

An aerial photograph of a mountainous region in the Pamir Knots, showing a complex network of terraced fields in various shades of green and brown, interspersed with rocky, barren slopes. The terraces are carved into the hillsides, creating a patchwork pattern. A small cluster of buildings is visible in the center of the image, surrounded by more terraced fields. The sky is a clear, pale blue.

Hermann Kreutzmann

PAMIRIAN CROSSROADS

Kirghiz and Wakhi of High Asia

Harrassowitz Verlag

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Dedicated to Sabine Felmy

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CONTENTS

Avant-propos 7

- Mapping the Pamirs and Wakhan 7
- Locating the arena 8
 - Approaches 8
 - Kirghiz and Wakhi communities 9
 - Ecology and economy in the Pamirs 9
 - Kirghiz and Wakhi migration in space and over time 10
 - Pastoralists across boundaries 10
 - Aspects and prospects 11
- Transliteration and transcription 11
- Acknowledgments 12
- Copyright 14

Introduction 17

- Pamir and Wakhan – locating the arena 17
- Pamir 20
- From Buddhist pilgrims to colonial missions 22
- People and places 32
- Wakhan 39
- Borders and maps 42
- Natural boundaries and scientific borders 51
- Frontiers of contact versus frontiers of separation 58
- Taking refuge – people to places 60
- Coping with transformation 63

Approaches 69

- Exploring the crossroads 69
- Asia and Europe – a widening gap 70
- Production of knowledge 71
- From Fergana, Kabul and Kashgar to the Pamirs 72
- Pamir and Wakhan – approach to the highlands 82
- Consolidating knowledge and playing the game 89
- Grombchevsky and Younghusband: two individuals driven by equal interests – representing rival powers 92
- The Gilgit Mission and Wakhan 96
- Shrinking ‘blank’ spaces and mapped desires 100
- Individual travellers on high ground 105
- Change of interests – from individual traveller to scientific expedition 112
- Gazetteers and handbooks for practice 114

Closed borders 114

Exploring the roads – vehicular traffic in High Asia 116

Wakhi and Kirghiz communities 127

- Imagination and persistence 127
- Conflicting classifications 127
- Denominational affiliations in space and time 137
- Nomads, pastoralists or combined mountain farmers 140
- Outsiders’ perceptions and attributions 141
- Collective terms and varying applications 144
- Distribution and diffusion – a spatial approach to mobility 146

Chances and constraints for pastoral practices 151

- Ecology and economy in the Pamirs 151
 - Environmental constraints in Kirghiz and Wakhi settlement areas 152
 - Climatic conditions 156
 - Classification of the Pamirs 158
 - Pamirian pasture potential 163
- Passes and valleys – location of settlements 167
 - Built environment 167
 - The house and the yurt 175
- Wakhi livelihoods 176
 - Mountain agriculture and cropping systems 179
 - Farm size and cultivation patterns 183
 - Animal husbandry and high-mountain pastures 184
 - Pastoral practices in Shimshal 187
 - Variations in Wakhi combined mountain agriculture 189
- Kirghiz migration in space and time 190
- Kirghiz yak-keeping 195
- Relations and transitions 197

Mobility and multi-locality in High Asia 205

- Kirghiz and Wakhi migration in space and over time 205
- Wakhan – maintaining independence despite external threat (1747–1872) 205
- Afghan and imperial pressure on Badakhshan (1872–1883) 216
- The Mir leaves Wakhan and half the population follows 221

Effects of boundary-making (1883–1899) 229	Chinese minority policies in Xinjiang: people's communes in Sarikol 384
Search for new abodes 249	– Nationality policies and autonomy concepts 385
Changing taxation and forced labour practices as a stimulus for mobilising Wakhi migrants (1899–1901) 255	– Transformation of rural communities in China 387
Consolidation of states within newly created borders (1901–1919) 261	– Minority policies in Xinjiang 388
Political and religious discrimination in the Pamirs (1919–1949) 267	– Collectivisation and regional autonomy in Xinjiang 389
Collectivisation strategies 277	– Wakhi in Sarikol 390
Border closures affecting exchange 281	– Transformation processes in Sarikol 392
	Absence of nationalities' policies – minorities in Pakistan 397
Migration as an adaptation strategy in High Asia 295	– Ishkoman – from seat in exile to periphery 397
Forceful dislocation of people 295	– Baroghil – pauperisation in a remote location 401
Migration to reduce risk 300	– Gojal – transition from outsider position to model of Ismaili integration? 406
Population dynamics among Wakhi 307	
Population dynamics in Kirghiz enclaves 312	Portraying the present age 431
	Afghan Wakhan 432
Kirghiz pastoralists across boundaries 319	Little Pamir 439
Kirghiz patterns of evasion and exchange 319	Great Pamir 443
Kirghiz communities 322	Rajon Ishkashim 445
Nomads and pastoralists in Central Asian peripheries 327	Murghab District 449
Life history of Khan Rahman Qul 335	Sarikol and Taghdumbash Pamir 456
Dissident Kirghiz in the Afghan Pamirs 342	Little Kara Köl 463
Kirghiz communities – perceptions past and present 343	Gojal 468
A long way to go 346	Ishkoman 472
	Baroghil 472
Aspects and prospects 351	Epilogue 477
Winds of change in minority politics 351	Scientific and sensitive boundaries in transition 477
Nation-building and regionalism of rural groups in Afghanistan: Wakhan Woluswali in Badakhshan 352	Final words – shepherdesses in harsh environments 478
– Formation of a social hierarchy without a traditional ruling elite 352	
– Exchange relations in a 'closed frontier' situation 356	Glossary of important terms and toponyms 485
– Trends in Wakhan since the Saur revolution in 1978 360	Glossary 485
– The Afghan Pamirs and Wakhan in relation to the Northern Alliance 362	Pronunciation 492
Soviet nationalities policy in Tajikistan: collectivisation and border protection in Gorno-Badakhshan 367	Toponyms and meanings 493
– The policy of national delimitation and administrative reforms in Gorno-Badakhshan 367	Toponyms and previous transliterations and usages 494
– Integration of the Pamir groups into the Tajik nation 373	
– Stages of collectivisation in Gorno-Badakhshan 374	Bibliography 496
– Socio-economic transformation in the Wakhi communities and national integration processes 378	Archival collections, files, memoranda and primary sources 496
	Bibliography of printed and published material 510
	Bibliography of maps 546
	Index 552



Avant-propos

MAPPING THE PAMIRS AND WAKHAN

A geographer's view on mountain areas seems to be primarily directed to the existing state of the art. This conspectus on a remote mountain region in High Asia is based on collections that span a wide range of space and time. The context for looking at marginal border areas of four different countries – Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and Tajikistan – is provided by an interest in the differentiating effects of boundary-making on people living in a similar ecological environment. The Kirghiz and Wakhi have utilised these high mountain lands and pastures over long periods and are living in all four present-day countries. I have had the opportunity to visit these areas frequently within the past 35 years and to spend more than six years of fieldwork in this part of High Asia. Thus, the empirical material used here – the first pillar of this book – has been collected over more than a generation and contains some overlap of history and memory.

The second pillar is the archival and library research aimed at collecting and analysing locally produced contemporary narratives, travelogues, gazetteers, and intelligence reports for local, regional and international usage. Assessments and

observations recorded prior to and during the 'Great Game' and serving external purposes and conflicting interests have been collected from British and Russian sources. Views from colonial 'explorers', travellers and professionals augmented the contemporary material. Closer to the present day, so-called development experts and consultants from inside and outside the area provided their insights and perceptions for the improvement of living conditions in remote mountain regions. Consequently, the written material that was inspected and quoted is quite diverse, kaleidoscopic and purpose-driven.

In order to grasp the 'Zeitgeist', a third pillar consists of historical drawings and photographs that were selected to illustrate the fields of attention. Some of the earliest photographs ever taken have been found and are reproduced here. Most valuable and often neglected sources of information are varieties of cartographic maps that explorers, spies and surveyors produced as tools for academics, decision-makers, diplomats and geographical societies. The illustrations of this book significantly depend on the Pamir Archive Collection that generously supplied rare maps that were produced over a long span of time; some are reproduced here for the first time.

The valley of the Panj close to Ishkashim where a bridge allows crossing the border between Afghanistan and Tajikistan. The wide valley floor merges with the flat scree slopes on which the settlements and village lands of Tajik Ishkashim and Afghan Sultan Ishkashim are located.

Photograph Monika Bulaj, April 2010

LOCATING THE ARENA

The Pamirs and Wakhan do not appear to be a 'natural' area of attention. Why this arbitrary selection of two adjacent areas? My interest in the region was stimulated by earlier studies on boundary-making such as the Durand Line separating Afghanistan and Pakistan and by the way in which borders delineated in the 19th century affected and differentiated the living conditions of people on either side. The experience of living in divided Berlin during the Cold War era may have contributed to this interest. Moreover, decision-making that was conceived and implemented in far-away urban centres of European empires and Asian nation states turned my attention to 'people and places', particularly in view of the often detrimental and long-lasting effects on remote farming villages and pastoral communities, regionally important khanates with autocratic and changing rulers, and small principalities with rather egalitarian wealth distribution. The incorporation of the Pamirs into conventional knowledge and the attention drawn towards Wakhan when boundary-making had its heyday in the final years of the 19th century contributed to the selection of both areas for special attention. Here the presented maps gained significance in showing shifting geopolitical interest, influencing public opinion and pretending to display natural and scientific borders. People come into focus when the question of remoteness is combined with frontiers of contact and/or separation. Boundaries in general and especially in the case presented here offer opportunities for evasiveness, desertion, flight and smuggling. Mobile pastoralists have crossed boundaries to optimise their opportunities; some of them established multilocal settings that offer space for temporary adaptation. Refugee movements play an important role in this arena where geopolitical and ideological confrontations, colonial administrations and development organisations triggered significant changes in lifestyles and welfare conditions. From the 'Great Game' to the October and Chinese Revolutions, from the struggles for independence and self-determination to the Cold War and right into the era of globalisation, the Pamirs and Wakhan have been an interface in the contested space claimed by adverse economic and political ideologies and competing development paradigms and modernisation strategies. A diachronic approach was adopted here in order to present three different perspectives on the Pamirs and Wakhan. First, the dimension of knowledge production; second, the dimension of commu-

nity construction; third, the mobility dimension generating the network of communication and exchange in a path-dependent development. These three dimensions reflect the shifting of my research interests from borderlands and their representation in cartographic products to aspects of ethnicity, community performance and their coping with modernisation and transformation. The arena of my interest is determined by the spatial fixation of the Pamirs and Wakhan with all kinds of communicative linkages beyond and within, with people's physical movements and with the exchange patterns of commodities, knowledge and power.

Approaches

Exploring the crossroads requires reflection on the production of knowledge that is created and generated. Who are the actors and influential people and whose knowledge survives and becomes part of the canonical wisdom? After the early travels of Chinese pilgrims crossing the Pamirs on their way to the Indian subcontinent, the region located between Asia and Europe rarely gained any attention. With the 'age of exploration' and the contesting imperial designs of the coming superpowers of Great Britain and Russia in the Central Asian realm, the demand for knowledge production increased. The reports, route descriptions, articles and books that have survived are the prime sources to be found in archives and libraries all over the world. The material accessed was found in archives and libraries in London, Delhi, Islamabad, St. Petersburg and Berlin. The geographical societies in London, St. Petersburg, Paris and Berlin were focal points for presenting the knowledge generated by mainly male explorers who gained social recognition in European circles. Often their knowledge was based on the communication skills of their trusted 'native explorers' who were not only mediators between visitors and local residents, but whose narratives and observations were often quoted at length in the literature produced. When this material is nowadays found in libraries and internet databases, it should be consulted as the product of many voices. The high mountain regions were approached from Fergana and Kashgar, from Kabul and Kashmir. Detailed research was connected to the search for the source of the Oxus at the time when the separation of spheres of influence was gaining in importance. The second half of the 19th and the early 20th centuries probably are the best documented periods with

quite a complex knowledge production. Led by military and strategic considerations, practical investigations into the state of economies and societies were accompanied by botanists, geologists and language hunters. Their publications provide a substantial body of the material used. From this period, the voices of a multitude of travellers and speakers are heard; an outstanding contribution is the report by Munshi Abdul Rahim¹ on Wakhan and Badakhshan that was commissioned by Captain John Biddulph. It is somehow distorted by an obviously less than competent translator. His observations are quite different from those of Thomas Edward Gordon who – along with three confidential reports – provided another angle of looking at the region in his ‘The roof of the world, being the narrative of a journey over the high plateau of Tibet to the Russian frontier and the Oxus Sources on Pamir’.² Both contributed most valuable material from a period when Wakhan was still a principality and prior to the major refugee movements. In the aftermath, the sources about the Kirghiz and Wakhi had to be retrieved from a wider area including all regions of refuge and beyond.

Time and its passing play a significant role not only in relation to history and memory, but also because we span two centuries in which Afghanistan changed its spatial appearance due to a boundary shift which brought the southern part of Wakhan into the Afghan realm of Badakhshan. Across the border of the Oxus/Panj/Amu Darya, the northern part of Wakhan and most of the Pamirs were integrated into Gorno-Badakhshanskaya Avtonomnaya Oblast’ after the loss of independence among the Badakhshan principalities under Russian domination. Then came the Soviet Union, which created a republic named Tajikistan which again became independent after the 1990s. Sarikol became a part of Yakub Beg’s Kashgaria before being integrated into Xinjiang – the new territories of China – that has subsequently been declared an autonomous region within the People’s Republic of China. The name Sarikol vanished and was replaced by Tashkurgan Tajik Autonomous County. Adjacent and across the Karakoram passes, Little Gojal was designated in contrast to Ghujal/Wakhan as a refuge for Wakhi migrants within the Hunza principality. Attacked by British troops in the late 19th century, Hunza retained a semi-autonomous status during British Indian rule and the Maharaja of Kashmir’s influence. After Pakistan’s independence, conflicts over Kashmir and its affiliation have continued. Several administrative reforms made it a part of Hunza-Nagar District

within the Northern Areas and subsequently of Gilgit-Balistan. Significantly different administrative and socio-political configurations characterise the settlement areas of similar environmental properties where Kirghiz and Wakhi reside. Thus, the body of accessible and available literature is quite heterogeneous and varies from country to country.

Kirghiz and Wakhi communities

Classical ethnography attributes common properties and traits to ‘ethnic groups’. In our context, reflections about such ascriptions are of significant importance because administrators, boundary-makers, explorers, ideologists and scientists have thought along these lines, from which stem designations of communities and groups. The applied terminology is shifting and varies in different contexts. These ascriptions tell us a lot about perceptions of ‘local people’, their treatment, and how they have been used in making territorial politics for consolidating and expanding spatial control, for implementing administrative structures in remote mountain areas, and for handling evasiveness and unrest. Beyond space, post-revolutionary reforms and post-independence movements have led to the application of a variety of development concepts that were tested to ‘modernise’ societies. Language or religion-based communities were labelled as minorities, nationalities, ethnic groups and communities. We have been confronted with conflicting classifications that appeared to be contradictory at times. Language, denomination and economic strategies have been distinguishing markers for Kirghiz and Wakhi. The interpretation of their religious affiliations to Ismaili and Sunni belief systems, the linguistic classifications of their Eastern Iranian and Turkic languages, and the distinction between pastoral strategies and combined mountain farming are strong categories of attributions that have been applied in various contexts. Beyond the analysis of written documents and records, fieldwork was necessary to establish the area of distribution, the understanding of the applied markers and the meaning of community affiliation in the respective countries.

Ecology and economy in the Pamirs

In some ways, the ecological setting seems to be the most homogeneous aspect of the area concerned. The Pamirs and

Wakhan are high mountain regions incorporating plateaux and valleys of significant orographic height and sharing certain geological and morphological features, botanical and vegetation characteristics, hydrological and thermal properties. The high mountain habitat has been utilised over long stretches of time by pastoralists whose seasonal moves to the valuable and high-lying Pamir pastures involve migrations over long distances in the course of a year. Combined mountain farmers permanently settled in high grounds where irrigated oases were the starting point for short-distance seasonal migrations to the high pastures. These 'classical' mono-causal utilisation strategies turned out to be much more complex and varied during my long fieldwork periods of up to ten months each in order to understand areal and seasonal variations, agricultural innovations, non-resource-based forms of economic undertakings and differing forms of outmigration. This slow learning process was only possible due to the great hospitality and openness that I have enjoyed over more than three decades. I was privileged to observe the growing-up of a full generation and to meet the knowledgeable men and women who found time to tell their stories at an older age. Frequent visits to the same locations and prolonged stays in befriended households were the basis for grounded research in deep-rooted connections spanning a vast area. My home was the house of the late Ghulam-ud-din whose friendship and hospitality and that of his family I enjoyed for over thirty years in the largest Wakhi village of Gojal in Hunza. He was knowledgeable and wise, supporting young researchers and local scholars.

Kirghiz and Wakhi migration in space and over time

A centrepiece for enhancing my understanding of Kirghiz and Wakhi communities of our time was the historical investigation based on archival research in London, Delhi, Islamabad, St. Petersburg and Berlin. The minute recordings of local and regional events in weekly, fortnightly or monthly official diaries and 'news-reports' by commissioned intelligence providers gave valuable details of contemporary information including transcripts of letters of local rulers, informants and spies. Certain topics were given special attention, for example by preparing trade reports, listing settlement sizes and their ethnic affiliation, tabulating useful information based on route reconnaissance, and assessing

the potential of local rulers and other influential personalities. To name only a few purpose-led undertakings, special envoys were sent for negotiations with local strongmen, boundary commissions were set up, and administrators were sent to establish bureaucratic control. In addition to the bulk of these clandestine documents and undisclosed reports that were not open to the public, a number of papers and books were published to serve the interested audience through journals and proceedings of geographical societies and specialised publishers. Great Britain and Russia were on a common path in applying a 'scientific' approach to colonial administration within their empires and beyond. The literature is augmented by publications of explorers and travellers from other countries who were commissioned by either colonial powers or academic societies of their home countries. We find an early form of globalised activities of leading personalities such as the Hungarian Gottlieb Wilhelm Leitner or the German Schlagintweit brothers who were commissioned by the British East India Company to investigate in India and China.³ Others were sent to Afghanistan and Central Asia. In the St. Petersburg Academy of Science, there was a strong group of German and East European scholars engaged in research. The Kazakh scholar Chokan Valikhanov and the Polish explorer Bronislaw Grombchevsky served the Russian Tsar, enhancing knowledge on Central Asia and China in a similar manner to William Stephen Alexander Lockhart and Robert Gosset Woodthorpe on their 'Gilgit Mission' (including Wakhan), Francis Younghusband, or the intelligence officer Reginald Schomberg.⁴ These bundled archival and published resources have been analysed for a better understanding of the power games in Central Asia. External interests, regional contests for dominance and local shifts of influence and power are presented as the background and context of Kirghiz and Wakhi migrations. The latest developments are contributed from fieldwork and interviews with affectees, from official reports and semi-official sources that were collected locally.

