

# RAISING THE ALARM: DEFENSIVE COMMUNICATION NETWORKS AND THE SILK ROADS THROUGH WAKHAN AND CHITRAL

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One of the key elements of Imperial Chinese strategy towards the Pamir borderlands<sup>1</sup> was the garrisoning of troops at strategic locations [Fig. 1].<sup>2</sup> The garrisons were a tangible demonstration of the patron-client relationship, and the resulting peace and security enabled cultural, political and economic exchange along the Silk Roads. The garrisons were supported and augmented by a network of watchtowers along the connecting routes.<sup>3</sup> Manned by small groups of men, often including local inhabitants, the watchtowers (*feng* 烽 in Chinese, *ri-zug* in Tibetan) could raise an alarm and send a signal of fire, smoke, or perhaps sunlight reflected on polished metal mirrors to alert the garrisons in case of trouble.

Supporting this network of garrisons and watchtowers required substantial expenditures of money, grain, military supplies and silk. Although un-

doubtedly less expensive and more practical than military conquest and direct rule, the system of supporting client states generated large flows of currency in the form of silver coins and bolts of silk flowing out of China and tribute and livestock into China.<sup>4</sup> The flow of wealth coupled with the security infrastructure along the routes enabled commerce, politics and state formation to be woven into the complex, coherent network that today is identified as the Silk Roads (Brown 2014, p. 16).

In Wakhan<sup>5</sup> massive stone and brick structures, locally termed *qalha* (fort) can be seen along both banks of the Panj River. On the Afghanistan side of the river, they are located from west to east at Qazideh,

Fig. 1. Wakhan and the Afghan Pamir, showing Pamir Borderlands. Map courtesy of Mareile Paley.

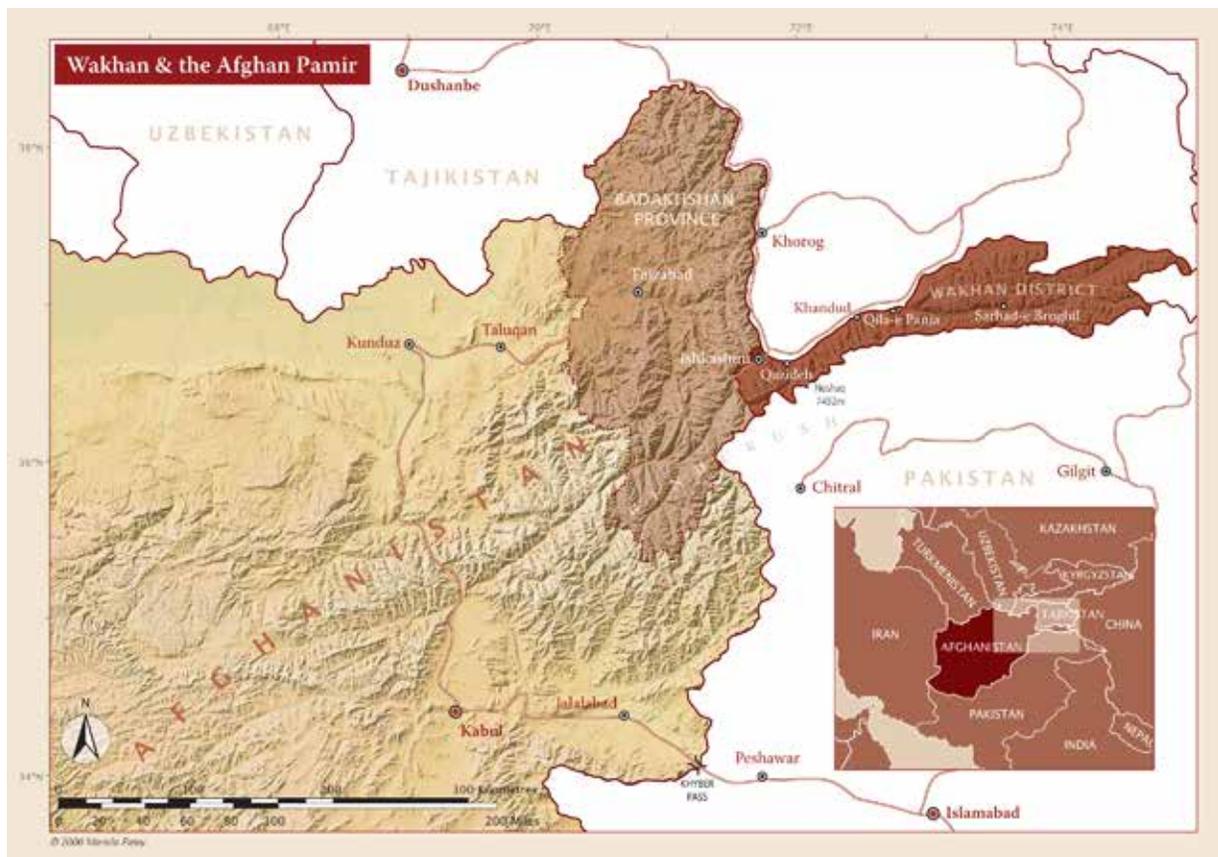
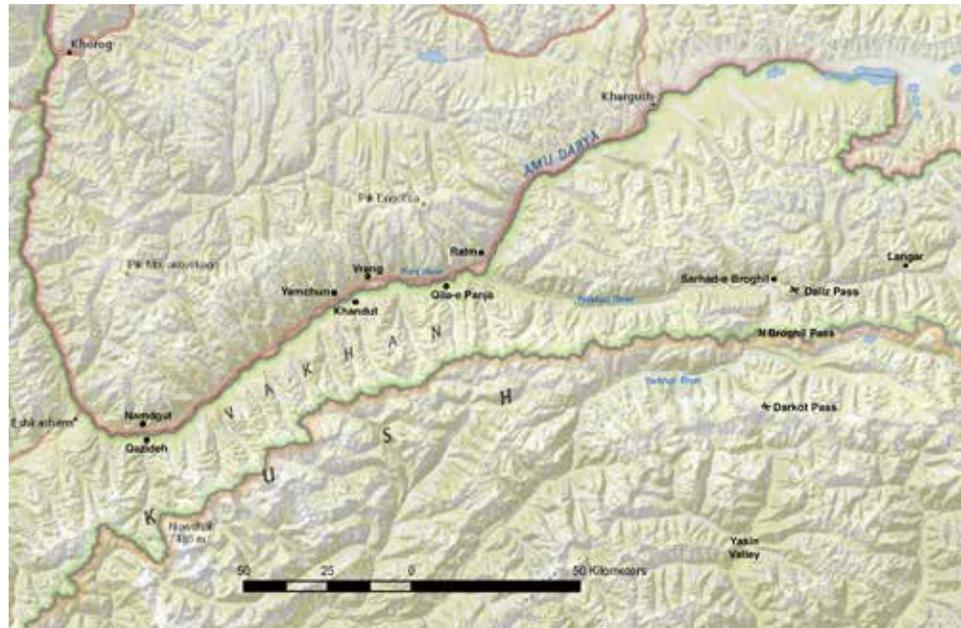


