

as Kafirstan ('Land of the Infidels'), because of the non-Islamic religion of its people.<sup>60</sup>

Outsiders used to regard the Kafirs as robbers, murderers, wine drinkers and fire-worshippers. Alexander Burnes, who travelled from Peshawar to Kabul in the early 1830s, added that the 'Kaffirs appear to be a most barbarous people, eaters of bears and monkeys, and fighting with arrows, and scalping their enemies'.<sup>61</sup> He furthermore described them as the aborigines of Afghanistan and added that the Kafirs were supposed to descend from Alexander the Great. Mountstuart Elphinstone, writing about 'Caufiristaun' in 1815, likewise told that they resembled the Greeks and were 'celebrated for their beauty and European complexion, worshipped idols, drank wine in silver cups or vases, used chairs and tables, and spoke a language unknown to their neighbours'.<sup>62</sup>

The number of Nuristanis from before 1979 was generally reckoned to be some 100,000.<sup>63</sup> They speak a variety of related languages. These so-called Kafiri languages belong to the Indo-Iranian language family and are thus related to the Indo-Aryan (including Hindi) and Iranian languages (as e.g. *Fârsi*, Baluchi, Pashto). The Kafiri languages probably constitute a third branch, being neither specifically Indo-Aryan nor Iranian.<sup>64</sup>

Relatively little is known about the culture of the Kafirs from before the time that they were forced to adopt Islam. Their society was tribal and oligarchal. The position of women was low, and polygamy was the norm. Poor kinsmen tended to look after the herds. There were also artisans, who formed a separate class, and then there were slaves. These were mostly captives from the wars that were fought among the Kafirs themselves and against the Muslims living along the fringes of Kafirstan. The Kafirs also had a strong sense of what was 'clean' and 'unclean', and they followed a complicated system of rules to separate the two. The pre-Islamic religious rituals of the Kafirs, although insufficiently known, are of particular interest. The drinking of wine, the sacrifice of animals, the presence of priests and singers of hymns, and the use of a sacrificial fire all suggest a close relationship to the ancient religion of the Indo-Iranians. The

60 From Arabic *kâfir*, 'infidel'. This name ('Capherstan') also occurs in a travelogue of the Jesuit priest Benedict Goës, who in the early seventeenth century travelled from India, via Peshawar and modern Afghanistan, to China (compare Sykes 1940:308).

61 Burnes 1834, II:211; see also I:165-6.

62 Elphinstone 1815:617.

63 Ethnologue Data Base.

64 Morgenstierne 1979:25.

names of some of the Kafir gods also recall Indo-Iranian deities, as for instance that of the main god of the Kafirs, called Imra, Mara or Yamrai. This name recalls Indo-Iranian Yama or Yima, the Lord of the Underworld. Another god in this context is that of Indr, whose name is related to that of Indo-Iranian Indra.<sup>65</sup> Next to the many gods and goddesses, there were also demons and spirits that needed propitiating.

Linguists recognize four (or five) separate Kafiri tongues, namely Kati, Prasun, Waigali (and Gambiri) and Ashkun. The various languages also reflect socio-political and cultural differences between their speakers. For instance, the Kati speakers used mainly to wear black coloured clothes (and were therefore often called, in Persian, *siyâh-push*; Pashto *Torkâfir*, 'wearers of black'), the others white coloured garments (the *safid-push*; Pashto *Spinkâfir*, 'wearers of white'). Kati is spoken in the northwest and especially in the northeast of Nuristan. The language often functions as the *lingua franca* of the region, and shortly after the Marxist takeover it was recognized as one of the official languages of Afghanistan. The centre of the Kati speakers, and of Nuristan in general, is the village of Kamgrom (Kamdesh), which is located in the Bashgal valley. Here the British doctor (Sir) George Scott Robertson spent much time during his year-long visit to the Kafirs in 1890/1891. This visit resulted in the famous book *The Kafirs of the Hindu-Kush*, which was published in 1896, in the same year that the Kafirs were defeated by the Afghans and forced to adopt Islam.

Kati speakers, similar to most of the other Kafirs, used to form a fairly egalitarian society, at least for those who were 'free'. There were, however, men of authority, and among the Kati speakers this resulted in some sort of oligarchy of influential clans. Among them, further prestige could be acquired by killing an enemy and by giving lavish feasts. Descent remained important, however, and from among the Kati groups derive the few extant, huge wooden statues of ancestors, either men or women, who are depicted sitting or standing, or, in the case of men, even riding a horse. Most of these statues were destroyed following the advent of Islam, but some of them have survived in ethnological collections throughout the world.

Another language is Prasun. It is spoken by a small group of people in a secluded valley with Kati speakers to the east and west. The valley used to constitute the religious centre of Kafirstan. Here, at Kushteki, there stood one of the few religious buildings of the area,

<sup>65</sup> Indr was known as the deity that introduced wine-making. In Indo-Aryan literature Indra is known for his ability to drink huge amounts of (equally intoxicating) *Soma*.

