

SCHUYLER JONES

THE POLITICAL ORGANIZATION
OF THE KAM KAFIRS

A Preliminary Analysis

Det Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab
Historisk-filosofske Meddelelser 42, 2



Kommissionær: Munksgaard
København 1967

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Selskabets sekretariat og postadresse: Dantes Plads 5, København V.

The address of the secretariate of the Academy is:

*Det Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab,
Dantes Plads 5, København V, Denmark.*

Selskabets kommissionær: MUNKSGAARD's Forlag, Prags Boulevard 47,
København S.

The publications are sold by the agent of the Academy:

*MUNKSGAARD, Publishers,
47 Prags Boulevard, København S, Denmark.*

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*Come thou also, Sahib, a little along the road,
and I will sell thee a charm—an amulet that
shall make thee King of Kaftristan.*

— Rudyard Kipling
The Man Who Would Be King

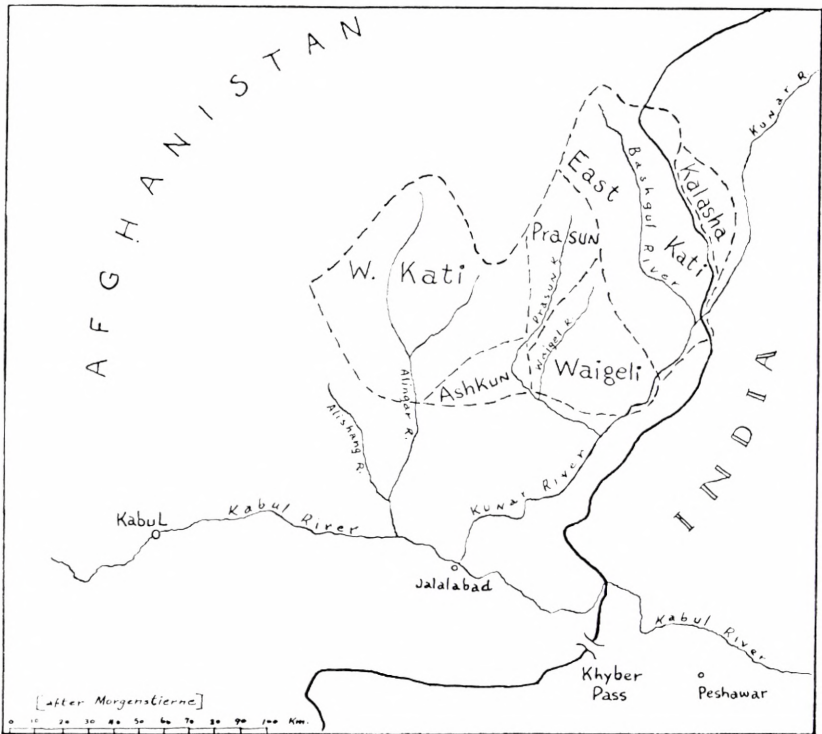
Preface

In the following text it will be noted that in some cases specific page references are missing from footnotes citing authoritative sources. Where this occurs it is due to one of two reasons: either the writer was working from a MS translation of the original work, or was using a copy of the original. In both cases the actual sources were not available at the time this paper was written.

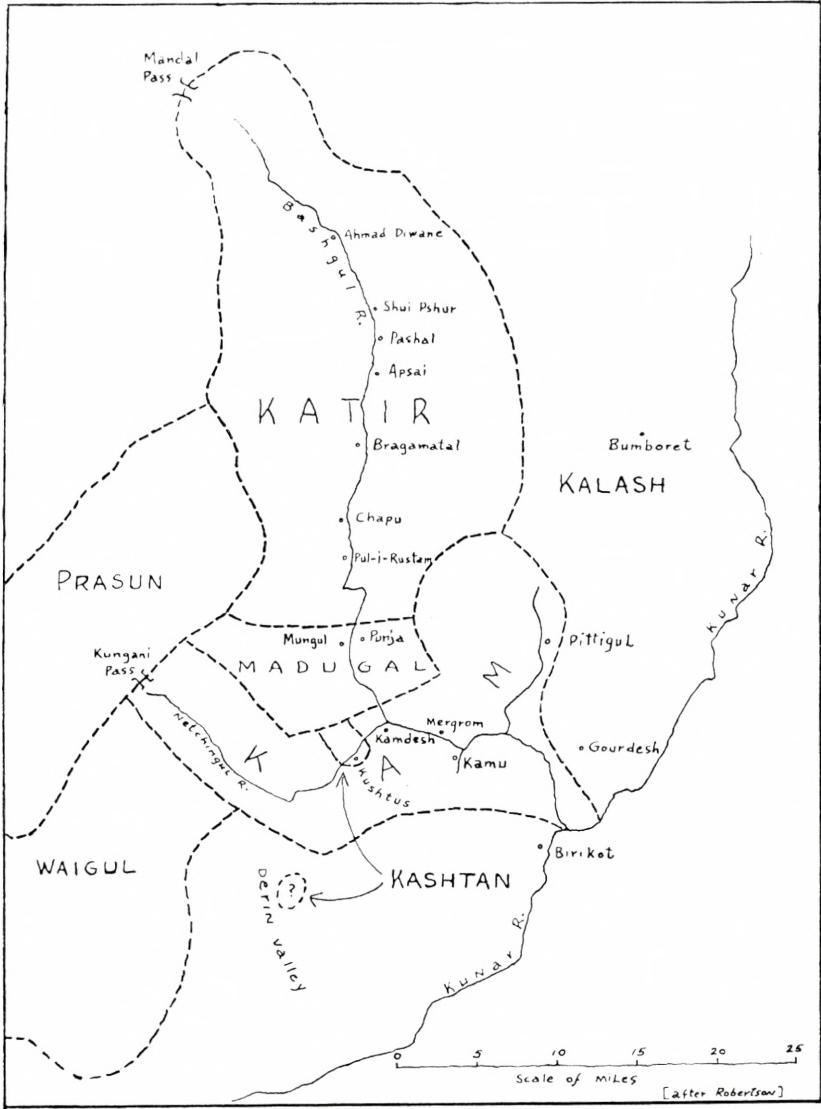
This paper, in a slightly different form, was originally prepared for and submitted to the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Edinburgh, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Honours M.A.

Grateful thanks are due to the following persons for permitting the writer to make use of unpublished material: Professor Georg Morgenstierne of Oslo, Lennart Edelberg of Ribe, and Klaus Ferdinand of Aarhus. I am also indebted to the latter two for reading this in manuscript and for the illuminating discussions which followed.

S. J.
Kabul
June, 1966



The most recent map of Nuristan is that by LENNART EDELBERG. It has been published in JONES, SCHUYLER, *An Annotated Bibliography of Nuristan (Kafiristan) and the Kalash Kafirs of Chitral*, part one. *Hist. Filos. Medd. Dan. Vid. Selsk.* 41, no. 3 (1966).



I. Introduction

In this paper we propose to examine the political organization of the Kam, an independent political community occupying part of the southern watershed of the Hindu Kush on the borders of Central Asia. The Kam are part of a congeries of political units grouped together in the literature under the term Kafiristan.¹ These 'tribes', although territorially distinct and politically independent, are culturally and linguistically closely related.²

The terms *Kafir* (infidel) and *Kafiristan* (land of the infidels) are of Arabic origin and were given to the people and the territory occupied by them some eight centuries ago by Muslims at the time of their invasion into Central Asia. The 'Kafirs' do not call themselves by a common name.

Differences in language and minor differences in culture, but particularly variations in political relations, enable us to distinguish several large territorial 'divisions' among the Kafirs, each as far as is at present known, comprising a number of political communities similar in size and political organization to the Kam. Among these larger divisions, each forming a small-scale political system, the best known is that which we shall refer to as the East Kati Kafirs, although such a larger division has no common indigenous name. The four independent political communities comprising the East Kati Kafirs are the Kam, the Madugal, the Kashtan and the Katir. Part of our study is concerned with the

¹ Kafiristan was conquered by the Afghan Amir Abdur Rahman in 1895-1896 A.D. and was renamed *Nuristan*, 'The Land of Light'. It is now a part of Afghanistan and its inhabitants are Muslim. This paper attempts to examine the political organization of the pre-Muslim era.

² For the most part we avoid using the term 'tribe', preferring instead the phrase 'political community' as used by Schapera in his *Government and Politics in Tribal Societies*, (London, 1956) p. 8, but where we do refer to a 'tribe' we mean "an independent political division of a population with a common culture." Cf. Mair, L. *Primitive Government*, (London, 1962) p. 15.

fact that the relations which these political units have with each other, although frequently hostile, differ in several important respects from the relations which they have with the political communities of the other divisions of Kafiristan.

A mountainous region some 5,000 square miles in extent, Kafiristan can be divided into five major regions on linguistic, geographical and political grounds.¹ Each of these regions is further subdivided into a number of independent political communities. In general, we can say that relations between the tribes belonging to different divisions of this kind are nearly always hostile as expressed by raiding. Relations between the political communities of a single region may be hostile, but at this level there is provision for the establishment and maintenance of peaceful relations and the desirability of maintaining such relations is generally acknowledged.

The Muslim population completely surrounding this congeries of Kafir tribes lives in a constant state of opposition to the Kafirs. Over the centuries the independent Kafir hill-tribes have incessantly raided Muslim communities for livestock and other plunder and frequently left their villages in flames. This has led to an exchange of hostilities which continued until recent times.²

The centuries of external Muslim pressure exerted on Kafiristan did not serve to weld the Kafirs into a single political unit, despite the fact that their institutions would have lent themselves to the formation of larger political units. We tentatively suggest four main reasons for this:

1. their languages, though related, are mutually unintelligible;
2. the larger divisions of Kafiristan noted above coincide with marked geographical divisions; high mountain ranges separating one from the other;
3. even the smallest settlements in Kafiristan are economically independent, and natural resources, technical skill and know-

¹ These regions are: East Kati, Waigel, Prasun, Ashkun and West Kati. There is a sixth—Wama—which is only a fraction of the size of the others. Aside from East Kati, very little is known about any of these 'divisions'. The names themselves are those of the indigenous languages. See Morgenstierne, *Report on a Linguistic Mission to Afghanistan*, Oslo, 1926, esp. pp. 96-97.

² In describing the political system of the East Kati Kafirs and the political organization of the Kam we use the present tense though in fact we describe social institutions and patterns of relations as they existed immediately prior to 1895.

ledge are relatively evenly distributed. There was no strong incentive for a regular, organized exchange of goods within Kafiristan and thus no friendly political relations were established between tribes on economic grounds;

4. among the Kafirs raiding is an integral part of the foundations of social, religious, political and, indirectly, economic organization. Since the size of a political community such as the Kam is viable both in regard to ecological factors and ordinary defense requirements, the formation of larger political units would serve primarily to reduce the number of raiding possibilities open to any given political community. This, as indicated above, would be a disadvantage.

We should like to stress that what we attempt here is merely a preliminary analysis of the political organization of the Kam Kafirs as defined by instances where individuals within the political community come into dispute and situations where different political communities come into conflict. We have been prevented from making an analysis of greater depth by the fact that our field work was limited to two relatively short visits, the primary purpose of which was not to elucidate problems of political organization, but rather to make a preliminary survey of the more mundane problems to be met with in the field; such as routes, availability of porters, food supplies, and so on.¹

The information which we have concerning the political institutions of the Kafirs is mostly contained in Dr. George Scott Robertson's book *The Kafirs of the Hindu Kush* (London, 1896).² A great many questions remain unanswered. Practically nothing, for example, is known of the Kafir kinship system.

After familiarizing ourselves with the existing literature we

¹ In the summer of 1960 we entered East Kati territory from the north-east and made our way on foot up the Bashgul Valley, visiting Kam, Kashtan, Madugal and Katir villages. Kamdesh was subsequently our base camp for some weeks. In December of 1960—again on foot—we entered Ashkun territory from the west, this being the second time that Europeans had ever travelled in the Ashkun district. In January, 1961, having spent some days in the valley of Nakara—not previously visited by Europeans—we were forced by a bout of pneumonia to abandon our attempt to cross the high pass into Prasun country.

² For other works relating to Kafiristan see Jones, Schuyler. *An Annotated Bibliography of Nuristan (Kafiristan) and the Kalash Kafirs of Chitral* (part one). Historisk-filosofiske Meddelelser. Det Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab, Vol. 41, No. 3. København, 1966.

found that we knew relatively little about the political organization of the Kafirs. Many statements had been made concerning power and authority, war and peace, crime and punishment, but these scattered remarks contributed little to our understanding of the political organization since they were not related to each other or to other institutions of the society. We have taken a body of data not previously subjected to theoretical analysis and have tried to gain some insight into the manner in which social order is maintained and political independence preserved in this society. The attempt to utilize a theoretical approach reveals serious gaps in the existing data and thus suggests potentially useful lines of inquiry. In section VIII we have drawn attention to a few of the questions raised by the material.

II. The East Kati Kafirs

Radcliffe-Brown has written that "a political system . . . involves a set of relations between territorial groups."¹ It is this set of relations that we propose to examine here with reference to the East Kati Kafirs. An analysis of this nature permits us to view a political community such as that of the Kam Kafirs in its correct setting in relation to other similar units.