Fig. 2. Wakhan villages, passes and historic fort locations.



Qala Panja and Korkut. On the Tajikistan side, they are located at Namadgut, Yamchun and Ratm. Wakhi tradition ascribes them to *kofir* (non-Muslims) and more specifically to the kafir king QaQa, discussed below [Fig. 2].<sup>6</sup>

These forts were constructed on a base of flat stone slabs, and, except for the Qazideh fort, all have mud-brick walls above (Bubnova 2008, pp. 222–39; Hirai 2015, pp. 21, 42–43; Iloliev 2015; Miller 2009, pp. 37–43; Stein 1921, 1, pp. 68–69). Hirai noted that the Qazideh fort has lower walls than the other forts and more than 50 small rooms connected by a corridor, similar to Gandharan monasteries at Taxila (in modern Pakistan). Stein remarked on the use of regular brushwood layers interspersed between the mud bricks of the fort at Korkut, a construction technique used in Chinese and Tibetan forts along the Inner Asian Silk Roads.

The forts on the Tajikistan side of the Panj River have been more extensively studied than those on the Afghanistan side. Bubnova details the Russian and Soviet archaeological work and presents a comparative chronology that roughly dates the Namadgut, Yamchun and Ratm forts from the 3<sup>rd</sup> – 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BCE to the 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, with subsequent occupation in later periods. Iloliev comments in summary that although there is no specific datable evidence (such as wood for radiocarbon dating) to determine initial construction, the associated finds and contextual evidence suggest construction of the forts during the Kushan era, approximately 50 BCE – 250 CE.

The location and design of the Wakhan forts, built with massive walls and towers on high ground above narrow river corridors, comports well with a network of control over trade routes. One can envision the kingdom of Wakhan as described by the Chinese monk Xuanzang (Hsüang-tsang 玄奘), in the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE, with its ten Buddhist monasteries along both sides of the river. The capital Khandud and its marvelous monastery temple was in the middle of the kingdom (Xuanzang 1996, pp. 363–66) and the monastic cloister and caves of Vrang were opposite on the northern bank (Bubnova 1997). The series of

forts and towers along both sides of the Panj River provided the security infrastructure for the kingdom and for the monks and merchants crossing the high Pamir.<sup>7</sup>

To the south of Wakhan was the kingdom of *Balûr*.<sup>8</sup> The kings of Balur, the Palola Shahis, were wealthy patrons of Buddhism, commissioning sumptuous bronze Buddha images and copying and preserving important Buddhist texts – the renowned Gilgit Manuscripts. Their “astonishing rich and flourishing Buddhist culture” (von Hinüber 2003, p. 35) also left a legacy of Sanskritic inscriptions and Buddhist art on numerous large rocks throughout the Gilgit region, which is today part of Pakistan.

