PLACES, MEMORIES AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY: MUSLIM PLACES OF WORSHIP IN BADAKHSHAN REGION OF TAJIKISTAN

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Abstract

This study examines the ways in which the Ismailis of the Badakhshan region of Tajikistan understand and relate to their sacred sites. It explores the sacred sites of Badakhshan within the framework of anthropological literature on space and place. Using the concept of chronotope, this study shows that the sacred sites disrupt the materialist and historiographic understanding of and relation to the spaces and places. Through the stories of the miracles of the saints, sacred sites validate and confirm the presence of the transcendent in the lived environment of the people. Beyond the legends about the miracles of the saints, sacred sites are chronotopes that evoke the memory of the Soviet campaigns against these places. Through the retrospective narratives about the Soviet past, people allocate the responsibility for the destruction and desecration of these sites at that period to members of their communities. Although these retrospective narratives are about recent events, they include transcendent intervention; that is, they show how these sites punished those that were involved in the Soviet campaigns against them. Moreover, through these discources and through their visitations to the sacred sites, people unconsciously attribute certain agency to them, which emerges in the relationship between people and these places. People seek the help of these sites to grant their wishes. In most cases, these wishes are about curing the seriously ill family member or curing infertility problems. In that sense, sacred sites help people to recapture the sense of agency in situations where they experience its loss. Therefore, sacred sites are chronotopes, the physical sites in the inhabited space of the community that incorporate and evoke the legends about the miracles of the saints, the stories about the recent Soviet past of these sites and the discourses about their current status in the life of the community. The stories and discources associated with the sacred sites affect and shape people's perceptions and articulations of their inhabited spaces and places.

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Note on the transliteration

I use a number of the Tajik-Persian and Arabic words in this text, which, except of proper nouns and well known events, are highlighted with italics. Most of the Persian, Tajik and Arabic words are generally transliterated following the second edition of Encyclopaedia of Islam. However, to keep things simple I used letter j instead of dj, (eg. hajj not hadj) letter q instead of k with a dot (eg. Qur'an not Kur'an) and did not use underline under the letters kh, sh, dh, th, gh, zh.

Maps



Map of Tajikistan – Badakhshan region is marked with brown color.



Map of Badakhshan region of Tajikistan. It shows all the districts of this region and the location of some of the larger villiges and towns. Source: <u>http://www.pamirs.org/maps.htm</u> Accessed. 30 April 2014.

Chapter I: Introduction

In this study, I examine the ways in which the Shi'a Imāmi Ismaili Muslims of the mountainous Badakhshan region of Tajikistan understand and relate to their sacred sites. I situate the analysis of the sacred sites in the Badakhshan region within the framework of the anthropological approaches to the social and cultural construction of space and place. I suggest that sacred sites are chronotopes (time-space) (Bakhtin 1981) that evoke a different perception of space and time that disrupts the usual historiographical and materialist perspectives on these issues (Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 2003). I employ the concept of chronotope in a way similar to Keith Basso's (1996), Tim Ingold's (1993) and Kathleen Stewart's (1996) use of this concept in their studies, which deal with the issues related to space and place. These studies show how people attribute various meanings to space and place, how stories attached to various places represent chronotopes of remembering that disrupt the linear historical narratives (Stewart 1996), how space and place are chronotopes that help people preserve and evoke moral values of the community (Basso 1996) and so forth. I will discuss these studies more fully below. However, unlike these studies, I will focus on the ways in which chronotope helps us to understand the space and place in relation to the sacred. Therefore, based on my ethnographic research, I use the concept of chronotope in the analysis of sacred sites as a general term that encompasses both the legends associated with these places as well as the stories about the past and present of these sites. In that sense, the sacred sites are chronotopes that allow the community to validate the presence of the transcendence (the divine) in their lived environment. Through their contents, the chronotopic narratives confirm this presence and make it acceptable, thereby transforming people's perceptions

and understandings of the particular places in their landscape.

The stories associated with the sacred sites, from the point of view of those who narrate them, are not separate from the history of their community. In that sense, these stories disrupt the historical narratives of historians about the origin and practice of Islam/Ismailism in this region that often view them as mere legends that have no value for historical "truth" (see Schadl 2009). They show different ways in which people understand and practice some aspects of their religion and religious practices that are related to these sites. Through recalling the stories associated with sacred sites, the Ismailis of Badakhshan produce a landscape within which the miracle works of their saints and ancestors are remembered and perpetuated.

The discourses about the status of sacred sites in the life of the community in the present are not homogenous. Some individuals in the community contest the status of these places as having divine power. Moreover, when remembering the past of the sacred sites, some people talked about Soviet anti-religious campaigns in the course of which some of these places were destroyed. Although these narratives are about historical events, they differ from historical accounts in that they include a divine element in their narratives. In these retrospective stories, sacred sites punish those people who are seen as responsible for their destruction or desecration. In that sense, sacred sites are chronotopes through which people remember certain aspects of their recent past and allocate the responsibility for the past wrongdoing to some members of their communities.

These retrospective narratives, along with the belief in the power of the sacred sites to grant wishes, represent some of the ways in which people unconsciously attribute an agency to these places. The agency of sacred sites is relational and is based on the relationship between people and places. In some cases, the Ismailis of Badakhshan appeal to the divine power of these sites when faced with problems in their social lives that they feel powerless to resolve. People visit these sites when faced with terminal illnesses of their family members, childlessness and deaths in their families.

Thus, drawing on the concept of chronotope, I will explore these three broad themes, including the legends and stories associated with the sacred sites, the recent retrospective narratives on these sites and the material agency of these places, to show the ways in which they affect and shape people's perceptions and understandings of their inhabited spaces and places. I will show that sacred sites are complex chronotopes that combine historical and supernatural, and induce and blend memories, feelings and stories from different points in the past to make sense of the present.

Anthropological approaches to space and place

A number of anthropologists have recently observed that the issues of space and place have not received much attention in anthropological theory and conceptualisation (Low & Lawrence-Zuniga 2003). As Margaret Rodman writes, "there is little recognition [among anthropologists] that place is more than locale, the setting for action, the stage on which things happen" (Rodman 1992: 643). In recent years, a number of studies have emerged that deal with some aspects of space and place (Hirsch and O'Hanlon 1995, Basso 1996, Stewart 1996, Mueggler 2001, Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 2003). Yet the study of space and place, as they relate to the sacred, has not received much attention in this anthropological literature.

My discussion of the sacred among the Ismailis of Badakhshan is related but not entirely similar to David Parkin's explanation of the sacred among the Giriama people inhabiting in the coasts of Kenva, which is understood as cleansing/expulsion (Parkin 1991: 224). In the case of Giriama, the ritual of cleansing and purifying certain places is about restoring or sustaining their sacredness. For the Giriama, Kaya, an abandoned settlement, serves as a central point through which they define their spiritual and cultural identity. Kaya, as a sacred, uninhabited place, stands for purity and tradition for Giriama. Giriama, according to Parkin, emphasize cleansing and expulsion as the means by which a place, such as Kaya, or their homestead, is kept free of death, disease and infertility (1991: 224). For the Ismailis of Badakhshan, the notion of sacred is also related to purity and purification. The sacred sites are often described as pure/clean places (toza joyen) that are visited by the angels (*farikhtagan*) and the spirits of the "great-ones" (*buzurgan*). In that sense, these sites are also called "sacred places" (buzurg joen), pure places (pok *joven*), places of angels (*jovi farikhtagan*) and places of the "great-ones" (*jovi buzurgan*). In most cases, these sites are located at a certain distance from people's houses. Most of the sacred sites in Badakhshan are adorned with the ibex's horns. According to the Ismailis of Badakhshan ibex lives in the wilderness, away from human settlements, on high mountains that are associated with the notion of purity.

As I noted above, I draw on Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope, as a particularly appropriate concept for the analysis of the sacred sites because it can encompass within its analytical orbit both the past myths and stories attached to sacred places as well as the new social and political discourses about the historical and religious significance of these places in the present. Bakhtin elaborates on the concept of chronotope (literary meaning time-space) in his analysis of the literary genre of Western novels and how the representations of space and time changed in these novels across history (Bakhtin 1981). Bakhtin does not provide a definitive definition of chronotope. His often-cited formulation of a sort of definition of this concept is as follows:

In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. The intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope (Bakhtin 1981: 84).

Nele Bemong and Pieter Borghart observe that "Bakhtin's basic assumption is the idea that narrative texts are not only composed of a sequence of diegetic events and speech acts, but also — and perhaps even primarily — of the construction of a particular fictional world or chronotope" (Bemong and Borghart 2010: 4). I engage the concept of chronotope in this thesis not strictly in the same sense that literary studies employ it (cf. Bemong and Borghart 2010); that is, I am not closely dealing with the analysis of the plot and motifs of the narrative texts. Rather, I use this concept to analyze the ways in which people attribute meanings to particular places in their lived environment.

Michael Holquist (2010), analyzing the importance of chronotope as analytic category observes the following:

Bakhtin in his book "*Art and Answerability*" insists on the exceptional place that each individual human occupies in existence. For Bakhtin the site we occupy in being is not merely a site we occupy in space and time, but a *task*, the obligation to forge relations within ourselves and with the world we live in that will keep all the separate elements from devolving into chaos. Making sense of ourselves and of the world is ... an ontologically imposed epistemological task from which we have no alibi [elsewhere]. ... As long as we live we can never be *elsewhere* from our unique place in existence (Holquist 2010: 25).

In this sense, chronotope helps to conceptualise the meanings people attribute to the spaces and places in which they inhabit. According to Bakhtin, we ... endow all phenomena with meaning, that is, we incorporate them not only into the sphere of spatial and temporal existence, but also into the semantic sphere. Every entry into the sphere of meaning is accomplished only through the gates of the chronotope (Bakhtin quoted in Holquist 2010: 26).

Ingemark Camilla Asplund (2006), analyzing the folktales and legends collected in the Swedish-speaking region of Finland, elaborates on the use of chronotope in folkloric stories. Ingemark examines "how human identity is constructed in relation to the extra-human forces of existence in folk belief narratives," which Ingemark refers to as "enchantment narratives" (2006: 1).

According to Ingemark,

Enchantment may transform well-known human landscape into alien territory in an instant, introducing elements that simply do not exist in the normal, everyday world, such as strange buildings that appear on previously uninhabited sites. In this case, the familiar human world appears to be overlaid by fragments of the other world, producing a multispatial site in which space of the two spheres is fused into one. Individual site in the landscape can alternate between being a part of human and supranormal spaces. Sometimes it is solely the enchantment that brings about this alternation between spaces. In other instances certain spots in the local landscape have a reputation for repeatedly constituting sites of such alternation and are recognized as conducive to an encounter with the supranormal (2006: 9).

Similarly, sacred sites are "enchanted" places where the relationship between humans and the divine is established by the presence of the latter in the particular spaces. Therefore, the chronotopes of the stories associated with the sacred sites are about the immediate encounter between humans and the divine in the particular places of the landscape, and in some cases, involve the transformation of these places as a result of this encounter. For example, some stories show how saints created water springs in dry lands or how a mountain was cut into two pieces, or how a lake was formed in a village after its people mistreated a saint.

As mentioned, Tim Ingold (1993), Keith Basso (1996), Kathleen Stewart (1996) and others employ Bakhtin's concept of chronotope in their studies that examine the ways in which human societies make place. While these studies are valuable, they pay little attention to the religious aspect of "place making". In this study, I examine sacred sites as the enchanted places where supernatural events had taken place in the past, which shape the present relationship of the people with these places.

Keith Basso's (1996) use of chronotope, in his study of the stories associated with the physical landscape among the Cibecue Apache, is close to the ways in which I employ this concept in this thesis. Basso shows that these stories are at once the ancestral commemoration and moral narratives of the Apache culture (Basso 1996). Basso notes that:

chronotopes are points in the geography of a community where time and space intersect and fuse. Time takes on flesh and becomes visible for human contemplation; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time and history and the enduring character of a people.... Chronotopes thus stand as monuments to the community itself, as symbols of it, as forces operating to shape its members' images of themselves (Basso 1996: 62).

For Basso, Apache's places are chronotopes in a sense that they embody the moral narratives of Western Apache. The possessors of this type of knowledge refer to these places and draw on the stories to criticize foolish, offensive and disruptive behaviour amongst their people urging the wrongdoers to behave differently. In other words, the places are consulted as guides for what to do and what not to do in specific situations (Basso 1996: 118–120). The past of Western Apache, according to Basso, is absorbed by certain localities that help them invoke it in order to address their present concerns. Basso calls this way of invoking and remembering the past "place-making". This type of history, according to Basso, is local, episodic and non-linear (1996: 33). Unlike Basso (1996), I draw attention to the sacred in the process of "place making" and how it affects and transforms the perception and understanding of particular spaces in the landscape.

Similarly, Kathleen Stewart (1996) draws on Bakhtin's concept of chronotope to demonstrate how the interaction with spaces and places produce different perceptions of past and present in the Appalachian coal-mining region of West Virginia. Drawing attention to the different kinds of narratives written within the setting, in the signs and places, Stewart notes:

Aside from History as a sequence of events there are still the chronotopes of *remembering* ruins, the state of mourning with its peculiar intensification, the arresting image that provokes the participation of an audience in a poetics of space-time that traces the accidental *within* the ordinary and the sudden eruption of the traumatic in the course of daily roamings (Stewart 1996: 106).

Stewart offers an insightful critique of history as "linear master narrative" (1996: 91). Critiquing the linear historical narrative, Stewart, like Basso, draws attention to the different kinds of history produced through the medium of the signs in the setting. Stewart shows how signs in the landscape become animated and involved in the creation of what she calls "local epistemology" in the course of everyday life (Stewart 1996). The stories associated with the sacred sites in Badakhshan are also a form of "local epistemology." In that sense, sacred sites are chronotopes that not only evoke stories about the miracle works of the saints but they are also chronotopes of remembering that "contain" the memories of the recent Soviet and post-Soviet experiences. The recent memories and current discourses about the sacred sites show how these sites are contested at certain levels and how these contestations affect people's relationships with these places.

Tim Ingold also examines the relationship of people and places in their everyday activities and observes that natural objects as well as the built forms are "chronotopes"; "that is, a place charged with temporality, one in which temporality takes on palpable form" (Ingold 1993: 168). Ingold usefully links chronotope with Martin Heidegger's

concept of dwelling, which assigns importance to the forms of consciousness with which individuals perceive and apprehend geographical space (Heidegger 1971:106). For Heidegger, "The relationship between man and spaces, is none other than dwelling, strictly thought and spoken" (Heidegger 1971: 157). According to Heidegger, humans already experience spaces "by staying constantly with near and remote locations and things" (Heidegger 1971: 156). Therefore, spaces become disclosed to humans when they are included into their dwellings (Heidegger 1971). Hence, Ingold calls his approach a "dwelling perspective" (Ingold 1993: 152). He conceptualizes the relation between time, landscape and everyday life of people with the term "taskscape." "Taskscape" is represented by the everyday activities of humans in the world in the past and the present (Ingold 1993: 162). According to Ingold, "taskscape" operates through the resonance of human activities with the life-process of the world around them. In this sense, even the built forms are not simply placed upon the landscape but are part of this resonance of the life-activities of the world (Ingold 1993: 168). In other words, the building resonates not only with humans but also with those of other living things and phenomena (Ingold 1993: 168).

Building on these types of analyses, I suggest that through sacred sites the Ismailis of Badakhshan validate the occurrence of the miracle events in their inhabited space. These events that occur, or occurred, in their inhabited spaces transform their relationships with these places. The sacred sites are believed to possess transcendent power. The landscape around them is kept clean. Through the narratives about the miracle of the saints associated with the sacred sites, the Ismailis of Badakhshan confirm the sacred status of these places and commemorate their saints and ancestors.

The stories associated with these sites, provide an interpretation of the past that, in some cases, for the people who narrate them, are historical accounts. The recollections about the recent Soviet past of the sacred sites represent the blend of the memory of the events with the interpretation in which supernatural presence is confirmed. Through retelling these stories, community members identify individuals responsible for the destruction of the sacred sites and indicate how these individuals were punished by the divine power of these places.

In other anthropological studies that deal with the relationship between people and places, the focus has been on the use of space by the state. In these studies the focus has been on the ways in which state ideologies use physical space for the control of their population and construction of national identities (Demetriou 2006, Erdreich and Rapoport 2006, Gupta 2003, Rabinow 2003). Zerubavel (2003), for example, argues that constancy of place is a formidable basis to establish a strong sense of sameness. That is, physical surroundings are usually relatively stable and "constitute a reliable locus of memories and often serve as major foci of personal as well as group nostalgia" (2003: 41). Therefore, according to Zerubavel, place plays a major role in identity rhetoric (2003: 42). For Zerubavel, the relation between place and identity has unmistakable essentialist overtones (2003: 43).

In recent decades, the concern of numerous studies on the relation between place and identity has been to expose its essentialist nature as something socially constructed (Bernbeck and Pollock 1996, Gable and Handler 2003). For example, Bernbeck and Pollock argue that a particular place or site as a historical fact is a social construct in a sense that it is an embodiment of a certain belief in society. Therefore, the discourses about the places of communal significance are the product of particular moments in space and time. These discourses are always essentialist and anachronistic. Gable and Handler observe that the implicit assumption of the studies, which are geared towards exposing the socially constructed nature of the relation between space and identity, is that once the natives realize its constructedness, they will no longer support it (Gable and Handler 2003: 370).

In this connection, Arjun Appadurai argues that in recent decades the social and political processes around the world have altered the relation between space and identity. That is, in the current globalised world, identity is becoming deterritorialised (Appadurai 2003). Following Appadurai, Akhil Gupta argues that the processes of place-making have to be situated within "systemic developments that reinscribe and reterritorialize space in the global political economy" (Gupta 2003: 321). Yet, Gupta and Ferguson note, even though the world seems to increasingly becoming deterritorialized, the ideas of culturally and ethnically distinct places perhaps become even more salient (1992: 10).

Jonah Steinberg observes that in the post-Soviet period, the Ismailis of Badakhshan have become part of the larger "transnational Ismaili assemblage" and "the encounter between the global Ismaili religious institutions that push for standardization of the Ismaili religious practices and the local religious practices in Badakhshan has become the source of contestations and tensions in the region" (Steinberg 2011: 14). In this context, sacred sites among other local religious practices became sites of contestations as these global processes are perceived by some as a threat to the alleged authenticity of local communal identity. To a certain degree, the contestations of the sacred sites deal with the status of these sites in the present. At the same time, the Ismailis of Badakhshan began to strongly affiliate with the global Ismaili community in the post-Soviet period. Steinberg argues that because of the historical marginality of the Ismailis of Badakhshan, the "transnational Ismaili" affiliation provides them with an advantage in relation to their neighbouring communities (Steinberg 2011).

The contestation of the sacred sites is also evident in the memories about the Soviet campaign against these places. During Soviet times, shrines and their visitations were viewed as incompatible with new modern Soviet society. In their recollections of the Soviet campaign against the sacred sites, people identified members of their communities whom they hold responsible for the desecration and destruction of these places. Sacred sites as chronotopes thus constitute what one could call the "sites" of "social memory" (Zarubavel 2003: 6). The legends about the miracles of the saints, the memories of the Soviet past and the ways in which people attend to the sacred sites in the present give these sites a certain form of agency. It is not to suggest that sacred sites have agency and act on the people's lives but rather to show that this agency arises as a result of the relationship between people and these places.

The sacred sites in Badakhshan region represent something similar to what Robert Nelson and Margaret Olin write about monuments. That is, monuments are in some sense "examples of a pre-modern cultural hybrid that modernity in its most powerful phases attempted to purify and neuter" (Nelson and Olin 2003: 6). Similarly, Robert Orsi (2008), examining Marian apparitions such as at Lourdes, notes that analyses of the Marian healing sites are often constrained "within the interpretive field of modernity" (2008:13). That is, the theoretical contribution of previous analyses of these kinds of sites is usually limited to the idea that "the reality [at these shrines] is at fundamental odds with modern ways of knowing and interpreting the world" (2008:13). Orsi notes that during the Enlightenment period and afterwards, "religion" in the European context was constructed within certain lines, which Marx Weber referred to as "disenchantment." Before that, according to Orsi, "the woods, homes, and forests of Europe, its churches, statues, relics, holy oils and waters, and its shrines, were filled with the presence of spirits, pre-Catholic and Catholic (or some hybrid)" (2008: 13). Yet, Orsi observes that the presence of the sacred did not disappear from the experience of modern humans and thus there is a need for a theoretical account of this presence. In Orsi's words, in the study of sacred sites such as Marian shrines, the scholars need to "allow other realities to break into theory" (2008:13).

According to Orsi,

Western modernity exists under the sign of absence. Time and space are emptied of presence. Absence is strictly enforced by language, by reigning aesthetics, and by a normative sensorium... to which the gods are not available by touch, taste, sound, or sight... (2008: 14). In conformity with this reigning aesthetics" religion is defined as "autonomous, a distinct domain apart from other areas of life, private, in conformity with the causal laws of nature, reasonable, interior — all the things that Marian apparitions and what follows from them are not (2008:14).

Marian apparitions, or the presence of the divine in these kinds of places, create a rupture within the modernist definition of religion. As Talal Asad observes, in the present European context, "secularism has entailed the legal and administrative intervention into religious life so as to construct 'religion' — in its spatial entailments, in its worldly aspirations, and the scope of its reasoning-along certain lines" (Asad 2003 quoted in Mahmood 2005: 77). In the case of Badakhshan, Soviet secularization was not only directed toward separation of religion from issues of the state, but was also geared towards replacement of religious narratives with a "scientific worldview" (Luehrmann 2011). As Sonia Luehrmann notes, Soviet secularization was about accustoming people to social relations in which there were no significant nonhuman agents and any

attachments to the divine power (cf. Luehrmann 2011: 7). For Soviet modernizers, sacred sites represented the backward past and sign of ignorance that must be corrected with the introduction of the "scientific worldview." Soviet studies of sacred sites of the Badakhshan region followed the orientalist approach of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which viewed these sites as remnants of ancient beliefs. The only difference was the Soviet scholars also argued that the belief in these places is an ultimate sign of past backwardness and has been exposed and undermined by the Soviet enlightenment of this region (Mayskiy 1935).

In this study, I will demonstrate the ways in which places are understood and related to as being filled with traces of the miracles worked by the saints who inhabited them in the past and whose presence continues to shape people's relationships with their lived environment. Even the narratives associated with the recent Soviet past of the sacred sites have supernatural aspects in them. In that sense, sacred sites constitute what Foucault calls the "other places" or "heterotopias" of the lived environment, which are not entirely formalized, delimited and desanctified (cf. Foucault 1984 [1967]).

Sacred sites are, thus, "heterotopias" of the social space in which the overt presence of the sacred is culturally acknowledged (cf. Foucault 1984 [1967]). As chronotopes, sacred sites are "manifestations of the divine which have somehow escaped the corrosion of time" (Louw 2007: 16).

A local scholar of folklore from the Badakhshan region, the late Nisormamad Shakarmamadov believed that in Badakhshan, people chose most of the sacred sites back in time because of their unusualness for the landscape.¹ That is, their alien-ness in the

¹ I worked with Doctor Shakarmadov for the project on the topic of sacred sites of the Badakhshan region, which was funded by the Institute of Ismailis studies in 2006–2007. Shakarmamadov's reference points

particular space that they occupy provoked human imagination to attribute supernatural qualities to these places. For example, some sacred sites are unusual-shaped juniper trees in a barren field or stones that have unusual shapes or spring water in dry land. The stories associated with the sacred sites offer a different way of looking at the inhabited space in which these sites come into being through supernatural powers of the saints, which continue to enchant people's "sense of the place" to the present day. In that sense, people attribute a certain agency to these places, which are believed to hit back those who campaigned against or destroyed them, and they are believed to grant or reject people's wishes. This agency of the sacred sites is relational and emerges in the relationship between people and these places. Thus, in dialogue with the above literature, I will show a different aspect of the relationship between people and place, in which the space is seen as "enchanted" and filled with transcendent power, which in various ways affect the social life of the people.

Ethnographic case study and setting

I carried out the research fieldwork for this project during the eight months from May 2011 to December 2011 in the Badakhshan region of Tajikistan. The Badakhshan region is located in the southeastern part of Tajikistan. One of the highest mountain systems of Central Asia, the Pamir Mountains, is centred in this region. Hence the region is also referred to as the Pamir, and its inhabitants are often identified and self-identify as Pamiris. The majority of the population of the region are followers of the Shia Nizari Ismaili religious tradition. Therefore, I use the terms the Pamiri Ismailis or the Ismailis of

were the Russian orientalist studies and in line with this literature, he argues that the sacred sites and the stories associated with them represent the ancient pre-Islamic beliefs, imaginations and worldviews of the local people; these stories, according to Shakarmamadov, show the ideas and imagination of people about the natural phenomena, historical and imagined personalities and reveal the level of social thinking about these things (see Shakarmamadov 2005: 592).

Badakhshan region interchangeably in reference to the people among whom this study was carried out.

In the beginning of my fieldwork I stayed in the city of Khorog.² The sacred sites here are somewhat inconspicuous; for example, one of the sacred sites in the city is located on the left side of the river, right across the bridge, and consists of a small concrete platform with a couple of stones on it. Another is located between the upper part of Khorog and the city centre in the locality called *chinak* at the foot of the mountain right by the motor road. This sacred site consists of red colour. People who visit the place leave some money there. In the beginning of the 1990s, young people from upper Khorog constructed a small platform under these mulberry trees, where visitors can sit. In my observations of the sacred sites around the city of Khorog, only on a few occasions did I encounter visitors who made a purposeful decision to visit these sites. In most cases people visited sacred sites because they happen to pass through the area where the sacred site was located.

I visited these two places, observing people's behaviour and talking to people about their significance in the life of their communities. I travelled to the centre of the city of Khorog or other parts of the region from my home in the upper part of the city. It takes about 20 minutes of walking to get to the centre of the city, or about five to ten minutes by public transport from where I stayed during the fieldwork. I passed by one of the sacred sites (the mulberry trees) every time I travelled to the city centre. Most of the

² Khorog city was founded around the Russian military unit established at the end of the 19th century in the village of Khorog. The Russian military officer, later captain, Eduard Karlovich Kivikes (d.1940) moved the headquarters of the Russian military unit in the spring of 1899 to the village of Khorog (see Khudonazarov 2006: 221). It became the centre of Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous region during the Soviet period in 1932.

drivers of the *Tangens*³ usually kiss the tip of their fingers and touched their foreheads while passing by this sacred site. Some of the passengers also do the same.

In the interviews, most of the residents of Khorog I talked to saw the sacred sites as part of their historical and cultural heritage that have to be preserved. The discourse about the loss of faith in the sacred sites was more prominent in Khorog than in the villages I visited. In Khorog, I hired a taxi to visit the sacred sites in the villages. The taxi driver Mirzo, who lived in my neighbourhood, became my constant companion during my numerous visits to the local sacred sites.

In the course of my fieldwork, I tried to map out the sacred sites of the region according to the significance people attribute to them. In Khorog, I also did some research in the local museum and in the Khorog Research Unit (KRU). The staff at the Khorog Research Unit gathered significant oral data about the different religious traditions of this region including the visitation of the sacred sites. Collecting this data was part of a project sponsored by the Institute of Ismaili Studies. In the course of this project, local scholars from the Khorog Research Unit conducted fieldwork and collected data from 1999 to 2003 on religious life and traditions of the Badakhshan region. A total of 900 tapes of 90- and 60-minutes' length are recorded with data about local religious traditions and kept in the office of the KRU.⁴ I visited the KRU's collection in order to establish the detailed names, locations and numbers of sacred places in this region. Some

³ This is a main form of public transportation in the city. *Tangen* is the name people use in reference to small cars produced in China that the residents of Khorog and other cities of Tajikistan in the last few years converted to mini buses and use as vehicles for public transit.

⁴ Khorog Research Unit is located in the city of Khorog in Badakhshan and is an institution run by the Institute of Ismaili Studies. Its aim has been to collect information and publish scholarly works about the living religious traditions of this mountainous region. I worked in KRU from October 2006 to August 2007 prior to my enrolment in the PhD programme at York and have kept contacts with KRU's staff since then.

of the narratives about the sacred sites that I discuss in chapter three were recorded by the KRU's staff and kept in their oral history collection.

I organized and conducted interviews with some of the people in Khorog, particularly with some *khalīfas* (religious leaders) and other local residents. I also had many informal talks with some of my informants, and I noted my observations and recollections at the end of each day. Similarly, in Khorog, I attended and observed different secular and religious holiday celebrations such as *vahdati milli* (national accord) celebrated on the 27th of June and *batakhtnishini* (Imāmate day) celebrated on 11th of July.⁵ The main goal in these interviews and observations was to identify formal and informal discussions related to the sacred places that circulate at present in the region. In addition, they served as guidelines to identify other potential informants and places that were relevant to my project.

I also had detailed discussions on various issues associated with sacred places and other traditions with my colleagues, the scholars at the Khorog Research Unit. All of them have had extensive fieldwork experience in Badakhshan and directed me to some potential informants across the districts and villages of this region, as well as provided me with a lot of helpful information. While being in Khorog I also conducted interviews with some employees of the Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Committee

⁵ *Vahdati Milli* is the official celebration of the end of civil war (1992–1997). The government and opposition leaders signed a peace accord on the 27th of June 1997 that effectively ended the civil conflict. For more on national accord and Civil war in Tajikistan see (Akiner 2001). *Batakhtnishini* is a religious holiday that celebrates the succession of the office of the Imāmat in Ismaili tradition. The current Imām of the nizari Ismaili community succeeded his grandfather on the 11th of July 1957. For more on the history and doctrine of the Ismaili communities see (Daftary 1990). Other public celebrations that took place while I was in the field include Independence Day on the 9th of September and the birthday of the Ismaili religious leader Imām Agha Khan IV on the 13th of December. These holidays are annually celebrated in public squares and attended by most of the local people as well as state officials and religious leaders. I was interested in the ways various places were used during these celebrations. I will discuss this and other issues in greater detail in the subsequent chapters.

(ITREC), which is based in Khorog, and the employees of the government Committee for Religious Affairs.⁶ In Khorog, the interviews were mostly geared towards people's relation to sacred places and how it has changed from the Soviet to post-Soviet period. I also explored the changes in Khorog's landscape where many Soviet monuments, such as the statutes of Lenin in the central square and near the children's libraries were removed and replaced with new ones. The big statue of Lenin that was in the central square in front of the government building was replaced with the statue of Ismail Saman-i (d. 907.CE), the alleged founder of the Samanid dynasty, which the Tajikistan government considers the first state that was founded by the Tajiks. I examined people's relations to these places and these changes.

Apart from Khorog, I focused primarily on the three sites and based my decision to do so on the information and references I obtained prior to and during the initial period of the fieldwork, and also because of the contacts I have had in these places. These sites were located in different districts of Badakhshan region and allowed for more comprehensive data collection and cross-case analysis. I stayed in the villages of Yamchun and Ptup of Vakhan valley during July and August, in the village Khidorjev of Roshtqala district September-October, and in the village Imām of Shugnan district in November and part of December. From these places, I visited the sacred sites that were located in the neighbouring villages of the particular districts.

Often, when I mentioned the purpose of my stay in the village people would recommend that I talk to an individual whom they believe is the most knowledgeable about the sacred sites. The individuals who are believed to know most about the sacred

⁶ ITREC is a branch of broader Ismaili religious institutions whose primary goal is to provide religious education to members of the Ismaili community around the world.

sites are usually male elders and local intellectuals. Some people that became my research informants were somewhat connected with the sacred sites. A few of them trace their genealogy to the saints who are believed to be buried in the shrines. I tried to interview people who experienced life of both Soviet and post-Soviet periods to get their views on the past and present relationship of the people and sacred sites.

I carried out formal interviews with some local intellectuals interested in the history and tradition of this region, religious leaders (*khalīfas*) and people who attended sacred sites. In interviewing, I used a digital recorder in all cases except where informants specifically asked me not to. I made notes during the interview, as well as during the day about the things I observed, and I reflected and noted my daily experience at the end of each day. As a native speaker of the language, I conducted most of the interviews in the local Shughni language, except in Vakhan and Ishkashim where I used Tajik language in my interviews and communications with the people.⁷

Whenever possible I accompanied individual informants on their habitual outings to carry out "walk-along" interviews to actively explore my informants' experiences and practices as they move through, and interact with, their physical and social environment, including the sacred sites (Kusenbach 2003: 463). Margarethe Kusenbach argues that "walk-along" or "go-along" interviews "offer insights into the texture of *spatial practices* by revealing the subjects' various degrees and types of engagement in and with the environment" (2003: 466 emphisis in original). Some of the interviews I intended to

⁷ The Pamiri Ismailis in Badakhshan speak Pamiri languages that belong to the East Iranian language group and are different from the national Tajik language. In the Shugnan district Shugni, in Rushan Rushani, in Ishkashim Ishkashimi and in Vakhan Vakhi (locally called *khik* or *khikwar*) languages are spoken. The Shugni and Rushani are closely related and mostly mutually comprehensible. These languages have no official status and have no alphabet, and formal schooling in the region is carried out in national Tajik language.

conduct as "go-along" ended up as group discussions that were also very valuable. In a few cases, in both Khorog and the villages, when I was outside walking with an informant many of our acquaintances, friends or neighbours would join us and my interviews would turn into group conversations. During these walks, the subject of the sacred sites would usually come up when the conversation was about the religious traditions. In some cases, I changed the subject directing the conversations to the issues of religion and sacred sites. However, generally, in these group conversations, I tried to give my informants little direction with regard to what I would like them to talk about and avoid participating in the selection or the contents of their narratives. Through this technique I wanted to observe which places and environmental features stand out in their minds and how they perceive and interpret them.

I observed the actions of my respondents when they attended the shrines or passed by them and noted the discrepancies between their actions and words. I also conducted an extensive observation of the landscape around the shrines. These interviews and observations were focused on how people understand and articulate their relation to the shrines, the mountainous landscape, Islam, Ismailism, local culture and Soviet ideology.

The sacred sites of Badakhshan region, examined in this thesis, do not have elaborate buildings. Some of them are small buildings with tombs of the saints (*awliyā*) located within them. Some have larger rooms in the form of the traditional house (*cheed*) attached to the sites where the tombs of the saint are located. In some cases, people use this larger room as a place of communal congregation, and on Thursday evenings the neighbourhood around this place gathers inside for a prayer. These gatherings are called *jumanamoz* (Friday prayer). The Pamiri Ismailis observe the Muslim Friday prayer on

Thursday evening, as according to them the day changes in the evening and not at midnight, so Friday begins on the Thursday evening. Some buildings are very small structures that do not have any tombs inside them and are constructed around a stone, a tree or water spring that a saint touched or visited. Many sacred sites also do not have any buildings and are simply things in the landscape such as water springs, trees and stones. Most of these places are also associated with the saints who are believed to have either visited or spent some time in these places, or worked some kind of miracles there.

