

Hermann Kreutzmann

WAKHAN QUADRANGLE

Hermann Kreutzmann

WAKHAN QUADRANGLE

Exploration and espionage during and after the Great Game

2017

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

*Dedicated to Sabine Felmy and all our companions and friends
en route to the Pamirian crossroads*

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Bibliothek:

Die Deutsche Bibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation
in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie;
detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.ddb.de> abrufbar.
Bibliographic information published by Die Deutsche Bibliothek:
Die Deutsche Bibliothek lists this publication in
the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available in the
Internet at <http://dnb.ddb.de>

For further information about our publishing program please consult our
website <http://www.harrassowitz.de/verlag>

© for this edition Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden 2017

This work, including all of its parts, is protected by copyright.
Any use beyond the limits of copyright law without the permission
of the publisher is forbidden and subject to penalty. This applies
particularly to reproductions, translations, microfilms and storage
and processing in electronic systems.

Cover illustration: Thomas Edward Gordon 1876
Back cover: Map of the survey made by the Mirza in 1868–69

Editors: Anne Beck and Sabine Felmy
Photography: Hermann Kreuzmann except where dedicated otherwise
Design and typography: Hermann Kreuzmann and Harald Weller
Desktop publishing and image processing: Harald Weller
Cartography: Bernd Hilberer and Markus Hauser
Printing and binding: Memminger MedienCentrum AG, Memmingen
Printed on permanent/durable paper.

Printed in Germany · ISBN 978-3-447-10812-6

CONTENTS

- Avant-propos 7
- Travelogues from forgotten visitors 7
 - Introducing actors and interests 9
 - Narrowing down the context –
 - Munshi Abdul Rahim’s mission 10
 - Contents and comments 11
 - The immediate aftermath and long-lasting effects 11
 - Transliteration and transcription 12
 - Copyright 15
- Introduction 17
- From river source to geopolitical pivot –
 - The Great Game on the Oxus 17
 - Dominance and restructuring – 40 years that shaped Central Asia 20
 - Men on the ground – an Anglo-Russian contest 31
 - Gambling in the Great Game – a multi-tier playground 35
 - Intellectual support during the Great Game 39
 - Endgame in the Wakhan quadrangle 43
- Missions with an aim 57
- From Kashgar to Wakhan 57
 - Colonial masters depending on indigenous intermediaries – collaboration in map-making and reconnaissance 63
 - Muslim trackers in trans-frontier Central Asia 65
 - A ‘skeleton map’ 68
 - John Biddulph – commanding officer and mastermind 75
 - Mukhtar Shah and Munshi Abdul Rahim – two travellers on their way to Badakhshan 83
 - Munshi Abdul Rahim’s journey revisited – from colonial ignorance to present-day reception 89
 - Munshi Abdul Rahim’s visit at a crucial time for Wakhan and Badakhshan 99
 - Topics covered and highlighted in
 - Munshi Abdul Rahim’s report 101
 - Religion 102
 - Ceremonies on the birth of a son 102
 - Marriage ceremonies 102
 - On death 103
 - Education 103
 - Built environment 104
 - Administrative division 104
 - Agriculture 106
 - Animal husbandry 109
 - Authority and rule 109
 - Wakhan within Badakhshan 111
 - Ishkashim 113
 - Zebak 113
 - Warduj 115
 - Faizabad 116
 - On the holy mantle 117
 - Sale of slaves 118
 - Manufactures of Badakhshan 118
 - Mineral wealth and other produce 118
 - Indian goods in Badakhshan 119
 - Russian goods in Badakhshan 119
 - Bokharan goods 120
 - Goods from Qataghan and Kunduz 120
 - Products from Chitral 121
 - Artisans and craftsmen from Faizabad 121
 - Khamchán, the ancient capital 122
 - On the tribes of Badakhshán 122
 - The tribe of Hazáras 122
 - On religion 122
 - On learning 122
 - On house-building 122
 - On habits of hospitality 123
 - Habits of the inhabitants of Badakhshan 123
 - On giving and taking girls in marriage 124
 - Pride of race of the tribes 124
 - On clothing 124
 - Clothing of women 124
 - Appearance and height of men 124
 - On the men’s labour 124
 - On the women’s labour 125
 - Sickness in Badakhshan 125
 - On cattle-rearing and wealth 125
 - Numbers of population 125
 - On the climate of Badakhshan 126