Pastoralists across boundaries

As colonial documents came to give more space to settled people and more detail about happenings in Wakhi villages, but less precise information about 'nomadic' movements, special attention is given here to the Kirghiz history in the



light of biographical interviews and recordings. The Kirghiz of Little Pamir and their resettlement in Turkey are strongly connected to the life of their leader Haji Rahman Qul, who was born in Pamirski Post in 1916 and died in Ulupamir Köyü in 1990. His biography provides a case in point for migration, refugee movements and societal transformation that are illustrated with the help of his sons in Turkey who expressed their memories in sculptures and paintings.⁵ In the end, it is always a personal story that tells best how a wide variety of events affected the living conditions and welfare. The consequences connected to them could significantly vary. The aim here is to connect personal experiences and memories with documented histories and communities living in locations such as villages and yurt camps, valleys and plateaux, districts and prefectures, principalities and states.

Aspects and prospects

The present conditions and perspectives are presented in contemporary depictions of Kirghiz and Wakhi settlements

in Afghanistan, China, Pakistan and Tajikistan. The diverging paths of development illustrate the context in which these communities are embedded today. Quite divergent strategies to handle minority issues and to apply legislation can be observed in the respective countries. Under the umbrella of nation-building certain traits in communalism and regionalism were side-lined in Afghan Badakhshan where absent traditional elite groups enabled the state to fill a power vacuum. Exchange relations were oriented in relation to closed frontiers and challenging cross-border constellations. The outcome of the Saur revolution has shaped internal affairs of Afghan Badakhshan where the major political role was played by the Northern Alliance since. Across the Panj River boundary quite contrasting developments took place when Soviet nationalities policies, collectivisation packages and border protection schemes were implemented in Gorno-Badakhshan. Path-dependent developments can be studied in Tajikistan when after independence a rescaling from Soviet to national planning processes was implemented. National integration, reform and transformation are strongly linked to previous experiences. Initially the Chinese model

The route to school can be long and filled with pebbles. School children from Sarhad-e Wakhan are crossing flat scree slopes during their daily routine. Photograph Monika Bulaj, April 2010



*Nikab Sultana is preparing our daily bread.
The photograph was taken on
April 23, 1990*

of minority policies followed the Soviet blueprint. An independent path was opened with the introduction of people's communes in China. The reform's expressions and their implementation as autonomy policies in Xinjiang and Sarikol significantly affected the whole society. Collectivisation, minority policies and regional autonomy have been the pillars of Chinese administrative presence with strong effects for Kirghiz pastoralists and Wakhi mountain farmers. Following the Pak-China Friendship Highway across the Karakoram Mountains into Pakistan the contrast between both countries appears to be most significant as any kind of nationalities' policy is absent for communities that would be treated as minorities in China. The areas where Wakhi are residing in Gilgit-Baltistan are very diverse themselves. Ishkoman was the former seat of exile for the Wakhi elite and has become a marginal valley positioned between the pauperised Baroghil area in northern Chitral and the prosperous Gojal region in Hunza. The specific developments in Gojal and their inter-linkages with the Ismaili community are an example for welfare creation parallel to state institutions.

Portraying the present age

The final chapter introduces ten locations where Kirghiz and Wakhi have been residing and presents some remarks on contemporary developments that characterise the place. The portraits are featuring physical spaces occupied by both communities that have adapted to all kinds of winds of change, political developments, catastrophes and hazards. By introducing these places and their inhabitants some insights are provided into conventional norms such as adaptation, change and resilience.

TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSCRIPTION

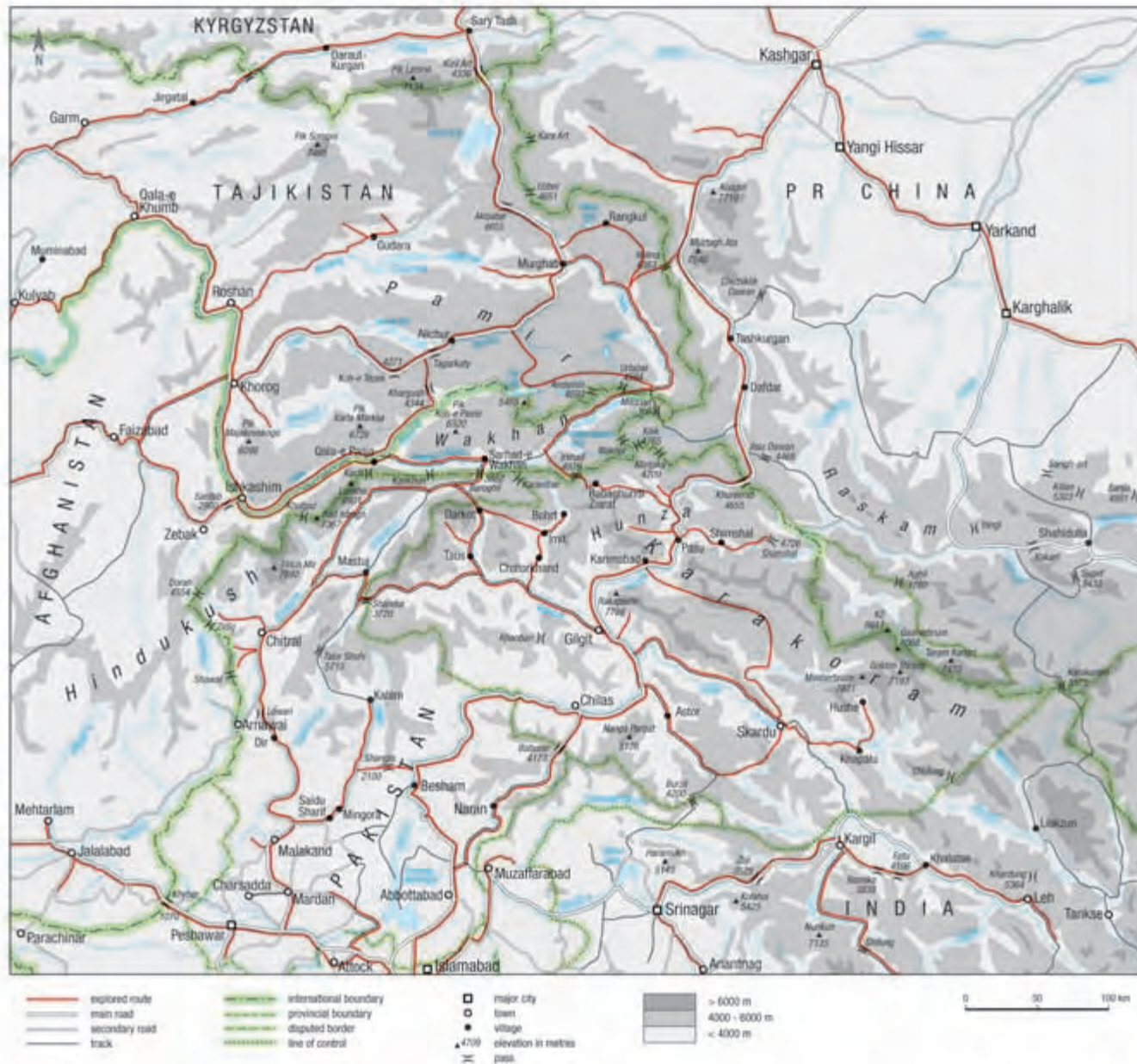
Terms from about twenty languages are included in the book and listed in the glossary. The majority belong to Kirghiz and Wakhi; in addition, we find expressions from neighbouring languages and from those of the conquerors. The dictionaries provided by Aleksandr Leonovich Gryunberg and Ivan Mikhailovich Stéblin-Kamensky have remained the benchmark for Afghan and Tajik Wakhi; Georg Buddruss contributed additional material on the Wakhi in

Gojal, whereas Rémy Dor studied the Kirghiz language of the Little and Great Pamir.⁶ The system of transliteration and transcription cannot be homogeneous and acceptable to every reader. In a zone of transition and transgression where different regional and systematic disciplines as well as clear-cut classical area studies have established their conventions and nomenclatures, this heterogeneity and non-conformity is to be expected. The purpose of presenting these terms is to be more precise and to give local flavour. The persons that I have consulted were all experts in their fields. The most constant support in improving my skills in handling these languages and linguistic terms was provided by Georg Buddruss. The shortcomings are all mine.

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*Routes explored in High Asia by Hermann Kreutzmann between 1977 and 2015.
Design by Hermann Kreutzmann*

last but not least Didar Karim, Ghulam Amin Beg, Fazal Amin Beg, and Zulfiqar Ali Khan in Gojal who along with their families have constantly provided friendship and support for so many years and who are personally mentioned on behalf of so many women and men, children and students in the Pamirs and Wakhan. All shared their knowledge and expertise with us – the plural applies to Sabine Felmy, my long-time travel companion and constant supporter in all matters – for which we are most grateful. We met the late Haji Rahman Qul in Gilgit in 1981. In Ulupamir Köyü my thanks go to his sons Akbar Kutlu, Aref Kutlu, and the late Malik Kutlu for their Kirghiz hospitality and the latter's permission to reproduce some of his drawings. Akbar's son-in-law Kozubay Sancaktar facilitated our stay in Erciş and Ulupamir Köyü and helped in many respects to better understand the details of the exodus and recent developments in the Turkish diaspora.

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Pamir Archive in Winterthur. From his vast collection of historical maps, a number of those relevant to my topic have been reproduced in sections or in full size in the book; his archive collection of Russian books, papers, and personal records qualified my somewhat language-biased view informed by predominantly English sources, and the provision of his own modified maps for this book helped to display the routes of exploration as well as the progress in cartography. Helpful and professional team members from Freie Universität Berlin supported the effort in various capacities: Emilia Adam, Andreas Benz, Andrei Dörre, Petra Harenbrock, Alexandra Konzack, Tobias Kraudzun, Fanny Kreczi, Maurice Neuwirth, Tim Polster, Stefan Schütte, Mayinur Shanatibieke, and Christian Sonntag. Bernd Hilberer, the late Joachim Kruhöffner and the late Detlef Engel contributed their cartographic skills to convert my sketches into meticulous illustrations. Special thanks go to Anne Beck who often advised and helped to improve my use of the English language in its written form. More than linguistic support was kindly provided by the eminent language scholars of the area: Ivan Mikhailovich Stéblin-Kamensky and the late Alexandr Leonovich Gryunberg in St. Petersburg, who provided me with access to their personal records and to archives in St. Petersburg. They extended their hospitality in true Wakhi tradition. Repeatedly and gratefully I acknowledge the valuable intellectual advice by Georg Buddruss from Mainz whose command of so many languages enhanced the quality of my glossaries over a period of thirty years. Chorshanbe Goibnazarov (Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies) and Lutz Rzehak (Humboldt University Berlin) made available their language expertise in Tajik and neighbouring languages. I am grateful to Niels Gutschow in Abtsteinach for his inspiration to make this book look different from my previous ones. The book is illustrated with an original drawing amiably provided by the late Andreas Brandt from Berlin and additional photographs by Monika Bulaj from Trieste, Roland Michaud from Paris and Matthieu Paley from Istanbul who kindly allowed me to include their professional images taken at different seasons. Harald Weller guaranteed a professional layout and safeguarded a suitable placement and adequate representation of the numerous illustrations in their respective contexts.

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and a section from his Pamir map); a satellite image composition by Christoph Hormann; photographs by Monika Bulaj (13), Roland Michaud (1), and Matthieu Paley (13). For all other illustrations, we approached the copyright holders, who consented in all cases of response. The sources are mentioned in the individual captions.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Munshi Abdul Rahim (1885).
- 2 Thomas Edward Gordon (1874a, b, 1875, 1876a).
- 3 Gottlieb Wilhelm Leitner (1891a, b, c); Hermann, Adolphe and Robert de Schlagintweit (1861-1866).
- 4 Bronislaw Grombchevsky [Grąbczewski] (1891); William Stephen Alexander Lockhart and Robert Gosset Woodthorpe (1889); Reginald Charles Francis Schomberg (1935c, 1936a); Chokan Chingisovich Valikhanof and Michail Ivanovich Veniukof (1865); Francis Edward Younghusband (1892, 1895a, 1896).
- 5 Malik Kutlu and Bernard Repond (1992).
- 6 Georg Buddruss (1974, 1986); Rémy Dor (1975); Aleksandr Leonovich Gryunberg and Ivan Mikhailovich Stéblin-Kamensky (1976, 1988).



Introduction

PAMIR AND WAKHAN – LOCATING THE ARENA

Mountains and rivers gained special attention when colonial exploration turned from the coasts towards continental interiors. The Tarim Basin, or Takla Makan Shamo, as the main lowland basin of Central Asia served as an area of reference in the ‘heart of Asia’.¹ The bowl-shaped structure was taken as a reference centre from which spatial relations on the mountain rim in the ‘heart of a continent’ were identified and interpreted.² Neighbouring watersheds and valleys were connected across mountain passes by trade routes and pilgrims’ paths. High Asia is the origin of some of the most important rivers of the continent, among them the Oxus, or Amu Darya. The rivers of Mawaranahar³ – the Oxus and Jaxartes – were referred to in Greek historiography by Herodotus and later on by Ptolemaeus Claudius. The Arabic word *Mā’ warā’a an-Nahr* – ‘that which is beyond the river’ [Amu Darya]⁴ – transcribed in simplified form as Mawaranahr or Mavarannahr covers Sogdia, or Transoxania, the region in Western Turkestan between the Oxus (Amu Darya) and the Jaxartes (Syr Darya), comprising Bokhara, Samarqand, Fergana, etc. The rivers attracted interest rather than the mountain lands of Imaus, which was a designation for the mountains of Central Asia that was familiar in the early 19th century when topographical knowledge was scanty. In search of the source of the Indus, James Rennell remarked in 1788: “I cannot find out where the springs of this celebrated river, are. Unquestionably, they are far more remote than the sides of the mountains, which separate Hindoostan from Tartary; and where both the ancient and modern Europeans have agreed to place them ...”⁵

As John Lauris Blake put it in 1826: “The ancients had only a confused idea of *central Asia*. They gave it the vague denomination of Scythia, beyond *Immaus*. At the foot of this celebrated chain they finished their geographical knowledge.”⁶ Alexander von Humboldt discussed in great detail the changing perception of Imaus.⁷ Carl Ritter and the cartographer Carl Zimmermann were the audacious masters of compilation in putting collected spatial knowledge into a map of Inner Asia, where an enormous display of detail disguised the fact that spatial relations were rather speculative.⁸ Carl Ritter introduced the term ‘High Asia’ for the Himalayas – a term which was subsequently applied to a wider region, including the

western portions of the mountain system, based on ground experience and a sound geological perception by Robert von Schlagintweit and Hermann von Schlagintweit-Sakünlünski.⁹

In the travelogues of early Chinese pilgrims, the challenges posed by mountains and passes seemed to be more prevalent than those created by rivers. In the early 19th century, the search for the exact location of the source of the Oxus motivated a number of explorers to follow the course of the rivers that had previously been described by Greek and Chinese sources. Mountstuart Elphinstone’s account of the ‘Kingdom of Caubul and its dependencies in Persia, Tartary, and India’, for instance, contains an appendix by Lieutenant McCartney based on hearsay by some ‘native informants’ on the “River Ammu, or Oxus: This river, from its source to the country of Durwaz, is better known by the name of Punj than Ammu. It has its source from the high lands of Pamer. It issues from a narrow valley two or three hundred yards broad in Wukhan, the southern boundary of Pamer.”¹⁰ The expertise of the ‘native informant’ was acknowledged by George Nathaniel Curzon nearly 90 years after its fieldwork and initial preparation: “Lieutenant Macartney’s native informant, whoever he may have been, was a better-informed and a more competent geographer than the host of big names who have succeeded him, and I gladly disinter this forgotten passage, in order to lay a tardy wreath upon its author’s grave. I am the more ready to offer this compliment, since the only competitor for its award, in the person of the single follower to whom I have alluded, was also a native. Mohammed Amin of Yarkand, the guide of the murdered Adolph Schlagintweit, supplied to Pundit Manphul a geographical description of Chinese Turkestan and the neighbouring regions, to the accuracy of which modern geographical research lends ever-increasing testimony.”¹¹ This information was collected at the beginning of the 19th century, in order to construct an impressive map of Afghanistan and surrounding regions.