The Ismailis of Badakhshan use various terms in reference to the sacred sites. The term *astan* (locally *astan*) seems to be the most widely used, particularly in the Shugnan district of Badakhshan.⁸ In the modern Tajik language, the term *astan* means a threshold. The term *qadamgah* (*qadam* in Tajik language means step and *gah* means place or space) is also often used in Badakhshan, which refers to the places where the saint rested or spent some time or worked miracles. The term *mazar* (tomb, grave, shrine) is often used in reference to those sacred places that contain the tomb of the saint and is more widely used in Tajik-speaking areas of Badakhshan. Also, the terms *ziyāratgah* and *maqamgah* are occasionally used in reference to the sacred sites. The term *ziyāratgah* is from the

⁸ The Badakhshan region of Tajikistan is administratively divided into seven districts. The largest district is Shugnan where the capital of the region, the city of Khorog, is located. The other districts include Ishkashim, Roshtqala, Rushan, Murgab, Darwaz and Vanj. This study focused on the Shugnan, Rushan, Roshtqala and Ishkashim districts where all the population are followers of the Shia Imāmi Ismaili tradition. Murgab, Darwaz and Vanj districts are mostly populated with Sunni population, although there are Ismailis living in some villages in Darwaz district and in the administrative centre of Murgab as well. According to some statistics, the total population of the region was estimated to be 213,000 in 1996 with 149,100 (70%) of the people professing Ismailism and 63,900 (30%) adhering to the Sunni tradition of Islam (See, Emadi 1998: 4). This statistic represents an approximate number as it is not clear from Emadi's article how it was collected. According to the Agency of Statistics Under the President of Tajikistan, the number of the total population of Badakhshan in 1996 was 191,4 thousand people. The number of the total population of this agency, was 208,3 thousand people (pp. 5–9). Out of this number, 28,2 thousand people in 2012 lived in the city of Khorog (p. 9). See the report in Tajik and Russian languages prepared by the Agency of Statistics under the President of Tajikistan titled *The number of population of Tajikistan on January 1 2012*: available at:

http://stat.tj/en/img/c3a02601197201dd0fba00b6b6a0ec4c_1345704099.pdf.

Arabic word *ziyāra* (to visit) and is often used to describe the visitation to the sacred sites.

Similarly, the Ismailis of Badakhshan use various terms in reference to the saints with whom the sacred sites are associated. In many cases the Pamiri Ismailis use the Arabic term $wal\bar{i}$ (pl. $awliy\bar{a}$), (meaning "to be near," "relative," "friend"), in the titles and names of the individual saint who is associated with the sacred site. The term $wal\bar{i}$ (pl. $awliy\bar{a}$) is one of the central concepts that define sainthood in Islam, and saints are often referred to as "Friends of God" (cf. Renard 2008, Radtke "Walī" in *EI*). Although the Pamiri Ismailis are familiar with this term, they often use different terms in reference to the saints.

In Badakhshan the Persian word *buzurg-war* (pl. *buzurgan* meaning "the great ones") is more generally used in reference to the saints rather than the term *awliyā*. The term *buzurgan* is also used in reference to the classical poets of Tajik and Persian literature such as Rudaki, (c. 858–941), Firdausi (c. 934–1020), Nasir-i Khusraw (c.1004–1077), Khayyam (c. 1048–1131), Saadi Shirazi (c. 2010–2091), Hafiz Shirazi (c. 1325–1390), Abd ar-Rahman Jami (c. 1414–1492) and so forth. Some of the poems and verses composed by these authors and other Persian Sufi writers such as Sanayi (c. 1080–1131/41), Farid ud-Din Attar (c. 1145–1221) and Jalal ad-Din Rumi (c. 2007–2073) that deal with religious and moral issues constitute an important part of the religious tradition of the Pamiri Ismailis that is called *maddah* (from Persian *madhiya* panegyric poem) and are sung during the religious ceremonies.⁹

⁹ For further discussion of *maddah*, see Gabrielle Rachel van den Berg's (2004) monograph, *Minstrel poetry from the Pamir Mountains: a study on the songs and poems of the Ismailis of Tajik Badakhshan.*

Also, until the 1930s, the Pamiri Ismailis used the term $p\bar{r}r$ in reference to their religious guides who were highly respected. In this region *pīrs* were venerated as holy men and were representatives of the Ismaili Imāms. In Badakhshan, pīrs traced their sacred lineage to some saints who are believed to have come to this region in the past; through these saints $p\bar{i}rs$ and their contemporary descendants trace their lineage to the family of the Prophet. These families are usually called *sayyids*. A *pīr* was a spiritual guide of the *murīd* (follower). In the past in Badakhshan, the appointment of a *pīr* was confirmed by a *farman* (edict) of the Imām. Without a *farman* the office of the *pīr* was not considered legitimate. As local popular memory and some Russian orientalists observe, *pīrs* had significant power and authority among the local people and their guidance was sought in every aspect of social life (see Bobrinskiy 1907). Some sacred sites are associated with the *pīrs* or the saints to whom *pirs* trace their sacred lineage. *Pīrs* were persecuted during the Soviet antireligious campaign, and this office does not exist in the religious life of the Pamiri Ismailis today. The sacred sites associated with *pīrs* and other saints serve as the medium through which the ancestral saints are spatially commemorated and remembered.

In Badakhshan, *khalīfa*, as religious rank, had a role of $p\bar{v}r$'s assistant. Each $p\bar{v}r$ had a number of *khalīfas* in different areas under his "jurisdiction" who were responsible to provide service for the day-to-day religious needs of the people. In the present time, the term *khalīfa* is the most widely used term in reference to the religious leaders among the Ismailis of Badakhshan¹⁰. Thus, throughout this thesis I use these range of terms with

¹⁰ In Islam the term *khalīfa* (Ar. pl. *khulafa*) was used in the sense of "successor" (caliph) to the prophet Muhammad. After the first four rightly guided caliphs (Ar. *al-khulafa' al-rashidun*), Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman and 'Ali, this term was used by Umayyad, then 'Abbasid, Umayyad of Spain and shi'i Fātimid rulers. That is, it meant the leader of the Muslim community. The full title is *khalifat rasul Allah* "successor"

reference to the sacred sites and the saints with whom these places are associated. In the present time, the Ismailis of Badakhshan refer to saints and sainthood using the above temrs such as *buzurg-war*, *pīr*, *shāh*, *walī* and so forth.

According to some historians of Ismailism the notion of sainthood in this tradition was in certain ways institutionalized during the Fātimid and Alamut periods of Ismaili history (Daftary 1990). At these periods an official institution of *da'wa* was established, whose mission it was to call people to accept Ismailism (Daftary 1990). Within the *da'wa* there were a number of religious ranks with the Imām at the top of the hierarchy followed by *hujjat* (lit. proof), *da'i* (summoner), *mu'allim* (teacher), *ma'zun-i akbar* (senior licentiate), *ma'zun-i asghar* (junior licentiate), and *mustajib* (respondent) (see Virani 2007: 160).

Imām in the Ismaili tradition occupies the central place. The concept of Imāmate is elaborate discussion that has a long history going back to the early period of Islam and the debates about the leadership of the Muslim community and the succession to the prophet. Different groups in Islam had different views on this issue. The Ismaili perspective on the imamate emphasised the permanent need of mankind for a divinely guided, infallible leader and authoritative teacher in religion (cf. Madelung "Imāma" in *EI*). In this perspective, 'Alī b. Abī Tālib, the prophet's cousin and son-in-law, and his decendants are viewed as the only true inheritors of the leadership of the Muslim community or the mankind in general. Imāms have the knowledge of the esoteric meaning of the Qur'an and only they are legitimate guides, who can guide human soul to

of the messenger of God." Among Ismailis of Badakhshan, *khalīfa* at present has the role and function that can roughly be compared to the role and function of the vicar or priest (see "Khalīfa" in *EI*).

its ultimate source. Hence the recognition of the Imām of the time is the essential part of the Ismaili spirituality.

Although the Ismailis generally do not observe the practice of visitation or worship at the tombs of the past Imāms, for most of the Shi'a Muslims the formal visitation *ziyāra* and worship at the tomb-shrines of the past Imāms has been an important aspect of their religious practice. *Ziyāra* (pl. *ziyārat*) is pious visitation, pilgrimage to a holy place, tomb or shrine. Unlike *hajj* (annual pilgrimage to Mecca), or the lesser pilgrimage to Mecca called the *umra*, the *ziyāra* lacked the authority of Scripture (cf. Meri "Ziyāra" in *EI*). The shrines of 'Alī in the city of Najaf, Iraq, or the tomb of Imām al-Husayn in the city of Karbala, Iraq are important pilgrimage sites for most of the Shi'a Muslims. In general, according to some scholars, Shi'is place greater emphasis on *ziyāra* ritual to the Imāms' tombs has, to some degree, been formalised and institutionalised. Shi'is uphold the intercession of the Imāms for their followers (cf. Meri "Ziyāra" in *EI*).

The *ziyāra* of the sacred sites among the Ismailis of Badakhshan is not formalised or institutionalised. Alghough the Ismailis of Badakhshan perform certain rituals, such as burning incense *strakhm*, litting self-made candle *tsirovak*, saying prayer, when visiting their sacred sites, etc., these are not prescribed or formalised rites. The Ismailis of Badakhshan usually visit the sacred sites during the Islamic holidays such as as *'id-i Qurban* (or *al-Ahda'*) and *'id-i Ramazan* (or *al-Fitr*), or to commemorate and pray for the souls of the diseased family members. I will elaborate on the notion of *ziyāra* a little more in chapter four and show how it is practiced among the Ismailis of Badakhshan.

Doing "Anthropology at home"

I arrived to the "field" after a 15-hour trip by car from the capital city Dushanbe in May of 2011. The motor road from central Dushanbe to Khorog (administrative centre of Badakhshan region) has some very rough terrain. It goes through high-mountain passes, and for those unfamiliar with mountainous roads the trip might seem to be a quite hazardous experience.¹¹ It is around a 500-km drive, but because the road goes through high-mountain passes the trip takes almost two days and is quite exhausting for the travellers. In certain sections, the road goes along the River Panj that separates Tajikistan and Afghanistan. At other places it goes through narrow passes over the edge of the mountain and the drivers have to be vigilant at all times to arrive safely to their destination.¹²

I was born and grew up in Khorog. In anthropological terms, I was an "insider". In this sense, I was doing what is often referred to as "anthropology at home". However, being from the same region did not mean my fieldwork was radically different from fieldwork in an unfamiliar environment. As my fieldwork experience unravelled, I recognized that conducting fieldwork at home has its advantages and disadvantages. For example, in the "field," the notion of familiarity and unfamiliarity seem to be relative and depend where in the region I was located and with whom I was communicating.

¹¹ During the Soviet period, there was an affordable frequent flight service to the region and most people preferred to travel by plane, which takes only 45 minutes to reach the capital city rather than by car, which takes almost two days. At the present day, most people travel by car, which is cheaper and there are only occasional flights once or twice per week if the weather is clear. The Soviet-type mini-buses *marshrutka* that carried passengers through this route since the 1990s until recently have by now mostly been replaced by smaller, more comfortable Toyotas, Land Cruisers and other new brands of cars.

¹² The drivers often remark that most accidents on this road happen due to drivers falling asleep while on the road.

I was familiar with the local culture in Badakhshan; I shared many things in common with the people, such as language, religion and food preferences. At the same time, there were differences in education background, and in some cases linguistic differences, particularly in Vakhan district, between the informants and me. Since 2002, I was in and out of the region pursuing my educational aspirations and during this time some aspects of life in the region have changed and have become somewhat unfamiliar to me. Also, being "away" meant that my own ethical, political and emotional sensibilities have changed to some extent.

The close familiarity with the "field" makes it difficult to delineate what aspects of my experience constitute fieldwork and what does not. For example, my field notes from Khorog, in those days when I had no interviews or meetings, are not very extensive; whereas my notes from the Vakhan region are quite extensive. This stems from the relative unfamiliarity that I felt in Vakhan despite sharing many cultural commonalities with the people.

Similarly, I encountered different points of view regarding the status and role of sacred sites in the past and present. Although all of my informants shared the same religious and cultural background, their views about the sacred sites and other religious traditions was not homogenous. Some people were against the practice of the visitation of sacred sites, while others saw it as an essential part of their religious tradition and culture. I will discuss these issues in greater detail in chapter four. In the following section of this chapter, I elaborate upon the concerns of doing anthropology at home that are found in the anthropological literature and discuss these issues in light of my own experience of doing fieldwork at home.

Recent discussions related to "anthropology at home"

In recent years, doing anthropological fieldwork at "home" has become more common and has gained greater legitimacy in social anthropology. In simple terms, "anthropology at home" means a study of one's own society; it refers to an anthropological inquiry in the home region of the researcher. Methodological and theoretical problems can arise when one conducts ethnographic research among people with whom one shares a cultural background (Hadolt 1998). Hadolt (1998) notes that after a century of studying the "exotic," European and North American anthropologists are turning their gaze on Western societies, and thus practicing anthropology at home (1998: 311). My fieldwork experience does not fit neatly into this definition of anthropology at home. I am not from the Western Euro-American society, I am from the "exotic" other and I study the "exotic" other. However, I am trained in the Western anthropological tradition and my modes of description and analyses are shaped by the concerns of Western academia. For example, the emphasis on reflexivity in current Euro-American anthropology has led me to pay close attention to my experiences during the fieldwork and to ask how my personal background and education might affect and shape my research and analysis. My methods, analyses, and results would probable have beeen different if my reference points in my research were Russian ethnological tradition and Russian academia. In Russia, reflexivity and the issue related to doing fieldwork at home or abroad have not been central until recent years, but this issue has become prominent in Euro-American anthropology in recent decades¹³.

¹³ There has been some resistance to doing "anthropology at home" within the discipline of anthropology, and the study of one's own society has been considered as antithetical to doing "real" anthropology (see Peirano 1998, Cole 1977). Only anthropologists who had gained experience elsewhere were seen as justified to do anthropology at home (Peirano 1998: 106, Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Some anthropologists point out that large geopolitical changes in the world after World War II encouraged the interest in doing

During my fieldwork, some informants—former colleagues, friends, and family members in Khorog and other villages—expressed surprise at the duration of my research fieldwork. A local scholar in Khorog noted that conducting fieldwork in one place for eight months was too long. I explained that it was difficult to establish trust and relationships with informants and to understand the culture during short visits. His argument was that, because I grew up in the region, I already "knew" the culture. Longterm fieldwork was not part of the Soviet anthropological tradition; Russian and local ethnographers usually made only short visits to the field during the Soviet era.

Some local anthropologists from Badakhshan carried out studies within the Soviet conceptual framework (Shakarmamadov 2004, Qalandarov 2005). In this tradition, studies carried out in one's own society were common (Shakarmamadov 2004). However, these studies were generally concerned with folklore and the survival of old traditions in remote villages. Some Soviet ethnography, or "salvage anthropology," aimed to record customs and traditions before they disappeared with the march of Soviet modernization. Usually data were collected during short-term expeditions to villages where the scholars talked to older generations of people and collected artifacts.

Doing anthropology at home I faced the same kinds of problems that anthropologists face when conducting fieldwork abroad, including power relations during the fieldwork, representations, and other ethical issues. Even in my home region,

anthropology at home (Cole 1977: 355). Other scholars note that decolonisation made it difficult to gain access to areas that were easily accessible in the past, and therefore many anthropologists turned their analytic gaze on their own societies (Peirano 1998: 112). Hadolt mentions other reasons for anthropology coming home, including "decreased funding, increased student numbers, the relative ignorance about societies 'at home' and the ease of access to one's own society" (Hadolt 1998: 313). Similarly, Hadolt argues that the "reflexive turn" in anthropology in the 1970s and 1980s led anthropologists to become more concerned with what they themselves do, rather than with what other people do (1998: 313).

differences in age, education, and the understanding of certain issues made anthropological study challenging.

Being an "insider" anthropologist in Badakhshan

My position as an insider doing anthropological fieldwork in Badakhshan was both helpful and constraining. As an insider I knew how to behave, how to adapt and mix with locals, and what behaviour to expect. At the same time, in Khorog, some people did not want to be interviewed. They might have mistrusted me or perphaps they were unsure of the implications of their responses to my questions in the local cultural setting that we shared.

Gaining access to the "field" also depends on the kind of identity people attach to the researcher. People might trust a stranger more with some information, which they might keep from the insider, out of fear of gossip or embarrassment. In this sense, the outside researcher may have more advantage in gaining access to some information, which is not shared with an insider.

On the other hand, an insider can, when needed, draw on the network of the relatives and friends who can help with identifying potential informants or who themselves become informants. In my case, many friends and colleagues assisted me in my fieldwork, by addressing me to individuals who have good knowledge of local religious traditions or talking with their friends and acquaintances in the villages to assist me with my research. This is an immediate advantage that the outsider anthropologist would not readily have, but would have to cultivate over a long period of time.

However, this did not mean that I had instant rapport with people because a friend or a relative asked them to help me or because we shared certain cultural traits. Clearly, there is a difference in the way we assume the participants in the field may see us and the way they actually perceive us, which may also vary from one person to another. I came to realize that an insider does not necessarily mean sharing the same ethnic background. Sometimes, we can be misled by the assumption that coming from the same ethnic group, town, and country puts us in a better position to conduct our research in a familiar setting, with the people with which we have so much in common. There are many differences that set us apart; differences such as class, gender and education play an important part in how one relates to other people and vice versa. Therefore, my personal history, biography, gender, social class and ethnicity, and those of the people in the setting, variously affected and shaped the course of my fieldwork.

Moreover, these differences are reflected in the multiple perspectives that I encountered during the fieldwork, and they also influenced my interpretation of the data. Therefore, both collection and analysis of the data in this research is by no means a direct representation of lived experience. It is an interactive process shaped by me as a researcher with all my biases and assumptions and by the people in the setting. Whether it is "anthropology at home" or "abroad," there are no objective observations. Observations are always socially situated in the worlds of the observer and the observed. Individuals are seldom able to give full explanations of their actions or intentions; all they can offer are accounts, or stories, about what they did and why. No single method can grasp the subtle variations in ongoing human experience (Denzin and Lincoln 1998: 24).

Social life offers the individual many alternative perspectives, and different people have different views. Moreover, one person may embrace separate views at the same time in various contexts or at various times of life. Therefore, finding patterns and translating these individual narratives into ethnographic text were the challenges that I faced during the analysis of my fieldwork data.

As mentioned above, in my position as an insider I was familiar with the general cultural characteristics of the region. Hence my assessment of the data was geared towards analysing the different views and understandings that various individuals expressed about the sacred sites in Badakhshan. This once again illustrates culture as a dynamic and complex process and shows that the "native's" point of view is not homogenous and uniform.

Ethical issues in the field

As previously stated, in my hometown Khorog, I found it difficult to make a distinction between "home" and "field." I did not have to adapt to a new environment, or learn a new language, eat unfamiliar food and so forth. This was different in Vakhan region where a certain amount of unfamiliarity, particularly the linguistic difference, was a constant reminder that I was not simply visiting home.

I visited Khorog a couple of times during the summer holidays in the course of my PhD studies. Yet this time I did not merely come to visit but to carry out research fieldwork. The conversations and interviews with the informants that I specifically planned and organized were one of the strategies to distinguish between the feeling of simply being home and doing fieldwork. At the same time I also had many unplanned observations and conversations that I noted in my field notes at the end of each day. These types of observations and notes give oneself a sense of being an "intruder" or at least seem problematic on a certain level. For example, observing people's behaviour during the weddings that I was invited to or when attending funerals or other public celebrations, and noting my observations without people knowing that I was in the "field" raised ethical problems.

As noted above, despite the cultural commonality, there were education, gender and age differences between my informants and me. Yet, since I have been in and out of the country for about ten years, I had a certain sense of distance from the local context. As an insider or native researcher, I faced particular problems related to personal and ethical dilemmas. Therefore, for me it meant to continuously negotiate my status due to the assumptions that people made about my intent, skills and personal characteristics. I obtained written or oral consent of the participants wherever possible; I informed them about the purpose, nature and implications of my study, and asked for their permission in sharing their views. I informed them that I would keep their information private and confidential, and alter their names in the final text if they wished to do so.

These differences had important implications for the dynamics of power relationships between the informants and myself. For example, when I informed a number of informants about my educational background they became more reserved in their views about the local religious traditions, while others, on the contrary, became more engaging. Amirsho, one of my informants from Vakhan, for instance, responding to my inquiries about the local tradition kept noting that "you know these things better than me," while another informant became more engaging, trying to emphasize his knowledge and understanding of the history and culture of Badakhshan. Other examples of similar nature indicate the importance of being aware of one's own positionality in the fieldwork and the way it affects the data-collection process.

I tried to make sense of the different viewpoints I encountered in the field in terms of the meanings people attach to them. In that sense, my research does not seek an understanding and interpretation of the "objective" reality out there but aims to show the socially constructed nature of reality, the close relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln 1998: 8). Therefore, I seek answers to questions that stress how social and cultural experience is created and given meaning.

Chapter outline

In chapter two, I discuss the European and Russian representations of Badakhshan since the late 19th century focusing of the ways in which sacred sites in the region were described and analyzed by these various scholarly traditions. The region was mapped, divided and incorporated into the sphere of influence of Russian and British empires during the colonial period. I show that written accounts about the region and its people during this period focused on the pre-Islamic beliefs of the people. These accounts often represent the sacred sites of this region as remnants of previous beliefs, such as Zoroastrianism, which have very little connection with the present beliefs of the local people. Following the 19th century anthropological search for the isolated people with the cultures untouched by modernity, these accounts argue that Badakhshan and its people represent the pre-historic past of the Aryan race. They describe the local people as representative of the Aryan race that preserved their culture and physical appearance due to their isolation in the mountains. This chapter shows how these accounts continue to affect and shape the public and academic discourses about this region in the present day.

In chapter three, I focus on the legends and stories associated with the sacred sites I collected during my fieldwork in Badakhshan through my conversations and extended semi-structured interviews with individual Pamiri Ismailis. I show how most of the stories are about the miracles worked by the saints who visited this region and reflect some of the moral values of the community. These stories connect local places with the historical events and personalities of the Muslim world. The contents of the stories link them with other places in the mountainous landscape and reveal people's attitudes to and understanding of their lived environment. These stories show an aspect of the Pamiri Ismailis' understanding of their religious tradition. In this sense, they are linked to the local worldview and local contextualization of Islam in this region. Drawing on Bakhtin's concept of chronotope, I argue that sacred sites are places through which the Ismailis of Badakhshan construct and attribute meanings to the particular places in the landscape and incorporate them into their social and cultural world. These are the sites in the inhabited space of the people where the occurrence of the supernatural becomes culturally possible and acceptable.

The chronotope of the sacred sites also extends to stories associated with the Soviet and post-Soviet past that are evoked through the medium of these places. Drawing on the interviews and conversations gathered during field research, in chapter four I demonstrate that when recalling the past of their sacred sites, the Ismailis of Badakhshan often refer to the Soviet campaign against these places. In the process, people identify members of their communities whom they hold responsible for the destruction of the sacred sites during the Soviet period. Similarly, people allocate responsibility to some members of their communities for what they perceive as the current decline in the status of the sacred sites. This chapter shows that sacred sites not only contain the stories and legend about the saints they are associated with, but also places where some aspects of the recent past of the communities are contested. The recalled stories associated with the sacred sites are concerned with the recent Soviet past of the community and are different from historical narratives. That is, the events of these stories always unfold through the presence of the supernatural.

In chapter five, I examine how the Ismailis of Badakhshan, in their relationship with the sacred sites in certain cases, unconsciously attribute an agency to them. Some anthropologists examining the issue of material agency observe that the nonhuman's inclusion among the agents in the world disrupts the modern idea of agency; it is also unacceptable for the modern religious reformers who often try to purify religion from materiality (see Keane 2007). In some modernist, particularly Marxist views, the appropriate seat of agency can only be located in the free acting, thinking and speaking individual (Keane 2007: 167). This was central to the discourse of the theorists of the Soviet scientific atheism who promoted the idea of the "scientific world view," which denied any form of non-human agency among the population (see Luehrmann 2011). I suggest in this chapter that for the Ismailis of Badakhshan, sacred sites have agency as they mediate between them and the transcendent. The agency the Ismailis of Badakhshan unconsciously attribute to the sacred sites is relational. It emerges in the process of engagement of the Pamiri Ismailis with these places and with the material things kept within them. According to the Ismailis of Badakhshan, sacred sites punish anyone that doubts their divine power or desecrates them; at the same time, they fulfill people's wishes and help them when they face a crisis in their social life related to illness, childlessness, death of the family members and so forth.

I end my discussion of the sacred sites with this chapter. In the concluding section of this thesis, I also provide a summary of my key arguments.

Chapter II: Representation of Badakhshan region and its places of worship in Western and Russian accounts

In this chapter, I examine the ethnographic representations of Badakhshan and its sacred spaces in the works of the Western, Russian and Soviet authors that were produced since the late 19th century when the Russian and British colonial empires met in this region. The analysis of this literature is important for a number of reasons; first, my thesis is situated in relation to this literature; second, the themes discussed in this literature, in most cases, informed my informants' views of their sacred sites and communal identity in general; and third, contemporary studies of Badakhshan region, carried out both by inside scholars and outsiders, to a great extent, are influenced by this literature.

I argue that most of the early ethnographic accounts about Badakhshan projected it as an isolated place with untouched ancient cultures and traditions. Johannes Fabian refers to these types of representations as "the denial of coevalness"; that is, representing physical and cultural difference as a difference in time (see Fabian 2002). These accounts viewed the life world of the people of Badakhshan as a window for understanding the pre-historic past. They essentialise and romanticise Badakhshan people's cultural and religious identities as fixed, static and primordial. I show the methodological and theoretical limitations of such approaches and provide an alternative direction to the study of the sacred space.

In the first section of this chapter, I look at the British accounts of the late 19th and early 20th centuries about this region. Given the historical context of colonial rivalry between Russian and British empires in this region, most of these accounts provide a lot of geographic and topographic information, and contain limited information about the religious life of the people. In the second section, I explore Russian accounts about this region and look at some of the issues that they raise. In the last section, I deal with the Soviet and post-Soviet studies about this region, and trace the thematic and conceptual continuities in their representations.

Mapping the mountains: Badakhshan a remote region

Before going into a more detailed discussion of the ethnographic accounts about Badakhshan region and its sacred sites, it is necessary to give a brief background about historical and geographic context in which these works were produced. These works were mostly produced during the time when the region was mapped and divided between the British and Russian spheres of influence during the so-called "Great Game."¹⁴ A number of studies discuss the political and diplomatic struggle of China, Russia and Great Britain to establish their influence over this region during the second half of the nineteenth century (cf. Kharyukov 1995, Postnikov 2005). The repercussions of this political struggle still echo in the present-day political discourses of the political leaders and common people of the region. For example, recently Tajikistan's ministry of foreign affairs announced a diplomatic victory when it gave 3% or 5% of the Badakhshan region's territory to China.¹⁵ This provoked a great deal of informal discussion and rumours among the residents of Badakhshan region. During my fieldwork in the region, a number of my informants articulated theories about Tajikistan political elites selling the

¹⁴ Rudyard Kipling coined the term "the great game" and since then it has been extensively used in reference to the 19th and early 20th centuries' geopolitical struggle between British and Russian empires in this region.

¹⁵ See. <u>http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-12180567</u> Accessed on 12 July 2012.

region's territory to China to make money. Badakhshan region has borders with China to the east, with Afghanistan to the south, with Kyrgyzstan to the north and the Kulyab region of Tajikistan to the west. This region was the last point of advance of the Russian empire to the east in the late 19th century. The representatives of the British and Russian empires, in parallel to the diplomatic struggle, were also engaged in the topographic and ethnographic study of this region.

The two empires signed an agreement in 1895 according to which the left bank of the River Panj of Badakhshan was given to Amir of Afghanistan and the right bank of this river came under Russian annexation. The Russians gave this region to Amir of Bukhara but due to constant complaints of the Ismailis of Badakhshan about the Bukharan rule, the Russians issued a special edict according to which this region was effectively put under the administration of the head of the Russian military garrison stationed in Khorog.¹⁶ In 1925, the Soviet authorities formed the Badakhshan autonomous region and included it in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Tajikistan.

Nineteenth-century British geographic studies of the Pamirs

In parallel to Russian accounts, the British travellers and explorers of the late 19th century put a lot of effort into mapping the mountainous region of Pamirs. Nineteenthcentury colonialism provided these British scientists the opportunity to travel to these mountainous regions in person and write the accounts of their travels.

These 19th- and early 20th-century accounts attempted to map the region with geographical precision. Their accounts are filled with speculations and arguments about

¹⁶ On the history of the Russian and British diplomatic struggle in Badakhshan region, see Postnikov's book *Skhvatka na Krishe Mira* (Battle on the Roof of the World), which constitutes one of the most comprehensive studies on the subject.

the geographical names and positions of rivers, lakes, mountain passes, their altitude, longitude and so forth. My analysis of these works suggests that such narratives often begin with the list of previous travellers who passed through this region and left some records of their travels. These accounts usually list the name of the Chinese travellers Hwui Seng, who, in 518 AD crossed from the valley of Wakhan to Tashkurgan and then to Kashghar, followed by Sung Yun who passed from Kashghar and Tashkurgan, followed by Hwen Tsang in 644 AD; the Venetian traveller Marco Polo, who crossed Pamirs in 1272–73; and the Jesuit, Benedict Göes, who took the little Pamir route to Yarkand in 1602–3. Then the "heroic" march of John Wood, in 1838, is mentioned, who proceeded from Badakhshan to the foot of the Great Pamir Lake, and was the first to give an account of the headwaters of the Oxus.

These accounts do not provide detailed information about the people of the Pamirs or their sacred places. Rather, the major interest of such accounts is in the topography, cartography and water systems of this region. Wood's mission was to trace sources of the river Oxus; the British political agent in Kabul, Alexander Berns, commissioned John Wood to do this job. Even references to the earlier texts such as Chinese travellers, or other ancient religious texts of Hinduism, are geared toward identifying and matching the names of rivers, mountain passes and lakes mentioned in these ancient texts with their own observations on the ground.

The preoccupation with geography of this region in these accounts is determined by the political struggle between the Russian and British empires. The result of this struggle had negative consequences for the people of this region, who were divided by international borders.

Beyond topography: representation of local people's life-world

In the accounts that provide information about the people of this region, the emphasis is on the isolation of this mountainous area and preservation of ancient cultures among its inhabitants. For example, the theme of "Aryan" origin of the people of Badakhshan and the region being a birthplace of Aryan race runs through most of these accounts (See, for example, Biddulph 1971 [1880]: 159).

These accounts also provide various interpretations of the word "Pamir," which is entymologically linked to ancient texts of Hinduism. For example, Rawlinson quotes certain Bournouf who believed that the term *Pamir* is a contraction of *Upa Meru* ("the country above Mount Meru"), and is thus associating the name directly with the holiest spot in the Brahmanical cosmogony (1872: 489).¹⁷ Rawlinson observes, "it is certain that the geographical indications of the Puranas do all point to the quarter of Central Asia as the scene of the primeval Aryan Paradise" (1872: 489). Rawlinson notes that a certain professor Wilson referred to the story in the Puranas, which describes the division of the Ganges into four great streams as it falls from heaven on Mount Meru and flows onto the surrounding worlds, and associated Mount Meru with the Pamir Mountains (See Rawlinson 1872: 489). The local scholars I interviewed in the region often drew on these sorts of etymological definitions of the term Pamir.

¹⁷ Regarding the etymology of the term "Pamir," these accounts provided numerous suggestions. Rawlinson notes that the "name of *Pamir*, or *Famir*, as it is always written by the Arabs, is derived from the *Fani* (Fauvoi), who, according to Strabo, bounded the Greek kingdom of Bactria to the east (strab. Lib. Xi. X. 14), and whose name is also preserved in *Fan-tau*, the *Fan* Lake, &c., signifying, 'the lake country of the *Fani*'" (Rawlinson 1872: 496). Rawlinson points out that it is highly probable that Pamir and Meru are of kindred etymology, both the names being connected with Mir, "a lake." Trotter suggests there is a tradition "which attributes the derivation of the word Pamir to 'Pa-e-Mir,' i.e., the foot of the Mir Hazrat Ali." Trotter notes that he himself is inclined to believe that the word "Pam" is the Kighiz word for roof, and "yer," which is both Turki and Kirghiz, for "earth" corresponding to the Persian word "Zamin" (Trotter 1878: 209).

Along with the toponymic and linguistic elements, the mountainous space had also probably fuelled interest in the links between the ancient people's cultures and current life-world of the inhabitants of these regions. Some accounts suggested that local people were driven to these mountains in ancient time. It has to be mentioned that the word "ancient" in these accounts usually refers to thousands of years before our time, when the inhabitants of this region were allegedly following Zoroastrianism or other Aryan beliefs. This period is often generally mentioned as "ancient time" without qualifying it with particular dates. For example, Yule suggested, "The inhabitants of secluded mountain districts generally represent the earlier population, driven by intruders from the easier life of the plains" (Yule 1971. [1872]: xxiii). The people of Badakhshan region are imagined as representatives of the civilisations and cultures that moved to these mountains in "ancient times" and preserved their cultural distinctiveness in purity across time due to their isolation. Most of these accounts argue that they are the descendants of the pure Aryan race.

A Dutch orientalist Ole Olufsen, who was in charge of two Danish expeditions to Pamirs, for instance, suggests that the local people are remnants of the ancient Persians who moved from Central Asian lowlands to these mountains (Olufsen 1904).¹⁸ Soren Hansen, who contributed one chapter to Olufsen's account on Pamir, argued for racial purity of people of Shugnan and Vakhan, attributing them to the "short skulled Celtic race of Europe" (see. Hansen 1904: 222). Hansen suggests,

The people of Shugnan and Vakhan must be regarded as Tadjiks, with distinctive peculiarities of race, and without any noteworthy intermixture of foreign elements, whilst the greater number of the Tadjiks in the lowlands west of Pamir are more or less strongly intermixed, especially with Turkish elements. In strong contrast to these Tadjiks of the lowlands, the type of the mountain

¹⁸ The First and Second Danish Expeditions headed by Olufsen to Pamirs were carried out during the years 1896–97 and 1898–99, the object of both journeys being the exploration of the geography, and ethnic composition of the Pamirs.

Tadjiks is so pure that we are able to form a very clear conception of that type through the brief descriptions handed down to us by former travellers, inasmuch as the type is identical today with the widely dispersed Celtic race of Europe (Hansen 1904: 218).

According to Hansen, local people of Badakhshan,

came to these mountains couple of thousand years ago where they have since preserved their racial character, unaffected by the violent warfare which has raged again and again in their neighbourhood and remained strangely unaffected by all culture (Hansen 1904: 222).

Most of these travellers were interested in the racial types of the local people. For example, Trotter, in relation to the people of Vakhan, notes, "Their physiognomies are very divergent, most of them have Jewish noses, but one boy I saw with a most perfect Greek profile" (Trotter 1878: 207). The racial "purity" of the local people was important as they were seen as the possible representatives of the past of the European race in the present time.

Although these accounts were carried out in the name of advancing geographic, anthropological and other sciences, they were part of the political interests of the British Empire in this region. This political interest was assisted and maintained by means of scholarly discoveries. Yet the relationship between these "scientific works" and political power is not direct. They are part of what Edward Said calls "orientalism discourse," which is shaped to a certain extent by a colonial or imperial establishment (Said 1979). Moreover, along with political and intellectual authorities, this discourse is also shaped by the exchange with cultural and moral authorities that involved not only colonial establishment and reigning sciences, but also canons of taste, values and beliefs (see Said 1979: 12). The knowledge that these 19th- and early 20th-century accounts produced, has been further elaborated by modern studies about this region and also entered the discourse of the local people about their cultural and religious history and identity.

