Afghanistan

5

Belief s

Film Essay

Faces of Change

AFGHAN NOMADS: THE MALDAR

THE AFGHANISTAN SERIES FILMS/ESSAYS

1. An Afghan Village: 44 min.
2. Naim and Jabar: 50 min.
3. Wheat Cycle: 16 min.
4. Afghan Women: 17 min.
5. Afghan Nomads: *The Maldar:* 21 min.

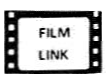
The Author:

LOUIS DUPREE, who joined the AUFS in 1959, is an anthropologist who has specialized in the Indo-European language areas of the Middle East and Central Asia. Dr. Dupree first visited Afghanistan in 1949 and again in 1950-51 for the American Museum of the University of Pennsylvania. After receiving his Ph.D. degree from Harvard in 1955, Dr. Dupree joined the faculty of the Air University where, concurrent with his Field Staff affiliation, he is an Adjunct Professor. In 1973-74, he was a Fellow, American Council of Learned Societies at Kings College, Cambridge. His published works include *Afghanistan,* a new edition of G. Robertson's *Kafirs of the Hindu Kush,* and *Afghanistan in the Seventies,* eleven monographs and numerous articles and reviews in such varied publications as *American Anthropologist, The Nation, The Economist, Evergreen Review,* and the *Middle East Journal.* He is based in Kabul to observe developments in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Soviet Central Asia.

Location: Balkh Province, an area inhabited by Tajik and other Central Asian peoples. 2200 feet altitude; wheat growing and pastoral economy. The town of Aq Kupruk is approximately 320 miles (14 road hours) northwest of Kabul.

Film/Essay Precis: At dawn a nomad caravan descends on Aq Kupruk from the foothills of the Hindu Kush. In their camp and in commerce with the townspeople, the *maldar* reveal the mixture of faith and distrust that has kept nomads and sedentary people separate yet interdependent over the centuries. Political altitudes and questions of a people's integration into the nation are underscored.

Theme: *Political/Religious Beliefs.* The films and essays in this series embrace five different and complex units of analysis concerning how political change occurs; individual altitudes, ethnic identity, national loyalties, institutional affiliations, and ideological beliefs.

Film Link 

This symbol in the essays indicates direct relationship to a scene or event in the film.

Film Dialogue — Denotes direct quotation from the sound track and indicates specific relationship between the film and essay.

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AFGHAN NOMADS:
THEMALDAR

by LOUIS DUPREE

Each spring the maldar *travel with their flocks of sheep and goats to the mountain grazing areas. In the fall they return to the low lands for the winter.*

This Mohm and Pushtun group has traveled some 250 miles from the Turkestan Plains to the high grasslands of the Central Hindu Kush.

With their return journey almost ended they camp near the village of Aq Kupruk. They sell sheep and goats in the bazaar and buy flour and other supplies before continuing on their way.

Maldar means "owners of property," and to the nonsedentary peoples of northern Afghanistan and elsewhere, property refers to large flocks of sheep and goats. Such flocks can be supported by seasonal movements to the fresh grazing areas, while sedentary farmers must limit their stock according to the constraints of local grasslands. The *maldar* are therefore proud of their way of life.To them, settlements in a year-round home is associated with failure and old age, so that despite the government's efforts to encourage such settlement, nomad caravans continue their yearly migrations between winter and summer quarters (called *quishlaq* and *yilaq,* respectively). Twice a year about 1,500 tents of *maldar* (about 7,500 people) pass through the town of Aq Kupruk.

The Mohmand Pushtun group which departed from Zari for Aq Kupruk on August 4 is one of six segments which gather at the tribe's traditional *yilaq* in the Siah Band Mountains. Altogether about one-half of the 5-600 Mohmands leave the *quishlaq* near Bagh-i-Koland (Garden of Kolandl each May for the annual trek, while others tend the home region in the plains. Different members of the tribe make the journey each year so that all the younger people will periodically have a chance to live the nomad life.

On the Move

Maldar groups string out like armies of ants along the narrow trails of Afghanistan, splitting with military precision into two segments where the mountains become too rocky and narrow to accommodate both flocks and pack animals.The young warriors then stump along the higher loess-covered grassy slopes with grazing sheep and goats, while the baggage train of camels, cattle,

horses, donkeys, older men, women, and prepubescent children plods along the main. lower trail.

Loaded with 300 pounds in these mountains and 400 in the plains, the camels shuffle along with the unconcern of their species, secure in the knowledge that they alone, of all creatures, know the hundredth name of Allah. Their wooden packs creak with each step, laden with such goods as tents, poles, pots, pans, five-gallon kerosene containers, kerosene lamps, wooden and leather storage boxes, musical instruments, and iron cooking trivets. Small children, calves, lambs, kids, puppies, and chickens tied on top of the loads bob and weave in time with the movement of the humps. Ropes linking each camel by its iron cheek-bit to the tail of its precedessor hold the caravan together.