We consider ourselves justified in grouping the East Kati Kafirs together under one term because they not only occupy a continuous stretch of territory in eastern Kafiristan, but they share a common language (Kati), they occupy themselves with common modes of livelihood, their rules of conduct and their religion are alike. In short, their 'culture' is homogeneous. They do not, however, recognize the authority of any centralized government. What we have chosen to call the East Kati Kafirs comprises four independent political communities, each of which conducts its own internal and external affairs, though we shall present evidence to show that on occasion they do act together to conduct raids and that it is not uncommon for them to exchange visits, particularly during the great religious festivals.

The territory occupied by the East Kati Kafirs is all the land drained by the Bashgul River and its tributaries, the largest of

¹ Preface to *African Political Systems*, Edited by M. Fortes & E. E. Evans-Pritchard, London, 1961, p. xxiii.

VILLAGES							
CLANS	<i>Kamdesht</i>	<i>Kamu</i>	<i>Mirdeshi</i>	<i>Saret</i>	<i>Pittigul</i>	<i>Bazgal</i>	<i>Gawardesh</i>
<i>Demideri</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
<i>Utaderi</i>	x	x		x	x		x
<i>Galakderi</i>	x	x	x		x	x	
<i>Jashideri</i>							x
<i>Pitderi</i>				x			
<i>Bilshideri</i>	x						
<i>Sukderi</i>	x						
<i>Narugderi</i>	x						
<i>Waideri</i>	x						
<i>Lananderi</i>	x						
<i>Kanarderi</i>	x						
<i>Gulketchderi</i>	x						
<i>Balarderi</i>	x						

which are the Nechingal and the Pittigal. The eastern border of this territory is the high mountain ridge which forms the western border of Chitral State. The northern border is the crest of the main range of the Hindu Kush, which divides Kafiristan from Badakhshan. On the west and south-west this territory is bounded by the high ranges which overlook central Kafiristan and the main valleys inhabited by the Prasun and Waigeli Kafirs. On the south it is bounded in part by a mountain range and partly by the Kunar (Čitral) River. The point at which the Bashgul River flows into the Kunar is the only place where the territory of the East Kati Kafirs meets that controlled by Muslims without benefit of a clear natural boundary. It is characteristic that the resulting political 'boundary' is correspondingly vague, the line blurred by myriad individual political alliances created by the ceremony of bond-friendship.

The Ashrath and Damir Valleys, and the Kunar district as far down as Sou . . . were favourite hunting-grounds for the Bashgul Valley [i.e. East Kati] Kafirs. In those districts almost every villager is a "brother" to some Kafir. This means that he is more or less protected from the exactions of other Kafirs, and in return supplies his "brother" with food and lodging whenever called upon to do so. In times of peace

a traveller of any importance on his way from Asmar to Chitral generally finds it expedient to get a Kafir to escort him up the dangerous part of the Kunar Valley.¹

The four political communities of the East Kati Kafirs are defined by the fact that each has specific territorial rights within which the inhabitants recognize the ultimate authority of a central government in all matters regarding internal and external policy, including the declaration of war and the making of peace with other political units. Each village within a given political community has a certain important degree of autonomy consistent with its economic independence and the distribution of clans.² The members of each village recognize that disputes among them should be settled by a body of annually elected officials who are endowed with the authority to pass judgment and the power to enforce settlement. But all matters of concern to the political community as a whole, such as homicide, are referred to the higher authority of the central government and decisions made at this level are considered final. The public and legal opinion as to what constitutes murder is a further expression of political unity which we shall consider later. We shall also see political unity expressed in numerous social and religious institutions where a large part of the population meet at the principal village and seat of government to participate in sacrifices, feasts and dancing.

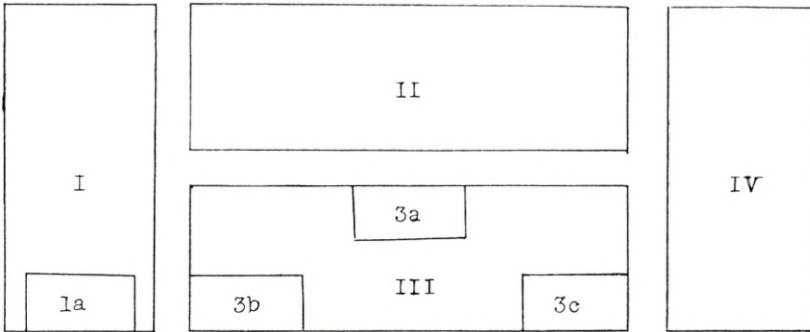
The four political communities comprising the East Kati Kafirs—the Katir, the Madugal, the Kashtan and the Kam—have, according to Robertson, a total population of approximately 20,000.³ The Katir are by far the largest, accounting for possibly as much as half the total. They occupy more than 15 villages and smaller settlements in the upper Bashgul Valley. In contrast, the Kashtan have only two villages of any size and two or three small neighbouring settlements. They inhabit a section of the Nechingal Valley, which is a tributary of the Bashgul, and they

¹ Robertson, George Scott. *The Kafirs of the Hindu Kush* (hereinafter referred to as *K.H.K.*), London, 1896, pp. 181–182.

² An incomplete record of clan distribution among the Kam is given on page 11.

³ *Confidential Report on a Journey to Kafiristan* pt. 2, Sec. 14, p. 152 [in the] *Political and Secret Home Correspondence*, Vol. 155. Herrlich gives a figure of 10,000 but stresses that it is “nur einen ungefähren Überblick.” He writes: “Eine Unterlage für die Schätzung bildete oft das Abzählen der Häuser einer Siedlung, wobei man für das einzelne Haus eine Bewohnerzahl von etwa 6 zugrundelegen konnte.” *Deutsche Im Hindukusch*, Berlin, 1937, p. 175.

The 'Divisions' of Kamdesh



- I. Paprusta (Čerbragrom) (200 houses)
1a. Birkotbragrom
- II. Urbragrom (300 houses)
- III. Yurbagrom (500 houses)
3a. Rigibadra ('fox-town')
3b. Panzagrom ('shadow-town')
3c. Kurdgrom ('castle-town')
- IV. Babagrom (100 houses)

This diagram of Kamdesh (not drawn to scale) is based upon unpublished information collected in the field by Lennart Edelberg. The number of houses given is based on informants' estimates. Robertson occasionally refers to the 'divisions' of Kamdesh. (See *The Kafirs of the Hindu Kush*, pp. 19, 21, 89, 330, 584, 591-2, etc.) but nowhere does he explain or discuss the significance or basis of these 'divisions'. Paprusta (I) is the 'division' referred to by Robertson as 'the east village'. According to him the 'upper' (i.e., II, Urbragrom) and 'lower' (III, Yurbagrom) villages had their own ceremonial dancing grounds, separate shrines to Gish and their own representatives. Babagrom (IV) is the *bari* or slave quarter. (See *K.H.K.*, p. 100). The political significance of these 'divisions' is only hinted at by Robertson. (See *The Kafirs of the Hindu Kush*, pp. 110-111 and p. 330 and 345.) *Note:* Returning to Kamdesh in 1966, we found that the four 'divisions' are, in fact, four separate villages.

have a settlement in the Dungul or Derin Valley which is entirely isolated from the Nechingal by winter snows for half the year. Madugal territory is a section across the Bashgul Valley between Kam and Katir country. The Madugalis have only three main villages. The Kam occupy the lower third of the Bashgul Valley from the Madugal border to the Kunar River, including most of the Nechingal Valley in the west and the Pittigal Valley in the east. The total number of Kam settlements is about twelve, at least five of which are villages of more than 100 houses. Kamdesh, "the chief village and the tribal headquarters of the Kam Kafirs",¹ has between 500 and 1000 houses.²

¹ Robertson, G. S. *K.H.K.*, p. 19.
² See diagrammatical sketch of Kamdesh.



Photograph taken in the upper Bashgul Valley (Kafir territory) by Surgeon G. M. J. Giles of the Indian Medical Dept. in Sept./Oct. 1885 on the occasion of the first confirmed and documented penetration of Europeans into Kafiristan—the Gilgit, Chitral, Yasin Mastuch Expedition led by Col. William Lockhart. Photograph courtesy of the India Office Library, Commonwealth Relations Office, London.

We pointed out earlier that the territory occupied by the East Kati Kafirs includes all the land drained by the Bashgul River. This point is of particular significance when we consider that the mountain ranges surrounding the drainage basin of the Bashgul average some ten to fifteen thousand feet in altitude and are covered with snow for as much as eight to ten months of the year. From approximately November to April all passes are closed. The Bashgul Valley is thus completely isolated from all other Kafir valleys for some six months of the year.¹ At other

¹ Robertson, *ibid*, p. 123. See also Vavilov & Bukinich, *Agricultural Afghanistan*, Leningrad, 1929.

times of the year, even if politically feasible, it is still physically difficult to cross the ranges which separate the East Kati Kafirs from, for example, the Prasun or Waigel Kafirs. We could therefore reasonably expect to find that while a degree of cooperation is both desirable and to a certain extent necessary between political communities occupying a single valley system such as the Bashgul, this is not necessarily true of relations between political communities in different valleys. An examination of the data supplied by our authorities tends to support this supposition.

The hostilities which are a feature of relations between the East Kati Kafirs and the inhabitants of the other valley systems of Kafiristan are expressed not only in political relations, but also in myth and folklore. For example, the light in which the Kam regard the Prasun is to some extent indicated in the following tale:

In the beginning of the world God [*Imra*] created a race of devils. He soon afterwards regretted having done so, but felt Himself unable to destroy all those He had so recently endowed with breath. But *Moni* . . . grieving at the terrible state of affairs, at length obtained a sword from *Imra*, and was given permission to destroy all the devils. He killed very many, but seven, the ancestors of the Presuns of to-day, managed to escape him.¹

Another Kam story relating to the origin of the Prasun people is as follows:

Imra one day sat himself on the rocky spur at the junction of the Kti and Presun rivers. He was engaged in making butter in a golden goat-skin churn. From the skin three women emerged, who went and populated different countries. *Imra* then added water, and a fourth woman was created, who settled in Presungul.²

In considering this second story we can perhaps relate the four women to the four main valley systems of Kafiristan. This is also in accordance with the five major divisions of Kafiristan, for of those five, two (West Kati and East Kati) acknowledge a common origin. The Kafirs are wine-drinkers and the fact that *Imra* added water to the churn to create the woman who settled in Presungul is consistent with the East Kati opinion that the

¹ Robertson, *ibid*, p. 161.

² Robertson, *ibid*, p. 385.



Kamdesh. Houses in the 'upper village' (Urbragrom). Note house on upper right. If we count the spaces between the poles as 'windows' we see that there are six. Every three windows demarcates a 'house' and is inhabited by a woman and her children. When a new marriage is contracted another '3-window-unit' is added on to the original structure. The house at upper left also has six windows, those at each end being shuttered. The largest house the writer has seen, and reputedly the largest in the valley, is that owned by Mohammed Afzal of Kamdesh. It has fifteen windows. (Aug. 1960).

Prasuns are weak and cowardly.¹ In contrast, Kam myths of origin concerning political communities of the Bashgul Valley are more favourable:

One day long ago, the people of Kamdesh were startled by the fall of a thunderbolt from heaven . . . After a time, venturing forth from their homes, the Kam perceived seven men, two of whom were playing reed instruments to two others who were dancing. The remaining three were busily employed in performing sacred rites to Imra. From these seven individuals, who took wives from the Katirs, the whole of the Madugal tribe is descended.²

¹ One of Lennart Edelberg's informants in the Kashtan village of Kushtos voiced the opinion that "The Paruni [Prasuns] are sheep! They sleep on their stomachs!" (Information privately communicated to the writer.)

² Robertson, *ibid*, p. 160-161.



The main room of Mohammed Afzal's house in Kamdesh. Fifteen windows light the room. Against the back wall (left) are five hearths—one for every three windows and, thus, one for each wife in pre-Muslim times. Mohammed Afzal is on the right. (Aug. 1960).

Thus far we have been primarily concerned to distinguish within Kafiristan as a whole several major divisions which are to serve as a frame of reference for the analysis of a political community which is to follow, since the relations such a political community has with other similar units is guided by a social and political awareness of these divisions.

III. The Socio-economics of Goats

Kafiristan consists of an irregular series of narrow steep-sided valleys covered, according to altitude, with evergreen oak, *Pinus Gerardiana*, *Pinus Excelsa* and *Cedrus Deodara*. Most villages are situated on steep rocky slopes near rushing mountain streams at altitudes of 5,000 feet or more. Round the villages are commonly found deciduous trees such as mulberry, walnut, hazel and persimmon.

The Kafirs practice animal-husbandry and agriculture. They also hunt *markhor* (wild mountain goats), *urial* (big-horn sheep), leopards and bears. They collect wild fruits such as figs, grapes and nuts. Bee-keeping is very popular and in some areas nearly every house has a hive or two built into the walls.

The nature of the relief in the Hindu-Kush is such as to impose severe restrictions on cultivation. With few exceptions, arable land is limited to small terraces built up behind stone walls and watered by elaborate irrigation systems, water in some cases being led two or three miles along wooden channels to the fields.

The main cereal crops are various types of barley (*Hordleum Palladum*, *Brassica Campestris*), wheat (*Triticum Vulgare eleigulatum Vavilov*), and millet (*Panicum Miliaceum*, *Panicum Italicum*).¹ Today maize is common but is a recent introduction.

All matters pertaining to the cultivation of crops are in the hands of the women. Consistent with this is the fact that supernatural beings concerned with cultivation are goddesses.