- Table of descent of the Mirs of Badakhshan 128
- Detailed account of the sons of the Mirs of Badakhshan 128
- Relationship and kinsmanship of the Mirs of Badakhshan 128
- Place of flight or refuge of the Mirs of Badakhshan 129
- Dependence of the Mir of Shughnan on Badakhshan 131
- History of Badakhshan 132
- Ancient revenue at the time of the Chughtai Kings and others 132
- The expenditure of the Mir on his house and army 132
- Habits of the Mir 132
- People of rank 132
- On the treatment of guests and vakils by the Mir 133
- Account of two or three generations of the Mirs of Qataghan 133
- Route descriptions 135
- General remarks on the Yarkhun Valley 142
- Comment on the narrative 143

- Journey to Badakhshan
with report to Badakhshan and Wakhan
by Munshi Abdul Rahim 151

- Sequel 191
 - Wakhan and its heritage in multi-local situations 191
 - Exodus of Mir Ali Mardan Shah 193
 - Options for returning to Wakhan 195
 - Wakhan divided – people on the move 197
 - Community division along the Panj 199

- The fate and future of the *pīr* 202
- Routes across the Hindukush, Pamirs, Karakoram and Himalaya 205
- The Wakhan quadrangle in transition – links between Afghanistan, British India and Kashgaria 207
- Chitral-Wakhan route – nexus with trade from Badakhshan 208
- Separate infrastructures – roads to development 213
- Contemporary life in Badakhshan 219
- Faizabad – the urban centre 221
- Adaptation in new abodes – mobility, migration and integration 227
- Rajon Ishkashim 227
- Sarikol 231
- Gojal 233
- Cross-boundary communication and exchange 236
- Strategic importance today 238

- Postscript 243
 - The fate of indigenous intermediaries 243
 - Exploration and intelligence collection in the Wakhan quadrangle – yesterday and today 247
 - Anthropological, botanical and geographical exploration 253

- Glossary 259
 - Pronunciation 265

- Bibliography 266
 - Archival collections 266
 - Published sources 268
 - Map bibliography 276

- Index 279



From the oasis of Baharak supplies are brought to the herders on Shewa Pamir. The two men have reached Sar-e Bom Darra (3,200 m); the Hindukush mountain range is visible in the background. The photograph was taken on 16 July 2009

Avant-propos

TRAVELOGUES FROM FORGOTTEN VISITORS

Over centuries travellers have been the main producers of spatial knowledge about new destinations; especially in areas where their numbers were only few, some have reached the status of highly respected pioneers without any competitors of equal standing. Certain names have represented the canon of geographical knowledge. For a long time Central Asia has functioned as an interface between densely populated areas such as China, India, Persia and Europe; the remote deserts, mountains and steppes had to be crossed in order to connect fertile oases, pulsating cities and networks of roads. Archaeological and geographical expeditions focused on retracing the flow of innovations and inventions and tracking the dissemination of material goods and knowledge along the ancient silk routes. Over time it became obvious that no single lines channelled these exchanges, but that a web of paths and routes enabled the crossing of deserts and mountains by caravans, expeditions and individuals on their way to better-known destinations. The lands in between ap-

peared as areas of ambiguity, as lost horizons, and as places of mystery. Just to mention one example: until a systematic ground-check materialised, the notion prevailed of a hidden kingdom and a fabulous mountain system by the name of Bolor. To proceed further into unknown territories motivated enterprising travellers in their search for lost places and 'blank spots'. The Pamirian crossroads appeared to be such hostile areas where physical challenges, poor infrastructure and political insecurity met.¹ The Bolor mystery was never solved and vanished completely when the territories where Bolor had supposedly been hidden became known. When Carl Zimmermann compiled his map of Inner Asia in 1841, it appeared to sum up the conventional knowledge of learned circles of its time. The map was produced to illustrate Carl Ritter's monumental work on geography, in particular volume three, in which the transition from Eastern to Western Asia was discussed.² Carl Ritter's perception of Asia influenced the thinking of many leading geographers of their time who attended his lectures including Alexander von Humboldt, Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen, Carl von Clausewitz, Elisée Reclus, Arnold Henri Guyot, Pyotr Petrovich Semyonov.³ There was ample space for specu-