Although the Palola Shahi dynasty is “unknown to ancient Indian historiography” (von Hinüber 2003, p. 36), the cultural, political and strategic significance of Balur for the Tang court is undeniable. The Chinese Imperial Commissioner described Balur and Wakhan as “the western gate of Tang” (Chavannes 2006, p. 150, n. 5). Although the Tang court maintained trade and diplomatic exchange with more than 20 western kingdoms, including Balur, Wakhan, Chitral, Udayana (Swat) and Kashmir, Tibetan soldiers passed unimpeded through Balur and Wakhan on their way to attack Kashgar and Khotan, two of China’s four major garrisons in the west (Beckwith 1987, pp. 29–34, 87–89, 116). In 722 CE, the Tibetan army occupied Little Balur, provoking a military response from the Chinese, who defeated the Tibetans in Balur. The Tibetans, however, did not go away and in 730 CE the king of Wakhan fled to Chinese territory where he requested military aid to counter Tibetan influence. In 737 CE, the Tibetan army captured the king of Little Balur, the entire Pamir region submitted to Tibet,



Fig. 3. Kansir fort, showing the long western wall and large tower at southwestern corner.

and all tribute to the Tang court ceased (Beckwith 1987, pp. 95, 111, 116). In 740 CE, the king of Little Balur married a Tibetan princess.<sup>9</sup> The Tang Imperial Commissioner's fears of losing the western regions to Tibet were realized and the Tang court sent an army of 10,000 to re-take Little Balur.

The campaign, led by general Gao Xianzhi (Kao Hsien-chih, 高仙芝), is recorded in his biography.<sup>10</sup> The army, equipped with horses, marched from Kucha to Kashgar to Tashkurgan. From there, they marched to the Pamir, most probably the present day Little Pamir in Afghanistan, where he divided his army into three. His strategic aim was to attack the Tibetan-occupied fort, which the Tang Annals call Lianyun (Lien-yun, 連雲), located near present-day Sarhad-e Broghil, which was and still is the easternmost village in Wakhan. The general sent 3,000 horsemen by the "Northern Gorge"; a second group went by the "Red Buddha Hall Road"; and the general himself and the Imperial Commissioner went via the "Kingdom of Wakhan."<sup>11</sup> The plan was to converge simultaneously on the fortress of Lianyun, where there were 1,000 Tibetan soldiers. About five km south of the fort the Tibetans had raised palisades behind which were another 8,000–9,000 soldiers. At the base of the fort flowed a large river, identified as the Wakhan River.

### Lianyun

Aurel Stein visited the Sahad-e Broghil area of Wakhan in May 1906, on his second Central Asian journey. It was still "bitterly cold" in Wakhan, and snow covered most of the higher ground (Stein 1912, p. 72). On the morning of May 21, he left his camp at Sarhad-e Broghil, crossed the Wakhan River to its southern bank, and rode his horse up to Kansir fort above Korkut village. He returned to his camp at Sarhad-e Broghil that afternoon and the next morning departed for the Little Pamir. Stein noted that Lianyun must have been on the southern side of the river, but

Fig. 4 (right). Detail of the southern wall of Kansir fort, showing brushwood layers between mud-covered bricks.



Photos by Kimberley O'Neil, taken August 26, 2007.

assumed that the fort was "on the open alluvial plain which adjoins the [Wakhan] river at the mouth of the valley coming from the Baroghil [pass]." Finding nothing there, he wrote that "the exact position of Lien-yun thus remains undetermined" (Stein 1922, pp. 117, 122).

Kansir fort is perched at an elevation of 3784 m on a ridge about 500 m above the southern bank of the Wakhan River and west of the valley leading to the Broghil Pass [Fig. 3]. It takes about two hours to walk up from Korkut village to the fort, which is not visible from Sarhad-e Broghil. Kansir is impressive and remains as Stein described it.<sup>12</sup> It sits on a high rock outcrop with sweeping views over the long Sarhad Valley and the trails to the Northern Gorge route from the Big Pamir and the Daliz Pass route to the Little Pamir. As Stein mentioned, the construction is reminiscent of Tibetan-style forts such as those at Miran and Mazar-tagh in present-day China. The massive tapered walls, thicker at their base, are made of sun-dried mud bricks interspersed with small sticks, resting on a base of flat stones [Figs. 4, 5]. A

Fig. 5. The southwestern tower of Kansir, showing the stone plinth with mud bricks above.

Photo by Kimberley O'Neil, taken August 26, 2007.





Fig. 6. *Kansir fort perches on a rocky ridge above the Sarhad Valley.*

partial plaster of mud over the stone plinth remains. Radiocarbon studies of the brushwood that separates the sun-dried brick layers and of the sun-dried brick material itself would help determine a date of construction, but currently Afghan border authorities do not permit foreigners to visit Kansir because of its proximity to Broghil Pass and the Pakistan border [Fig. 6]. When I visited the fort in 2007, the southern tower, which looks toward the Broghil Pass (the pass itself is not visible from the fort), was the most intact. Three other wall segments were also intact overlooking the western side suggesting, as Stein surmised, that attack was feared from that direction, ascending from Korkut village.

West of and below Kansir fort on a grassy, level area not visible from the fort is a herders' settlement with a small, spring-fed stream nearby. The Wakhi herders from Korkut village

Fig. 7. *Impoundment pond near Kansir fort.*



told me that there was once a canal that brought water from the stream over a low saddle to Kansir fort. As one walks from the herders' settlement to Kansir, a line of partially-buried stones appears to be the faint remains of an old canal following the contour line around the ridge to the fort. A branch off this line descends to a now-dry impoundment pond, which is confined by a well-weathered earthen wall, about one meter wide. At the western base of the fort are what appear to be two more impoundment ponds, also dry. A water source, such as the ponds would provide, was necessary to make mud bricks used in construction and for troops manning Kansir fort. Excavation at the pond sites could yield clues as to when and by whom the ponds were constructed [Fig. 7].