A number of the British explorers were probably the first to provide more detailed comments on the religious beliefs of the people of the Badakhshan region (see. Leitner 1996 [1890], Biddulph 1971 [1880], Elias 2008 [1886]). The sacred places, however, were not very popular topics for the British orientalists yet one may come across some occasional references to these places in their accounts. For example, John Wood mentions the shrine of Nasir-i Khusraw, the key figure of Pamiri Ismailism, presently located in Badakhshan of Afghanistan. Wood observes,

Shāh Nasr Khusrau, whose remains are here interred, came originally from Mecca, and died in the year of the Hidjrut 393. We heard, for the first time, in this Astanah, that the earth is supported on the shoulders of four holy men, of whom it need not be added that the saint of Badakhshan, the before-mentioned Shāh Nasir Khusrau, is one. His companions are – Sultan Yar Khoda Ahmed, of Afraziab; Sheikh Fureed Shukkur Gunge, of Hindustan; and Imaum 'Alī Mooza Raza, of Khoristan. Shāh Nasir is the patron saint of the Kohistan, and much revered by the inhabitants of the Upper Oxus. For the support of this Ziarat a tract of land was assigned at the time the buildings were erected; and in return for an indulgence which had been confirmed by the subsequent rulers of Badakhshan, the Mazar is bound to furnish the wayfaring man with food, water, and a night's lodging (Wood 1840: 168).

One of the British government's agents, Munphool Pundit, who travelled to the

region, also mentions this shrine as a point of pilgrimage for Muslims from Khurasan and

India. He notes,

The celebrated shrine of Shāh Nasir Khusro, a Muhammadan saint and philosopher of note, who lived in the tenth century of Christ, is situated in a romantic part of the valley of the Kokcha.¹⁹ It is largely resorted to by Muhammadan fakirs from India and Khurasan (Yule H, Munphool Pundit, and Faiz Buksh 1872: 445).

Historians have placed Nasir-i Khusraw in the 11th century, contrary to Pundit's

account, suggesting these accounts may contain historical inaccuracies. It is important to

note some of these inaccuracies because they formed the authoritative basis of scholarly

ideas about the religion of the people. A particular example is the above-mentioned

Dutch orientalist Olufsen. He states:

A sect of Zoroastrian religion probably was ruling in Vakhan up to the middle of the 19th century, when the Shiite religion (which at the time of Wood's travels in 1837 was forced upon Shugnan

¹⁹ Nasir Khusraw's tomb-shrine is located in Yumgan Valley in Badakhshan of Afghanistan.

and Roshan by the Islamitic rulers in Balkh, Khulm, Kundus and Faisabad) was proclaimed the official religion of Vakhan without gaining any foothold upon the people (Olufsen 1904: 210).

Olufsen explains the beliefs associated with the sacred places as remnants of the

Zoroastrian religion. He describes the physical features of the mazar in Garm Chashma in

the village of Shund, the mazar Khoja Radjab in the village of Barshar in Ghoron, and the

mazar Shāh-ii Mardon in the village of Namadgut in Vakhan (Olufsen 1904: 30, 155,

159–161). Olufsen observes that people come to the mazars to say their prayers and seek

cures against diseases:

The natives everywhere look strong and healthy. When they are ill they tear a piece off their clothes, touch the suffering place on their body with it, and then place the rag on the grave of some holy man, believing that his spirit will take away the illness. Sometimes they tie this rag to some fantastic-looking tree in a lonely place, believing that the disease will be transplanted into the tree (Olufsen 1904: 149).

Olufsen then draws on other aspects of the religious beliefs of the people of

Vakhan, and also draws parallels with the Zoroastrian religion. For example, he notes,

With regard to the religion of the people, and more especially the religion of the Vakhan, I am inclined to believe that the Parsee religion [that is, Zoroastrianism] held its own here up to the beginning of the nineteenth century; and even if the Shiite faith were the official religion, it is the religion forced upon them by the Afghans, and is not favourably looked upon by the people (Olufsen 1904: 198).²⁰

²⁰ According to historical sources, the Afghans that occupied Vakhan, Shughnan, Rushan and Badakhshan in 1883 to 1893 were Sunni and not Shi'a, and they did not force Shi'ite faith upon the people of Vakhan as Olufsen notes. Local tradition regarded Nasir-i Khusraw, who lived in the 11th century CE, as the founder of the Ismaili belief in this region. Most British accounts of the late 19^{th} and early 20^{th} centuries mention the negative attitude of the Sunnis toward the Ismailis in this region. In particular they note that due to their religious differences, most slaves came from the Ismaili region. For example, John Wood who, travelled through Badakhshan in the 1830s, observes, "In the report of the great trigonometrical survey of India for 1869 and 1870, it is stated that between Kabul and the Oxus slavery is as rife as ever, extending through Hazara, Badakhshan, Wakhan, Sirikul &c" (Wood 1971 [1872]: 197). Wood notes that the slave trade is justified on the grounds of converting the enslaved to "Islamism," the term he uses in reference to Islam. Wood notes that the slave trade was a source of income for the local rulers in Vakhan, Shugnan and Rushan. The author observes, "The laws of their Prophet do not admit the making of slaves, but the Mohamedans get over the difficulty by calling their victims proselytes... The unhappy wretches who are thus enslaved are bartered with the Uzbeks of Kunduz for horses, and are again sold by them to Shah Kittore, the Chitral ruler, at an advance of fifty per cent" (Wood 1971 [1872]: 244). The author notes that slavery is a terrible thing and can be eradicated only through diffusion of knowledge. Wood's discourse on slavery and his concerns probably stem from the debates about abolition of slavery in Great Britain, which led to Parliament passing the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833. Interestingly, British accounts note that the Afghan occupation of this region in 1883 put an end to the slave trade. However, it was under the instigation of the British that the Afghan occupied these small chiefdoms as a means to push the Russians further back from their Indian territories. Therefore, the British tried to show that the Afghan occupation

By noting that the people of Vakhan were practising Zoroastrianism until the 19th century, Olufsen points to the isolation of this region from the wider world and indicates the "ancientness" of the local people that is preserved there to the present time.

On the other hand, John Wood, who travelled to this region in the 1830s, refers to the religious belief of the Upper Oxus regions as Shi'aism and to the people as Shi'ah, suggesting they must have been pushed into the mountains over some time by the Sunni invasions (Wood 1840: 192). Later 19th-century accounts provided more detailed information about the religious belief of the Pamiri Ismailis. The British accounts, in general, were ahead of the Russians in terms of identifying the religious adherence of the people in this region. For example, Anglo-Hungarian Orientalist, Gottlieb Wilhem Leitner, claims,

I had already pointed out in 1867 the importance which our good friend, His Highness Agha Khan of Bombay, the Head of the Khojas in that city, enjoyed in those, then nearly inaccessible, regions [reference to the Northern areas of Pakistan], as also in Wakhan, Zebak, Shignan, Raushan, Kolab and Derwaz, where the *Mulais* predominant and are governed by hereditary $P\bar{r}s$ or ancient sages of their own choice, to whom they yield implicit obedience, as do also the covenanters with "Al-Hakim" among the "initiated" of the Druses (Leitner, 1996 [1890], Appendix VII: 4).

Interestingly, Leitner notes that

the local people are Muhammadans,²¹ of the Shiah persuasion and refer to themselves as *Mulais*. Leitner explains that the term, "Maula" or "Mula" come from the same root and is generally applied to a spiritual master, but, among the Shiahs, specially to their "Lord" 'Ali. Therefore "*mulais* are the special followers of the "Lord A'li" (Leitner, 1996 [1890], Appendix VII: 2).

In addition to the term *maulai*, Leitner also uses the term *Ismailiyan* but mostly in

reference to Khoja Ismailis. For example, Leitner notes,

had a progressive effect on the region. On the other hand, the Russian accounts of that period emphasize the oppression that the Afghan occupation had on the local Ismaili people and depict the role of Russians as liberators.

²¹ Muhammadans and Muhammadanism are the common 19th- and early 20th- century orientalist terms used to refer to Muslims and Islam.

The Khojas of Bombay, who had been converted from Hinduism, but whose very name is Ismailian, used to read the "Das-awtar" or "Tenth Incarnation," thus rendering their step from Wishnu Hinduism to Shiah Muhammadanism an easy one (Leitner, 1996 [1890], Appendix VII: 3).

The term *maulai* was probably the religious self-designation of the Ismailis of the northern areas of Pakistan, where most of Leitner's data comes from, and which he uses to describe the Ismailis of Badakhshan as well. In Badakhshan, the term *panjtani (panj* literally means five and *tan* means body in reference to Muhammad, 'Alī, Fātima, al-Hasan and al-Husayn) has probably been one of the markers of self-identification for the Pamiri Ismailis in the past. At least this is how most of the local people define their religious tradition in some cases.

In addition, Leitner also provides some information about the theological aspects of the belief of the Ismailis in Badakhshan. He claims that the book *Kelam-i-Pīr* takes the place of the Qur'an among them. He notes,

The "Kelam-i-Pīr," or "the Logos or word of the Pīr or ancient sage," mainly refers to the sayings attributed to the Sheikh-ul-Jabal," or "Old Man of the Mountain." (Leitner 1996 [1890] Appendix VII: 10)²².

Similarly, John Biddulph, in his study of the northern areas of Pakistan, uses the term "Maulai" in reference to the Ismailis living in the mountains of Hindu Kush and Pamirs. Biddulph notes, "the whole of the people of Hunza, Ponyal, Zebak, Shighnan, people of Sirikol, Wakhan, Yassin, and the greater number of the inhabitants of the

²² Ivanow compared the content of *Kalami Pīr* with the contents of a number of other manuscripts and concluded that *Kalami Pīr* is wrongly attributed to Nasir-i Khusraw. *Kalami Pīr*, according to Ivanow, is actually a slightly altered version of a manuscript titled *Haft-babi Abu Ishaq* written by a 15th century author named Abu Ishaq. (cf. Ivanow. 1935. *Kalami Pīr; A treatise on Ismaili Doctrine, also (wrongly) called Haft-Babi Shah Sayyid Nasir*, Edited in original Persian and translated into English by W. Ivanow, Bombay: Islamic Research Association No 4.). Moreover, contrary to Leitner's claim that *Kalami Pīr* is the central theological work of the Ismailis of Badakhshan, there are other theological works by Nasir-i Khusraw, particularly his *Vajh-i Din*, that the Ismailis of Badakhshan highly value as part of their canonical religious literature.

Ludkho Valley in Chitral, belong to the Maulai sect" (Biddulph 1880: 119). Biddulph

further observes,

The countries inhabited by the Maulais are roughly divided among a number of Pīrs, who are treated by their disciples with extraordinary respect, but residence does not give the Pīr authority over the whole of any special district. The office is hereditary, and Maulai families transfer their spiritual obedience from father to son, regardless of changes of residence. For instance, Shāh Abdul Rahim of Zebak, who is honoured and respected as being next in rank to Agha Khan himself, has disciples in Sirikol, Kunjoot, Zebak, Yassin, and Badakhshan, but other Pīrs also have disciples in those places. The respect paid to their Pīrs by their disciples is unbounded; nothing is refused them (Biddulph 1880: 119).

In terms of the other communities' relationships with the Ismailis, Biddulph notes,

Soonnees [Sunnis] speak of them [Ismailis] as "Kaffirs" and "Rafizi," but they themselves do not refuse to pray or eat with Soonnees. They are sometimes accused of worshipping Ali, the son-inlaw of the Prophet, and accordingly styled "Ali-purust," and they undoubtedly esteem Ali, who, they say, was born of Light as superior to the Prophet Mahommed, and an incarnation of the deity. They reject the idea of a future state, believing in the transmigration of souls. Evil deeds are punished by the spirit being translated into a dog or other mean animal. Good actions are rewarded by a future incarnation as a great or holy man. They claim little in common with other sects of Mahommedans, saying, the Soonee is a dog and the Shiah is an ass. They question the divine character of the Koran, though they say that it was entrusted to the angel Gabriel to give to Ali, but that he gave it by mistake to Mahommed (Biddulph 1880: 121).

Biddulf echoes Leitner in pointing out that "They use in place of the Koran a book called the *Kalam-i-Pīr*, a Persian work, which is shown to none but men of their faith.... The only pilgrimage is to the living head of their faith who is styled the Imām-i-Zaman, or Sahib-i-Zeman" (Biddulph 1880: 121).

These accounts are the product of the context of colonialism. The study of the religious beliefs and practices, therefore, was not an innocent undertaking with the noble goal of advancing the social sciences. It was part of the "orientalism-discourse" "by which European culture was able to manage — and even produce — the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively" (Said 1979: 3). The representation of the Badakhshan people as remnants of an ancient past, who could be observed in the present, was more about confirming the ancient roots of the European identity than it was about the local people of the region.

The final diplomatic agreement between British and Russian Empires for the influence over the region was signed in 1895, and after this the Russian scholars dominated the study of Badakhshan region that became part of their sphere of influence.

Examples from the works of Russian scholars

Russian studies of the region initially relied on information about the religious beliefs of the Badakhshan people provided by British accounts.²³ The Russian accounts of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, similar to the British, provided a lot of information about the topography, cartography and ancient origins of this place and people. Russian geographer A.P. Fedchenko perhaps was the first who began the geographic study of the Pamirs. Fedchenko organized three expeditions to this region from 1869 to 1873 that explored the valley of Zaravshan, in the area of Iskandar-kul, and drew a map of Kokand Khanate and the Pamirs (Arunova 2006: 212).

Later, other Russian military-scientific expeditions were sent to the region: these included M.D. Skobelev's expedition in 1876 to Alay valley, H.A. Severtsov's Fergano-Pamir expedition in 1877–1878, Captain Putyata's expedition in 1883, military topographer N.N. Pokotilo's expedition in 1886, exploration of the naturalist brothers G.E. and M.E. Grum-Grzhimaylo and so forth (cf. Arunova 2006: 213–215, Postnikov 2005: 133-136). Almost all of these expeditions included a number of Russian military

²³ For example, the Russian orientalist Aleksey Alekseyevich Bobrinskiy (1852–1927), who is credited as the first scholar that pointed to the Ismaili affiliation of the Pamiri Ismalis in Russian scholarship, refers his readers to Leitner's and Biddulf's accounts for more detailed information about the Ismaili religion (Bobrinskiy 1908: 226). Bobrinskiy provides more detailed information about the religious aspects of this region than other previous Russian accounts. Bobrinkiy published his article *Sekta Ismailia v Russkikh i Bukharskikh Predelakh Sredney Azii* in 1907, which contains interviews with the three local religious leaders *pīrs*, who explain aspects of the local religious beliefs. According to another Russian scholar and military officer, Snesarev Andrey Evgenevich (1865–1937), up to this point Russian scholars including Aleksander Aleksandrovich Semyonov (1873–1958), and Andrey Evgenevich Bertels (1926–1995) made significant advances in the study of Ismaili tradition in this region. Semyonov published his works both before and during the Soviet period, while Bertels worked during the Soviet time.

officers, geographers, military topographers, land surveyors, astronomers, zoologists and naturalists who jointly studied and mapped the region. A number of mountain peaks and glaciers still bear the name of some of these Russian scholars who "discovered" them.

The first full monograph about this region in the Russian language was published in 1879 by Ivan Pavlovich Minaev, which was based on some of the data provided by some of these expeditions and other British sources. Minaev draws his data from the works of previous Russian and British accounts that studied the geography, ethnography and languages of this region (Minaev 1878).

Some of the Russian studies were concerned about whether or not the Ismailis of Badakhshan are "real" Muslims. For example, Polovtsoff, in his account about his travel to Samarkand, Bukhara and Pamir in the first decade of the twentieth century, describes the religious practices of the Pamiri Ismailis as follows²⁴:

These mountainous people are not Moslems, though outwardly they pretend to profess Islam in order not to be meddled with; they are what is improperly called 'Shiahs' in India, or 'Ismailis' in Western books, though both these names mean nothing to them (Polovtsoff 1932: 130).

Polovtsoff does not elaborate on what his understanding of the "real" Muslim is. Polovtsoff goes on to point out that the people in this region "are of the same stock as ourselves: they are Indo-Europeans, of Iranian origin" who have significant "number of blue-eyed and fair-haired children" (1932: 129).

The assumption about the religious practices of people in this region being far from "real" Islam is also evident, for instance, in Aleksander Semyonov's discussion of the religious views of the mountainous people. Semyonov writes:

The religious views of the mountainous Tajik are very simple. Despite a thousand-year presence of Islam amongst the Tajiks of mountainous Asia it has not left deep traces in their beliefs unlike

²⁴ Unlike the other Russian accounts discussed in this chapter, Polovtsoff's account is published in the English language. The rest of the Russian authors mentioned in this chapter published their works in Russian and all the quotes that I draw from their works are my own translation from the Russian language.

in the other places, where the worldviews of the Arab prophet completely wiped out the primitive religious understandings of the people. I will not judge why this is the case; whether it is the centuries long isolation of these Tailks in the mountainous slums and their disconnection from the rest of the Muslim world, or whether it is the complete ignorance of the Mullahs and their unwillingness and sometimes open hostility to accept missionaries from the great madrasas of the holy Bukhara and Samarkand. In any case, mountainous person has quite indifferent attitude towards his present Muslim religion and reveres his ancient indigenous beliefs and customs, which almost disappeared amongst his plain Tajik kinsman (1898: 81).

Semvonov then discusses the beliefs of mountainous Tajiks about Khudo/Parvardigor (God), farishtas (angels), pari (fairy), div (demon), shaytan (Satan), *djin* (jinn), *azhdahor* (dragon) and so forth, and sees them as "ancient indigenous beliefs and customs" disconnected from the "present Muslim religion" (1898: 81).²⁵ From the above quote it appears that what Semyonov probably regarded as proper Islam is related to the teaching of the "missionaries from the great madrasas of the holy Bukhara and

Samarkand" (Semyonov 1898: 81).

Similarly, P. M. Mayskiy, already writing during the Soviet period, quotes

Semyonov to support his argument about the "remnants of ancient beliefs in the Pamiri

Ismailism". Mayskiy writes:

From the stories of the people it is evident that the Ismaili missionaries encountered various beliefs that were left by the previous conquerors of the Pamir such as Chines, sivah-push-kafirs and others. The remnants of these beliefs can be observed in pamiri Ismailism; as professor Semyonov pointed out "... customs such as worship of mazars, sacred stones, the belief in the transmigration of soul and other phenomena that are alien to Ismailism, peacefully co-exist with commonly accepted religion; if they are not part of written dogma, they are included into the folk tradition with the silent agreement of the local custodians of the rules of the sect (Mayskiy 1935: 53).

²⁵ It has to be noted that Semyonov, in some of his other articles, presents other ideas related to theological and cosmological aspects of Ismailism that are found in the religious belief of the Ismailis of Badakhshan. For example, in the introduction of his "K Dogmatike Pamirskogo Ismailizma XI Glava "Litsa Veri" Nasiri Khosrova," he talks about the religious belief of the Ismailis of Badakhshan with the reference to Nasir-i Khusraw's views about *Tawhid* (unity of God), universal intellect, universal soul, prophet-hood, imāmate, paradise, hell, good and evil, and so forth. Although Semyonov does not mention this, one can speculate that this is what he might probably have regarded as "real" Ismailism as apposed to the beliefs of the mountainous Tajiks about Khudo/Parvardigor (God), farishtas (angels), pari, div, shaytan djin, azhdahor and so forth (see Semyonov, K Dogmatike Pamirskogo Ismailizma XI glava "Litsa veri" Nasir-i Khosrova, Tashkent: 1926).

Mayskiy further notes, "The worship of mazars and sacred stones existed in the Pamir long before the arrival of Shah Nasir-i Khusrav and was inherited from the previous beliefs; and it is like Hagia Sophia for the Turks and the black stone of Ka'ba for the Arabs" (1935: 54).²⁶

Given the historical context the Russian scholars of the late 19th and early 20th centuries operated in, their approach to the sacred places and other traditions of the people of Badakhshan is similar to the general trend that was dominant during the colonial era. During this period, scholars were searching for groups of people untouched by civilization, the study of which could open a window for a better understanding of the ancient past of the European population. This view is quite clearly articulated in Andrey Snesarev's article. For example, he writes:

In the face of the mountainous people of the Western Pamir we have in front of us the best preserved group of people from the ancient times; the group of people which across the ages preserved their language, customs, and probably their physical appearance. Within this group of people, to put it metaphorically, we have the yellowest pages of the history of the humankind. This is already a sufficient reason for us to study these people, their language, and everyday life while its all fresh and is not distorted. We also take into consideration that these people are our kin; that they are the approximate type of what were our remote ancestors like; the study of these mountainous people will also shed light on the primordial past of the European race (Snesarev 1904).

Through the detailed study of the people of Badakhshan in the present time, some

of these scholars believed they could better understand their own primordial past. The life

²⁶ In this connection, Devin De-Weese, in recent years wrote few articles critiquing the Western scholarship on Islam in Central Asia that, according to De-Weese, "defined Islam in quite narrow terms that would exclude much of the daily substance of religious life in most traditional Muslim societies (De-Weese, 2002: 309). De-Weese argues that: "To restrict what is 'Islamic' to the Qur'an and a limited body of Hadith may be the business of contemporary Muslim fundamentalists and the medieval jurists they cite, but it was never the business of the majority of self-defined Muslims over the centuries..." (2002: 309-310). De-Weese notes that this restrictive vision of Islam was part of European colonial discourse and was also adopted by the Soviet academic establishment and the official clergy during the Soviet period that condemned as "un-Islamic" a practice as central to traditional life as, for example, the visitation of saints' shrines (2002: 310).

world of the people of Badakhshan was seen as a window for the study of prehistoric time.

Aleksey Bobrinskiy, on the other hand, points to the migration of people in and out of Badakhshan and proposes to consider the beliefs and customs of the people of Badakhshan, including the those associated with the sacred sites, in light of this movement of people and ideas. Bobrinskiy notes:

The ancestors of the contemporary mountainous people, when they moved to these mountains in masse or individually also took with them their own cultures, customs, and beliefs according to which they lived in the their previous homeland. When they found themselves in the mountains, locked in the isolated and difficult of access gorges and valleys, cut off from the external world, they thus removed themselves from the influence of the destructive whirlwind of the important historical events: Therefore, they were bound to preserve all the distinctive features of their old way of life, which they had in their previous homeland in its wholeness and purity. The whole body of their morals and manners, with which they withdrew to the mountains in the times immemorial, were bound to be preserved intact in this new isolated and immobile condition of life... (1908: 41). ...The characteristics of the ancient Aryan race are still present in the life of these mountainous people. Self-respect, absence of theft, extremely polite in their relationship with one another, respect to the elders and elegant manners are present in their attitudes (Bobrinskiy 1908: 49).

The content of this quote is quite similar to Soren Hansen's ideas mentioned earlier about Aryan purity of the people of this region who preserved their racial character despite the passage of time. Bobrinskiy mentions the movements and relocations of people across the borders between Shugnan, Vakhan, Afghanistan and Chinese Turkestan due to political circumstances that he personally witnessed (1908: 42).²⁷ Bobrinskiy provides these examples of the movements of people as evidence of his proposition that different people moved to the mountains of Badakhshan in ancient times with their own distinctive cultures and due to geographic isolation preserved them in

²⁷ Bobrinskiy personally witnessed the movements of people across the region. He writes that during the reign of Ali-Mardan, the last *mir* ruler of Vakhan, up to 150 families were moved from Vakhan to Afghanistan, or during the times of Sho-Jon-Khan whole villages from Shahdara under the fear of persecution ran from their valley, or lastly the eviction of the whole valley of Ghund to the Chinese Turkestan as a result of constant discords between local *beks* rulers and the raids by Kyrgyz (Bobrinskiy, 1908: 42).

purity up to the present day. However, Bobrinskiy fails to see that the same examples directly question his assumption about the untouched ancient culture being preserved in this isolated mountainous place.

In this connection, it is also interesting to mention the reasons for M.S. Andreev's choice of the valley of Khuf as his fieldwork site. Andreev carried out ethnographic fieldwork in Khuf Valley before the Soviet rule in this region, and revisited it in the 1920s during the Soviet time. He notes that he chose to include in his monograph the data collected during the pre-Soviet time, as it was more "authentic" and not tainted with modern changes that rapidly altered the life of people in this region. Andreev notes that he chose the valley of Khuf as the site for his fieldwork because of its relative isolation and preservation of old ways of life in comparison to other more accessible valleys: for this reason, the Valley of Khuf, according to Andreev, represents a great interest for the research (Andreev 1953: 9).

Andreev elaborates on this in the text and points out the following:

I do not mean to say that the valley of Khuf is most archaic of all the other upper *pandj* valleys. For example, it is possible that Bartang and Yazgulam, which are much more difficult to access, in many respects preserved even more archaic traits of everyday life than Khuf. However, Khuf, and Rushan in general, in comparison with Shugnan better preserved age-old customs and beliefs and are less Islamised... (1953: 9).

The exigency for the study of the people of Badakhshan is linked with the idea that "they are the living monument of the distant ages" and in that sense can provide important clues for the study of history of ancient cultures. The search for "others" that are most isolated from "ourselves" and thus more authentically rooted in their "natural" setting has probably been part of ethnographic research since its inception (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997: 8). In the accounts about Badakhshan region, this "authentic rootedness" of people in their "natural" setting is articulated as the representation of primordial past of European people that can be observed and studied in the present time.

The theme of spatial isolation of "authentic" cultures, according to anthropologists Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, has been the recurrent theme in the narrative of the classical ethnographic works. That is, "in a harsh ecological setting, a way of life thousands of years old has been preserved only through its extraordinary spatial separateness" (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992: 15). Gupta and Ferguson propose that there is a need to move beyond the naturalized conception of spatialized "cultures" and to explore instead the production of difference within common, shared and connected spaces (1992: 16).

Furthermore, they argue that

...if one begins with the premise that spaces have *always* been hierarchically interconnected, instead of naturally disconnected, then cultural and social change becomes not a matter of cultural contact and articulation but one of rethinking difference *through* connection. In other words, instead of assuming the autonomy of the primeval community, we need to examine how it was formed as a *community* out of the interconnected space that always already existed. Colonialism, then, represents the displacement of one form of interconnection by another (1992: 8).

Therefore, according to Gupta and Ferguson, "if we question a pre-given world of separate and discrete "peoples and cultures," and see instead a difference-producing set of relations, we turn from a project of juxtaposing preexisting differences to one of exploring the construction of differences in historical process" (1992: 16). There is a need for a critical engagement of the image of Badakhshan and its people as an "archaeological discovery" and de-essentialise the ways in which their culture and religion have been represented in these accounts. The analysis of these 19th- and early 20th-century accounts about the Badakhshan region shows that they are mainly framed within the theme of geographical isolation of this region where, due to its spatial

separateness, an ancient culture has been preserved. The knowledge that these accounts produced has been elaborated later on by other studies during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, and has also filtered into the local people's discourse about their self and communal identities.

Continuities in Soviet and post-Soviet approaches to the sacred sites

In the Soviet period (1917 to 1991), scholarly studies of Badakhshan's places of worship were limited. Some pre-Soviet Russian scholars such as A.A. Semyonov, M.S. Andreev and I.I. Zarubin continued their academic careers and their research on Badakhshan in the Soviet period. I.I. Zarubin visited Bartang Valley of Badakhshan in 1914 and published his article titled "Materiali i Zametki po Etnografii gornikh Tadzhikov" (Materials and Notes on the Ethnography of Mountainous Tajiks) in 1917. Unlike other Russian scholars of that period, in this account, Zarubin seems more cautious and only aims to provide a description of the sacred places and religious rituals that he observed in these places without touching on the issues of their pre-Islamic or non-Islamic characteristics. For example, Zarubin provides an account of a sacred place called Khoja Nurdin in the village of Basid and a story attached to it without commenting whether it is an Islamic or ancient form of religious beliefs (Zarubin 1917: 130–140).

M.S. Andreev's ethnography, *Tajiks of the Valley Khuf*, mentioned above, also has a chapter on sacred sites. Andreev describes sacred sites such as Shāhi Khamush, who is considered to be the founding ancestor of the former *Shāhs* (rulers) of Shugnan, Panjai Shāh (Lit. Palm print of the king) associated with 'Alī, and Poi Khoja, which are presently located in Badakhshan of Afghanistan (1953: 49–50). Andreev elaborates on

the significance of the symbol of human palm *panja* among the Ismailis of Badakhshan, and writes that this is probably a very ancient symbol, which with change of religions is attributed to the prominent personalities of the new religion; that is, to Buddha, to 'Alī or to some other local gods or holy persons (1953: 26). Andreev, Semyonov, Zarubin and other Russian scholars of Badakhshan continued their academic work during the Soviet period and published other works on different aspects of this region.

The influence of the Soviet ideology is most explicit in P.M. Mayskiy's article mentioned before. In this article, Mayskiy describes a ritual connected with a shrine of Nasir-i Khusraw in the village of Tavdem, and mentions the shrine of Shāhi Mardan in the village of Namadgut in Vakhan and a shrine in the village of Barrushan of Rushan district. He writes that the visitation to the sacred sites is a remnant of pre-Islamic beliefs that had become part of the religious practice of the Ismailis in Badakhshan, however, it has nothing to do with Ismailism. Mayskiy disagrees with Aleksander Semenov's view of Ismailism as a progressive religion that strived for equality among all human beings. Mayskiy notes that Ismailism has been a religion of the ruling classes, which doctrinally justifies exploitation and inequality (Mayskiy 1935: 50).

In that period, many studies that touched upon the issues of religion or shrines were anti-religious and continued with the theme of pre-Islamic origin and character of the shrines (Mayskiy 1935). Maria Louw, in her study of Muslim shrines in Bukhara, notes that the Soviet studies approached sacred sites from the perspective of Marxist historical materialism, defining it "as an irrational form of social consciousness, a twisted reflection of people's material life, a fetish inhibiting people from acting on the real material world" (Louw 2007: 3). The campaign against the sacred sites in the 1920s–1930s and 1960s were part of Soviet general policy against religion. The local elders in Badakhshan often talked about the Soviet campaign against the sacred sites in our conversations about their past (see chapter 4). They pointed out that in the 1920s and 30s, some of the sacred sites that had larger buildings were turned into schools, while others were dismantled.

Shoshana Keller, in her study of Islam in Central Asia in the 1920s and 1930s, observes that during the anti-religious campaigns in Central Asia, communist agitators, specialists in agriculture, medical doctors and other enthusiasts were mobilized to explain the natural phenomena from a scientific point of view. They were lecturing people about the causes of wind, rain, thunderstorms, how crops grow, and how to get a better harvest and so forth. The assumption was that if these phenomena were scientifically explained people would abandon their religious views of the world. Similarly, antireligious lectures were instructed to discuss traditional *dastans* (epic poetry) and stories about Sufi saints, devils, *jinns, devs* and similar creatures from a scientific point of view, provoke argument from the people, and defeat them with science and logic (cf. Keller 2001: 159).

Some of the Soviet studies about the shrine in Tajikistan examined the artistic and architectural elements of the shrines, and most of these studies were about the shrines in the lowlands of Tajikistan and Central Asia in general (cf. Hamza 2005: 20). As the shrines of Badakhshan region did not have artistically impressive buildings, there were no studies of this kind carried out about the shrines of this region. During the Soviet time some studies about Muslim places of worship in Tajikistan were published including, Abdulazizov, S. 1970, "Haqiqat dar borai Mazorho" (Truth about the mazars), Mukhtorov, A .1964, "Siri Mazorho" (Mystery of the mazars), Murodov O. 1977,

"Paydoishi mazorho va osori onho dar zamoni mo" (The origin of mazars and their legacy in our time) and so forth. These studies were not ethnographic studies as such and were framed within an anti-religious discourse. Along with emphasis on the pre-Islamic character of shrines, some Soviet studies also viewed them as barriers for progress and urged to eradicate this practice from the social and cultural life of Soviet society.

In the academic field, the concept of vestige (*perezhitok*) was central in most of the studies during the Soviet period, and was one of the central analytic categories in Soviet ethnography. If the pre-Soviet Russian accounts were based on more or less longer time spent in the field, after 1928–1932, fieldwork and the study of specific contemporary societies disappeared almost completely (Slezkine 1991: 481). According to Slezkine, in that period in the Soviet Union,

ethnography had been effectively reduced to the theory of the 'primitive communist formation,' and the debate revolved around the genesis of class institutions, the problem of internal contradictions within pre-class societies, and the role of vestiges in subsequent evolution... As the present was assumed to be socialist, non-socialist reality became past (1991: 476).

The notion of vestiges provided an almost limitless flexibility of analysis by allowing the researcher to dismiss any fact that did not fit the adopted definition (1991: 482). As the practice of religion was discouraged, the few studies that dealt with religious practices mostly framed them as vestiges.

Oshanin's 1937 study of the racial composition of the people of Badakhshan is a remarkable example of Soviet anthropological scholarship of that period. Oshanin measures head length, face index, face height, face breadth, nose index, nose length, nose breadth and body stature of the people of Badakhshan in order to determine if they came from multiple or single racial groups. Oshanin compares his measurements and concludes that

by all characters, both descriptive and dimensional, these groups of population [people of the Vakhan, Shugnan Rushan] are closely allied to each other. In other words, the Iranian tribes of the Western Pamirs must be regarded as belonging to one and the same anthropological type, viz., brachycephalic brunets of medium stature. ... But this composite type has probably formed out of different racial elements (Oshanin 1937: 181).

Based on the linguistic characteristics, the author attributes the people of Shugnan, Vakahn and Rushan to the northeastern branch of the ancient Iranian people (1937: 13).

An example of the later ethnographic approach from the 1950s onwards is Lidiya Fedorovna Monogarova's ethnographic study of Pamir that dealt with the processes of ethno-genesis (see Monogarova 1972). L. F. Monogarova's main concern was to show the ways in which people of the Soviet Badakhshan are gradually assimilating with the other ethnic groups of Tajikistan and consolidating into the single Tajik Socialist nation. The Institute of Ethnography of Academy of Sciences of USSR named after N.N. Miklukho-Maklay, and the Institute of History of Tajik Academy of Science continued sending short-term ethnographic expeditions to the Badakhshan region until the end of 1980s and ethnographers carried out different studies. Soviet ethnographers including A.K. Pisarchik, N.N. Ershov, N.A. Kislyakov and E. M. Peshereva defended their dissertation on the different aspects of the lives of people of the Badakhshan region in that period.

In line with the Soviet state ideology, the Soviet ethnographic studies on Muslim places of worship in Central Asia approached the visitation of these sites from the perspective of Marxist historical materialism (Louw 2007). Soviet scholars tried to show the pre-Islamic character of shrine visitation in Badakhshan and mostly described it as an ancient suvival (see Maiskiy 1935). The depiction of the sacred sites as the vestiges of pre-Islamic beliefs is the continuation of 19th-century Russian and Western accounts

about local religious beliefs. Some of the local scholars that trained during the Soviet and post-Soviet period have also contributed to this tradition.

