

# PIERO MORANDI, AN ITALIAN TRAVELER IN KAFIRISTAN

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Between 1968 to 1970, Piero Morandi, a collector and art dealer of Venetian origin, twice visited the regions of Chitral and Nuristan in order to learn about the customs and culture of the so-called “Kafir” people. Until the Muslim emir Abdur Rahman’s murderous military campaign in 1895, the Nuristan area, located in Afghanistan, was known as Kafiristan. “Kafir” is an Arabic word historically related to the spread of Islam. It referred to non-Islamic people as a whole, though not to Jews and Christians, who were called “peoples of the Book” in the Islamic world.

After Abdur Rahman’s military campaign, the Kati (“Red Kafirs”) people’s culture almost disappeared. By contrast, the Kalasha (“Black Kafirs”), who inhabited Bumburet, Rumbur, and Birir valleys in the present-day Chitral region of Pakistan, did not suffer the same fate. This was due in large part to the Durand Line, a border established in 1893 following the Second Anglo-Afghan war, which separates Afghanistan from Pakistan [Fig. 1].

## “Pedro” Morandi, An Unconventional Traveler

In 1968, Piero Morandi [Fig. 2], known as “Pedro” to many of his friends and acquaintances, arrived in Chitral for the first time. With Piero was Ingrid Borum, a Danish painter who went along with him on previous visits to Turkey. At the time, Morandi was around twenty years old. They stayed for a while with the Kalasha, then moved on to India and later to Nepal. During the 1970s, Morandi decided to settle down in this Himalayan country, where he died in 2007. While based in Nepal, he became a respected art dealer and

worldwide expert on Newari art.

In 1969, before leaving Italy for his second trip to Chitral—when, along with the Venetian painter Nini Morelli, he would also visit Nuristan for the first time—Morandi gave the Florence Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology some selected objects from his collection of Kalasha and Kati material culture. It was his first contribution to our knowledge about these cultures—but not the last. Thirty years later, in 2000, the French music label Disques Dom published a CD titled *Pakistan-Afghanistan: Kafiristan/Nuristan-Chitral—Music and Songs* for the series *Albatros: document original de musique ethnique des peuples du monde*. The album included songs and melodies recorded by Morandi during both of his travels. In recent years, the art collector Gabriele Romiti acquired some photographs and negatives from Morandi and Morelli’s journey, which he initially attributed to Morandi. Romiti offered these to the Florence Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology as a means of enriching the Morandi collection. When I started to collect pieces of information about Morandi’s travels from his companions, it became clear that Nini Morelli was the photographer. This discovery constituted the first step toward recovering the untold story of the Chitral and Nuristan travels made by Pedro Morandi, whose legacy enhances our knowl-



Fig. 1. Map of the Kalasha and Kati area on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

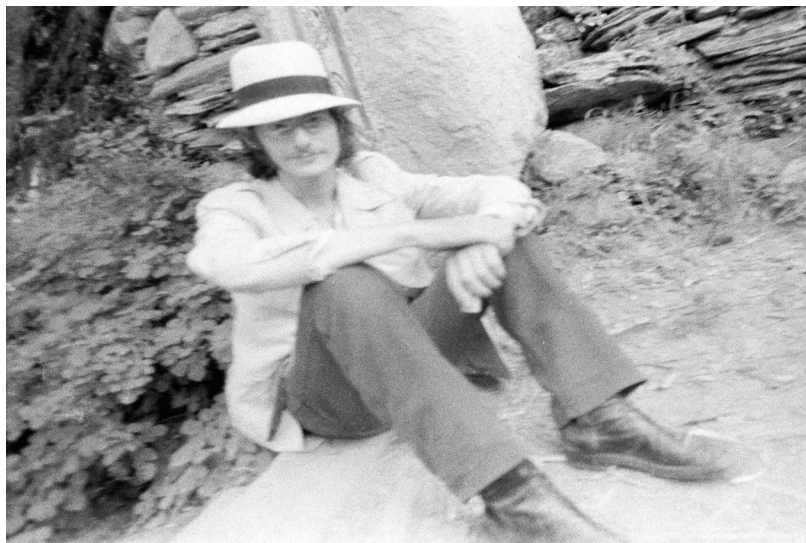


Fig. 2. Portrait of Piero Morandi. Nini Morelli collection.

edge of a disappearing culture.