Following the stream down from the herders' settlement, one comes to a northern spur ridge with a commanding view over Sarhad-e Broghil and the route from the Northern Gorge approach to the Sarhad Valley. Here on this ridge is an old fort known as Arzun,



elevation 3474 m. Smaller than the massive Kansir fort, only four low walls of loosely piled stone forming a rectangular enclosure are evident. What may have been other walls or towers are heavily eroded and difficult to discern [Fig. 8]. Close inspection, however, reveals one much-eroded wall about one meter thick, made of mud bricks. The bricks appear similar to those at the Kansir fort [Fig. 9]. Radiocarbon analysis of the brick material could determine if it dates from

Fig. 8. *Arzun fort on a spur ridge below Kansir fort, overlooking the Sarhad Valley and the steep side valley that is part of the Northern Gorge route.*

Fig. 9. *Detail of mud bricks at Arzun fort.*



All photos on this page by Kimberley O'Neil, taken August 26, 2007.

the same time as Kansir. The stream from the herders' settlement flows down steeply just east of Arzun fort. The fort guards the approach to the herder settlement and also to Kansir fort above. Perhaps Kansir fort was constructed later by Tibetans after their defeat in 747 CE, when Arzun fort proved too vulnerable. The forts require further study, but it seems certain that the fort of Lianyun mentioned in the Tang Annals should be identified with one or both of these two forts, Kansir and Arzun.<sup>13</sup>

It is also clear that Kansir is not just the single fort described by Stein, but rather is a complex of structures, including a lower, possibly earlier fort, a water supply system and ponds for storing water. Significant resources were utilized in constructing this complex. Knowing when it was built would help resolve the question of who was responsible. The strategic location of Kansir and Arzun makes clear their purpose of guarding the approach to Broghil Pass from any of the three routes mentioned in the Chinese account of 747 CE. The gentle, grassy Broghil Pass marks the present-day boundary between Afghanistan and Pakistan. From Afghanistan, the route over the pass leads into the upper Yarkhun Valley of Chitral and, via the Darkot Pass, into the Yasin Valley of the Gilgit River basin, where the Palola kings ruled.

Wakhi narratives about Kansir provide interesting corroborative details. The fort is said to have belonged to the kafir king QaQa. Additional QaQa forts at Qazideh in Afghanistan and Namadgut and Yamchun in Tajikistan and secondary locations associated with the sister of QaQa and QaQa's general(s) may date from the same era as Kansir fort. The QaQa forts are today woven into the social fabric through the ascription of the defeat of the kafir king by Ali, the fourth caliph succeeding the Prophet of Islam. Although the army of the Caliph al-Ma'mun campaigned against the Qaghan of Tibet and defeated Wakhan and Balur around 814-15 (Beckwith 1987, p. 162), it is historically impossible that Hazrat Ali, who died in 661 CE, could have been physically involved in the campaign. More interesting are the shared onomastics of the name QaQa with the Turkish title Qaghan and with the same appellation applied in Arabic sources to the kings of Tibet (Beckwith 1987, p. 160). This provides a basis for the interesting possibility that the present name QaQa may be a surviving reference to Tibetan kings.

Local legends of QaQa offer another tantalizing correspondence. Interviews I recorded at Sarhad-e Broghil state that "QaQa had a fort on the Korkot side" and that he "constructed a wall purely from the thorn *zakh*," which is the Wakhi name for sea buckthorn (*Hippophae rhamnoides*). This fits curiously

with the Tang Annals' description of a wall or palisade constructed by the Tibetan forces above the Lian-yun fort close to Broghil Pass. Sea-buckthorn is abundant in Wakhan, where it grows over 3 m in height with dense, stiff and very thorny branches. Present-day Wakhi herders use sea buckthorn for livestock enclosures. If cut and piled, it would form a dense and difficult to penetrate barrier.

Furthermore, Wakhi people in Sarhad-e Broghil state that the fort of QaQa's sister is on the opposite side of the river from Kansir, high on the northern ridge above Sarhad-e Broghil, where it overlooks the Northern Gorge route. Any troops approaching via that route would be seen and a signal could be sent to the Kansir fort. Like Chinese and Tibetan forts along the Silk Roads that had beacon towers for signaling if enemies approached, it appears that QaQa's sister's fort and other small forts or posts along the Pamir routes may have had a similar function. These smaller watchposts could signal to a larger force stationed at the Broghil Pass or to other forts in Wakhan downstream from Sarhad-e Broghil.

#### Watchposts along the Pamir routes

East of but visible from Daliz Pass, on a spur ridge about 15 minutes above the trail, is a square, walled structure, 6 x 6 m. Wakhi men described it as a *qalha* named *tope khana* (gun house). I made an initial site survey in 2016. The walls are formed of dry, flat, stacked stones, which have extensive lichen growth, indicating considerable age.<sup>14</sup> The south and west walls are dilapidated. The northern and eastern walls are slightly less than one meter high; the north-eastern corner is the tallest remaining component, two meters high. The walls are 0.7 m wide. No wood was used in the walls as they were not tall enough to require wood for stability. In the eastern wall a slightly lower short section may have been a window or aperture. The fort has a range of view from Daliz Pass in the west to the now-abandoned Wakhi settlement of Langar in the east. Only a few men could have occupied the post at any one time. Its location is high enough above the trail to suggest its main function was as an observation and signaling post [Fig. 10].