Post-Soviet studies on shrines in Badakhshan

Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the former Soviet ethnographers and their post-Soviet students have produced a few studies about the Badakhshan region. The classics of the Russian and Soviet ethnographies on Badakhshan written by Andreev, Bobrinskiy, Semyonov and Zarubin guide the general framework of the studies produced locally about this region in the present day. The focus on "pre-Islamic" signs in the beliefs of the people of Badakhshan is still dominant, yet the notion of "vestiges" is gradually being abandoned. In post-Soviet studies, more attention is paid to the religious aspects and association of local religious practices with Islam. For example, K.S. Vasiltsov, in his article on the traditional Pamiri house *Cheed*, pays more attention to the ways in which people relate its architecture to cosmological aspects of Ismailism (Vasiltsov 2009). Yet, the significant part of Vasiltsov's study deals with the issue of the adaptation of ancient beliefs to the current Muslim Ismaili belief of the Pamiri Ismailis. In the manner of the classical late 19th-century ethnographies, Vasiltsov brings examples from sacred texts of Hinduism, such as the Atharvaveda and Rigveda, about the house and draws parallels with Pamiri house (Vasiltsov 2009: 166–169, 171–172). The author's association of local religious practices with the beliefs mentioned in the ancient texts of Hinduism is problematic since the connections he draws are often based on vague historical or archaeological evidence.

Similarly, Tohir Qalandarov's recent (2004) ethnographic study of Shugnan shows the continuity of the Russian/Soviet ethnographic approach. Qalandarov draws on most of the Russian/Soviet ethnographers who studied the region and pays close attention to the remnants of the pre-Islamic beliefs and practices in the present religious tradition of the people of Shugnan. The author notes that

Ismailism undoubtedly had significant impact on the whole way of life of the people in the Western Pamir. However, many pre-Islamic beliefs and customs have been preserved in this region as vestiges, which indicate their ancient origin and constitute a kind of mixture with a current religion (2004: 300).

Qalandarov attributes the reasons for the existence of pre-Islamic beliefs in the region to the poverty and helplessness of the region's people in the face of the natural cataclysms that produced the sense of fear and powerlessness in the past, illiteracy of the people who understood the natural phenomena through their superstitions in the past, patriarchal and traditional attitudes, and so forth (2004: 315). The author notes that Snesarev is right when he attributes the belief in sacred sites in Central Asia to the ancestors' worship and to the pantheon of Zoroastrian gods that was formed during the context of ancient civilisation of Central Asia (2004: 378). However, Qalandarov notes that most of the pre-Islamic practices lost their organic meaning and now have only fragmented and symbolic meaning (2004: 321, 342). The major focus in Qalandarov's study is placed on the adaptation of ancient beliefs to the present Muslim belief of the local people.

In the last few years, a number of new Western studies emerged that specifically examine the sacred sites of Badakhshan of Tajikistan and Badakhshan of Afghanistan (Gross 2011, 2013, Schadl 2009, Mock 2011, Iloliev 2008). Jo-Ann Gross (2013, 2011) examines the stories associated with some of the shrines in Shughanan, Rosht-qala and

Wakhan, and shows how the stories link these shrines together, which are otherwise located in different districts (2013, 2011: 111).

Gross analyzes oral stories, genealogies and historical sources associated with a number of shrines in Badakhshan, and argues that they "map a sacred Islamic history that links local and distant cultural geographies and regional and universal traditions" (2013: 165). Furthermore, Gross points out that shrines and the oral traditions associated with them serve as a medium that legitimises Ismaili communal identity, establishing links to the family of the Prophet Muhammad (*ahl al-bayt*) (2013: 165).

Abdulmamad Illoliev (2008), in his study of the shrines in the Vakhan region, examines what he calls "the process of museumesation" of the shrines that this region experienced in the early 1990s (Illoliev 2008). Illoliev argues that museumesation of the shrines in Vakhan is a positive process that helps the "preservation and enhancement of religio-cultural values" of these places in modern times (2008: 68). According to Illoliev, during this process the buildings of the shrines were modernized and "their socio-religious functions and cultural significance" were modified "in accordance with demands of modern society" (2008: 68).

Schadl Marcus (2009) and John Mock (2011) focus on the shrines that are located in the Badakhshan of Afghanistan. Marcus Schadl's article investigates the Nasir-i Khusraw's tomb-shrine located in Yumgan valley of Badakhshan of Afghanistan. Schadl's main focus is on the historical and architectural aspect of this particular shrine. He examines the inscriptions on the beams and walls of Nasir-i Khusraw's tomb-shrine with the goal of reconstructing a historical picture of this place. Schadl observes that Nasir-i Khusraw is regarded as a saint both by Ismailis and Sunnis living in this region. The Sunnis of Yumgan, according to Schadl, "consider themselves descendants of Nasir Khusraw and believe their ancestor was a Sufi pir, and a Sunni like themselves" (2009: 74). Schadl suggests that in the past a Sufi brotherhood maintained Nasir Khusraw's shrine, and compares it to *tariqat mausoleum* of the Sufi orders, which are established in memory of their deceased masters. These mausoleums are usually "structurally exceedingly plain and have structure of vernacular buildings" (2009: 78).

John Mock examines the sacred sites of the Vakhan region of Afghan Badakhshan. He argues that the stories associated with the shrines in Vakhan "draw upon a commonly understood set of signifiers and follow a familiar discursive pattern: a set of topoi that recur throughout the region" (2009: 143). Mock writes, "In retelling these stories and retelling these legends, community members recreate the landscape within which they live and revitalize the deeds of their saints and their ancestors in the landscape" (2009: 143). These scholars' studies of the shrines in Badakhshan examine these sites within the context of the Islamic religion and balance the studies that have largely focused on pre-Islamic characteristics of these places. However, some of these studies are primarily concerned with the historical aspect of the shrines in the Badakhshan region, which pays little attention to the ethnographic aspect of the visitation of sacred sites.

Conclusion

I analyze the accounts of the 19th and early 20th centuries in detail in this chapter because they continue to influence the scholarly studies about this region, as well as people's ideas and categories about the sacred sites and historical origin of their community. The idea of the Aryan origin of the community is common among the people of this region, which a number of informants also elaborated on during the fieldwork. A number of my informants interpreted the traditional Pamiri house *cheed* (in Shugni language) as having ancient roots going back to Aryan beliefs. Some Pamiri Ismailis refer to the ornaments resembling swastika, which are found in the Pamiri traditional woollen socks that local people knit, as evidence of Aryan origin of the local people. Growing up in the region, I have also heard this even before my academic studies. The generations of scholars from the region who were trained in Russian academia were under the influence of these ideas and engaged and elaborated upon them in their studies. The British and Russian accounts' focus on geography, cartography and topography of the region is not dominant in the present day. Yet the idea of the bounded, ancient culture preserved in the mountains for centuries continues to stimulate academic and public imagination.

Ironically, for the Ismailis of Badakhshan region of Tajikistan, the neighbouring Afghanistan has become the space that is in another time. Just as 19th-century Western and Russian scholars saw the Ismailis of Badakhshan as the ancient version of themselves, the Ismailis of Badakhshan imagine their Afghan neighbours as their earlier version (see Manetta 2011). The Ismailis of Badakhshan of Tajikistan echo the orientalist discourses when they talk about the backwardness of their neighbouring Badakhshan of Afghanistan, as well as the purity and authenticity of the ethnic and religious identity allegedly preserved in this region.

I am not suggesting that the academic discourse about the Badakhshan region produced since the late 19th century completely shapes the views of the Pamiri Ismailis regarding their religious and cultural traditions. However, they do inform certain aspects of the local worldview. Pamiri Ismailis use these ideas in the discourse of their communal identity along with other concepts related to Ismailism or Soviet-Marxist concepts of progress, revolution and evolution. For example, some of my informants saw the sacred sites as pre-dating Islam and as an essential part of their Ismaili religious tradition. Similarly, some Pamiri Ismailis talk about the symbolism of the traditional Pamiri house both as part of ancient Aryan heritage and their present Ismaili religion.

Soviet scholarship adopted the previous studies' focus on the ancient "pre-Islamic" character of the sacred places. In addition, it examined the beliefs associated with the sacred places from the perspective of Marxist historical materialism. The post-Soviet scholarship on sacred sites, that uses Russian ethnographic literature as its reference point, engages these ideas and elaborates them further in their studies. In addition, a number of Western studies produced in recent years examine the sacred sites of Badakhshan region. Some of them focus on the historical aspect of the sacred sites and do not fully elaborate on the ethnographic present of the subject. My approach to the sacred sites in this study is ethnographic, which means my concern has been to observe and document the ways in which the Ismailis of Badakhshan understand and attend to their sacred sites in the present time.

The accounts of the Badakhshan region and its sacred sites, produced since the late 19th century, construct "chronotopes" (time-space) of their own. In their chronotopes, time and space are "scientifically" produced through sciences of geography, topography, history and anthropology. In the next chapter, I examine the stories associated with the sacred sites that produce a different kind of chronotope that challenges the "scientific" view of space and time.

Chapter III: Places Beyond the Real – Chronotope of the sacred sites in Badakhshan

In the hot afternoon of August 28, 2011, I was in the company of three men standing near the motor road in the village of Tughos in Vakhan region talking about the local shrines and whether or not some of the historical personalities they are associated with did actually visit Vakhan. "These are all myths and do not correspond to historical truth," said Davlatqadam.²⁸

Historically, 'Alī or any other Imāms had never visited this area. These stories are like the myth of "Lenin in the Pamir" (*Lenin dar Pomir*) that we were taught during the Soviet time. Clearly, Lenin had never visited Pamir but people held this myth as if he did. Many buildings, streets, town squares, even mountains were named after Lenin and Stalin but this doesn't mean they visited these places. It has an ideological function.

Amirsho, a man in his late seventies, disagreed noting that the Imāms can be present in spirit (*ruhan*) anywhere and that 'Alī had also physically (*ba zahir*) visited this place. Ahmad, a young unemployed man in his twenties, agreed with Amirsho.

These types of contestations are common features of the discourse of sacred space in the Badakhshan region of Central Asia. Davlatqadam linked place naming to its ideological function — a point that has been analyzed in some of the anthropological literature related to the issues of space and place in recent years (cf. Demetriou 2006, Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 2003.). On the other hand, Amirsho's views and understanding of space and place received less attention. In this chapter, I examine a range of stories I collected in the field associated with the Ismaili sacred sites of Badakhshan to demonstrate the ways in which contemporary Pamiri Ismailis in some parts of Badakhshan region understand and relate to these sites. I argue that the stories

²⁸ I have used pseudonyms instead of the actual names of all individuals whose names are mentioned in this study.

associated with the sacred sites represent a particular view of and attitudes toward the lived environment that I call an "enchanted" view of space and place. In this view, some places in the inhabited surroundings acquire significant meanings through supernatural intervention. They also create a rupture in the standard narratives about the history of Islam in this region and the perception of inhabited space as devoid of supernatural forces. In that sense, the sacred sites stand at a borderline between the real and the incredible. They are real in a sense of being material things — a building, a tree, a stone, a spring-water or even a mountain — and they are incredible through the contents of the legends and stories associated with these places and things.

These stories are often about the miracle works of the Imāms and other saints (*buzurgan*, the great-ones) who often help people resolve situations that human beings are powerless to fix. Through these stories the natural surrounding becomes animated and appropriated as part of the social and cultural world. In this view, sacred sites are chronotopes that represent places with unidentifiable sacred time in which the divine power intervened in particular places where its presence is still accessible to the present time.

I analyse these stories in dialogue with the works of Basso (1996), Ingold (1993), Stewart (1996), Ingemark (2006), Mueggler (2001) and other studies on space and place, particularly, Basso's (1996) analysis of the Western Apache narratives that are attached to particular sites is relevant to this chapter. Basso uses the concept of chronotope to show how particular sites in the Apache landscape are consulted as moral guides. That is, these sites preserve and evoke certain moral stories that represent the moral values and worldview of the Apache community (Basso 1996). Similarly, Stewart (1996) and Ingold (1993) also use the concept of chronotope to show how people in their everyday activities give meaning to their inhabited spaces and places. My application of the chronotope is slightly different from these studies as I use it to explore the space and place in relation to the sacred. In that sense, sacred sites are chronotopes that validate the presence of the transcendent in the inhabited spaces and places of the community. Sacred sites as particular places in the lived environment serve as "evidence" of this presence. Moreover, the chronotopes of the sacred sites transform the material places, giving them meaning beyond their material qualities. The chronotopic narratives affect and shape people's perceptions of and relation to the particular spaces and places in their inhabited landscape.

The stories associated with sacred sites in Shugnan, Rushan and (Ishkashim) Vakhan

As I analyzed the stories associated with the sacred sites in Shugnan, Rushan and Vakhan valleys, a number of themes emerged. I organized the stories according to the following themes: First, I will start with a description of the sacred places associated with 'Alī and his wife Fātima. This will follow with a description of the stories associated with sacred sites attributed to Imām Zayn al-Ābidīn, Imām Muhammad al-Baqir and Imām al-Mustansir bi'llāh. I will then provide some stories associated with the sacred sites related to the Persian poet, philosopher and theologian Nasir-i Khusraw, whom the local religious tradition greatly venerates and views as a founder of Ismaili beliefs in Badakhshan. Finally, I will analyze some of the stories associated with sacred places dedicated to other saints whom local people believe visited this region from outside, and the local saints *awliyā* who were born and lived in the region.

'Alī the king of men (*shāh-i mardan*) and the king of saints (*shāh-i awliyā*)

After spending around two months in Khorog, I travelled to Vakhan at the end of July. I aimed to get some comparative perspective by examining the sacred sites of the Vakhan region. Vakhan is quite far from Khorog and there is no regular transportation between them. In the small station in Khorog, from where people travel to Ishkashim district, there were very few cars travelling to Vakhan the day I planned my trip. One of the drivers offered to find five other passengers so that we could leave for Vakhan that day, but if there were not enough passengers he would postpone his travel to the next day. Luckily, after about two hours of waiting a *Tangen* pulled over and its driver shouted to see if anyone was travelling to Yamchun.²⁹ These were residents of Khorog travelling to the hot spring Fātima al-Zahrā' and needed one more passenger to contribute to the cost of the trip. Although I initially planned to visit another village in Vakhan where I had some contacts, I decided to join them and go to Yamchun instead.

After we arrived at Yamchun, I stayed in the guesthouse of the sanatorium. In the sanatorium, I stayed in one room with Davlatqadam, a man in his 60s from Shugnan who arrived one day before us. Davlatqadam was head of a Sovkhoz (state farm) in Shugnan during the Soviet time and now works in the district's government office. He noted that as an honoured worker, he got *putyovka* one-month free stay in the sanatorium from the state ministry of social welfare. As there were not many activities in the sanatorium, Davlatqadam accompanied me on some of my trips to explore the local sacred sites in Yamchun and nearby villages of Tughos, Ptup, Shirgin and others.

²⁹ Yamchun is the village in Vakhan where a health sanatorium built around a hot spring Fātima al-Zahrā is located. The hot spring contains many minerals and is believed to cure infertility problems and many other diseases.

Some of the employees of the sanatorium, who come from the nearby villages and with whom I talked about the local sacred sites, recommended that I talk to a local man called Amirsho. I met Amirsho three days after my arrival in Yamchun. Amirsho is a teacher who is now retired as he is in his late 70s. He is a widower and has three sons and two daughters. Two of his sons are in Moscow as labour migrants. Both of his daughters are married and live with their husbands' families and only occasionally visit their parents' home. Amirsho's youngest son Alifbek, along with his wife and two small children, live with Amirsho.

One of the most important sacred sites in Vakhan, according to Amirsho, is Shāhi Mardan in Namadgut village associated with 'Alī. Namadgut is quite far from Ptup and in order to visit the sacred site Shāhi Mardan I hired Amirsho's neighbour Shamir to drive us there. We drove to Namatgut in the afternoon and stopped next to the sacred site, which is located right by the motor road. When we got out of the car, Amirsho explained that the ruins of an ancient fort that belong to *kafir* king Qakhqah is on the mountain hill opposite the sacred site Shāhi Mardan and we can climb up after we visit the place. Shāhi Mardan (lit. king of men) is one of the epithets that local people use in reference to 'Alī Ibn Abi-Talib; other such labels are Shāhi Wilāyat (king of sainthood), Shāhi Awliyā (king of saints), etc. 'Alī is the cousin and son-in-law of the prophet Muhammad, and is considered the central figure in the Shi'a Islam as well as in most Sufi traditions. He is one of the four caliphs that succeeded the prophet following his death, who are called "rightly guided caliphs". Alī became caliph in 656 CE and was assassinated in 661 CE. In the Shi'a Imāmi Ismaili tradition, 'Alī occupies the central place spiritually and theologically. In the Ismaili theology, 'Ali's position is the Legate ($was\bar{i}$) of the Prophet Muhammad.³⁰ According to this tradition, 'Alī is the inheritor of the spiritual authority of the prophet and possesses the divine knowledge of the inner (*batini*) meanings of the Qur'an. This spiritual authority is passed down within his family from one Ismaili Imām to the next, who in their turn guide their followers.

As we entered the courtyard of the sacred site Shāhi Mardan, Amirsho noted that the fallen branches from the trees in front of this place are used only for cooking ritual foods (*khudai*) and not for other purposes³¹. The grass that grows in the large backyard of this sacred site, according to Amirsho, is not normally used as fodder for the domestic animal and instead is cut and thrown into the river. The keeper of the sacred sites, an elderly man named Alimardan, emerged from the backyard when he heard our voices. Amirsho informed him about the purpose of our visit and he readily agreed to talk to us about this site. The sacred site itself is a small square building with a small entry area. On top of its door is a painted picture of a man believed to be 'Ali, which is probably cut from calendar posters that were sold in the kiosks in Khorog in the late 1980s and early

³⁰ The Ismaili cosmology and theology evolved over more than a thousand years and was modified in different periods of the history of the Ismaili community. According to the doctrine of Ismailism, each prophet during his time also had a Legatee (*wasī*). The legatees existed from the beginning of human history. Their function was to uphold the law laid down by Adam and five legislator prophets: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. Each of these speaking prophets (*nātiq*) was a founder of a historical era, and each of them was succeeded by a legatee. The legatee of Noah was Shem, the legatee of Abraham was Ishmael, the legatee of Moses was Aaron or Joshua, the legatee of Jesus was Simon Peter and the legatee of Muhammad was 'Ali. The *nātiq* brought the scripture in its generally accepted meaning (*tanzīl*), while the (*wasī*) introduced systematic interpretation of its inner esoteric aspects (*ta'wīl*) and initiated a series of *imāms*, of whom the last became the *nātiq* of the following era. The (*wasī*) is therefore called a founder (*asās*). The *imāms* are known as *atimmā'* (sing, *mutimm* "completer"), since they complete the mission of the founder (see, Kohlberg "Wasī" in *EI*). Popular tradition holds that the Prophet during his spiritual night journey (*mi 'rāj*) to the heavens was informed that 'Alī was his (*wasī*) (Kohlberg "Wasī" in *EI*). It is also believed that the Prophet proclaimed 'Alī as his legatee on various other occasions (Daftary 1990).

³¹ *Khudayi* is a religious ceremony where one family, or the whole community, slaughter sheep, cows or oxen, prepare the ritual food called *baj* and invite the entire village to share the food. After having food *khalifa* reads passages from the Qur'an and says a *dua* (prayer) in Tajik language. In some villages people sacrifice sheep, sometimes cows or oxen, in the courtyard of "astans" and organize *khudai* there. All the people of the village gather inside the courtyard of "astans," have food and then the *shaikh* or *khalifa* reads some passages from the Qur'an, mainly sura al-Nur or sura al-Yasin, then some people sing the spiritual poems called *maddah* and then disperse to their houses.

1990s. I had a similar poster at home at that time with some aphorisms attributed to 'Alī written on it. Inside this sacred site there is a square podium on top of which are five round stones and some ibex' horns. According to the story I heard from Amirsho and Alimardan, these are some of the stones 'Alī used to destroy the *kafir* king Qakhqah's army.

While we were in the sacred site, three women, two boys and a man came in.³² They kissed the tips of their fingers and touched the podium. Then Alimardan recited a prayer for us all and everyone apart from the children gave him a small amount of money as a sign of gratitude.

I heard the story of 'Ali's battle with Qakhqah from some people during my fieldwork in the village of Tughos and Ptup in the Vakhan region. The embellishment of the story greatly varied from one person who told this story to another. Some people provided only a general outline of the story, while others provided greater details. A version of this story was offered in written form at some point. A number of people who told this story noted that it is written in a book called *Jangnama* (Legend about Battle).³³ This legend generated numerous variants and is famous in other localities as well. For me, this suggests the ways in which the written and thr oral interface each other. One can

³² They were coming from the Yamchun sanatorium going back to Khorog and stopped to visit the sacred site to get divine blessing for their future journey as one of the women and her two sons are leaving in a few days to Moscow where they live.

³³ In his recent study, Abdulmamad Iloliev examines the shrines of Wakhan region and points out that the written version of the story of 'Ali's battle with local pre-Islamic king Qakhqah is available in three manuscripts called *Kitabcha-yi Avval, Kiabchai-yi Duvvum* (i.e., the first and second notebook) and *Qissa-yi Kahkh-Khah* (the story of Kakh-Kah), by unknown authors found in Wakhan and given in 1909 to the St Petersburg Institute of Oriental Studies by a Russian captain of the Pamir Post (Illoliev 2008:60). Also, Nisormamad Shakarmamadov provides a version of this story in his second volume of the book "Folklori Pomir" (Shakarmamadov, 2005a: 76–79). There is another intresting unpublished manuscript about the sacred sites of Shugnan and Rushan titled *Hikayat-i Mazarha-i Kuhistan* that a collegue of mine shared with me. This manuscript is written by an unknown author from this region, probably at the end of the 19th and early 20th century, as it mentions the names of the *pirs* of this region who lived at that time. It provides the stories associatated with some of the shrines in Shughnan and Rushan. It also mentions a number of shrines, which do not exist at the present time.

find the written version of some other stories associated with sacred sites in the manuscripts preserved in the region. Below, I provide a version of the story I heard from Amirsho.³⁴ It is an example of the ways in which the sacred site and the ruins of the fortress across the road on the mountain hill are connected with 'Alī and other historical characters, whose imagined presence in the various places in the region the stories preserve to the present time. The local places, far from being seen as marginal to the emergence and development of Islam in Central Asia, are placed at the very centre of the events.

...Shāhi Mardon is one of the most important *qadamqohs* in our region. I heard that in the time of the Prophet Muhammad a person named Mubashir travelled from Mecca to Pamir. A kafir king named Qakhqah ruled Vakahan at that time from his fort. The ruins of his forts survived to the present time. I heard that Qakhqah had one hundred and ten thousand people in his army. They were idol worshipers (butparaston) as were the local people. Mubashir came and saw that Qakhqah claimed that he was God and forced people to worship him. Then Mubashir, after some time returned to Mecca and informed the prophet Muhammad that in a certain place a king, who is a giant of a man, oppresses people severely. Some generals and companions of the prophet asked the permission of the messenger of God to let them go and destroy this king and establish Islam in this country. They got the permission and came to Ishkashim. They arrived during the spring-time. At that time, on the top of this mountain there was a huge stone on which there was written that "anyone who can lift this stone is powerful enough to fight with Qakhqah. Those who try and fail to lift it will be destroyed". All the generals and companions of the prophet tried to lift that stone but failed. Then Qakhqah's guards informed him that several people tried to lift the stone but failed. Qakhqah arrived and defeated them. Then he cut off the tongue of one person among them and told him; "now go to your God who sent you here and inform him about my power". This person with great difficulties came back to Mecca. The prophet Muhammad saw that his tongue is cut off and with the blessing of God cured him. That person said that Qakhqah defeated the twelve thousand army you sent and imprisoned them. He cut off my tongue and sent me to you. Imām Alī and others were there. Alī said; "the messenger of God if you allow me I will go and destroy Qakhqah". The prophet agreed and 'Alī with a few people came to Vakhan. 'Alī threw Qakhqah's stone with such a force that it flew and rested in the city of Balkh in Afghanistan, where now is the mazar of 'Ali. 'Alī fought with Qakhqah and killed him and from then on the people of Vakhan were following the religion of the prophet Muhammad³⁵.

³⁴ The original was narrated to me in Tajik language and this is my own translation of Amirsho's narrative. ³⁵ Another related story about 'Alī and Qakhqah is associated with *mazar* Shāhi Awliya in Darwaz district. Qakhqah's brother named Sha'sha ruled in Qal'ayi Khum. The story holds that Ali, after defeating Qakhqah in Ishkashim, ordered the Muslim army consisting of twelve thousand men to go and fight with Sha'sha. 'Alī himself followed them later. Then this army of 12,000 people came to fight against Sha'sha. Sha'sha's army was 110,000 strong. The twelve thousand Muslim army was surrounded by Sha'sha's huge army, and at the subsequent battle all these twelve thousand men were killed. When 'Alī arrived it was already late. He buried the bodies of the soldiers and followed that kafir (Sha'asha). 'Alī caught up with him (Sha'sha) shortly, defeated his army and killed Sha'asha as well. The sacred site Shāhi Awliya was established at that time. When 'Alī came to Qal'ayi Khum people asked him to perform a miracle. 'Alī

In other versions of this story that were narrated to me, 'Alī disguises himself as a magician and asks Qakhqah to compete with him in sport. They compete in four sportlike competitions and in all four 'Alī gets upper handed and through these competitions 'Alī weakens and destroys Qakhqah. The story of 'Alī and Kahkakh seems to provide an explanation of the origins of the ancient ruins and of Islam in this region. Neither Amirsho nor Alimardon are much concerned about the exact time of the events or the historical validity of the story. For them the presence of the ancient ruins and the sacred sites represent the evidence that confirms the story. This, according to them, is what their grandparents told them about these sites, and for them this is how these places came into being.

The theme of enchantment runs through these kinds of stories. In this case, "enchantment may be said to introduce changes into man's relation to his own human world, as well as to the other, supranormal sphere" (Ingemark 2006: 8). Through these stories, the particular places in the landscape are transformed from being human to supernatural spaces. The sacred sites in the local landscape, thus, constitute sites, which are accepted as helpful for the encounter with the transcendent. Moreover, in the narratives associated with the sacred sites, the chronotope of the enchantment provides unlimited possibilities; for instance, great distances can be travelled in a instant; mountains are cut into pieces; water springs and lakes are created; or large armies are defeated by a single person.

struck with the edge of his sword *Zulfiqar* on the mountain and the mountain became ruby. The ruby of Badakhshan, according to this story, appeared at that time. When the people saw this miracle they became Muslims.

Both Amirsho and Alimardon are aware of the challenge of historicity to the stories associated with the sacred sites. For example, in the discussion I presented in the opening paragraph of this chapter, Davlatqadam challenged Amirsho on the grounds that there is no historical evidence that 'Alī actually visited Vakhan or Central Asia. Amirsho and Alimardon both allow the ahistorical view of the sacred sites. In the sacred sites, the power of the supernatural and its presence in relationship with humans makes many things possible that otherwise are viewed as incredible.

The themes of this story are extended to other sites in the Vakhan region. For example, above the village of Tughos, about one kilometre distance on foot, the ruins of another ancient fort called Zangibar are located in the locality of Yamchun. At the edge of Yamchun a little farther from the ruins of the fort, a sacred curative hot spring called Bībī Fātima al-Zahrā is situated. A health sanatorium and other small hotels have been constructed in this area for the visitors who come to this spring. Zangibar is believed to be the brother of the king Qakhqah, and similar to the ruins of Qakhqah's fort in Namadgut, the destruction of the ruler of this fort is associated with the name 'Ali, and the hot spring with the name of his wife Fātima. The story attached to the sacred hot spring Bībī Fātima al-Zahrā³⁶ links it with the ruins of the Zangibar's fort in Yamchun and Qakhqah fort in Namadgut. Below I provide a summary of one of the versions of the story about 'Ali's defeat of Zangibar and the hot spring of Fātima al-Zahrā.

³⁶ Fātima was the Prophet Muhammad's daughter and 'Ali's wife. Local people in Badakhshan pronounce the name Fātima as Fotima and al-Zahrā as Zahro.



On the left side, there is the photo of the ruins of the Zangibar's fort on distance from the direction of the Bībī Fātima al-Zahrā's hot spring-water in Yamchun, Vakhan valley. On the right side, there is a close up photo of the ruins of this fort. These pictures are taken during my fieldwork in 2011.

This story explains the destruction of the fort and the emergence of the hot spring and why it is named after Fātima al-Zahrā. According to the story that Amirsho narrated to me, Qakhqah's brother named Zangibar ruled this part of Vakhan from this fort. Zangibar had a large army stationed at this fort. His soldiers guarded the fort well. Fātima al-Zahrā approached the main gate of the fort and the guard asked her what she was doing there. Fātima responded that the country belongs to her and asked him to call his master. The guard then shot an arrow towards her. Fātima al-Zahrā' grasped the arrow and threw it back at him and wounded him. In the morning, 'Alī, mounted on his horse Duldul, entered the fort and with his sword Zulfigar defeated Zangibar's army. Zangibar jumped on his horse and fled toward Afghanistan. In a certain place, Zangibar knocked his head against a low-hanging tree branch and died. To the present day, the fruits on the trees in that place do not ripen. After that 'Alī wanted to clean his sword from the blood. Fātima al-Zahrā then pointed to the rock of the mountain and the hot water sprung out from it and 'Alī cleaned his sword there. The water in the hot water spring comes out of the rock formation that local people interpret as "sleeves" of Fātima al-Zahrā. According to Amirsho, these "sleeves" were longer in the past, but in the 1950s Soviet soldiers shot at them and broke them (see Appendix A-1 for the story as related by an informant).

People from across Tajikistan and even beyond visit Fātima al-Zahrā hot spring for its curative qualities and sacred aura. While in Yamchun I often visited Fātima al-Zahrā hot spring together with Davlatqadam. My observations of Davlatqadam's behaviour at this place show the ambiguity in some people's attitude and behaviour to these places. Davlatqadam, despite often expressing skeptical views about the divine status of sacred sites in all our visits to this spring, acted contrary to his skepticism. Inside the sacred site Fātima al-Zahrā there is a small pool, which is open to visitors from six in the morning until late at night. One side of the pool is walled with the mountain from which the water comes out. Women and men have separate hours for bathing in the pool.



On the right side, there is the picture of the front side of the Bībī Fātima al-Zahrā hot water spring in Yamchun, Vakhan valley. On the left side, there is the picture of some people inside the yard of the hot spring waiting to get into the pool. These pictures are taken during my fieldwork in 2011.

During the weeks I spent in one room with Davlatqadam in the sanatorium, he always woke me up at five in the morning so that we would get to the hot spring before others started coming. Inside the small pool of the Fātima al-Zahrā hot spring he would often recite a supplication to God, 'Ali, Fātima, and even follow the common belief of climbing into a narrow hole inside the pool and making wishes. This hole is part of the mountain wall of the pool and is a natural feature that was formed by the hot water. It is believed that if you climb inside this narrow hole of the hot spring, dive in and grab some sand from the bottom, the small stones that you pick up will bring you luck and make your wish come true. When I asked if he believed in this, Davlatqadam responded that this hot spring is God's miracle *mujizai Illohi yid*, and that he believes in God. There was a discrepancy between the words and practice; I noticed on a few occasions when some people expressed skepticism about the sacred sites, or dismissed them as superstition in one occasion and kissed the tip of their fingers, then touching their forehead when passing by a sacred site in another.

This small pit inside the hot spring is also interpreted as a "womb" and if those who suffer from childlessness get inside it and make a wish they will definitely have children. A woman from Shugnan, who is childless and came to Yamchun sanatorium with her older sister and her family, showed me a handful of stones that she picked up from this pit. She noted that she was upset with her ten years old nephew who was playing with these stones and lost one of them. In the sacred sites such as Bībī Fātima al-Zahrā, people negotiate their hopes, desires and fears in their relationship with the divine. In these sites, the materiality of the place (in the case of Bībī Fātima al-Zahrā the hot water and the setting) makes this relationship seem more immediate and efficient. These sites affect people's actions and thoughts when they visit them; this is the case with Davlatqadam who shows his pessimism about sacred sites but then it seemed to dissolve in that setting. In that sense, sacred sites are chronotopes where time and space are not fixed, and as Orsi notes they allow the "ongoing eruption of presence" (the divine) into the inhabited spaces of the people (Orsi 2008; 14).

Story of 'Alī and a king in Shugnan

After I returned to Korog from the Vakhan region, I decided to visit the village of Imām in Ghund Valley where the *qadamgah* associated with Muhammad al-Baqir is located. The village Imām is located quite far from Khorog in the upper part of the Ghund Valley. The taxi driver Mirzo and I left Khorog in the morning around eleven o'clock in the morning and reached our destination by about three o'clock in the afternoon. As we did not know where the sacred site was located, we asked a man, who was busy working in the field, about this place's whereabouts. Surprisingly, the man turned out to be the keeper of the sacred site and readily accompanied us there. We entered the small gate and the shrine keeper led us into the sacred site. The sacred site itself consists of a small building. Two pictures of His Highness the Aga Khan IV are attached above the entrance door. Some unusual-shaped stones are kept on the shelf on its front left side. Inside is a small raised area in the right corner where visitors can burn strakhm (a sacred plant that is believed to expel evil spirits) or lit tsirovak. On top of this raised area a photo of His Highness the Aga Khan IV is attached to the wall. There are also other pictures of the Imām 'Ali, Imām Sultan Muhammadshah the Aga Khan III, and His Highness the Aga Khan IV attached to the pillar and the left-side wall of the sacred site. Next to the raised area is a small safe-box where visitors can put their monetary donations. Mirzo and I burned some *strakhm* in the right corner and the shrine keeper recited a prayer for us. A water spring runs down from above the hill behind the sacred site. The shrine keeper explained that the site where the water emerges was a cave, which Imām al-Bagir entered and disappeared. In the courtyard of the sacred site is another building and on Thursday nights the villagers gather there for their communal prayer called jumanamoz.

The shrine keeper recommended that I talk to Sayidsho who, he believed, had abundant knowledge about this site and the local religious traditions in general. In the village, Mirzo and I stayed with Iqbol who is Mizo's colleague from when he was working as a long-distance lorry driver at the state transport enterprise in Khorog. Iqbol helped us meet and interview Sayidsho the following day. In our first meeting we mostly talked about the sacred site associated with Imām Muhammad al-Baqir. In the following meetings, Sayidsho recalled the stories about the other sacred sites. I shared my experience of visiting sacred sites in the Vakhan region with Sayidsho, and he noted the similarities between narratives associated with 'Alī in Vakhan and the story associated with the sacred site Shāhi Wilāyat (king of sainthood) located in the village of Boghev in Ghund Valley. The story he narrated indeed had many thematic similarities with those about 'Alī in Vakhan region. It talks about how 'Alī defeated a non-Muslim king there, and makes a reference to Qakhqah in Vakhan. Saidsho narrated:

There is an astan Shāh-i Wilāyat located in Boghev. It is also called *qadamgahi* Shāhi Wilāyat. There is no historical information about this site, however, there are many legends associated with this place. It is believed that the *kafirs* (infidels) were living in this fort (*qal'a*) on top of this rock and to the present day it is still called kafar-qal'a (lit. fort of the infidels). I heard from the old men (*murden muysafeden nagl chud*) that Imām 'Alī physically (*zahiran*) visited this place. A people who came from China or Mongolia built this fort and stayed there. They were oppressing local people forcibly confiscating their possessions and taking them to their fort. They occupied all of the Ghund and Shahdara valleys enslaving people who lived there. They could not go further towards Ishkashim and Vakhan as another powerful kafir king named Qakhqah ruled there. Then one day Imām 'Alī passed through this area. He was riding his horse. The guards from the fort saw him and wanted to capture him. They came down to the road, stopped him and brought him to the fort. On their way towards the fort Imām 'Alī stuck a wooden staff into the ground, which immediately turned into a huge tree. The guards were astonished and told their king that we captured a man who stuck a wooden staff into the ground and it turned into the tree. Their king said that this man is a demon (jodu) and ordered them to throw him into the prison. They surrounded Imām and tried to dismount him but failed. Then the Imām with zulfiqar (a name of 'Ali's sword) destroyed all these people in this plain. The sand in this plain to the present day has a red colour. Imām 'Alī then rested on that stone and prayed. When he finished his prayer and stood up the imprint of his blessed palms and his horse's hoof prints remained on that stone. Our ancestors since then fenced this stone with stonewall and during religious festivals organize *khudai* there, sing *maddah* and read and interpret religious books in this place.