*The Wakhan quadrangle shows the four corners, directions and sources of political interference in local affairs before, during and after the Great Game. The major colonial players were Great Britain and Russia whereas China was comparatively weak. Wakhan's strongest relations were to Badakhshan and subsequently to Afghanistan. The Amir of Afghanistan gained the major territorial portion of Wakhan as a result of boundary-making while the northern portion was dominated by Bokhara and Russia; nowadays it is part of Gorno-Badakhshan within Tajikistan (see Hermann Kreutzmann 2015a: 205–293).
Design by Hermann Kreutzmann*

lation about Bolor, and the placement of Badakhshan and Wakhan seems rather arbitrary, but rumours and tales were linked to the Pamirian interface.⁴ It was the early phase of a period when overall interest in the crossroads led to significant political changes.

The Wakhan quadrangle gained in attention when particular spheres of influence were expanded from areas such as Afghanistan, Qataghan, Fergana, Kashgaria and Kashmir – with centres of power in Kabul, Kunduz, Qoqand, Kashgar, and Srinagar – into their respective peripheries. Locating places and knowing the power structures in remote spaces started to become an endeavour of geographical exploration. Resources, routes, and rule in the Wakhan quadrangle entered the focus of geographical knowledge production that became closely related to political scheming and strategic considerations.

Later on, China, Russia and Great Britain directed their interests towards the Pamirian crossroads as mighty powers tended to override regional interests or to create dependency through loyalty agreements. The Great Game is mainly perceived as a power-related competition between Tsarist Russia and Great Britain over control and dominance in Afghanistan, Central Asia and India. The outcome succeeded in averting confrontation between the mighty powers, no heavy losses were involved on their sides, but failed to respect regional sovereignty and local interests. Significant numbers of residents in the Wakhan quadrangle became refugees or migrants that had to give up their villages or nomads that were forced to evacuate former grazing grounds.

Asymmetric power relations are reflected in the outcome of the gamble; the same applies to the perception of actors. Their functions and roles have been assessed and rated according to their position in the imperial setup. The widely known and advertised heroes originated solely from Europe. Their stories have been told many times.⁵ Yet many more people were involved in various functions and disguises, such as geopolitical players and religious pilgrims, subalterns in colonial hierarchies and service providers in imperial endeavours, knowledgeable path-finders and competent translators for individual travellers and missions, gossip-collecting newswriters, clandestine spies and secret missionaries, enterprising merchants and profit-seeking traders, trained intelligence officers and surveying assistants for map-makers, trusted companions and extraordinary sources of inherited knowledge, local historians and storytellers. The list could be prolonged even further, for many protag-

onists have been forgotten, ignored or neglected, such as local residents, bazaar dwellers and transport providers. The personalities concerned fulfilled different duties and served a variety of expectations.

Grouping their diverse contributions, we may distinguish between 'political' and 'non-political', as their clients did in elaborated confidential abstracts and synopses. A most obvious and revealing presentation of a report divided into these two rubrics is the account by Mukhtar Shah in the 'Secret and confidential reports of Trans-Himalayan explorations in Badakhshān', published with a preceding comment and synopsis by the Deputy Superintendent of the Survey of India Colonel Henry Charles Baskerville Tanner.⁶ Individuals could contribute to both rubrics in their reports; the processors of information in the survey offices and intelligence branches decided whether the narrations should be considered and assessed their relevance for their respective interests. Most of the information collected by Mukhtar Shah was termed 'non-political'; sometimes it was augmented by 'political' information that originated from an account by Munshi Abdul Rahim, the origin of which is not further specified in this source.⁷