The next mission was welcomed by Murad Beg, the Uzbek ruler in Kunduz, who controlled the northern territories adjacent to those ruled by the Durrani in Kabul: “What wonderful men these Firingees are! Three months ago four of them came into the country; now one is at Cabool, one at Candahar, one here, and one at the source of the Oxus. Wullah! Billah! they neither eat, drink, nor sleep:

Opposite
The Panj River bisects the mountain ranges of the Hindukush and Pamir and provides the living space for Wakhan; the right bank belonging to Tajikistan, the left bank to Afghanistan while Chinese and Pakistani territories are in the far background. In the foreground the Hindukush peaks raise up to nearly 7,000 m while on the right bank of the Panj River the highest peaks of the Shakh-dara range are Pik Karla Marska (6,724 m) and Pik Engels (6,507 m). In the background the elevated peaks of Kongur (7,719 m) and Muztagh Ata (7,546 m) in the Western Kun Lun Shan are visible. In between the Pamirs resemble a high plateau in comparison to the steep mountains that are the result of erosive forces due to high relief energy that ranges between 2,500 m in the valley bottom to 7,700 m. Satellite image processed and provided by Christoph Hormann

The map 'Tab[ula] VII. Asiae, exhibens Scythiam, intra Imaum Sogdianam, Bactrianam, Hircaniam, aliasque Asiae Regiones' from app. 1698 identifies east of Sogdiana the area of the 'Scae' who are described as 'nomades'. North of the land of the Scae and Sogdiana describes Imaus a vast stretch of sparsely settled space separated by a meridional mountain range dividing 'Scythia intra' from 'extra'. In contrast the parallel mountain range separates 'Parthia', 'Aria', 'Paropanisus' and 'Indiae' from Sogdiana. Both imagined mountain ranges will have long-lasting effects for the perception of continental divisions between Western and Eastern Turkestan, Central and South Asia. Source: Claudius Ptolemaeus: Tab[ula] VII. Asiae, exhibens Scythiam, intra Imaum Sogdianam, Bactrianam, Hircaniam, aliasque Asiae Regiones Tabulae geographicae Orbis Terrarum Veteribus cogniti 13, app. 1698. Map reduced to half of its original size. Courtesy Pamir Archive Collection



all day they make syl [enjoy themselves] and all night they write books!”¹² John Wood had succeeded in being allowed to search for the source of the Oxus and was protected by Murad Beg, the strongman of the North. Another member of the mission, Perceval Barton Lord, who realised that Murad Beg and his territories could become important allies in the interface between the Kabul kings and the Central Asian khanates, provided a detailed description based on a geometrical perception of political space: “The dominions of Murad Beg may be conceived as forming an irregular right-angled

triangle, the base extending generally along the line of the Oxus from Wochan [Wakhan] east, to a point opposite Tash Koorghan west: the perpendicular running south from this through Tash Koorghan, Heibuk, Koorum, and so on to a point between Agrabad and Baumeen [Bamyan], where it meets the territories of Dost Mahomed Khan, while the hypotenuse, much more irregular than either of those, may be best represented by a series of curves of greater or lesser magnitude sweeping into all windings along the northern face of the Hindu Koosh, as well as along the western face of the



The hand-coloured map is based on a copper engraving by Johann Baptist Homann, a well-known cartographer of his time from Nuremberg. The section reproduced here presents insight into territorial possessions and nomenclature of the 18th century. Mawaralnahr (Mawarannahr – the Central Asian Mesopotamia – the land between the two rivers Oxus and Jaxartes) and Turkestan (Turkestan) are prominently placed north of the coloured section of the Persian Empire. Within the Persian realm Chorasana (Khorassan) and Balch (Balkh) comprise Bactria, Sablutan and Candahar the eastern part. North of the Paropamisus beyond the reach of the Persian influences Badachschan/Badascian is located as a single settlement within ‘Chethlan’. Cabul is depicted as part of the Mongolian sphere of influence while the Caschgar (Kashgar) kingdom is regarded to be part of Turkestan. Source: Johann Baptist Homann: *Imperii Persici – in omnes suas Provincias (tum veteribus quam modernis earundem nominibus signatas) Exacte Divisi Nova Tabula Geographica, quam ex praecipuis Olearii, Tavernieri, Relandi aliorumque recentium Authorum Scriptis concinnatam luci publicae exponit – Io. Baptista Homann Sac. Cas. Maj. Geographus, et Regiae Borussiae Scientiarum Societatis membrum Norimbergae. Nuremberg, app. 1730.* The represented section is reduced to 84 % of its original size. Courtesy Pamir Archive Collection

great offset from it which running north buttresses as it were the elevated plain of Pamere, and in which lie successively the small Tajik states of Doshee, Khinjan, Underab, Khost, Firing, Versuch, and so on through Jirm and Ishkashem until we again reach the great northern base of Wochan.”¹³ Here we find an approach to the Pamir and Wakhan from the south by way of a river. The relationship between the centres of power in Kabul and Kunduz was explored with respect to the upper and most remote reaches of the watershed, and so the peaks and plateaux of High Asia as physical barriers to exploration activities constituted environmental limitations to communication, settlement and trade.

PAMIR

Mountains and valleys are steep and flat, share differences and commonalities, are wide apart in orographic terms and are part of a common watershed. Glaciers and rivers connect both of them, as do slopes and gradients. Pamir represents a unique Central Asian mountain system that commands the central position of the Pamirian Knot, where in geological terms several mountain ranges meet on the ‘roof of the world’ (*bām-e dunyā*).¹⁴ The translator of Russian geographical sources for an English-speaking audience, Robert Michell, summarised contemporary knowledge in 1892 and defined the extent of the ‘roof of the world’: “... the Bam-i-Dunia, as we now commonly understand it, embraces the basins of the Kara-Kul, Rang-Kul, Yashil-Kul and Victoria lakes; – also the whole of the Aksu-Murghab-Bartang river, the Alichur river, and the Ghund river down to Sardym village at 72° 20’; – also the Pamir river ascended by Wood; – and the Wakhan river. Its limits may be said to be: On the North, the trans-Alai Mountains and the Muztagh-tau; on the East, the Kashgar meridional range; on the South East corner, the Taghdum-Bash; and on the South the Hindu-Kush which forms the great water-parting of the Indus from the river systems of the Western half of Inner Asia. The Western limits remain to be defined; for here arises the question of where the line is to be drawn between the mountain valleys and the plateaux above them, — of the small Afghan dependencies of Shighnan and Roshan. ... We are to comprehend thus in the Bam-i-Dunia an area varying from circa 34,000 to circa 37,000 square miles. The drainage of this tableland is to the West, and the courses of the rivers

show that whatever ridges surmount it run latitudinally or N.W. – S.E.”¹⁵

According to tectonic terminology, the Himalayan ranges belong to the northern margin of the Indian Plate, whereas the Karakoram and Pamir ranges, as well as most of the Tibetan Plateau, belong to the southern margin of Asia.¹⁶ Here, plate tectonics have exerted their powers, creating an assembly of some of the highest mountain peaks on earth.

The Pamirs lie in a transition zone that is attributed to Central and South Asia in contemporary classification. Locally, the area appears quite homogeneous, with similar ecological conditions prevailing in both mountains and valleys. The Pamir extends across a high plateau with overarching peaks. Hindukush, Karakoram and Kun Lun Shan originate in this knot and disperse into mountain ranges that radiate outwards in different directions. In its singular form, the Pamir is regarded as a plateau-like mountain range in morphology and structure. Furthermore, the Pamir is one of the most important mountain ranges and is on a par with and surrounded by Hindukush, Karakoram, Tien Shan and Kun Lun Shan. The plural form ‘Pamirs’ often refers rather to the flat stretches of extended high mountain pastures that are mere valley bottoms in close vicinity to lakes and springs.

In contrast to geological perceptions, the focus here is on the importance of the Pamir for human utilisation; hence, the question of its accessibility plays a key role. An extensive debate about the appropriate use of the singular or plural form – Pamir or Pamirs – will not be repeated here, though, as both terms will be applied according to their appropriateness in different contexts.¹⁷ The Lieutenant of the Danish Army and leader of the Pamir expedition, Ole Olufsen, distinguished ‘Mountain Bokhara’ and the ‘Bokharan Pamir Mountains’ from the desert and steppe parts of the emirate and highlighted a number of physiognomic differences.¹⁸ In a British Intelligence report titled ‘The Pamir line of advance’, compiled in 1893 from a variety of British and Russian sources, claiming to summarise existing knowledge and to define Pamir on the basis of environmental properties, it was noted: “These valleys in places open out, forming flat or gently shelving troughs from one to several miles in width, covered generally with low wormwood scrub, but here and there with the richest grasses. Such flat open valleys known as Pamirs, while deep, narrow ravines are never so described. It is therefore quite inaccurate to speak of the whole region as Pamir, though the term is a convenient ex-



The Map of High Asia taken from the 'Atlas von Asien 1. Lieferung 1833' was prepared by Julius Ludwig Grimm. It represents in this early version the area west of Kashgar as belonging to the Chinese Empires which encompasses the Pamirs all the way to Yashil Kul and Tuz Kul. 'Vachan' (Wakhan) is located north of Darvaz and Shughnan and in contrast to both is under Chinese domination. The represented section is enlarged to 115 % of its original size. Source: Karte Von Hoch-Asien: Zu C. Ritter's Erdkunde, Buch II, Asien, Th. 1 & 2, designed by Julius Ludwig Grimm, published by Carl Ritter and Franz August von Oetzl in four sheets in 1833. Scale: app. 1:6,300,000. Berlin: Geographisches Verlags-Comtoir, 1833. The section represented here is taken from the north-western sheet. Courtesy Pamir Archive Collection



The Irshad-e Win Pass (4,979 m) found an early description by Xuanzang during his journey in 644 CE. This first ever photograph shows the top of the Kirghiz-e Win Pass which is the passage that is steeper than the summer route via Kik-e Win with a view from the Afghan side into the Chupursan valley of Hunza. Kirghiz pastoralists regularly cross the Irshad-e Win for trade with Wakhi mountain farmers exchanging livestock and their products for all kinds of household goods to replenish their stocks prior to the closure of the pass in the cold and snowy season. The photograph was taken on June 15, 2000

pression for describing the wild uninhabited tract between Eastern Turkistan and the Upper Oxus Provinces. [Colonel Dmitri] Ivanoff defines the Pamir as the district between Alai on the north, Kashgaria on the east, Wakhan on the south, and Shighnan on the west. This definition, though a broad one, is fairly accurate. He derives the name from ‘the Pamir river’, but this is unquestionably an error. Doubtless the Ak Su is known in places as the Ab-i-Pamir, but that is simply the oriental custom of naming a river locally according to the place it runs through or by, and that the river is named after the region and not the region after the river is the most probable. The general description of the Pamir given by Ivanoff is: ‘A country where spacious level valleys are formed between low mountains, and where nothing grows but grass, whose only denizens are Kirghiz nomads, yaks, ovis polii, and bears, and which is traversed by routes in every direction.’ It is, however, scarcely correct to say the Pamir is traversed by roads in every direction. The mountains are quite impracticable, except at certain well defined points; and, as a matter of fact, there are only few routes which are ever used. ... In summer yaks are driven up to graze by Kirghiz, Wakhis, and Shighnis. The Kirghiz, how-

ever, are the only people who can be said to inhabit the Pamir, and even they only during the summer.”¹⁹ Accessibility has changed over time, but the Pamir traverse still remains a challenge. Different visitors have contributed a variety of assessments, and perspectives on the Pamirs have certainly transformed.

FROM BUDDHIST PILGRIMS TO COLONIAL MISSIONS

For early Chinese travellers the Pamir Mountains occupied a central position. The Chinese pilgrim Faxian is credited with an early traverse of the Karakoram Pass in 399 CE and with the naming of the mountain range as *tsungling* (onion mountain).²⁰ Sung-yün accessed the Pamir from the east in 522 CE and described his experience as one approaching heaven. Halfway to heaven, the rivers appeared to part in two directions – east and west – and here he located the centre of heaven and earth, where neither trees nor grass grow.²¹

The great pilgrim and travelogue writer Xuanzang traversed the Pamir in the summer of 644 CE. His detailed account mentions for the first time Po-mi-lo, the Pamir Valley comprising the Upper Panj up to its source.²² Its infamous strong winds and its location between two steep, snow-clad mountain slopes are conspicuous features of the valley, which he considered to be the centre of the Onion Mountains (*Tsung-ling Shan*).

Xuanzang did not find any traces of human habitation in an area ostensibly devoid of vegetation cover and with prevalent permafrost conditions: “The Pamir Valley stretches for a thousand *li* from East to West and about a hundred *li* from South to North. In its narrowest part the width is about ten *li*. It is located between two major mountain ranges. Ice-cold conditions and strong winds prevail. Even in spring and summer snow falls. Day and night the wind continues. The soil is saturated with salt and covered by small pebbles. Grain crops and fruit cannot mature properly; any vegetation, shrubs and trees are rare specimens. From here one reaches barren deserts devoid of human traces.”²³ Xuanzang goes on to let us know that the Wakhan Mountains are bisected by the Pamir Valley, and in its central part there is supposed to be a big lake, positioned in the centre of the world (*Jambudvīpa*) on a very high plateau.²⁴ Xuanzang’s detailed description explains: “The basin of this lake is located in extreme height in the centre of the Pamir. Its



Detail of the map 'Central Asia; comprising Bokhara, Cabool, Persia, the River Indus, & Countries eastward of it. Constructed from numerous authentic documents, but principally from the original M. S. surveys of Lieut. Alex. Burnes, F. R. S. to whom this Map is most respectfully dedicated, by his obliged Servant, J. Arrowsmith, June 1834'. The section shows the limits of Bokhara that is depicted as part of 'Independent Tartary' bordering in the north and west with Choresm or Khiva, in the north-east with Kokand, and in the south with Afghanistan. Herat, Kabul and Peshawar formed the northern part of Afghanistan while Maimana and Balkh belonged to Bokhara. Badakhshan – described as 'inhabited by people claiming descent from Alexander the Great' – was squeezed in between Bokhara, Kokand, Afghanistan and Chinese dominions. The ruler's seat Fayzabad is also called Badakhshan that includes Chitral and parts of Kafiristan as well. Source: The London atlas of universal geography, exhibiting the physical & political divisions of the various countries of the World, constructed from original materials. Is most respectfully dedicated to his venerable friend John Middleton Esqr. As a testimony of gratitude and esteem, by his much obliged & humble servant, John Arrowsmith, F.R.G.S. & R.A.S. 35, Essex Street, Strand, London. London, pubd. by J. Arrowsmith ... 1838. Plate 29. Courtesy Pamir Archive Collection

'A Map of the Kingdom of Caubul and some of the neighbouring countries, altered from a Map constructed in the Year 1809. By Lieut. John Macartney, 5th Regt. Bengal Native Cavalry. A New Edition: Redrawn and engraved with considerable improvements' was published in 1838 to accompany the third edition of Mountstuart Elphinstone's famous book 'An account of the Kingdom of Caubul' that has drawn the attention of Great Britain towards Afghanistan. The northeastern section represented here partly shows the Mooz Taugh (Muztagh = Snowy Mountains) or Karrakoorum Mountains (Karakoram = black gravel) as the border between Chinese Toorkestaun on the one hand and Toorkistaun including Little Tibet in the East. The source of the Oxus (Punj, Ammu) is located in a knot where Wukhan (Wakhan) features as the most prominent besides Sirhud (sarhad = border) and Pooshti Khur, a rarely used term. The headwaters of the Oxus originate in the Valley of Wukhan. The Oxus is bordered in the South by a range called 'Budukhshaun' merging with the 'Beloot Taugh or Cloudy Mountains' that separate Fyzabad from 'Kaush-kaur' with the centre in 'Chitraul' and touch 'Caufristaun'. Further south 'Co-histaun' leading to the 'Hindoo Coosh' or 'Indian Caucasus'. Mountain ranges separate Kabul from the northern mountains and principalities. The represented section is reduced to 85 % of its original size.

Courtesy Pamir Archive Collection



waters are pure and crystal clear like a mirror; nobody has ever fathomed its depth. Its colour is black and blue; its taste is sweet and tasty. In its deeper layers sharks, dragons and turtles are living. On its surface ducks, wild geese, cranes and other birds are to be found.”²⁵ René Grousset adds that Xuanzang identified the Sarikul as the main water-parting between Kashgaria and Transoxania, between the Oxus and the Tarim.

The topic of centrality is discussed by Alexander von Humboldt when trying to establish the aforementioned position of Imaus as a central feature of the Inner Asian mountain systems. In the 18th century, Peter Simon Pallas attributed a central position to a peak in the Tien Shan, an ascription criticised subsequently by Alexander von Humboldt. The search for the meeting of north-south and east-west striking chains in a central position is rooted in early Greek texts and remained a topic of academic debate in the 19th century, when the structure of mountain systems in meridional and parallel chains²⁶ became a topos of the systematic scientific ordering of the world. Humboldt’s assessment of the morphological structure of Inner Asia is a great leap forward compared to Immanuel Kant’s lectures on physical geography, where the only reference to Inner Asian mountains concerns Tibet.²⁷ Alexander von Humboldt assumes that Imaus – its etymology is traced back to the Sanskrit *himavat* (snow mountains) – presents a mountainous meridional dividing line between Mesopotamia and China.²⁸ Moreover, he excels in summarising knowledge about the people living at the ‘foot of the Indian Caucasus’²⁹ and about the caravans crossing the Imaus mountains. The map referred to was published in 1843 to accompany his book and is based on an earlier version that was prepared in 1827.³⁰ The map, prepared by John Macartney in 1809 and improved in 1838 for the third edition of Mountstuart Elphinstone’s book ‘An account of the Kingdom of Caubul’ in the following year, represents the Hindukush as the ‘Indian Caucasus’, thus going back to James Rennell’s definition.³¹ Alexander von Humboldt mentions Dards, Baltis, Indo-Iranians, Macedonians and Seres in their search for Bactrian gold, trading between Kabul and Serica and crossing the Hindukush – the Indian Caucasus – and the Himalaya as well as the Altai and Tien Shan mountains over long periods of time.³² The search for gold is a continuing and enduring subject in High Asia. Prompted by early Greek historiography and geography, Herodotus associated the high mountain ranges of inner Asia with gold.

Bactria, Tibet and the Pamirs became the destinations for an upsurge in interest in the metal, and consequently, mineral gold and gold attire were topics of prime importance in early gazetteers, travelogues and treatises.³³

In particular, gold deposits are connected with a second mountain toponym. In the second half of the 19th century, Bolor was becoming the emblem of the desire to access High Asian wealth. The ‘founder of Kirghiz historiography’³⁴, Chokan Valikhanov, summarised: “The Bolor is particularly rich in minerals. Gold in nuggets forms the staple of trade between Karategin and Kokan, and slaves (Lapis Lazuli), turquoises and rubies constitute that between Badakhshan and Yarkend. The Pamir Kirghizes bring rock-crystals, jasper in various forms, and gold nuggets to Yarkend and Kashgar.”³⁵ A similar form of mineral wealth is described by Munshi Abdul Rahim for Badakhshan: “Gold is obtained in the form of dust from the River Kokcha, and compared with that of Gilgit, it is cheap in Badakhshán. The people generally take this gold by way of Balkh to Kábul. Lapis lazuli is found in the pass of Yamgán, in the district of Askán or Gharmi, and the ruler of that place sells it in Faizábád. According to the Badakhshánis, the best lapis lazuli is a clear blue, and has specks of gold on its surface. This kind is also most in favor in Bokhára, and the larger the grains are, the greater is the value. Russian merchants buy lapis lazuli and take it to their own country. ... None can sell lapis lazuli except the ruler, but when there is anarchy in Badakhshán, and one king being deposed, no other has been appointed, the miners appropriate whatever lapis lazuli they have by them.”³⁶ Both descriptions differ on their interpretation of the centres of mining, but the wider area seems to be the Pamirian region.