Besides creating the godlings, Imra also created seven daughters, whose special province it is to watch over the work of agriculture with a protecting hand. As the time for sowing approaches, goats are sacrificed in their honour, in order that crops may be ample and the earth beneficent.²

Also:

Dizane is a popular goddess . . . [she] takes care of the wheat crop, and to propitiate her, or to increase the produce of wheat-fields, simple offerings are made unaccompanied by the slaughter of an animal. A great irrigation channel is shown the traveller in Presungul, which it is affirmed that Dizane herself constructed.³

Men have very little to do with any stage of cultivation. Their main occupation is the care of their flocks. Goats and cattle are the most important domestic animals, wealth being largely calculated in terms of the quantity and quality of these animals possessed by an extended family. Livestock, especially goats, are a man's most prized possession and he does not hesitate to risk

¹ Cf. Vavilov & Bukinich, *Agricultural Afghanistan*, Leningrad, 1929. Also, Koie & Rechingier, *Symbolae Afghanicae*, Biologiske Skrifter, vol. 8, 1955; vol. 9, 1957; vol. 10, 1958. Det Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab, København.

² Robertson, *ibid.* p. 382.

³ *Ibid.* p. 410.



Kamdesh. On a rooftop in Paprusta, the 'eastern division' of the village.
(Sept. 1960).

his life to protect his flocks or to raid those belonging to members of other political communities. Virtually all social, economic, religious and political activities in Kafiristan are bound up inseparably with goats, cattle and, to a lesser extent, sheep. Goats are one of the primary means by which cultural values are expressed. If a man carefully utilizes his resources according to the prevailing system of values he can expect in time to rise to high social position and attain important political office. We shall see that in the course of a year a very large number of goats are required by an extended family in order for them to satisfy social and ritual obligations.

Livestock are owned by families, the head of the house having nominally full rights over the herd, though in practice his rights are modified by the legitimate demands of other members. When the head of the house dies the herd remains as a symbol of the unity of the family. The eldest son becomes head of the family, though the youngest son inherits the paternal home. The group of brothers make every effort to retain the common herd as a unit, though eventually quarrels over the use of the herd will end in an equitable division of the family property.

The disadvantage of separating until separation can no longer be avoided is so well recognised, that great efforts are made by relations and fellow-clansmen, or other friends, to patch up any quarrel which occurs. Separation means weakening the family, and if none of the brothers have sons old enough to help in tending or herding the flocks, it also means great inconvenience, for no man can leave his grazing-grounds to go to his village unless he leaves a deputy behind him, either as paid servant or as partner.¹

In many respects the life of a Kafir shepherd parallels that of his counterpart in certain Alpine regions of Europe. At the various pastures controlled by the political community Kafir shepherds have huts where they live beside their flocks. There they care for the kids, lambs and calves, milk the animals, and make cheese and butter. With the changing seasons the herds are moved according to considerations of security, pasture and water. Generally the movements fall into three distinct phases: (1) spring pastures (*ostesh-towot*); (2) summer pastures (*sombra-towot*); and (3) winter quarters (*yog*). Only in winter may the shepherds and their animals be found in and round the villages. At any other season of the year shepherds are fined for bringing their flocks anywhere near the village because of the risk of damage to crops. If an individual is discovered keeping an animal in the village he is required to kill it and distribute the meat among the villagers.²

Each Kafir village or settlement is economically independent. It has associated with it the water supplies, the terraced fields, the pastures and the water mills necessary to its continued existence. Each village also has its own shrines to *Imra*, *Gish* and other deities, as well as being associated with a special deity of its own.

It is the availability of adequate water supplies for irrigation and the powering of water mills, the suitability of the relief and soil conditions for the construction of terraces, and the existence of sufficient pasturage within reasonable distance which are prime factors influencing the siting of villages and thus of the population distribution. These factors likewise influence political relations and political organization, for villages are usually from two

¹ Robertson, *ibid.* p. 475.

² Motamedi, Ahmad Ali. اقتصاد روستای نورستان (The Rural Economy of Nuristan). Teheran, 1335 A.H. (1956).



Terraced fields at Malil. Each terrace belongs to the man who constructs it, though in fact the job requires the work of several men, usually close agnates. The walls pictured here are 4–6 ft. high. The primary irrigation channel enters at the top where its course is marked by an uneven row of fruit trees. (Jan. 1961).

to six or more hours' march from each other and completely isolated in winter for varying periods due to heavy snowfalls. Consistent with this is the fact that each village has a degree of political autonomy invested in a special council (called *Urir*) which is concerned with social control; functioning as a law-enforcement agency and court.

IV. The Political Community

In attempting to analyze the structure of government in a political community we have sought those recognized institutions within which certain individuals exercise the influence and authority vested in their positions to make decisions which involve to a greater or lesser degree all members of the political community. It has also been necessary to examine the individuals occupying positions of importance in government to discover those qualities,

whether ascribed or achieved, which are considered essential to positions of influence and authority in Kafiristan.

An integral part of the political organization, one which cannot be examined in isolation, is that of ritual. The course of a man's rise to social and political importance is marked by numerous and clearly defined ritual observances conducted by certain individuals endowed either by birth or by achievement with the authority to so act. Indeed, all phases of social, political and economic activities are marked by religious observances most commonly manifested by sacrifices, dancing and feasting on a tribal scale. Thus in our analysis of the political organization of the Kam Kafirs we have found it necessary to look beyond mere 'political office' and 'political action' to consider religious, social and economic factors which bear directly upon the problem and without which the political organization cannot be understood.

Our political community—that of the Kam Kafirs—is a well defined territorial unit governed at the highest level by two bodies which, taken together, possess legislative, judicial and executive powers for dealing with all matters, whether internal or external, of concern to the political community as a whole. If we include government at the village level, we can say that the three bodies which constitute government among the Kam are the *Urir*, the *Jašt* and that group of *Mirs* which Robertson calls the 'Inner Council'.

The *Urir* and Village Government

The *Urir* council of Kamdesh consists of thirteen annually elected men—one from each clan represented in the village.¹ This representative body has the power and authority not only to hear but to settle disputes and to enforce compliance with their legal judgements. They also have other important duties which are of concern to the village as a whole.

¹ This hypothesis was formed in the course of our study. Searching for confirmation, we found the following: Robertson does not relate the number of men in the Kamdesh *Urir* with the number of clans represented in the village. Motamedi merely notes that "the number of men found in any *Urir* [council] depends upon the size of the village" (Motamedi, *ibid.*), but he does not carry it further. Klaus Ferdinand has noted that "the *Urej* [*Urir*] are from all clans (*deri*) in Arrandz and there are 24 members." (Private communication.) Lennart Edelberg notes: "A man from each *deri* becomes *Urir*." (Private communication.)

The *Urir* are under the leadership of the *Ur jašt* (senior *Urir*). The incumbent of this office, like the other members of the *Urir*, is selected each spring at the great *Durban* festival. Members of the *Urir* council thus serve for one year. The elections, held on the first day of the festival, are opened by the sacrifice of a bull to *Gish*, the god of war and most popular deity of the East Kati Kafirs. Following this, all members of the political community who have, by virtue of feast-giving, attained the rank of *jašt* meet to choose the *Urir* council which will function for the next twelve months. When the twelve members and the *Ur jašt* have been elected, the principal ritual leader carries a quantity of flour remaining from the sacrifice to the home of the newly elected *Ur jašt*. The new official is subsequently obliged to feast the entire community for 'several nights'.¹ On the last day of the *Durban* festival the *Ur jašt* is confirmed in office by a ceremony in which women from each household in the village walk in procession to his home carrying baskets of flour. The flour is given to the *Ur jašt* but each woman takes away a small quantity which is burned on the family hearth together with ghee, bread and cedar branches in an offering to *Imra* the Creator.

The office of *Ur jašt* has many ritual as well as secular obligations. Not only is the *Ur jašt* the chief elected magistrate, but he also plays a role in all religious festivals and dances. He is "the most earnest chanter of responses, and the most untiring dancer in the village."² Every seventh day he lights the fire which marks the beginning of the *Agar*, the Kafir day of rest. He is the official host of all guests from outside the political community.

Robertson writes that the importance of the *Ur jašt* far outweighs that of the other members of the *Urir*; they "are merely his followers and assistants".³ But this observation would seem to apply only to social and ritual affairs outside the council in session. Within the council itself, each member, though a representative of his clan, is first and foremost a representative of his tribe and a symbol of its values as expressed in law and order.

One of the duties of the *Urir* council is to regulate the amount

¹ Robertson, *ibid.* p. 438.

² Robertson, *ibid.* p. 437.

³ Robertson, *ibid.* p. 435.

of water distributed to the fields from the common irrigation channels. In this matter disputes between families are frequent, particularly in a year in which the winter snows have been light and the following summer is hot and dry. The *Urir* are also responsible for supervising the construction and maintenance of the main irrigation channels—an arduous task after the ravages of winter and one vital to the well-being of the village. Anyone caught diverting water into his fields without permission is fined by the *Urir*. Among the Kashtan the fine is “either a goat or a few pounds of grain. The goat will be given out to the villagers for a feast, but the grain is given to the members of the *Urir*”.¹

Other common sources of dispute in a community relate to garden fruits and forest products. There are strict regulations concerning the gathering of fruit. Anyone who picks walnuts, grapes or other fruit before the day on which that particular fruit may be picked is brought before the *Urir* and fined.

Many wild stories are told of the strictness with which this is done, and it is related that the inquisition is so searching that the ordure of suspected individuals is examined to see if it contains grape stones.²

Motamedi relates that a boy caught stealing fruit is fined one cheese, while an adult is fined a goat for the same offence. He records that the laws are particularly strict in Wama where an adult is fined a cow if he is caught picking so much as one plum. As for the fines, “since the members of the *Urir* do not receive salaries, the villagers give their cheese or other fines to them.”³ Robertson considers that “it can only be the prospect of sharing in the fines which make men willing to serve in the often thankless office of the *Urir*,”⁴ but we are inclined to agree with Motamedi who writes that “any family is proud to have a member who is in the *Urir*.”⁵ The privileges and obligations of membership are clearly such as to enhance the standing of an individual in the village.⁶

¹ Motamedi, *ibid.*

² Robertson, *Confidential Report on a Journey to Kafiristan*, pt. II, p. 76. See also *K.H.K.*, p. 436.

³ Motamedi, *ibid.* For an interesting parallel see Marsh, H. C. *Description of a Trip to the Gilgit Valley, A Dependency of the Maharaja of Kashmir*. Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, vol. 45, pt. I, pp. 119–138, Calcutta, 1876.

⁴ *K.H.K.* p. 436.

⁵ *The Rural Economy of Nuristan*.

⁶ Robertson writes that all duties and privileges must be ‘paid for’ by feasting the community. See *K.H.K.* pp. 438, 505–506, 584, 586–587 and 645.

Among the Katir, according to Mohammad Abdullah¹ the *Urir* have a wide range of important duties. Not only do they preside over the annual distribution of grazing grounds, but they are also charged with the duty of examining the genealogies of a prospective couple to determine whether or not marriage is permissible. If no genealogical link between the families is found in the course of the previous seven generations, the *Urir* then meet with the senior male agnates of the two families to determine the amount of bridewealth and dowry which shall be given. The *Urir* also attend wedding feasts and supervise the distribution of property in inheritance cases. Their primary duties, however, are concerned with the settlement of disputes.

In all cases where the laws of the political community have been contravened, e.g., cases of theft, adultery, homicide or assault, the *Urir* meet to examine the evidence and to hear witnesses. The plaintiff is required to provide evidence against the accused, especially witnesses. In cases of theft the offender is obliged to give seven times the value of the stolen goods to the plaintiff.²

When a case has been legally settled in court there remains the need to adjust matters ritually between the two parties to the issue. To this end the *Urir* preside over the sacrifice of a goat provided by the guilty party. The offender must also prepare a feast which is attended by the plaintiff and the *Urir* and "after the meal they are both made to give up their stubbornness and settle the matter between them".³ In this manner the primary objective of the proceedings—to restore social equilibrium—is achieved. Or, as Mohammed Abdullah puts it: "... the hatred of their hearts is removed".⁴

In the event of there being insufficient evidence to convict a person suspected of theft or adultery, the accused can only clear

¹ An East Kati Kafir who, about 1900, wrote an account of the Katir in Hindi. The MS was purchased from the author by Morgenstierne in 1929 and later translated. Excerpts have appeared in *A Kafir on Kafir Laws and Customs*, Göteborgs Högskolas Årsskrift, vol. 39, p. 195–203, Göteborg, 1933. I am grateful to Prof. Morgenstierne for giving me a copy of the complete translation for use in connection with the preparation of this paper.

² Robertson, *ibid.* p. 440, & Morgenstierne, *A Kafir on Kafir Laws and Customs*. Robertson states that "a cow is a standard of value, being reckoned at twenty Kabuli rupees; a goat is three rupees, and a sheep two . . . If one asks the price of a matchlock, he will possibly be told that it is worth one or two cows, that is twenty or forty rupees. A drum might be valued at a goat, and so on." *K.H.K.* pp. 542–543.