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dedicated to Mara (Imra), the main deity of the Kafirs. The Prasun speakers were primarily concerned with religion. As in the case of the Kati speakers, they were led by a small group of people whose position was fairly secure. There were no carved statues of ancestors. Instead all energy was spent on the production of statues of the gods.

South of the Prasun speakers there are Nuristanis who speak Waigali (and closely related Gambiri) and Ashkun. Together they form a large group. Of all the Nuristanis, the Waigali and Ashkun speakers traditionally maintained the closest contacts with the people living in the Kabul valley to the south. These contacts were not always peaceful, and the Waigali and Ashkun speakers therefore developed a fairly martial culture in which fame could be acquired by killing enemies. In this way, their society was the most egalitarian, and the carving of woodwork was directed at the living, rather than the ancestors or the gods.

### The Baluch and Brahuis

Another Iranian-speaking group, living in the southwest of the country and in neighbouring parts of Pakistan and Iran, are the Baluch.<sup>66</sup> They speak a Northwest Iranian language, Baluchi. Most of them are now sedentary and all of them are Sunnis. They seem to descend from people who moved from the north to the southeast of the Iranian Plateau during the Middle Ages. They are first mentioned in Islamic sources from the tenth century. Sometime later they moved further from present-day Southeast Iran into modern Pakistani Baluchistan. Their name also appears in Firdawsi's *Shâhnâme* (early eleventh century). Large number of Baluch tribesmen settled in Sistan by the end of the eighteenth century, following the fall of the Iranian Zand dynasty.<sup>67</sup>

In 1979, according to estimates, there were some 200,000 Baluch in the country. In 1996, their number in Pakistan was estimated at one million.<sup>68</sup> Often living together with them are the Brahuis, who speak a Dravidian language akin to the languages spoken in South India, such as Tamil and Malayalam.<sup>69</sup> Their number in Afghanistan, prior to 1979, was estimated at about 20,000, but this figure is controversial. The Brahuis used to dominate a large extent of land. The

66 See Orywal 1986:35-8. Compare Morgenstierne 1958:169-200.

67 Compare Tate 1910:93ff.

68 According to the Ethnologue Data Base.

69 For the Brahuis, see Orywal 1986:37-8.

so-called Brahui confederation was established in the seventeenth century, and by the mid-eighteenth century it comprized almost all of eastern Baluchistan, including the modern port of Karachi. It was led by Brahuīs and included the many Baluch tribes of the area. The confederation collapsed by the early nineteenth century and in 1876 a treaty was signed which made it into a British protectorate. Its main centre is the town of Kalat, south of Quetta.

#### The Hazaras

The Hazaras of Central Afghanistan speak Persian (*Fârsi*, *Hazârâgi*), but are clearly of Mongolian origin which shows by their Turco-Mongoloid features.<sup>70</sup> Their number is estimated at about 1.5 million (1989 figures).<sup>71</sup> They inhabit the poor lands in the mountains of Central Afghanistan, generally called Hazarajat.<sup>72</sup> Their name derives from Persian *hazâr*, 'thousand', and probably refers to a (Mongol) military contingent (Mongol *ming*). The Hazaras used to occupy a much larger area, including large tracks to the east and south of their present habitat. However, following their defeat at the hands of Amir 'Abd al-Rahman Khan during a war that lasted for some years (1890–3), the Pashtuns drove them higher up into the mountains. Most of the Hazaras are Imami Shi'ites and are in relatively close contact with their co-religionists in Iran and Iraq.<sup>73</sup> There are also Isma'ili Hazaras, who live in the northeast of Hazarajat in separation from the Imami Hazaras.

The Hazaras are grouped into tribes and clans, traditionally headed by a *Mir* or *Beg*, but there is no overall genealogy and the tribal organization is far less important than with the Pashtuns. They are traditionally led by 'outsiders', namely *Sâdât* (singular: *Sayyid*), who claim descent from Muhammad.<sup>74</sup> Those who have enjoyed a religious education, receive the title of *Shaykh*. The recent war, however, has changed the structure of Hazara society, and most power now lies with newly emerged religious leaders and the officials of political parties, the most important of which is the *Hizb-i Wahdat-i Islâmi*.

70 A recent study on the Hazaras is by Mousavi 1998. For a bibliography, see Orywal 1986:26–7.

71 Ethnologue Data Base.

72 Being the Arabic plural form of *Hazâra*. Now often also called Hazaristan.

73 Their conversion from Sunnism to Shi'ism appears to date back to Safawid times (sixteenth–eighteenth centuries AD).

74 Kopecky 1982.

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### The Aymaq

The Aymaq of West Central Afghanistan form another Persian speaking group.<sup>75</sup> They represent the Persian-speaking, Sunni nomads and semi-nomads of West Afghanistan and their number in Afghanistan in 1993 was estimated at more than 400,000.<sup>76</sup> This group of people is made up of the Chahar ('four') Aymaq, which includes four tribes (the Jamshidis,<sup>77</sup> Aymaq Hazaras, Firuzkuhis<sup>78</sup> and Taymanis).<sup>79</sup> Together with the Taymuris<sup>80</sup> and some other groups (the so-called *Aymaq-i digar*, 'other Aymaq')<sup>81</sup> they constitute a relatively distinct group in the western foothills of the Central Afghan highlands. They are generally semi-nomads, and especially the Firuzkuhis are known for the conical felt yurts in which they live.