The search for the location of Bolor is part of Humboldt’s systematic recounting and interpretation of knowledge: “...Bolor, das heißt des Knotens der Berge von Badakschan, Durwaz und Pamir ...”³⁷ His prolonged interpretation of the Pamirian Knot terminates in the perception that an important dividing line is located there, culminating in a meridional mountain chain: “... Imaus, der von Süden gen Norden zieht und Asien jenseits des Himalaya in zwei fast gleiche Teile zerlegt.”³⁸ In a similar manner, Alexander Cunningham consulted early Chinese sources and concluded: “To the south of Pamer he [Xuanzang] places *Po-lu-lo*, or Bolor, of which he says that the south-eastern part of the district is inhabited, and that the country produces much



In the vicinity to the Bezeklik caves in the Turfan depression a monument of Xuanzang and his company was erected to remember one of the best-known journeys of a Chinese traveller across the High Asian mountain divide into the Indian subcontinent. His journey took place between 629 to 645 CE under the protection of the expanded and far-reaching Tang Empire and provided detailed descriptions about the routes and the economic, religious and linguistic situation in Inner Asia. Xuanzang’s travelogue was the basis for Wu Cheng’en’s novel ‘Xiyouji’ – Journey to the West, which was published in 1570 and has remained popular in artworks, theatre plays, puppet shows and comics up to the present day. The monument located east of Turfan refers to the novel while Xuanzang met with local dignitaries that are alike to the persons depicted in the Turfan murals and wall-paintings. See René Grousset (1986); Albert von Le Coq (1926, 1928); Mishi Saran (2005); Wu Cheng’en 1982. The photograph was taken on September 25, 2010

The map section displayed here is part of the 'Atlas von Asien 3. Lieferung 1852' under the direction of Heinrich Kiepert. The map that was produced to accompany Carl Ritter's third tome on West Asia covers what contemporarily was described as 'Turan oder Türkistan'. The area between Badakhshan in the south-west and Kashgar in the east is attributed to 'Kirghizen' stretching from the 'Belur Tagh' (Belur Mountains) in the north to the 'Hochland Pâmir' (Pamirian Highlands) in the south including Wakhan above Khandut. The area depicted is definitely outside the Russian realm and strictly separated from territories controlled by the Chinese Empire.

Source: C. Ritter's *Erdkunde, Buch III. West-Asien, Theil VII*, designed by Heinrich Kiepert, published by Carl Ritter, produced in Geo-lithographische Anstalt by H. Mahlmann – Courtesy Pamir Archive Collection Opposite

The map 'Gebirgsketten und Vulkane in Central-Asien nach den neuesten astronomischen Beobachtungen und Höhenmessungen' was prepared by Alexander von Humboldt in 1839–40 and finalised by C. Petermann in Potsdam. The map accompanies the 1844 edition of von Humboldt's opus on Central Asia. The northern part of the section shows an area where Kirghiz hordes seem to control the steppes while the mountainous South is devoid of such indications. Here the meridional and parallel ranges of major mountain systems are visualised in a double cross consisting in its northern part of the Tien Shan and in the southern part of the northern Hindu-Kho (Hindukush) and the Kuen-Lun. The latter are functioning as the major watershed between the Oxus and Jaxartes on the northern side and the Indus system in the South. The meridional mountain system connecting both parallel chains is the Bolor range that separates Badakhshan and Wakhan from the Pamir and Sirikul in the East. The Oxus is cutting through the Bolor mountains that are named Tsungling (Onion Mountains) close to the cross. The southern section shows the course of the Indus and its tributaries of the Punjab. Indus and Sutlej are cutting through the Himalaya that forms the eastern continuation of the southern Hindu-Kho.

Courtesy Pamir Archive Collection





gold. But these facts are true of the present Bolor or Balti; the higher mountains moreover abound in rock-crystal, which is consequently called the Belor-stone, or simply Belor. The transverse north and south range of mountains is called *Belut-Tágh*, or the 'Cloudy Mountains'; and this name has, I believe, confounded with Bolor."³⁹

Henry Yule supported Humboldt's opinion on the ordering and classification of the mountain ranges: "The prolongation of the Himalaya, binding the Indian Caucasus to the Celestial Mountains, this Outer Imaus, Tsung-ling, or Pamir, is the most notable watershed and natural limit in Asia."⁴⁰ The early Kazakh explorer Chokan Chingisovich Valikhanov suggested: "The Bolor mountains, otherwise called Alai by Andijans, are precipitous and inaccessible on their western face, and form on the east a high, cold plateau, visited only in summer by the Kirghizes. There is only one caravan road over the Bolor, which passes through Badakshan. This Badakshan road is said to be very fatiguing, and, at best, is not practicable on horseback. The road through Badakshan to Yarkend leads to Khulm, thence to Bokhara, Balkh, and Cabul; caravans requiring sixty-five days to reach Bokhara by this route."⁴¹ Thomas Douglas Forsyth was thought to have positioned the mountain cross in Sarikol: "Sárigh Kul or Sirikul is an entirely mountainous district wedged in at the point of junction of the Bolortagh range with that of the Hindú Kush, where it joins the great Himalaya chain. To the northward and westward it is separated from the Pamir by the Tagharma mountain and its emanations, and to the southward and eastward from the independent little States of Yasín and Kunjud by the Múztágh or 'Glacier Mountain' and its lofty western peaks called Taghning Bash or Taghdumbash or 'Mountain Head', where meet, as in the point of section of a cross, the four great mountain systems of the Central Asian Continent, viz., the Himalaya and Hindu Kush separating Tartary from India, and the Suliman and Bolor ranges dividing those two great countries into their respective distinct geographical regions; the tablelands of Khurasan and the plains of India on the one hand, and the valley of the Oxus and the basin of the Tárim on the other."⁴²

The position and meaning of Bolor has remained an enigma throughout the ages. Although represented in many early descriptions and cartographic sketches as a mountain chain and/or a political unit, its location and extent remain vague. From his reading of Xuanzang's *Si-Yu-Ki*, Karl Jettmar inferred that "... Bolor was a state which had only a

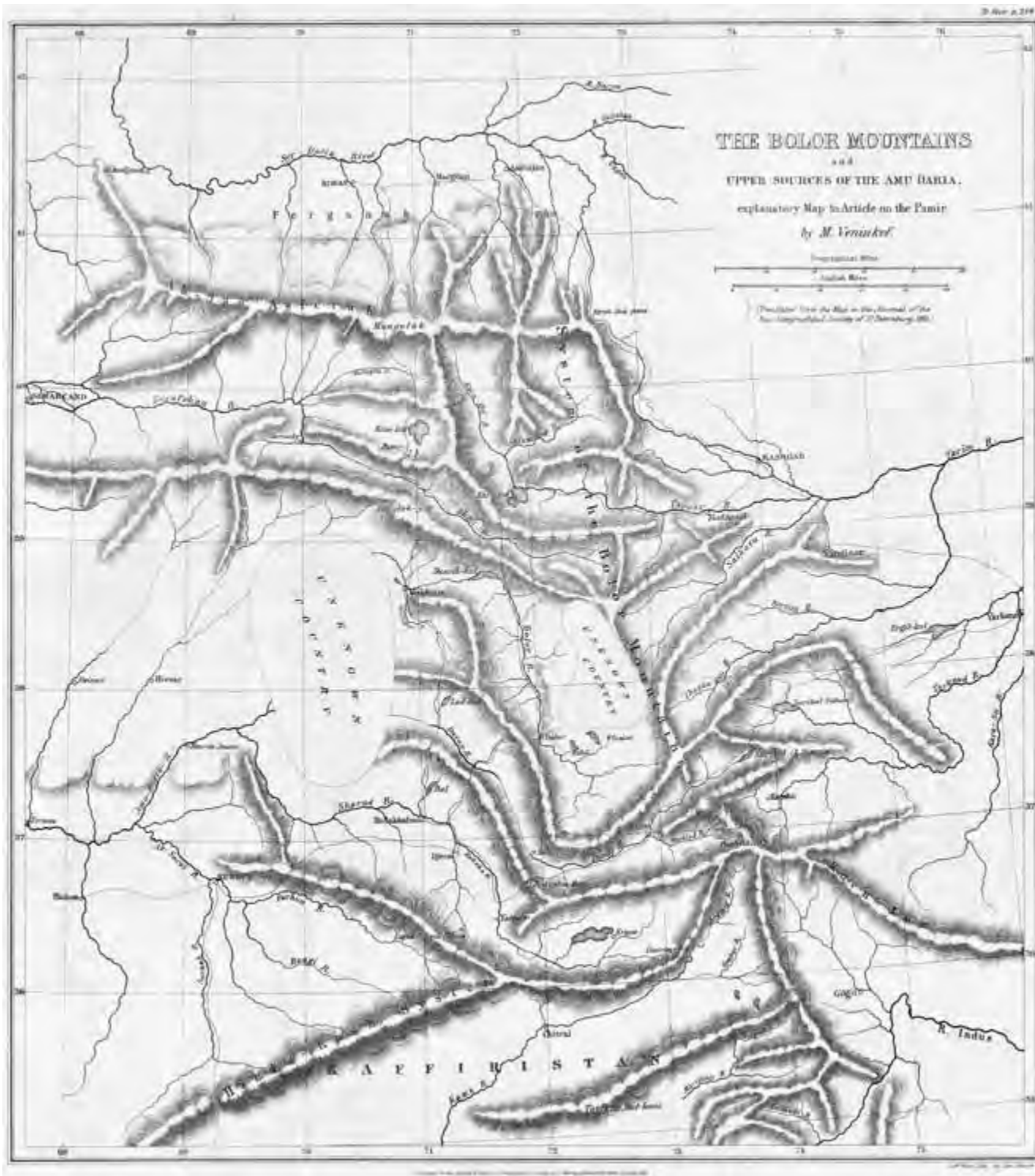
restricted extension from north to south but covered a large strip of land from west to east.”⁴³ Karl Jettmar distinguished between Little Bolor as the Gilgit Valley and Great Bolor as Baltistan.⁴⁴ At the beginning of the 16th century, Mirza Haidar Dughlat described a vast area that was bounded in the north by Badakhshan, Sarhad-e Wakhan, Sarikol and Raskam, in the east by Kashgar and Yarkand, in the south by the Swat Valley and extended westwards to Kabul and Laghman: “The width of the Pámir, in some places is eight days’ journey. Passing onwards, one comes to some of the Yarkand mountains which adjoin Balur, such as Raskam and the Tágh Dum Bash ...”⁴⁵ Later sources refer to smaller entities that are somehow related to Chitral, Gilgit and Baltistan.

In the map prepared by Alexander von Humboldt, we find Bolor as an important and centrally located meridional mountain range linking the Tien Shan and northern Hindu-Kho (Hindukush). His perception is in accordance with the Jesuit travellers of the mid-18th century, who note Bolor as ‘Massif des Tsoung-ling’ east of Wakhan and south of Kashgar.⁴⁶ About a century later, in 1861, the Russian Colonel Michail Ivanovich Veniukov presented to the Imperial Geographical Society in St. Petersburg a map that five years later was published in London in the Royal Geographical Society’s journal titled ‘The Bolor Mountains and the upper sources of the Amu Daria’.⁴⁷ It showed the ‘system of the Bolor Mountains’ as the meridional range east of Kashgar, separating Sarikul from Wakhan. In the upper parts of the Bolor river, a place representing a settlement is identified by the same name. Veniukov’s book, which was translated into German, shows that the debate gained attention again when the ‘Great Game’ started to heat up.⁴⁸ A rather different location southwest of Kashgar was given in a map published by Henry Yule in 1872, in which Bolor is located in the centre of a pentagon with corners formed by Kanjut, Badakhshan, Shighnan, Wakhan and Sirikol.⁴⁹ Henry Yule summarises a lengthy debate on Bolor in the accompanying paper. At the beginning of the 20th century, Andrei Jevgenievich Snessareff did not give in and tried to identify Bolor as the parting plateau separating the Western and Eastern Pamirs.⁵⁰ Attempts to locate Bolor span over a wide range, reaching from the Panj River to Sarikol and from Kanjut to Baltistan.

Over the centuries, identifying Bolor as a clear-cut and enduring spatial and political entity has remained an elusive and unsuccessful endeavour. Robert Michell tried to terminate the discourse by stating: “This has been all explored

(and almost all thoroughly) by scientific and intelligent men. So well, indeed, has this region been studied, that its geological structure, its natural history, topography, and hydrography, have been very satisfactorily resolved at St. Petersburg, and the questions considered by the great Humboldt, by Ritter, and others have been finally determined; the matter of the speculative, as well as of the apocryphal, geography of the ‘Bolors’ has been set at rest.”⁵¹ A rather prolonged search for Bolor ended at the point where Thomas Edward Gordon had begun his research in the Pamirs in April 1874: “We made repeated enquiries from Kirghiz and Wakhis, and from Mir Fatteh Ali Shah, regarding ‘Bolor’, as a name for any mountain, country, or place, but all professed perfect ignorance of it.”⁵² The initial hypothesis of a long meridional mountain chain, with Bolor as its centrepiece, had been discarded; Alexander Cunningham had been the first to realise the fallacy, and others soon followed suit.⁵³

The Indian Caucasus and the Kuen-Lun Mountains changed names over time. The former became known as the Hindukush and some added even the Hindu Raj as a north-eastern addition thereto. Kuen-Lun, Kouenlun and Muztagh were toponyms for a mountain chain that was identified as a separate massif by the Schlagintweit brothers, who introduced the term ‘Karakorum’, which was used by von Humboldt as a secondary chain of the Kuen-Lun – ‘Nubra oder Karakurum’ – and as a name for a pass in his map on Central Asian Mountains.⁵⁴ He had relied on Godfrey Thomas Vigne, who observed in 1837–38: “When the Shy-Yok is too full for wading, the merchants travelling from Ladakh to Yarkand enter the valley of Nubra, and then turn up a path to the right, and arrive at Kurukurum, ... The Kurukurum mountains I believe to be a branch or spur from the Muztak, and the principal crest to be passed in the way of the Shy-Yok to Yarkund.” In his map, he identified the ‘Mustak’ as being ‘extended from Gilghit to Nubra’ and its eastern extension was named ‘Kara Kurum’.⁵⁵ A few years later the ‘Assistant-Surgeon on the Bengal Establishment, and Commissioner to Tibet’, Thomas Thomson, ascended the pass and observed: “The natives of Ladakh and Nubra have no name for the extensive range of snowy mountains, and in general these names are confined to localities (towns or encamping places); even rivers have no general names. The name Karakorum is confined to the range N. of the table-land, and in particular to the pass ...”⁵⁶ Hermann von Schlagintweit-Sakünlünski claimed to have identified the Himalaya,



'The Bolor Mountains and the upper sources of the Amu Daria, explanatory map to the article on the Pamir' accompanies M. Veniukof's contribution to the *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* in 1866 after the Russian edition had been published in the *Journal of the Imperial Geographical Society of St. Petersburg* in 1861. The mountain ranges east of Kashgar are attributed to the Bolor Mountains while Bolor is supposed to be linked with Wakhan by the Bolor River, 'Dzarik Kul' and close to 'Eshil' Kul. In relation to the 'ruby mines' it would correspond to the capital of Shughnan, otherwise it is positioned further east towards Alichur. The Hindukush is stretching like a southern border towards the Kuen Lun, southwards 'Kaffiristan' – the land of the infidels – is located around Chitral separated by another range from Gilgit and the Indus Valley. Further comments were provided by Michail Ivanovich Veniukov in 1869. One of the controversial debates of that time were related to a travel report by an anonymous German called 'Georg Ludwig von ---', whose journey supposedly took place in 1769–70 and the text was translated by Heinrich Klaproth into French. Sir Henry Rawlinson considered the account to be fabricated while Colonel Veniukov refreshes the debate.

Source: Michail Veniukof 1866a: *The Pamir and the Sources of the Amu-Daria*. In: *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*. London: Murray, Vol. 36. The represented section is reduced to half of its original size.

Courtesy Pamir Archive Collection and Royal Geographical Society

The central section of the 'Sketch map illustrative of Sir D. Forsyth's mission to Kashghar' shows the routes of the 'European members' and the 'Native explorers' attached to the Forsyth Mission. The Wakhan routes were explored by Thomas E. Gordon who approached the principality from the Kashgar side via Sarikol and Tashkurgan. Munphool Meer Monshee proceeded further down the Pjandj – here denominated Ab-i Panja – all the way to Kila Wamar in Roshan. Both explorers contributed substantially to the British notion and perception about the state of affairs in Wakhan. Source: *The Geographical Magazine*. London: Trübner, Vol. 2, 1875. The represented section is enlarged by twenty-one percent. Courtesy Pamir Archive Collection





The sketch of Qala-e Panja was published in Thomas Edward Gordon's book 'The roof of the world'. The perspective is looking east towards the Great and Little Pamirs and showing five fort-like structures from which number Gordon explains the toponym Panja. In his narrative he refers to two forts and three towers. Gordon's drawing might be the earliest of its kind showing the capital of Wakhan. Source: Thomas Gordon (1876a: 131 opposite)

Karakoram and Kuen-Lun as separate mountain systems, labels which have been respected as such ever since.⁵⁷ Shortly afterwards, the claim was accepted by the tragic traveller George Hayward, who reported to the Royal Geographical Society in London: "It would be satisfactory were a definite geographical name assigned to the great watershed dividing the basin of the Indus from the Turkistan rivers, and which is comprised of the great chain known, in the different portions of its length, as the Karakoram, Muztâgh, and more anciently Belortâgh, and Pololo. To the inhabitants of Eastern Turkistan the whole chain is known as the Muztâgh range, which in Turki means the 'Glacier Mountain', or range; the word Karakoram being merely applied to the pass of that name. That the name Karakoram should be given to the range indefinitely is desirable for the sake of distinction ..."⁵⁸

More important for posterity than nomenclature was the focus on Central Asia that had been set by Humboldt. In his ground-breaking work on China, Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen (1877, I: 3) acknowledged Humboldt's achieve-

ment and realised the importance of Central Asia in gaining an understanding of China.⁵⁹ Neither of the great scholars got a chance to travel from the west or east towards the inner and mountainous parts of Central Asia. With Alexander von Humboldt's ground-breaking work and his theoretical considerations and thoughts about a mountain system ended the construction of Central Asian worlds by masterminds behind the scenes.⁶⁰ Consequently, attention placed on Central Asia did not fade, and the time had come for explorers to travel personally into the Inner Asian mountains in order to carry out ground surveys.

Interest in the Pamirs remained high, and ground surveys – such as the 'Gilgit Mission', led by William Stephen Alexander Lockhart and Robert Gosset Woodthorpe, in 1885–86 – took an interest in the geology, morphology and vegetation cover of Pamir and Wakhan. Surgeon George Michael James Giles, a member of the mission, described the environment: "The characteristic feature of the Trans-Hindú Kush is the Pamir steppe, the peculiarities of which, though to a less marked extent than on the Pamir proper, can be rec-

ognised throughout nearly the entire length of the Wakhán valley. The word ‘steppe’ is a somewhat misleading one, as it is apt to give the impression of a plain. This, however, is far from the truth, as the Pamir is a succession of mountain valleys differing only from those met with elsewhere in the Himalayas by the superior width of the valley bottoms.”⁶¹ The aim of their mission, which returned with the first photographs from Pamir and Wakhan, was to search for suitable routes across passes and to connect known territories by understanding regional characteristics and properties.