³ Morgenstierne, *ibid.*

⁴ Morgenstierne's MS translation.

himself by removing his clothes, shaving his head and beard and going with the *Urir* and the plaintiff to *Imra's* shrine where he must swear his innocence. Both the accused and the accuser must afterward sacrifice a goat each.¹

Most cases of adultery are apparently settled 'out of court'. If the couple are caught in the act, a great clamour is set up by the husband or his kin upon which the neighbours rush in to keep the peace. A goat is sacrificed and a peace-making feast follows. The adulterer is then required to pay a fine consisting of a certain number of cows. "In the Kam district six cows have to be paid; in the Katir district only three."² It is unlikely that the adulterer will refuse to settle, for he cannot expect the support of his clan in such a case. But if he fails to make satisfactory settlement, the wronged husband takes the case to the *Urir*.

Both Robertson and Mohammed Abdullah provide us with information regarding the punishment for homicide. The *Urir* do not have the power to hear homicide cases alone, but only in conjunction with the *Jašt* and the 'Inner Council', for such cases require decisions at a tribal level. This is in keeping with the punishment for homicide which is exile.

The Katir place of exile "is situated towards Badakhshan, north of Kafiristan . . . a perfectly desolate and melancholy region . . ."³ With the exiled man goes his wife and any of his relations who may wish to accompany him. "The murderer's property is sold by auction and given to the heirs of the murdered person."⁴ Among the Kam the murderer is exiled to what Robertson calls 'cities of refuge'⁵—presumably a Kam village having no resident members of the dead man's clan, for a murderer and his descendants are required to always avoid meeting members of that clan. The murderer's house "is destroyed . . . by the victim's clan and his property seized and distributed".⁶ The procedure in both cases is regulated by the *Urir* and the *Jašt*.

Robertson inquired about the punishment for killing in self-

¹ Robertson, *K.H.K.* p. 445 & Morgenstierne, *A Kafir on Kafir Laws and Customs*.

² Robertson, *ibid.* p. 444.

³ Morgenstierne, *A Kafir on Kafir Laws & Customs*.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Robertson, *K.H.K.* pp. 440–441.

⁶ *Ibid.*

defence and was told that it was the same as murder because "the man should have defended his life without killing the other man".¹ He concludes that

Murder, justifiable homicide, and killing by inadvertence in a quarrel are all classed as one crime and punished in the same way. Extenuating circumstances are never considered. The single question asked is, did the man kill the other?²

But according to his own data there are extenuating circumstances on occasion:

In the event of a double killing—that is to say, of a killer himself being slain by his victim's relatives—I was told the custom was for a cow to be killed, when the representative men of each clan would each put a foot in a pool of the animal's blood. This would constitute a solemn peace and an oath of a very binding character.³

Mohammed Abdullah relates that among the Katir "if at the time of the murder, one of the murdered person's heirs forcibly attacks and kills the murderer, the uru's [*Urir*] may fine him. But he is not punished with exile".⁴ Thus while public sentiment may even approve the act of retaliation, the community is reminded that its laws have been contravened. The *Urir* and the *Jašt* should have settled the matter according to law.

Settlement of a homicide by payments to the kin of the deceased are apparently rarely made. Among the Kam the necessary 'price' is stated to be 400 Kabuli rupees in cash and 400 Kabuli rupees worth of goods.⁵

... if this kind of atonement is made it reflects so much honour on the family of the man who makes it, that the males are ever afterwards permitted to carry about a particular kind of axe to show their social importance.⁶

It would seem that the payment for homicide is so high that it ordinarily fails to act as an effective mechanism in preventing vengeance or exile. Morgenstierne, however, cites the case of a

¹ Robertson, *Kafiristan*, Geographical Journal, vol. 4, London, 1894, pp. 193–218.

² Robertson, *K.H.K.* p. 440.

³ Robertson, *ibid.* p. 442.

⁴ Morgenstierne, *ibid.*

⁵ Robertson, *ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.* 'Honour' possibly because the society recognizes this as an ideal settlement. The alternatives—further bloodshed and exile—are avoided.

Waigeli he knew who had killed a man and eloped with his wife. They had crossed the border and taken refuge in Chitral. For several years the two saved until they had enough to return home and make the homicide payment.¹

Quarrels which might lead to bloodshed are generally peacefully concluded by a sacrifice without recourse to the *Urir*.

It is considered an act of virtue to dash in and separate quarrellers. Men, women and children will throw themselves between fighting men with the greatest intrepidity, and frequently get hurt in doing so.²

It is a matter of honour for a man who considers himself wronged to attempt to injure his opponent, and all bystanders are equally obliged to do their utmost to prevent injury. Thus some of them attempt to hold or stand between the antagonists while others rush off to secure a goat for sacrifice. The two opponents continue their efforts to injure each other up to the moment of sacrifice, when all hostilities must cease.³ To act as peacemaker is to acquire the approval of the community. If the peacemakers are not successful in preventing serious injury, the matter comes before the *Urir* and a fine, usually a number of goats, is imposed on the individual who is judged to be in the wrong.

Grievous injury would always be paid for. Slight hurt would be atoned for in the usual way, the man in the wrong having to provide the goat for the reconciliation feast.⁴

Robertson observes that outraged public opinion sometimes results in what he refers to as a kind of 'lynch law' where, apparently of one accord, the inhabitants of a community may destroy an individual's house, loot his property and drive him out of the village. He gives the following example:

The chief man at the village of Kamu was caught by the husband in an intrigue with a woman. The husband was soundly beaten by the seducer and his followers, but the whole village turned out, the peccant individual's house was burnt down and he himself put to flight. It was only after much intercession that he was allowed to return to and remain in the village.⁵

¹ Morgenstierne, *Report on a Linguistic Mission to North-Western India*, Oslo, 1932. p. 34. See also *A Kafir on Kafir Laws & Customs*.

² Robertson, *K.H.K.* p. 442.

³ *Ibid.* pp. 166-167, 191-192, 442-443.

⁴ Robertson, *K.H.K.* p. 443.

⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 443-444.

Careful observation of what actually occurred would probably reveal that the proceedings were directed by members of the *Urir* and *Jašt*.

Robertson sums up his observations concerning the *Urir* with these remarks:

There are occasionally disputes and quarrels in consequence of the penalties inflicted, but both the punishers and the punished are obliged to be circumspect, for a public opinion which avenges any outrage on itself by promptly burning down the culprit's house and destroying his property, is a power not to be lightly disregarded. If the *Urir* were flagrantly unjust or tyrannous, public opinion would suppress them at once, while on the other hand disobedience to their lawful and proper enactments would be certain to be punished.¹

The *Jašt*

The *Jašt* is a political body consisting of an indefinite number of men who have distinguished themselves in a variety of ways, but particularly in battle and in the giving of lavish public feasts. Their rank is indicated by various ear ornaments—pendants and rings—rather than by dress.² In conjunction with the 'Inner Council' they convene to discuss and make decisions regarding any and all matters affecting the political community as a whole, in particular to formulate policy relating to other political communities.

Each member of the *Jašt* is a clan representative, though he may share the honour with other men of his clan who have attained the same rank. Large clans, having more male members, have more representatives in the *Jašt* than smaller clans, and are thus politically more influential. As clan representatives the men of the *Jašt* are in a position to be aware of public sentiment regarding any given issue and in their debates they make these sentiments known to the members of the 'Inner Council' who possess the authority to make final decisions on all matters of foreign and domestic policy. As we shall see, however, political influence and/or authority is not attached to rank *per se*. The

¹ *Ibid.* pp. 436–437. It is interesting to compare the institution of the *Urir* with the temporarily elected leaders of early Pashtun society mentioned by Elphinstone. Cf. *An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul*, London, 1839, vol. 1, p. 216 and vol. II, pp. 60–62. See also Maine, Henry, *Village Communities in the East and West*, London, 1881, pp. 122–125.

² Robertson, *K.H.K.* pp. 449 and 505.

important man is one who can command a large following and this in turn depends upon the degree of his popularity. The man of rank who is influential is the man who acts in accordance with that vague but all-important thing called public opinion.

Theoretically anyone can achieve the rank of *jašt*, but in fact the rank is attained only by the head (and perhaps his close agnates) of an extended family possessing vast flocks of goats and large herds of cattle. Such assets alone provide the means for the giving of the twenty-one feasts required to become *jašt*. Indeed, the sole purpose for the accumulation of wealth, which is principally livestock but also consists of wines, cheeses and grain, is so that it may be given away in an elaborate series of public and private feasts (extending over a period of three years) which are virtually the only means of gaining *entrée* into the realm of social distinction and political influence in Kafiristan. These feasts are, in effect, competition for political power.

A man's entertainment may not fall below a certain standard, but it may be as expensive or ostentatious as he likes. A very rich man will supplement these average banquets by giving wine or other luxuries.¹

The required feasts are a tremendous drain on the resources of a family.

Amongst the Kam many men utterly ruin themselves in becoming *jašt*, spending their substance to the last goat, the last cheese, the last pound of ghee, and take praise to themselves for having done so.²

Of the twenty-one feasts, ten are given to those members of the political community who have already achieved the rank of *jašt* and eleven are given to the community at large.³ At the public feasts all persons, whether members of the political community or foreign visitors, are invited. At each feast both the quality and the quantity of the food-stuffs offered are carefully inspected by a delegation of *jašt*.

¹ Robertson, *ibid.* p. 456.

² *Ibid.* p. 450.

³ Cf. Beattie, J., *Other Cultures*, p. 199. "... every potlatch is at the same time both a claim to status and its public acknowledgment. In a society where social worth is implicitly equated with institutionalized liberality, it is in this, and not in economic considerations, that the function and significance of the institution lie."

If he [the candidate for the honour] were to offer cattle in poor condition or male goats of inferior size, he would be immediately heavily fined.¹

Each stage of the long climb to the rank of *jašt* is marked by ritual observances involving the sacrifice of bulls and male goats at the important shrines. And here too "the animals are examined with jealous eyes by the spectators to see that they come up to the prescribed standard of excellence".² The meat from these sacrifices is distributed among those present. For the general distribution of food to all members of the political community who appear, the day prior to the feast is entirely given over to the ritual slaughtering of livestock. During the actual feast, wine, salt, bread, cheese and ghee are also dispensed liberally.³ As mentioned, the feasts are spread out over a three-year period. This means that an average of one feast must be given every six or seven weeks. One realizes something of the expense involved and the resources necessary to become *jašt*.

The political rank of *jašt* is achieved by fulfilling requirements of a socio-religious nature and the individual acquires ritual power as he progresses through the various stages. Candidates for the rank of *jašt*, known as *Kaneash*, are considered pure and their actions are greatly influenced by a concept of purity and impurity. They must, for example, avoid coming in contact with dogs, certain paths are held to be impure, they may not approach the graveyards, etc. Because they must strictly maintain themselves in a state of purity they can carry out certain of the functions of the principal ritual leader on occasions such as officiating at sacrifices at the shrines.⁴ In addition to feast-giving, a *Kaneash* is required to dress in a certain manner on special occasions, and for varying lengths of time, make numerous sacrifices at specified times and places, take part in ceremonial dances, spend the night at certain shrines and, for one period of several weeks, may not leave his village. In short, throughout the entire three-year period of his candidacy, the *Kaneash* spends much of his time fulfilling prescribed social and ritual requirements.

¹ Robertson, *ibid.* p. 450.

² *Ibid.*

³ Cf. Robertson, *ibid.* pp. 450-459.

⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 418, 466, 468-469.

The main rights, duties and obligations of the *jašt* are political in nature. The attainment of the rank is not an end in itself but is part of an on-going process and a springboard to still higher office. It should not be supposed, moreover, that one automatically assumes influence and authority together with the title of *jašt*. As Robertson puts it: "An individual cannot become of great importance in the tribe until he is a Jast."¹ It is the first major step. The rank is necessary to 'importance' but is not a guarantee of it. One must bring to the title those qualities which are valued in Kafir society.

In the Kafir's opinion a really fine manly character, what he emphatically calls a 'good' man, must possess the following attributes: he must be a successful homicide, a good hill-man, ever ready to quarrel, and of an amorous disposition. If he is also a good dancer, a good shot with a bow and arrow or matchlock, and a good 'aluts' player, so much the better. These qualities constitute a fine man, but to be really influential in the tribe, an individual must also be rich. The possession of wealth gives enormous power to anyone in Kafiristan. A man may be brave, devoted to his country, clear-headed and sagacious, and yet have little or no weight in the tribal councils if he is poor, unless indeed he be also an orator, when to a certain extent his eloquence may make amends for his lack of riches.²

Of course, as we have already seen, it is not merely the possession of wealth that makes a man influential, but rather the manner in which and the extent to which he utilizes his resources according to the prevailing system of values.

The social and political ground which is gained by achieving the rank of *jašt* is not such that the individual can rest secure. Robertson makes this clear when he writes:

It is a very curious custom that, although once a jast, always a jast, yet a very wealthy man is practically compelled by public opinion to keep on going through this ceremony again and again, or else he must make his sons and nephews, however young, headmen³ one after another. Unless he does this he is certain to fail in maintaining his influence and popularity with his fellow tribesmen.⁴

¹ *Ibid.* p. 449.

² *Ibid.* pp. 194-197.

³ Robertson uses the term 'headman' interchangeably with that of *jašt*. One would assume that a brother's rights in the family herds would take precedence over those of 'sons and nephews'. Robertson relates that a man can give feasts for his sons and that they can then wear the earrings of the *jašt* "but they will not be considered as other than boys while they are boys". See *K.H.K.* p. 449.

⁴ Robertson, G. S., *Kafiristan*, *The Geographical Journal*, vol. 4, p. 203, London, 1894.

