mongol Khans], *ZVORAO*, 2 (2006), p. 528.

- i) Badakhshān was not subjected to a barbaric destruction of the population like, for example, the cities and regions of *Mā warā' al-nahr*.
- ii) even the conquest of this region was carried out by Chingiz Khan, either by force or on occasion negotiation.
- iii) more often the Mongols preferred to negotiate with the rulers of Badakhshān rather than seize the region and bleed it.
- iv) the position of the local rulers was special. They enjoyed greater privileges and rights than the rulers of other conquered territories, which is clearly seen from the analysis of numismatic material and written sources.
- v) the region was rich in both precious stones and, apparently, working silver mines.
- vi) during the 8th/14th century the rulers of the Chaghatay state, one of the Mongol successor states, tenaciously kept this area under their control even under the most difficult conditions of civil strife.¹⁰⁸

So it would appear that the local *amīrs* of Badakhshān continued to rule over the region in a semi-independent fashion during the Mongol period, and that Wakhān, Ishkāshim, Shughnān and Darvāz escaped the Mongol invasions:

At the beginning of the 7th/13th century, on the eve of the Mongol invasions, Badakhshān, Wakhān, Ishkāshim and Shughnān were subject to the ruler of Khwārazm, Muḥammad Khwārazm-Shāh, whose empire encompassed the greater part of Central Asia. There is no direct evidence that these people were conquered by the Mongols, though the conquest of both Xinjiang and the bulk of Afghanistan makes this is highly probable. Their subjugation by Tīmūr and the Timurids has, however, been abundantly demonstrated.¹⁰⁹

In fact it was Tīmūr's great-grandson, Abū Sa'īd (r. 855–873/1451–1469), who wanted to incorporate Badakhshān into his realm, and succeeded in conquering it after a number of punitive expeditions.¹¹⁰ Later the region was conquered in 993/1584 by the Uzbeks, although they were persistently resisted by different local dynasties, including the Ismaili *mīrs* of Shughnān.¹¹¹ The region was then ruled by various dynasties,

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 539.

¹⁰⁹ Pirumshoev, 'The Pamirs and Badakhshan', p. 225.

¹¹⁰ Nourmamadchoev, *The Ismā'ilis of Badakhshan*, p. 60.

¹¹¹ Daftary, *The Ismā'ilis* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), p. 452.

including local Tajik, as well as Turkic and Afghan ones. These dynasties were headed by *murīds*, *mīrs* or *beks*, wealthy landlords whose authority depended very much on the political situation, external as well as internal.¹¹²

Taqiyya and the Ismailis in the Post-Alamūt Era

With the fall of Alamūt in 654/1256 the Ismailis moved from the Caspian provinces to other parts of Iran and the neighbouring regions. This period is one of the most obscure in Ismaili history not only in Iran but elsewhere. Although historians of the time, such as ‘Aṭā’-Malik Juwaynī (d. 681/1283), say that the Ismailis were totally extinguished, the community in fact survived and developed in a different form on the peripheries of Muslim states. Thus, it becomes apparent that communities like those in Badakhshān, as well as northern areas of Pakistan, in common with other Ismaili communities in the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent, continued in isolation, which allowed each community to develop a distinctive tradition of its own.

The structure of the Ismaili *da‘wa* institutions in the Nizārī Ismaili state in Iran had not remained the same as that under the Fatimids in Egypt. The Nizārī *da‘wa* had become simpler, reflecting the changed circumstances of the Ismailis in Iran confronting the Saljūq sultans. As a result, it was referred to as the *da‘wat-i jadīda*, that is, ‘the new preaching’, by contrast to *da‘wat-i qadīma* or the ‘old preaching’. The idea behind the *da‘wat-i jadīda* was a modification of the doctrine of the imamate, which was called the doctrine of *ta‘līm* (teaching). However, it has been argued that this ‘new teaching’ did not mean a change of doctrine, but rather the reformulation of an old Shi‘ī doctrine that the Ismailis had long been acquainted with, the Shi‘ī doctrine of *ta‘līm*, or authoritative teaching by the imam,¹¹³ and this provided the basis for the Nizārī Ismaili teachings of the later Alamūt times and subsequent periods. Following the destruction of the Nizārī Ismaili state, centred at the mountain fortress of Alamūt in northern Iran, in 654/1256¹¹⁴ and of other Ismaili fortresses, as well as the news of the execution of Rukn al-Dīn Khurshāh (d. 655/1257), the last lord of Alamūt and the 27th Nizārī imam, the Nizārī

¹¹² Bakhodur I. Iskandarov, *Vostochnaia Bukhara i Pamir v period presoesedineniia Srednei Azii k Rossii* (Stalinabad, 1960), pp. 36–37.

¹¹³ Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), p. 339.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 396.

Ismailis became isolated in different areas of Iran. Many of them became assimilated into other communities, mainly the dominant Sunni community.¹¹⁵ But they also moved to areas in Central Asia, Sind, the Punjab and various other parts of the Indian subcontinent, where there already were Ismaili communities.¹¹⁶ Under these circumstances, the scattered Nizārī communities in the Persian-speaking world resorted once again to the strict observance of *taqiyya*.¹¹⁷ It is important to bear in mind that the observance of *taqiyya* in this period, marked by the absence of a viable central *da'wa* organisation and leadership, was not imposed on the community.¹¹⁸ The Nizārīs had become experienced in adopting external guises to safeguard themselves. For a while during the Alamūt period, they had even adopted the *sharī'a* in its Sunni form.¹¹⁹

Thus, when after the fall of Alamūt, rulers and religious scholars again attacked the Ismailis as *kāfir* (infidel) or *mulhid* (heretic), and they were threatened again with persecution,¹²⁰ they developed ways to secure and safeguard themselves. They started to conceal themselves under Sunni, Sufi or Twelver Shi'ī guises, elements of which, with the passage of time, came to be included in their diverse traditions. When the Ismailis of Badakhshān concealed their true religious beliefs the result was the amalgamation of various Sufi and Twelver Shi'ī elements in their beliefs and practices.¹²¹ The practice of *taqiyya* also continued in other areas where the Ismailis used Sufi terminology, such as *khānaqāh*, *darvīsh* (dervish), *ʿārīf* (gnostic), *qalandar* (wandering dervish) as well as *pīr* and *murshid* to refer to elements of their organisation and their people.¹²² It was during this period that the

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 410.

¹¹⁶ Fidā'ī Khurāsānī, *Kitāb-i Hidāyat al-mu'minīn al-tālibīn*, ed. A.A. Semēnov (Moscow, 1959), p. 20. Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), p. 410.

¹¹⁷ *Taqiyya* is an Arabic word that in the Ismaili context means the precautionary dissimulation of one's true religious beliefs, especially in time of danger. The Nizārī Ismailis have been obliged to dissimulate rather strictly to protect themselves against widespread persecution. See, Daftary, *Historical Dictionary*, p. 165.

¹¹⁸ Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), p. 410.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Farhad Daftary, 'Assassins', *EIS*, vol. 3, pp. 911–914.

¹²¹ Hafizullah Emadi, 'Praxis of *Taqiyya*: Perseverance of Pashaye Ismā'īlī Enclave, Nangarhar, Afghanistan', *Central Asian Survey*, 19 (2000), pp. 253–264.

¹²² Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), p. 412. See also, Nizārī Quhistānī, *Dīvān*, ed. M. Muṣaffā (Tehran, 1371–1373 Sh./1992–1994), vol. 1; L. Lewisohn, 'Sufism and Ismā'īlī Doctrine in the Persian Poetry of Nizārī Quhistānī (645–721/1247–1321)', *Iran, Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies*, 41 (2003), pp. 229–251.

institution of the *pīr* or *pīrship*, another example of the deployment of Sufi terminology, was introduced as a central element in the religious hierarchy (*ḥudūd al-dīn*) of the Nizārī Ismailis of Central Asia, and this usage survived throughout the Soviet period.

The *Ḥudūd al-Dīn* in the Context of Central Asia

One aspect of studying the Ismailis, as carried out by pre-Soviet Russian and Soviet scholars, concerned the role of religious leaders, and specifically, the hierarchy of religious authorities. The Ismaili hierarchy served as a means of maintaining the community and providing it with guidance on religious and socio-political issues. However, due to the risk of persecution, religious leaders and their associates were frequently compelled to hide their true identity, revealing their status to only a few loyal Ismailis. So study of the *ḥudūd al-dīn* is limited by the lack of written sources and reliance solely on oral testimony, which has acted as an impediment to any profound analysis of the topic in the context of Central Asia. One of the exceptions to this dearth of primary sources is Nāṣir-i Khusraw's introduction to his *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*,¹²³ where he provides a short but precise explanation of the concepts of *ḥudūd al-dīn*, *ḥadd-i jismānī* and *ḥadd-i rūḥānī*. But this only refers to the state of affairs in the 5th/11th century and is not necessarily valid for later centuries.¹²⁴

Publications in the secondary literature on the theme of the *ḥudūd al-dīn* include a brief study by Wladimir Ivanow,¹²⁵ the relevant sections in Henry Corbin's *History of Islamic Philosophy*¹²⁶ and Farhad Daftary's monograph, *The Ismā'īlīs*.¹²⁷ Soviet studies on the subject included, notably, A.E. Bertel's *Nāṣir-i Khusraw and Ismailism* which paid particular attention to the spiritual realm of the Ismaili hierarchy. In

¹²³ Nosir Khusrav [Nāṣir-i Khusraw], *Jome'-ul-hikmatain* [Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn], ed. K. Olimov, K. Askardaev and A. Sharipov (Dushanbe, 2011). See also Eric Ormsby, tr., *Between Reason and Revelation, Twin Wisdoms Reconciled*, an annotated English translation of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *Kitāb Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn* (London, 2012).

¹²⁴ Dagikhudo Dagiev, 'The Ismā'īli Hierarchy - *Ḥudūd al-Dīn* – in the Context of Central Asia', *JSIS*, 10 (2019), p. 344.

¹²⁵ In Wladimir Ivanow, 'The Organisation of the Fatimid Propaganda', *JBBRAS*, NS, 15 (1939), pp. 1–35; reprinted in Bryan S. Turner, ed., *Orientalism: Early Sources*, vol. 1, *Readings in Orientalism* (London, 2000), pp. 531–571.