PEOPLE AND PLACES

Hydrography and orography seem to have initiated an exploratory interest that only vaguely disguised further ambitions. The inhabitants and the traversers of this mountainous interface have been addressed so far only in passing. In early communications, people occupied such harsh places only as part of the natural environments that posed special challenges at the respective borders of the ecumene. The limits of settlement and survival were measured in terms of altitude, aridity and low temperatures. Glacial formations have left their mark in the landscape and contributed to a unique environment characterised by harsh ecological conditions, in which substantial grassy areas in the Inner Asian highlands are exceptional and therefore highly valued. The pastures, rangelands and hunting grounds constitute attractive locations for human endeavours, in stark contrast to the sterile rock formations and high mountain deserts. Pamir thus represents mountain and valley: a habitat perceived sometimes as so harsh that it could only be termed a ‘region of refuge’⁶² or a hiding place. Nobody would choose to live there if other lands and pastures were accessible and available for agricultural and pastoral practices.

If the region is unsuitable for permanent abodes, then episodic or seasonal usage could be of interest. Pamirian pastures offer a substantial fodder potential during summer, whereas winter poses extreme challenges. In Marco Polo’s frequently quoted travelogue, these areas are mentioned as being most suitable for animal husbandry,⁶³ as livestock grows fat over short periods and the Pamirs offer ample pasturage. About 600 years later, Mountstuart Elphinstone stated: “A great part of the people of Bokhaura reside in tents, and follow pasturage, to which indeed they are compelled

by the unproductive deserts of which so much of their country is composed. Ferghauna, a richer country, which is secure of water from the neighbourhood of mountains, has few wandering tribes”.⁶⁴ Seasonal access to the Pamirs has a long tradition: while pastoralists preferred the summer season, hunters took advantage of the lower snowlines in winter to pursue game.

More important – although sometimes rare – were intruders on the high plateau, who came for reasons of trade, pilgrimage and conquest. Seasonal preferences depended on the chances of crossing rivers and mountain passes. In these high mountain regions, rivers often posed greater obstacles than passes above 5,000 m in altitude. The caravans of traders and explorers depended mainly on makeshift camps, as the Pamirs were devoid of villages and military posts for long periods of time. Robert Shaw, a tea merchant and one of the first British travellers to visit Kashgaria, consulted a local notable, Prince Mirza Haider, for a description of the area’s geography: “*Badakhshân* is on the west of *Yârkand*, and there also these mountains intervene. That which lies between *Yârkand* and *Badakhshân* is called *Pâmîr*. The width of *Pâmîr* is, in some places, seven or eight days’ journey. When one has passed this, there are some mountains of *Yârkand* which adjoin *Balor*, such as *Raskam* and *Tâgh-dumbâsh*; and when one has passed these, the rest is land belonging to Tibet.”⁶⁵ The prince highlighted the Pamir’s position between places of commercial interest. In another instance, the Greek traveller Papagiotis Potagos visited the Pamir in summer 1870 and defined its location: “Pamir is a narrow and long-stretched grassland, bordered by ramifications of the seven remote mountains on the west side, by Tach-kourgan [Tashkurgan] Mountains extending till Siberia on the north and east side and by the Pamir mountain located in the right angle formed by the Tach-kourgan with the Himalaya. The whole surface of this long grassland seems undivided, but it is actually cut by numerous small valleys; it extends to the North-East under the name of Little Pamir and to North-West it is called Great Pamir. Both Pamirs lie in the middle of a chain of mountains that reach the chain of the Himalaya to the South, descend to Siberia to the North and extend to the Boukhara and Techkand [Tashkent] prairies to the West and Kachgar and Yarkand ones to the East. This huge chain of mountains that close the Pamir has its crest in the Tach-kourgan Mountains, from which flow to the West Sir [Syr] and Amou rivers and to the

East Yarcand River.”⁶⁶ From his point of view, the Pamirs formed a landscape unit between Siberia, the steppes and the Himalayas that was structured by valleys and passes for connecting routes. Muztagh Ata was perceived as the towering mountain peak of the Pamirs. Thomas Edward Gordon inspired many following travellers and writers with his precise observations: “The Pamir plateau may be described as a great, broad, rounded ridge, extending north and south, and crossed by thick mountain chains between which lie elevated valleys, open and gently sloping towards the east, but narrow and confined, with a rapid fall, towards the west. The waters which run in all, with the exception of the eastern flow from the Taghdungbash, collect in the Oxus, the Aksu, from the Little Pamir lake, receiving the eastern drainage which finds an outlet in the Aktash valley, and joining the Murghab, which obtains that from the Alichur and Siriz Pamirs. As the eastern Taghdungbash stream finds its way into the Sirikol and Yarkand rivers, and the Great and Little Karakuls send their waters to the Oxus and the Kashghar river respectively, the Neza Tash range and Kizil Art plain must be regarded as forming the watershed between Eastern and Western Turkistan.”⁶⁷ Henceforth its location was interpreted as an area in between, or as a major mountainous threshold from one river valley to another.

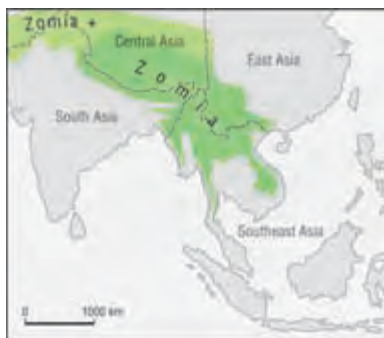
Prior to his visit in 1894, George Nathaniel Curzon summarised the overall connotation from a geopolitical perspective: “... Pamir or which have been variously represented as grassy plains and horrible wildernesses, as a certain death-trap for invading armies, and yet as the vulnerable gates of Hindustan ...”⁶⁸ After visual inspection, Curzon highlights other aspects in his description: “The main and differentiating features, therefore, of a Pamir are the abundance of pasturage, affording excellent food for every variety of animal; and the almost total absence either of timber or of cultivation. There are parts of the Pamirs where a few trees grow, and where a scant tillage is practised ... The fact is that the Pamirs are both fertile and barren, both habitable and desolate, both smiling and repellent, according to the point of view from which they are regarded.”⁶⁹ Permanent dwellings in the Pamirs are mainly the outcome of events that changed the political landscape in the 19th and 20th centuries. In addition to settlements, boundaries were laid down during this period, which were delineated and demarcated in high terrains that some administrators perceived as uninhabited and out of bounds, not to say beyond civilisation.⁷⁰



Boundaries and borders are significant markers for this growing interest and for dividing an area into different spheres of influence, attributing parts and pieces to different actors and stakeholders. From an academic point of view, a similar process happened here to that described by Willem van Schendel for Zomia and later expanded to Zomia+ – the latter including the Pamirs and Wakhan – which he termed an ‘area of no concern’.⁷¹ From a more general perspective, this can be interpreted as the result of the peripheralisation of upland regions and the neglect of powerful mainstream discourses. The Pamir in its politically divided appearance has some similarities to Zomia, in that its location is characterised as a transition zone between Central and South Asia. The spheres of political interference have influenced scientific perception. In terms of regional studies, Afghanistan, British India, China and Russia have been attributed to separate academic disciplines, thus distinguishing between Iran and Turan, India and China. In

The photograph is the earliest lantern slide of the fort in Qala-e Panja. Captain George Michael Giles took the photograph during the ‘Gilgit Mission’ when the expedition stayed in Qala-e Panja between May 23 and June 5, 1886. The former seat of the Mir of Wakhan had been vacated only two years earlier, when Ali Mardan Shah moved into exile. The expedition camped close to the fort while they were negotiating the onward journey and permissions with representatives from Badakhshan and the Amir of Afghanistan.

Source: The photograph was published in William Lockhart and Robert Woodthorpe (1889: 97 opposite) and is reproduced here with permission from the Royal Geographical Society in London: call number 030899)



Zomia and Zomia+ are supposed to cover areas where 'state evasiveness' prevails. Willem van Schendel (2002: 653) defines Zomia as an 'area of no concern'. Zomia incorporates 'zomi', a term for highlander in a number of languages spoken in Bangladesh, India and Myanmar. It refers to contiguous upland regions located in China, north-east India, Nepal, Pakistan, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam that have been expanded as Zomia+ towards Central Asia and the Hindukush Mountains; see Jean Michaud (2010: 202); James Scott (2009: 3–39).

Design by Hermann Kreutzmann

the contemporary discourse, Turan and Iran were treated as oppositional pairs that distinguished between language and physiographic units at the same time. Both terms can be found in the maps accompanying Carl Ritter's compilation work on Asia, under the title 'Vorderasien: Iran und Turan oder Persien, Afghanistan, Beludschistan & Türkistan', in 'Stieler's Handatlas' in 1860.⁷² In his essay on 'major natural regions', Andrew John Herbertson differentiated the 'Altai type' as an 'interior mountain area', as distinguished from the 'Turan type', as 'interior lowlands', from the 'Iran type' consisting of 'plateau' and the 'Tibetan type' representing 'lofty tropical or sub-tropical mountains'. In the discussion following the presentation of his paper in the Royal Geographical Society in 1904, Halford Mackinder supported Herbertson's attempt to define standards for 'regional geography or chorography', both of which were linked to the German fashion of 'Länderkunde'.⁷³ It was suggested by Daniel Waugh that Halford Mackinder himself derived some of his ideas about the Central Asian 'heartland' from Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen and his *opus magnum* on China. There he surprisingly attributes a central position to the Pamirs. Although he never got a chance to visit 'Chinese Central Asia' he suspected a very prominent function of the Pamirian hub.⁷⁴ The location of the Pamirs between these regions resulted in comparatively different treatments by regional scholars – Sinology, Turkology, Oriental studies, Iranian studies and Indology developed quite a variety of methodologies, perceptions, approaches and research interests. Their approaches were mainly embedded in regional studies. Similar connotations have been adopted by anthropologists, geographers and historians. Once the nation state enters the arena, schools of regionalism tend to become more articulate and adhere to their own respective affiliations.⁷⁵ Iran and Turan functioned as a dichotomy not only linguistically and spatially, but the pair also addressed the urban and the rural, the settled and the mobile. The Iranian Wilhelm Geiger suggested in his interpretations of the Avesta that the Aryans might have adopted the term 'Iran' in order to distinguish themselves from the "... Nomadenrassen, den Turaniern, in deren Originalnamen Tura die Schnelligkeit des Reiters liegt."⁷⁶ A European reception of the term Turan was dated by Vladimir Minorsky to as late as the 19th century, although it had already become known in Herbelot's *Bibliothèque Orientale* more than a century earlier.⁷⁷ In the 20th century, the term Turan gained a geopolitical meaning when Turk nationalists in Central Asia applied it to a common 'ethnic

community' in which Tatars, Uzbeks and Kirghiz struggled for 'national' independence.⁷⁸

Emphasis on the nation state sometimes disguises global implications. In order to identify different perspectives on the Pamirs, two aspects may be of importance. First is the global perspective on commercial and geo-political interests and external influences from parts of the world that are not physically connected to the Pamirs. Decision-making in Beijing, London and St. Petersburg had significant effects on the area of concern.⁷⁹ Second are factors on the ground such as separating spheres of influence by boundary-making, creation of nation states and divided scholarly domains, resulting in a container-like perception of space. Both perspectives are linked through different levels of communication and magnitudes of exchange. The application of different methodologies may contribute to a more holistic notion by assessing different effects, scales and degrees of freedom along trade corridors and across domains.

Borders and borderlands were the result of the formation of nation states.⁸⁰ Political scientists and regional researchers have developed their perspectives from viewpoints that are strictly anchored in their respective home regions. For the perception of the Pamirs, a Russian – later Soviet, and nowadays Tajik – perspective is embedded in the colonial conquests of Turkestan and the Emirate of Bokhara, the Great Game between Russia and Great Britain, Soviet policies of regional autonomy and more recently Tajikistan's struggle for independence. While external perceptions of the Pamirs have remained unchanged, the context has altered significantly. A contrasting British-Indian Empire's view emanated from Gilgit and Kashmir, its focal points during the 'Great Game'. Their contesting thrust towards the Pamirs was later replaced by Pakistan's pledge and subsequent drive for dominance in Gilgit-Baltistan, the former Northern Areas, with a view to maintaining its dominance in the Kashmir arena and rejecting Indian claims. China's perspective on the far-off Pamirian lands at its contemporary north-western periphery gained pace after it firmly established its claim to the 'new territories' (Xinjiang), also known as Altishahr, Kashgaria, Eastern Turkestan⁸¹ in other contexts. A well-rooted observer was Chokan Chingisovich Valikhanov, who, presenting a detailed account of Eastern Turkestan and Dzungaria, was described by his translators as follows: "Although an officer in the Russian service and a man of good education, he is the son of a Kirghiz Sultan and a native of the Steppes."⁸² Chokan Valikhanov and Michail Veniukov describe Altishahr as 'Kashgar, Yanyshar,



The map titled 'Iran & Turan oder Persien, Afghanistan, Balutschistan, Turkestan' carries the author's name August Petermann while the map was prepared by Hermann Habenicht and Fritz Hanemann at a crucial stage of the 'Great Game' prior to the settlement of the Pamirian boundaries. In the section represented here the green line shows the extent of Afghanistan's sphere of influence which roughly reaches Faizabad in the east. The 'Shiwa Pamir' and Shughnan, Roshan and Gharan are off-limits and outside all identified attributions and claims. The British realm (red line) has incorporated Gilgit up to Punial. The Bokharan control (beige colour) ends at the border of Darwaz, while the Russian sphere of influence (dark green line) includes Alai and the Kara Köl Pamir. China's western border (yellow colour) extends to the Kizil Art mountains with Kashgar and Yarkand as the prominent outposts. Consequently, there remains the 'Pamir-Plateau' as an in-between area bordering with Kafirstan that includes Dir, Chitral and Yasin. The Karakoram principalities such as Hunza and Nager, the Taghdumbash Pamir and Little Kara Köl Pamir, the Eastern and Western Pamirs all belong to that space in between that would become highly contested in the final stages of the 'Great Game'.

Source: Stieler's Hand-Atlas, initially published in the 1870s by Justus Perthes in Gotha, revised in 1882. The represented map section is enlarged to 130 % of its original size.

Courtesy Pamir Archive Collection

The nomenclature assigned to different territories varies over time as the effect of changing alliances and loyalties, colonial and imperial interventions, boundary-making and formation of nation states. Four glimpses at different times put the position of Pamir and Wakhan in perspective with regional relations. The year 1878 marks the termination of Yakub Beg's rule in Kashgaria that subsequently returns under Chinese domination. Eastern or Chinese Turkestan remain terms to be applied until the Chinese Revolution when Xinjiang – the 'new territory' – replaces the previous ones as an administrative title. In 1878, the borders of Afghanistan are in the formative phase, the present-day delineation is the result of the Durand Line (1893) and the work of the 'Pamir Boundary Commission' (1895). The Russian Empire's advances into the Pamir region are materialised in the establishment of Post Pamirski (1893) that functions in the Soviet Union as administrative and military headquarters in the Eastern Pamirs (Murghab). During the early stages of the Soviet period union territories were designed and borders shifted (1918–1929). The post-World War II map shows the Tajik Pamirs as part of Gorno-Badakhshanskaya Avtonomnaya Oblast (GBAO), a status whose principle objective and exclusive demarcation was not changed after Tajikistan's independence in the 1990s.

Design by Hermann Kreutzmann



Yarkend, Khotan, Aksù, and Ush-Turfan'⁸³ while Demetrius Charles Boulger mentioned "... six cities Kashgar, Yangy Hissar, Yarkand, Khoten, Ush Turfan, and Aksu and these constitute the territory of Kashgar proper. At one time, indeed, it was called Alty Shahr, or six cities, from this fact. In addition to these may be mentioned, in modern Kashgaria, Sirikul, or Tashkurgan, in the extreme south-west, which is principally of importance as the chief post on the frontier of Afghanistan ..."⁸⁴ Yakub Beg replaced the term 'Altishahr' with 'Jitishahr' after his conquest of the Turfan oasis.⁸⁵

The Pamirs served as a laboratory for Soviet-style experiments with regional autonomy, later adopted by Chinese authorities for Xinjiang that have more recently resulted in pastoralist resettlement schemes. Afghanistan enters the picture in a dual function. The Amir of Afghanistan acted as a conqueror of the northern territories as well as a respondent to the imposition of international boundaries by dominant imperial powers. The Pamirs had been a meagre resource for state revenue, and they had long remained a 'blank spot' on maps, but with the delineation of boundaries a significant chunk of the Pamirs became Afghan territory.

Opposite

During the high time of the 'Great Game' Captain Friedrich Immanuel published this overview map 'Uebersichtskarte der Pamir u. d. Quellgebiets des Amu-Darja' in which he depicted the conflicting claims of competing parties on the Pamir. The British version is presented in which Chinese demands reach westwards across the Kizil Yart range towards Yashil Kul incorporating Pamirski Post, Rangkul, Murghab and Alichur Pamirs. Afghan claims incorporate most of the Western Pamirs with Roshan, Shughnan, Garan and Wakhan, while the Amir of Afghanistan concedes to Russia the northern part with Darwaz and Karakul. Russian claims are supposed to include the Western and Eastern Pamirs, and the section of Wakhan east of a line drawn from Zor Kul to Sarhad-i Wakhan excluding the Great Pamir, but touching the Taghdumbash Pamir and the borders of Kanjut (Hunza). The map that is devoted to the Pamir Mountains and the source of the Amu Darya indicates a meeting of interests of three actors: Afghanistan, China and Russia while the English map makers are pretending to be observers. The Pamirs that were before often represented as a white spot in between now become 'colourful', i. e., under competition, at least according to the view of the fourth party Great Britain interpreted by a Prussian Army Captain. The represented map is reduced to 97 % of its original size.

Source: Friedrich Immanuel 1892: Die Pamirfrage. In: Dr. A. Petermann's Mitteilungen aus Justus Perthes' Geographischer Anstalt; hrsg. von A. Petermann. Gotha: Perthes, 38. Band. Courtesy Pamir Archive Collection

Petermann's Geograph. Mittheilungen.

Jahrgang 1892, Taf. 8.



GOtha : JUSTUS PERTHES
1892.

Jahrgang 1892, Tafel 8.



This early map titled 'Eastern Turkestan and its neighbours' by Demetrius Boulger is accompanying his book on Yakub Beg and carries the subtitle 'showing trade routes through Yakoub Beg's dominions'. Two interesting aspects are displayed here. First, the Pamir region stretches from the Pamir Plateau to the Kizil Yart Steppe and the Karakoram Range. It represents a true 'white spot' between the influential parties such as the Russian Empire, Bokhara, Afghanistan, Cashmere and the Chinese Empire. Its eastern border is given here as

'Eastern Turkestan or Kashgaria'. Interestingly, mountain ranges are prominent frontiers. Second, the British interest to support an independent ruler such as Yakub Beg at its northern frontier is clearly visible. Kashgaria is represented as a compact state of equal standing with its neighbours. Yakub Beg's dominions are framed in the north by the Tien Shan or Celestial Mountains along a line from Kashgar to Turfan, they cross the desert southwards towards the Altyn Tagh from where the borderline runs westwards through the Great Sandy

Desert to the Kuen Lun Mountains (Kun Lun Shan), northwards through the Taghdumbash Pamir of Sirikul (Sarikol) and the Kizil Yart Mountains. The Tarim River appears as a natural supplier and drain of his dominions.