We conclude that the strictly regulated and elaborate feast-giving ceremonies connected with the rank of *jašt* are basically political in nature in that admittance to the honour is officially controlled not only by those already in positions of social and political influence, but unofficially by the community as a whole. The honour, moreover, is maintained only by an almost endless series of lavish feasts which, in effect, act to secure the support of the political community. A *jašt* who fails to continue feasting the village at approved intervals loses the political support of the community, while "the very rich man who is popular in the tribe because he keeps going through ceremonial feast-giving is certain to have a large number of ordinary supporters on almost any question."¹ In contrast, Robertson provides us with the example of Katr Astan:

He was a man of much consequence amongst the Kam, for he was not only one of the *Mirs*—i. e., individuals allowed to sit on a stool outside a house—but he was old . . . and was a tribal orator . . . He was very wealthy, and a sagacious, far-seeing man. Five wives owned him as lord, and indeed he possessed every attribute which should have placed him in popular Kafir estimation on a par with Dan Malik and Torag Merak, had he not lacked liberality. He was stingy, and, with all his ambition to be the controller of the destinies of his nation, he could not bring himself to incur the continual expenditure in banquets and in sacrifices by which alone that position could be attained.²

The *Mirs* and the Inner Council

A man who has achieved the rank of *jašt* is eligible to try for a still higher rank which the Kam Kafirs call *Mir*. Just as for the rank of *jašt*, the correct procedure is clearly prescribed. At the *Nilu* festival, which is held annually in autumn, the candidate, after satisfactorily carrying out the required sacrifices, feasts the entire community in a banquet of truly monumental proportions. This must be repeated the following year at the *Nilu* festival and again the year after that, so that three major feasts, together with their associated sacrifices and other ritual observances are required to attain the rank of *Mir*. The difficulties of achieving this in addition to the feasts necessary merely to maintain the

¹ Robertson, *K.H.H.* pp. 446–447. See also p. 87.

² *Ibid.* pp. 207–208.

influence associated with the rank of *jašt* are considerable, particularly because a *jašt* or *Mir* is also obliged to contribute heavily to the feast-giving activities of his immediate agnatic kin, who also wish to become prominent in the political community.

Robertson reports that among the Kam in 1891 only "three men enjoyed the title [of *Mir*] while a fourth was qualifying for it,"¹ and that there are never more than four or five *Mirs* in the tribe.² According to Robertson, the 'only tangible advantages' in being a *Mir* is the privilege of sitting on a stool out of doors.

Anyone may sit on planks or benches or stools inside a house, but the unique position of occupying a stool outside the house is reserved for the *Mirs*, and the priest [Uta].³

The 'advantage', tangible or not, is given by Robertson when he notes that "the men of the very highest importance in Kamdesh in 1890-91 were all *Mirs*."⁴ They form, in fact, the Inner Council⁵ of the *Jašt*. This Inner Council is the highest authority in the political community of the Kam. It consists of four men: the principal ritual leader and three *Mirs*. The Inner Council thus embodies that combination of secular and ritual authority which is characteristic of all authority in Kafiristan.

The responsibility of making political decisions on the highest level rests ultimately in the hands of those who are members of the Inner Council, but "they used their power tactfully and always knew the bent of public opinion."⁶ Political decisions are, in fact, almost invariably arrived at, directly or indirectly, as a result of the activities of the orators. Robertson tells us very little about these men. They appear as a vaguely defined group within the *Jašt* and are men who have gained a reputation for "volubility, assurance and a good voice".⁷

In considering politics in a Kafir political community it is necessary to keep in mind the fact that a *jašt* is only as impor-

¹ *Ibid.* p. 472. These three were Torag Merak, Dan Malik and Katr Astan.

² *Ibid.* p. 87 & 472.

³ *Ibid.* pp. 472-473. See also p. 93.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 473.

⁵ We have used Robertson's term throughout, but it is well to keep in mind the fact that the Kam have no term for such a group of *Mirs*. It seems they may have been more a part of the *Jašt* and less a separate institution than we have indicated.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 434.

⁷ *Ibid.*

tant as his following is large and the nature and extent of each individual *jašt*'s following is more or less accurately known throughout the political community. The body of a *jašt*'s followers does not necessarily or perhaps even ordinarily coincide with the group of individuals comprising his lineage or clan. Politics operate in such a way as to cut across the bounds of kinship. This is shown by the fact that the candidate for the rank of *jašt*, or the person who has already attained the rank, does not feast the members of his lineage or clan alone, he must feast the entire political community. Feast-giving enhances his status and enlarges his political following on a tribal scale.

The speech-making activities of the orators, together with contributions by other *jašt*—for all have theoretically an equal voice in government—and the decisions handed down by the Inner Council constitute clearly defined political activities. Robertson sums it up thus: “On all questions of policy, foreign or domestic, Kafirs sit in Parliament and discuss the matter noisily.”¹ He provides us with an illuminating account of a ‘Kafir Parliament’:

The clamour is wonderful. A dozen men, perhaps, try to speak at once; each has his own little group of listeners whose attention, if it wanders, he seeks to recall by loud ejaculations of “ai, ai!” or by little pokes in the ribs with his walking-club. If some very exciting topic is being discussed, perhaps all are talkers and none are listeners, but, as a rule, when one of the tribal orators begins to speak he gets the attention of the greater part of the assembly, his efforts being helped by shouted illustrations or further arguments by one or two of his admiring friends.²

As for the extent of the influence and authority wielded by the *Jašt* and Inner Council, Robertson relates “the danger involved in disobeying the orders of the Jast, the mildest of which, it was explained, comprised the burning of the delinquent’s house, and the plundering of his goods and chattels.”³ And again:

Disobedience to the Jast in council is punished promptly and severely. The offender’s house is burnt down, and his property dispersed and destroyed. As the Jast come from all the clans of a tribe, their decision is the decision of the whole people, and he must be a brave man

¹ *Ibid.* p. 434.

² *Ibid.* p. 435.

³ *Ibid.* p. 282.



The Kam Village of Kamu. (Sept. 1960).

indeed who would refuse to accept the fiat of the council . . . If he felt himself unable to obey the rule of the Jast, a man would run away from his tribe altogether . . .¹

As we have seen in considering the *jašt* and the *Mirs*, influence and authority do not automatically accompany the attainment of rank. Thus one does not become a member of the Inner Council by virtue of being a *Mir*, though only a *Mir* can be a member of the Inner Council. The principal ritual leader, 'head of the Utahdari clan,'² is the only one who holds a rank equal to that of *Mir* by virtue of birth alone. We now turn to a consideration of his role in Kam political organization.

¹ *Ibid.* p. 439.

² Robertson, G. S., *Confidential Report on a Journey to Kafiristan*, pt. 2, Sec. XI, p. 123. Political and Secret Home Correspondence, vol. 155.

V. Ritual Leadership

The principal ritual leader of the Kam is always a member of the Uta clan (Utadari), 'the priestly clan' of the political community. Toward the end of the last century the ritual leader of the Kam was Lutkam, or 'Uta' as he was commonly called, "the seventh of his line in direct descent".¹ This is the only example recorded among the Kafirs where succession to a position of authority is ascribed on the basis of descent.

The Utadari is one of the most important clans in the Kam political community. This importance, however, is not derived from the number of able-bodied male members which it can contribute to the fighting force of the Kam—the usual criterion of importance—for we are told that these number only some 120 men as compared with the 300 'fighting men' of the Garakdari or the Bilezhedari.² The importance of the Utadari is based on the fact that it alone can provide the principal ritual leader—the individual without whom no social, economic, political or religious occasion of any consequence is complete. This person is automatically a member of the Inner Council and an equal of the *Mirs*. Like them, he has the right to seat himself on a stool out of doors.³

By virtue of the incomplete data available we know something of the distribution of clans among the Kam. The most important men of the tribe are apparently either members of the Demidari or Utadari and these two clans are, as far as we know, represented in all villages of the political community. This fact is undoubtedly related to government at the village level, but just how we do not know. As regards ritual leadership at the village level, Robertson says that "away from the headquarters of the tribe there is usually some individual specially appointed to do the work of the Utah".⁴ Such a person is almost certainly

¹ Robertson, G. S., *Confidential Report on a Journey to Kafiristan*, p. 123. Political & Secret Home Correspondence, vol. 155. See also *K.H.K.* p. 138.

² Robertson, *K.H.K.* p. 86.

³ But, consistent with the value placed upon 'institutionalized liberality', he gives feasts anyway, becoming *jašt* and, in time, *Mir* in his own right. Cf. *K.H.H.* pp. 138 & 415–416.

⁴ Robertson, *K.H.K.* p. 423. See also p. 208. Robertson writes: "There is another Utah for the [Kam] village of Pittigul, but he is not the tribal priest, and is of small importance. The Katirs of the Bashgul Valley have as their Utah Kan Mara of Bragamatal, who is far above every one else of his tribe in wealth and impor-

a member of the Utadari and probably a close agnate of the principal ritual leader of the Kam.

This ritual leader is perhaps the most widely respected person in the political community, for his authority is on a higher level than that derived from mere popular political support. He alone is entitled to receive two portions of every animal sacrificed. "On the march and elsewhere he takes precedence of everyone."¹ He is in direct touch with the affairs of the Kam to a greater extent than any other individual, for not only is he present in an official capacity at all gatherings of a political nature, but he also conducts the religious ceremonies at the shrines which alone ensure the well-being of all Kam Kafirs.

Two other individuals with special ritual functions must be mentioned. The *Debilala* can be dealt with briefly. In the first place we know comparatively little about him, and in the second what we do know seems to indicate that he does not have any political functions. Robertson merely tells us that

The *Debilala* is also a man held in high respect, particularly amongst the Kam tribe. He recites the praises of the god in whose honour a sacrifice is being made, and at the great religious dances in the spring has a special place assigned to him in the centre of the performers and by the side of the priest [*Uta*], where he sings and dances. He also is debarred from using certain pathways supposed to be impure.²

It is necessary to consider the *Pshur*, or *Dehar* as he is known among the Kalash Kafirs, in more detail. The matter of becoming a *Pshur* or *Dehar* is entirely dependent upon divine call.

No man can become a *dehar* without that, and when the call has been received, no further training or education is necessary.³

The individual may first become aware of this call when he hears voices or sees a spirit during the course of a funeral or other religious ceremony. On subsequent occasions of that nature he may become inspired and temporarily able to transmit to the people a message from one of the deities. On some such occasions, as we shall see, the role of the *pshur* becomes political in effect.

tance. All the Utahs are greatly respected. In Presungul there is one to each village, and some of the elders among them are considered men of great sanctity. They are all rich men." *K.H.K.* p. 415.

¹ *Ibid.* p. 415.

² *Ibid.* p. 416.

³ Siiger, Halfdan. *Shamanism Among the Kalash Kafirs of Chitral*. Folk, vol. 5, p. 295. København, 1963.

So important is the *pshur* or *dehar* to the political community that one may be imported from outside to fill a gap left by the death of their own. Robertson records that the Kam once brought in a *pshur* from Madugal country, but they subsequently ejected him from their territory when, on the strength of one of his divine messages, an unsuccessful raid resulted in the death of two Kam warriors.¹

The large-scale raids carried out on a neighbouring people are commonly inspired by the activities of the *pshur*. While in a trance he may be informed by the supernatural that a great number of goats and cattle are wanted for sacrifice at certain Kam shrines. He accordingly directs that an attack be made to secure the necessary livestock. The *Jašt* and the Inner Council then meet to consider the question.² When a decision has been reached "messengers [are] sent hot foot to all the other tribal villages, and in an incredibly short time the fighting men [have] assembled and started."³ Ritual matters and political issues are maintained apart in so far as the revelations of the *pshur* do not specify the community to be raided. For example:

The Bragamatal [Katir] *pshur* . . . declared that Gish demanded more sacrifices, and had given a general order to the Bashgul Kafirs 'to attack'. This resulted in a raid on the Amzhi Valley of the Wai people and originated a bloody war . . .⁴

The actual community to be attacked in such cases is not chosen at random but is always consistent with prevailing political conditions. Thus, while the decision to attack may be derived from the ritual activities of the *pshur*, the actual attack is directed by the *Jašt* and the *Mirs* and is conducted in the light of current political considerations.⁵

VI. Social and Political Inequality

We propose now to examine some forms of social and political inequality—particularly slavery—and to consider the conditions which determine the nature and extent of this inequality.

¹ Robertson, *K.H.K.* pp. 417–418.

² *Ibid.* pp. 334–335, & *Kafiristan and Its People*, Journal of the Anthropological Institute, vol. 27, p. 75, London, 1898.

³ *Kafiristan and Its People*, *ibid.*

⁴ Robertson, *Confidential Report on a Journey to Kafiristan*, pt. II, p. 124.

⁵ Robertson, *K.H.K.* pp. 335 and 562.