Nonetheless, Morandi only published a single article related to the Kalasha and Kati cultures. It was titled *Etnoresistenza kafira* [Kafir ethnic resistance] and included in *L'umana avventura* [The human adventure], a periodical published by Jaka Book publishing house, in 1980. The article demonstrates that Morandi was very knowledgeable about contemporary literature on the Kafirs. He was aware of recent contributions from Danish anthropologists and also knew of fieldwork undertaken by the Norwegian linguist Georg Morgenstierne, as evidenced by a brief quotation from Morgenstierne's essay. Ingrid Borum, who traveled together with Morandi from 1966 to 1969, first to Turkey and then to Chitral, testified to Morandi's expertise:

Piero was, already in 1966-67, passionately studying anthropology among many other subjects, mainly in English, and he was rather influenced by the Royal Danish Library, where he found books about Kafiristan, such as George Scott Robertson's *The Kafirs of Hindu Kush*, plus books on Danish expeditions to Hindu Kush/Nuristan Afghanistan. When we entered Kalash Kafiristan, he already knew the places names and locations of the holy spots. Piero was always reading, taking notes, and learning perfect English by reading. (Author interview, July 16, 2015)

In Denmark, Morandi prepared for his journey to Chitral by reading the aforementioned books and Morgenstierne essays. Looking at the related literature, however, the most relevant contributions from Morgenstierne were published after Morandi's travels (see Di Carlo, 2010: 292-93). Nevertheless, from 1926 to 1965, Morgenstierne edited

a large number of articles related to linguistic and cultural issues in Nuristan, most of which Morandi probably could have read in the Copenhagen libraries. Likewise, during his wandering youth, Pedro irregularly attended Ca' Foscari University in Venice. There he took Oriental languages classes together with students who later became scholars in Bologna, such as Claudia Pozzana and Maurizio Pistoso. The latter, in conversation with the author, recalled that Professor Gianroberto Scarcia had given Morandi his translation of the *Şifāt-Nāma-yi Darvīš Muḥammad Hān-i Ġāzī* (1965), a book which narrates the military campaign led by an Indian Moghul against the Kati people of Nuristan in 1582.

During both of his travels with Borum and Morelli, Morandi acquired objects to bring back to Italy to serve as a record of his experiences. Once, according to Borum, Morandi exchanged his clothes for some artifacts, with no regret for the loss. Nini Morelli told the author that an opportunity to collect Kalasha objects arose when they found some relics from a cemetery that had been scattered after a landslide. In that way, Morandi also acquired grave goods. The artifacts now held in the Anthropology and Ethnography Museum in Florence are labeled as having come from a graveyard, too. According to Borum's statements, Morandi collected these during their journey to Chitral. During the second stay in the same mountainous area of Pakistan and in Nuristan, together with Nini Morelli, they also collected two *urei*, which are metal wine goblets traditionally used by the Kalasha and Kati peoples [Fig. 3]. Unfortunately,

Fig. 3. Two *urei*, metal wine goblets. Nini Morelli collection.

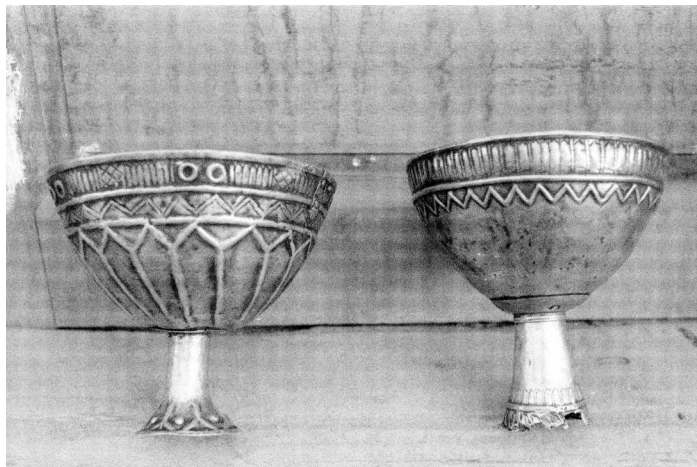




Fig. 4. Terracotta vessel. Nini Morelli collection.

they disappeared from the Italian consulate in Peshawar some time after being deposited there by the two travelers. As for the objects obtained during the 1970 trip to Nuristan and Chitral, the author could find no trace of these at all. Thanks to the photographic documentation undertaken by Nini Morelli, however, we can still obtain a glimpse of the traditional art from these areas [Figs. 4-5].