In order to give appropriate attention to this valuable source, the entire report by Munshi Abdul Rahim is presented here. The narrator, who is titled *munshī* or scribe, served the British Raj as a 'political' traveller to Badakhshan and Wakhan. On the basis of his discoveries, interviews and observations, he prepared an extensive account about his winter journey towards the Wakhan quadrangle in 1879 to 1880 for the Foreign Office, where it was printed five years later in an English translation. His report was widely ignored, neglected or kept secret; the few bits and pieces that have been reproduced appear mainly in the 'political' rubric. Other colleagues who served similar purposes are better known and their findings and stories have received more attention. Munshi Abdul Rahim is definitely one of the forgotten explorers of the Wakhan quadrangle, but his report deserves due attention. It is an extraordinary communiqué in many respects, offering information and insights about hardships and dependencies, local chronologies and genealogies in contrast to those official reports which offer topographical placements and route descriptions that solely served military demands and strategic interests. We do not know much about the personality, upbringing, professional background and even origin of the author, but we are acquainted with the clients who commis-



The 'Map of Afghanistan, and the adjacent countries' was published under the auspices of the directors of the East India Company. It shows Kunduz and Badakhshan as two little-known principalities north of the Hindukush. The map provides more detailed information about the Afghan territories and Kashmir. It was released two years before the East India Company ceded 'hilly or mountainous country' to the Maharaja of Kashmir in the Treaty of Amritsar (Charles Umpherston Aitchison 1909, XI: 264). Hunza, Sarikol, and Wakhan are not represented at all, but the ruby and lapis lazuli mines are marked. Source: Map of Afghanistan, and the adjacent countries drawn and engraved by John and Charles Walker in 1844. Courtesy of the Pamir Archive Collection

sioned his services at a crucial time. Places and timings will be contextualised from a number of contemporary sources that provide insights into the hierarchical structures of employing 'native explorers', the function of espionage and reconnaissance trips, and the exploitation of spatial knowledge as a competitive advantage. Concurrent and interrelated sources about Badakhshan and Wakhan provide additional insights beyond the prime objective of his commission. Publishing his account provides the opportunity to shift the angle of curiosity and scrutiny slightly: away from the focus on better-known 'native explorers' and their supervising colonial officers towards narratives about everyday life, challenges for survival, ruling elites, commerce, slave trade and professional occupations. Most likely the text was rendered from Munshi Abdul Rahim's original Persian writing into English by an unknown translator who must have been an employee in the colonial intelligence service in Simla. In order to contextualise Munshi Abdul Rahim's narrative, it appeared advisable to frame his account with an introduction and a comment, followed by a sequel and a postscript. The additional material supports a positioning of Munshi Abdul Rahim's account in a defined spatial setting and ranges from contemporary 19th century sources to present-day life in Badakhshan and Wakhan.

Introducing actors and interests

The opening chapter highlights certain aspects that draw attention to why the remote and comparatively less well-endowed Wakhan quadrangle became a geopolitical pivot and area of strategic interest in the era of international boundary-making. The 19th century shift of exploratory interest from the coastal lines towards the sources of the mighty Asian rivers meant that hitherto unknown mountain ranges became the target of exploration, expeditions and missions. The hidden agenda of expanding spheres of influence resulted in monopolising territorial appropriation, domination and demarcation of boundaries. The attempt to define 'scientific' and to find 'natural' geographical borders disguised salient features of the imperial project that would lead to the significant restructuring of political realms, revaluation of spatial properties, and transformation of social structures. Until the Anglo-Russian Accord of 1907 it took less than half a century to shape and demarcate Central Asian borders in a manner that has had lasting effects until today. The gambling entailed in the Great Game involved not only supra-regional imperial powers, but a number of smaller regional and local players that gained or suffered. These po-



The rough sketch of Albert Pépin is depicting a Wakhi mountain farmer (Berger wakhanais) was made on 15 April 1887.