¹²⁶ See, Henry Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, tr. L. Sherrard (London, 1993), pp. 86–93.

¹²⁷ Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), pp. 211–223.

addition, fieldwork in Badakhshān (1959–1963) led to the collection of primary material, such as *Bāb dar bāyān-i dānistan-i ‘ālam-i dīn*; *Risāla dar bāb-i haft hudūd-i dīn*, and *Dawāzdah faṣl* which also speak about the concept of the *hudūd al-dīn* and the role and influence of the Ismaili religious authorities. These original works are preserved at the Rudaki Institute of Oriental Studies and Written Heritage in the Academy of the Sciences of the Republic of Tajikistan, and it is hoped will provide fruitful material for further studies on this important subject.

The establishment of the Ismaili spiritual hierarchy dates back to the mid-4th/10th century, but it originally did not have an elaborate structure or organisation until the Fatimids had established themselves in Egypt.¹²⁸ The *da’wa* organisation acquired its definite shape during the reign of al-Ḥākim (r. 386–411/996–1021), the sixth Fatimid Imam-caliph, as reflected in the work of Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī.¹²⁹ Paul Walker argues that the theme of *hudūd* is vital to the Ismaili cause. In Fatimid times, it consisted of twelve office-holders called either *lāḥiq* or *hujja* or even *naqīb*, each of whom was in charge of one of the twelve districts or territories (s. *jazīra*) of the known world.¹³⁰ Each *jazīra* represented an independent region for the purpose of propagating the *da’wa*.¹³¹ In the writings of the Ismaili jurist al-Qāḍī al-Nu’mān¹³² produced earlier in the 4th/10th century, the twelve *jazā’ir* are listed as al-‘Arab (Arabs), al-Rūm (Byzantines), al-Ṣaqāliba (Slavs, i.e. Eastern Europeans), al-Nūb (Nubians), al-Khazar (Khazars), al-Hind (India), al-Sind, al-Zanj (East Africans), al-Ḥabash (Abyssinians), al-Ṣīn (China), al-Daylam (the Persians), and al-Barbar (the Berbers). Interestingly enough Khurāsān, of which Nāṣir-i Khusraw claimed to be the *hujjat* in the second half of the 5th/11th century, is not included as a *jazīra* in al-Nu’mān’s list.¹³³ However, Daftary points out that ‘al-Nu’mān’s well-informed and possibly Ismā‘īlī

¹²⁸ Nadia Eboo Jamal, *Surviving the Mongols: The Continuity of Ismaili Tradition in Iran* (London, 2002), p. 28.

¹²⁹ H. Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, p. 89.

¹³⁰ Paul E. Walker, ‘The Ismaili *Da’wa* in the Reign of the Fatimid Caliph Al-Ḥākim’, *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, 30 (1993), pp. 161–182.

¹³¹ Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), p. 217.

¹³² Al-Qāḍī al-Nu’mān b. Muḥammad, *Ta’wīl al-da‘ā’im*, ed. M.Ḥ. al-A‘zamī (Cairo, 1968–1972), vol. 2, p. 74. See also, Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī, *Ithbāt al-nubuwwāt*, ed. W. Madelung and P. Walker (Tehran, 1395/2016), p. 268, where seven of these *jazā’ir* are named, together with al-Turk.

¹³³ Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), p. 218.

The ranks of the Ismaili religious hierarchy at various historical periods¹

Fatimid period ² (909–1171)	Alamūt period ³ (1090–1256)	Post-Alamūt period ⁴	According to Sayyid Haydar Shāh's text ⁵
<i>al-nāṭiq</i>	<i>Imām</i>	<i>Imām</i>	<i>Imām</i>
<i>al-Asās/al-waṣī</i>	<i>muta'alim</i>	<i>ḥujjat/Pīr</i>	<i>ḥujjat</i> (Naṣir-i Khusrāw)
<i>al-Imām/al-mutimm</i>	<i>mu'allim</i>	<i>dā'i</i>	<i>dā'i</i>
<i>al-lāḥiq</i>	<i>mā'ī/Bāb-i bāṭin</i>	<i>mu'allim</i>	<i>mā' dhūn-i akbar</i>
<i>al-yadd</i>	<i>zabān-i 'ilm</i>	<i>mā' dhūn-i akbar</i>	<i>mu'allim-i ṣādiq</i>
<i>al-janāh</i>	<i>ḥujjat-i a'zam</i>	<i>mā' dhūn-i asghar</i>	<i>(ishāns)</i>
<i>al-mā' dhūn</i>	<i>dast-i qudrat</i>		<i>mā' dhūl-i asghar</i> (<i>khalīfas</i>)
<i>al-mustajīb/al-mu'min</i>			other believers

¹ For more details on the table and the Ismaili religious hierarchy see Muzaffar Zoolshoev, 'The Soviet State and a Religious Movement: A Socio-Historical Study of the Ismā'ili Panjebhai Movement in Soviet Tajik Badakhshan (early 1920s late 1930s)' (Unpublished Report for the IIS, 2015), p. 108.

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³ Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-maqlād al-malakūtiyya*, ed. I.K. Poonawala (Tunis, 2011), p. 437.
⁴ Naṣir al-Dīn Tūsī, *Rawḍa-yi taslīm*, ed. and tr. S.J. Badakhchani as *Paradise of Submission: A Medieval Treatise on Ismaili Thought* (London, 2005), pp. 122–123.

⁵ Khayr-khwāh-i Harāū, *Taṣnīfāt*, ed. W. Ivanov (Tehran, 1961), pp. 2–3.

⁶ A.V. Stanishevskii, 'Sbornik arkhivnykh dokumentov i materialov po istorii Pamira i ismailizma', vol. 2, 1923, pp. 175–262 (Unpublished Report), pp. 179–184. Haydar Shāh was a local scholar who wrote a History of Shughnān in the request of A.A. Semēnov.

contemporary, Ibn Ḥawqal, who himself travelled through eastern Persia and Transoxania around 358/969, does mention Khurāsān as a *jazīra* of the Fatimid *da'wa*.¹³⁴ One of the Ismaili manuscripts discovered in Badakhshān in 1967, gives the names of only two *ḥujjas* of the Fatimid period, Nāṣir-i Khusraw in Khurāsān and Bābā Sayyidnā (Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ) in Persia.¹³⁵ They were, of course, the two most prominent ones, at least in historical terms. At the time of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's arrival in Badakhshān, the term *dā'ī* was used to refer to a religious rank, and later on, other terms such as *ma'dhūn* and *mu'allim* were introduced. These terms are not unique to the Ismailis of Badakhshān, as they were used in other areas where the Ismaili *da'wa* was active.

The table above shows that there were either seven or nine main ranks, described slightly differently by various authors and covering various historical periods,¹³⁶ however, the core assumption that the Ismaili teaching is in accordance with the imam's guidance never changed.

In the case of the Badakhshān community, the hierarchy continued unchanged from the post-Alamūt period when the role of the *pīr* was introduced until the late 14th/20th century when new Imamāt institutions were introduced by the present Ismaili imam. Thus the ranks below that of the imam were *ḥujja*, *pīr*, *mu'allim* (teacher) and finally *khalīfa* (the deputy of a *pīr*).¹³⁷ The Ismaili hierarchy, through its religious dimension or *ḥudūd al-dīn*, sought to demonstrate an understanding of the realms of spiritual and material existence. The study and analysis of the Ismaili sources allow us to better understand the Ismaili hierarchy and its role in preserving and sustaining the integrity of the Ismaili community and the continuity of its religious practice.

¹³⁴ Ibn Ḥawqal, *Ṣūrat al-arḍ*, p. 310; tr. Kramers and Wiet, vol. 2, p. 304. In Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), p. 218.

¹³⁵ *Silk-i gawhar-rīz*, ed. Qudratbek Elchibekov (retyped version of a manuscript in the Ismaili Special Collections Unit, The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London), p. 91; El'chibekov, *Ierarkhiia Dukhovenstva*, p. 73.

¹³⁶ See W. Ivanow, 'The Organisation of the Fatimid Propaganda', *JBBRAS*, NS, 15 (1939), pp. 1–35; El'chibekov, *Ierarkhiia Dukhovenstva*, pp. 45–54; S. Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, pp. 71–83.

¹³⁷ Hakim Elnazarov and Sultonbek Aksakolov, 'The Nizari Ismailis of Central Asia in Modern Times', in Farhad Daftary, ed., *A Modern History of the Ismailis: Continuity and Change in a Muslim Community* (London, 2011), p. 68.

Pīr and Pīrship in Central Asia

In Central Asia the Ismailis are mainly concentrated in Badakhshān. As mentioned above, Nāṣir-i Khusraw is regarded as the founder of this community in Badakhshān, although there is evidence of earlier *dā'īs* travelling to the Pamirs. In its external structure, Badakhshānī Ismailism differs only in terms of certain aspects of its tradition and rituals from other expressions of Ismaili beliefs found elsewhere. Followers of the tradition of Nāṣir-i Khusraw in Central Asia are now spread across parts of four modern states: Badakhshān of Tajikistan, Badakhshān of Afghanistan, the Xinjiang region of China, and the Gilgit, Hunza and Chitrāl areas of northern Pakistan. With regard to the context of Central Asia, it was Ivanow who first demonstrated that in the post-Alamūt period Persian terms borrowed from Sufism, such as *pīr* and *murīd*, replaced Arabic terms such as *ḥujja*, *dā'ī* and *ma'dhūn* in the *ḥudūd al-dīn*.¹³⁸ This was part of the form of *taqiyya* adopted in this period similar to that used by Ismailis in other parts of the Iranian world. The term *pīr* is derived from Persian meaning an 'older person', the equivalent of the Arabic word *shaykh*. In the religious context, *pīr* refers to a 'spiritual master' or 'spiritual guide'. In Badakhshān, besides the terms *pīr* and *murīd*, the term *khalīfa* (successor, vicegerent),¹³⁹ was also introduced.