Fig. 10. The northeastern corner and eastern wall of the Daliz watchpost, showing the view east up the Wakhan River valley. Photo taken September 3, 2016.



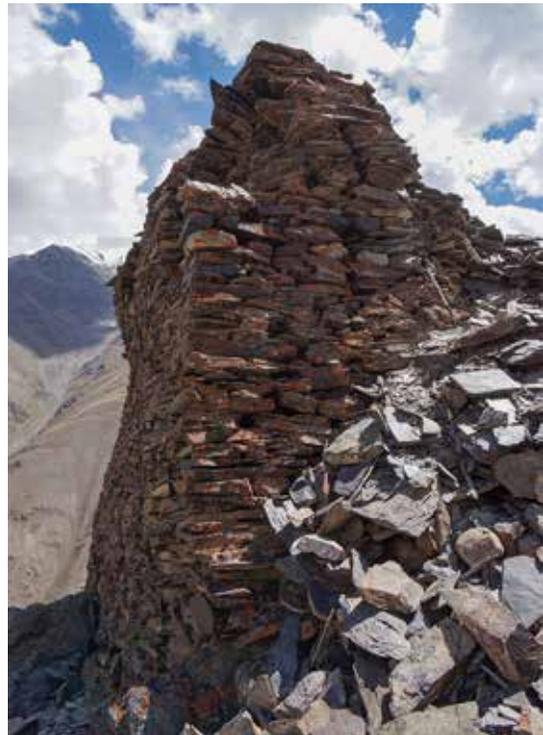
Fig. 11. Eastern wall of the Zangkuk watchtower.

Fig. 12. The northern wall of Zangkuk tower has been excavated by "treasure hunters". The eastern wall is bowed, but otherwise intact.

Both photos taken September 4, 2016.

Along the trail that parallels the Wakhan River between Sarhad-e Broghil and the Little Pamir, near a side stream and camping place called Zangkuk (*kuk* means spring in Wakhi) is a stone tower on a ridge about 350 m and one hour's climb above the trail. The location is obviously too far from the trail for anyone at the tower to hinder effectively anyone passing below. The tower has commanding views up and down the Wakhan River. Any movement in either direction along the trail between Sarhad-e Broghil and the Little Pamir would be detected from the tower, from which a visible signal could be sent either up or down valley [Fig. 11]. There is no water source near the tower, and anyone staying there would have to carry water uphill about 30 minutes from a stream in a lateral ravine called *Yupke Thur* (water ravine in Wakhi). Hence, it is unlikely that many people would stay there.

I made site surveys in 2007 and 2016. The tower is solid with no interior and is built of flat stones stacked horizontally, the layers interspersed with small branches, similar to the base of the Kansir fort, but with no external mud coating. The branches may be juniper, which grows abundantly nearby. The base is approximately 7 x 7 m, although the western side is about 10 m long. A right angle inset about half way along the southern side makes up the difference between the eastern and western sides. The tower is approximately 8 m tall and the structure tapers gradually to about 4 x 4 m at the top. A raised outer wall on the northwestern corner may be the remains of a battlement. The center of the top of the tower and portions of the western and southern sides (the uphill sides) have been dug into, obliterating any signs of usage that might have existed. According to local Wakhi men, this was done recently by "treasure hunters" [Fig. 12]. Illegal digging and excavation in



search of saleable objects is a concern in remote areas of Afghanistan, and Wakhan is no exception. The eastern side of the tower overlooks the Wakhan River and is intact. It is densely covered with orange lichen, indicating considerable age.

At the base of the ridge on which the tower sits, above and in close proximity to the trail along the Wakhan River, lies a second site. Only the base of a structure remains, which is obvious when viewed from above, but unnoticeable from the trail below. A wall of flat stones interspersed with small branches demonstrates a similar construction to the tower high above. This structure faces the trail, and anyone traveling on the trail would be exposed to attack from above, the distance short enough so that arrows could be used. This structure's location and its similarity of construction with the tower above point to a strategic function for both.

There are additional watchposts along the mountain trails between the Pamir and Sarhad-e Broghil (Mock 2016; Mock in press). Although these trails were used by the Chinese army when it attacked Lian-yun in 747 CE, Tibetan inscriptions at these watchposts show that they were used by soldiers serving the Tibetan Empire. The precise dates are not determined, but they must have been used during the period when Tibet extended its rule into the Pamir region, approximately mid-7<sup>th</sup> - mid-9<sup>th</sup> century CE. Their location at high points above the trails matches written descriptions of *ri-zug* or hill-stations used for signaling (Takeuchi 2004). The watchposts could signal to larger forts if they needed to raise an alarm, forming a defensive

network through the mountains from the Pamir to Sarhad-e Broghil.