Source: Demetrius Charles Boulger 1878: *The life of Yakoub Beg. Athalik Ghazi, and Badaulet, Ameer of Kashgar*. London: Allen. The map reproduced here is reduced to two thirds of its original size. Courtesy Staatsbibliothek Munich

WAKHAN

To consider the Pamirs from a historical-political viewpoint of imperial boundary-making and its spheres of influence as well as from an environmentally informed barrier perspective alone would neglect the presence of local actors, their changing alliances and the struggles for survival played out by residents of the peripheral mountain region. Wakhan and neighbouring principalities have provided a space for mountain dwellers who settled in the Pamirian Knot over long stretches of time as well as for mobile pastoralists who changed their multi-local abodes more frequently. In earlier times, the latter moved there on a seasonal basis, though the distinction between seasonal and permanent is no longer justifiable, as will be shown in the course of the argument. Degrees of mobility and modes of production differ in space and over time. Similarly, the shape of the regional entity, its size in a changing set of borders, its administrative characteristics and patterns of authority all vary, too. External interference and internal power games have contributed to a dynamism that has shaped changing borders under authority and domination, which reflects how evident political debates in European capitals and theoretical considerations by strategic planners can become in far-flung areas of High Asia, leaving their marks on political maps and affecting the everyday life of rural communities on the periphery.

Wakhan has been selected as the second regional focus because of the prominence it gained during boundary-making in the 'Great Game'.⁸⁶ Seen from the outside, Wakhan was part of the 'high road to India', where there are "over the Pamir ... a thousand roads," as Demetrius Charles Boulger – the author of the map showing trade routes between Eastern Turkestan and its neighbours – stated in his book 'England and Russia in Central Asia'.⁸⁷ Information derived from Kirghiz guides explains on the one hand that there are ample routes and manifold ways to cross the mountain ranges and the vast plateaux; on the other hand, actual 'expeditions' and explorations follow certain tracks that often led through Wakhan. The Russian explorer Chokan Valikhanov endorses this perception: "The Pamir is intersected by roads well-trodden by the Kirghizes; all of which lead to the Khanate of Kokan, or to Karategin."⁸⁸ A few years later, Jean-Baptiste Paquier provided descriptions and exploration maps depicting thoroughfares across the Pamirs that were taken by famous travellers from ancient to colonial times.⁸⁹

His maps show that Wakhan came into focus mainly during Anglo-Russian rivalry.

The compiler of the most authoritative gazetteers, Edmund Barrow, introduced Wakhan in a narrow topographical sense but with strategic importance: "Though politically this term comprises the Great and Little Pamirs as well as the inhabited valley of the Panja, practically it consists of the latter only, commencing at the point near Bozai Gumbaz, where the Panja leaves the Pamirs and ending on the frontier of Ishkasham. It is a desolate, treeless country, very sparsely inhabited. ... the real Wakhan may be described as a narrow strip along the Panja with tiny hamlets here and there on both banks. ... The importance of Wakhan lies not so much in the utility of these passes as lines of military operation, as in the fact, that were it occupied by the Russians, the tribes to the south of the Hindu Kush would always be in a state of restless uncertainty, and a raw would be established on our flank which might be difficult to cure."⁹⁰

In many respects, Wakhan as the source region of the Oxus became a major destination for exploration and, in its peculiar shape, has remained a symbol of imperial boundary-making to this day. Demetrius Boulger perceived the external relationships of Wakhan as being channelled towards the Amir in Kabul via the rulers of Badakhshan. Wakhan seemed to be an important stage for caravan trade between 'Eastern and Western Turkestan and Afghanistan' and as 'the northern entrance to the Baroghil pass leading from Kashgar to the Chitral valley'.⁹¹

Mir Munshi Abdul Rahim prepared a report on Wakhan 'by order of Major John Biddulph' presenting his findings from a mission to Badakhshan in 1879–1880.⁹² His detailed account remains a prime source of information about the state of affairs in Wakhan during the rule of Mir Ali Mardan Shah prior to the latter's escape into exile. Munshi Abdul Rahim matter-of-factly assessed the power and position of the ruler of Wakhan: "The Mirs of Wakhán have not much power ... No one in Badakhshán is held in so little honor as the Mir of Wakhán; but the people of Wakhán are very contented with his rule, so much so that if the Mir of Badakhshán made any one else Mir and deposed him, all the people would leave their country deserted and go away with him ..."⁹³ The internal setup of Wakhan is understood by Boulger as a state ruled by 'a semi-independent prince in Wakhan, Sirikol, and Sarhadd'.⁹⁴ The three distinct parts mentioned here are entities that are attributed to different environments

The 'Map of the Pamir Steppe and Neighbouring Districts to illustrate the letters of Colonel Gordon & Members of the Kashgar Mission' is based on John Biddulph's sketch and was published the same year. Thomas Edward Gordon (1874a, b, 1876a, b) delivered the most comprehensive account of Wakhan to date. Wakhan is presented only in its Pamirian part above Qala-e Panja. The course of the Kizil Yart Range is somehow out of orographic direction, confused with the Alai Mountains and the map shows the location of both Kara Köl lakes on a singular plain with the smaller one close to Muztagh Ata. The Great Pamir of Wakhan appears to be like a mountain fortress surrounded by the Alichur and Little Pamirs, both prominently featured. Adjacent Shughnan is labelled as 'Shijnan Territory'. Source: Extracts of letters from members of Mr. Forsyth's mission to Kashgar relating to the geographical results of the mission. In: *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography*, Vol. 18, No. 4, 1873–1874. The represented map is reduced to 77 % of its original size. Courtesy Pamir Archive Collection and Royal Geographical Society

Opposite

The sketch map of the Pamir region was prepared by John Biddulph during his mission with Thomas Gordon and Henry Trotter from Kashgar via Tashkeurgan to Qala-e Panja in Wakhan and back in 1874. The accompanying text gives a description of the two Kara Köl lakes, Shughnan etc. which reads for Wakhan: "Wakhan territory extends up to junction of Ahtash stream with stream flowing from Lake Karakul and contains the Great, Little and Alichur Pamir" and about the Kirghiz: "The Shijnan [Shughnan] Pamir and the Kizzilyart Plain are inhabited by wandering Kirghiz, the other Pamirs have been abandoned of late years." The map shows the sphere of influence of the Khanate of Kokand, the territory under the control of the Amir of Kashgar including Sarikol and the Kara Köl Lakes, and the perceived extent of Wakhan. Source: RGS Map Collection Call number mr Asia S/S.49. Courtesy Royal Geographical Society London



and inhabitants. Wakhan represents the valley below the confluence of Pamir and Wakhan Darya where all Wakhi villages are located. Sirikol is rather a vague description that could refer to the pastures of Kirghiz nomads stretching from Little and Great Pamir towards the Eastern Pamirs and the Taghdumbash Pamir. These are the high-lying grounds, whereas Sarhad – the literal meaning is 'border' or 'frontier' – describes the transition zone between them. The border connotation is alive in the toponym Sarhad-e Wakhan or Sarhad-e Baroghil, the village from where three routes take off towards Wakhan proper, the Pamirs, and Chitral. In Sarhad-e Wakhan, the settlements of Kirghiz and Wakhi meet at

an altitude of 3,320 m, where the highest permanent hamlets of Wakhan are located. Thomas Edward Gordon identified the Kirghiz as the 'population ... between the plains and Sirikol' and thus acknowledged their seasonal mobility.⁹⁵

Wakhan's transition from an independent principality, embedded in a set of changing and costly relationships with more powerful neighbours, to a divided entity that was reduced to separate and merely administrative units in different nation states is taken as a case in point for the analysis of political relationships, changing perspectives, mobility and migration in a Pamirian setting. From an Afghan perspective, M. Nazif Shahrani drew attention to the border situation and coined the important subtitle 'adaptation to closed frontiers'. In his pioneering study on the 'Kirghiz and Wakhi of Afghanistan', he concluded that "... the present location of the Kirghiz and Wakhi communities and their particular adaptive strategies are strongly influenced not only by their response to the constraints of high altitude, but also by their relationships with other societies in the context of larger regional, national, and international politico-historical processes. ... the initial occupation and continued habitation of the Wakhan and the Afghan Pamirs by the Wakhi and Kirghiz are not the result of a free and unrestricted choice but the result of long and protracted competition among many different interest groups in the region for control of strategic resources."⁹⁶ The Wakhi and Kirghiz are actors crossing the borders of domains and spheres of influence. Their mobility has created a cross-cutting mountain space of communication and exchange, while their movements and shifting of settlements and pasture grounds have spanned a quasi-'Zomian' space⁹⁷ that requires special attention at the peripheries of political divisions, where marginalised actors receive due attention by becoming central protagonists. Over long periods of time, the 'friction of terrain'⁹⁸ and the difficulty of access have provided security to remote mountain realms that kept a safe distance from dominant and strong neighbours.

Wakhan's lost independence is strongly linked to the creation of the Afghan state along borders that are the outcome of the Great Game. The two existing divisions of partition that nowadays belong to Afghanistan and Tajikistan are proof of the successful implementation of an imperial 'divide and rule' approach that is still reflected in international boundaries and internal administrative borders today. What can be identified easily nowadays as the out-reaching



There are two Karakul Lakes, one flowing East and one flowing West. The one flowing East forms the Ghiz stream and passing through the Ghiz Sawaan becomes the Cashgar river. The one flowing West joins the stream from the Ghazal Lake or Pamir Kul and forms the Murghab River, enters Shijnan at Burtang and traversing Shijnan falls into the Oxus at Tamer, five days journey below Kila Punja.

Shijnan is perfectly independent ruled over by
Yuseuf Ali Shah who also owns Koshan and adjoining
Pamir.

Wakhan territory extends up to junction of Ak-tash stream and stream flowing from Lake Karakul and contains the Great, Little and Alichur Bomirs.

The true watershed between East and West is the Kizil-
yart plain belonging to the Amir of Cashgar.

The Shynan River and the Keggikast Plain are inhabited by wandering Kergiz, the other Rivers have been abandoned of late years.

From Tashkurgan to small Karakul Lake is one days march from Small Karakul to Gt. Karakul is 5 days and to Ash from Gt. Karakul is 6 days march.

The Barojil Pass into Chitral is extremely easy and open the whole year with the exception of about five weeks in March and April.

The thin red line shows our route
The broad colored lines show the bound-
aries of Kashgar, Wakhan and Rhokand territory-

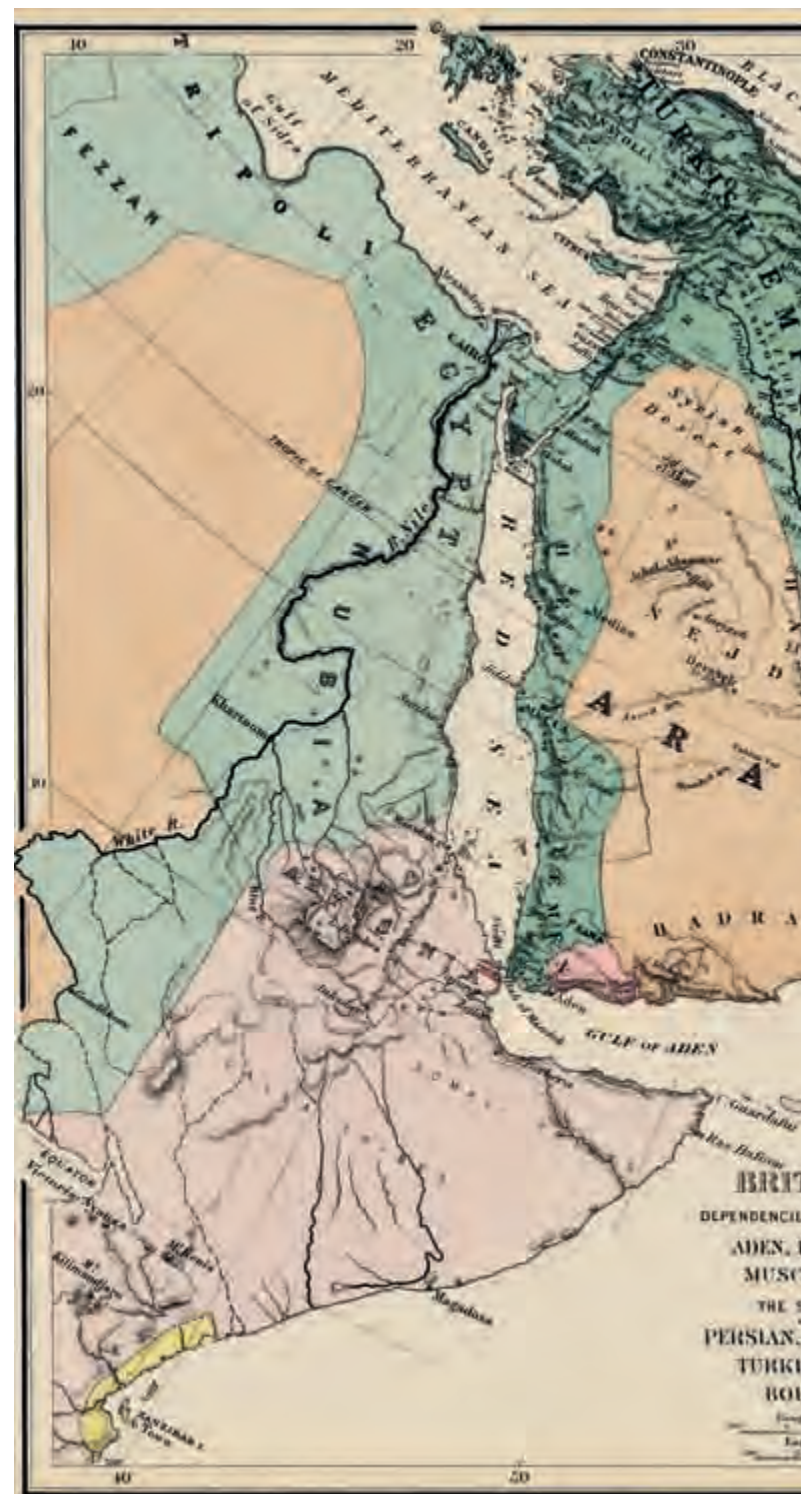
Clements Robert Markham's 'A Map of British India with its dependencies and political agencies including Aden, Baghdad, Bushire, Muscat and Zanzibar also the surrounding states with reference to the Persian, Afghan, Belooch, Turkish and Russian boundaries, etc.'

Source: Clements Robert Markham 1874. The represented map section is reduced to 62 % of its original size. Courtesy Pamir Archive Collection

north-eastern extremity of Afghanistan's boundaries is only one part of Wakhan's destiny and entirety, a notion which will be discussed and illuminated in the course of this argument.

BORDERS AND MAPS

Spatial perceptions and territorial divisions change significantly over time. Explorers and surveyors, travellers and adventurers have contributed to the expansion of spatial knowledge as summarised and displayed in maps. It was a search for accurate maps, as Alastair Lamb stated for the Sino-Pak boundary delineated in 1963, which in agreement revealed "... the fact that maps of remote tracts like the Karakoram are not always accurate."⁹⁹ The question of cartographic evidence displayed in maps was later taken up from a rather different viewpoint. The search for truth and accuracy in maps was significantly challenged when John Brian Harley started the deconstruction and reinterpretation of maps by stating: "Cartography has never been an autonomous and hermetic mode of knowledge, nor is it ever above the politics of knowledge. My key metaphor is that we should begin to deconstruct the map by challenging its assumed autonomy as a mode of representation."¹⁰⁰ Jeremy Crampton pointed out that "... maps are social constructions. The map is not objectively 'above' or 'beyond' that which is represented; nor can one track back from the representation to some ultimate object, knowledge or mind. One of the important implications of this is that, according to Harley, we should accept maps as rhetorical devices which dismantle the 'arbitrary dualism' (1989: 11) of propaganda versus true maps, or scientific versus artistic maps."¹⁰¹ A similar debate about the loss of innocence can be attributed to the nexus of maps and borders and more specifically to the search for science-based, accurate representations that were pursued in a positivist spirit and claimed sole authority. While boundaries seem to be linear elements that surround and separate areal entities, maps can be perceived as spatial representations with a complex array of territorial knowledge. The dualistic approach of dividing spaces in a bipartisan manner into the inner and outer, the included and excluded, the natural and artificial, the knowable and unknowable needs to be questioned as such and discussed in the context of history and power, thus embedding the de-





bate in the imperial game, the relationships between rulers and subalterns, and the network of exchange relations in general.

Matthew Edney plainly states: “Imperialism and map-making intersect in the most basic manner. Both are fundamentally concerned with territory and knowledge” and, he continues, “knowledge of the territory is determined by geographic representations and most especially by the map.”¹⁰² Edney’s book deals with ‘mapping an empire’ – British India – and focuses on mapping within, which is quite different from mapping borders. Within empires, the urge to administer and to govern a hitherto unknown territory dominates, while at the outer borders competition reigns between rivals. Governance and law, power and maps seem to have been interlinked for ages. The English statesman Fulke Greville provided a brief summary in the 17th century: “Powre must use lawes, as her best instrument; Lawes bring Mappes.”¹⁰³ All three categories mentioned are perceived as homogenising abstract parameters that represent the extent of territorial control. At the same time, maps can illustrate the diversity in composite spatial units. Their qualities for illustrating current knowledge, the vital interests of external powers and their extent of spheres of influence in the process of boundary-making will be frequently referred to by presenting and commenting on contemporary maps from the Pamir, Wakhan and adjacent regions in the context of various resources, from local traditions to archival sources.

The consolidation of British India involved the incorporation and taking over of the Moghul Empire, thereby replacing it in a process that gained pace in Bengal in 1757. At Plassey, far away from Pamir and Wakhan, the territorial conquest began to be transformed into an administrative and bureaucratic form of domination. Ainslee Embree argued that “... Pakistan is the legatee of Mughal frontier policy, but the more direct continuities are clearly with the imperial pattern worked out in the mid-nineteenth century.”¹⁰⁴ By the mid-18th century, about the same time as at Plassey, a similar process was initiated by the conquering Qing dynasty armies in the Tarim Basin, where in the span of “... five to six years the territorial expanse of the Qing empire had been almost doubled.”¹⁰⁵ At its outer limits – and especially in the northwest – emirates, khanates, mirdoms, principalities and states such as Afghanistan were actively trying to maintain their independence, often simultaneously, from British, Chinese and/or Russian influence.