### The Photographic Collection at the Florence Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology

The last pictures, made in Nuristan in 1970 [Figs. 3-5], come from Nini Morelli's collection, which were stored in her house in Venice. They consist of an extensive number of black and white diapositives and negatives. The pictures of the *ureis*, the terracotta bowl, and the two chairs portray artifacts from Nuristan. According to Morelli, most of these photographs were taken as they passed through the villages of Wama, Waigal, and Nisheigrom, along with several other places visited during their month in Nuristan. Upon the conclusion of this trip, which included visits to India and Nepal, Piero Morandi added notes about these places on the photographic envelopes, drawn chiefly from Morelli's memories.



Fig. 5. Wooden chairs. Nini Morelli collection.

Morelli made the pictures using three different cameras: a Rollei, a Nikon-F, and "my grandfather's old Leica." Her private collection enriches the large set of photographs published in 1999 by Max Klimburg in *The Kafirs of the Hindu Kush: Art and Society of the Waigal and Ashkun Kafirs*. Klimburg went to Nuristan during the 1970s, to a region not far from Morandi's travels. In this two-volume work, Klimburg was able to include an extensive number of photographs taken by the Danish researcher Lenart Edelberg, who had taken part in the Third Danish Central Asian Expedition (1948-49 and 1953-54) and returned to the region in 1964 and 1970 (Barrington et al. 2005: 3).

The reason Morelli could take photographs so freely was due to the friendly disposition of a man named Khalil. Khalil was an art dealer in Kabul and the son of the Nuristan governor [Fig. 6]. He accompanied Morandi and Morelli during their

travels through Afghanistan. The Venetian artist recalled those days some years ago in a conversation with the author. "When we were in Nuristan," Morelli said in 2016, "I went to the Indrakun Garden, a forbidden place for women. They did not let me go inside. So I went there secretly, and I started to take pictu-

Fig. 6. Khalil (right, seated) was an art dealer and son of the Nuristan governor. Nini Morelli collection.

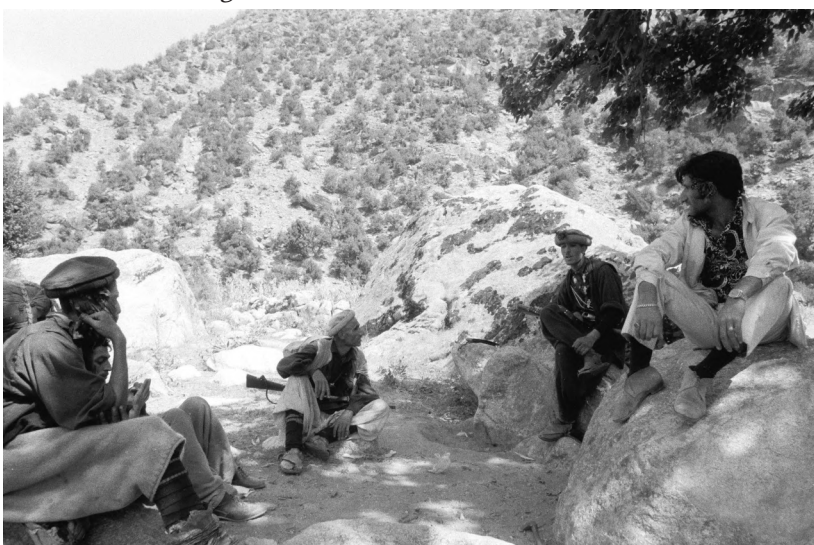




Fig. 7. Young girls wearing the so-h'olyak hat during the Prun celebration. Florence Anthropology and Ethnology Museum Collection.



Fig. 8. Kalasha singers during the Prun celebration. Florence Anthropology and Ethnology Museum Collection.

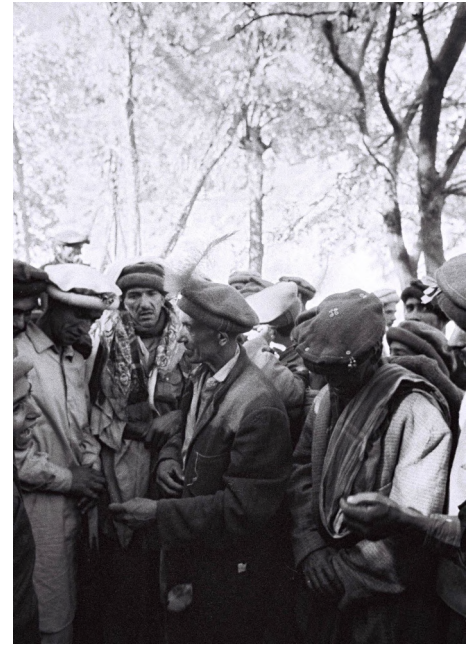


Fig. 9. Kalasha singers during the Prun celebration. Florence Anthropology and Ethnology Museum Collection.

res of the grapevines. They appeared two hundred years old to my eyes. Then my grandfather's Leica broke! I couldn't take pictures from the Indrakun Garden, unfortunately, but a French traveler [I] met in Chitral later fixed my camera."

