Short Notices

Preliminary Notes on the *Naṣab-nāmas* of Badakhshan

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The history of the Nizari Ismaili community in the Pamir mountains of Badakhshan is understudied in comparison with other Shi‘i communities in the Islamic world. This is due to limited access by scholars to the large cache of unpublished manuscripts and documents that remain in private collections in the towns and villages of Gorno-Badakhshan in eastern Tajikistan and Badakhshan in northern Afghanistan on the one hand, and the limited references to the historical development of the community in the extant doctrinal and theological writings of Ismaili sources on the other.\(^1\) Badakhshan, moreover, has long held a reputation as a remote and isolated region, which

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\(^1\) Important collections of Persian manuscripts from Badakhshan are contained in the Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) Library in London, although they remain uncatalogued. Scholars working in the Khorogh Research Unit of the IIS in Gorno-Badakhshan, established in the post-Soviet period, have made numerous expeditions to photograph manuscripts in Badakhshan, which have been digitized and are currently in the process of being catalogued. There is also an archive of photostat reproductions of the manuscripts in Badakhshan that were collected by Andrei Bertel's and Mamadvafo Bakoev between 1959 and 1963, which are held in the Rudaki Institute of Oriental Studies and Written Heritage of the Republic of Tajikistan in Dushanbe. For the latter, see Bertel's and Bakoev, *Alfavitnyi katalog rukopisei obnaruzhennykh v Gorno-Badakhshanskoj Oblasti: Ekspeditsiie 1959-1963*. The Bertel's and Bakoev collection does not include any copies of *naṣab-nāmas*. While there are a few *naṣab-nāmas* contained in the London and Khorogh collections of the IIS, they have not been systematically collected or catalogued.
has led to its marginalization in scholarship. Recent scholarship on early modern Eurasia, however, demonstrates the connectedness of histories that tie into broader historical developments, including the spread of Islam and the formation of communal and sectarian traditions such as Nizari Ismailism in Badakhshan. The Badakhshan region, furthermore, has long been host to a flourishing manuscript culture that persisted well into the Soviet era in Tajikistan and to the rule of Muhammad Zahir Shah in Afghanistan, unlike other regions of the Islamic world in which orality and the manuscript tradition were replaced by print culture. In recent years, there has been a significant expansion of scholarship on Badakhshan, particularly in Gorno-Badakhshan, including historical, ethnographic and archaeological studies that seek to apply new methodologies and utilize previously unstudied sources.

Between 2004-2016, I carried out field research on shrines, oral traditions, and familial communities of Ismaili pirs and khalīfas in the towns and villages of Badakhshan in Tajikistan, and in the region of Shughnan in Badakhshan, Afghanistan, in addition to archival research and secondary literature reviews. Until recently, scholarship on Ismailism in Badakhshan has relied primarily on a corpus of unpublished devotional literature, oral traditions, a small selection of local histories, British and Russian traveler literature, and Russian and Soviet-era ethnographic reports. Field research has revealed a largely ignored yet significant genre of Persianate documentation in Badakhshan, namely the genealogical histories (naṣab-nāmas/shajaras) of the families of past religious

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2 See, for example, Joseph Fletcher’s article, “Integrative History”; Christopher A. Bayly’s *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914* for the modern period; and for the Central Asian context, see Pickett, “The Persianate Sphere during the Age of Empires”.


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