The religious hierarchy remained mainly three-tiered, with the *pīr* as the spiritual guide in the absence of the imam, the *khalīfa* as the *pīr*'s deputy, and the *murīd* as his disciple.¹⁴⁰ In the religious hierarchy, one *pīr* could have several *khalīfas*. The *khalīfa* performed all the religious duties under the instruction of his *pīr*. Historically, the *pīrs* were responsible for the organisation of the *da'wa* in their areas of jurisdiction and this included the provision of religious instruction, ensuring the correct practice of the faith and the development and sustaining of a healthy relationship with rulers, and with non-Ismaili communities amongst or alongside whom the Ismailis lived. The position of the *pīr* was regarded as one of the highest; the *pīr* could be replaced by his son or, in the absence of a son, by a very close relative. This hereditary succession of religious authority is one of the

¹³⁸ Wladimir Ivanow, *Brief Survey of the Evolution of Ismailism* (Leiden, 1952), p. 67.

¹³⁹ For details on the origins and application of this term, see, A. Pakatchi, 'Khalifa', *EIS*, vol. 5, pp. 407–464.

¹⁴⁰ Najima N. Susumu, 'Pir, Waiz and Imam: The Transformation of Socio-Religious Leadership among the Ismailis in Northern Pakistan', *Area Studies Working Paper Series*, 23 (Tokyo, 2001), p. 7.

important characteristics of the Ismaili tradition in Badakhshān, where families of *pīrs* and *khalīfas* remained in charge of religious matters for centuries. This enabled them to maintain the practice of religious duties independently from whoever was in charge of the political establishment over the region, whether local rulers, outsiders, Sunnis or Communists. The religious hierarchy was also a stronger marker of identity than any political authority by virtue of its role as protector and preserver of Ismaili religious belief and ritual practice from the time of Nāṣir-i Khusraw onwards. In this regard the *Sīlk-i gawhar-rīz* is of great significance in identifying the genealogy of the Ismaili imams and the religious hierarchy in the context of Badakhshān and the role of the *pīrs* there.

The Russian ethnographer and archaeologist Alekseĭ A. Bobrinskiĭ (1861–1938), during his visit to Badakhshān in 1901, after conversations with the local *pīrs* and *murīds*, concluded that, ‘the *pīr* is the complete ruler of the heart and soul of the *murīd*, and has rights over the moral, family and civil duties of the *murīds*.’¹⁴¹ *Pīrs* were directly appointed by the imams as it was their prerogative to bestow the title of *pīr* upon a *murīd*, and in order to be appointed a *pīr* it was not necessary to be a *sayyid* (a descendant of the Prophet’s family).¹⁴² However, in most cases *pīrs* and their *khalīfas* belonged to either a *sayyid* family or a *khawāja* clan.¹⁴³

In his recent study, ‘Pirship in Badakhshān’, Abdulmamad Iloliev details the significant role played by the *pīrs* in organising and maintaining the socio-religious and socio-political affairs of the community in the late 13th/19th and early 14th/20th centuries.¹⁴⁴ Iloliev defines the role of the *pīrs*’ network, referred to as the *pirship*, ‘as an institution of social control and organisation that not only provides religious guidance, but also collects and distributes the religious dues, and responds actively to the immediate political and social environment of its time.’¹⁴⁵ Over time the role and the authority of the *pīrs* increased and they became very powerful; they represented and negotiated on behalf of the community with the rulers of the area or the neighbouring *amīrs* regarding political and social issues.

¹⁴¹ A.A. Bobrinskiĭ, ‘Sakta ismail’iā v russkikh i bukharskikh predelakh Srednei Azii’ [The Ismaili Sect in Russian and Bukharan Central Asia], *EO*, 2 (1902), pp. 1–20.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁴³ *Khawājas* usually marry someone from their own social rank, the daughter of a *sayyid* or of another *khawāja*. See also, Abdulmamad Iloliev, ‘Pirship in Badakhshan: The Role and Significance of the Institute of the Religious Masters (*Pīrs*) in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Wakhan and Shughnan’, *Journal of Shi‘a Islamic Studies*, 6 (2013), p. 169.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

As a result of the rivalry between the amirates of Bukhārā and Afghanistan in the 13th/19th century, the Ismaili community found itself under enormous pressure from these Sunni *amīrs* who raided the region, treating the local Ismailis brutally and imposing heavy taxes on the population on the pretext that being Ismaili they were not fully Muslim. When the Ismaili *pīrs* became important agents during the ‘Great Game’ (the rivalry between the British and the Russian empires over Central Asia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries), and negotiated on behalf of the community with the Russian representatives, asking for their region to be annexed to the Russian empire, their aim was to avoid the privations and suffering imposed upon the population by the Afghan and Bukharan *amīrs*.¹⁴⁶

There is also a considerable body of literature on Ismaili doctrines produced by the *pīrs* between the 8th/14th and the 12th/18th centuries. This includes the *Ṣaḥīfat al-nāẓirīn* (also known as *Sī va shish ṣaḥīfa*, composed in 857/1453). The text exists in two versions: one attributed to Pīr Ghiyāth al-Dīn Iṣfahānī, and a second attributed to Pīr Sayyid Suhrāb Valī.¹⁴⁷ Another *pīr* of the early 10th/16th century was Khayrkhwāh-i Haratī, who was regarded as the head of the *da‘wa* in Khurāsān, including Badakhshān.¹⁴⁸

However, gradually the role of the *pīrs* were reduced and in particular from the middle of the 20th century, with the establishment of new

¹⁴⁶ B.I. Iskandarov, *Iz istorii dorevolutsionnogo Tadzhikistana* [On the History of Pre-Revolutionary Tajikistan] (Dushanbe, 1974), pp. 41–71; Ėl’bon Hojibekov, *Ismailitskie dukhovnye nastavniki (pīry), ikh rol’ v obshchestvennoī zhizni Shugnana (vtoraia polovina XIX - 30-e gody XX vv.)* [Ismaili Spiritual Mentors (*pīrs*) and their Role in the Social Life of Shughnan: the Second half of the 19th Century – 1930s] (Dushanbe: ‘Bukhoro’, 2015), pp. 50–119; Otambek Mastibekov, *Leadership and Authority in Central Asia: the Ismaili Community in Tajikistan* (London, 2014), pp. 52–55.

¹⁴⁷ A detailed discussion on Ghiyāth al-Dīn Iṣfahānī and Sayyid Suhrāb Valī will be provided later on in this study.

¹⁴⁸ Khayrkhwāh-i Haratī was a Nizārī Ismaili *dā‘ī* and poet, who was born in Ghūriyān near Herat. His life and activities coincided with the early Anjudān period in Nizārī history (i.e. mid 9th–early 10th/15th–16th centuries), when the Nizārī *da‘wa* activities were revived under the direct leadership of the Qāsim-Shāhī Nizārī imams themselves. He was appointed as the chief *dā‘ī* or *hujja* and as *pīr* of Khurāsān and Badakhshān. See Daftary, *Historical Dictionary*, p. 127. His collected works were edited and published by Wladimir Ivanow as *Taṣnīfāt-i Khayrkhwāh Haratī* (Tehran, 1961). See also, Beben, ‘The Ismaili of Central Asia’, p. 6.

imamate institutions, and the development of modern technology, which improved direct communications between the Ismaili imam and his *murīds* all over the world, reduced the role of the *pīrs*. Then the need for an institutional restructuring of the Ismaili community in modern times resulted in the ending of the role of the *pīr* and its institutions.

Structurally the institution of *pīrship* was an extension of the Ismaili religious hierarchy, i.e. *ḥudūd al-dīn*, but on a much smaller scale. The religious terminology and dimension were defined by, and adapted to, the local environment of the post-Alamūt era. The Ismailis of Badakhshān upheld the belief that the religious authority of the institution of *pīrship* had always been based upon Ismaili religious doctrines, as the directions were given by the imam, who directly or indirectly appointed the *pīrs*. However, in the post-Alamūt era in Badakhshān until 13th/19th century there was very little evidence available to confirm direct contact with the higher ranks of the Ismaili *da'wa* and therefore, there is not much evidence of *pīrs* being directly appointed by the Ismaili imam, although some *pīrs* were appointed by agents of the imam, who had been given the authority to do so. However, *Silk-i gawhar-rīz* mentions several instances of Ismaili *pīrs* who visited the Ismaili imams' headquarters, first in Persia and later in India and received *farmāns* about their appointments. For instance, individuals such as Shāh Gadā, Shāh 'Abd al-Raḥīm and Faqīr Shāh visited the court of the Imām Khalīl Allāh 'Alī where they were appointed as *pīrs* over different areas of Badakhshān.¹⁴⁹ During the reign of Ḥasan 'Alī Shāh, Aga Khan I, the Ismailis of Badakhshān established even closer contact with the imamate. A series of *farmāns* and documents confirm this connection. The study by Kawahara Yayoi and Umed Mamadsherzodshoev of 164 historical documents collected from private collections of the Ismailis of Badakhshān includes Imām Ḥasan 'Alī Shāh's decrees and rescripts.¹⁵⁰

The Political History of Badakhshān

This study focuses mainly on the Ismailis of Badakhshān, a region of present-day Tajikistan and historically part of Greater Khurāsān. The

¹⁴⁹ Kuchāk [Gawhar Rīz], *Silk-i gawhar-rīz*, p. 185; Ēl'chibekov, *Silk-i gawhar-rīz*, p. 131.

¹⁵⁰ Kawahara Yayoi and Umed Mamadsherzodshoev, *Documents from Private Archives in Right-Bank Badakhshan (Fascimiles)*, TIAS Central Eurasian Research Series 8 (Tokyo: Department of Islamic Area Studies, Centre for Evolving Humanities, Graduate School of Humanities of Sociology, University of Tokyo, 2013). For more see, Gulamadov, *The Hagiography of Nāṣir-i Khusraw*, pp. 109–110.

region of Badakhshān was divided into four sectors as a result of Russian and British colonial policies. A large part of Badakhshān now lies within Tajikistan and another section, with its historical capital city of Fayḍābād lies in Afghanistan. Two other parts of historical Badakhshān fall within the borders of present-day Pakistan and China. Similarly, the Ismaili community which observes the Nāṣir-i Khusraw tradition is also spread across these four countries. The focus here is primarily on the Ismailis of Badakhshān in present-day Tajikistan with some reference to the other parts of Badakhshān now lying within Afghanistan, China and Pakistan.

The political history of Badakhshān over the last millennium is undeniably connected with the existence and spread of Ismaili Islam in the region. The harsh topography and remoteness of the area have played a major role in maintaining and preserving the Ismaili community's rituals and traditions. The power struggle between local and foreign rulers continued until the late 13th/19th century, when Britain and Russia, the colonial powers, effectively stoked religious feuds in order to further their respective imperial policies in the region.