These stories have the common theme of non-Muslim kings who were oppressing the local people and the situation was resolved by the intervention of 'Alī who awes and defeats the evil kings with his supernatural power. In Sayidsho's story the mountain hill with remains of an ancient fort, the plain with red sand, a stone with a human palm imprint and horse hoof imprint on it all serve as the material bases of this story. These things in the landscape validate the presence of the supernatural in relationship with humans. The sacred sites, in this sense, not only become the basis for narratives about a remote past, but also constitute places that inform aspects of local people's present experience of the world.

These kinds of stories are not only associated with sacred sites but with many other features of the landscape including mountains, lakes and other spaces that according to these stories were formed in the aftermath of the supernatural intervention in the landscape. For example, the story associated with Lake Sumanqul or a story about a locality 'Alichul and other stories that were narrated to me have this type of content.

The narrative associated with Suman-qul is about a *kafir* (infidel) king who causes one of his servants to run into debts. The king looked for a pretext to take his servant's two daughters, who were extremely beautiful, as slave girls. As the servant could not repay his debt on time his daughters were taken away. The man in despair visited 'Alī and asked him for help. 'Alī disguised as a common man and arrived at the king's court. 'Alī fulfilled three conditions that the king applied for the freedom of the servant's daughters, but the king put forward a fourth condition, which was to bring the head of 'Alī. Then 'Alī revealed his identity and destroyed the king and his kingdom, and in its place Lake Sumanqul was formed (see Appendix A-2 for the story as related by an informant). A story about a locality, 'Alichul has similar theme. According to some of my informants, 'Alī destroyed a city in that locality because of the disbelief and moral laxity of its citizens, hence the name 'Alichul, which according to them means a place that 'Alī destroyed.

Another story associated with 'Alī is recorded in Khuf Valley by the staff of the Khorog Research Unit in 2001 and is linked with a sacred site called Teghi Barahnagon. The main theme of the story is about how people faced insurmountable trouble and how 'Alī with his supernatural power resolved their problems. Here, Teghi Barahnagon refers to 'Ali's sword *zulfiqar* (here *tegh* means blade and *barahna* means unsheathed). The story holds that a devil called Khager was troubling people of Khuf and 'Alī passed through Khuf and cut him into three pieces with his sword. The pieces of the devil's body turned into mounds that stand to the present day. This place is now called Khager (see Appendix A-3 for the story as related by an informant).

In these stories, the material features in the landscape, such as the lake, the mountain and the mounds, acquire meanings beyond their material quality. They become the visible examples of the presence of the power of the divine in the immediate landscape. Some of these sites have a certain level of enchantment to them; that is, they are often places and things that seem unusual for the landscape. Their unusualness also helps people to recall the meanings attached to them. The uniqueness of some of the sacred sites contributes to the sense of enchantment that the stories associated with them express in narrative form.

During our conversations about the sacred sites, Saidsho repeatedly drew my attention to the lack of "scientific" and historical sources that could confirm these stories.

Unlike Amirsho from Vakhan, Saidsho had some concerns about the scientific and historical legitimacy of the narratives that claim the actual presence of the Imām 'Alī or Imām Muhammad al-Baqir in Ghund Valley. At the same time, he did not exclude the possibility of the Imām 'Alī or Muhammad al-Baqir's visits of this region in the past. Similar to Amirsho, he emphasized the supernatural spiritual power of the Imāms who are able to accomplish things that seem impossible for the common people. In that sense, sacred sites are chronotopes, the points in the landscape of the community that "can offer an insight into modes of being in the world not easily intelligible from within rationalist, secular vocabularies" but are of ethical and religious relevance to people (Mittermaier 2011: 3).

The story associated with the sacred site Imām Muhammad al-Baqir³⁷ (locally *qadamgahi Imām Muhammad al-Baqir*) in Ghund Valley that Sayidsho and a number of other people narrated to me is another example of how the natural features of the landscape, characters from Islamic history and local folktale blended in one narrative. The historical characters such as Imām Muhammad al-Baqir, the famous leader of the Abbasid revolution Abu-Muslim, Umayyad caliph Marwan, the local mythic person Bobo Ghundi, the mountain called Lamlon, a spring water and the village Imām in Ghund Valley are woven into the narrative of the story to convey the presence of the divine in the material features of the environment.

³⁷ Muhammad al-Baqir is the fourth Imām according to the Ismailis.



The picture on the left is the front side of the *qadamqah-i* Imām Muhammad al-Baqir in the village of Imām in Shugnan, Ghund valley. On the left side picture is the spring water that runs next to the shrine that comes out of the 'cave', which the Muhammad al-Baqir allegedly entered and disappeared. These pictures are taken in 2011 during my research fieldwork.

According to this story, the sacred site of Muhammad al-Bagir in Ghund Valley is his *qadamgah*; that is, the place, which he visited or rested in. Imām Muhammad al-Bagir's actual residence, according to the story, was on the mountain called Lamlon (kuhi *Lamlon*), which is located above the village of the Imām. According to Savidsho, this mountain becomes colourful during the springtime and has red, yellow, green and other colours. Sayidsho noted there is a water spring with crystal clear water on the mountain nearby, on which Imām resided. The story narrates that Abu Muslim, the famous leader of the revolt against the Umayyad dynasty that brought Abbasids to power in 750 CE, visited Imām al-Bagir on the mountain of Lamlon in Ghund Valley. After overcoming great hardships that were on his way, Abu Muslim eventually earned an audience with the Imām, who blessed his leadership of the revolt. Many people joined Abu Muslim and defeated the Umayyads. Then the story changes its theme and talks about how people of the Ghund Valley did not trust the holy man who appeared from a cave that is located above the current sacred site associated with Imām Muhammad al-Bagir. The holy man told people to call upon him near the cave with *azan* (Muslim call for prayer) whenever people needed help. In a few years, some people doubted if the man was telling them the truth and tried to test him. They gathered near the cave and called *azan*. The holy man on horseback appeared and saw there was no trouble. He cursed Ghund Valley and its people and disappeared in the cave. The holy man, according to my informants, was the Imām (see Appendix A-4 for the story as related by an informant).³⁸

A story associated with the sacred site Imām Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn³⁹ (locally *Imām Zayn al-Ābidīn astan*) in the locality Tem near Khorog is in some ways connected to the sacred site Imām Muhammad al-Baqir in Ghund Valley. Except for the sacred sites associated with 'Ali, those such as Imām Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn and Imām Muhammad al-Baqir are the only sites that are associated with the names of the Imāms in Shugnan and Vakhan valleys. Two other sacred sites are associated with Imām al-Mustanşir-i bi'llāh⁴⁰; one is in Khuf Valley and another in Darwaz region. The sacred site Imām Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn is located by the right side of the motor road. It consists of a modern building that was renovated in the 1990s that has doors from both north and south sides and large windows.

³⁸ The second part of this story about people doubting the Imām's words and Imām coming out of the cave is also associated with the sacred site Pīri Nutmand in the village Buni. According to this story, Pīri Nutmand passed through this area and people gathered around him. He told these people that whenever you have any trouble come to this mountain, burn the *strakhm* (incense) and call the azan, and I will come out of the mountain and help you. They waited three days, got inpatient and decided to test if the man was actually divine or was just a devil (*thevo jin vud*). They burned incense (*strakhm*) and called the azan. He appeared and asked what is the matter but they were all perplexed and could not say anything. Then he cursed them that "sometimes gathered sometimes scattered" and disappeared. Then a mudflow destroyed the village Buni...

³⁹ Zayn al- Ābidīn ("Ornament of the Worshippers") (b. 658–9) is the third Imām of the Ismailis (fourth Imām according to the Twelver Shia). He is grandson of 'Ali ibn Abu Talib and great grandson of the Prophet Muhammad (cf. Kohlberg "Zayn al- 'Ābidīn" in *EI*).

⁴⁰ According to some historical accounts, there were three Imāms in the line of the Ismaili Imāms that had the name al-Mustanşir-i bi'llāh. These sacred sites, according to some of my informants, refer to al-Mustanşir-i bi'llāh the eighth Fātimid caliph (reign 1036 to 1094), during whose reign Nasir-i Khusraw was appointed as *hujjat* of Khurasan and went there to lead the Fātimid (*dawa*) religious mission (cf. Gibb and Kraus "al-Mustansir" in *E1*).



Qadamgah-i Imām Zayn al-Ābidīn near Khorog. I took the picture on the left when I visited this place during my fieldwork in 2011. The black and white picture on the right is allegedly the view of this site that was taken at the end of 19th century by a Russian photographer.

I visited this place during my fieldwork on Sunday afternoon June 18, 2011, together with Boymamad. When we entered this site, Boymamad touched its threshold with his fingertips, kissed them and touched his forehead. He then recited verse 24:35 from the Qur'an and a prayer in Tajik language. Boymamad used to work as a construction worker during the Soviet time and when the Soviet Union collapsed the state construction industry ceased to exist. Since then Boymamad has been unemployed and became more closely interested in the religion. I have known Boymamad prior to my PhD studies as he lived in the street close to my neighbourhood in Khorog. Boymamad is now in his 50s and has two sons and two daughters. Boymamad's family is originally from Ghund Valley and his father moved to Khorog in the 1950s. He noted that he heard the stories about the sacred sites of Imām Muhammad al-Baqir and Imām Zayn al-'Ābidīn from his uncle who was *khalīfa* (religious leader). According to the story Boymamad narrated,

Imām Zayn al-Ābidīn [Imām Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn] is the father of the Imām Muhammad-i Boqir [Imām Muhammad al-Baqir]. They probably escaped from Arabia together with Muhallib. Muhallib gave his own son to the enemy as they were searching for Imām Boqir to execute him. When the enemy surrounded them Muhallib, in order to save the real Muhammad-i Boqir, pointed at his son and told them that he was Muhammad-i Boqir that they were looking for. Then Muhallib's son was taken to the execution site but could not killed him. They wanted to burn him alive but failed and wanted to stone him to death but the stones did not reach him. He was safe and was joyfully reading the Qur'an and a water spring was flowing near him. By the evening all the *kafirs* gave up and left the execution site and Muhallib's son returned home. He knocked on his door, his father opened and was astonished. He asked: "how did you survive?" He said: "a hand that they did not see appeared from the sky and protected me. They were trying to burn me, throwing stones and shooting arrows at me but nothing was harming me." Imām Zayn al-Ābidīn "left his robe in this place" (*xo jomai yedand lackchud*). Imām Muhammad-i Boqir left to Ghund. People from different regions came here to visit this place. I heard that in the past, a prince passed by this place and did not dismount his horse. Then his head turned backward. Nobody could cure him. Then a *khalīfa* who was looking after this astan had a dream vision that instructed him to pray over this man and he was cured...

According to Boymamad, the presence of the Imāms in these sites has to be understood in a spiritual sense and not in a sense that they actually physically visited these places. Therefore, a person with the "right state of mind", as Boymamad noted, can feel this presence in these sites even today. The stories associated with the sacred sites represent the articulation of this kind of sense or experience of the place in narrative form.

The experiences that Boymamad, Amirsho and Sayidsho articulated have been analyzed in some studies on religion, which pointing to these experiences criticized the assumption about the inevitability of disenchantment in modern times (cf. Orsi 2008). Yet these experiences also show the sense of enchantment with the particular places in the inhabited landscape. The uniqueness of some places and the status of particular places as links to the transcendent also transform people's relationships with these spaces. In other words, people's relationship with the space is filled with the experience of enchantment.

Sacred Sites and Stories associated with Nasir-i Khusraw

In addition to the sites that are associated with particular Imāms from the Shi'i Imāmi Ismaili tradition, the narratives also connect particular saints such as Nasir-i Khusraw with certain sites across the region. Nasir-i Khusraw (1004-1077) is an 11thcentury Persian poet, theologian/philosopher who occupies one of the central roles in the local religious tradition.⁴¹ His mausoleum is located in the Yumgan Valley in the Badakhshan province of Afghanistan. There are many sacred sites attributed to him across the Badakhshan region. The sacred site associated with Nasir-i Khusraw in Porshnev is one of the most popular in Shugnan region. In 2003 a statue of Nasir-i Khusraw created by an artist was unveiled there. There is also a museum of Nasir-i Khusraw that the local people established in the courtyard of this sacred site.⁴² The story associated with this sacred site that was narrated to me relates that when Nasir visited this village, he asked a woman who was carrying a jug of water from the river below to give him some water so that he could quench his thirst. She refused to give him some water. Then Nasir worked a miracle in this place, stuck his staff into the ground and created spring water there for the villagers. Pamiri Ismailis across the region regard this water as sacred.

A story tape-recorded by the staff members of the Khorog Research Unit in Derushon village is also about how in various places of the region Nasir is commemorated through various sites, where he worked miracles and called people to religion.

⁴¹ According to some authors, Nasir-i Khusraw worked as a government functionary for Ghaznavid and Seljuq dynasties, which ruled in the Central Asia region at that time (Thackston 1986: 1). In his *Safarnama* (Book of Travels) Nasir-i Khusraw reports that he had a dream vision, in which an unknown person reprimands him for improper use of his reason and drunkenness. When he wakes up he begins to search for spiritual wisdom and converts to Ismailism (Thackston 1986: 2). He travels to Cairo, the capital of the Fātimid dynasty, in 1047 and stays there for three years. In Cairo, Nasir-i Khusraw meets other Ismaili scholars, such as the chief *da 'i* and head of the Fātimid *da 'wa* al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Din al-Shirazi (d. 1078), whom Nasir-i Khusraw describes as his mentor (Hunsberger 2000: 157). According to some historians of Ismailism, Nasir-i Khusraw was appointed as *da 'i* and later as *hujjat* of Khurasan region by the Fātimid Chaliph/Imām al-Mustansir (2000: 250). After his return to Khurasan around 1056, the local authorities probably persecuted Nasir-i Khusraw for his Fatimi and Ismaili allegiance and he fled to Badakhshan, where in the locality of Yumgan he spent the rest of his life until his death around 1077. He composed a number of his theological works in Yumgan.

⁴² In the 1990s local people created museums associated with particular sacred sites. The museums of Mubaraki Vakhoni in Shirgin Vakhan or Nasir-i Khusraw in Porshnev are some of the examples of this museumisation of sacred sites. Abdul Iloliev argues that that museumisation increased the social status of the sacred sites and attracts more people to visit them (Illoliev 2008).

Nasir-i Khusrav saved people of our region from ignorance. Pīr Shāh Nasir is among the great ones (*buzurgan*) and was an outstanding scholar. When he came to Derushon people were avoiding him. People were fire-worshipers at that time. He bought sheep and organized *oshi khudai* for the people. People gathered around him everyday and he delivered sermons and more and more people joined him. Then he visited Barzud. People there were suffering from occasional droughts. He worked a miracle and created spring water for them. Then he came to Vamar and his *qadamgah* still exist there. In Vamar he met his other companions Shāh Talib and Sayidjalol, who accompanied him from Yumgan. Shāh Talib and Sayid Jalol stayed in Vamar and taught people religion and Nasir left to Sulton Ishkashim.

Nasir-i Khusraw, according to this tradition, spent some time in Derushon, and people even built a *chillakhana* (a hut where the ascetics spend forty days in spiritual meditation with little or no food) for him where he stayed for a while. This story also notes that Nasir had with him other companions who are also regarded as saints. In some stories the saints are grouped together as fellow travellers who arrived together to a particular area of Badakhshan and regarded amongst the founding ancestors of certain local groups. The particular places such as spring water, trees and buildings in the landscape allow the Pamiri Ismailis to commemorate Nasir-i Khusraw and attest his spiritual power. Nasir-i Khusraw's spiritual power can be accessed through drinking the holy water of these springs and visiting these places. For them, these places constitute the material evidence of Nasir-i Khusraw's visit of this region and evidence of his sanctity.

The fellow saints: Qalandars, Dervishes and Awliyā

The theme of fellow saints who came from outside (usually from Persia) together in one group to teach people religion is common in the stories associated with sacred sites in all three valleys of Shugnan, Rushan and Vakhan. In these stories a number of saints are grouped together and are seen as close companions or brothers, who came to call people to accept Islam. Thus, some sacred sites and stories in the Shugnan district are about the four dervishes (*char darvish*) that came to this region from Iran (from a locality of Sabzbahar in Khurasan) to teach faith to the local people. They are locally known as Shāh Malang, Shāh Khamush, Shāh Kashan and Shāh Burhan. Similar stories associated with sacred sites in the Vakhan region are about four holy persons Shāh Qambari Aftab, Shāh Isamiddin, Shāh Burhan, Shāh Mubaraki Mardi Walī who came to Vakhan from Khurasan. In Rushan, the holy persons who came in a group to this region from outside to propagate the Ismaili faith to the people are believed to be the fellow travellers of Nasir Khusraw and arrived in his company. They are Shāh Talib Sarmast, Said Jalal Bukharai, Hasani Yakdasta, and in some stories his fellow travellers also include Sayyid Suhrab-i Walī and Baba Umar-i Yumgi.⁴³ A number of families trace their lineage to these holy persons. Amongst the stories associated with the travelling dervishes, the story with four dervishes including Shāh Khamush, Shāh Malang, Shāh Kashan and Shāh Burhan who allegedly came from Khurasan of Iran to Shughnan district is given greater historical validity and significance by some scholars (see Pīrumshoev and Dani 2003: 226, Iskandarov 1983).⁴⁴

⁴³ According to the manuscript *Silk-i Gawhar-riz*, written by an author named Kuchak in 19th-century Badakhshan, Sayyid Suhrab-i Walī was allegedly one of the followers of the Nasir-i Khusraw. Kuchak claims to be a descendant of Sayyid Suhrab. He notes that Sayyid Suhrab worked a lot of miracles during his lifetime. He was mysteriously abducted the day he was born and after some time was returned to his parents. He was paralyzed in his childhood. He had a vision dream where an old man instructed him that only Nasir-i Khusraw could cure him. Then a certain man named Haydar carried him on his shoulders and brought him to Nasir-i Khisraw. When they arrived it was enough for Nasir to look at Suhrab-i Walī for the latter to get cured. He studied various sciences under Nasir-i Khusraw's guidance for about 30 years and became his closest follower. Kuchak notes that Nasir gave his book "Vajhi Din" to Sayyid Suhrab-i Walī. The author of the *Silk-i Gawhar-riz* traces his lineage to Sayyid Suhrab-i Walī (see Elchibekov 1974: 308). The historical accounts note that Sayyid Suhrab-i Walī was not contemporary of Nasir-i Khusraw and lived in the mid-15th century (see Virani 2007: 119).

⁴⁴ See also *Tarikhi Shughnan* (History of Shugnan) p. 8–10; the work is written at the request of the Russian scholar A. Semyonov by Sayyid-Haydarsho, son of Muboraksho from Porshenev in 1912. According to the author of *Tarikhi Shughnon*, Shāh Malang was from Khurasan and was sent to Shugnan by the Imām of his time to propagate Ismailism (Semyonov p.7). People of Shugnan at that time followed various religious beliefs: some were Ismailiya, some were Shi'a and half of the people were Sunnis (Semyonov p. 6). He was pious and this is why he was called king of *darwishes*. He built *khanaqa* in Shahdara. Haydarsho sees himself as a direct descendant of Shāh Malang through his mother's side (Semyonov 7). Semyonov in the introduction to this work observes that it is a pity that the author [Haydarsho] did not provide any information about the towering figure of Ismaili religion in this region — Nasir-i Khusraw (Semyonov 2). A.A. Bobrinskiy also reports that according to pir Sayyid Yusuf Ali Shāh, his ancestor Shāh Malang arrived to Shugnan together with his other three brothers, including Shāh

Amirsho and other informants from Vakhan narrated to me the story about the sacred site Shāh-i Samiddin (or Isamiddin), located in the village Ptup, that also has the similar theme of four *galandars* saints coming from the Khurasan to Vakhan region. These four holy persons include Shāh Qambari Aftab, Shāh-i Samiddin, Shāh Mubaraki Walī and Shāh Burhan. The story narrates the various miracles that these saints worked during their travel through Vakhan. For example, on one occasion a wife of the ruler disrespects them and they inflict a curse upon her, which paralyzes her neck so that she cannot move her head. Her husband finds them and apologizes for his wife's behaviour and they reverse the curse. The ruler also sends his son named Qizil to accompany them. On the snowy mountain pass Qizilrabot, Qizil feels cold and the saints turn ice into fire so that he can warm up. This mountain, according to my informants, still has the red colour as a result of this miracle. In the story, the saints perform other miracles such as curing a handicapped daughter of a ruler of a certain area whom they then marry to Qizil. The story ends with Qizil revealing the secret of Shāh Isamiddin to the people in spite of the latter warning not to do so. Isamiddin "passes away" jama ivaz mikunad (lit. changes his robe but here probably means to go into another state of being) and people fall into great despair. Qizil sees him alive in a certain area but he warns Qizil not to reveal it to the people. When Qizil sees that people are desperate, he tells people that Isamiddin is alive and that saints do not die but "change their cloak" (jama ivaz mikunand) — that is, go to another state of being. People open Isamiddin's grave and see that his body is not there. Isamiddin punishes Qizil for disobedience and curses him and all his descendants with death at a young age (see Appendix A-5 for the story as related by an informant).

Burkhan, Shāh Khamush and Shāh Kashan, from Sebzevar of Khurasan. Shāh Burkhan left no offspring. Shāh Khamush moved to Kulyab and passed away there. Shugnan's rulers trace their geneology to him. Shāh Kashan also has numerous descendants (Bobrinskiy 1902:1–5).

In the story, the places such as the mountainous pass of Qizilrabot, the shrine associated with Shāh Isamiddin and the shrines associated with the other three saints represent traces in the material domain that enable the Pamiri Ismailis to generate meanings that affect their understanding of and relationship with these spaces. These places, for them, are charged with the supernatural power or in some cases have been created as a result of the divine intervention in the material domain.

In the Rushan Valley, the fellow saints are companions of Nasir Khusraw. They stay in Vamar as Nasir Khusraw moves on and continues his travels across Badakhshan. Here is one version of the story about these fellow travellers who visit Rushan Valley that was narrated to me by a man when I visited the sacred site Shāh Talib in Vamar during my fieldwork.

I heard that more than thousand years ago pir Shāh Nosir (Nasir Khusraw), Shāh Talib, Sayyid Jalol, Hasan-i Yakdasta together with other forty *qalandars* traveled to our region. They came to call people to accept Islam. There were no roads at that time. On his way pir Shāh Nosir saw a huge snakes (*azhdaho*) that did not let him go further and he turned them into the stones and opened the road. You can still see the imprints of these snakes on the mountain above the river. Shāh Nasir and his followers arrived in Vamar and rested in this place for a while having their meal. Then Nasir moved further on towards Ishkashim. Shāh Talib, Sayid Jalol and Hasan stayed in Vamar. The big pine trees here in front of Shāh Talib's astan are their staffs, which they planted there and they grew into these trees. Shāh Talib passed away here (*jomaye yindi lachud* lit. left his robe here). His tomb is in the sacred site. Sayid Jalol married a local woman. We trace our family lineage to him. Some other people that belong to our family line live in Chitral [Northern Pakistan]. This astan used to be a place where religious dues (*mali sarkar*) was collected and sent to Imām's court (*Pīrkhana*). The shaikhs of this astan were from our family line. We have a written copy of our family genealogy (*nasabnoma mashand*).

For some of my informants who related these stories to me, the sites they mentioned are enchanted places that exist to the present day and serve to confirm the sacred events of these stories: these sites serve for them as the signposts or reminders of the power of the transcendent. For some of them the curse inflicted upon Qizil is real as they claim that individuals in the families that trace their lineage to Qizil die before the age of forty. Similarly, the red colour of Qizilrabot Pass, the clear water of the spring, the

big pine trees near the sacred sites and the imprints of the image resembling big snakes on the mountain all are signs of the saints' actual presence in these places in the past.

Sacred Sites associated with other Awliyā

The story associated with the sacred sites called *Chiltan* (or *Chiltanan* forty men) in a few villages of Rushan is thematically linked with the death of the famous Muslim mystic Mansur al-Hallāj (c. 858–922). Mansur al-Hallāj was accused of heresy and executed by the order of the Abbasid Caliph Al-Muqtadir. He was disembodied and burned, and his ashes were thrown into the Tigris. It is believed that while he was disembodied he was smiling and kept repeating, "I am the Truth" (see Massignon and Gardet, "al-Hallāj" in *El*). The staff of the Khorog Research Unit recorded the story in 2000 in the village of Barushon from a local female resident, which briefly summarise below.

According to this story, a king orders Mansur to be executed and throws his ashes into the river. His ashes turn into foam and float on the river, and with the currents they flow into a pool belonging to another king. The king's daughter comes to the pool with her 39 maids and sees the floating foam. She and her maids touch it and after some time all get pregnant. The king gets very angry with his daughter but she explains what happened and he puts her under the guard. She and her maids give birth to forty boys. All the boys have shining faces like a moon and sun. The king kisses the children. The sacred sites *chiltan* is the *qadamqah* of these forty boys (see Appendix A-6 for the full story). This story associated with a number of sacred sites in Badakhshan shows the ways in which people incorporate Islamic historical figures into their narratives about their sacred sites. It shows the ways in which the past is narrated through the medium of particular places. Yet this is not a narration of history in an academic or "scientific" sense. Rather, the story is filled with the supernatural/divine intervention.

Apart from the sacred sites associated with personalities from the history of Islam and saints who came to Badakhshan from the outside, there are also sacred sites associated with local saints. One example, and the story associated with it, is Marqadi Haji Kamol in the village of Barrushon. The story is about an early 20th-century local saint and is part of the material from Khorog Research Unit's Archive.

According to this story, few years prior to the Bolshevik revolution, a boy named Kamol, who had a strong desire to see the Im \bar{a} m, appeals to his $p\bar{r}r$ and his companions to take him along for the pilgrimage to the Imām's residence in Bombay. At that time, $p\bar{i}rs$ or their representatives visited Imām's residence to deliver the offerings to the Imām (sarkar-i or mali sarkar) and bring back the farmans of the Imām to read for the community. Kamol's *pīr* refuses his appeal and instructs him to help his mother instead with the household chores. Kamol finishes his monthly household work in few days and after getting permission from his mother sets out on the journey to Imām's residence. He miraculously arrives at Imām's *darbar* court much earlier then his *pīr*. Kamol gets rewarded with *didar* with the Imām. When his *pīr* arrives and sees him, he is astonished at how the boy travelled this great distance in such a short time. He serves in the Imām's *darbar* in Bombay and his duties include distributing a bowl of golden coins to the poor every Friday. At one point his father visits him and asks Kamol to give him some of the golden coins. Kamol hesitates but eventually gives some coins to his father but when he distributes them to the poor the coins were not enough to give to everyone. He comes back to the court and is given another bowl but it also was not enough for everyone.

Kamol realizes that he made a mistake and in becomes mentally ill. He returns home and lives in the place where the sacred site is now located (see Appendix A-7 for the full story).⁴⁵

The sacred sites, such as Haji Kamol, serve as mediums through which these stories are articulated differently as opposed to classified and "scientific" memories provided in historical accounts, museums or other heritage sites. The sacred sites provide enchanted stories remembered and narrated by various individuals. Moreover, in the sacred sites the perception of space is different from other spaces such as museums, parks and city squares. The sacred sites are places of enchantment, where space and time are not ordered or institutionalized in the same "scientific" mode as in the heritage and museum spaces. However, it is not to suggest that these are places of resistance to what is modern, rational and scientific. This will only be the case if one accepts the view that the only legitimate perception and articulation of the space and time is the scientific one based on a fixed, classified and institutionalized approach (Edensor 2005).

The above examples are not the only sacred sites and stories associated with them that exist in Vakhan, Shugnan and Rushan. There are many other sacred sites with different or no stories associated with them. Many sacred sites have the theme of a saint creating spring water for the people of the villages. The stories associated with sacred sites such as Shāh Mubaraki Walī in the village of Shetkharv in Vakhan, the *mazar* Khaja Rajab in the village of Bashor in Ishkashim, astan Shāh Burhan in the village of

⁴⁵ There are number of other stories with similar themes. For example, Maqbarai Haji GhulomShāh in Barrushan and story about Haji Mamadnazar draw on the similar themes. GhulomShāh also was keen to go on pilgrimage to Imām's court and was dissuaded. He later arrives before the pilgrims and Imām asks him to take some food for the pilgrims. In this story GhulomShāh returns home before the pilgrims as well. His tomb was turned into the sacred site. Mamadnazar was son of Salol and was sent to Imām's court as a boy. He becomes a treasurer in the Imām's court. When he gets old he begins to miss his home country. Then the Imām gives him *farman* and sends him back to his village. He was living in the sacred site *chiltan* in a hut people constructed for him.

Shambideh in Ishakshim, astan Pīri Shāh Nasir in Porshinev in Shugnan, Pīri Shāh Nasir in Barzud in Rushan have this theme. The moral behind some of these stories usually is that people are greedy and always demand more, which sometimes results in floods or destruction of the springs.

The other common theme in the stories associated with some sacred sites is that of a powerful saint who helps people get rid of a great illness or other evil forces that people felt helpless to overcome. Sacred sites such as Puri Shāh in the village of Garmchashma, or qadamgah Shekhbek (Shekhbeki balagardan) in the village Kuhi Lal of Ishkashim district, Shāh Mahdi or Tughi Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn in the village Baghush Ishkashim district have this type of theme. Another theme is apocalyptic in which a saint visits a village under the guise of a poor old man and everyone mistreats him after which some kind of disaster destroys the village. The story associated with the astan Pīri sarob in Ghudara in Bartang has this theme. There are also sacred sites that have stories about human beings turning into natural objects such as trees or stones through divine intervention. For example, the astan Bībī Nekzan in the village of Sineb in Ishkashim or qadamgah Pīri Parvazi in the mountain gorge (dara) of Abkhar near the village Yakhshwol have this type of theme. Many sacred sites do not have any stories associated with them or do not even have a name and are simply called astans. In most of these stories the natural features in the environment play a significant role and serve to bind together the past and present of the local communities.

Conclusion

In this chapter I proposed that the concept of enchantment might serve as an appropriate lens through which to analyze and understand how the Ismaili communities in Badakhshan relate to their sacred sites. Pamiri Ismailis view these sites as points where the transcendent is accessible in their inhabited space. These places trigger the imagination of the individuals visiting or remembering them and become material "evidence" of the stories associated with them. In the process of narrating the stories, the otherwise inconspicuous small square building, a tree, a stone and spring water acquire meanings beyond their material qualities. Many things, such as the miracles of the saints, which are otherwise considered incredible, are validated and accepted through the medium of the sacred sites. These sites provide "evidence" of the spiritual power of the saints who created or visited them, or who are buried there. In some cases, these sites are unique objects in the landscape and their unusualness adds a further sense of enchantment to the people's perception of these sites and to the stories they associate with them. The sacred sites validate the enchanted stories and the presence of the transcendent in the immediate landscape of the people.

These sites and their stories produce a "local epistemology" that connects the local sacred sites to the broader Islamic landscape by drawing on images, personalities and events of Islamic history. The chronotopic principle in the narratives associated with the sacred sites is molded by social values and worldviews of the local communities. In that sense, the sacred sites and the stories associated with them are not part of the officially classified and institutionalized memory that is constructed in places such as museums and heritage sites. Rather they are enchanted places and stories that disrupt the ordered forms of perception of space and remembering of the past. In the next chapter, I discuss the relationship between the sacred sites are chronotopes that not only "contain" the

legends about the saints' miracles but also evoke memories of the Soviet past and produce new discourses about the role of these sites in the present.

Chapter IV: Contested places and meanings – the past and the present of the sacred sites

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which the Ismailis of Badakhshan region remember and represent the past and produce the current discourses associated with the sacred sites. I demonstrate that sacred sites are chronotopes that not only contain the stories and legends about the saints they are associated with (that were discussed in the previous chapter), but also places through which some aspects of the recent past of the communities are remembered. I argue that in the process of remembering the past of the sacred sites people often refer to the Soviet campaign against these places and identify members of their own communities whom they hold responsible for the destruction of the these sites during this period. Similarly, people allocate responsibility to some members of their communities for what they perceive as the current decline in the status of the sacred sites. In that context, sacred sites are chronotopes that constitute the physical embodiment of personal memory that otherwise might not have been remembered. Although these recollections are about actual events, most of them differ from historical accounts in a way that they involve supernatural or divine elements or intervention in their chronotopic narratives. In these discourses, various individuals contest visitation and veneration of the sacred sites. This chapter will examine the historical roots and present role of the sacred sites as contested spaces.

Before further discussion of the sacred sites as chronotopes of remembering, I will examine the contextual background of the veneration of saints and shrines in Badakhshan and its relation to the broader Islamic context. I will then analyse the narratives that retrospectively discuss people's relation with the sacred sites during the Soviet period. In the last section I will look at the current discourses associated with the role of the sacred sites in the religious life of the Ismailis in the Badakhshan region in the present.

Although most of the Pamiri Ismailis I talked to during my research fieldwork did not dismiss the sacred sites, there were a few respondents who questioned the legitimacy of these places. For example, on one occasion an informant in Khorog noted:

I think this is one of our customs. People believe in these places but they are just stones. For example, my grandfather believed in them, my father followed him and thus this belief continues. This is not religion (*mazhab*) this is a custom (*adat*).

This viewpoint is rare but it shows the belief in the sacred sites among the Pamiri Ismailis is not homogenous. It also raises the issue of theological status of the practice of the veneration of the sacred sites in Ismailism and in Islam.

Contestations of the sacred sites in Muslim contexts in past and present

The veneration of saints and their shrines has been under contention in other parts of the Muslim world in both the present and the past. The concept of sainthood in Islam is an elaborate discussion. In this chapter, I only briefly discuss the ways in which the veneration of saints and their shrines have been contested since the early period of Islamic history.

The opponents of the veneration of saints and shrines have often pointed to the Qur'an's recurring stress on oneness of God; that is, worshipping God only, and its warnings against associating anything or anyone with Him (cf. Goldziher 1971 [1889]: 256-57, the Qur'an 10:18, 5:72, 4:48,116 13:16 etc.). They had also been concerned with a number of issues, including the relation between sainthood and prophet-hood, the

ability of the saints to work miracles, visitation of their graves and so forth (Goldziher 1971 [1889]: 260).