As mentioned previously, a small part of the Morandi-Morelli photographic collection has been stored at the Florence Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology. These pictures portray the Prun celebration, which nowadays persists only in the Birir valley of Chitral. Thus the set of photographs contribute to our knowledge of the Kalasha culture. Pierpaolo Di Carlo, who spent some time in the Kalash valleys with Alberto and Augusto Caccopardo, wrote extensively about the Prun celebration (2007, 2009). After being shown photographs from the Florence collection by the author, Di Carlo noticed that some of the girls portrayed in the Morelli pictures wear the *soh'olyak*, a traditional Kalasha hat adorned with dog rose berries. The Kalasha girls wear this peculiar hat only during the initiation ceremony (Kal. *soh'olyak samb'ek* "to wear the *soh'olyak*") on the last day of the Prun celebration [Fig. 7]. Alberto Caccopardo also confirmed Di Carlo's identification of the hat, while notes added by Morandi on the photographic envelopes found at Morelli's home dispelled any remaining doubts.

Therefore, we can conclude that the set of pictures

given to the Florence Museum by Gabriele Romiti, who was unaware of the total extent of the collection, most likely depicts the last day of the Prun celebration in 1970. The photographs [Figs. 8-16] capture the singers, musicians, and dancers' arrangements at this moment in time, as described precisely in Di Carlo's *I Kalasha del Hindu Kush* (2009). The photographs taken by Nini Morelli [Figs. 8-9] recall Di Carlo's descriptions of the singers' postures and their change in number, based on the performance. Thanks to these pictures, it is possible to identify the shimmering cloaks worn by the most prominent singers to distinguish themselves from their companions (Di Carlo 2009: 192). Di Carlo's description of the Prun celebration dances (see also Di Carlo, 2007) is detailed and exhaustive. It can be regarded as a useful commentary on Morelli's photographs. The author invites readers interested in learning more about Di Carlo's contributions to consult his works listed in the bibliography. As Di Carlo wrote, Morgenstierne himself attended the celebration, which the Norwegian linguist called *přū-nat* (viz. "Prun dances"). It appears to confirm the research carried out by Morandi during his travels to Nuristan and Chitral, which were aimed at gathering anthropological research material in the form of recordings and images in hopes of enriching our knowledge about the Kalasha. The same kind of scrupulous photographic report assembled during the 1970 Prun celebration

*Figs. 10-13. Performance of the ca~ dances.  
Florence Anthropology and Ethnology Museum Collection.*



*Figs. 14-16. Performance of d'ushak (or drazha'ilak) songs.  
Florence Anthropology and Ethnology Museum Collection.*





*Figs. 17-22. A shepherd in Chitral storing milk in his mountain pasture hut. Nini Morelli collection.*

was taken in different circumstances. It is thus possible to observe these performances through many sets of photographs kept in Morelli's private collection.

We know that Morandi asked Morelli to stay in Chitral during the subsequent autumn, but she refused due to the hard weather conditions and the lack of food. In any case, in several different circumstances during their spring-summer visit to Nuristan and Chitral, she made the same kind of

scrupulous photographic report as was taken during the 1970 Prun celebration. Morandi and Morelli's trip to Afghanistan and Pakistan is documented through many sets of photographs kept in Morelli's private collection, such as those of a shepherd storing milk in goatskin in his mountain hut [see **Figs. 17-22**]. I invite institutions interested in further enhancing the utility of Morelli's extensive photographic collection to contact me. The photographs concern the ceremonies, landsca-

pes, and daily activities of the Kalasha people. It would be an unworthy end to Morelli's story to let her photographic collection gather dust. When combined with the work of Morandi, these two important scholarly resources can go a long ways toward preserving the story of a nearly forgotten culture and people.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Luca Villa** is an independent researcher in the field of cultural history. He received his M.A. in Indian Philosophy at the University of Bologna and a Ph.D. in Indology and Tibetology at Turin University. After working together with different public and private institutions, he currently collaborates with Fondazione Del Monte and Fondazione Giovanni XXIII for the religious sciences, photographic inventories, and web-based projects.  
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