Fayḍābād, the capital of historical Badakhshān and present capital of Badakhshān of Afghanistan

Long before the Achaemenids,¹⁵¹ the Iranian people developed the principle of what we call now local autonomy. This means that the *shāhanshāh* (supreme king) recognised the autonomy of each *kishwar* (country), as part of a vast empire. Petty rulers were then called *shāh*, and were subservient to the *shāhinshāh* (King of Kings).¹⁵² Based on this principle, the Sāsānid empire (224–651) and later in the Islamic period, the Sāmānid state,¹⁵³ included Badakhshān, Shughnān, Wakhān and Darvāz, as independent *kishwars*. As already mentioned, after the fall of the Sāmānids in the late 4th/10th century and the movement of Turkic nomadic tribes into their domains, Badakhshān remained outside the lands of subsequent states, such as those of the Ghaznawid and Saljūq Turks and retained its independence until the beginning of the 8th/14th century, when the Tīmūrids (771–913/1370–1507) annexed various parts of it.¹⁵⁴

The last local independent *shāh* of Badakhshān, Shāh Sulṭān Muḥammad, was executed by the Tīmūrid sultan Abū Saʿīd in 780/1466–67. According to the sources he claimed descent, like all his predecessors, from the Achaemenid Dāryūsh I (Darius the Great, r. 522–486 BCE) and Alexander the Great (336–323 BCE).¹⁵⁵ The founder of the Mughal empire, Bābur, refers to the Alexander lineage of Shāh Sulṭān Muḥammad.¹⁵⁶ There is scant evidence available regarding the local rulers of Badakhshān, apart from some coins minted in the name of ‘Alī Shāh and dating to 690/1291. Other evidence is provided by coins (dating to the years 690–691/1290–1292) in the name of his son Dawlat Shāh b. ‘Alī Shāh minted with the title of ‘al-Sulṭān al-‘Āẓim’.¹⁵⁷ This indicates that ‘Alī Shāh

¹⁵¹ The Achaemenid Empire (ca. 550–330 BCE), also called the First Persian Empire, was founded by Cyrus the Great and based in Western Asia, though it covered an area from the Aral sea to North Africa. See also, Gareth C. Sampson, *The Defeat of Rome: Crassus, Carrhae and the Invasion of the East* (Barnsley, 2008).

¹⁵² Shokhumorov, *Razdelenie Badakhshana*, pp. 25–26.

¹⁵³ The Sāmānids, the first local dynasty after the Arab domination, ruled from the 3rd/9th to 4th/10th centuries.

¹⁵⁴ Shokhumorov, *Razdelenie Badakhshana*, p. 26.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁵⁶ Zāhīr al-Dīn Muḥammad Bābur, *The Baburnama: Memoirs of Babur, Prince and Emperor*, tr. W.M. Thackston (Washington, DC, 1996), p. 15.

¹⁵⁷ D. Dovudi and L. Ilish, ‘Manety Badakhshana v sobranii Tübingenskogo universiteta FRG’ [Coins of Badakhshān in the Collection of Tübingen University FRG], *Soobchshenie naśional’nogo muzeā respubliki Tadzhikistana, imeni Kamoliddina Bekhzoda*, vol. 8 (2009), p. 101; A.B. Petrov, ‘Badakhshan XIII–XIV vv. pod Vlast’iu Mongol’skikh Khanov’ [Badakhshān 13th–15th Centuries under the Rule of the Mongol Khans], *ZVORAO*, 2 (2006), pp. 496–540. Mu’izzī, *Ismā’iliyya-yi Badakhshān*, p. 153.

was an independent ruler. However, these coins do not show any traces of Shi'i or Sunni Islam and nor do they show whether these rulers had any connection to Abu'l-Ma'ali 'Alī b. al-Asad, the *amīr* of Badakhshan in the time of Nāṣir-i Khusraw.¹⁵⁸ Nevertheless, there is a possibility that Shāh Sulṭān Muḥammad was a descendant of 'Alī b. al-Asad given that, at the time when the Tīmūrid Abū Sa'id (d. 926/1520–21) sought to eliminate him, many writers and historians, including Marco Polo, Dawlatshāh Samarqandī and Bābur, wrote that Shāh Sulṭān Muḥammad was of the lineage of Alexander the Great.¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless, there is no evidence to substantiate this claim and scholars believe that it was part of the legends fabricated by historians on the orders of Shāh Sulṭān Muḥammad to provide legitimacy for his rule. But Marco Polo referred to this claim in his travelogue written in the early 8th/14th century, so even if it is considered only myth, there can be no doubt that it was a long-standing claim.¹⁶⁰

According to some scholars, most notably Abusaid Shokhumorov, by the time of Shāh Sulṭān Muḥammad, the majority of the population in Badakhshān openly practiced Ismailism.¹⁶¹ He himself was a poet and had a *Dīwān* of poetry and there were a number of renowned poets including Mawlānā Ṣāhib Balkhī and Khwāja Maḥmūd Bursa,¹⁶² philosophers and Ismaili scholars at his court. One of them may have been the philosopher, scientist and poet, Ghiyāth al-Dīn 'Alī b. Amīrān Sayyid al-Ḥusaynī al-Iṣfahānī, who most probably arrived in Badakhshān during the reign of Shāh Sulṭān Muḥammad.¹⁶³ He was a prolific writer on mathematics as well as religion and his *Dānish-nāma-yi jahān* was allegedly written in response to the *Dānish-nāma* of Ibn Sīnā. There are other treatises attributed to Ghiyāth al-Dīn and preserved by the Ismaili community in

¹⁵⁸ Mu'izzī, *Ismā'īliyya-yi Badakhshān*, p. 153.

¹⁵⁹ Sir Henry Yule, ed., *The Book of Ser Marco Polo, the Venetian*, vol. 1, p. 149; Dawlatshāh b. 'Alā' al-Dawla, *Tadhkirat al-shu'arā*, ed. Fāṭima 'Alāqah (Tehran, 1385 Sh./2007), pp. 819–820; Zāhir al-Dīn Muḥammad Bābur, *The Baburnama: Memoirs of Babur, Prince and Emperor*, tr. W.M. Thackston (Washington, 1996), p. 15.

¹⁶⁰ Yule, ed., *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, vol. 1, p. 149. See also Mu'izzī, *Ismā'īliyya-yi Badakhshān*, p. 148.

¹⁶¹ Shokhumorov, *Razdelenie Badakhshana*, p. 27; Beben, 'The Ismaili of Central Asia', p. 8. See, Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḥaydar Dūghlāt, *Tārīkh-i Rashidī*, ed. 'Abbāsquī Ghaffārī Fard (Tehran, 1383 Sh./2004), pp. 346–347 (quoted in Beben, 'The Ismaili of Central Asia').

¹⁶² Samarqandī, *Tadhkirat al-shu'arā*, pp. 817–820, 851–853.

¹⁶³ Ghiyūs al-Dīn Alii Iṣfahānī [Ghiyāth al-Dīn Iṣfahānī], *Nujūm*, ed. Umed Shohzodamuhammad (Khārūgh, 1995).

Badakhshān. However, until now the attribution of these treatises to any particular Ismaili figure has not been verified, despite being included in Andreï Bertel's and Muhammadvafo Bakaev's *Catalogue*.¹⁶⁴

The Tīmūrids were Sunnis and adopted punitive measures against the Ismailis in their domains. The Tīmūrid governor, Sulṭān Ways Mirzā, violently suppressed an Ismaili uprising in Badakhshān which was led by the Muḥammad-Shāhī Imam Rāḍī al-Dīn 'Alī in 915/1509. Tīmūrid rule in Badakhshān came to an end when the Shaybānīd Uzbek ruler 'Abdullāh Khān II seized most of Badakhshān in 992/1584, although he also faced revolts by the Ismailis there.¹⁶⁵

In the mid 11th/17th century, Badakhshān fell under the control of Mīr Yāribeg Khān (r. 1067–1119/1657–1707), who succeeded in establishing a dynasty which ruled over most of the region for almost two centuries. Like his predecessors the Shaybānīds and the Tīmūrīds, Mīr Yāribeg Khān professed Sunni Islam and was strongly opposed to the Ismailis. His descendents continued to oppress and attack the Ismailis, for instance, in the mid 12th/18th century raiding Chitrāl.¹⁶⁶ The religious hostility and intolerance of the Yarids resulted in the Ismailis being declared adherents of a heretic creed and was one of the main reasons for the sharp socio-political and cultural decline of Badakhshān.¹⁶⁷ Moreover, prior to this, there are numerous documents dating to the beginning of the 11th/17th century which provide information about the condemnation of the Ismailis by the ruling authorities. These documents which were discovered and published by Khalilallāh Khalilī in Kabul in 1959 include a series of *waqf* (endowment) deeds whose wording contains anti-Ismaili sentiments.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ A.E. Bertel's and Mamadvafo Bakaev, *Alfavitnyi katalog rukopisei obnaruzhennykh v Gorno-Badakhshanskoï avtonomnoï oblasti ekspeditsiei 1959–1963 gg.* [Alphabetical Catalogue of Manuscripts found by the 1959–1963 Expedition to the GBAO], ed. B.G. Ghafurov and A.M. Mirzoev (Moscow, 1967), pp. 78–119.

¹⁶⁵ Beben, 'The Ismaili of Central Asia', p. 8. See, Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḥaydar Dūghlāt, *Tārīkh-i Rashīdī*, ed. 'Abbāsquī Ghaffārī Fard (Tehran, 1383 Sh./2004), pp. 346–347, referenced by Beben in 'The Ismaili of Central Asia'.

¹⁶⁶ Mirzo Sangmuhammadi Badakhshī and Mirzo Fazlalibeki Surkhafsar, *Tārīkh-i Badakhshon*, pp. 32–33; Beben, 'The Ismaili of Central Asia', p. 8.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. Also see, Gabrielle van den Berg, 'Keeping Religion Alive: Performing Pamiri Identity in Central Asia', *International Institute for Asian Studies*, 74 (Summer 2016), p. 37.