Sainthood in the Muslim contexts is generally defined with the Arabic word *walī* (pl. *awliyā*) meaning, "to be near," which occurs many times in the Qur'an (see. Radtke "Walī" in *EI*, Al-Geyoushi 1971: 17). Al-Geyoushi notes that the words *walī* and *wilāya* were in use before Islam and had the related meaning of "helper," 'friend," "beloved," "relative" and so on (Al-Geyoushi 1971:17). In the Qur'an the adjective *walī* is also applied to God, who is the believers' friend (see. Radtke "Walī" in *EI*).

The concept of sainthood was extensively elaborated in Islam in its early centuries. Muhammad ibn 'Isa al-Tirmidhi (d. between 907 and 912) is credited with developing the first systematic theological elaboration of sainthood in the Islamic context (see Renard 2008, Al-Geyoushi 2001). Al-Tirmidhi's famous treatise on this subject *Sirat al-Awliyā* (Life of the Friends of God), also known as *Khatm al-Awliyā or Khatm al-Wilāya* (The Seal of Sainthood), elaborates a sophisticated theory of "sainthood and saints" (see Al-Geyoushi 2001: 18). Different authors place the hierarchy of the saints in Sufism in different orders, and some see them as common men and others as hidden spirits⁴⁶ (cf. Elchibekov 1974, Renard 2008).

A 14th-century Muslim theologian and scholar, Ibn Taymiyya (d.1328), is often quoted as one of the harshest adversaries of the veneration of saints and their shrines. Ibn Taymiyyah, in his book *Haqiqat Madhhab al-Ittihadiyyin*, attacks al-Tirmidhi for his theory of "the Seal of the Saints," calling it absurd and a path to unbelief (Al-Geyoushi

⁴⁶ According to some authors, forty elected *awliya* — other names are *siddiqin, abdāl, umana*, and *nusaha* — took over the control of the world, each of them exercising it in temporal succession. The fact that they exist is a guarantee for the continuing existence of the world. Among them is a group of seven who are especially blessed. As runners-up of creation, the forty friends of God form, after the prophets, the second spiritual hierarchy of the cosmos (cf. Radtke "Walī" in *EI*).

1971: 58). Ibn Taymiyyah, however, sees no objection to the idea that there may be some among the saints who are *siddiqun* and *muhaddathun* ("in communion with God"), but there is no definite number of them, because nothing of this was ever mentioned (Al-Geyoushi 1971: 58).⁴⁷

In similar fashion, Ibn Taymiyyah, cites various opinions against the practice of shrine visitation (Renard 2008: 280). Praying at the gravesites with the belief that the prayer there will be answered more readily than elsewhere, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, is a serious sin. He believed that this practice would lead to the belief that God's power and grace are somehow more accessible in these places, which, according to him, is a mistake. He denounces the construction of commemorative structures over graves. John Renard observes that one of the ironies is that today, many people continue to visit Ibn Taymiyyah's grave in Damascus (Renard 2008: 280). Ibn Taymiyyah or his ideas are mostly not familiar to the Ismailis of Badakhshan. Even when some individuals express ideas that seem similar to Ibn Taymiyyah's thought, they are usually not elaborated with reference to Ibn Taymiyyah or other Muslim theological. Also, the veneration of saint and shrine is not denounced in Ismaili theological works. I am describing the ideas elaborated by al-Tirmidhi, Ibn Taymiyyah and other Muslim scholars simply to illustrate the broader context related to the concept of sainthood and veneration of shrines.

On the other hand, some eminent theologians of Islam, including Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d.1209) and Muhammad al-Ghazali (d. 1111), defended the practice of the

⁴⁷ According to John Renard, "Ibn Taymiyyah was not opposed in principle to the notion that God singles out certain individuals for distinctive gifts and roles in the divine dispensation, with Muhammad leading the list... They are not set apart from ordinary people by obvious differences, and aggrandizement of Friends of God beyond the status of the prophets is a grave error" (Renard 2008: 281).

visitation of graves (Renard 2008: 279, Goldziher 1971 [1889]: 338). In his book, *The Revitalization of the Religious Disciplines*, al-Ghazali argues that

The purpose of the visitation of graves is that the visitor should be admonished, and that the one visited should receive benefit form his prayers. The visitor should not neglect to pray for himself and for the one deceased, or to derive a lesson. This latter may only come about through picturing the deceased in one's heart, and the way in which the members have been scattered abroad, and how he shall be raised up from his grave and that one shall be joining him before long (see Renard 2008: 280).

Ibn Taymiyyah's ideas had a major influence on the early modern "Wahhābi" movement (Renard 2008: 281)⁴⁸. According to Bruce Privratskiy, in "Saudi Arabia the Wahhabis and their clients, the Saud family, pulled down all shrines outside Mecca and Medina" (Privratskiy 2001: 161). However, as Privratskiy notes, saint veneration "long ago won the day against the scholastic monotheism" (2001: 161). According to Privratskiy "in Central Asia even the official guardians of the 'puritan' or 'scripturalist' tradition have tended to support the veneration of saints…" (Privratskiy 2008: 161). This is the case among the Ismailis of Badakhshan as well. The Ismailis of Badakhshan support the visitation of the sacred sites, and it is rare to find among them a supporter for the ideas such as those expressed by Ibn Taymiyya.

⁴⁸ Wahhābiyya is named after Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb (1703-1792) the founder of an eighteenthcentury movement for the revival of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula. It has been noted that the term is not used as self-designation by the adherents to the doctrines of 'Abd al-Wahhāb who prefer to call themselves the "Unitarians" (*al-muwahhidun*) (Eickelman 1993: 69). 'Abd al-Wahhāb's central teaching was the concept of *tawhīd* (oneness of God) and its opposite *shirk* (polytheism). He believed that most of his contemporary Muslims were ignorant of the real meaning of *tawhīd* as prescribed by God and taught by His prophet Muhammad. Abd al-Wahhāb argued that most of his contemporary Muslims are not Muslims as they observe religious practices, which according to him were *shirk*. He considered any act of devotion, which displayed religious affection expended on human beings or objects like the veneration of tombs, shrines of saints, or veneration of places considered to possess supernatural powers, to be in violation of *tawhīd* and thus *shirk* (cf. Peskes "Wahhābiyya" in *EI*). I use the term "Wahhābism" in reference to the adherents of this doctrine, who, among other other things, believe that veneration of saints and shrines is equal to committing polytheism.

The concept of sainthood in the Pamiri Ismailism

In the case of the Ismailis of the Badakhshan region, the idea of the living saint (locally, $p\bar{r}r$) was common practice in Badakhshan until the first two decades of Soviet rule (see Bobrinskiy 1902, Hojibekov 1999). Generally, the word $p\bar{r}r$ (lit. old person, elder) in religious contexts is often used in the case of a spiritual director who is qualified to encourage and direct the aspiring novice (*murīd*) on the Sufi path (see Bosworth "Pīr" in *EI*). Among the Ismailis of Badakhshan, prior to the establishment of Soviet rule, $p\bar{r}rs$ were the spiritual guides of the local people, and several families of *murīds*, spread across the region, belonged to each $p\bar{r}r$. $P\bar{r}rs$ had a mediating role between the Imām of the time and his followers in this region. The Ismaili term $p\bar{r}r$ was a specific dignitary in the Nizari [Ismaili] hierarchy... The purpose of the pir is to lead the seekers to someone who will accept their submission (i.e., to the Imām himself)" (Virani 2007: 144-145).

As is evident from the Western and Russian accounts of the 19th and early 20th centuries, the title $p\bar{v}r$ was an official office in Badakhshan: $P\bar{v}rs$ were selected from the families who claimed the ancestral lineage of *sayyid* and were confirmed by the edict (*farman*) of the Imām (see Bobrinskiy 1902). Locally, $p\bar{v}rs$ trace their genealogies to the family of the prophet Muhammad (*ahl-al-bayt*) through the saints who arrived into the region from Persia and who are believed to be "foundational figures" of the local religious tradition (see Gross 2011, 2013). For example, in an interview a descendant of one of the last $p\bar{v}rs$ in Shugnan district explained his ancestral genealogies as follows:

My family (*mash awlod*) is traced to one of the four *qalandars* who came to Shugnan after Shāh Nasir [ie. Nasir-i Khusraw]. First, Shāh Malang came to Shugnan with the decree to be a *pīr* (*farmani pīri qati yat*). Then Shāh Khamush, with the decree to become a ruler (*farmani mire qate yat*) arrived in Shugnan and later moved to Kulyab. The rulers (*miren*) of Kulyab are Shāh Khamush's descendants (*az awladi Shāh Khamush-en*). Shāh Malang's descendants mainly reside in Shugnan. For example, we call ourselves Shāh-Malange. These two came with a decree

(farman). The two other, Shāh Kashan and Shāh Burhan were their servants. After Shāh Nasir, they were the ones who spread Ismaili religion (dini Isma'iliya) in Shugnan. Then our grandfathers after Shāh Malang, such as Sayyid Malang then few others then Sayyid Salomatsho, Sayyid Shāh Partovi, Sayyid Shāh Khuja then Sayyid Farrukhsho then Sayyid Yusufalisho had decree of religious leadership (farmani $p\bar{r}r$) and were responsible for teaching religion. Then Soviet authority arrested him. His children moved to the other side of the river [River Panj dividing Tajikistan and Afghanistan] and the religious leadership was abolished (na pirdori redat na murīdori).

The other group that claims religious title of *khujas* generally claim descent from Sayyid Suhrab-i Walī, who they believe was a devotee of Nasir-i Khusraw, although some studies argue that it is historically improbable since Sayyid Suhrab-i Walī lived in the 15th century, almost four centuries later than Nasir-i Khusraw (Virani 2007: 119, Illoliev 2008: 63). Some representatives from these and other families played an important role in the religious life of the Ismaili communities in Badakhshan.

An anonymous manuscript preserved in Badakhshan titled *Tariqqat-nama* defines $p\bar{n}r$ as the one who provides spiritual knowledge and blessing to his followers *murīds* and teaches them true knowledge (Elchibekov 1974: 316). Furthermore, the manuscript quotes a poem of the local Badakhshani poet named Nazmi. In the poem, Nazmi talks about the role of $p\bar{n}r$ in the community and his role in the spreading the *Ta'lim* (Ismaili religious teaching). Nazmi attributes to $p\bar{n}r$ the quality of the "one who sheds light on the truth" (*rawshankunanda-i haqiqat*), the most perfect being (*kamil-tarin-i mawjudat*) (1974: 317).

In Ismaili theology and religious hierarchy, Imām has a central role. The Imām of the time in Ismailism is the one who guides the believers to knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of God. The allegiance to the Imām is thus a soteriological necessity for the believers. There is an elaborate doctrine of Imāmat in Ismailism that explains the sanctity of the Imām (cf. Daftary 1990). In the Fātimid and Alamut periods of Ismaili history, other ranks of religious dignitaries were below the rank of the Imām who were part of the Ismaili religious institution of *da'wa*. The *Ismaili* manuscripts found in Badakhshan region, such as *Dar Bayan-i Haft Hadd-i Din* and *Bab dar Bayan-i Danistan-i 'Alam-i Din*, list the Ismaili hierarchy in the following order: 1. Imām, 2. *hujjat* (lit. proof), 3. *da'i* (summoner), 4. *mu'allim* (teacher), 5. *ma'zun-i akbar* (senior licentiate), 6. *ma'zun-i asghar* (junior licentiate), 7. *Mustajib* (respondent) (see Elchibekov 1974: 316, Virani 2007: 160). These ranks were part of the Ismaili *da'wa* (mission) and had probably changed over time⁴⁹ (cf. Daftary 1990, Virani 2007). These ranks, apart from Imām, are not part of modern Ismaili religious leadership.

The Ismaili theology is a complex system with a blend of Neo-Platonic ideas with the Ismaili system of thought that attempted to explain the origin and nature of creation, the doctrine of *Tawhid* (unity) of God, the cycles of the Prophets, the role of the Imām of the time and so forth. This system of thought evolved over a long period of time and in a different period of the history of Ismailism different conceptions were added to it and elaborated within it (see Daftari 1990).⁵⁰

⁴⁹ *Da'i* (pl., *du'at*): lit., he who summons: a religious propagandist or missionary amongst the Ismailis and other Shi'i groups; a high rank in the *da'wa* hierarchy of the Ismailis. The term *da'i* came to be used generically from early on by the Ismailis in reference to any authorized representative of their *da'wa* (lit. mission); a propagandist responsible for spreading the Ismaili religion and for winning suitable converts (see Daftary, 1990: 559). The Ismailis often referred to their movement simply as *al-da'wa*, or, more formally, as *al-da'wa al-hadiya*, 'the rightly-guiding mission' (1990: 560). The *hujjat* (Ar. *hujja* (lit. proof) was a high rank in the *da'wa* hierarchy of the Fātimid Ismailism; there probably were twelve such *hujjas*, each one in charge of a separate *da'wa* region, called a *jazira* (lit., Island). In Nizari Ismaili *da'wa*, the term generally denoted the chief representative of the Imām, sometimes also called *pīr*. Badakhshan was probably a part of the Khurasan *jazira* (region) (1990: 562).

⁵⁰ I will not discuss the details of the Ismaili philosophical and theologal system of thought here due to the limited scope of this chapter and also because it is not central to my general argument. For further information regarding the Ismaili philosophy and theology, please see (Daftari 1990). For some primary sources see Al-Kirmani, *Rahat al-'aql*, ed., Muhammad Kamil Husayn and Muhammad Mustafa Hilmi. Ismaili Society Series C, no.1; Silsilat makhtutat al-Fatimiyyin, 9. Leiden: Published for the Ismaili Society by E.J. Brill, 1953. Nasir-i Khusraw, *Shish fasl, ya Rawshana'i-nama-yi nathr*, ed. and English trans., Wladimir Ivanow. Ismaili Society Series B, no. 6. Leiden: Published for the Ismaili Society by E.J. Brill, 1949. Nasir-i Khursaw's *Wajh-i din*, ed., Mahmud Ghanizada and Muhammad Qazwini. Berlin: Kaviani, 1924. For later periods see Al-Tusi, Nasir al-Din's *Rawdat al-taslim*, ed. and English trans., Wladimir Ivanow as *The Rawdatu't-Taslim commonly called Tasawwurat*. Ismaili Society Series A, no. 4. Leiden: Published for the Ismaili Society by E.J. Brill, 1950.

At the present time in Badakhshan, the terms $p\bar{v}r$ and $mur\bar{v}d$ no longer function as designating religious hierarchy in local religious practice. The Soviet order persecuted $p\bar{v}rs$ during the 1920s and 1930s, and many were arrested, their properties confiscated and this institution abolished (cf. Hojibekov 1999). However, the term $p\bar{v}r$ is attached to the names of many shrines and holy men along with other terms such as *walī*, *sayyid*, *shaykh*, *khuja* (master), *shāh* (king).

In the course of my work at the Research Unit in Khorog on the project dealing with the sacred sites, our team, headed by Dr. Nisormamad Shakarmamadov, counted the first titles in the names of the sacred sites in the four districts of Badakhshan. The table below that we developed shows how many sacred sites have the title of $p\bar{r}r$, khuja, $sh\bar{a}h$ and so forth.

Districts	Number	First titles in the names of the sacred sites						
	of	Khuja	Shāh	Pīr	Sayyid	Shaykh	Bībī	Imām
	sacred							
	sites							
Ishkashim	58	8	10	7	2	1	9	-
Shugnan	34	7	8	3	-	-	1	2
Rushan	74	10	6	5	-	4	1	1
Darvaz	26	9	3	-	-	1	-	2
Total	192	34	27	15	2	5	11	5

As the table shows, the terms *khuja*, *shāh*, and $p\bar{v}r$ are most numerous in the titles of the sacred sites. People used these titles to designate the saints. In general, all these titles in the table roughly covey the same meaning of authority and prestige. The term *shaykh*, for instance, etymologically denotes "someone whose age appears advanced and whose hair has gone white" and has been used in reference to the chief of any human groups or head of religious establishments (see. Geoffroy "Shaykh" in *EI*). The term $p\bar{n}r$ (lit. meaning old person) corresponds in meaning to the term *shaykh*. The term *khaja* (*khuja* in Badakhshan) was used in a different sense across time in various Muslim societies. In the Samanid state the term *khaja* along with another term *buzurg* designated the head of the bureaucracy; later it was used in the title of wazirs, teachers, rich men and merchants ("Khwaja" in *EI*). The term *khōja* is also a designation of the Ismailis from the Indian subcontinent (see Madelung "Khōja" in *EI*). Similarly, the term *sayyid* originally meant chief (of a tribe) and in Islamic times was used as a title of honour for the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad (Bosworth "Sayyid" in *EI*). The term *Imām* also has the meaning of the leader or to lead, and the term *shāh* literary means, "king."

The Ismailis of Badakhshan always use one of these terms before the names of the saints to indicate their sanctity. In the case of some shrines associated with 'Alī b. Abī Tālib, the Ismailis of Badakhshan often use only the epithets such as *Shāh-i Mardan* (king of men) or *Shāh-i Wilāyat* (king of sainthood) rather than the actual name of 'Alī. This is related to the ways in which the Ismailis of Badakhshan attend to and articulate the notions of the sacred and sanctity.

Visitations *ziyārat* of shrines in Badakhshan

The Ismailis of Badakhshan visit their sacred sites individually or with families at various times. Individually, people often visit sacred sites on Fridays. People make wishes (*murad*) at these places and commemorate the deceased. During the religious events such as '*id-i Qurban* (or *al-Ahda'*) and '*id-i Ramazan* (or *al-Fitr*), people take food to the sacred site and pray for the souls of their deceased family members. During

religious holidays, someone might slaughter sheep and prepare *khudai* (a ritual where the community have food collectively then *khalīfa* reads verses from the Qur'an and says a du'a) in the sacred site.⁵¹

The important feature of the visitations to the sacred sites is the prayers for the souls of the deceased and close family members. People burn *strakhm*, light *tsirovak* (made of small branches of *strakhm* or juniper tree *ambakhs* wrapped with cotton and soaked in oil) at the sacred site or the grave of the deceased family members during the religious holidays as symbolic of lighting the path of the soul to its final destination. Usually in the third day after someone's death their family members visit their graves and a sacred site, bringing offerings to this place, light *tsirovak* and pray for the soul of their family member to rest in peace.

Both sacred sites and the graveyards are considered "heavy places" *vazmin joyen*. People usually build their houses a distance from both of these places so that in their daily life they do not disturb the spirits of the dead. The belief in the power of the dead ancestors, (*arwagan*), who even after death can affect the living, is part of local contextualizations of Islam among the Ismailis of Badakhshan. That is, people fear to disturb or upset *arwagan*, whether their own deceased family member or the spirit of the saint buried in the sacred site.

This is how Sarwar, a 55-year-old teacher at the local secondary school in Shāhdara district, in the interview about sacred sites of his village explained the reasons for people visiting sacred sites:

People visit these places because they love God. People love the Prophet, the Imām and Nasir Khusraw and therefore visit these places that remind them of God and the Prophet and the other

⁵¹ Often *khalifa* recites the particular passages from the verse al-Nur particularly 24:35, verse al-Kursi 2:255, in the shrines, and then the du'a is recited in Tajik/Persian language.

saints (*buzurgan*). We are Ismaili Muslims and believe in the Imām. We visit the sacred sites and ask the Imām to grant us health and forgive our sins. When Imām utters the word *khanaabadan* [lit. from Persian *khana* means house, *abad* means in good condition] he means our souls not our residential houses. In other words, it means let your souls be *abad* (in good condition). Our people have great love for God. As God is beyond our comprehension, cannot be seen by human eyes, and beyond the capacity of human reason to imagine Him, our people visit the sacred sites to express their love for God. In these places they seek and worship God...

A few people labelled the visitation of the sacred sites as idol worship and alien to the Muslim religion. Others saw them more as cultural and historic relics of the local communities. However, in general most people had no objection to the shrines and their visitation, and explained that they worship the sacred sites and object within them as the mediums between the divine and people, and do not worship "woods and stones."

Nizoramo, in a conversation after she visited a sacred site across the river from her village of Khidorjev in Shāhdara Valley, emphasised their historical and cultural value and their function as places that bring community together. Nizoramo is a Russian language teacher at the local secondary school and is concerned with what she sees as current moral decline among young people.

These are historical places and as the ancient custom of our ancestors these places should be preserved. People gather in these places make *khudai* and socialize with each other. This helps to create and maintain peace and unity between people. When someone saw Imām in their dream or saw a dream about the sacred site they visit and make an offerings in the sacred site. When our kids are called to serve in the army or whenever someone is going to embark upon a journey we take them to the sacred site and make a wish for them to return safely. We celebrate some religious holidays in the sacred places and ask sacred site to grant our wishes.

The reasons for the visitation *ziyārat* of the sacred sites are thus different depending on the individuals and the places they come from. In some villages, the collective celebration of some religious holidays is still held in the sacred sites, especially during Islamic holidays such as 'Id-i Qurban (or al-Ahda') and 'id'-i Ramadan (or al-Fitr).

Retrospective narratives: Sacred sites in the recent past

According to some of my informants, people continued to visit the sacred sites in secret during the Soviet anti-religious campaigns. Similar to the persecution of the $p\bar{i}rs$, the Soviet authorities launched anti-shrine campaigns at the end of the 1920s to 1930s and 1960s in which some of these places were destroyed and people visiting these places were arrested.

The Soviet anti-religious campaigns in Badakhshan region did not significantly differ from anti-religious campaigns elsewhere in the Soviet Union. In the early 1920s, anti-religion, and by implication anti-shrine discourse, emerged from within Badakhshan's communities under the influence of Soviet ideology. Many members of the local intelligentsia in Badakhshan were supporters of the new Soviet order. The Soviets saw the veneration of the sacred sites as a dead weight of the past on human agency and as an impediment to progress. To attribute agency to wood and stone and to surrender one's agency to shrines was unacceptable in Soviet modernists' views. Therefore, they saw the worship of shrines as an anachronism: the remnants from the backward past that will disappear eventually as the communities become more modern.

As some people recalled, there was also an attempt to reform some religious aspects of the local Ismaili communities in the 1920s. Many people recalled the visit of Sabzali in this regard (in Badakhshan referred to as Mashnari Sabzali — Mashnari is the local version of the word missionary), who according to the account of his journey, was sent to these areas by His Highness the Aga Khan III Imām Sultan Muhammad Shāh in March 1923.⁵² According to some of my informants, Mashnari Sabzali delivered *farmans* of the Imām, also brought an updated version of the Ismaili prayer, as well as asked

⁵² See the account of Sabzali's journey at: http://www.ismaili.net/Source/pirsabzali/intro.html

people to stop the worship of the sacred sites as the Imām removed his blessing from them. The memory of Sabzali visit is very prominent in some people's narratives about the recent past and will be elaborated on more in the paragraphs below.

Apart from Soviet campaigns, there seem to be no theological contestations of the practice in local religious literature. There also seems to be no evidence that the $p\bar{i}rs$ acted or spoke against the practice of shrine visitation (*ziyārat*) in Badakhshan. On the contrary, many shrines are associated with the saints to whom the $p\bar{i}rs$ trace their sacred lineage.

Current discourses about the sacred sites in Badakhshan rely on memories from the time between the Soviet and post-Soviet period. A main theme that features in people's discourses about the past and present of the sacred sites is the narrative about the loss of their divine power. It has to be noted though that most people who speak about the lost power of the sacred sites, at the same time, also mention how anyone who doubted their sacred character suffered great misfortune. That is, they seem to deny and confirm the divine character of the shrines at the same time. Some people emphasise the deterioration in the attitude of people towards the sacred sites and link it with general moral decline in society. The establishment and disintegration of the Soviet rule has probably played a significant role in changing attitudes towards religion in this region. Thus, along with the social and political transformations of the last century, the narratives about the past of sacred sites also indicate the changing relationships of people to their religious belief. This is how Abduraim, a former secondary school teacher in his eighties, remembered the past of the sacred sites when I asked what he could remember about the ways people attended to them in the past in his village.

In the 1920s Mashnari [reference to Sabzali] said that *Mawla* removed his blessing (*fayzat barakat*) from the *astans* and they are now just woods and stones. My father was *khalīfa* at that time and he proposed to renovate the sacred site of our village and convert it into *jamaatkhana*. People agreed but somehow the work didn't start... Then this astan was converted into a public school. Later, I was in charge of this school. All its sacred objects such as *tughs*, (a "flag"), and other stones were removed. Although it was converted to public school, people continued to visit it secretly at night and say their prayer there. They usually bought their food, *strakhm* and other stuff with them to that place. I allowed them to visit but asked them to clean after themselves in the morning so that to not get me in trouble with that. I hid all the sacred objects in the attic of this building. Later on this building caught fire and was burned down but by that time I had already resigned my position as a principle of this school. A person from the village Riwak was appointed as a principle. He was very arrogant man and did not allow people to visit this place and it is during this time that it was burned down.

Abduraim further elaborated on how this place was renovated in the early 1990s and how the first representatives of the Imām that came to Badakhshan visited this place at that time. In the course of my fieldwork, I heard a lot of narratives of similar theme and content. The role of the Mashnari Sabzali is especially prominent in the narratives of the people over the age of 60. Some informants note that Sabzali did not know the local languages and his translator from local people distorted some of his messages. Some informants described Sabzali as a saint who worked some miracles in the villages he visited. Nazarbegim, a former state farm employee in her 60s, in an interview noted she heard from her parents that Sabzali performed a miracle and created the spring water of her village. Whatever the "real" historical events, these narratives are imprinted into the local landscape, and through the medium of the sacred sites they are evoked and become part of the social memory of these communities.

Another major theme in these retrospective narratives is that of the punishment that the sacred sites inflict upon those who were responsible for their pollution, destruction or who doubted their divine power. Kamol, a retired former collective farm worker, recalls how the sacred site of his village inflicted punishment on those who disrespected it.

I was old enough and I remember that there was gold in the shape of human palm in the *qadamgah*. That golden palm was taken away during the Soviet time. At that time if anyone organized a *khudai* was under threat of being arrested. I remember our neighbour Fayzmamad slaughtered sheep and gave food to the people as *khudai*. There were people who reported this to the security services of the government; then government security services came and arrested him and other people because they were suspected to be involved in this work [observing *khudai*]. Then the head of the regional court from Porshnev named Qishqorov Zohirbek came and another man from Sinib whose name was Nazar took that golden palm from the *astan* put it in his bag and went away.⁵³ Few years later when I moved to Dushanbe to work as a teacher I saw Zohirbek there whose condition was not well. All of his relatives passed away and he was left alone. He was dismissed from the Party [Communist Party] and from his work.

Kamol's story is not a single case and many people related similar accounts about

the shrines of their villages. I have heard numerous stories with the theme of sacred sites

"revenging" those who desecrated, destroyed or propagated against their visitation. For

example, Odil from the valley of Shāhdara recollected the following incident:

Shoabdurahmon from Shāhdara was a minister of education at that time he was one of the most enthusiastic propagandist against the sacred sites. He usually gathered people in the villages and spoke against the sacred sites. Then after some time his head turned backward and he became dumb. *Khalifa* (religious leader) Munir wrote *tamar* [spiritual amulets containing verses from the Qur'an that people in the region wear on their neck or wrist as protection from evil] for him and he got a little better. I saw this with my own eyes. Another person from Sizhd his surname was Qosimov was very active in this campaign. Once he along with other people visited our village. They were mounted on horses and a bull hit Qosimov's horse so hard that he fell down and lost his consciousness. He was badly hurt.

In our village the head of the office of the government Kholmamad due to his ignorance was against the sacred places. He ordered several *komsomols* [members of All-Union Leninist Young Communist League] and other government servicemen to destroy the sacred place of our village. Later on he was murdered by some of his rivals in the government office and was quickly buried. His body was dug up several times by security services and even after death he did not find peace. This is how powerful sacred places were at that time... I don't want to sound superstitious but I saw myself how some people who acted against the sacred places became mentally ill. Older people at that time warned them to not harm these places but they said the old time is over and these things don't mean anything now.

⁵³ The image of the human palm is an important religious symbol of the Pamiri Ismailis. There are many petroglyphs with the image of the human palms on the stones and rocks in the landscape of Badakhshan. Most of the orientalists suggested that Pamiri Ismailis adapted the symbol of the human palm from their ancient belief into their current faith (Andreev 1953, Bobrinskiy 1909). This may or may not be the case. For the Pamiri Ismailis the symbol of the human palm is associated with the five holy persons: the Prophet Muhammad, his cousin and son-in-law 'Alī, his daughter and 'Alī's wife Fātima and their sons al-Hasan and al-Husayn. Therefore, local people sometimes refer to themselves as the followers of the five holy bodies (*panjtani*); *panj* means five and *tan* body.

The sacred sites in the above cases serve as benchmarks for these retrospective narratives. In these narratives people identify the members of their own communities that were responsible for the destruction of the sacred sites. The narratives evoked, on the other hand, confirm the divine power of these places.

In these retrospective narratives, due to their official positions, or in certain cases their personal beliefs in the new communist ideology, school principals and teachers, the members of the *komsomol* (All-Union Leninist Young Communist League) along with other government officials, feature as primary agents who acted against the sacred sites. At that time, according to some of my informants, most of the construction materials from the destroyed shrines were re-cycled for the construction of public schools.

Some sacred sites that had bigger buildings with several rooms were turned into public schools. In my interviews and conversations, local people blamed the members of their communities who were state employees in charge of the district government offices or school principals for the destruction of the sacred places. In these narratives the policies of the Soviet state became internalised and embodied in persons of the fellow neighbours and relatives, and the blame for the loss of faith in sacred sites is cast on them.

Sacred sites in the present time

The ambiguity about the status of sacred sites also features in the content of the narratives about the status of these places in the present time. One of the major issues in most of my informants' narratives revolved around whether or not sacred sites are needed at the present time when the Ismailis of Badakhshan were blessed with the *didar* of the

Imām. A few of my informants held the local employees of the religious institution

ITREK responsible for the perceived decline in the status of sacred sites.⁵⁴

In an interview, Majid, a man in his forties who is interested in religion, defended

the shrine visitation and described his perception of the lack of faith in these places as

evidence of the general decline in people's religious beliefs.

Every person has his own ideas about these things. *Khalifas* are saying that the divine power was taken away from these places but I will visit these places as long as I last. You have probably seen the writings on the wall of the Aga Khan Foundation office in Khorog under the picture of Hazrat 'Alī that says: "The greatest teacher is experience". I observed in my experience that these *astans* are actually holy...

In the 1990s we were told in the meetings that we should not worship small *astans* and worship only the main ones such as Imām Muhammad al-Baqir, Imām Zayn al-Ābidīn, Shāh Nasiri Khusraw and so forth. We have a lot of small *astans* in our pastures their names are unknown but people worship them when they take their cattle to the pastures. These are very old *astans;* Surely, they are there for some reasons; they are established in the honour of some angels (*farikhtayen*), Imāms or other *awliya*, otherwise people wouldn't have worshiped them...

I think any place that Imām blessed with his visit will forever remain blessed and sacred. As long as we have faith the blessing (*baraka*) of these places will never fade away. Imām visited us and we were blessed with a *didar* with him in 1995-1998-2008. But as you probably noticed yourself the fields in the village of Porkhinev or Sizhd or other places where the audience (*didar*) took place were not converted to the sacred sites. I think it shows that in modern time people faith is weaker than in the past.

In contrast to Majid's view, Gulnazar, an accountant working in the welfare office

of the government from Khorog, articulated the following about the significance and role

of the sacred sites.

It depends on every individual what kind of relationship he or she keeps with the sacred sites. We were blessed with the Imām's audience (*didar*). If it was permissible, the fields where we gathered for our audience with the Imām would have been turned into sacred sites. But this is not permissible and we don't act without an edict (*farmon*) from the Imām. Whatever the Imām says is the law for us. The time of the sacred sites has passed. Now is the time of Qaim who is present. This is the time of *haqiqat* (lit. truth) Imām is now present and revealed to us. Our faith is in the Imām who is present. In the past, Imām was concealed and people had to look for the mediums such as sacred sites. Now our sacred site is the Imām...

⁵⁴ ITREK stands for the Ismaili Tariqa and Religious Education Committee and began its work in Badakhshan in the 1990s. The Ismaili institutions that arrived in the region in the 1990s after the disintegration of the Soviet Union had significant impact on the social, economic and religious life of people of this region. The Ismaili Institutions such as Agha Khan Development Network (AKDN) supported local people during the hard times of the Civil War (1992–1997), providing people with humanitarian aid, and to this day it is one of the major donors involved in the development projects in this region. They are assisting the region in the spheres of education, health, economy and so forth (cf. Bliss 2006). The ITREK organizes seminars on various aspects of religion for religious leaders and the general public, and coordinates the religious life of the people.

I also heard similar points of view in other parts of Badakhshan region. Navruz, a government employee in his 50s, asked me about my research interest in the sacred places. Navruz is interested in the social and political processes, as well as the history of the region, and is familiar with some of the academic works on this region. Hence his interest in what I was researching. I was acquainted with Navruz before my PhD studies. I asked him for an interview for my research and he readily agreed. His view regarding the veneration of the sacred sites is more categorical and he expressed his scepticism about the sacredness of these places as follows:

...The sacred sites have no any meanings whatsoever. Our people (*mash mardum*) created these places wherever they wished. Baron Cherkasov said it very well about our people in one of his books that we are not true Muslims. We claim that we are Muslims but there is nothing from the religion of the Prophet Muhammad that our people follow. We unreasonably visit and worship the woods and stones and commit idol worshiping, while Mawlo Sulton Muhammad Shāh during his time had already removed divine blessing from these places. These places do not constitute anything now and are not needed... I read somewhere that everyone will understand God according to their level of understanding and imagination and our people based on the level of their understanding did whatever they wished...

Navruz's interpretation seems to be in line with the Soviet, some Muslim modernist and "Wahhabist" attitudes toward these places. The narratives provided by Majid, Gulnazar and Nawruz reflect some of the discourses that have probably surfaced among the Ismailis of Badakhshan in the post-Soviet period. The issue, whether or not the veneration of sacred sites is part of the "correct" practice of Ismailism in Badakhshan, seems to find its way into the local discourses about religion. As the data from my fieldwork shows, some people expressed their concern about the loss of "authenticity" of local religious traditions in modern times.

Throughout my fieldwork, in the conversations with particular individuals about the sacred sites, I noticed that the same clusters of comments came up again and again. These comments include the destruction of the sacred sites during the Soviet antireligious campaigns, the response of these sites to this process and the current discourses about their status. In that sense, sacred sites are chronotopes that not only allow people to engage the transcendent in their immediate lived environment, but also become the means through which people remember their own past, allocating responsibility about the past to one another in the changing political circumstances and articulate the present meanings of these sites. These comments emerge as responses to the Soviet past and the need to negotiate the meanings of the sacred sites in the present. In this sense, the sacred sites are chronotopes by means of which people recall their own past and retrospectively romanticize or criticize it to make sense of the present.