In the mountain kingdoms of Wakhan, Balur and Chitral<sup>15</sup> were villages, forts and monasteries where monks and merchants stopped on their journeys.<sup>16</sup> A series of watchposts manned largely by indigenous soldiers formed a network connecting these small kingdoms. Starting from Wakhan one network continued south over the Broghil and Darkot passes to the kingdom of Balur (Mock 2013b). From Wakhan another network also continued over the Broghil Pass and along the Yarkhun River. Aurel Stein described a Chinese fort at Brep village in the Yarkhun Valley as having “a base or plinth of large uncut slabs, with masonry of sun-dried bricks superimposed,” which parallels the structure of the Kansir fort in Wakhan (Stein 1921, 1, pp. 46-47). The network of watchtowers continued past the important town of Mastuj and followed the Mastuj River to Chitral, which was the capital of the state of Chitral (*Military Report 1928*, pp. 71-72). From Chitral, a route continued along the Chitral and Kunar rivers south to meet the Kabul River near present-day Jalalabad, forming a direct link between Chitral and Kabul.<sup>17</sup>

Along the Yarkhun River in upper Chitral there were 14 traditional fire-signaling posts, called *phumbarash*<sup>18</sup> in Khowar, the language of Chitral. They are discussed by Chitrali scholars, who cite local knowledge and a 1928 British military report on Chitral (Faizi 1991, p. 147; Beg 1996, p. 144; *Military Report 1928*, p. 112).<sup>19</sup> The 14 “beacon sites” from Mastuj to Broghil and their locations as listed in the 1928 British military report are:

- |                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| 1. Lokap Dap    | Left Bank ½ mile South of Mastuj Post Office.             |
| 2. Mokul Dok    | Right Bank 1 mile South of Khuzh.                         |
| 3. Chakal Unt   | Right Bank 1 mile South of Istach.                        |
| 4. Marting Spur | Right Bank 1 mile North of Marting.                       |
| 5. Miragram Dok | Left Bank 1 mile North-East of Mehtari Bungalow Miragram. |
| 6. Paur Ridge   | Right Bank 1 mile West of Paur.                           |
| 7. Wassam Dok   | Left Bank 1 mile South of Wassam.                         |
| 8. Darband      | Right Bank 2 miles North-East of Jhopu.                   |

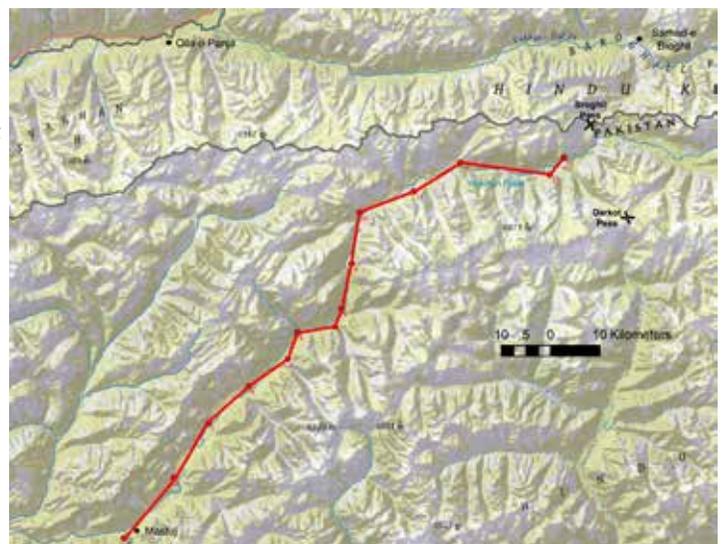
Fig. 13. Beacon signaling sites (*phumbarash*) in the Yarkhun Valley, Chitral. Based on the descriptions given in *Military Report 1928*.

- |                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| 9. Ichpirin     | Left Bank 2 miles South of Dobargar.     |
| 10. Yosh Kist   | Right Bank 2 miles South of Shost.       |
| 11. Pari Yor    | Left Bank ½ mile South of Lasht (Imkip). |
| 12. Bajdong     | Right Bank 1 mile East of Kankhun Kuch.  |
| 13. Kotal Kash  | Left Bank 4 miles South of Vedinkot.     |
| 14. Rakang Hill | Left Bank 1 mile East of Vedinkot.       |

These fire-signaling stations may have been a continuation of the signaling system that operated during the period of Chinese and Tibetan rivalry in the Pamir and Hindukush. Further study in Chitral would be useful, but access to the Yarkhun Valley is currently difficult to obtain for non-Pakistani citizens [Figs. 13, 14].

A confirmation of the link between the hill-stations for fire signaling in Wakhan and those in Chitral is provided by the shared use of the word *phumbarash*

Fig. 14. A watchtower at Shuwor Shir in Pakistan near the Broghil Pass. Photo taken August 19, 1997.



in both locations. A recent article on forts in Tajikistan Wakhan notes that there were “. . . control towers between [the forts], which allowed the guards to observe . . . the main road. They would report any potential danger by using an inter-towers alarm system, locally known as *pumbrsh* (firing arrows) . . . which used fire (at night) and smoke (during the day) to alert the commandants of the fortresses about suspicious movements on the road” (Iloliev 2015, p. 316). This shared word for fire signaling is not surprising, given the history of persistent contact and exchange between Wakhi-speaking Wakhan and Khowar-speaking Chitral from “very ancient” times up to the present (Morgenstierne 1926, p. 81, and 1973, pp. 433-44; Bashir 2001, p. 3).<sup>20</sup> The shared term<sup>21</sup> for fire-signaling stations, coupled with the evidence for fire signaling during the Tang and Tibetan imperial periods points to a time when fire signaling was organized and employed in Wakhan, Chitral and Balur.<sup>22</sup> As Takeuchi notes (2004, p. 55), “. . . small kingdoms, such as . . . Little and Great Balur in eastern Tokharistan and the Pamirs – were allowed to retain their regimes under the Tibetan colonialists, but they had to pay tribute and supply troops when ordered to do so by the Tibetan authorities.” The detailed accounts in the Tang Annals demonstrate that the same held true under Chinese authority.