The Taymuris live northwest of Herat. The Jamshidis live further to the west, in and around the modern town of Kushk, north of Herat. The Aymaq Hazaras, who live northeast of Herat, are ethnically related to the Hazaras in Central Afghanistan, but they are Sunnites and not Shi'ites. Their urban centre at present is Qal'a-i Naw. Finally, the Firuzkuhis live along the upper course of the Hari Rud river, east of Herat. The Taymanis, some of whom have adopted a Pashtun-style black tent, live south of the Firuzkuhis.

### Minor Ethnic Groups

Other, minor ethnic groups that have settled in Afghanistan include Mongols, Arabs, Qizilbash and many others. There are also various groups that originate in the Indian subcontinent, or at least ethnically closely related to the people of India and Pakistan. The oldest of these are probably the speakers of Dardic (Indo-Aryan) languages, includ-

75 For this group, see Orywal 1986:29-34, and especially Centlivres 1976.

76 Ethnologue Data Base.

77 The Jamshidis claim descend from Jamshid (compare Avestan *Yima Khsaêta*, the Lord of the Underworld) and they sometimes call themselves also Kayanis (compare the legendary Kayanian, Kavyan dynasty of ancient Iranian tradition).

78 For this group, see Mandersloot 1971. According to their own traditions, they originate from Firuzkuh east of Tehran, whence they were taken to the Herat area by Timur (also known as Tamerlane), in the late fifteenth century.

79 The composition of the Aymaq is still disputed. The Aymaq Hazaras are sometimes excluded from the Chahar Aymaq, and the Taymuris are sometimes added. Elphinstone (1815:480) lists the four tribes of the *Chahaur Oeemauk* as the *Teimunees*, *Hazaurehs*, *Teimoories*, and *Zoories*.

80 Also called the Sunni Hazaras. For the Taymuris, see Singer 1982.

81 Including the Zuris, Malikis, Mishmast and Tahiris.

ing Pasha'i.<sup>82</sup> The Pasha'i speakers live along the western and southern fringes of Nuristan and are nowadays also known as *Dihgân* or *Kohistâni*. Many of them are Shi'ites, and accordingly known as *'Ali-Ilâhis*. Marco Polo in the 1270s may refer to them and their 'Indian' character:<sup>83</sup>

Ten days' journey south of Badakhshan is a country called Pashai. The inhabitants, who have brown skins and speak a language of their own, are idolators. They are adepts in enchantment and diabolic arts. The men wear ear-rings and brooches of gold and silver and pearls and precious stones in profusion. They are very crafty folk and artful in their own way. The climate is very hot. The stock diet is flesh and rice.

The Pasha'i speakers may in fact have arrived here from the east at a very early date, if they did not settle here immediately after the Indo-Aryan migrations from north of the Hindu Kush in the second millennium BC. They inhabit an area that stretches from close to the Salang Pass north of Kabul,<sup>84</sup> south and eastwards along the fringes of the mountains of Nuristan, to the banks of the Kunar river north of Jalalabad. Their number was estimated in 1982 at more than 100,000.<sup>85</sup> From their habitat in the side-valleys along the Kabul river it is clear that they used to live in a much larger area, and that in the course of time they were pushed out of the plains between Kabul and Jalalabad, mainly by Pashtun immigrants. This process is still continuing.

Another Dardic (Indo-Aryan) language, now (almost) extinct, is Tirahi, which used to be spoken in some villages south of Jalalabad by people who apparently had been pushed out of Tirah (further south, on the other side of the Safed Koh) by Pashtuns (the Afridis).<sup>86</sup>

The number of Mongols in Afghanistan is extremely limited.<sup>87</sup> The Ethnologue Data Base lists a few thousand people, with only some 200 or less speakers of Mogholi. They live, or used to live, in various villages south of Herat in West Afghanistan.

In North Afghanistan there are said to be some communities of Arabs, speaking Arabic.<sup>88</sup> They regard themselves as descendants of the Arab colonists from the early years of the Islamic conquest.

82 Orywal 1986:54-6. See also Kieffer, in Orywal 1986, and Elphinstone 1815:319.

83 Marco Polo, ed. Latham 1958:78.

84 They may even have lived at some time in the Panjshir valley (Morgenstierne, in Jettmar 1974:4).

85 According to Ethnologue Data Base.

86 Orywal 1986:62-3.

87 Orywal 1986:42-3.

88 For an extensive study of the Arabs of Afghanistan, see Barfield 1981. See also Orywal 1986:39-40. Compare Elphinstone 1815:322.