Sacred sites as chronotope of remembering

Sacred sites, as particular signs in the landscape, evoke a certain kind of memory of the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, which is beyond the conventional history as a sequence of events. The conceptual distinction between memory and history that historian Pierre Nora makes in his edited volume *Realm of Memory* is partly relevant in the analysis of the narratives associated with sacred sites in Badakhshan. Nora observes that "memory situates remembrance in a sacred context," while history is an intellectual, nonreligious activity (Nora 1996:3).

Sacred sites, in that sense, constitute the "sacred context" of social memory aas opposed to other more institutionalised places of social memory such as libraries, archives, museums and so forth. The difference is that in the museums, libraries, archives and other heritage and commemorative spaces, memory is classified, fixed and even commodified, while in sacred sites memory is not ordered; rather, it is more sensual and affective (cf. Edensor 2005). Bruce Privratskiy (2001) notes that a person's memory is social because it depends on having other people around as a context for recall and articulation. Memory is also cultural in a sense that the things it recalls are set in the context of the values, conceptions and habitual practices that the person who remembers holds in common with others (2001: 19). Therefore, it is not surprising to see the patterns of the same comments occurring over and over again, revealing how entire communities, and not just individuals, remember the past of the sacred sites and their communities in Badakhshan. Yet these comments are not homogeneous and show that people do not always agree on the meanings and relevance of these sites, so memories do not necessarily invoke the same interpretations.

Eviatar Zerubavel (2003), in his study about how people collectively remember and attribute various meanings to the past, notes that to call this kind of remembering social "presupposes the ability to experience things that happened to the groups to which we belong long before we even joined them as if they were part of our own personal past" (2003: 6). The narratives associated with the sacred sites that relate to the period between the Soviet and post-Soviet periods show how these places become a medium through which the Ismailis of Badakhshan articulate and deal with certain aspects of their recent past.

The discourses about the recent past of the sacred sites also have a moral implication. Michael Lambek (1996) argues that memory is largely a form of moral practice (1996: 235). According to Lambek, we should "think about memory as a human, cultural practice rather than a natural object or process; and that the kind of practice it is be understood as moral rather than simply technical, intellectual, or instrumental" (1996: 235). Lambek notes that memory has usually been understood as subjective and

objective. It is subjective in a sense that each of us has our own memories, and at the same time "it has become an object of professional knowledge about which experts can discover the timeless truth" (1996: 237). Moreover, memory is understood as constitutive of our individual and collective identity. This objectification of memory, according to Lambek,

enables us to resituate memory ostensibly outside engaged experience and the give and take of social relations. An inherently and preeminently temporally constituted process like remembering is thus detemporalized (1996: 238).

To resist the excessive subjectivity and objectivity, Lambek proposes to focus on memory as situated in time and "see it as a function of social relationships, in part a mutual affirmation of past interaction, in part the traces of our introjection of one another" (1996: 238–239).

The narratives associated with the sacred sites that the Ismailis of Badakhshan recall and construct are also intersubjective. They represent the act of remembering that are connected to social relationships in the present. That is, the present social relationships influence the narratives' perspectives.

As Lambek explains,

...we must understand memory as *essentially incomplete;* memory is perspectival and the perspective is a continuously shifting one. The voicing of memory is transitional, no longer fully subjective and not yet fully objective before it is legitimated in collective constructions like history textbooks, ritual commemorations, or legal testimony (or vice versa) (1996: 242 emphasis in original).

The narrative, which itself is recounted in a particular temporal context, is always the interpretation and transformation of the past. Individuals narrate them from their own particular perspective. In this process, sacred sites as chronotopes mediate the narrators' accounts of the past. The narratives associated with the sacred sites in Badakhshan also have an affective quality. Privratskiy notes that since Halbwachs (1925) and Bartlett (1932), it has been understood that remembering is very largely a matter of feeling or affect (Privratskiy 2001: 21). This, according to Privratskiy, "overturns the traditional theory of memory as recall, where memory is thought to pursue cognitive 'traces,' however elusive they may be to pin down" (2001:21). Privratskiy's more general point is that rather than the specialized knowledge of religious scholars, the shared affectivity, which involves things such as dreams in which one sees deceased relatives, emotion experienced when passing by a cemetery or visiting shrine, has provided the process by which Kazaks in the city of Turkestan have identified with Muslim lifeways and preserved them (2001: 21).

This also seems to be true in the case of the Ismailis of Badakhshan who traditionally had no Mosques and the sacred sites were in part the focus of their religious affections.⁵⁵ People visit sacred sites to say prayers and light *tsirowak* for the souls of their deceased family members, to make a wish *murad* for the health of their children and other family members, or to ask God to give them children; in other words, people negotiate hope, wants, desperation, etc., in these places. The narratives about the miracles worked by the saints associated with the sacred sites are also part of this affective field.

The native languages of the Ismailis in Shugnan, Rushan and Vakhan are different from the language of their religious books. Their local languages are not written languages, and the Ismailis of Badakhshan use the Persian language for their religious ceremonies. The visitations of shrines and the oral stories about the saints associated with these places have had an important place in the affective field of their religious

⁵⁵ The religious ceremonies of the Ismailis in Badakhshan were mostly performed in their traditional houses (*cheed* in Shugni), which for them have great religious significance.

expression and their Ismaili Muslim identity, rather than the specialized knowledge of the Ismaili theology.⁵⁶

In the retrospective narratives from Badakhshan region, one can find numerous examples of the shared affectivity associated with the sacred sites. For example, people recall how they visited these places in the past and whether or not their wishes *murad* were granted. In an interview, Shodmon, a former state farm worker from Shugnan and in his 70s, told me how their village sacred site cured him. Shodmon notes,

I think in the past more people visited the sacred sites to ask a cure for their sick children or other family members than in the present. At that time apart from sacred sites nobody else could care about your troubles. Through these places we knocked on the door of God and asked help and also it is due to these places that we didn't forget about God's existence and mercy. I remember Orif a young man got very ill and was about to die. His mother was our neighbour a woman named Dunyo. She visited the sacred site and asked it to exchange her life for him. Then Orif was cured and his mother died. When I was very ill our village *khalīfa* Islombek asked my family to take me to the sacred site. Inside the sacred site was a photo of Imām Sultan Muhammadshāh. I put my hand on this photo and in a few days got cured.

On another occasion, a woman in her forties named Mehriniso, whom I

interviewed in Shāhdara Valley, articulated her view about the sacred sites as follows:

My grandmother used to tell us that she could not conceive a child long after she got married. Then she made an offering to the sacred site. She baked bread and along with some milk took it to the sacred site. She collected some sand from the sacred ground into a bowl and on her way home she saw three leaves inside this sand. Soon after that she became pregnant and gave birth to her son. In total she had three children. However, sacred sites don't grant everyone's wishes. My four years old grandson did not have the ability to speak and also could not walk. I visited the sacred site and asked to cure him. My wish was not granted. My grandson passed away.

⁵⁶ This is not to deny the importance of the theological aspects in the current religious tradition in Badakhshan. The literary heritage of the local religious tradition, which is preserved in the individual private collections across the region, contains many books on Ismali cosmology and theology. In fact, many stories associated with the sacred sites are also given in written form; there has been a symbiotic relationship between orality and literacy in the development of the local religious tradition. Although I mention both, the literary religious heritage of the Ismailis of Badakhshan and the oral stories associated with the shrines, I do not use this distinction as analytical tool for explaining the local religious tradition. That is, I am not suggesting the Ismailis of Badakhshan make a clear-cut division between the theologically oriented literary heritage and the religious practices such as shrine visitation that are mostly based on oral tradition, and somehow one is more valid than the other. On the contrary, in this thesis I try to dismantle this dichotomy by drawing on my ethnographic examples. I show the theoretical limitation of some orientalist approaches that viewed literary religious tradition as the representative of what is "real" Islamic and religious practices such as shrine visitation as the representative of what is "real" Islamic

People visit sacred sites for many other reasons beyond the issue of health. The narratives concerning *murad* are always dealing with hope, which is beyond one's capacity to fulfil and require another agency. For example, people make wishes in the sacred sites to cure terminally ill members of their family, or grant them children when they suffer from childlessness. Making a wish *murad* at the sacred sites is often described as a selfless act because it focuses on the needs of others; that is, one's family members (cf. Privratskiy 2001). Typical "wishes" are prayers for the conception of children or their nurture, or for keeping those family members who are abroad safe, and so forth. Mehriniso's and Shodmon's narratives show the ways in which sacred sites help people deal with life crises and give meaning to their life experiences.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined the ways in which people remember and articulate the significance of sacred sites in the lives of people in some parts of Badakhshan region in the past and how it has changed. When remembering the past of the sacred sites, most people were talking about the Soviet period and identified some of the members of their communities whom they hold responsible for the destruction of these sites. On the other hand, some people who attended the sacred sites articulated the concern about the role of these places in the present time. Similar to the retrospective narratives about the past, in the narratives about the present role of the sacred sites, people allocate responsibility to some members of their communities for what they perceive as the current decline in the status of these places. These narratives express the anxiety of the people over the

perceived loss of "authenticity" of the local religious tradition in the face of changing socio-political context.

In this sense, sacred sites constitute chronotopes (time space) that preserve and evoke memories of the recent past that otherwise might have been forgotten. As chronotopes, Badakhshan's sacred sites constitute places where aspects of the current discourse around the local religious traditions are negotiated. These narratives are different from the stories and legend of saints associated with sacred sites in the way that they are based on recent historical experiences of the Ismaili communities in Badakhshan. Yet although these narratives are based on remembering recent events, their content is often situated in a sacred context. That is, there is a divine intervention in the plot of these narratives. For example, individuals who campaign against these sites are punished or other individuals' wishes are granted. The next chapter will explore the material agency of the sacred sites and the ways in which these places affect and shape the relationship between people and space.

Chapter V: Sacred Sites and Material Agency – Social and Cultural Interrelation Between People and Places

As the previous chapters demonstrated, the Ismailis of Badakhshan relate to their sacred sites in different ways, and there is a kind of symbiotic relationship between people and these places. The relationship between people and sacred sites suggests that these places are not passive objects and contribute to shaping people's understanding of and relations to the world. In this chapter, I examine the issue of the material agency of the sacred sites. Through discussing the significance of the sacred sites in the present day and remembering the recent events associated with these places, people unconsciously attribute an agency to these places in which they are not only the objects of veneration but act upon the people in certain ways. In the narratives of the people, these sites are sacred because of the divine power inherent in them. In these sites, the spirits of the saints (buzurgan) mediate between the transcendent and people. Moreover, these sites also have "an epistemic agency" through the embodiment of a certain kind of memory in them. That is, the narratives associated with these places evoke particular understandings of and attitudes to the space and place. This chapter suggests that material things do not have agency as their inherent quality. Rather, material agency of the sacred sites is relational and emerges in the process of the relationship between people and these places.

Material agency of the sacred sites

Until recently, the relations between people and material objects, including space and place, was conceptualised as the relations between subjects and objects. That is, materiality as well as space and place were treated as passive objects that represent social relations or, in the case of space and place, serve as the stage for social action (see Buchli 2002, Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 2003, Miller 1998, Vellinga 2007). Marcel Vellinga,

for example, argues that until the 1980s, the study of the relationship between people and

things was conceptualised as the relationship between subjects and objects.

The objects were generally regarded as signs, representations, or expressions of social or cultural relations or identities. As such, the study of material culture (e.g., of textiles, masks, architecture) provided a "way into" a culture or society, allowing the anthropologist to understand the nature of cultural values, cosmologies, or social relationships and the way in which they were represented in material form (Vellinga 2007: 761).

In the last two decades, a number of studies balance this interpretation by placing the relationship between people and things on more equal grounds. In this interpretation, according to Vellinga,

people and things create and define one another in a continuous process of objectification. Through the production and consumption of material culture, people define and order social and cultural relationships. These social and cultural relationships do not exist independent of their objectification in material form but are constituted through them, while in turn they help to create and define the material forms concerned. In other words, people and things, or subject and objects, mutually constitute one another (Vellinga 2007: 761).

In this view, objects are actively implicated in the construction and perpetuation of social and cultural identities. Some recent studies push the idea of the symbiotic relationship between people and things further, arguing that material objects actually do things; that is, things have their own agency (Ingold 1993).

In dialogue with this recent discussion of material agency, one can argue that the presence of the sacred sites affects and shapes the ways in which people in Badakhshan attribute various meanings to their surroundings and interpret the aspects of their faith (see chapter 3). According to Bill Sillar, our self-awareness and cognitive abilities could only have developed through our ancestors' engagement with material culture (2009: 368). That is, "our self-consciousness emerges out of the dynamic process of our interaction with physical objects including our own and other people's physical bodies" (Sillar 2009: 368).

The sacred sites, in parts of Badakhshan, evoke certain kinds of memories and particular types of actions merely by their presence in the surroundings of people. People passing by the sacred sites stop and kiss the tip of their fingers, and touch the objects in these places: people visiting these places do not turn their back to the sacred sites when they leave, walk backwards and speak in a very low voice inside these places. Some people report that in the past those who were mounted on horses had to dismount when they approached the sacred site and only when they passed it far enough did they mount their horses again. Thus, sacred sites evoke a cultural space for acting in a certain way.

In the case of the sacred sites of Badakhshan, there are at least two direct ways in which these places are believed to "act" upon the lives of people that were briefly mentioned in the previous chapters. First is related to the belief that sacred sites punish those who were responsible for their pollution, destruction or who doubt their divine power. The second is related to the belief that sacred sites have the power to heal people and grant their wishes. For example, the quotes from my informants Kamol and Abduraim about the role of sacred sites in the past, discussed in the previous chapter, point to some of the ways in which sacred sites are believed to hit back those who were engaged in the propaganda campaign against them. Many people related similar accounts about the shrines of their villages. I have heard numerous stories with the theme of sacred sites hitting back those who desecrated or destroyed their buildings or places, or who propagated against their visitation. For example, Alixon, a former driver from Bartang Valley, provided a similar story:

I know that astan Khojai Nuriddin was destroyed during the Soviet time and the beams supporting its roof were taken to Siponj. Shodi was the chairman of the district committee. This astan was destroyed by his order and its beams were taken down by the flow of the river to another village. None of those people, who dismantled its roof, survived. Among them was Shodi who disappeared without a trace. Those beams were re-used for the construction of Siponj's secondary school. We also had two juniper trees that people visited as sacred places. The school principal and other government officials ordered to cut them down. Nobody agreed to execute this order. Only two people Kholiqnazar and Mavjud agreed. Then at night wolves destroyed their livestock. The school principal, who ordered to cut those trees, also later on suffered a great loss. His son was taken to serve in the army and was killed somewhere. He became mentally ill. *Buzurgwar* (the great one) punished him.

Many similar stories were narrated to me during the fieldwork. For example,

when I visited the sacred sites of Nasir-i Khusraw in Porshinev, a man whom I met at that

shrine related the following about the power of this place:

In the 1960s some Russian workers were installing electric lines here in our village. They were staying at the Nasir-i Khusraw shrine. They brought pork and cooked it here. People warned them that they should not cook pork at the sacred site. They did not pay attention. Then they all got seriously sick. Two of them died here and the rest left the region. Down the road we also have another sacred site called *Sumbi Dul-Dul*. There is a small ditch that runs near it. The workers from the state farm wanted to widen this small ditch and blasted some of the stones near the sacred sites. People warned them not to do this but they went on with their work. The person who initiated this got severely injured from the blast as a piece of stone hit him in the head. He was taken to the hospital but he didn't survive and passed away.

In my travel from Khorog to Dushanbe, in our conversations in the car, the driver

noted that he always visits the sacred sites of Nasir-i Khusraw in Porshinev before his long drive between these two cities. This, according to the driver, helps him to return safely every time. He noted that whenever he passes by this sacred site and forgets to visit it, some kind of misfortune would definitely afflict him that day.

Through these kinds of narratives, sacred sites become animated and their authority confirmed. They become animated through their retributions inflicted upon the people who committed harmful action against them and questioned their divine power. In these narratives, the persons responsible for harm to the shrines learn their lessons and end up in misery and death; often in these stories the men (they are usually men) who harmed the shrines are inflicted by the various kinds of misfortunes. The events such as a death in someone's family or killing of the livestock by wolves or tigers are connected to people's relation with the sacred sites. These sites do not act upon people directly but mediate the interpretation and understanding of certain events. In that sense, the agency of the sacred sites as material things is not an attribute of their material quality but derives from the transcendental power that these places are believed to possess.

Healing power of the sacred sites

Along with the sacred sites as built structures or natural features, the sacred objects within them also play a mediating role between the divine and the people. *Tughs* are one of the most prominent objects that seem to have been present in most of the major shrines. They, according to some informants, possess a healing quality and used to be taken from village to village during the spread of the epidemics in the past. Some of my informants described them as flags on long poles with the pointer in the shape of the human palms attached at the top. The keeper of the sacred site in Vakhan region explained the characteristic of *tugh* as follows:

We call it *tughi Imām*. It was taken out of the sacred place when some epidemic disease emerged in the villages. One year a disease that mostly afflicted children emerged and many children died from it. Then *tugh* was taken out of the sacred place and the disease disappeared. It looks like a flag. It is a flag of Imām. It was taken out, from where it was kept, and taken from village to village. Then it was brought back to its place and people slaughtered sheep or bulls next to the sacred place. The meat was cooked and everyone shared food together there. People listened to *maddah* singers there.

The *tughs* are kept in a separate place on the mountain above the village. Nobody is allowed to see or touch them, and only the shrine keeper visits them once a year to clean the place where they are kept. According to the shrine keeper, the *tughs* are also visited during the day of Ashura (the day of mourning for the death of al-Husayn b. Alī, at the Battle of Karbala in 680 CE). On this day a special ceremony is conducted with lighting *charagh* (a special candle made of cotton), people slaughter sheep and have food and pray for the soul of the deceased relatives. It is believed that these *tughs* were the

banners of the Imām al-Husayn during his battle in Karbala. Similar *tughs* are kept in the village of Baghush in Ishkashim district, and the sacred site where they kept is called Imām al-Hasan and Imām al-Husayn. It is believed that they were brought to Baghush from a place called Sikimol in Afghanistan by a person named Shāh Mahdi Balagardan long ago. It is said that Shāh Mahdi brought them because of the spread of an epidemic disease in Baghush; hence the name Balagardan, which means the one who relieved people from a misfortune. The family who trace their lineage to Shāh Mahdi are looking after the *tughs* at the present time.

According to some of my informants, in the past most of the bigger sacred sites contained *tughs* within them. They were taken out whenever any trouble, particularly any epidemic disease, emerged in the area. Some of the sacred sites that had, or according to some people still have, these *tughs* are Shāh Talib in Vamar, astan Imām Zain al-Ābidīn near Khorog, Shāhi Wilāyat in Suchan, Imām Muhammad al-Baqir in Ghund, etc. Apparently it was taken to distant places in the region from those sacred sites that possessed it. In my visits to some of these sites, the custodians of these places often related a similar story about someone taking the *tughs* out from the sacred sites and never returning it. For example, in the village of Imām, I was told that the *tughs* from this site were taken by someone to Kyrgyzstan in the 1950s or 1960s and never returned. An informant observed that:

There was a *tugh* inside the astan Zain al-Ābidīn, which is located in Khorog. In the past when an epidemic disease emerged in Vakhan, my grandfather took that *tugh* and went to Vakhan. The old people in our village said that in the past when any serious disease emerged in the village people gathered in the sacred site and were singing the *maddah* until dawn. Then the disease disappeared.

Sacred sites and the objects within them, in this sense, along with people, coconstitute and share an agency through actions connected with health and healing. Some of the sacred sites such as Bībī Fātima al-Zahrā in Yamchun, Vakhan, Khaja Nekzan in the village of Baju, Rushan and others are popular for treating illnesses associated with infertility. People visit these places to find cures for many other diseases. As some examples from previous chapters show, some people view these places as having a particular character: they might grant some people's wishes at certain times and might refuse to grant others' wishes. The sincerity, purity, honesty and piety of the individuals visiting the sacred sites are important to grant their wishes. According to most of my informants, the visit to the sacred site will work if the person visiting it has a pure heart and sincere intention. By being pure in heart people mean a person who lacks jealousy, envy or any other negative intention towards other people in their community.

People usually refer to a sacred site when the illness is terminal or very serious, or whenever someone suffers for a long time with a certain disease. Many people over their 40s and 50s relayed stories of how a sacred site cured their family members or them. Nazarbek, a sixty-year-old state employee, recalled the following story:

I remember when I was in the high school my brother got terribly sick (*dardi shukufa*). At that time we had no motor road to take him to the hospital in Khorog. He was about to die. On the Friday night my father performed an ablution and without putting on any shoes went to visit the sacred site in our village. He stayed inside the sacred site the whole night and in the morning brought some earth from this place. Then he rubbed my brother's body with this and in about two days he was cured. I also had a chronic headache. I visited this place. I performed ablution in the nearby spring. The keeper of this place told me to not speak loudly inside the sacred site. I took some offerings with me there and while inside I fall asleep. I had a strange dream where I heard the sounds of shooting and shouting. I told this to the keeper of the sacred site and he said that you wish will be granted. From then on I haven't had any headache.

Similarly, some people take some ground from the sacred site as *tabruki* (from Ar. something that is blessed and can help during trouble) when they travel to different countries. This they believe can help protect them from evil spirits and can cure any illness that they might suffer from in their time away from home. Nusayr's account shows the ways through which the belief in sacred sites is underpinned through the

description of the powerlessness of biomedicine in certain cases and the divine power of the sacred sites.

At the present time people do not visit the sacred sites that often. Until recently people had greater faith in these places. My brother was called to serve in the army. He took some earth from the sacred site of our village. He was stationed in the city of Chita in Russia. While in the army he got very sick and the doctors at the hospital in Russia said that he will not survive. But he recovered and returned back home safely. He told us that during his sickness he put some of the earth that he took from the sacred site into his mouth and it helped him to recover. When I also was called to serve in the Soviet Army in the 1980s, I took some earth from the sacred site of our village to protect me from evil spirits. After the first year of service I got seriously ill. My body temperature reached 40 degree centigrade. I lost my appetite and didn't eat for couple of days. I was sick for 45 days. Then I took some of the earth I took from the sacred site and swallowed it. That day I was heavily sweating and the next day I felt better and was cured. These days they do not grant wishes.

In my first visit to the sacred site Shāh Isamidin in the village Ptup in Vakhan, the shrine keeper asked me to take some mud from the walls of this sacred site as a *tabruki*. When I visited this place, the shrine keeper asked me to sit inside the very old and small construction in a shape of a hut, which is believed to be Isomidin's *qadamgah* where he believed to stay. The shrine keeper recited a Qur'anic verse 24:35 and a prayer *fātiha* for me, which is often recited during the death ceremony. I took some mud from the mud wall of the *qadamgah* as the shrine keeper told me. This is probably the shrine keeper's routine interaction with the visitors as I observed later on, where visitors take some mud from the walls of the sacred site as *tabruki*. This is similar to the general Islamic notion of *baraka* that is present in the places of worship and related to the *baraka* of the saints who are buried there.

Along with sacred sites that are associated with some saints and are known to cure diseases, *kargahs* (an old hut for metal works) are also a seen as sacred places that can heal people. When someone suffers from a long illness, even at the present time, he or she visits *kargah* and puts something (it can be traditional handwoven socks, or an expensive cloth for dress, money or anything else) on the top of *sandān* (anvil). In some

places, water is poured on the anvil, collected in the bottle and used for healing various diseases. The visitors to the *kargah* do not turn their back towards it when they get out. People usually visit these sites early in the morning. The Pamiri Ismailis usually associate *kargah* with the prophet David (locally Dowud). It is believed that he was a very skilful blacksmith along with being a prophet and a king.

Alixon, a driver from Bartang who narrated one of the stories mentioned above, also talked about the status of *kargah* in Bartang:

Some people say that the status of *kargah* is higher then that of *khalīfa*. People visit *kargahs* make offerings (*nazr*) there. Sometimes people organize *khudai* in front of *kargah*. When someone gets sick his family makes an offering to the *kargah*. They rub the offering against the body of the sick person and take it to *kargah* and pray to God to heal this person. Usually people visited this place on Fridays. People bring offerings to *kargah* and if there were someone else's offerings they can take them for themselves.

However, at the present time *kargahs* exist only in very few villages, particularly in Bartang Valley, where they are treated as sacred sites. In the above excerpts from my conversation with various people, the sacred sites and other objects influence the performance of certain actions. They are believed to heal people not only through people praying in these places or making wishes, but also through more direct contact with the places and objects. Taking the sick person to the sacred sites, or taking a small amount of earth from them and using it as medicine, or the ceremonies related to taking *tughs* out, constitute some of the ways in which people and sacred sites interrelate and co-shape the action.

The degree to which material entities have agency as an intrinsic quality by virtue of their materiality depends on how people engage with things and how they mediate humans' perception and understanding of the world. In other words, material culture, as a result of its necessary relation to other human and nonhuman agents, possesses the capability of transforming (ordering, evoking, directing) how humans perceive the world (Kirchnoff 2009). Michael David Kirchnoff's (2009) point about the "epistemic agency" of the material objects is relevant for the discussion of the relations between people and the sacred sites. Kirchnoff notes,

material entities have "agency" as an epistemological quality *only if* the concept of "epistemic agency" is tantamount with "technological intentionality" and co-constitutive of non-linguistic, materially mediated forms of understanding. Therefore, material entities are "epistemic agents" in virtue of technological intentionality and being co-constitutive of non-linguistic, materially mediated forms of understanding (Kirchnoff 2009).

By "technological intentionality," Kirchnoff means the mediating role of technology or material things that shape the ways in which humans perceive reality or when technologies form the cultural framework available to interpret a situation in the world (Kirchnoff 2009).

Material agency in Kirchnoff's view is a relational and asymmetrical quality. It is relational in a sense that human beings plus material objects co-constitute the activity, and it is asymmetrical as there are two kinds of agents — humans and nonhumans — qualitatively different from one another (Kirchnoff 2009). Kirchnoff thus distinguishes between human and material agency, arguing that the latter is qualitatively different from the former. In this view, even if people and things mutually constitute a given activity, their contribution is not equal; that is, the material agency is qualitatively different from human agency. However, it is not clear from Kirchnoff's discussion how one can assess the degree of material agency. The idea of things actually having agency — that is, that they intentionally act on their own volition — seems to be far stretched. In the case of the sacred sites, people unconsciously view them as potentially having the power to act, but again this potentiality originates in how people perceive and engage with the material world. That is, this potentiality is actualized in the relationship between people and places.

Animism and the belief in the sacred sites

The stories associated with the sacred sites discussed in chapter three constitute another way in which the agency of the sacred sites is established. In that sense, they constitute what can be called "epistemic agents" and serve as sites of a certain kind of memory. In these stories, the local places are connected with the historical personalities from Islamic history (see chapter 3).

These stories are not only attached to the sacred sites containing the graves of the saints and that have some form of built structures, but also associated with the natural objects such as stones, trees and water springs. The stones, which often have an unusual shape and are somewhat distinct from other stones around them, are regarded as sacred sites. Similarly, the trees that are chosen as sacred sites also have some features that set them apart from their surrounding. As mentioned above, the unusual shape of the objects helps to identify the sacred sites more easily and evokes a sense of enchantment with the space.

Some of the stones and big rocks that have features resembling human palm or hoofs of horses on them are usually interpreted as having the imprints of the saints or their horses. The stones with imprints resembling hoofs are usually associated with the footprints of the horse of Imām 'Alī. The sacred sites that have these kinds of stones with a "hoof's print" on them are thus called *sumbi Dul-dul (sumb* means hoof and *Dul-dul* is believed to be the name of the horse of 'Alī).

The stones inside the sacred sites are often soaked with oil. The reason, as most people explained, is to distinguish them from other stones that are not sacred. A Russian orientalist Andreev, who visited this region in the early decades of the 20th century, suggested that the worship of the stones in the sacred sites might be connected with the belief in the transmigration of soul into animal and other inanimate objects after death. According to Andreev, local people in Khuf Valley, where he conducted his ethnographic fieldwork, believe that the soul after death of a human transmigrates into another human, or as punishment incarnates in birds, animals and natural objects including stones. Therefore, Andreev suggests it might be possible that people worship stone because of the soul of the deceased people embodied in them as the souls transmigrated into stones are left there for eternity (Andreev 1953: 204).

Andreev notes that he did not have a chance to talk to the religious leaders on this subject, and this view might be a distorted understanding of the local peasants who are unfamiliar with the cannon of their religious belief (see Andreev 1953: 204). The belief in transmigration of souls into inanimate objects or other humans has been rejected by the official Ismaili doctrine as elaborated by some Ismaili theologians. Yet there might be individuals who have had this belief among the local people. In my conversations with people about their religious belief, the emphasis often was on being pure in heart and keeping one's soul (*ruh*) pure for its return to its source (*asl*).

Patrice Ladwig, in his analysis of the Lao Buddhist ancestral spirits, examines how material objects can express the idea of immateriality in the material domain. According to Ladwig, objects have the capacity to take on multiple roles and can mediate between various systems (Ladwig 2012: 440). Ladwig draws on Webb Keane's statement that

part of the power of material objects in society consists of their openness to "external" events and their resulting potential for mediating the introduction of "contingency". This contingency rests on the fact that both the value and the possible meanings of objects are underdetermined. They call

for speech, and interpretative practices (Keane quoted in Ladwig 2012: 440).

Similarly, the sacred sites in Badakhshan constitute an expression of the immaterial in the material domain. Their meaning is determined by their status as sites where the encounter of people with the transcendent occurs in their immediate material environment (see chapter 3).

There are also stones that are believed were human in the past and were turned into stone by the divine will. For example, in the story recorded in the village of Dashti Andarob in Ishakashim, associated with the sacred site called *Bībī Nekzan*, a woman with her child in her hand was turned into stone near a lake when they were running from the persecution by the infidels (*kafirs*). The story notes that a woman and her family were running from the *kafirs* and when they reached the edge of this lake this woman prayed to God to turn them into stones rather than let them fall into the hands of their persecutors.

The story recorded in the village of Ravid by staff of the Research Unit in 2001 also shows how some sacred sites are treated as having a particular characteristic:

There is a sacred site above the village. Once it got angry with the people and came down from its original place. Then people made offerings to it and organized *khudai* and took it to its original site far above the village, where is the water spring. It is a stone, which if one looks carefully has features of human face. When the sun rises its face turns towards the sunrise. People ritually clean themselves before they visit this site. It is said that it is the brother of Khojai Nuriddin and Safdaron [two other sacred sites in Bartang valley].

A story with a similar theme is associated with the sacred site Khaja Abdal in the village of Shujand in Rushan district. It is believed that Khaja Abdal was located up on the mountain near the pasture while his sister Kabud Kamal was in the village. However, the sister oppressed the villagers and her brother Khaja Abdal exchanged places with her. In some versions, Kabud Kamal was cursing people as many people in the village were getting astray and far from their religious values. Now, Kabud Kamal is located near the pasture above the village and Khaja Abdal is in the village.

Among the natural objects, some trees, particularly Christmas trees, are also regarded as sacred objects in some places of this region. The Christmas trees often grow up in the mountains and symbolised purity for the local people. In the village Roshorv in Bartang, for example, a Christmas tree is venerated as a sacred site. The residents of Roshorv say that in the past when they took their cattle and sheep to pasture, they organized the *khudai* ritual food next to this tree. They performed prayer and asked from this pure place to protect their cattle and sheep.

A similar story is associated with the sacred site Pīr-i Parvazi in the village Yakhshwol in Ishkashim region. It is said that Pīr-i Parvazi lived together with his sister in the mountain gorge of Abkhar above the Yakhshwol village. He often travelled to the village of Barwaz in Shāhdara Valley. Some people say he could fly and flew to Barwaz, hence his name Parvazi (the one who can fly). Others say he was from Barwaz and his name is actually Barwazi. Once he travels to Barwaz, he does not return as he was before. His sister waits for him but he does not show up. Then she turns herself into the Christmas tree, which according to the people is still there. Pīr-i Parvazi returns after some time and looks for his sister in Abkhar. He sees that she has turned into the tree. Then he turns himself into a Christmas tree as well. Both of these trees are still located in the Abkhar in the pasture, and people visit them when they take their livestock there.

These kinds of sacred sites are located mostly in the pastures, near spring water and on the foot of different mountainous passes. These sacred sites are often simply called *astan* and rarely have a particular name. All the pastures, which are usually located high above the villages, have this type of sacred site. In the past, when people of the villages took their cattle to the pasture, they first sacrificed sheep, prepared and shared the ritual food next to the sacred site, and then went to the pasture. According to some of my informants, this custom was widely observed until the 1950s almost in all the villages that had animal husbandry as one of the the main activities for their subsistence. At present, the collective observance of this ritual at the sacred site before going to the pasture is not practiced. People mentioned the creation of the collective and state farms in the 1920s and 1930s as one of the main reasons for the discontinuation of this custom. However, the sacred sites are still visited by the shepherds and believed to protect them and their cattle in the pasture from evil spirits and other misfortunes.

Similarly, many water springs are considered sacred sites. The stories associated with the water springs connect their origins to the miracles worked by the saints. The major theme of these stories is about how the people of the village suffered from drought and how the saint helped them work a miracle and create the water spring.

For instance, the story associated with the sacred site Khaja Rajab in the village of Bashor in Ishkashim district has this kind of theme. In the past Bashor suffered from lack of water, and Khaja Rajab's father, Khaja Bashir, gives him his staff and sends him to the gorge above the village. His father tells him to stick the staff into the ground in a certain place and come back without looking backwards. He does as he is told and water comes to the village. People of the village tell Khaja Rajab that the water is good but not enough and he should go and stick the staff into the ground one more time. He gives up to the people's requests and does what they ask. Then a mudflow hits and destroys the village.

Another story with a similar theme is associated with the sacred site Shāh Mubarak-i Mardi Walī in the village of Shetkharv in Vakhan. This sacred site is a water spring that was worked as a miracle by Shāh Mubarak-i Walī. It is said that Shāh Mubarak visits Shetkharv and sees a man who looks very sad. The man informs him that there is no water in the village to irrigate the fields. Shāh Mubarak gives his staff to this man and tells him to go to a certain location and stick it into the ground then pull it straight out. The man does as he is told and sees that water is coming from under the staff. Then he decides to twist and turn the staff in order to make more water come out but the staff breaks and one half remains stuck on the ground. The man returns back embarrassed about breaking the staff, but Shāh Mubarak tells him that it is good that the staff broke otherwise there would have been so much water that a mudflow would destroy the village.

The sacred sites such as Shāh Mubaraki Mardi walī, Khaja Rajab in the village of Bashor and Shāh Burhan in the village of Shambiden in Ishkashim, Shāh Nasir-i Khusraw in Porshinev, Yi khiterz and Chiltan in the village of Vamd in Rushan, etc., are of this type.

The sacred sites such as water springs, trees, mountains and lakes are always kept clean and protected from any kind of pollution. As Harrison-Buck observes, this engagement of the natural objects such as stones, trees, water springs and so forth is part of the "relational ontology centered on relationships between human and 'other-than-human' agents" (Harrison-Buck 2012: 65). This is a view of the material world in which things are not reduced to mere lifeless objects but are accepted as having an immanent power. This understanding of the environment, Harrion-Buck notes, is based on a type of engagement with the environment described as a two-way conversation of a "responsive relatedness" (see Harrison-Buck 2012: 67). It is related to a different way of knowing the

world "that emphasizes one's relationship with it, which is perceived as mutually responsive changes in things in the world and at the same time in themselves" (2012: 67).