Individuals who belong to numerically small kin groups with comparatively little in the way of land or livestock are in a weak position, not only economically, but socially and politically. Such a group

... consists of men of no family or position whatever, who are also devoid of wealth. They are not slaves. They have no flocks nor herds of their own, merely a little land, which their community cultivates. It is from this class that the shepherd or 'patsa' is obtained. During the winter months he takes care of the goats, and receives for the whole winter one animal for every 20 in his custody. He often attaches himself to an important man as a henchman, and performs all the duties of a servant without receiving that title.¹

Thus a system of clientage exists between those who are socially, economically and politically secure and those who are not. Both parties benefit from the arrangement. The man of position obtains the loyal services of one whose first responsibility is to him, and the man of low status obtains the protection of his patron. Such protection is necessary, for a man without strong family connections is liable to find himself delivered into the hands of another tribe as a homicide payment.²

The basic division in Kafir society, however, is that line which separates free men from slaves. According to Kam tradition the slave population is partly descended from the son of a blacksmith who dwelt in the sky. The blacksmith one day asked his son to bring him some fire. As the youth turned to fetch it there was a lightning flash, a rift opened in the floor of the heavens and the young man fell down to earth. The myth does not relate whom he subsequently met to produce part of the slave population of the Kam. Perhaps she was a Kam woman 'of no family and devoid of wealth'. In any case the balance of the slave population, we are told, is made up of descendants of Waiguli prisoners.³ The two origins recounted in the myth may correspond to the basic division between the slaves: the household

¹ Robertson, *The Kafirs of the Hindu Kush*, pp. 473-474. See also, *ibid.* pp. 84-85. Both Herrlich and Mohammad Abdullah consider these men as a type of slave. Cf. *Deutsche Im Hindukusch*, pp. 236-237 regarding the *Lawin* or *Lane*—a term applied to free men who had fallen into debt. They could be 'sold' but only within the tribe. Cf. Robertson, *K.H.K.* p. 446.

² Robertson, *ibid.* p. 562. Slaves are not generally used for this purpose because they are owned by influential families and play an important economic role in the society.

³ *ibid.* p. 161.

slaves and the *jašt bari* (lit. 'senior' or 'elder' slaves), who are the craftsmen of the tribe. There is a clear division between the two. Mohammad Abdullah writes that the household slaves are *Lavans*, "voluntary slaves who have sold themselves".¹ Robertson notes that "among the slaves all are not of the same social position, for the house slave is said to be much higher in grade than the artisan slave".² The blacksmith is the lowest of all slaves in social esteem. All *jašt bari* reside apart in a special quarter of the village, called Babagrom.³ They are the potters, blacksmiths, woodcarvers, silversmiths, shoemakers and weavers of the tribe. In short, the *jašt bari* produce virtually all the material culture of the Kafirs. Each craft is associated with a certain *bari* clan. Thus, for example, *Tsikokderi* is the clan of shoemakers and *Kirwogderi* is the blacksmith's clan.⁴ Herrlich provides us with the names of six *Kamdescher Sklavensippen*,⁵ but we do not have any estimates of the size of each clan, nor do we know if there are more than these six. It would seem, however, that Herrlich's report to the effect that each free man in Kamdesh has from five to twenty slaves is excessive.⁶ It is nevertheless evident that the *bari* population of a Kafir community is numerically significant and economically important.

Slaves are owned by individuals rather than being the property of clan or community. The individual who owns a slave is free to sell him, "but only in the village or down the valley,"⁷ i.e., within the political community. Robertson emphasizes the fact that there is very little traffic in slaves. According to Herrlich, the price of a slave varied from six to twelve cows, depending upon his strength and ability.⁸ "A young female slave is more valuable than a male, because there is the probability that she will bear children; an old woman or a very old man is of course worth nothing at all."⁹

¹ Morgenstierne's MS translation.

² Robertson, *ibid.* p. 99.

³ See diagramatical sketch of Kamdesh, p. 13.

⁴ Herrlich, Albert, *Beitrag zur Rassen und Stammeskunde der Hindukusch-Kafiren* [in] *Deutsche Im Hindukusch*, pp. 225 & 235.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ "So hat angeblich bei den Kamdeschis jeder 5–20 Sklaven besessen. Von Dschena, einem Groszen der Kantosis [Katir], wird die beachtliche Zahl von 180 Sklaven berichtet." *Deutsche Im Hindukusch*, p. 233.

⁷ Robertson, *ibid.* p. 102.

⁸ Herrlich, *ibid.* p. 234.

⁹ Robertson, *ibid.* p. 102.

All slaves are considered impure. They are not permitted even to approach within a certain distance of the village shrines.¹

All broken victuals are kept for these *baris*, who sometimes come and stand behind a person whilst eating, to receive whatever may be left unconsumed. But if a *bari* chances to come in front of a Kafir whilst eating, it is considered defilement and the aggressor is well abused, and soundly beaten also for so doing . . .²

A *bari* may enter the doorway of the principal ritual leader's house but must not approach the hearth, for it is a particularly sacred place, as are the hearths in all Kafir homes.³ Connected with this we may note that the *bari* are not employed in tasks related to either cultivation or the care of flocks.⁴ This is consistent with the ritual values attached to these important spheres of economic activity.

Thus far we have stressed the social and political inequality of the *bari*. We have noted that they may be bought and sold within certain limitations; that they are impure and therefore may not even approach those places in the community to which great ritual importance is attached. Thus certain ritual ceremonies are closed to them and this effectively restricts all *bari* to the lowest strata of society. On the positive side it should be noted that they have the right to bear arms. The enemies of the tribe are their enemies. When the occasion arises the *bari* fights alongside his master with the other warriors. According to McNair

If one of them slays a Mahomedan he cannot display the head before the God Gesh [*Gish*] but has to take it to Mane [*Moni*]; the title of Shanish is given him for this deed, and a dance got up in his honour; but he enjoys no other privilege except the exemption of himself and family from being sold . . .⁵

¹ *Ibid.* p. 100.

² Raverty, H. G., *Notes on Kafiristan*, Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, vol. 28, Nos. 1-5, Calcutta, 1859.

³ Robertson, *ibid.* p. 103. Siiger writes: "The space between the hearth and the back wall of the ordinary houses are imbued with a certain pure or sacred quality . . . strict precautions . . . protect them from pollution." *Ethnological Field-Research in Chitral, Sikkim, and Assam*. Hist. Filol. Medd. Dan. Vid. Selsk. vol. 36, no. 2, p. 28, København, 1956.

⁴ Siiger reports that the goat pens and stables are considered pure or sacred. Siiger, *ibid.* The presence of a *bari* would mean pollution.

⁵ McNair, W. W., *Confidential Report on the Explorations in Part of Eastern Afghanistan and Kafiristan during 1883*. pp. 42-43. Dehra Dun, 1885. *Political & Secret Letters from India*, vol. 44.

A *bari* may also achieve a social distinction, valid only within the *bari* community, by giving a certain number of feasts to members of the free community. Our authorities do not tell us how many feasts are required but, the honour achieved, the *bari* is permitted "to wear the earrings of the Jast".¹ No political influence accompanies the honour because the *bari* lacks the support of those with a voice in government.

It remains to describe a further advantage enjoyed by the *bari* class; one which is consistent with Kafir political organization in that one of its characteristics is representation. Robertson tells us that members of the *bari* community "are sometimes chosen to be members of the *Urir*."² We suspect that this is the rule, rather than the exception for, as one Kafir remarked to Robertson:

It was a useful thing to elect a slave representative, because he knew so much about his own class and their doings.³

While Robertson was in Kamdesh an interesting social situation arose in this connection. A slave *Urir* was responsible for the imposition of a fine upon a free man who had broken some law. The offender, together with several of his kin, "waited a certain number of days during which the persons of the *Urir* are peculiarly sacred" and then, watching their chance, they set upon the *bari Urir* to administer a beating.

The rest of the *Urir*, all of whom were freemen, rushed to protect their brother magistrate; the different families and clans began to take sides, and what promised to be a bloody quarrel was only averted with great difficulty.⁴

Other problems relating to social and political inequality which we cannot consider fully here include those concerning the position of women. According to Robertson they could give feasts and attain high rank in the society. He cites the case of Sumri, whom he describes as 'old and weak-looking'. She had risen to the rank of *Mir* by virtue of her lavish banquets, and was

¹ Robertson, *ibid.* p. 101.

² *Ibid.*

³ Robertson, *ibid.* p. 101.

⁴ *Ibid.*

the only woman among the Kam permitted to sit out of doors on a stool.¹

The question of slavery requires a far more detailed discussion than can be provided here. A careful examination of what little data is available inclines us to tentatively compare Kafir social classes with caste. Many elements of casts are, in fact, present: the concept of pollution, prohibition of intra-group marriage, prohibition of commensality, association with a profession, etc. These factors, along with many others, warrant further investigation.

VII. Raids, Alliances & Peace Settlements

An analysis of the data provided by our authorities relating to raids, alliances and peace settlements enables us to bring into focus our discussion of the political system of the East Kati Kafirs, for these data serve to define relations between various Kafir political communities and between these communities and the various Muslim peoples with whom they come in contact. We see that, generally speaking, these relations are hostile.

Hostility toward Muslims is expressed in a religious idiom. An ambitious young Kafir seeks to 'kill the enemies of his religion', for by so doing he achieves the esteem of his fellow tribesmen and adds to his status in the political community. These cultural values profoundly influence political relations. Connected with this is the fact that the highest ideals of the Kafirs are expressed in the qualities attributed to great *Gish*. He is by far the most popular of the gods; every village has at least one shrine dedicated to *Gish*. He is a hero to all, a model of what every male Kafir should be.

In order to compliment a Kafir and to make his eyes glisten it is only needful to compare him to *Gish*, and it is impossible to say a more acceptable thing to a Kafir woman than to call her *Gish istri*, i.e., *Gish's wife*.²

¹ *Ibid.* pp. 92-97.

² Robertson, G. S., *The Kafirs of the Hindu Kush*, p. 400.

Great *Gish*, though he lived on earth as a man, was not born of a woman but was fashioned by *Imra*, the Creator. Above all, *Gish* was a warrior, powerful and fierce, with nerves of iron.

In his furious lightning-like attacks and in his desperate enterprises he was successful above all others. He is the Kafir type of a true man, and can never be sufficiently honoured. Fabulous numbers of enemies felt the weight of his fateful hand. He killed Hazrat Ali, he killed Hasan and Husain; in short he killed nearly every famous Musalman the Kafirs ever heard of.¹

Only male animals may be sacrificed at *Gish's* shrine. Robertson writes that an extraordinary number of bulls and male goats are offered each year. "Dozens of goats are killed there at a time, and the temple is drenched with the ladlefuls of blood cast upon it."² The prayer most commonly chanted at the shrine of *Gish* is: "Send us many goats, cows and other plunder,"³ for great *Gish* is the God of War. "It was his worship which greatly helped to keep Kafiristan free for so many generations."⁴ Raverty recounts how, at the great religious festivals, the *pshur* gets everyone's attention and then:

proceeds to harangue the audience on the deeds and prowess of their ancestors; how many Muhammadans they had killed in their lifetime; how many of their villages they had plundered and destroyed; and enjoins them to take example therefrom. If there should be anyone amongst the assembly, distinguished for his actions against the enemies of their faith, they are recounted and enlarged upon, as also the deeds of any other individuals the orator may recollect.⁵

Wives and daughters of men who have slain Muslims are permitted to wear cowrie shells in their hair and on their headdresses so that all the community may be aware of the status achieved by the head of the house.⁶ The man who has killed not less than four or five Muslims is permitted to wear over his shoulders a length of blue cloth taken from the turban of a dead Muslim.⁷

¹ Robertson, *ibid.* p. 401.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.* pp. 410-411.

⁴ Robertson, *Kafiristan: Its Manners & Customs*, Journal of the Society of Arts, vol. 45, p. 573. London, 1897.

⁵ *Notes on Kafiristan*, Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, vol. 28, pp. 317-368, Calcutta, 1859.

⁶ Raverty, *ibid.*

⁷ Robertson, *ibid.* p. 105 & pp. 506-507.

It will be clear that among Kafirs the act of slaying a Muslim is universally approved on social, religious and political grounds. A Kafir who succeeds in killing more than a few is well on his way to becoming an important man, while the able-bodied male who has not done away with at least one Muslim is subject to ridicule.

Those who have succeeded in slaying an enemy will not eat or drink in the company of their less fortunate comrades; but each as he succeeds in killing a foe, is again received into their society.¹

According to Vigne:

When a cow is to be eaten at a feast, those who have not been bloodied by the death of a Mussulman have their food handed to them over the carver's shoulder, and are pelted with cow-dung by the women.²

The sanctions are apparently not so severe as this among the Kam for Robertson merely says that a person cannot hope to achieve a position of any importance without a good reputation as a warrior. In any case it would seem to be of rare occurrence for a young man to reach maturity without having slain a Muslim, for raids are frequently conducted and every youth looks forward eagerly to the day when he can accompany his father on a raiding expedition.

Despite these antagonisms, where a political community of Kafirs are neighbours to a militarily powerful Muslim group, both sides frequently find it to their advantage to arrange treaties and alliances. Muslim settlements near the Kafir border obtain thereby a measure of security for their lives, their homes and their herds, while the Kafirs in return may be able to enlist the aid of the Muslim force against other hostile Kafir tribes. On more than one occasion Kafir tribes have called in a Muslim force from the outside to assist them in inter-tribal conflicts.³ Regarding relations between the Kam and Chitral Robertson writes:

As near neighbours to the dreaded tribesmen [i.e., the Kafirs] the high officials of the Chitral State thoroughly understood the situation . . . It was galling for them to know that the nominal tribute of the

¹ Raverty, *ibid.*

² *A Personal Narrative of a Visit to Ghuzni, Kabul and Afghanistan and of a Residence at the Court of Dost Mohamed; with Notices of Runjit Sing, Khiva and the Russian Expedition*, London, 1840. See pp. 234–239.

³ Robertson, *K.H.K.* p. 181 & 568.