## Conclusion

A series of large forts along the northern Tajikistan side and the southern Afghanistan side of the Panj River and along the Wakhan River in Wakhan date from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE at the earliest to the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century CE. Tang Dynasty records show the significance of the kingdom of Wakhan and document a large military campaign to Wakhan in 747 CE. The Old Tibetan Annals provide separate textual confirmation of these events. The site of the fort Lian-yun involved in these accounts was not determined by Aurel Stein. Recent surface surveys of the site described in the Tang Annals indicate that the fort known today as Kansir is the location of Lian-yun, and that previously unknown monumental structures associated with the site were part of the entire fort complex. Field surveys also identified a series of towers and small outposts along the routes leading to the fort. These can be associated with watchtowers that sent signals to larger forts. A network of forts and towers existed along the Silk Roads during both Tang and Tibetan imperial periods. Old Tibetan inscriptions at several such sites show they were used by Tibetans, which provides a discrete range of dates for Tibetan occupation. The Silk Roads through Wakhan extended into neighboring states, including Palola/Balur (present-day Gilgit-Yasin) and Chitral.

A line of signaling posts through the upper Yarkhun Valley of Chitral shares the same indigenous name as signaling posts in Wakhan. This linguistic evidence suggests that the system of forts and signaling posts extended from the Little Pamir to the kingdom of Wakhan and on to the kingdom of Chitral, which finds confirmation in the on-site identification of a series of towers and outposts along those routes. Extrapolating from the Tang Dynasty Annals, it can be postulated that a network of forts and signaling posts existed along the Silk Roads throughout the western regions of the Tang and Tibetan empires, including Wakhan, Chitral, Palola/Balur. In rugged mountainous terrain, signaling towers provided the only practical means for alerting the garrisons at forts in these kingdoms. In return for maintaining security along the Silk Roads, the small kingdoms received recognition, wealth and security from their Imperial overlords.

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## Notes

1. Pamir, a Wakhi word, refers to U-shaped high-elevation mountain valleys unique to Central Asia, where there are 14 named Pamirs in the vast mountainous plateau of the Pamir region. Pamir also refers to a mountain range largely inside today's Tajikistan. The term Pamir Knot refers to the area where the Pamir, Tien Shan, Kun Lun Shan, Karakoram and Hindukush ranges meet. To cross from Kashgar or Yarkand to Balkh or Bamiyan, one traverses the Pamirs. Chinese Buddhist pilgrims over 1000 years ago used the term *Bomiluo* (Po-mi-lo, 波謎羅) and once across, they arrived in the small

kingdoms of the Pamir borderlands. For a more detailed cultural geographical perspective, see Kreutzmann 2016.

2. This Tang Dynasty strategy was employed widely and not limited to the Pamir. Jonathan Skaff's fascinating study of Tang China's relations with its Turko-Mongol neighbors and the "patrimonial political networking" involved is applicable to China's (and Tibet's) strategies and relations in the Pamir (Skaff 2012, pp. 288-300).

3. Stein (1912, pp. 152-53) described watchtowers at Miran along the southern Silk Road west of Dunhuang. Takeuchi (2004, p. 55) studied them in detail and suggested they also existed along the southern route of the Silk Road including "Little and Great Balur ... and the Pamirs". Mu Shunying (1984, p. 65) mentions Han and Tang dynasty beacon towers along the northern and southern routes of the Silk Road. Dotson (2009, pp. 56-57) links the Tibetan hill stations with "red fire raising stations" that are mentioned in the Old Tibetan Annals.

4. Valerie Hansen (2012) and Jonathan Skaff (2012) discuss this in their recent studies. Although Skaff's main focus is on China's relations with the Turko-Mongols to the north, his study demonstrates similar customary political relations throughout Inner Asia, including the Tibetan empire. Hansen's study of the archaeological and textual record from important locations along the Silk Roads leads her to conclude that "Silk Road trade was largely the byproduct of Chinese government spending" (p. 111).

5. Wakhan, the homeland of Wakhi-speaking Wakhik people, lies along both banks of the Panj and Wakhan rivers east of Ishkashim to the highest settlement at Sarhad-e Broghil. Once an autonomous polity, Wakhan was bisected along the Panj River by the Anglo-Russian Boundary Settlement of 1895 (Kreutzmann 2017). Today the northern side of the Panj River is in Tajikistan, and the southern side is in Afghanistan.

6. QaQa is the local Wakhi pronunciation. In Persian and Arabic, the name QahQahah is associated with a *div* (demon) and Qahqahah was a demon killed by Rustam in the Shahnamah. The legend of *Qa Qa-e jodu* and his fort at Hissar near Dushanbe is well known in Tajikistan (Middleton and Thomas 2008, p. 122). For more on QaQa in Wakhan, see Mock 2011 and Iloliev 2015.