Source: Illustration in Gabriel Bonvalot's book 'Du Caucase aux Indes à travers le Pamir' (1888: 396)

litical skirmishes were not fought on the battleground; they mainly involved people who became trespassers of future boundaries and cross-border producers of knowledge. Numerous persons of the above-mentioned qualifications participated in scientific exploration, generation of intelligence information and production of route maps. The interested public took notice of their work only when it was embedded in the Great Game contest. In Great Britain and Russia, leading intellectuals of their time became advocates for forward policies and imperial expansionism based on the conviction of promoting civilisation. Their voices were heard by decision-makers, although they had not necessarily been men on the spot; often they interpreted the knowledge and narratives that were shared in the elite circles of geographical societies and their like. British and Russian explorers and travellers were ennobled when they presented their findings in such circles; most of them published articles in geographical journals and newspapers, several wrote books. Rarely do we find here the names of 'native explorers' or 'indigenous intermediaries' of Indian or Central Asian origin. They grossly have remained without accessible pictorial images; their colonial masters fared differently. Some military officers who reached the ranks of generals and eminent British and Russian surveyors became well-known celebrities of their time; some even became the objects of satirical magazines. The officers who provided intelligence and confidential reports have remained less visible; for example, there are only very few images of John Biddulph and Reginald Schomberg, while the high-ranking and influential office-bearers of the geographical societies have been sitters for painters and photographers. From Munshi Abdul Rahim and his Muslim colleagues we could not trace any image; the few exceptions among the 'native explorers' include the companions of the Schlagintweit Mission and Pundit Nain Singh from Kumaon. Muslim trackers on the crossroads have largely remained invisible.

NARROWING DOWN THE CONTEXT – MUNSHI ABDUL RAHIM'S MISSION

The Pamirian crossroads including the Wakhan quadrangle were explored mainly from three directions. Russian travellers started their reconnaissance from Siberia and later on from the added 'possessions' in Central Asia such as the

Fergana Valley. Comparatively early, and by the mid-19th century at the latest, Russian and British explorers had realised the crucial importance of the oases of the Southern Silk Road. Both directed their interests towards Kashgar and Yarkand, which themselves became arenas for playing the Great Game. The third approach involved Afghanistan and Kashmir. As Afghanistan remained a desired destination for British and Russian travellers on their way to the Pamirs, a significant effort was made to use Kashmir and its vassals as a starting point for forays towards Badakhshan. In the aftermath of the Treaty of Amritsar in 1846, the Maharaja of Kashmir had enjoyed control and reserved rights in the area, followed by expansionist moves towards the Hindukush. The final quarter of the 19th century saw enhanced activities by all contenders. Missions to Kashgar, Gilgit, Chitral and Wakhan were lined up for exploration and surveying purposes. All of them were headed by prominent protagonists who subsequently made eminent careers in the imperial military services and who have been well respected as authorities on the region to date. Their knowledge-gathering was embedded in several previous explorations commissioned by the Survey of India, intelligence branches or geographical societies. The matrix of travellers and their yields appears to be three-dimensional. In the first dimension we find the distinction between European and Asian explorers, the latter occupying only a subordinate position. Asymmetry is a governing principle of function and reception. Europeans are the leaders, if not always on the ground, then definitely in the processing of knowledge. The subaltern functions as an intermediary and speaks to local informants and interlocutors, translates for his master every utterance of hosts, officials, local experts and companions; he is the prime communicator, mediator and procurer of the expedition. Both are always male. In the second dimension the protagonists differ in their duty schemes. Explorers and surveyors fulfil a variety of tasks; the outcomes and results appear to be either confidential or declassified; sometimes the borderlines are quite opaque and depend on the respective period of time. The third dimension makes distinctions among the 'native explorers'. Some have received some prominence and their findings have entered publications and maps, while others are forgotten. Munshi Abdul Rahim belongs to the latter category; even in comparison with his contemporary Asian travellers he is ignored and neglected on every count. Although he was sent on his own, his orders were given by a