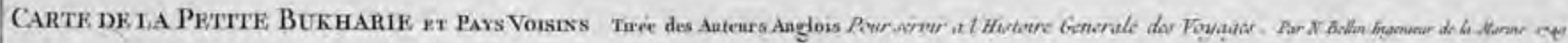
The arena of competition afforded and presented different justifications and rationalisations of borders and spheres of influence. Thus, the search for natural or scientific boundaries became a topic of diplomatic and academic debate. Their main sources of reference were contemporary maps. Compared with the lowlands of India, Tsarist Russia and eastern China, the mountainous interface remained rather marginal for map-makers, leaving substantial space for the imagination. As a result, blank spots and/or imagined places and spaces characterised early map-making. In a map titled ‘Tab[ula] VII. Asiae, exhibens Scythiam, intra Imaum Sogdianam, Bactrianam, Hircaniam, aliasque Asiae Regiones’, from about 1698, a mountain range identified as ‘Imaus mons’ separates ‘India intra Gangem’ from ‘Sacae’, where ‘nomades sunt, ciuitates [civitates] non habent, nemora autem & speluncas habent’. The land beyond the mountains – as perceived from the plains – lacks civitas and remains under the control of barbarians synonymous with nomads. Half a century later, greater detail is displayed in the map by the French nautical engineer Jacques Nicolas Bellin in which he presents a ‘Carte de la Petite Bukharie et Pays Voisins’. As chief cartographer to the French King, Bellin was a major contributor and member of the group which compiled and published Diderot and d’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie*. In his effort to compile contemporary knowledge of the world, his map of the remote mountain regions of Inner Asia is an early example of ‘Vakhan’ and the ‘Belur Tagh’ being positioned within ‘Grand Bukarie’.¹⁰⁶ Here, other people’s knowledge was compiled, but the quality of cartographic representation would change significantly a decade later. For their legacy in Chinese map-making, three Jesuits became famous as employees in the Qing imperial services: The Austrian Augustin von Hallerstein, who headed the Imperial astronomical tribunal from 1746, the Spaniard Joseph d’Espinha, who later became von Hallerstein’s successor, and the Portuguese Felix da Rocha. Together they published the *Qianlong Atlas* (*Qingdai yitong ditu*) consisting of 108 sheets in 1760.¹⁰⁷ Two of them – Felix da Rocha (Fu Zuolin) and Joseph d’Espinha (Gao Shensi) – and Minggantu, a Manchu¹⁰⁸ cartographer, headed a team that was sent by the Qianlong Emperor to measure especially recently conquered lands in the Far Northwest as part of a project to map his vast empire. Remarkable maps were prepared in the wake of the Qing conquest of Altishahr and Dzungaria that James Millward reads as “... almost reactively, as the Qianlong em-



The south-eastern section of the map 'Tab[ula] VII. Asiae, exhibens Scythiam, intra Imaum Sogdianam, Bactrianam, Hircaniam, aliasque Asiae Regiones' from app. 1698 identifies east of Sogdiana the area of the 'Sacae' who are described as 'nomades'. Further on it is mentioned that they obviously are 'speluncas habitant'.

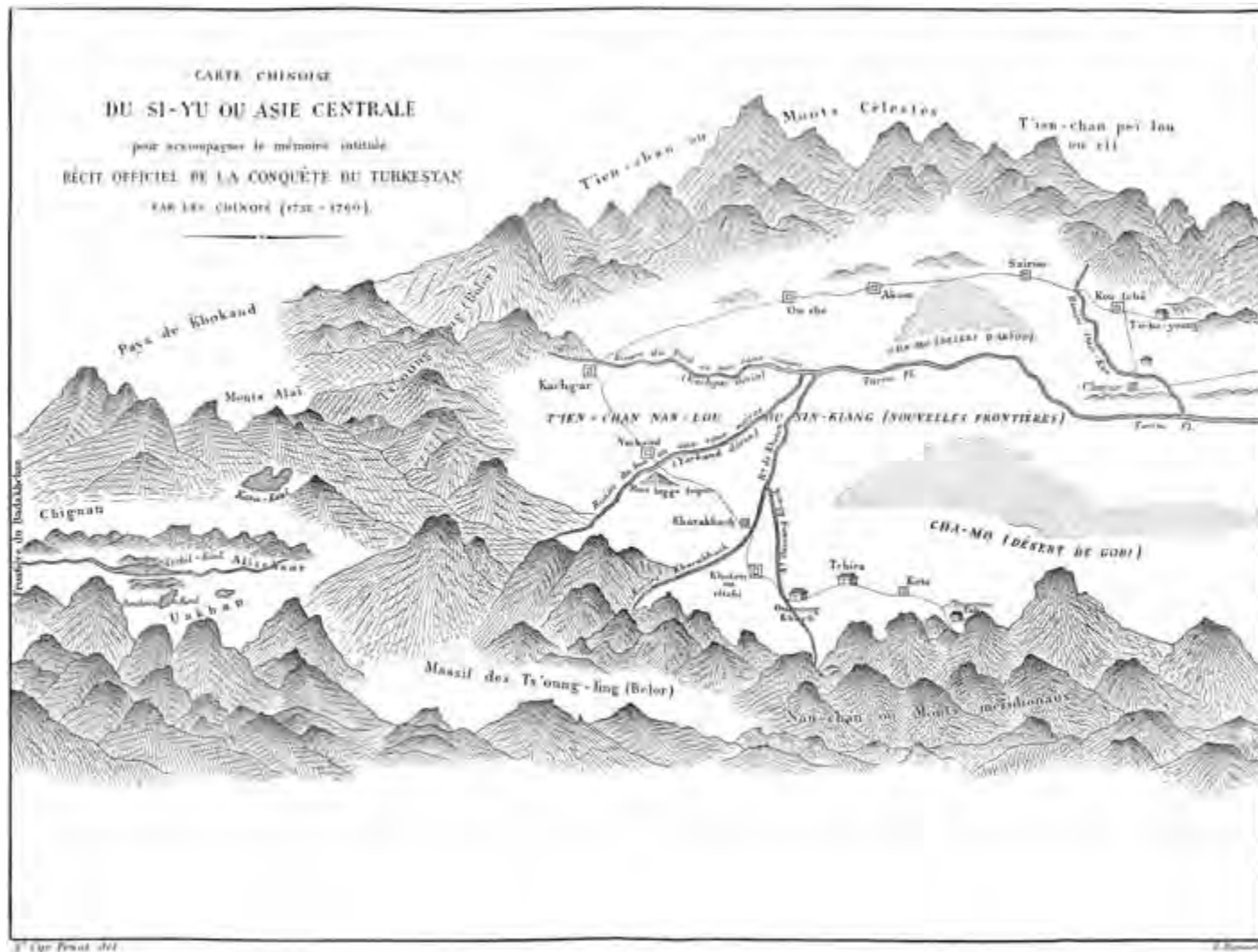
Source: Claudius Ptolemaeus: Tab[ula] VII. Asiae, exhibens Scythiam, intra Imaum Sogdianam, Bactrianam, Hircaniam, aliasque Asiae Regiones Tabulae geographicae Orbis Terrarum Veteribus cogniti 13, app. 1698. The represented section is reduced to 87 % of its original size.

Courtesy Pamir Archive Collection



at a prominent point where major rivers originate in most directions and where routes connect between Bokhara, Kashgar and Yarkand. The southern portion is left blank and without any hint. Source: Jacques Nicolas Bellin 1749: Carte de la Petite Bukharie et Pays Voisins: Tirée des

Courtesy Pamir Archive Collection



The early map titled 'Carte chinoise du Si-Yu ou Asie Centrale pour accompagner le mémoire intitulé récit officiel de la conquête du Turkestan par les chinois (1758-1760)' shows mountains, deserts and inhabited oases. Familiar terms such as Chignan (Shughnan), Uakhan (Wakhan), Althour (Alichur), Bolor, Alai and the six oases of Altishahr at the fringes of the Tarim Basin (Takla Makan Shamo), termed here as 'T'ien-chan nan-lou ou Sinkiang' (nouvelles frontières) are displayed here in an early description. The term 'Ts'oung-ling' is translated as 'Onion Mountains' is twice attributed and meant to represent the area of Bolor. The contemporary knowledge depicted here is based on Jesuit missionaries' itinerary mapping during the Qing dynasty's conquest of the Far West and an interest to control fertile oases and trading centres such as Kashgar, Yarkand, Khotan, Aksu, Kucha. After the conquest '... Xinjiang enjoyed the relative tranquility of pax Manjurica for about 60 years' (James Millward 1998: 34). Source: Camille Imbault-Huart 1896: Récit officiel de la conquête du Turkestan par les Chinois (1758-1760). In: Bulletin de Géographie Historique et Descriptive. Année 1895. Paris. The map is reduced to two thirds of its original size.

Courtesy Staatsbibliothek Munich

peror responded to betrayals by erstwhile allies" in order "... to secure the 'Muslim Region' (Huibu), as it came to be called in Chinese, as far as the Pamir range".¹⁰⁹ The map, entitled 'Carte chinoise du Si-Yu ou Asie Centrale pour accompagner le mémoire intitulé récit officiel de la conquête du Turkestan par les chinois (1758-1760)', is an illustration of their collection of scant, but more detailed information than in previous efforts to depict the region.¹¹⁰ Here, Wakhan (Ouakhan) and parts of the Pamirs such as Alichur and Kara Köl are positioned in relation to the Tarim Basin and the oases of Altishahr. Mountains, rivers, deserts and lakes structure the map in which important urban oases linked by lines

of communication that connect to China contrast with the white spots embedded in the Onion Mountains – Ts'oung-ling (Tsungling) – on the frontiers of Badakhshan. While the attribution of the Tarim Basin to Qing China becomes obvious, the meaning and spatial extent of certain toponyms still remains vague. Pamir and Wakhan as well as Badakhshan and Bolor were put on subsequent maps in different guises as settlements, regions and/or rivers. It took about a century to make Bolor vanish as a toponym and lose its function of marking the threshold between the Chinese realm and further west, or between Eastern and Western Turkestan.¹¹¹ The systematic collection of topographic information was

broadened. In 1841, a 'Second Lieutenant' of the Prussian infantry, Carl Zimmermann, prepared a map to accompany Carl Ritter's 'Erdkunde von Asien'¹¹², a state-of-the-knowledge expression of its time in terms of toponyms, regions and relief. In contrast to Alexander von Humboldt's conceptual approach to understanding the Inner Asian mountain systems, here we find an additive approach and overlays of information, recorded from a host of sources, that can be partly identified in the map and which are contradictory. It shows the limits of compilation that were transcended when geographers, geologists, botanists and zoologists as well as travellers, who turned out to be businessmen, hunters of trophies and cultural artefacts, became suppliers of information for the construction of maps.

The Superintendent of the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India, Colonel James Thomas Walker, who prepared the map 'Turkestan, with the adjoining portions of the Russian and the British territories' and published it in four sheets in 1868–69, summarised in 1873 not only the cordial professional relations of the time (not only among map-makers), but also the support received from influential circles interested in these maps: "It appeared that our knowledge of the Geography of these regions was almost solely derived from the maps which had been compiled in 1711 by the French Jesuits in the service of the Chinese Emperor ... This state of things being most unsatisfactory, I obtained the permission of the Secretary of State for India to proceed to St. Petersburg, to ascertain whether any more accurate and valuable information might be obtained from Russian sources. The Russian Government was known to have recently obtained, by the treaty of Peking, a grant of land in Kashgar, in Eastern Turkestan, for the erection of a factory; the Russian frontier had been recently carried south-wards into Western Turkestan, and thus embraced a portion of what to Englishmen was still terra incognita; and there was much reason to believe that Russian Officers had already acquired a large amount of information regarding the regions to the south of their frontier line, and that they would not be unwilling to impart this information to a British Officer. ... At St. Petersburg, I received every assistance from Lord Napier, the British Ambassador, by whom I was introduced to General Miliutine the Minister of War, M. Golovinne the Minister of Public Instruction, and Admiral Lütke the President of the Russian Geographical Society. I readily obtained access to the Archives of the Geographical Society, which were re-

plete with valuable publications and maps, many of which had not yet found their way to England. To obtain free access to the Topographical Department of the War Office was anticipated to be a more difficult matter, for in all parts of the world the time honored custom still prevailed of treating the documents in such offices as secret and confidential, and not to be shown to foreigners; but General Miliutine at once authorized my admission to the Topographical Office, and I have every reason to believe that I was shown all the maps it contained of the regions in which I was interested. In one respect I was disappointed; I found that the Russians had not carried their explorations to any thing like the distance beyond their frontier, that the British had done in India; though there were then holding the north-west portion of Kokan, around Tashkend, they had very little knowledge of the central and eastern portions of that important Khanat; the treaty by which they had obtained a grant of land for a factory in Kashgar was still a dead letter, only one Russian officer having visited Kashgar, and he went there in disguise and was unable to take any observations for fixing its position; and it appeared that such knowledge of Turkestan as was possessed by the Russians was derived, for the most part, from the same sources as our's, – namely from the maps of the French Jesuits, which were a century and a half old. But there were expectations that this state of ignorance would not last long; the Russian Government had appointed as Political Agent to the Native States of Turkestan an accomplished astronomer, M. Charles Struve, who was expected to determine the correct position of all places of importance near the boundary line, and thus it was hoped that very valuable data for the rectification of the existing maps would be soon forthcoming."¹¹³ The common intellectual practice of filling many existing topographical blanks, and the desire to produce accurate maps, was shared among the elite concerned with Central Asia. Beyond professional understanding, competition was involved as well, which itself would increase over the course of time.

The Pamirs received prominence once again and entered the focus of diplomats, politicians, geographers and explorers alike. In the political debate there were 'non-interventionists' who tolerated Russian advances as a 'civilising mission' promoting 'masterly inactivity', while others boisterously objected and demanded that the British sphere of influence be extended towards Afghanistan, Fergana and Kashgar. Major-General Henry Rawlinson, a high-flying and strong



The section from the 'Karte Innerasiens zu Carl Ritters Erdkunde Buch 3' of 1841 was prepared by Carl Zimmermann in Berlin. It supports the compilation work of Carl Ritter who gathered contemporary knowledge and tried to present it in a holistic manner. The 'Zimmermann map' clearly shows the variegation in knowledge for certain Asian areas. In the Badakhshan context Wakhan and the Pamir Plateau are connected with Kashgar by a natural passage in the mountain range north of Bolor and close to Lake Karakul. Where Wakhan (Vokan) occupies a wider range it is attributed to the 'terra incognita'. Consequently the compilation seems to lack sufficient evidence here. Source: Carl Zimmermann 1841: Karte Inner-Asien's zu C. Ritter's Erdkunde Buch 3: Übergang von Ost- nach West-Asien. Berlin: G. Reimer. Courtesy Pamir Archive Collection

South-eastern section of the 'Map of part of Central Asia showing the routes of the Russian Hissar Expedition, the Havildar and the Mullah, 1874-75. Principally from the last edition of Colonel Walker's Map of Central Asia by E. G. Ravenstein, F.R.G.S., Scale 1: 2,000,000'. By 1874 the British spies, named the Havildar and his servant, the Mullah, explored the routes from Jalalabad – the winter capital of the Afghan King – towards Chitral and subsequently leading through the Yarkhun Valley and across the Baroghil Pass to Sarhad-e Wakhan. The second route followed the common approach from Kabul to Badakhshan, reaching Faizabad from where the Warduj Valley was taken to reach Zebak and Ishkashim. Both explorers did only touch the Wakhan principality at its fringes. The ruby mines of Gharan were visited from where the return journey was commenced. Others – namely Thomas Edward Gordon (1874a, b, 1876a, b) and Munphool Meer Moonshee (1872) – were assigned the task to explore Wakhan in greater detail. Source: *The Geographical Magazine*. London: Trübner, Vol. 2, 1875. Courtesy Pamir Archive Collection



advocate of a 'forward policy' and the intermittent President of the Royal Geographical Society, who simultaneously occupied other influential positions, stimulated a new phase of the 'Great Game' by publishing supporting articles, culminating in his monograph 'England and Russia in the East' in 1875. It could hardly remain unnoticed among explorers how geopolitical conditions were transformed and how expectations towards knowledge-gathering steadily changed. For some explorers, knowledge-gathering remained their prime interest. The interface between different areas of interest – namely the Pamirs – became the outer limits of exploration and data-gathering. The leading Russian explorer Alexei Pavlovich Fedchenko assessed the narrowing gap in 1875: "If, possessed of the information which I collected during my travels, I were now able to visit the Pamir, I should at once set out and traverse the whole of it without asking the way of anybody. Complications and difficulties could arise only from political causes. The Pamir and the region of the sources of the Oxus cannot long remain unexplored; its secrets will be revealed either by Russians or by Englishmen. ... I am more inclined to believe that this will be the work of Russians. I believe this, because access to the Pamir is easier from the north. From all I have read, it is very difficult to penetrate through the mountains from India. From the Russian side the conditions are much more favourable, and if it were only a question of passing across (I do not speak of exploration), and a volunteer came forward, I would boldly wager that, starting from Tashkend and crossing the Pamir, he could reach the Siri-kul and return in the course of a single month."¹¹⁴ Alexei Pavlovich Fedchenko's account of his 'Travel to Turkestan' was posthumously published in several volumes by his wife Olga. His journey to the northern Pamirs was one of the early Russian explorations to establish an understanding of the system of the Pamirs. Olga fulfilled a similar function for the Russian Imperial Geographical Society in St. Petersburg to that of the Michell brothers for the Royal Geographical Society in London, as both translated major works on exploration that had been published either in English or Russian into the respective other language.¹¹⁵