7. Xuanzang (Hsüan-tsang 玄奘) passed through Wakhan in 645 CE on his way back to Khotan. In his translator's introduction, Li Rongxi describes Xuanzang's caravan: "He brought with him as many as six hundred fifty-seven books bound in five hundred twenty bundles that he acquired in India, carried by twenty packhorses" (Xuanzang 1996, p. 2).

8. Beckwith (1987, p. 30, n. 97), working with Tang Dynasty Annals, notes that Balūr is the correct reading of the Chinese name, not the more common "Bolor". Working with the Gilgit Manuscripts and a remarkable series of inscribed bronze statues, von Hinüber recognizes Patola as the Sanskritized form of the geographic term Palola, from which Balur is derived. He notes that Palola is the correct name of the dynasty that ruled in the Gilgit area from the 6<sup>th</sup> through the 8<sup>th</sup> centuries (von Hinüber 2004, Introduction, Die Palola Shahis).

9. The Lady Khri ma lod was married to the *Bruzha rje*, or Lord of Bruzha, the title the Tibetans conferred on him. Such marriages resulted in *zhang dbon* relationships, in which the Tibetan king was *zhang* or uncle, and the local king who married the princess was *dbon* or nephew (Richardson 1998, p. 16; Dotson 2009, pp. 31-37).

10. Found in *Jiu Tang Shu* (舊唐書, Old Tang History), Ch. 104; translated into French by Édouard Chavannes (1993/2006, p. 154). Stein (1922) interprets the Chinese narrative in conjunction with his (Stein's) 1906 visit to Wakhan. Beckwith (1987, pp. 130-33) offers a revised reading of the original biographic narrative.

11. For more on this remarkable military campaign, see Mock 2016.

12. Miller's description (2009, pp. 42-43, 60) has Stein visiting the site in "the late 19<sup>th</sup> century" and Stein "observing ... Buddhist painted plasterwork in some areas", neither of which is accurate. As indicated above (n. 10), Stein visited only in 1906 on his second Central Asian journey and made no mention of painted plasterwork of any kind.

13. Dr. Go Hirai, a Japanese physician, visited Wakhan on mountaineering expeditions in 1969 and 1971. From 1999 until 2011 he made 11 visits to Wakhan and the Afghan Pamir and also to Tajikistan Wakhan. He visited Kansir fort and equated it with Lian-yun (Hirai 2015, pp. 41-42).

14. For more on the use of measurements of size and extent of lichen growth on rocks for dating the age of archaeological features, see Benedict 2009.

15. The Chinese names for Wakhan, Balur and Chitral were *Hukan* (Hu-k'an, 鑞侃), *Bolü* (Po-lü, 勃律) and *Juwei* (Kiu-wei, 拘緯). See Mock 2013a, pp. 5-6 for more on the name for Wakhan. For more on the name for Balur, see note 8 above. Kiu-wei is analogous to Kivi, which, as Buddrus noted (1989, p. 197), is the Wakhi word for the Khovar language of Chitral.

16. Chitral was visited by Buddhist pilgrims Xuanzang 玄奘 in 645 CE (Xuanzang 1996, p. 366), the Korean Hyecho 慧超 in 727 CE (Hyech'o 1984, p. 50) and Wukong (Wu-k'ung, Ou--k'ong, 梧空) in 751 CE (Ou-k'ong 1895, p. 348). The pilgrims Song Yun (宋雲) and Hui Zheng (Hui Sheng, 惠生) may have passed through Chitral in 519 CE (Hyech'o 1984, p. 9).

17. The Chitral Valley provided a direct but perhaps more dangerous link between Balur and Kabul (Cacopardo and Cacopardo 2001, pp. 28-29; 52). The longer southern route along the Indus River and through Gandhara was likely more commonly used. It is interesting to note, however, that a unique Buddhist script, known as Gilgit/Bamiyan, is attested only from those two places (Melzer 2014), indicating there was direct communication between them, by one or both of the two routes.

18. The Khovar word *phumbarash* is etymologically related to the Indo-European and Sanskrit word for fire, *pūr*. Similar words in neighboring languages are Pashai *pūr* and Panjabi *phaabar*, both meaning a bonfire (Turner 1962-85, p. 429). The 'm' in the Khovar word seems to be an artifact of assimilation to the articulation of the following 'b' (Bashir, personal communication).

19. Faizi names only nine posts, whereas Beg and the British military report list 14. Faizi apparently conflated a list and map of nine British-established signals posts with the mention of older, indigenous fire-signaling beacon towers.

20. Vrang village in Tajikistan Wakhan had a family of Khowar/Kivi speakers (Buddruss 1989, p. 205), and a number of clans in Chitral trace their origins to Wakhan (Faizi 1996, p. 48). The apparent borrowing and application of the Wakhi word for Khowar as a name for Chitral in the Tang Annals, as mentioned in n. 15 above, further underscores the close linkage between Wakhan and Chitral.

21. A cognate word, *puberanch*, occurs in the Burushaski language of Hunza for fire-signaling posts, which are also known in the Hunza Valley (Ali 2014, pp. 21-22).

22. Fire beacon signaling was a widespread cultural practice throughout the ancient Near East. The earliest known example is from Middle Bronze Age Syria, c. 1800 BCE (Earley-Spadoni 2015, p. 22).