¹⁶⁸ Khalilallāh Khalilī, *Yumgān* (Kabul, 1959), pp. 2–15. See also, Shokhumorov, *Razdelenie Badakhshana*, p. 27.

The *waqf* deeds specifically state that the lands around the tomb of Nāṣir-i Khusraw were granted as *waqf* administered by the *shaykh* of the *mazār* (mausoleum or shrine). Nāṣir-i Khusraw was declared a Sunni saint, and a shrine was built over his grave. Another anti-Ismaili campaign occurred with the rise to power in Kabul of Aḥmad Shāh Durrānī (r. 1160–1186/1747–1772), who fought a devastating campaign against the Yārid dynasty and the Ismailis of Badakhshān. The weakening of Yārid rule over Badakhshān allowed for the emergence of a semi-independent Shughnān region. In this regard Shaftolu Gulamadov writes that:

In the second half of the 11th/17th century, the Ismāʿīlīs seem to have established closer contacts with their Imams, who, as demonstrated were generally practicing pious circumspection under Twelver Shiʿism. Still later, in the second half of the 12th/18th century, other, more significant, socio-political developments in Ismāʿīlism and in Badakhshān took place, making this period different from the immediate preceding centuries. First, the power of later Yārids, who were clearly anti-Ismāʿīlī, weakened due to internecine wars and the constant struggles with other external dynasties. Second, the Ismāʿīlī imamate in Iran and subsequently in India came to operate openly, which seems to have encouraged the Ismāʿīlīs of Badakhshān to follow suit and carry out their religious activities more publicly. The Imam authorized the *pīr* to establish the Ismāʿīlī *daʿwah* in Badakhshān. From the mid-18th century until the time of the composition of the *Sīlk-i gawhar-rīz* (completed in the 1830s) and until the beginning of the 20th century the Ismāʿīlī *daʿwah* operated actively in Badakhshān.¹⁶⁹

As regards Shughnān, even though local sources indicate that the ruling dynasty was not Ismaili, the sources confirm that in the course of the 12th/18th century it developed a close relationship with the heads of the Ismaili *daʿwa*. One such Shughnānī ruler was Shāh Vanjī, who became the disciple of a prominent Ismaili *pīr*, Khwāja Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ. According to *Sīlk-i gawhar-rīz*, a work written by Khwāja Ṣāliḥ's grandson, Shāh Vanjī sponsored the efforts of a number of missionaries to spread the *daʿwa* in other parts of the region.¹⁷⁰ But this should be seen as an interlude since from then on there was a constant struggle between Sunni rulers on the one hand, and the Ismaili population and the *pīrs* on the other. Indeed, from the 10th/16th century onwards, after the Timūrid conquests,

¹⁶⁹ Gulamadov, *The Hagiography of Nāṣir-i Khusraw*, pp. 84–85. See also, Elʿchibekov, *Ierarkhiā Dukhovenstva*, p. 269.

¹⁷⁰ Beben, *The Legendary Biographies*, p. 287.

Badkshshān was no longer a place of refuge for Ismailis and instead considered as unbelievers the Ismailis of Badakhshān had to practise *taqiyya*.¹⁷¹

This study will now narrow its focus to the areas where Ismailis have been the majority or dominant group. The Ismailis of this region, often referred to as Pamiri or Pamiri-Tajik people, have been studied by a number of scholars, such as the historian Bahodur Iskandarov (1912–2004). He provided a thorough examination of the history of the late medieval and modern periods even though, like his contemporaries, he was subject to Soviet ideological constraints on his scholarship. However, by focusing on a reconstruction of the past, Iskandarov was able to sidestep the Russian-Soviet political and ideological understanding and interpretation of the literature on the Ismailis.

Until the early 11th/17th century, the remote regions of Badakhshān, that is Wakhān, Shughnān, Rūshān and Darvāz, had enjoyed virtual independence under the rule of indigenous dynasties. Throughout the 12th/18th century, Rūshān, Shughnān and Wakhān fought for political independence from the rulers of Badakhshān, Qundūz and Darvāz, and eventually became semi-independent satellite kingdoms under the sovereign rulers of Darvāz, who levied taxes on them. In 1829, an Uzbek khan called Murād Beg who ruled over Qunduz to the east of Badakhshān invaded the region.¹⁷² Like previous external rulers he targeted the Ismaili population of the region in slave raids, forcing many Ismailis to flee to the inaccessible gorges of Shughnān and the surrounding areas. As a result of this persecution, the only Ismaili communities in Badakhshān that were able to preserve their beliefs and practice were those living in isolated mountain gorges such as those in the districts of Wakhān, Shughnān and Darvāz.

Thus in the first half of the 13th/19th century, Shughnān (including Rūshān) and Wakhān while preserving a degree of independent rule, varying in degree and length, acknowledged also the authority of more powerful neighbours such as the *amīr* of Badakhshān, although Murād Beg, the ruler of the local feudal state of Qunduz, was able to maintain his independence.

¹⁷¹ Shokhumorov, *Razdelenie Badakhshana*, p. 27.

¹⁷² Murād Beg mounted several devastating invasions of Wakhān (in which he killed the ruler of Wakhān) and Shughnān (leading to a significant reduction in population). See, John Wood, *A Journey to the Source of the River Oxus* (London: John Murray, 1872), pp. 159–160.

Throughout the 13th/19th century there seem to have been a series of wars between the rulers of Shughnān and Wakhān for control of Ishkāshim, and other areas such as Ghārān (known for its ruby mines), Shākh dara and Ghund. Likewise, there were frequent wars between the Kyrgyz of the Eastern Pamir and Darvāz and Shughnān over Rūshān and Bartang.¹⁷³

Around 1295/1878, the Khanate of Bukhārā incorporated Darvāz along with Qal'a-yi Khumb and the valley of Vanj and Yazghulām into its territories as Eastern Bukhārā. But the end of the 13th/19th century saw increasing rivalry between Russia and Britain for influence in this part of Central Asia. This resulted in an Afghan army under Amīr 'Abd al-Raḥmān Khān (r. 1299–1319/1880–1901) invading Wakhān, Shughnān and Rūshān. The expansionist policies of 'Abd al-Raḥmān Khān prompted an immediate response from Tsarist Russia.

As a result of this situation, the British and Russian colonial powers decided to hold a special conference on the Pamir question, which took place in St Petersburg in April 1309/1892. The conference considered two main issues: (i) sending Russian armed forces to the Pamir region; and (ii) demarcating the territory of the Pamir region and marking the borders of China, Afghanistan and British India. The conference also decided to send an Anglo-Russian commission to this region to study the topography of the northern and eastern borders of Afghanistan.¹⁷⁴

This arbitrary demarcation of the borders, agreed between Great Britain and Russia on 25 February 1313/1895, put an end to a series of protracted border disputes.¹⁷⁵ On 29 August 1313/1895, the commission finalised the border demarcation. Britain and Russia signed an agreement in London defining 'the spheres of influence of the two countries in the region of the Pamirs' to which both Afghanistan and Bukhārā had

¹⁷³ N. Elias, 'Report of a Mission to Chinese Turkistan and Badakhshan 1885-1886', in M. Ewan, ed., *Britain and Russia in Central Asia, 1880-1907* (London, 2008), vol. 5, pp. 47–48.

¹⁷⁴ *Illustrated London News*, 14 June, 1884, p. 574. The *Times* carried a similar notice entitled 'The Northern and North-Western Frontiers of Afghanistan' on 9 June 1884, p. 5, in Neil K. Moran. *Kipling and Afghanistan: A Study of the Young Author as Journalist Writing on the Afghan Border Crisis of 1884–1885* (London, 2005), p. 13.

¹⁷⁵ The Earl of Kimberley to M. de Staal, Foreign Office March 2, 1895. 'Agreement between the governments of Great Britain and Russia with regard to the spheres of influence of the two countries in the region of the Pamirs. 1894', in Martin Ewans, ed., *Britain and Russia in Central Asia, 1880–1907* (London, 2008), pp. 252–254.

consented in advance.¹⁷⁶ According to this treaty, Darvāz, and parts of Rūshān, Shughnān and Wakhān on the left bank of the Panj River, became part of Afghanistan. Furthermore, under the same agreement the administration of Wakhān, Shughnān and Rūshān on the right bank of the Panj River was nominally transferred to the *amīr* of Bukhārā as compensation for his loss of territories in Darvāz. The outcome of the 1313/1895 establishment of the frontier between the Emirate of Bukhārā (which had become a Russian protectorate), and Afghanistan, which was under the tutelage of British India, was that the lion's share of historical Badakhshān now became part of Afghanistan.¹⁷⁷

Following the demarcation of the borders, the Russians set up permanent military headquarters in Khārūgh, now the capital of Gorno-Badakhshān, and expelled the Afghan forces installed there. Having already made the *amīr* of Bukhārā and the Khan of Khoqand their vassals in 1285/1868 and 1293/1876, respectively, the Russians now established their sovereignty over the whole Pamir region.¹⁷⁸ However, the demarcation of the region of Badakhshān did not put an end to the suffering of the local people at the hands of the Afghan and Bukharan *amīrs*. While the British had 'granted' the districts of Wakhān, Shughnān and Rūshān on the left bank of the Panj River, to the Afghan *amīr*, the Russians had left the territories on the right bank of the Panj in the hands the *amīr* of Bukhārā. Having received these districts from the Russians, the *amīr* of Bukhārā appointed his viceroy governor there. In fact, the rule of the *amīr* of Bukhārā lasted only nine years (1313–1321/1895–1904), during which he continued with the same anti-Ismaili policy he had pursued previously.

The main reason for the unwillingness of the Ismaili population of the Pamirs to accept the *amīr*'s rule was their religious differences.¹⁷⁹ The local people under the leadership of the Ismaili *pīrs* vented their frustration at the Russian decision that left them in the hands of the Bukharan *amīr*. Following a request from the Russian military garrison in Khārūgh to include the

¹⁷⁶ Seymour Becker, *Russia's Protectorates in Central Asia: Bukhara and Khiva, 1865–1924* (London, 2004), p. 124.

¹⁷⁷ Haīdarsho S. Pirumshoev, *Ta'rikh-i Darvoz* [The History of Darvāz] (Dushanbe, 2008), p. 108; Dagikhudo Dagiev, *Regime Transition in Central Asia: Stateness, Nationalism and Political Change in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan* (London, 2013), pp. 93–94.