Kam tribe and its nominal recognition of the suzerainty of the Mehtar, were purchased by the payment of presents to the Kam headmen [*Jašt*] and by the avoidance of critical disputes, even when the Kafirs were clearly in the wrong; that the servility shown by these men was merely lip-service; and that it behoved all prudent Chitralis of any position, including even the Mehtar and his sons, to spend large sums in buying Kafir wives, and so obtain family connections with the more important clans of the Bashgul Valley.¹

Relations between a given Kafir political community and any other political unit or its representatives is thus either expressed in hostility or brought into a friendly relationship by the establishment of kinship ties, either through marriage or through the ceremony of brotherhood² with a member or members of the more important clans. We see this in the case of Robertson himself who had arranged his entry into Kafiristan through the auspices of the Mehtar of Chitral. His presence in the Bashgul Valley assured the Kam of the Mehtar's assistance in the event of any attack on the Kam by another tribe. Equally, it prevented the Mehtar from making undue demands on the Kam.³ On the first day of his arrival in Kamdesh, Robertson is surprised to find that

a kind of deputation of the headmen [*Jašt*] led by Dan Malik and the priest [*Uta*] warmly welcomed me, and expressed the hope that my stay amongst them would extend over three or four years at least. They declared that, if I would only take the daughter of some headman as my wife, their satisfaction would be complete, for then they would surely know that my real desire was to remain with them. I was not at all prepared for such a friendly reception, the offer of a wife being as unexpected as it was probably unprecedented. My reply was couched in appropriate terms, and the wife difficulty was got over without offence . . . they obviously placed a curious importance on my getting married.⁴

Robertson subsequently found it expedient to go through the ceremony of brotherhood with two of the principal personages of the Kam in order to consolidate his position.

¹ Robertson, G. S., *Confidential Report of a Journey to Kafiristan*, pt. I, p. 4.

² Apparently travel between political communities is almost exclusively based on exchange visits by bond-friends. Unpublished data collected by Lennart Edelberg and Klaus Ferdinand shows that not only is there a system of trading partners based on bond-friendship, but also that such individuals functioned as peace-makers on occasion. Marriage ties were also used in this way. Cf. *K.H.K.* p. 301.

³ Robertson, *K.H.K.* p. 208.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 61.

I had long become convinced that it was absolutely necessary to conciliate Torag Merak by every means in my power, for owing to the influence he had obtained through his prodigious banquets, it was a positive danger to have him against me.¹

The act of making Torag Merak his brother had the effect of alienating *Uta*, who felt slighted, so Robertson went through the ceremony again; an astute political move, for he thus became 'brother' to two of the four members of the Kam Inner Council.

The nature of the relations which a given Kafir political community has with another political unit is clearly not based on a simple dichotomy such as that which distinguishes between Kafir and Muslim. There is no perpetual state of war between 'believers' and 'infidels', nor is there eternal peace among the Kafirs. Each Kafir tribe builds up its own system of relations, particularly with those political communities whose territories are contiguous to its own. Some of these political units are other Kafir tribes and some of them are Muslim controlled territories. In some cases the relations will be more or less peaceful and in others the relations will be hostile. The effectiveness of these relations is maintained by the sanction of vengeance and the possibility of uncontrolled hostilities.²

In Kafirstan when a man of any consequence, that is, considering the importance of his clan and his position within that clan, is killed by a member of another political community, his death must be avenged.³ We have seen that within a tribe, between members of the same clan or between members of different clans, there is no provision for regulated vengeance. Such matters are settled by the *Urir*, the *Jašt* and the Inner Council, the guilty individual being exiled. Between political communities, however, the sanction of vengeance does function to maintain the *status quo*, provided that friendly relations existed prior to the incident and that it is considered desirable to maintain these relations.

The murder of a Kafir in the territory of a people, or by a member of a tribe, with whom his tribe is at peace, is not necessarily followed by war. As an example, two [Kam] Kafir youths were killed by a distant tribe, through whose valley they were travelling to try and murder in

¹ *Ibid.* p. 214.

² *Ibid.* p. 225 & 440.

³ *Ibid.* p. 122, 147 & 562.

a third tribe closely connected with the other. The Kam did not want war just then, so the affair was compounded in the following way. The fathers of the two young men who had been killed went to the valley where the event had occurred, and after much negotiation obtained two persons, a man and a woman, whom they conducted a short distance on the road home to Kamdesh and then slew. Thus their honour was satisfied and the two tribes remained at peace.¹

And what happens to a man who threatens inter-tribal peace by the act of homicide? Robertson tells us that he is treated just as if he had slain a member of his own tribe. His house is burned, his property distributed, and he is exiled.²

Any member of the offending political community will serve to compensate for a death, the issue is not restricted to the killer or his close agnates.

At the end of 1891 old Dan Malik [a *Mir* and member of the Inner Council] was killed in the Kunar Valley during a treacherous raid on the Kafir grazing-grounds there by Umra Khan of Jandul. Some time afterwards a Pathan was caught in the Kunar Valley by some of Dan Malik's relatives and taken to Kamdesh where the poor captive was placed on the ground in front of Gish's shrine. The whole village assembled there, and a regular worship of Gish was conducted in the orthodox way by the high priest [*Uta*]. At its close the prisoner was taken to the Kamdesh cemetery and stabbed to death in front of Dan Malik's coffin.³

In another incident a Kam Kafir was killed by a Chitrali and the head of the dead man's family demanded "a Chitrali to kill". The demand was considered reasonable because the Kam and Chitral were then at peace. In this case the head of the family "was prepared to accept any Chitrali, a slave even, but a Chitrali of some kind or other he must have".⁴ On another occasion the Muslims of Asmar, with whom the Kam were at peace, killed seven Kam men, mistaking them for Kashtan Kafirs—a tribe with whom the Asmaris were at war.

There was more than a suspicion that the men were slain in positions where they had no business, and not impossibly while actively fighting against the Asmar people. The Kamdesh elders made no protest, but small parties of Kam warriors went secretly and murdered a suf-

¹ Robertson, *ibid.* p. 562.

² *Ibid.* pp. 201–202 & p. 128.

³ *Ibid.* p. 564.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 563.

ficient number of the Asmaris to satisfy the dead. These proceedings were winked at. There was no dancing at the gromma, no songs of triumph, but every one in the village knew what had occurred.¹

The Kam thus satisfied themselves regarding the men that they had lost and yet at the same time avoided war with Asmar. Robertson sums up the whole question thus:

The mere killing of an individual is looked upon as a small affair, provided that he does not belong to the tribe or to another near tribe with which it is at peace, for in the latter case it might result in war. Killing strangers might or might not be considered inexpedient, but it would hardly be considered a crime.²

A peace settlement between two hostile Kafir political communities may be arranged through the intercession of a third political unit which has friendly relations with both.³ Details of the settlement are probably worked out in a series of meetings where the *Mirs* of the political communities concerned get together, but we have no definite information on this point. The supposition is, however, consistent with what we know of the functions of the Inner Council.

Within the present generation the Kam have been at war with the Wai, the Kashtan, the Madugal and the Bashgul Katirs, in addition to their long-standing feuds [with more distant tribes] which have never yet been settled. At the different peace-makings, the Kam and the Katirs exchanged a cow for a cow, showing that they considered themselves still equal in strength, while the Wai paid the Kam four cattle and the Kashtan paid 18 cows and 18 axes, in this way indicating that they were more desirous of peace than the Kam . . . The animals in each case were sacrificed at Arom's shrine.⁴

The god *Arom* is the tutelary deity of the Kam. All cattle received (and cattle are the only animals used to conclude peace) are sacrificed at his shrine. The meat is distributed to the community.

The number of animals demanded from the opposing tribe depends entirely on the strength it retains. If very weak, many bulls would have to be given, while if peace were made on equal terms a bull would be exchanged between the late belligerents.⁵

¹ Robertson, *Confidential Report of a Journey to Kafiristan*, pt. II, Sec. XI, p. 107.

² Robertson, *K.H.K.* p. 194.

³ *Ibid.* p. 567.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 409.

In such settlements the decision of the Inner Council of whether to accept the terms or not, or what terms to offer, would prevail. But at all times the *Mirs* and the principal ritual leader are guided by the state of public opinion and this is communicated to them through the orators and other *Jašt* who, in their turn, are always aware of the sentiments of the people comprising the political community as a whole.

On occasions when an incident occurs which might lead to war, the *Jašt* and the *Mirs* can, if they so desire, be instrumental in preserving the peace.

When war was imminent between the Kam and the Chitralis in 1891, as soon as wiser counsels prevailed on both sides, several Kafirs went to see the Mehtar, and solemnly promised to abstain from killing Musalmans in Chitrali territory, and agreed to pay tribute in kind for grazing rights in the Kunar Valley; they confirmed their promises by ceremoniously sacrificing a goat at Chitral.¹

In general we can say that relations between Kafir political communities are balanced by (1) the *need* for raiding each other's herds in order to obtain animals, particularly goats, a very large number of which are required to fulfill socio-religious obligations, and (2) the parallel need to establish peaceful relations—at least within the valley—in order that everyday affairs can be conducted.

On a larger scale, the religious observances of the Kafirs; the prayers, dances and sacrifices in which the entire community participates, are the means by which public sentiment concerning Muslims is expressed and maintained. Some of the chief cultural values of the Kafirs find their expression in social, religious and political opposition to the encircling Muslim population. These sentiments and the manner in which they are expressed, together with the nature of the physical environment have enabled the Kafirs to maintain down through a number of centuries a state of continual opposition and occasional warfare that achieved a political balance in which neither side gained nor lost territorially, but retained cultural integrity and political independence.²

¹ *Ibid.* p. 568. See also p. 225 & 440.

² The fact that there was no significant territorial loss or gain on either side may be related to ecological factors rather than a balance of power *per se*. See Barth, F., *Ecologic Relationships of Ethnic Groups in Swat, North [sic] Pakistan*, American Anthropologist, vol. 58, 1956.

In summary, the following general observations may be made regarding political relations among the East Kati Kafirs.

1. Hostilities between the independent political communities of the Bashgul Valley can be and generally are settled by arbitration, while hostilities with the political communities of contiguous valley systems are rarely settled. In other words, peace in the valley is the rule. With more distant political communities relations can conveniently be more or less perpetually hostile.
2. Among the East Kati Kafirs the killing of a member of one political community by a member of another is settled by regulated vengeance to avoid the outbreak of hostilities, while a homicide involving an East Kati Kafir and a Kafir of another valley is not settled other than by an exchange of hostilities unless peaceful relations existed prior to the incident and it is considered desirable to maintain these relations.
3. As a general rule the East Kati Kafirs do not raid each other's settlements but conduct their raids outside the Bashgul Valley.
4. While Kam, Kashtan, Madugal and Katir men may join together to conduct a raid into Wai or Prasun or some other Kafir or Muslim territory (see *K.H.K.* p. 137), they would not join Wai or Prasun or other Kafirs in a raid.
5. Inter-marriage is not uncommon between Kam, Kashtan, Madugal and Katir but rarely takes place between the East Kati Kafirs and the inhabitants of the other large divisions of Kafiristan.¹

In short, the rate of social and political interaction is relatively high among peoples occupying the same valley system. This calls for some recognition of common interests and sentiments as particularly expressed by the efforts made to settle disputes.

¹ While this statement is consistent with what we know of political relations in Kafiristan there is as yet very little data to support it.

VIII. Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this section is to briefly indicate a few lines of inquiry suggested by the foregoing discussion of Kam political organization.

1. We know very little about kinship and marriage among the Kafirs. Regarding marriage rules Robertson tells us that "no man can marry a woman of his father's clan, his mother's clan or his father's mother's clan".¹ Both bridewealth and dowry are given. Bridewealth is not large, usually consisting of some eight to twelve cattle, while dowry consists of various amounts of jewellery and slaves, depending upon the status of the families concerned. "All well-to-do Kafirs have more than one wife, but rarely more than four or five. It is considered a reproach to have only one wife, a sign of poverty and insignificance."²

Descent is reckoned patrilineally and marriage is virilocal. The extended family is a residential unit, usually three to four generations in depth. The head of the family provides domiciles for his sons as they marry; these being added on to the patriarchal home as required, so that it develops on the ground into a complex of contiguous houses. At the death of the founder of the house the eldest son becomes the nominal head of the extended family and owner of the family herd, but all members have specific rights in the livestock. No data has yet been collected describing the manner in which the family resources are allocated to members for bridewealth and feasting or, for that matter, in ordinary day-to-day requirements. Investigation of the developmental cycle with special reference to the economics of the extended family would be a valuable study in itself. In addition, it would throw light on the sources of political influence in the society.

2. Robertson provides little information about inheritance and none at all concerning rights in land. It seems, however, that there is no land-allocating authority in Kafir villages. Land is owned by individuals and is passed on to male heirs. Edelberg found

¹ Robertson, *K.H.K.* p. 86 & 535.

² *Ibid.* p. 534.

that terraced fields belong to the man who constructs the retaining wall and fills in the space behind it with soil.¹ Pastures are not owned by individuals but are under the control of the village *Urir* council. Each spring pastures are allocated to extended families by the drawing of lots. We have already referred to the fact that primary irrigation channels are constructed and maintained under the supervision of the *Urir* council and that this body is also charged with the duty of allocating water.