Ingold describes this animate quality of inanimate things not as a human projection of imagination onto things but rather as "the dynamic, transformative potential of the entire field of relations within which beings of all kinds, more or less person-like or thing-like, continually and reciprocally bring one another into existence" (Ingold quoted in Harrison-Buck 2012: 67).

The trees, water springs, stones and rocks that Pamiri Ismailis see as sacred sites acquire social meaning and agency in the continuous mutual relationships of humans and things. The natural phenomena provoke the imagination of people who attribute a kind of enchanted animism to them. This relationship is based on active negotiations between human and other-than-human, and therefore has the potential for disharmony and imbalance if mutual responsiveness and reciprocity is lacking (Harrison-Buck 2012: 75).

This engagement with natural objects such as sacred sites differs in some ways from Edward Tylor's elaboration of the concept of animism as the belief that an entity has a soul or animating spirit (cf. Sillar 2009: 369). Sillar observes that many people consider some or all ancestors, animals, plants, places and things to have a vital force, spirit or identity that directly affect the human world, and that these non-human "persons" deserve respectful relationships from humans (Sillar 2009: 369). Sillar points out that

According to Sillar, the material world can be conceived of as sentient without the

a large part of what Tylor was describing as animism is a very direct and personal engagement with the materiality of the natural and cultural world,... therefore, animism can be viewed as a belief in the ability of people, places and things to communicate with each other rather than Tylor's focus on the super-natural world of spirits (Sillar 2009: 369).

need attributing purely human-like qualities or "spirit" to it (Sillar 2009: 370).

Sillar focuses on the Andean people's relations with their material world and notes that the ritual offerings that Andeans observe in their relations with their fields, mountains, house and animals, promote a reciprocal commitment between these things and the people making the offerings. According to Sillar,

as with all gifts, the aim of ritual offerings is to create a tie of obligation between the animate entity and the devotee making the offering, these gifts are a material expression of an on-going commitment to care for the house, the fields and the animals that is also expressed in less overtly ritual acts such as ploughing, irrigating and planting crops (Sillar 2009: 370).

The mutual reciprocity is to some extent part of the relationship between the sacred sites and the people in Badakhshan. People pray for the souls of the deceased relatives inside or next to the sacred sites and make offerings to these places to ensure that they mediate between the people and the transcendent to grant people wishes about the well being of their families.

Based on the Andean relationship with the material world, Sillar argues that one of the main components of Andean animism is a concern over moral behaviour and social responsibility to other people and the animate world. Animism in this view is not about material entities having "spirit" or "soul," but rather it is about the material world and people being inter-dependent in social relationships. According to Sillar, "It is the personal relationship and communal commitment that we invest in specific items that gives them their agency" (Sillar 2009: 374). One can argue that most people, despite their modernist detachment from the material, have animistic tendencies. Probably, everyone has places and things that they closely relate to and sometimes treat as persons. In that sense, material agency is located in the interrelationship between people and the material world.

Conclusion

The discussions of agency are thus mainly framed as active human interaction and engagement with a social and material world. As Sillar observes,

there is no agency without individual humans, who have a distinctively active, embodied consciousness, but that equally there can be no autonomous agent, as this active consciousness can only really develop through interaction (Sillar 2009: 367).

The goal of this chapter was to show how the Ismaili people in Badakhshan construct their social relationship with the sacred sites as material entities and how through this interaction they inadvertently attribute an agency to these places. In this relationship sacred sites influence people's lives in many ways; they are believed to punish those who are not acting in a moral way, they promote good health, grant children to people suffering from problems with infertility, provide security during travel and so forth. Agency is thus located in the social interaction of people with these places.

Moreover, the stories associated with the sacred sites that people recollect in Badakhshan, as well as the behaviour of some people in these places, illustrates the way in which these material entities are co-shapers of materially mediated forms of understanding. Sacred sites evoke memory that helps people to locate their immediate surrounding within the broader Islamic imaginary. There are many stories about Imāms and other saints who some people believe visited this region, some of whom are buried there. In this way people sanctify and appropriate space through their social and cultural interaction with the environment.

The material qualities of the sacred sites have probably also influenced people's relations with these places. That is, some of the sacred sites have unusual qualities such as spring water in dry land or a tree of unusual shape, which provoke people to attach

memories to these sites. As material things in the environment, sacred sites mediate aspects of people's worldview, and influence and shape the meanings people attribute to their landscape.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

In this study, I examined the social, cultural and historical significance of the sacred sites of the Ismailis of Badakhshan region. I approached the study of the sacred sites in Badakhshan within the theoretical framework related to the concepts of space and place. Drawing on Bakhtin's concept of chronotope, I demonstrated that sacred sites evoke a particular understanding of and relationship to the space and place, which is beyond the materialist and historiographical approaches to the relationship of humans and their inhabited environment. I showed how people understand and articulate space and place in relation to the sacred.

To view sacred sites as chronotopes helps us to locate the narratives about the miracles of the saints and the stories about the Soviet and post-Soviet experiences associated with these places within a single conceptual framework, which shows the ways in which they affect and shape people's perception and understanding of particular spaces and places. In that sense, sacred sites are enchanted places where the presence of the supernatural in the inhabited places of people is validated. Through the chronotope (time and space) of the sacred sites, many things that are otherwise regarded as incredible become possible; mountains are cut into halves, water springs are created in dry lands, forts are destroyed by a single person, great distances are travelled in an instant and so forth. The material things in the inhabited environment serve as evidence for the occurrence of these events. The time of these events, in a historical sense, is unidentified.

Similarly, the sacred sites are chronotopes of the social memory about the recent Soviet past of the community. Although these chronotopic narratives are about the recent Soviet past, they are set in the sacred context; that is, there is divine presence or intervention in the contents of these narratives. In these retrospective narratives, people allocate responsibility for the destruction of these places to some of the individuals in their community. In these stories people who are involved in the campaign against these sites or responsible for desecrating them are punished by these places. On the other hand, these places also grant people's wishes. People often visit sacred sites after the death of a family member, or serious sickness in the family, or when someone suffers from childlessness and so forth. In these places, people seek the power to help them resolve the situation that they cannot resolve through their own agency. Thus, through these stories, people unconsciously attribute a certain form of agency to these places. This agency is relational and emerges in the relationship of people and the sacred sites. In this view, spaces and places are filled with supernatural power, which influences many aspects of human life. Particularly, when people are faced with a loss of agency in their social life they seek the power of these places to restore it. Sacred sites are thus compound chronotopes that "contain" and evoke both the sacred legends as well as memories of the recent historical experience and the current discourses about the status of these sites in the present. These are also places where wants, hopes and desperations are expressed, and through the agency of these places are ultimately dealt with.

The sacred sites have been contested places, and as some of the discourses surrounding these places show, people interpret them in different ways. The current discourses often revolve around the issues of the loss of the divine blessing *baraka* at the sacred sites. Some informants pointed out that in the present time the Imām is accessible *ashkar* and there is no need for any form of mediation such as sacred sites. At any rate, the contestation of these places mostly remains at the level of discourse. As the example

of Davlatqadam in chapter three demonstrates, in some cases the individuals who express their opposing opinion about the veneration of the sacred sites sometimes behave differently in practice.

The present contestations of the sacred sites are similar in some cases to the retrospective narratives about these places during the Soviet anti-religious campaign. The present discourses associated with sacred sites and other religious traditions of the Ismailis of Badakhshan are in some ways connected with the broader social and political transformations that happened in the last two decades. The implicit assumption behind these discourses is that current processes threaten the "authenticity" of local tradition and their communal identity. The general uncertainties brought about by the collapse of the Soviet Union and other global processes in recent decades enhanced these anxieties to some extent. The present discourses as well as the narratives about the Soviet past, in addition to the legends about the saints, constitute part of the chronotopes of the sacred sites and are evoked through the medium of these places.

Sacred sites are associated with the saints, who are in many cases believed to come to this region from other areas of the Muslim World. Pamiri Ismailis view some of these saints as the founders of the local religious tradition, and some of the local families trace their sacred lineages to them. In this sense, the study of the sacred sites contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the Islamic religious practices of the Pamiri Ismailis in the Badakhshan region.

The stories about 'Alī's battle with the local kings, associated with a number of sacred sites, show how some people view the origin of Islam in their region, and how they understand and attribute meanings to their environment. Through these types of

stories, some people see the ruins of the ancient forts as evidence of the battle of 'Alī and the pre-Islamic kings, and the superhuman powers of 'Alī. The different variants of the story integrate other places to its plot. Many other places in the region are associated with 'Ali, where the traces of his sword *zulfiqar* or his horse *dul-dul's* hoofs are believed to be imprinted on the stones and rocks and venerated as sacred sites. Other places such as the hot water spring are linked to 'Ali's wife and the prophet's daughter Fātima al-Zahrā', sacred sites associated with their sons Imām al-Hasan and Imām al-Husayn, and with other Imāms such as Imām Zayn al-Ābidīn , Imām Muhammad al-Baqir and Imām al-Mustansir bi'llāh, which also show how people imagine and articulate the connection between their inhabited places and their Islamic/Ismaili religious belief. The same point is relevant to the other sacred sites associated with other saints such as Nasir-i Khusraw. People interpret the natural features of the environment as the miracles (*karamat*) worked by Nasir-i Khusraw and other saints.

Yet, the stories associated with the sacred sites are not narratives that have historical "facts." Rather, they reflect local worldviews and the ways people find certain places in their surroundings meaningful. People differ in their opinions about these stories and whether or not 'Alī or other historical figures actually visited this region. Obviously, in the villages and towns of Badakhshan, not everyone knows the legends and stories associated with the sacred sites; it is often the people over their 50s and 60s who have the most elaborate knowledge about these places. In many cases people view this as an important part of religious knowledge. In the interviews with some of the *khalīfas* (religious leaders) in Khorog and in the villages, most of them tried to show that they know some of the stories of the more popular sacred sites and in most cases did not

dismiss it as an unimportant aspect of local religious practice. In my inquiries about the sacred sites, people often tried to refer me to those people in their villages who they believed have the best knowledge about these places. Some of these stories also have written versions in the manuscripts and were probably written by local authors at some point in time. Sacred sites thus constitute an important aspect of the local religious tradition that shows the ways in which people attribute meanings to their social and natural environment, and articulate these meanings within the framework of their Ismaili Muslim faith. Through the stories associated with the sacred sites, the natural surrounding becomes animated and appropriated as part of their social and cultural world.

Appendix A: Samples of the stories associated with sacred sites as narrated by some of my informants

1. I heard from elders that long ago two brothers, Qakhqaha in Namadgut and Zangibar in Yamchun - ruled the Wakhan. They had two sisters: Zulhasham who lived on the left bank of the Panj [present Afghanistan], and Zulkhomor. Bībī Fātima al-Zahrā arrived at the gate of the fort. A guard from the fortress shot an arrow towards her. Bībī Fātima al-Zahrā grasped the arrow and threw it back at the guard and wounded him. Bībī Fātima al-Zahrā told the guard to call his master. He replied that he was sleeping, but she insisted on talking to Zangibar. Finally, Zangibar heard the uproar and came out. Bībī Fātima al-Zahrā said that the country was now hers. Hazrat 'Alī defeated Qakhqaha in Namadgut and rode to Yamchun on Sumbi Duldul to attack Zangibar. 'Alī entered the fortress, and when Zangibar heard 'Alī shout for him, he jumped on his horse and fled as fast as he could. In his flight, Zangibar knocked his head against a low-hanging tree branch and died. 'Alī killed some of Zangibar's soldiers with Zulfiqar and the rest ran away in panic. After this, 'Alī wanted to clean his sword and stuck it in the ground – just then hot water gushed out from the hole. Bībī Fātima al-Zahrā then came to the bank of the spring and unfolded her sleeves to wash them. From this time, the hot medicinal water in Yamchun is known as the Bībī Fātima al-Zahrā spring. People with different diseases come to this spring and get treatment: it is said that women who cannot have children come there to pray that they may have a family.

2. You probably heard about Suman-qul [*qul* means lake]. Long time ago there was no lake there but in its place was a kingdom that was ruled by a *kafir* king. A man was working for this king in his court. This man had two daughters. One was named Gul and the other Rano. They both were extremely beautiful. The king liked them very much and looked for the ways to take them away from their father. The king lent a lot of money to their father who ran into debts. Then the king demanded his money back but the money was so great that the poor man could not pay it back. In the end the king took the daughters of this man as security until he can repay his debt. The man was in despair. Then in his dream he had a vision that he had to visit a certain individual in a certain country. This man traveled and visited *murtuzo* 'Alī and begged for help. 'Alī said that I don't have much money but lead me to the court of this king and sell me to this king. I will fulfill all his conditions and free your daughters. Then 'Alī fulfilled the three conditions that the *kafir* king asked in order to free the man's daughters. The first condition was to bring the skin of the dragon (*azhdahor*), the second condition was to built a water canal, the third condition was to bring two lions from the wild. 'Alī fulfilled all these three conditions. Then the king announced the fourth condition which is to bring the head of 'Alī. At that moment 'Alī revealed his identity and with *zulfiqar* destroyed the king and his kingdom and freed the man's daughters. The kingdom was flooded and now it is called Sumanqul.

3. In the valley Khuf there are a number of sacred sites (*ziyaratgahs*). One of them is Teghi Barahnagon. Teghi Barahnagon refers to *zulfiqar* [*Tegh* lit. means blade]. If anyone makes wishes in this place it will cut all their troubles because it is 'Alī's sword. The legend has it that since the ancient time a huge devil (*dev*) lived in the Khuf valley. People here called this devil Khager. There is a mountain that we call Khager, where the sign of this devil is still present. This devil was eating two-three people every day. People were in despair because of him. Then a man mounted on horse passed through Khuf. He was 'Alī. 'Alī cut the devil into three pieces with zulfiqar and these three pieces of the devil body turned into these mounds. We celebrate religious festivals in this place.

4. [So akai Saidsho did Imām Muhammad al-Baqir physically stayed in this astan?] There are no written historical sources about this astan. I heard from my farther and grandfather that Mizrobsho a man from Suchan (*az dev Khitson shaen*) had more information about this astan. His son Sherjon told us that Imām Muhammad al-Baqir had long time ago resided in this place. Abu-Muslim travelled from Khurasan to Ghund valley. Before becoming the leader of the Abbasid revolution, he had a dream vision that he has to have an audience (*didar*) with the Imām Muhammad al-Baqir in his residence and will receive the leadership of the revolution from him (*sahib khuruji 72-um ta sawi.*, lit., you will become a leader of the revolution of the seventy two). Then you will fight and defeat Marwan and other *kafirs*. Abu-Muslim's name at that time was Abdurahman. This was a time when Marwan launched a severe persecution of those who

followed our religion (mash din) and anyone who uttered the name of 'Alī was immediately blinded and thrown into the desert kali sangibon. Abdurahman's parents also were caught by Marwan's people and accused of uttering the name of 'Alī. They were blinded and thrown into that desert. In that desert there were seventy-two blind people, including Abdurahman's parents. Abdurahman was taking care of these blind people. As the desert was very dry, without any water, Abdurahman brought water from the far wells and sold it to the merchants who crossed through this desert. Then he went to the city and bought food for the blind people on that money. After his dream vision he was instructed to take the blind people to their homes and go and visit the Imām. He travelled great distance and passed through Khogand, Osh, Murgab, Alichur and arrived at Badchor. In the village of Badchor he stayed overnight in the house of a man named Mirsalim. He asked Mirsalim where is the residence of the Imām Muhammad al-Baqir. Mirsalim told him that you have to go to Sardem and then cross the bridge to the village Ghundak. Abdurahman crossed the bridge in the village Patkhor and saw a man named Bobo Ghundi who was plowing his field with the oxen. He was hungry and asked the man if he has any food. Bobo Ghundi told him to hold the oxen while he can go home and bring him some food. Abdurahman leaned on plowing staff and it together with the oxen sunk into the land...[that's how powerful he was]. The man came back and Abdurahman told him the reason of his travel and asked how to reach the Imām's place. Bobo Ghundi told him to pass through the villages and in a certain place you will find it. He spent a night at this man's house and in the morning went to visit the Imām Muhammad al-Bagir. The astan Imām Muhammad al-Bagir that we have now was not the actual residence of the Imām. This is a place Imām rested. Imām's place was on the mountain Lamlon (kuhi Lamlon) that is over there above Shah Ghayosiddin's house. This mountain is very colorful and has red, yellow, green and other colors. The hunters (ghevdojen) know this place. The hunter Buik said there is a spring with crystal clean water there nearby of which the Imām resided. At the time of Abdurahman's travel, the way to this mountain was blocked by a huge dragon (azhdahor) and it was impossible to climb there. The dragon did not allow Abdurahman to go any further and he sat down under a stone in despair and cried that the audience (didar) with the Imam was not granted to him. Then he fell asleep and had a vision of a man who instructed him to get up and take the bow that was brought from the unseen (az ghayb) and shoot the arrows with the following utterances: In the name of Shāhi Mardon, and beware I am amir Abu-Muslim the leader of the revolt of seventy two (sohibkhuruji 72yum). Then the road will be open for you. When he woke up he saw that a bow was next to him. He did as he was instructed in his dream vision (khobi khayoland). When he finished shooting the arrows a sandstorm arose and darkness fall all around him and when it all settled he saw that the dragon was not there anymore. At last he was able to proceed and meet the Imām. He stayed three days at the Imām's court, had an audience with the Imām (didar wird muyassar sut) and was granted the leadership of the revolt. Sherjon told us this in details but I forgot most of it. Then the pahlavonen (powerful men) MizrobShāh Jahongir and Ahmadi Yamchi joined him. They started their war with Marwan and killed all the kafirs (unbelievers).

Some time passed and a man on horseback appeared in this place where now we have the astan. He told the people that whenever any hardships fall upon you, choose two or three older men among you and let them come to the front of this cave and say *azan* [Muslim call for prayer] and I will come out to assist you. Disbelief has existed in all times. Two-three years passed and some people became anxious and wanted to test if the man on horse told them the truth. They wanted to test it and several old men came to the cave and called him. Suddenly, a man on horseback appeared and rode his horse first towards the Lamlon Mountain (towards Duzakhdara) and saw that nothing was happening; then he turned his horse towards Sumbi Duldul [name of an astan in village of Wer in Ghund valley]. After that he returned to the cave and said to the people "You are Ghund apostates; you do not trust in God. Sometimes gathered and sometimes scattered sometimes populated/prospered and sometimes ruined". This part of Ghund valley from that time was cursed

5. Shāhi Isomiddin's (or Somiddin) *astan* is the greatest in our village. These were four *qalandars* [saints]. They arrived from Khurosan. These four holy persons Shāh Qambari Oftob, Shāhi Somidin, Shāh Muboraki Wali, and Shāh Burhon travelled to our region. On their way they visited a house that belonged to the *hokim* [ruler] of a region. When they entered that house a woman there was washing her hair. The moment she saw them she began to complain that these *qalandars* always wonder around and disturb people's quite with their visits that one cannot even wash their hair in quiet because of them. The *qalandars* upon hearing this got out of this house. The woman turned her head into the left and could not move it anymore. Her neck remained paralyzed. Then her husband returned saw her in this condition and asked what happened. She explained that four *qalandars* were here, she didn't welcome them properly and when

they left she turned her head to the left and cannot move it now. Her husband went after them and brought them back to the house. He apologized to them and treated them as honorable guests. Then they told him that you are *hokim* we don't need any money or possessions from you but we want your youngest son to accompany us. The hokim gave them his youngest son. As he [the son of hokim] was very pale, Shāh Isomidin named him Oizil. Then they travelled long distance, perform a lot of miracles [mujizahoi zivod nishon medihand], and through China they arrive to the icy mountain pass, which is now called Qizilrabot. It was extremely cold there and Qizil was freezing. Shāh Isomidin saw that Qizil is feeling cold and ordered him to take two pieces of ice and blow on them. Oizil did as was ordered and the ice turned into fire and it instantly became worm. All the ice on that mountain pass was burned. The colour of that mountain is still red to the present day. Then they arrived to Chiltoq a place on the hill in our village. A hokim of that place had a daughter who was handicapped and could not stand up or walk. They visit this hokim and after learning that his daughter was ill, Shāhi Som [reference to Shāhi Isomidin] asked the girl to fetch them water, as they were thirsty. This girl said that she could not walk but Shah Isomiddin ordered her to stand up. Then she stood up and found that she was cured and could walk. Her parents were astonished. The hokim told them that everything that I have is now yours. Tell me what you wish and I will give it to you. They said that they wanted his daughter to accompany them. They married this girl to Qizil. Qizil's and this girl's descendants (avlodon) still exist to the present. Shah Isomidin stayed in our village and Oizil stayed with him as his servant. Qizil was travelling to Shāhdara and back. One day Shāh Isomidin departed (joma memonad lit. left his robe) that is died ostensibly. He was buried. People were crying and were grieving greatly. Qizil at that time was visiting Shahdara and was not aware of his departure. On his way back from Shāhdara Qizil met Shāh Isomidin. He told Qizil that you provided a great service to me and I have a request for one last service from you. If people ask you about me don't tell them that you saw me, as they would cry and grieve greatly again. You try to calm people down. When Qizil arrived and people saw him they began to cry and grieve for the death of Shāh Isomidin. Then Qizil could not keep it anymore and told them that you people are out of your mind he died but never dies (vay memuradu hej goh namemurad). He changes one robe for another (az yak joma ba jomai digar meguzarad). I saw him recently. People didn't believe Qizil and opened his grave. His body was not there. When Qizil got home he saw Shah Isomidin there and he told him that you revealed my secret and disobeyed my order. Death at young age will be your curse (javonmarg shavi). Members of this family (hamon qawm) to the present day die at the young age around 39-40. Now some of them live till the old age because they mixed great deal with people from other places and countries. But most of them, for one or another reasons, die at the age of 40. This is all I know about this astan.

6. Once upon a time a powerful king lived in this area. He had a daughter, and his daughter had forty maids. This king had a beautiful garden with a lake. His daughter and her maids spent most of their time in the garden near this lake. Another king ruled over a kingdom where a *shaykh* (a saint) whose name was Mansur lived. This king believed that after death the physical body of human being will be brought to life again in the grave, and will be interrogated about everything this person had done in his worldly life. If he did good deeds during his life, he will be taken to the paradise and if he did evil deeds he will be taken to the hell. Mansur heard this and said: "go and tell the king that human body will not be brought to life again in the grave rather his soul either returns to or fails to return to its beloved and the body after death becomes nothing but matter". The king in response said that the sheikh is lying. The king told the shaykh that if what you are saying is true, and you can prove it, I would give you my entire kingdom, and if you are wrong I will order to cut your head off. The sheikh agreed and said that we will put a handful of millet on the chest of somebody who dies next. Then we will open his grave next day to see if the millet is scattered over or remained on the body. If it is spread all over his body it means you are right and his body was brought to life and interrogated, and if we find it intact that would mean I'm right. Few days later, a person died and they buried him leaving on his chest a handful of millet. Then at night Mansur received a revelation in his dream that it was wrong to convince them that physical bodies are not brought to life again in the grave as these people were only scared from this (meaning from the suffering of physical body). Mansur got up at night and opened the grave and scattered the millet from the chest of the dead all over his grave. The next morning, when they opened the grave they saw that the millet was scattered all over the grave. They concluded that whatever the king said was right. The king ordered to bring wood from the forest and burn the sheikh. And when Mansur was on fire he continued saying haqqi Mawlo (Mawlo is Truth). He was remembering Mawlo. Even when Mansur's body turned into ashes, his ashes were

repeating the Truth haqq. The king ordered to throw the ashes into the river. When the ashes were thrown into the river they turned into foam and this foam also continued repeating *haqq*. The other neighboring king with beautiful garden and a lake had dug a canal from this river to feed his lake. And this foam from that river got into the lake of that king via this canal. One Friday, the king's daughter together with her maids came to the lake to swim. They saw that the foam in the lake was repeating haga. The king's daughter touched the foam and put her hand into her mouth. Her forty maids also did the same and all of them got pregnant. After some time the king was informed that his daughter was pregnant without marriage. The viziers asked what they should do. They proposed various ways in which to punish the king's daughter and her maids. An old man said to the king: "O king of the world did you ask your daughter how she got pregnant?". The king said: "No I did not". And the old man said that you should first ask your daughter about how it happened to her and then after finding out what happened you will arrive at the correct judgment. The king asked his daughter how she got pregnant. She replied that I did not do anything wrong. We went to the pool one day and saw ashes, which were saying hagq, and we touched it and put our hands into our mouths and became pregnant. The king after hearing this did not kill them and locked them up and put guards next to the door. The king daughter and her maids gave birth to forty babies; the right side of these babies' faces were shining like a sun and the left side were shining like a moon. The guards conveyed this news to the king. The king kissed the children; these children were chiltan and their *qadamgah* is in here. This *astan* is their *qadamgah*. This was the history of chiltan"...

7.Khoji Kamol was a servant to pir Shahzoda Husayn. In the past, pirs collected the religious dues from people and sent them to the Imam. They collected money and things from people then converted some of it into gold and took it to Imām's court. Khoji Kamol from early childhood had a very strong love for the Imām. When his pir and some of his followers set on pilgrimage to the Imām's court Khoji Kamol asked if he could accompany them too. They declined his request and told him that his mother was alone and he had to help her with the household chores. This, they told him, will be great service to the Imām on your part. He finished all the work, which he was supposed to do within forty days, in a few days. Then asked the permission of his mother to set on pilgrimage to the Imām's court. He reached Bombay (a place of residence of the 49th Imām Sultan Muhammad Shāh) forty days before his pir and other pilgrims arrived. He was blessed to have the audience (*didar*) with the Imām. He was also given a duty to distribute a bowl full of golden coins to the orphans and poor every Friday. One day, Imām asked him to take some food and meet his fellow villagers together with his pir in a certain plain. He met them. The pir asked him why you didn't listen to me when I told you to stay with your mother. Kamol said that he finished all the work he was supposed to do and after asking the permission of his mother set on the pilgrimage to Imām's court. He told his pir that he has been already serving the Imām in his court for forty days now. Kamol staved there for many years. His father back at home missed him and came to Bombay to visit him. In Bombay his father heard that Kamol according was distributing golden coins to orphans and poor every Friday at a certain place. His father got up early in the morning on Friday and went to that place to meet his son. The father and the son met and were very happy and talked for some time. Then his father asked if he could give some golden coins to him as well as he didn't have much money. Kamol for a moment thought that it was not right, as Imām might not be happy about this. On the other hand he didn't want his father to be upset. Then he decided to give some coins to his father. But when he distributed the rest of the money to the orphans and poor there was not enough to give to everyone. Then he came back to the court and said there was not enough gold to give to everyone. He was given another bowl of golden coins but this was not enough as well. Kamol thinking that Mawlo was unhappy with him became mentally ill and returned home. Mawlo sent a decree (farman) after Kamol returned in which he stated that those who respect Mawlo should respect Kamol even if he is mentally ill. One day Kamol entered his neighbor's house without any clothes on and the husband of a woman who lived in that house suspected Kamol of indecent behavior. When Kamol got out of this house this man got terminally ill. Only after Kamol prayed over him he was cured. Kamol passed away after some time and people brought him to this place where is his astan now. His body disappeared there. Only his well-worn robe remained there. This was ten years before the revolution....

Appendix B: The names and locations of the sacred sites in Rushan, Shughan, Roshtqala and Ishkashim districts of Badakhshan

RUSHAN DISTRICT Village Shujand Pīr Shāh Nosir Khoja Abdol Kabud Kamol (in the pasture) Village Shipat Shaykhsalol Chiltan Village Deh (or Dehrushon) Safedastan Pīr-i chiltan Pīr-i Naychikhuf (in the pasture) Village Vaznavd Hazrat-i Shāh (attributed to Nasir-i Khusraw) Shāhiskandar? Village Khidz Kuhnapush Shaykhmurod Pīroni Sarob Village Vamd Qadamgahi Hazrati Mawlono 'Alī (also called Chiltan spring water) Qadamgah Shāh Nosir Khusraw Astan Khoja Hamdin (a companion of Nasir-i Khusraw) Kargah Astan Mavlono Sulton (also called Hazrati Dovud or Khotuni Qiyomat) Sabzpush Astan Pīri Yikhidorj Astan Pīri Naychikhuf (spring water) Village Derrushon

Astan Tikai Shāh Husavn Pīri Yikhiterz (spring water) Pīri Shāh Nosir (situated between Derrushon and Vamd) Hazrati Dovudho, Pīri Chiltan Pīri Naychikhuf Village Barrushon Pīri Shāhnosir Hazrati Dovud, Panjai Shāh (also called Shāh Abdulloh) Chiltan, (the story about Mansur al-Hallāj associated with this site) Astani Zaynul'obiddin Marqadi Hoji Kamol Hasani Yakdasta Jamoatkhana Imām? (also called Mazorak, associated with Shāhi Koshon?) Astan-i Damyogah Hoii GhulomShāh Village Derzud Ziyoratgohi Bobo Alisho, Panjai Shāh Chashmai Pīri Shāh Nosir Shāh Talib Village Barzud Panjai Shāh Sabzpush Bobo AliShāh Jamoatkhana Pīr Shāhnosir Hazrati Dowud? Administrative centre Vomar

Shāh Talibi Sarmast Gulkhani Saidialol Shāhi Mardon Takkai Shāh Husayn Pīri Tojdoron Village Bajui Bolo Povi Khoja Khojai Nekbakht (most visited) Pīri Mutmand Shāhi Safdar Sulton Haydar Pīri Mehrubon Pīri Tanob (in the pasture) Jamoatkhana Hazrati Dowud (Kargah far from village) Village Pastkhuf Sunbi Duldul Bobo AliShāh (also called Shāh 'Alī Shāh) Astan al-Mustansir bi 'llāh (established by Nasir-i Khusraw in the honour of al-Mustansir bi'llāh) Teghi Barahnagon Shāhburhon and Khojaburkhon Jamoatkhana Khaymasang Bobulay-i Sipunjij

BARTANG VALLEY Village Rukhsh

Shāh Husayni wali Village Ravmed Nirv Village Pasor Khojai Alamdor Village Roshorv Shāhusayn

Borkhaghidz ShāhTalib Hujjatgoh Hazrati Dovud Khuja Khavoz Zilzilakhotun Astan Indirim Village Basid Guli Khandon Boboi Khandon Farman zhuv Khojai Nuridin Village Devlokh Safdaron Zhuv? **Village Savnob** Khojai Khizr Hozirbogh Altinmazor Village Nisur Shāhnosir, Shāhhusayn Borkhats Hazrati Dowud Village Ghudara Khojai Alamdor (the major astan) Pīri Sarob Khojai Nurridin, Mushkilkusho, ShāhTalib Village Miyonapond Vorkhichih Khuchinior **Village Barchadiv** Shāh Nosir Khukhchinor Savzmazor Village Darzhomch Khoja Nabi (in the pasture) Village Siponj Bobo AliShāh Village Razuj Takbirgoh Shāh Hasan (Ali)

Khojai Nuriddin Village Bardara Farman Sumbi Dul dul Khoja Attor Jarjis Langar (in the pasture) Village Khijez Pīr Shāh Nasir Kargah Village Emts Mushkilkusho Pīri Guf Pīri Surkhruy

ROSHTQALA DISTRICT Village Bithiz Foqmamadi Parvozi Village Tusyon Shāh Burhon Village Tavdem Sayidjalol-i Bukhoroi **Village Bathom** Pīr Foqmamad Pīri zur Roshtgala administrative centre Shāhi Tirandoz Village Sizhd Khoja Abdol

ISHKASHIM DISTRICT Village Baghush Tughi Imām Husain va Imām Hasan Pīroni Rahdor Sherghulom Sabzpush Village Qozideh Khoja Bashir (Father of Khoja Rajab) Hazrati Dowut (Kargah) Village Shambedeh

Shāh Burhon (spring water) Derhujir va Bohujir (in the pasture) Zedunjir va Bogijir khoharon (in the pasture) Village Kuhi La'l Takhti Sulaymon (qadamgah), Pīri Fokmamad (qadamgah) Shexbek Balogardon Village Siz Khojai La'l Village Andarob Puri Shāh (mazor) Khujai Chilmehrob (in the pasture) Bībī Nekzan (in the pasture) Shāh Mahdii Balogardon (in the pasture) Village Nud Pīr Foqmamadi Parvozi Khujai Mughlon Pīri Darvobon Bībī Marwori, Bībī Biryoni va Bībī Sabzpush (in the pasture) Kali Muborak (in the pasture) Village Sunjen Bībī Sabzpush Xuja Hoji Pīr Foqmamad Bobojafar **District center** Poyi Khoja Village Barshor Khoja Rajab Village Yakhshvol Pīri Parvozi (Barvozi) Hazrati Bībī Gulband

Xojai Xizr (in the pasture) Xumbi Bībī (in the pasture) VAKHAN VALLEY Village Ptup Shāhi Isomiddin (somiddin) Chiltoa Village Vichkut Pīri Foqmamad Village Shetkharv Shāh Muboraki Wali Boboi Khoki Village Darshay Pīr Foqmamad Village Toqakhana Shāhi Balandparvoz Pīri Shāh NavruzShāh Village Vudit Pīri Foqmamad Khojai Khizr Village Namadgut Shāhi Mardon Haft Kudakon (in the pasture) Bībīsabzpush Vojpivakh Khardel Poyi Khoja Village Rin Zanjiri Ka'ba (biggest in that village) Pīri Foqmamad Khushki Khushki Pok (in the pasture) Zechai Bacha

SHUGNAN DISTRICT

Ghund vallev Village Imām Imām Muhammad-i Bogir Village Wer Pīr Shāh Nosir Sumbi Dul Dul Village Khitam Pīr Shāh Nosir Poyi Khoja Khon Said Maloika Village Vibist Khojai Sabzpush Village Sizhd Shāh Burhon Bībī Zaynab (sister of Shāh Abdullohi Zayd and Balandparvoz) Shāh Malang Shāh Abdullohi Zayd Balandparvoz Sayyid Mirzo Village Ghorjvin Shāh Burhon Village Oqmamad Foqmamadi Parvozi Village Oqtayloq Panjai Shāhi Mardon Village Barsem Pīr Shāh Nosir Sumbi Dul Dul **Village Alichur** Sumbi Dul Dul Village Boghev Shāhi Wilāyat

Village Sokhcharv Astan Pīri Nutmand

(chokhandez)

Maqomgoh Khuja Solor (mazor in Afghan side in the village Saghnud) Sumbi Duldul Ghukakmazor Sabzpush Village Buni Khojai Namozgoh Poyi Khoja (has a story similar to astan Imām Bogir) Bojzhir Sabzpush ShāhTalib Khudbarovarda Village Bar Yomj Sabzpush Shāh Talib Village Barchid Pīr Shāh Nosir **Porshinev village** Kukhk Mir Said 'Alī Hamadoni (also called Dargoh) Khorog, Tem Imām Zaynullobidin Shāh Burhon Astani Zinevdara Khorog Shoshkhorog Shāh Nematullohi Wali (according to the local legend he was a son of Shāhburhon) Khorog Shamsidin Khorog Barkhorog Shāhburhoniddin Sultoni Wali (Ges)

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