¹⁷⁸ L.N. Kharīukov, *Anglo-russkoe sopernichestvo v Tsentral'noi Azii i ismailizm* [Anglo-Russian Rivalry in Central Asia and Ismailism] (Moscow, 1995), pp. 100–113.

¹⁷⁹ Shokhumorov, *Razdelenie Badakhshana*, p. 62.

Map of Badakhshan

The Panj River (Amū Daryā) which divides Tajik Badakhshān from Afghan Badakhshān as a result of Anglo-Russian rivalry in Central Asia in the late 13th/19th century

Pamir region under the direct control of the Russian governor-general of Turkestan, several uprisings against the *amīr* of Bukhārā broke out.

The representatives of the *amīr* of Bukhārā ‘Abd al-Aḥad Khān (r. 1303–1328/1885–1911) regarded the Ismailis as ‘infidels’ and so their treatment of them was inhuman. In this regard, the Russian officer L.N. Khariūkov wrote, ‘after the establishment of a new border in the Pamir (and the Pamir’s transfer to Bukharan administration) at the behest of the great powers, without taking into account the vital interests of the Pamir nationalities, life became even harder for the Ismaili populations.’¹⁸⁰ As a result several letters were sent to the Russians on behalf of the Ismaili community under the leadership of the *pīrs*, such as the one from Yūsuf ‘Alī Shāh (d. 1932) who played a critical role at this point in the history of the Pamir region. The Russians also felt some responsibility for the fate of the people whose territory they had transferred to Bukhārā, and began to create obstacles for the Bukharan officials in pursuing their anti-Ismaili policy in the region. T.G. Tukhtametov wrote, ‘During the anti-Bukharan

¹⁸⁰ Khariūkov, *Anglo-russkoe sopernichestvo*, p. 63.

uprising of 1314/1896, the Tsarist authorities began intensively intervening in the affairs of the Bukharan authorities over Shughnān, Rūshān and Wakhān, and this undermined the authority of Bukharan officials in the eyes of the local inhabitants.¹⁸¹

In 1905, upon being apprised of several of the grievances of the Ismailis, the *pīrs* appealed to the Russian authorities. This situation forced the Russians to take a decisive step in terms of changing the status and the socio-political situation of the western Pamir, and the region was taken out of Bukharan control and handed over to the Russian governor-general of Turkestan.¹⁸² As a result, there was for a time some kind of certainty and stability in the social life of the communities in Wakhān, Shughnān and Rūshān. Beside protecting them from the depredations of the Afghans and Bukharans, the newly arrived Russians began road building, encouraged the use of horses¹⁸³ and gradually a minimum of basic health care was established through the Russian *feldsher* system.¹⁸⁴ A public school was opened in Khārūgh in 1914, and the commitment of the local Ismaili community to educate both boys and girls is recorded in late 13th/19th century reports by explorers.¹⁸⁵ A road between Osh (now in Kyrgyzstan) and the Murghāb district (now in Gorno-Badakhshān) was opened in 1315/1897 and connected to Khārūgh a few years later. However, stability

¹⁸¹ T.G. Tukhtametov, 'Antiruskie poiski inostrantsev v Bukhare i na Pamire. Politicheskie techeniia v emirate Bukhara' [The Anti-Russian Search for Foreigners in Bukhara and the Pamirs. Political Trends in the Emirate of Bukhara], *Voprosy istorii Tadzhikistana. Uchenye zapiski* [Questions on the History of Tajikistan. Scholarly Notes], vol. 26. Serii obshchest. nauk, 4 (Stalinabad, 1961), pp. 140–177.

¹⁸² Shokhumorov, *Razdelenie Badakhshana*, p. 78. We might also note here that the Russian annexation of Turkestan as a whole increased the size of the Russian empire by approximately 11 per cent.

¹⁸³ O. Olufsen, *Through The Unknown Pamirs – The Second Danish Pamir Expedition, 1898–99* (London, 1904), p. 117: 'When I passed from Langarkish to Khorok the first time in 1896, there were no horses to be seen. But of late years the province has made much progress under Russian protection, and now the little horses of Kirghiz and Badakhshān have been imported. These horses are small, persevering, sagacious, and well adapted to mountain use, and they are highly prized by the people.'

¹⁸⁴ *Feldsher* is the Russian term for a health care professional who provides various medical services, mainly in rural areas. *Feldshers* provide primary, obstetrical and surgical care services in many rural medical centres and ambulatory care across Russia.

¹⁸⁵ Hermann Kreutzmann and Teiji Watanabe, ed., *Mapping Transition in the Pamirs: Changing Human-Environmental Landscapes* (Cham, 2016), p. 248.

and progress for the Pamirs was short lived, as it was interrupted by the revolutions and upheavals in Russia starting at the end of the 1917 and continuing in 1918.

As noted above, Russian imperial interest in Badakhshān was strategic and formed an integral part of Russian strategy in the Great Game. In addition to competition with British imperial rule in the end of the 13th/19th and the beginning of the 20th century, it intersected with an anti-Ismaili strategy that was being unfolded by Russian military forces in Bukhārā, Afghanistan and China.

In 1902 the Consulate of Russia in Kashgar reported to the Tsar Nicholas II that the Ismaili faith had spread in Kashgar (eastern China) and Osh. This expansionist trend was perceived as a threat to Russian interests in the region. Therefore, the Russians decided to block communications between the Ismailis of Central Asia and their spiritual leader, Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh, Aga Khan III (r. 1885–1957), the Nizārī Ismaili imam. The Russian Consulate, thus, viewed the Ismailis as agents of British imperial interests, who could work against Russian interests in the region.¹⁸⁶

According to Bobrinskoï, writing in the early years of the 20th century, and in contrast to the state of affairs in the 11th/17th and 12th/18th centuries, the Ismaili faith had now spread throughout Badakhshān and neighbouring regions and prevailed in the Wakhān valley, the Zībāk and Mundjān areas of Chitrāl, Kandjut (now in Afghanistan and Pakistan), Ishkāshim, Ghārān, Shughnān on both sides of the Panj River, Rūshān and Sarikūl (now in China). Furthermore, Bobrinskoï propounded, in Afghan Darvāz, Ismailis were found in villages such as Jārf, Ghūmaï, Āmur and Jāmarj, and below Qal'a-yi Khumb (the centre of Darvāz), and on the Afghan side in villages such as Khādara and Zingiria. In the village of Yāgīd, on the other side of the Panj River, most of the population were Ismaili, with a minority being Ithnā'asharī. In the Katagan village of Guria, there were a few Ismaili families, while the majority were Sunni. Furthermore, the Hazāra communities near Kabul were mostly Ismaili with only a small portion being Ithnā'asharī. In Bukhārā, Qoqand and Osh, the residents who were natives of Shughnān and Wakhān were all Ismaili.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ Stanishevskii, *Ismailizm na Pamire* (1902–1931) [Ismailism in the Pamirs (1902–1931)], p. 108. Also, Kharīukov, *Anglo-russkoe sopernichestvo*, pp. 100–113.

¹⁸⁷ Bobrinskoï, 'Sakta ismail'īā', p. 18.

Tsarist colonial policy and imperial interests resulted in the marginalisation of the broader Tajik religious communities, a process which continued into the Soviet era. Communities were isolated by the establishment of borders that were political rather than geographic, making conditions difficult for the Ismailis in parts of Badakhshān in both Tajikistan and Afghanistan, the western regions of China and northern India (now northern Pakistan).¹⁸⁸ Until then, the Ismailis of the region had been united in their common faith, culture and history, as well as through the Persian language, which was used as a lingua franca throughout Central Asia, Afghanistan, in the north of the Indian sub-continent and in Kashgar in the west of China.¹⁸⁹ However, in the course of the 13th/19th century, with British control of India and the Russian advance in Central Asia, Farsi ultimately lost its status and other languages became dominant. Since then, the Tajik Ismaili communities in the north of Pakistan have adopted Urdu, and those in western China used Uyghur, as their functioning languages.¹⁹⁰

Meanwhile, once the Pamir region had been subjugated in 1905–1906 and placed under the direct rule of the Russian Tsar, the situation gradually stabilised, and until the October Revolution in Russia in 1917, supreme power remained with the Russian military forces (the governor-general of Turkestan). In the Pamir region, this was implemented by the Russian Pamir military detachment in Khārūgh. Over time, the Tajik Ismailis came to be recognised by the Russians and to a certain extent the attitude towards the Ismailis and their spiritual leader, Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh, Aga Khan III, in the early decades of the 20th century improved:

In 1912, at the invitation of His Majesty, the Emperor of Russia Nicholas II, the spiritual leader of the Ismailis – His Highness Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh [Aga Khan III] visited St Petersburg. He was in amicable relations with the Tsar of Russia. Subsequently, the Aga Khan was highly appreciative of the accord for the voluntary joining of the Pamirs to the Russian Imperial Rule. Already in 1913, the first delegation of the Pamirs visited St Petersburg to

¹⁸⁸ Karl Jettmar, *Religii Hindukusha*, tr. from German by K.D. Tsivina (Moscow, 1986).

¹⁸⁹ Edward A. Allworth, *The Modern Uzbeks. From the Fourteenth Century to the Present* (Stanford, 1990), p. 104.

¹⁹⁰ Linda Tsung, *Language Power and Hierarchy: Multilingual Education in China* (London, 2014).

celebrate the 300th anniversary of the House of Romanov. Among them there were 'Aziz Khān, the ruler of Shākh-dara, a resident of Bartang-Mastali, and a resident of Alay-Tahur Bek.¹⁹¹

Compared to the rulers of Bukhārā and the Afghans, the Russian evinced a much more humane attitude towards the local people, especially the Ismailis. In addition, as has been said, they helped to develop education by establishing modern schools, which later on embarked on teaching local culture and tradition, and by teaching sciences and modern languages significantly contributed to the future development of the region. Correspondingly, a Russian scholar of oriental studies, Bobrinskiĭ, expressed an influential opinion in this regard:

In conclusion, I must express my opinion about our relationship with Islam in Central Asia. Currently, we support only Sunnis, ignoring not only the small minorities (Ismailis, Babis), but even the Shi'a, as if our goal is the unification of Islam and the absorption of all its ramifications by Sunnism, which, I think, does not fully coincide with our interests. I think that our direct political calculation should be to recognise that all the branches of Islam have the right to an official and independent life, and, as a consequence of this recognition, I would consider it obligatory for us to protect this right, given to everyone, from the encroachments of the stronger sides or more militant confession.¹⁹²

Bobrinskiĭ visited the local *pīrs* and discussed the Ismaili Weltanschauung with them. According to him they displayed a liberal and tolerant interpretation of Islam. He believed that the Pamiri *pīrs* should be acknowledged for the crucial role they played in the modern history of the region. This was probably the case as it was the tremendous efforts of the local *pīrs*, local political leaders and certain intellectuals in the Pamirs that had preserved and maintained the cultural heritage of the community down the centuries and helped it to flourish.