NATURAL BOUNDARIES AND SCIENTIFIC BORDERS

Contemporaneous cartographic depictions of Pamir and Wakhan gained more detailed contours, especially in the 19th

century, when the number of expeditions increased significantly. Applying a systematic approach, spatial data were organised in an areal manner. Borders and frontiers – the terms were used synonymously in the mid-19th century – were the visible expression of categories in space. From an initial frontier belt that might expand over wide stretches of space, delineated and marked boundaries would finally emerge by the end of the 19th century.¹¹⁶ While visiting Murad Beg, the ruler of Kunduz, in the early stages of the 'Great Game', Perceval Barton Lord – as a member of Alexander Burnes' mission to Kabul – realised the importance of the frontier region in the North, but disguised any suggestion of border lines: "... if we delay until Russia possesses herself of Khiva, and Persia of Herat, then indeed the sources of our fair becomes at least problematical, and something more potent than mere commercial counteraction must be had recourse to. Here again it will be of utmost importance to have accredited Agents in Turkistan to establish our influence, to use it in combining the different, and at present, hostile states ... But the whole of our policy in Turkistan should be pacific and conciliatory – its object should be to prevent Russia getting a foot in that country under the guise of a friend. If we can succeed in that, and in diverting its commerce to our own channels, we have done all which policy can be expected to effect. Negotiations end, when war begins ..."¹¹⁷ Policymakers adopted the territorial approach that led to the search for natural frontiers of empires. Map-makers gained information from the many reports and letters that reached the Geographical Societies in Berlin, London, Paris and St. Petersburg, and their compilations of this knowledge helped to construct the world of political decision-makers and administrators. Approaching the region from Chinese 'possessions', 'natural' limits seemed quite obvious to Chokan Valikhanov: "Eastern Turkestan is enclosed by mountains from three sides: by the Thian-Shan on the Northern, the Bolor on the Western, and Kuen-Lun on the Southern. These mountains belong to the highest ranges of Central Asia, and form the natural limits of the Western portion of the Chinese Empire. The actual boundary, however, runs along the line of pickets stretching through the outlying lower ranges on the Chinese side; beyond this frontier the territory is occupied by roaming Kirghizes, who recognize the authority of the Kokan Khan."¹¹⁸ Lord Curzon, reflecting in the 'Romanes Lectures' on frontiers at the end of the 'Great Game', when the major boundary disputes



Sir Henry Creswicke Rawlinson, watercolour by Sir Leslie Ward, cartoonist and portraitist who published it under his pseudonym 'Spy' in *Vanity Fair* 12 July 1873.
Courtesy National Portrait Gallery London



Alexei Pavlovich Fedchenko, drawing displayed as frontispiece to the tome on his journey to Turkestan.
Source: Alexei Pavlovich Fedchenko (1875)

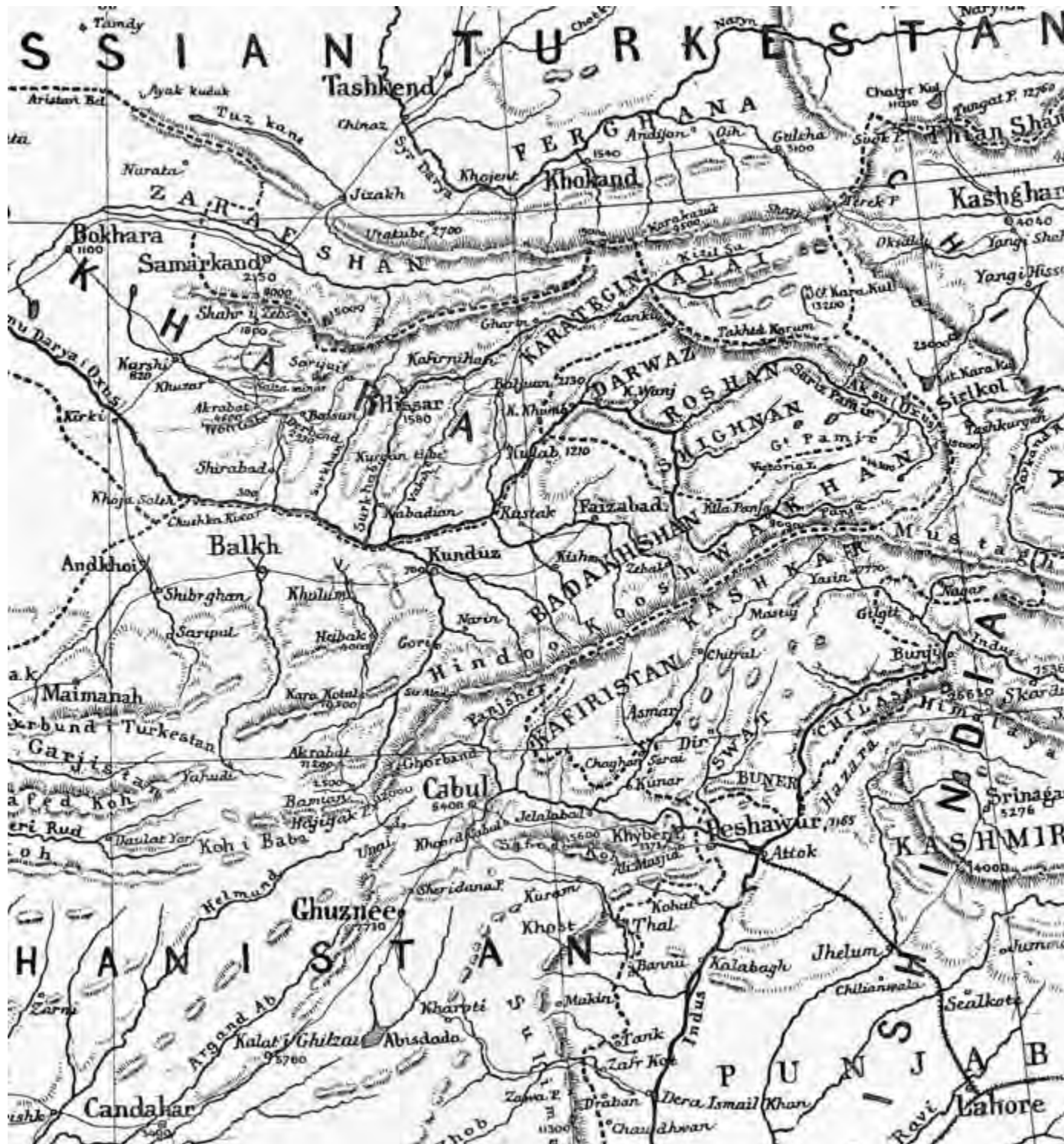
in High Asia had been settled, endorsed this view by stating: "Mountains constituted the earliest and most obvious barriers ... mountains were the earliest of the barriers accepted by wandering man."¹¹⁹ Here, Lord Curzon recalls the spirit that was the guiding principle for the Anglo-Russian Pamir Boundary Commission in 1895. Diplomats had settled the most important case of dispute between Russia and British India, and an elite group of boundary-makers divided Wakhan and created the Afghan buffer zone. From a British point of view, only the open flank remained, where Hunza touched the Chinese Empire. Four years later, the idea of a 'natural frontier' was submitted by the British envoy Sir Claude MacDonald, who made a suggestion to the *Tsung-li Yamén* (Chinese Foreign Ministry) in Beijing on how to align the future border.¹²⁰ After long discussions, the intentional drawing of conflicting maps and several exchanges of diplomatic notes, a negotiated solution was agreed upon that was based on political considerations rather than on natural conditions in the borderlands.

The search for natural limits accompanied discussions about where appropriate borders might be found and located. In the case of Russia, the British position changed over time. In the early stages of the 'Great Game', the 'Times' regularly commented on the developments and influenced the debate, as Memet Yetisgin highlighted: "Reaching natural boundaries would not only mean reaching boundaries were marked by a mountain chain, or a lake, a river, or a sea. It also meant reaching secure and workable boundaries. In an editorial, The Times stated that Russia had no choice but to move forward to reach her natural boundaries, borders that she shared with states that had the same degree of civilized life. It said, 'Nor can Russia be blamed for thus extending her territory. Touching the confines of half-civilized States, she cannot stop even if she would, and she must go on until the way shall be barred by immense physical barriers, or by a civilization equal to her own.'¹²¹ Nearly at the same time the Austrian cultural historian Friedrich von Hellwald stimulated the debate about the 'nature' of British and Russian competition and explained his ideas about their different role models in Greek and Roman colonialism, respectively: "Der Angelsachse colonisiert wie der antike Hellene; Beiden ist es lediglich um die kommerzielle Ausbeutung zu thun; ... Anders der Russe, dieser colonisiert wie die alten Römer. Seine Pioniere ... sind Rußland in ihrer Art seine Militärcolonisten, die Kosaken. Mit dem Systeme der Mil-

itärcolonien wurden die nomadisirenden Tataren, Kalmyken und Kirgisen in den Organismus des russischen Staatsverbandes eingezwängt, zur Heeresfolge und zum Steuerzahlen gewöhnt und allmählich auch für die vollständige Russifizierung vorbereitet. ... So wälzt sich denn unaufhaltsam, wie die ins Rollen gerathene Lawine, das Russenthum über die tatarischen und mongolischen Stämme hin, bis es an den großen Bergketten Innerasiens seine natürlichen Schranken findet."¹²² Despite his distinction between British and Russian colonial practices Friedrich von Hellwald expects a limit of Russian expansionism only when the 'natural barriers' of the Inner Asian mountain ranges would be reached.

Different aspects were subsumed under the heading 'natural boundary'; practice and security as well as the so-called 'white man's burden' of a civilising mission appear here as points of reference. During the 19th century, both superpowers had reached a state of confrontation over contested supremacy in Central Asia. Both contestants received support from literary celebrities in justifying their cause. In both countries, contemporary bourgeois debate highlighted the civilising mission to have been accomplished. Great Britain had Rudyard Kipling, who was one of the foremost advocates of the 'Great Game' and had coined the term 'white man's burden'.¹²³ With missionary zeal and state authorisation, civil society measures were to be promoted in Asia and grounded in European standards. His Russian counterpart was Fyodor M. Dostoyevsky, who published an essay on the importance of Asia for Russia's future, in which he justified the Asian conquest as a mission for the promotion of civilisation. Dostoyevsky compared colonial expansion into Central Asia with the European conquest of North America.¹²⁴ He was also close friends with Chokan Valikhanov, whom he regarded as the first westernised Kazakh: "Is it not a great aim, a holy task, to be just about the first of your people to explain in Russia what the steppes are and their significance and about your people with regard to Russia, and at the same time to serve your native land by *enlightened* intercession for it with the Russians. Remember that you are the first Kirgiz [Kazakh] completely educated in the European way."¹²⁵

In his study on boundary-making in the Russian Empire, Alexei Postnikov stated that mapping and cartography were strongly influenced by the aims and objectives of interests pursued by military strategists, fur hunters or – as was the case during the 'Great Game' – by geographical explorers



The section of a map published in the 'Illustrated London News' of October 5, 1878 was prepared by Ernst Georg Ravenstein and is devoted to 'The countries between British India and Russian Asia' mainly showing the borders of territorial entities that as in the case of Bokhara are still secondary participants in the 'Great Game'. Badakhshan and Wakhan are displayed as part of Afghanistan's sphere of influence. The entire principality of Wakhan – including the Little and Great Pamir – is attributed to Afghan domination while Shighnan, Roshan and Darwaz are forming an entity of their own. Prior to the expansionist movements of Amir Abdur Rahman towards Kafiristan the area soon to be renamed into Nuristan is still excluded. Source: The Illustrated London News. London: Elm House, October 5, 1878. Courtesy Pamir Archive Collection

*Meeting of Chokan Valikhanov and
Fyodor M. Dostoyevsky in 1859*
Courtesy Smithsonian Institution
Archives, Washington, D.C.

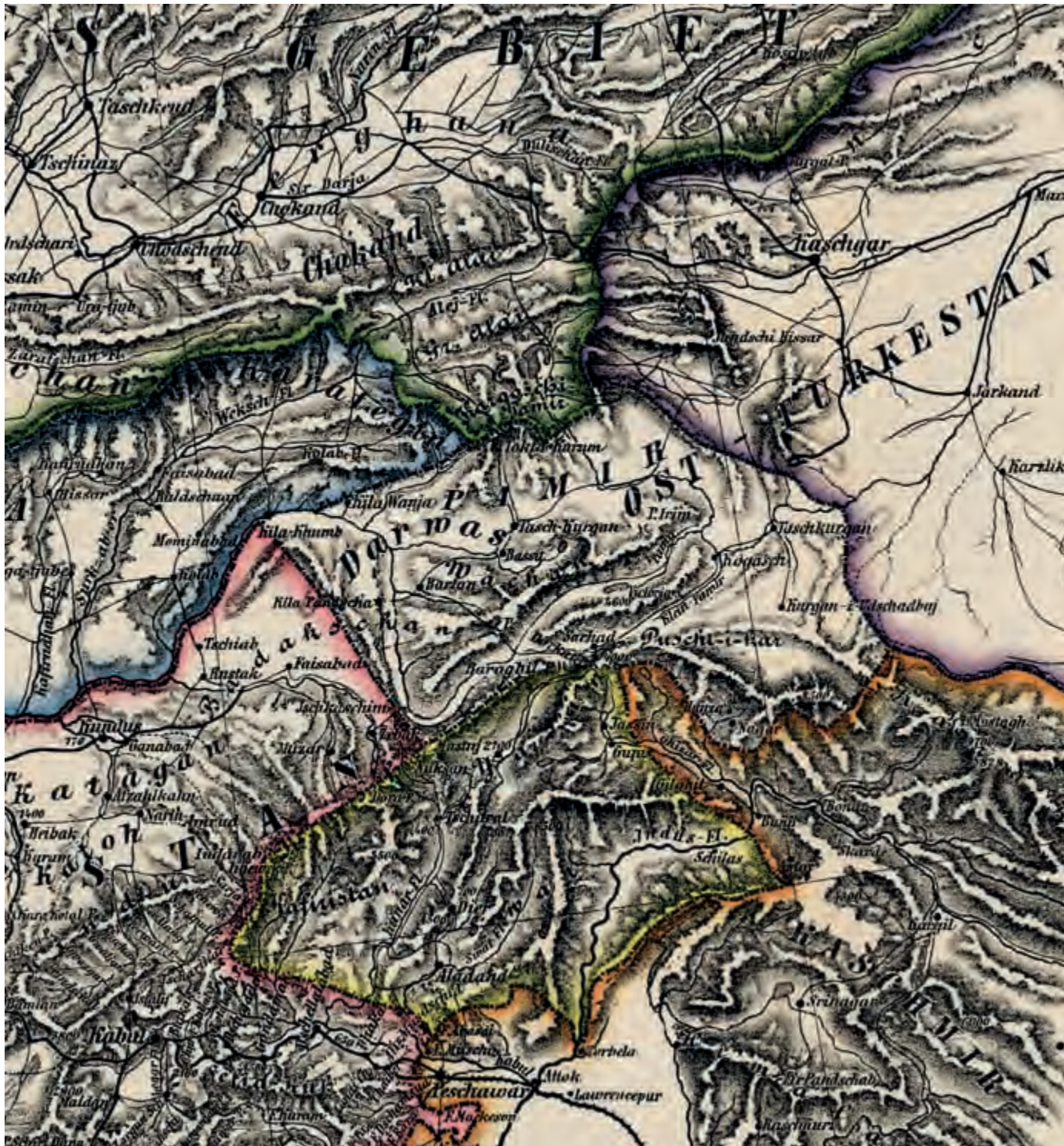
*The 'Great Game' depicted by march-
ing forces of Great Britain and Russia
touching ground in Turkmenia and
Afghanistan. The series 'nashi karri-
katury' (our caricatures) depicted the
Anglo-Russian rivalry under the head-
ing of 'fizicheskie opyty v Srednei Azii.
Deistvie otricatel'nago eletrichestva'*
(physical experiments in Middle Asia:
The effect of negative charges).
Source: Originally published in
Vsemirnaya Illyustratsiya (1881, No.
633) and reproduced from *Turkestan-
skij Sbornik* (1883, Vol. 357: 169); a
modified version was reprinted by
Napoleon Ney (1888: 433)

and land surveyors. The “competition between these states could not fail to influence the investigations’ and surveys’ methods.”¹²⁶ Bordering and boundary-making that eventually would separate spheres of influence and nation states were the result of the ‘making of a frontier’¹²⁷, while the quest for a natural border and territorial rootedness initially had an amicable undertone. If nature determined the limits of commercial and political influence, then a mutually agreeable boundary could and should be found. When British and Russian trigonometrical surveys met in the Pamirs in the 1870s, the ‘roof of the world’ seemed to have been incorporated along with the rest of the region: “The English and Russian surveys were linked at this period at Chatyr-Kul by Colonels Gordon and Trotter, and in 1883 they were further linked by the Russians at Tash-Kurgan and on the Alichur river. Thenceforward the gateways to the Bam-i-Dunia were opened to the Russians from Kokand and through Bokhara, passing also through Karateghin from the Upper Zarafshan valley.”¹²⁸ The initial survey obviously did not satisfy the requirements of the annually held International Geodetic Conference in Hamburg, which suggested that a “... linking together of the Russian and Indian Triangulation Surveys [that] would be of great scientific interest and would supply valuable information on which to base our knowledge of the shape of the earth. ... The Russian Survey had carried their series of triangulation across their Pamir territory and had reached the frontier between the two great neighbouring countries of China and Afghanistan. Between that frontier and India lay the great ranges of the Himalaya ...”¹²⁹ In



1911, Lieutenant Bell was in charge of a triangulation party commissioned by the Survey of India, but could not achieve its goal. In 1913, Lieutenant Kenneth Mason took charge and led the survey team to success, linking the two systems and collecting valuable information.¹³⁰ Even some of the peaks that were identified and mapped for the first time by Russian land surveyors were given British names: “Pamir Alichur communicates with Pamir Kalan by the Dasht-i-Khargoshi (Plain of the Hare), a wide meridional valley starting from a point opposite Ishal-tau. It was here that the surveys of the Russians crossed those of the British officers, in whose honour Severtsov named several of the peaks and ranges: ‘Trotter’, ‘Gordon’, ‘Biddulph’, and ‘Stoliczka’.”¹³¹ This amity among professionals, though, could not disguise the desire for fixed boundaries as result of civilising mission. It seems that the prognosis of Michail Ivanovich Veniukov was fulfilled who had envisaged in 1877 the ‘progress of Russia in Central Asia’ in a summary statement for government offices: “Possibly time will produce a radical change in the sentiments of the English, and then both great European nations will advance to meet the other in Asia, not with bitter suspicions and reproaches, but with confidence and benevolence as workers in the same historical mission – the civilization of the Far East. But will that time come soon? Russia in any case, without awaiting it, must complete her





The north-eastern section of a map that was initially published under the title 'Ultima Thule' in the 'Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift' in 1885 clearly shows the interface between the Russian and British spheres of influence, the Afghan Kingdom in its earlier shape, and in the particular section the corridor formed by the Emirate of Buchara (Bokhara) and the Pamir. The Pamir is somehow partly attributed to Badakhshan and to 'Ost-Turkestan' (Eastern Turkestan). While the eastern part is under Chinese control Bokhara is depicted as a separate entity. The Pamir is regarded as a white spot in between where Darwaz is prominently featured.

Source: Streffleur's Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift (ÖMZ). Wien: Seidel u. Sohn, Vol. 26 (1885).

The represented section is enlarged to 130 % of its original size.

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