3. The only Kafir genealogies which have been published are those collected by Morgenstierne.² These are nothing more than lists of agnates in order of descent, the longest of which goes back 54 generations. The majority of the others given by Morgenstierne range from 25 to 48 generations in depth. It was found that some elders could remember their ancestors only seven or ten generations back, while others in the same village knew eighteen or twenty generations. Morgenstierne's material is, unfortunately, unaccompanied by relevant ethnographical data. Unpublished genealogies obtained by Ferdinand and Edelberg are also in great depth and there is an interesting tendency for genealogies collected in various political communities to merge after some twenty to thirty generations, thereafter continuing back into what Morgenstierne calls the 'genealogical stratosphere' together. It is significant that the genealogy of greatest depth collected by Morgenstierne (54 generations) is that of *den gamle hedenske presten*—the old pagan priest. We have already shown that the position of the principal ritual leader is based on the ascribed status of birth; the eldest son of a ritual leader succeeding to the role at the death of his father.

4. Following our authorities we have used the term 'clan' throughout, but it would perhaps be more useful as well as more accurate to regard them as lineages. Robertson writes that "a clan is always ready to act together as a clan, without reference to cousinship or marriage ties".³ He neglects to say in what circumstances such corporate action takes place but, in any case, this sounds

¹ Private communication.

² *Ælletradisjon hos Kafirne i Hindukusj*, Maal og Minne, p. 155, Oslo, 1950.

³ Robertson, *K.H.K.* pp. 86–87.

like a lineage. Furthermore, some of these 'clans' are apparently numerically quite insignificant. Robertson reports that "the Lanandari contains probably no more than a dozen or fifteen warriors altogether".¹ Again, this should probably be referred to as a minor lineage. According to Mohammad Afzal's genealogy, part of which is given with this paper, the term 'dari', usually translated as 'clan', is used for both the maximal, the major and minor segments of the descent group. Minor lineages are distinguished one from another by the name of a prominent member. Thus Torag Merak has given his name to the Toragdari of the Demidari. Unfortunately for our knowledge of the role played by lineages in the political organization, we do not know how many Kam men hold the rank of *jašt*, nor do we know to what lineages they belong. As for the 'Inner Council' of *Mirs, Uta* was a member of the Utadari, Dan Malik was of the Demidari, as was Torag Merak. No information is available on *Katr Astan*. Until we know more than we do at present about the distribution of lineages and about the part they play in inter-village relations it will not be possible to estimate fully their political significance.

5. The value placed on 'institutionalized liberality' is reflected not only in the nature of the road to political influence but in other *rites de passage*, especially in the great mortuary feasts, and the scale on which these are conducted is directly related to the status of the family involved. When the young Kam warrior Sunra (of the Demidari) was killed in battle "many animals were slaughtered by Dan Malik, Sunra's grandfather, in order to keep up the position of the family".² The status of the family is further emphasized on such occasions by 'an old woman' who recites the genealogy of the deceased in a large public gathering.³ The major mortuary feasts are held one year after the death of a person, at which time a life-sized wooden effigy is paraded through the village and erected in the cemetery.

This is both a duty and a privilege, and consequently has to be paid for by feasting the community. The style of image to be erected depends entirely on the amount of food to be distributed. One day's feasting is

¹ *Ibid.* p. 86.

² *Ibid.* p. 637.

³ *Ibid.*

sufficient for a flat common affair, but to have the effigy placed on a throne or astride a couple of horses, a three days' banquet would certainly be required.¹

The number of occasions that give rise to public feasts and sacrifices are legion. Since these are all related directly or indirectly to political influence, a detailed study of inheritance, land tenure and agriculture, together with the economics of kinship, is required to obtain a balanced picture of the bases of the political system.

Much more information is required about the economics and politics of feast-giving. We can see that behind the scenes there must be an elaborate system of exchanges constantly in effect to organize resources for social and political ends. We suggest that the basic framework of this activity is provided by the kinship system. The number of feasts required and the number of men seeking higher rank are such that large-scale feasts must be given every two or three days in an important center like Kamdesh.² Robertson no more than hints at the economic activity involved.

At these final feasts cheese was given away to everyone, and the most arduous efforts had to be made by the food-givers to get a sufficient supply of the article. For many days before the Munzilo they were busy buying up all the cheeses they could obtain anywhere, an immense number being required to meet the extraordinary demand.³

6. We need to know more about the various 'divisions' of Kamdesh (see diagram on page 13). At present we do not know the basis of these divisions nor do we understand their function in political affairs*. We suggest that these divisions will be found to have a kinship basis; i. e., although members of various lineages may dwell in each section, one of the lineages will be politically dominant. We do know that each division has a *jašt* representative.⁴ One crisis in Kamdesh caused the village to break up, temporarily, into its constituent parts.

¹ *Ibid.* p. 645.

² *Ibid.* p. 110.

³ *Ibid.* p. 472.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 345.

* As mentioned in a note on page 13, we found, upon returning to Kamdesh in 1966, that the four 'divisions' are actually four separate villages.

... the representatives of the three divisions of Kamdesh—the upper, the lower, and the east villages—were hard at work quarrelling. At first they were all against one another, but before the end, the east division had to contend against the other two united.¹

Robertson rightly omits the fourth division, Babagrom, for the slave community would have no role in this political argument. Again he writes:

... my steady supporters included, amongst others, all the inhabitants of the eastern division [Paprusta] of Kamdesh. These men, although comparatively few in number, comprised many individuals who were the most respected in the tribe for prowess in war, or for the possession of wealth.²

7. We need to know more about social stratification in general and the position of slaves in particular. The resemblance of the various strata of Kafir society to caste is strong and requires further investigation. We have seen that there are at least two clearly distinguishable categories of free men and two categories of slaves. Edelberg has collected material (unpublished) from Waigel which shows each clan not only associated with a particular deity, but a particular profession as well.

Robertson, Herrlich and Lentz provide us with enough data to permit the tentative conclusion that clientage is relatively common in Kafiristan. Whether or not clientage serves as a mechanism for lineage recruitment is not known, but, as indicated earlier, individuals 'of no family or position whatever, who are also devoid of wealth' find it expedient to attach themselves to a wealthy patron. Apparently common also are individuals in a different but similar position who have fallen into debt and become bonded labourers. Both categories of men are quite apart from the question of slavery. Clients and debtors are still essentially free men, *de jure* if not *de facto*. They are not, for example, excluded from full participation in ritual affairs as are *bari*.

8. In considering the checks on influence and authority in Kafiristan we have tried to show that effective *influence* tends to be in the hands of those possessing certain achieved ranks, though the amount of influence wielded by different rank-holders varies

¹ *Ibid.* p. 330.

² *Ibid.* pp. 110–111.

greatly. *Authority*, on the other hand, is, with the exception of that held by members of the 'Inner Council', in the hands of elected officials. These office holders serve for only one year. No data are available on the politics of nomination, election procedure, or the possibility of re-election.

The incumbent of the office of *Ur jašt* or *Urir* may be removed from his position for abuse of authority. The man of influence, no matter what his rank, will simply lose his following. Flagrant abuse of the rights and obligations of rank or office can result in the destruction of a man's house, the looting of his property and his expulsion from the village. The influence of the *Jašt*, the authority of the *Urir* and the power of the *Mirs* is, in each case, exercised only by the consent of the people.

9. We need to know a good deal more about local government, i.e., at the village level. In particular we would like to know something about the process of selecting members of the *Urir* council, the criteria of choice, and the possible connection between eligibility for *Urir* membership and lineage/clan affiliation. The social and political links between separate villages within a given political community need to be known. In this connection a complete survey of the distribution of clans is required. Together with clan distribution we need quantitative data on the strength of clan membership in each community. Possibly we will find that each village, although inhabited by men of diverse clans, is associated with a particular lineage/clan, the members of which are regarded as having special ritual/political rights. If this is the case, the Demidari would seem to hold such a position. We do know that each village is associated with an exclusive shrine, but at the same time has shrines which are recognized throughout Kafiristan.¹ The fact that the influential Demidari is represented in every village in our sample is undoubtedly related to the political organization of the Kam, as is the prevalence of the Utadari. Unfortunately we have no details concerning village authorities outside Kamdesh. That each village has its own *Urir* council seems fairly clear, but even at this elementary level

¹ *Ibid.* p. 376-377.

published data is nonexistent. Robertson, admirable field-worker that he was, is silent on this point.¹

10. Crucial to the political organization and directly connected with clan distribution are ecological factors. Given the Kafir level of technology and the physical environment of the Hindu Kush, the size of a Kafir village is strictly limited. Houses are constructed only where they do not encroach upon arable land. Arable land, in turn, consists primarily of terraced fields. These in their turn can only be constructed where the relief permits, where soil is available and, most importantly, where they can be irrigated. The environment, therefore, imposes strict limitations on both the location and size of a village. When the population of a village rises above a certain level fission takes place and a new settlement is founded elsewhere. The fact that the Demidari is represented in every Kam village in our sample may, in the case of this numerically large group, indicate that the process of fission has taken place several times. If members of the Demidari did found the Kam villages listed in the sample it would account to a large extent for the position of influence they occupy among the Kam. In a like manner, the fact that the Utadari is found in five of the seven villages is consistent with both the numerical strength of that clan and the important ritual functions performed by certain of its male members.

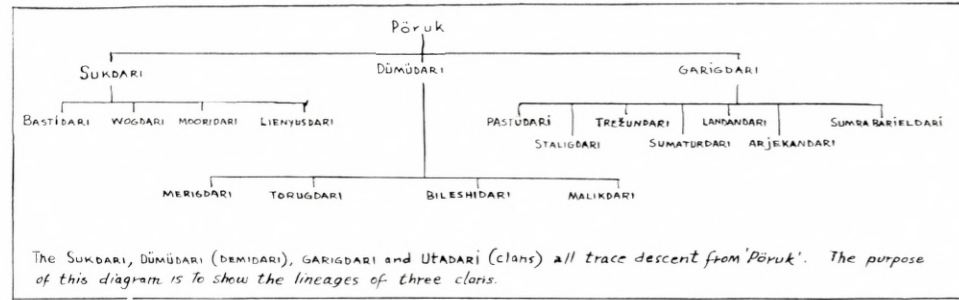
The reader who has followed us this far will realize that the quote from Kipling at the beginning of this paper is not an entirely irrelevant literary device, for to be successful, (all supernatural considerations aside), our 'amulet' must contain detailed information relating to the sources of influence and authority in Kafiristan, the system of norms within which they may be exercised, and the way in which they may be acquired. This we have attempted to do.

¹ Since writing the above, we have visited the majority of the villages in the Bashgul Valley. Without exception, each has its own *Urir*, or, more correctly, *uru* council.

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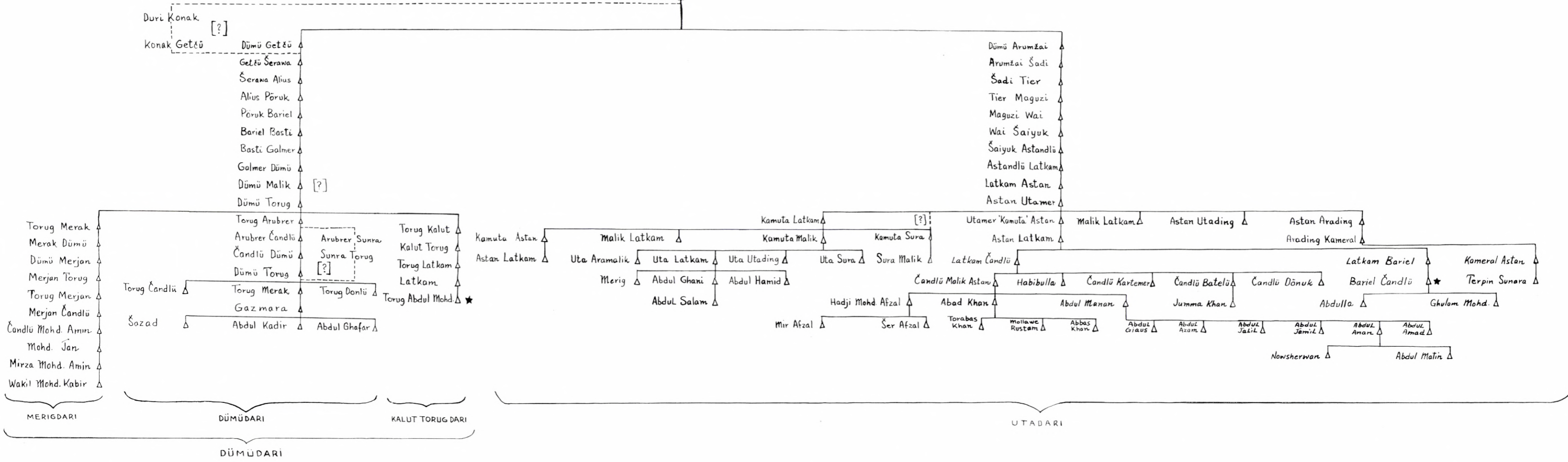
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- Kam
- Kamzai
- Kon
- Kam
- Şewena
- Sewena Duri
- Duri Arom
- Arom Duri
- Duri Konak
- Konak Getëü
- Getëü Duri
- Duri Pörük
- Pörük Duri

"About forty generations ago Käm and his relations came from Arabia. They founded Kämä, near Jalalabad, where our kinsmen still live. Then they came here and settled in Kämdeh and Kümü. Käm is the father of all Käm people."
 -- Torug. Kämdeh, August 1966.



★ Author's informants; Kämdeh, August 1966. [?] and discontinuous line indicates disagreement between informants.

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