¹⁹¹ *Istoriia Pamira*, available online at: <http://www.pamir-spb.ru/istoriya.html> [Last accessed, 16 April 2017]. Also see, Sunatullo Jonboboev, 'Geography, ethnicity and cultural heritage in interplay in the context of the Tajik Pamiri identity', in Dagikhudo Dagiev and Carole Faucher, ed. *Identity, History and Trans-Nationality in Central Asia: The Mountain Communities of Pamir* (London, 2018), pp. 11–22.

¹⁹² A.A. Bobrinskiĭ, 'Sakta ismail'iā', p. 18.

The Russian Revolution and the Panjebhai Movement

The Russian Revolution put an end to Tsarist rule and revolutionary committees were established in every corner of the empire, eventually taking initiatives and establishing the new social order, or as it was labelled later on, *Sovetskaia Vlast* 'Soviet power', which was also known locally as the *Hukumat-e Shūravī*. In the Pamir, until December 1918, power remained in the hands of the Pamir border detachment of the Provisional Government, headed by Colonel V.V. Fenin (1875–1933). But when the Council of Peoples' Commissars of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (TASSR) sent a detachment of Revolutionary Guards headed by P. Volovik to the Pamirs in November 1918; however before they reached the Pamirs in December, Fenin and his collaborators fled to India.¹⁹³ The fall of Tsarism in Russia was received with pleasure by the *amīr* of Bukhārā, Mīr Muḥammad 'Alīm Khān (r. 1911–1920), who immediately endeavoured to take advantage of the situation, with the help of local officials, in order to regain control over the western Pamir region. But the people of Shughnān rose against the Bukharan soldiers in support of the new Soviet authorities,¹⁹⁴ and as a result the *amīr* of Bukhārā's attempt at a take-over proved abortive. Another failed attempt was made by an anti-Bolshevik group known as the Basmachi,¹⁹⁵ who sought to restore traditional rule over these territories and implemented harsh measures against the local Ismailis.

In 1921, the Pamir Revolutionary Committee was established; it began to organise the *Hukumat-e Shūravī* in the villages and the mountain districts. After the *Hukumat-e Shūravī* was established in the Pamirs, daily life and protection of the state's borders were administered by a military-political Troika consisting of T.M. D'īakov, T. Khuseinbaev and S. Shotemur, who have been recorded by history as the organisers of *Hukumat-e Shūravī* in the Pamirs.¹⁹⁶ A study of archival documents

¹⁹³ Diplomba: *Tadzhikskii narod v period mezhdu dvukh revoliutsii (fevral'-oktiabr' 1917 goda)*. Available online at: <http://diplomba.ru/work/84575> [Last accessed, 20 May 2019].

¹⁹⁴ Hakim Elnazarov and Sultanbek Aksakolov, 'The Nizari Ismailis of Central Asia in Modern Times', in Farhad Daftary, ed., *A Modern History of the Ismailis: Continuity and Changes in a Muslim Community* (London, 2011), pp. 45–75, 53.

¹⁹⁵ The Basmachi were anti-Soviet rebels in Turkestan between the Russian Revolution and the early 1930s. The term, derived from the Turkic word *basmak* (to attack or raid), connotes banditry and was originally a pejorative term used by the Russians.

¹⁹⁶ M. Nazarshoev, *Muborizi rohi haqiqat* [Fighter for Justice] (Dushanbe, 1993), pp. 10–11. Shokhumorov, *Razdelenie Badakhshana*, p. 87.

reveals that until 1922 the attitude of the new government towards the Ismailis was completely neutral and there were no repressive measures against either *pīrs* or ordinary Ismailis. In the first years of Soviet rule, despite the fact that the Communist Party and its ideology were fundamentally hostile to religion, attempts were made to maintain good relations with religious figures and their *murīds*.¹⁹⁷

Following the establishment of Soviet rule in the Pamirs, the region was transferred to the Farghāna Oblast of TASSR in 1923, becoming part of the Turkestan region. Two years later, in 1925, with the demarcation of national borders, the Pamir region was promoted to the status of 'Autonomous Oblast [region] of Gorno-Badakhshān'. It was then transferred to the Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, which became known as the Soviet Socialist Republic of Tajikistan in 1929.¹⁹⁸ According to the Soviet authorities, the incorporation of the Pamir region was carried out on the basis of common geographic, linguistic, cultural and ethnic features. Some historical sources of the 19th and early 20th century, including ethnographic studies by the Russians, argued that the people of the Pamir region, regardless of certain differences such as linguistic diversity and divergence of belief from the lowland Tajiks, referred to themselves as 'mountain Tajiks'.¹⁹⁹ In fact, several Tajik Ismailis played a vital role in the formation and the establishment of the autonomous region of Badakhshān and the national republic of Tajikistan. One of these was Shirinsho Shohtemur (1899–1937). Originally from Shughnān, he received his secondary education at a Russian school and played an instrumental role in the formation of modern Tajikistan. For this reason he was declared a national hero of Tajikistan in 2006.²⁰⁰

However, the voluntary submission of the Pamir region to Russian imperial rule, on the one hand, and the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, on the other, led to divisions in the Ismaili religious hierarchy in the region. The dramatic changes in the socio-political life of the Ismaili

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 87.

¹⁹⁸ Dagiev, *Regime Transition in Central Asia*, p. 26.

¹⁹⁹ A.M. D'īakov, *īazyki sovetского Pamira. Kul'tura i pis'mennost' Vostoka* [Languages of the Soviet Pamirs. Culture and Writing of the East], vol. 10 (Moscow, 1931); A.S. Davydov, *Ėtnicheskaiā prinallezhnost' korennogo naseleniā Gornogo Badakhshana (Pamir)* [Ethnicity of the Indigenous Population of Gorno-Badakhshān (Pamir)] (Dushanbe, 2005); Dagiev, 'Pamiri Ethnic Identity', pp. 23–44.

²⁰⁰ Dagiev, *Regime Transition in Central Asia*, p. 28.

community engendered reforms to religious traditions and rituals in order to modernise the community so that it could face of the challenges of the modern era. The Panjebhai was one such movement, headed by a group of Ismaili community leaders, which attempted to rise to the challenge.

The term Panjebhai is a compound of two nouns: *panj* ‘five’ and *bhai* ‘brother’, both components of which appear in a variety of South Asian languages (such as Hindi, Gujarati, Punjabi, etc.). The first component, *panj*, means five in Persian and Sanskrit, while the second component, *bhai*, means brother in a variety of modern South Asian languages.²⁰¹ According to Paul Bergne, the Ismaili reform movement in the Pamirs became known as the Panjebhai movement in the 1920s.²⁰² The movement initially spread among the Ismailis of South Asia in the second half of the 19th century. It spread in Soviet Badakhshān, predominantly in Shughān and Rūshān, during the early 1920s and its activities coincided with the visit of a high-profile Ismaili emissary of the Imam Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh, Pīr Sabzalī Ramḍān ‘Alī (1871–1938) in 1923.²⁰³ During these years, advocates of the movement in Badakhshān introduced changes to both the religious and social life of the community. For instance, they sought to introduce religious education throughout the community and attempted to simplify some religious rituals. However the introduction of initiatives such as the new *panj tasbīḥ* ‘Alī-i Zamān funeral ceremony instead of the old *Charāgh-i rawshan*²⁰⁴ funeral rite and the establishment of the ‘trusted groups’ or *anjumans* who would be

²⁰¹ Muzaffar Zoolshoev, ‘Forgotten Figures of Badakhshan – Sayyid Munir al-Din Badakhshani and Sayyid Haydar Shah Mubarakshahzada’, in Dagiev and Faucher, ed., *Identity, History and Trans-Nationality in Central Asia*, pp. 143–172. For more details, see also Zoolshoev, ‘The Soviet State and a Religious Movement’.

²⁰² Paul Bergne, *The Birth of Tajikistan: National Identity and the Origins of the Republic* (London, 2007), p. 97.

²⁰³ Zoolshoev, ‘Forgotten Figures of Badakhshan’; Zoolshoev, ‘The Soviet State and a Religious Movement’.

²⁰⁴ *Charāgh-i rawshan*: a religious funeral ceremony conducted by the family of the deceased. The ceremony is ascribed to Nāṣir-i Khusraw and known also as *da’wat-i Nāṣir*. There are two types of *da’wat* ceremony in Badakhshān; the first is *da’wat-i fanā*, performed for the soul of the deceased; and the second, is *da’wat-i baqā*, performed for the eternal life of the soul. See also, H. Elnazarov, ‘Chirāgh-i Rawshan’, *EIS*, vol. 5, pp. 676–681.

responsible for the collection and sending of religious dues known as *zakāt* to Bombay, to the Ismaili Imam Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh, Aga Khan III, met with strong opposition from some influential *pīrs* and *khalīfas*, who then began an active campaign against the movement.

Another significant element of the movement's history is the fact that its emergence coincided with the establishment of Soviet power which became distinctly hostile towards religion in the interwar years. By the late 1930s, and as a result of the Soviet anti-religion campaign, the leading Panjebhais, as well as the *pīrs* who opposed them, had all been either imprisoned or eliminated by the state authorities. Only a small number of the Panjebhai groups continued practising their new *panj tasbīḥ* 'Alī-i Zamān funeral ceremony in some villages in Shugnān and Rūshān.²⁰⁵

The movement's aim to introduce reforms and bring modernity to the Ismaili community in the Pamir region coincided with the development of modern schools, hospitals, cultural centres, power stations, roads and airports in all major areas of the region brought under Soviet rule, which dramatically changed the living standards of the local Ismaili community.

The Ismaili Community in the Soviet Era

During the Soviet era, the Badakhshān region had the highest proportion of individuals with higher education qualifications in the Soviet Union. It produced a great number of highly educated professionals who made valuable contributions to the Tajik state and society. Improved health, education, social welfare and security resulted in rapid demographic changes and greater mobility, which prompted many Ismailis to migrate to the lowlands of Tajikistan and to other parts of the Soviet Union. However the Ismailis, like the rest of the Soviet peoples, also experienced the collectivisation of agriculture, when land was nationalised and the cultivation of certain cash crops (e.g. tobacco and cotton) was forced upon the people. Furthermore, 'beginning in the 1930s and continuing intermittently until the late 1960s, the Soviet authorities forcibly transferred people from the central and eastern zones of Tajikistan to provide labour for new industries and, especially, for intensive agricultural projects.'²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ Zoolshoev, 'Forgotten Figures of Badakhshan', pp. 143–172.

²⁰⁶ Shirin Akiner and Catherine Barnes, 'The Tajik Civil War: Causes and Dynamics', in Kamoludin Abdullaev and Catherine Barnes, ed., *Politics of Compromise: The Tajikistan Peace Process*, Accord Issue 10 (London, 2001), pp. 16–21.

The forced migration of the mountain people, including Ismailis, to the southern lowlands of Tajikistan with their very hot summers resulted in many deaths. In 1937–1938 the ‘great purges’ of Soviet intelligentsia and intellectuals who displayed any opposition to Soviet rule, or who might possibly present an obstacle to the realisation of the Hukūmat-e Shūravī, included a great many of the Ismaili political, intellectual and cultural elite. Furthermore, the local youth were encouraged to move to other parts of the Soviet Union to meet the deficit in labour elsewhere.²⁰⁷

By the end of the 1920s, the Soviet authorities had started placing restrictions on religious freedom and the activities of the religious communities and their leaders. Taking a Marxist perspective, the Soviet government regarded any religious belief, ceremonies and functionaries as the means of manipulating uneducated people in order to disturb them or distract them from building the new Soviet society and creating the new Soviet man (*Homo Sovieticus*).²⁰⁸ In the history of the Ismailis of Soviet Tajikistan the year 1936 marked a turning point. A particular concern for the Hukūmat-e Shūravī and the Communist Party was the border issue between Tajikistan, China and Afghanistan, given the number of Tajik Ismailis residing in these countries. Moscow decided to seal the borders of Tajikistan with Afghanistan and China, which resulted in the complete isolation of the Ismailis of Tajikistan from their co-religionists in those countries. Above all, the sealing of the borders was intended to prevent any future contacts with the Ismaili imam and his representatives. The Hukūmat-e Shūravī launched a new propaganda campaign, accusing the *pīrs* and other religious officials of being class enemies and disloyal to the Soviet system. Moreover, the strengthening of the Hukūmat-e Shūravī all over the country and the consolidation of centralised power led to the imposition of a strict atheist ideology, which gradually forced prominent religious authorities such as *pīrs* to flee the country, and if they did not they were either jailed or executed.²⁰⁹

Thus, during the Soviet era religious life and the practice of the faith became restricted in every aspect and in some areas it was almost

²⁰⁷ Sarfarozi Niyozov, ‘Shi‘a Ismaili Tradition in Central Asia: Evolution, Continuities and Changes’, *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 24 (2003), pp. 39–46. Available online at: <http://www.ca-c.org/journal/eng-06-2003/05.niyprimen.shtml> [Last accessed, 7 May 2019].

²⁰⁸ Alexander Zinoviev, *Homo Sovieticus* (Paladin Grafton Book, 1986).

²⁰⁹ Shokhumorov, *Razdelenie Badakhshana*, pp. 72–76.

impossible for religious communities to maintain and observe their traditions and rituals. The Hukūmat-e Shūravī considered any religion or religious ritual as outdated myths, superstitions and expressions of fanaticism, and membership in religious communities was suppressed.²¹⁰ Therefore the clerics, or *khalīfas*, had to ‘hand over all religious matters to local officials’, as refusal could have led to imprisonment or even the death penalty. Government officials or representatives of the state institutions, including whistle-blowers, were present during religious ceremonies with the result that the *khalīfas* could not perform their religious duties.²¹¹ However, some *khalīfas* did manage to perform rituals as they regarded it their duty to do so, even though the consequences could be dire.²¹² The *khalīfas* went underground and some ordinary members of the community also risked their lives and, in private, maintained their devotional practices, in particular, the funeral ceremony. The oppressive measures of the Soviet authorities could not prevent the performance of these religious obligations, and this led to the practice of a ‘parallel Islam’, where religious rites were performed informally and secretly.²¹³ However, a shift in the official approach occurred during the Second World War, particularly in 1943, when the Soviet authorities desperately needed the support of the entire Soviet population in the war effort against Nazi Germany. They finally relaxed state repression and restrictions on religion, allowing people to perform their religious duties and ceremonies and re-opening many mosques, churches, synagogues and other places of worship.

A similar policy of détente towards religion occurred in the 1960s when the Soviet authorities realised the impossibility of imposing atheism on the population and decided to change their policy and keep religion under their control, creating official religious structures. As far as the Ismailis were concerned, henceforth, *khalīfas* were appointed by the state,

²¹⁰ Frank Bliss, *Social and Economic Change in the Pamirs (Gorno-Badakhshan, Tajikistan)*, tr. from German by Nicola Pacult and Sonia Guss (London, 2005), p. 62.

²¹¹ Valentin Bushkov and Tokhin Kalandarov, ‘Ismaility Tadzshikistana: Traditsii i Sovremennost’, *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 6 (2002), pp. 130–135. Available online at: http://www.ca-c.org/journal/2002/journal_rus/cac-06/15.busrus.shtml [Last accessed, 9 Nov. 2014].

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ A. Matveeva, ‘The Perils of Emerging Statehood: Civil War and State Reconstruction in Tajikistan an Analytical Narrative on State-making’, *Crisis States Research Centre* (March, 2009), p. 8.

but nonetheless the observance of religious practices continued to be a highly private and concealed domain of life.²¹⁴

The Ismaili Community in the Post-Soviet Era

In 1986, Mikhail Gorbachev introduced the policy of *perestroika* (reconstruction) and *glasnost* (openness) in the Soviet Union, and the attitude of the state towards religion underwent a complete change, as a process of political, cultural and religious renaissance took place throughout the USSR. The Soviet state's monolithic atheist policy could not survive the renaissance of its multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, and the year 1991 saw the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Like other Soviet National Republics, Tajikistan declared its independence on 9 September 1991, and the Ismaili community of Badakhshān remained an integral part of it. Tajik Ismailis, like many other people in the newly independent Tajikistan, actively participated in the political developments of the early 1990s, which ultimately led to a civil war (1992–1997). Some Ismaili activists founded a movement called *La'l-i Badakhshān*, with the aim of achieving greater autonomy for the GBAO.²¹⁵ In the early stages of the civil war in 1992–1993, many Ismailis took refuge in Badakhshān, which the war had isolated from the outside world. The inflow of refugees from other war-zones in Tajikistan resulted in food shortages and the conflict caused a complete implosion of the economy and a humanitarian catastrophe of enormous proportions. But, from 1993 on, the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF)'s rural development interventions in Tajikistan coordinated relief and humanitarian assistance. Subsequently, with the change in political climate and the restoration of stability, the AKDN has grown extensively in Tajikistan to become a major force for improving the quality of life in the country.

In addition to this, the re-establishment of connections with their current Imam, Shah Karim al-Husayni, Aga Khan IV, as well as with the global Ismaili community, brought about a new climate of hope for the Tajik Ismailis. Various institutions began working in varying capacities in the region, including grassroots initiatives with local businesses and education, and working towards the development of civil society in the post-Soviet era.

²¹⁴ Niyozov, 'Shi'a Ismaili Tradition in Central Asia', pp. 39–46.

²¹⁵ Dagiev, *Regime Transition in Central Asia*, p. 115.

Khārūgh, the capital of Badakhshān of Tajikistan

Moreover, three visits by Aga Khan IV to Tajikistan in 1995, 1998 and 2008 generated a new spirit in all the people of the region. For the first time in centuries, the Ismailis and their fellow Muslims in Badakhshān joined in recognising their common aspirations. In each of his visits, the Ismaili imam stressed the importance of peaceful co-existence, education and ethics for the development of the economy and civil society in Central Asia. These visits substantially raised the self-confidence of the people, sparked hope in many of them, and contributed to the peace process. The people of the Pamirs now face the future as a revitalised and confident community that hopes to play a constructive role within the global Ismaili community in general and in Central Asia in particular.²¹⁶

In October 2009, an Ismaili Centre in Dushanbe was opened by Aga Khan IV and the President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon. The Ismaili Centre was built in the heart of the capital city with the purpose of encouraging a 'spirit of peace and dialogue and in the search for knowledge and human dignity'. The Ismaili Centre offers the Ismaili community's own outlook and understanding of Islam as 'a thinking, spiritual faith'.²¹⁷

Earlier, in 2000, the University of Central Asia (UCA) was founded. The Presidents of the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan, along

²¹⁶ Niyozov, 'Shi'a Ismaili Tradition in Central Asia', pp. 39–46.

²¹⁷ Fayaz S. Alibhai, 'An Architectural Manifestation of the Continuity between Tradition and Modernity', *The Middle East in London*, 6 (2009), p. 8.

The Aga Khan addressing members of the Ismaili community during his visit to Badakhshān in 1998

with Aga Khan IV, signed the International Treaty and Charter establishing this secular, private, not-for-profit university, which was ratified by the relevant parliaments and registered with the United Nations. The UCA's Tekeli Town campus in Kazakhstan was officially opened in 2003, the Naryn campus was inaugurated in September 2016 in the Kyrgyz Republic, and the second residential campus in Tajikistan, in Khārūgh, opened in September 2017. The UCA brings with it the commitment and partnership of the broader AKDN by offering an internationally recognised standard of higher education in Central Asia. The UCA's mission is to promote the social and economic development of Central Asia, particularly its mountain communities, while at the same time helping the different peoples of the region to preserve and draw upon their rich cultural heritage and diverse traditions as assets for the future.