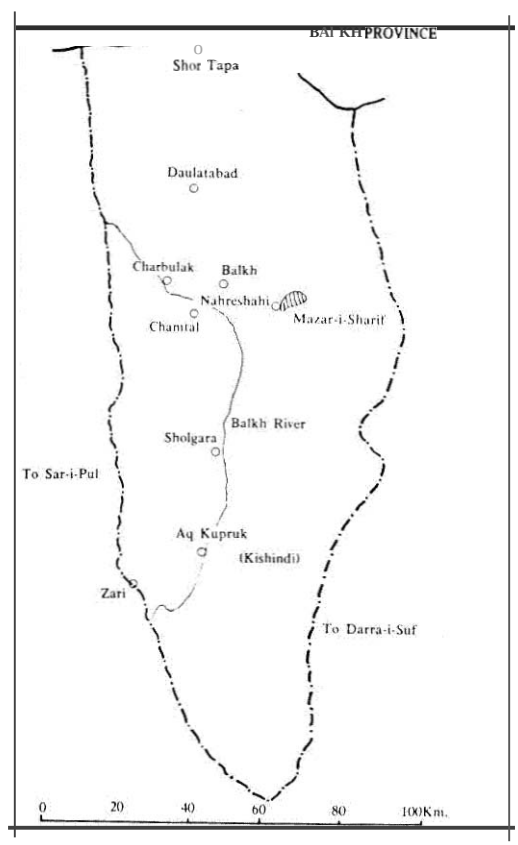
The donkeys, and even cattle, also serve as beasts of burden, while large, well-trained, mastiff-like dogs accompany both the upper and lower trail groups. Khans (chiefs) and their sons ride horses, prestige animals which seldom feel any burden but the weight of a man (or possibly a pregnant woman).

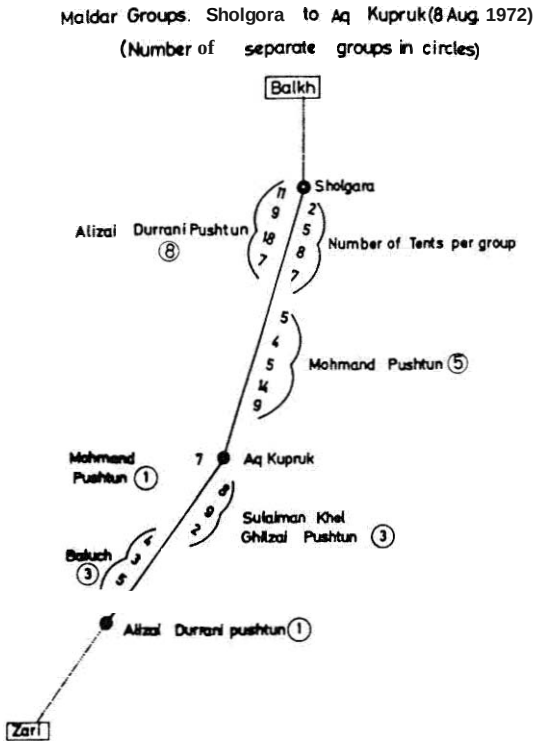
The nomadic womens' headshawls, bordered with a heavy band of gold **braid, are worn without a cap underneath,** In addition to heavy silver ornamentslt ikkn), long strand sof white glass beads are also popular, The nomadic dress style includes a yoke heavily embroidered or omamen ted with gold and **silver braid.**

Maldar women often ride the camels, wearing their best clothing and jewelry while traveling, They decorate their camels with brightly colored trappings, and drape valued rugs or cloth over the saddles to create a kaleidoscopic impression that arouses the envy of town swomen in every village through which they pass, Coins of various denominations and dynasties are sewn into the women's clothing, making them walking banks, Woman-stealing is consequently as much a fiscal as a sexual goal.

Mohammad Ismail Khan and His Mohmand

After their 15-hour trip from Zari, the Mohmand Pushtun group pitched tents near Aq Kupruk in the light of early morning, Generally traveling in late afternoon and through the night to avoid the punishing August sun, they stay about three days at each town to trade and to water their animals before continuing, Mohammad Ismail Khan, as chief of this group (and of all six of the groups which meet at the Mohmand *yilaql,* must plan these moves with military precision, because many groups and hundreds of thousands of sheep and goats thread their way along the same routes each year. In the Aq Kupruk area alone, about 450,000 sheep and goats (about 2 per cent of the estimated total of 22 million sheep and 3 million goats in Afghanistanl, 10,500 camels (about 8,5 per cent of the total 3 million), and unnumbered thousands of donkeys pass through twice a year. About 55 days elapse from the time the first group arrives in July until the last departs, but the period of maximum concentration of *maldar* in this area is mid-August, when reaping is at a peak and surplus wheat can be purchased in the bazaar, During the visit of Ismail





Sketch by Afghan Bureau of Consulting Architects and Engineers N.A. SABERI.

Khan's group in August 1972, 21 separate camps consisting of 151 tents (about 750 people), and about 50,000 sheep and goats were counted within 40 kilometers of Aq Kupruk, excluding several gypsy-like bands. Camp sizes ranged from two to 18 tents, averaging eight to nine; with an average of five people per tent. Twenty-six of the 151 tents were within 30 minutes walking distance of Aq Kupruk (see sketch).

Ismail Khan's group consisted of seven tents, 2,000 sheep and goats, 50 camels, five adult males, six teenage boys (also considered adults by the group), 22 women and unmarried girls past puberty, and two infants (girl and boy), both born in the *yilaq* in June.

Women do most of the work in setting up the *maldar* camps, but the men do pitch in and lift the heavier items. Everyone knows his or her job in this age-graded society. While young girls take care of the infants, the younger boys look after the dogs, and observe the loading and unloading of animals, learning as they help out. They graduate first to loading donkeys alone, then, as teenagers, to camels. Only when they can handle the camels do they become fully recognized as men.

In the early morning and late afternoon, the flocks were led past Aq Kupruk to the Balkh River for watering. Incredible sights and sounds arose when the sheep and goats moved in single file toward the river, the still air cracking with the metallic echo of tiny hooves as the flocks followed their large, intelligent *shahbuz* (lead or "king goat"). Shepherds sang, sheep baaed, dogs barked, donkeys brayed-all was bedlam until the watering began. Stillness returned as the animals drank, then gradually clustered about their respective *shahbuz* until the shepherds and dogs moved them out, passing another flock that tapped its way to the water as they climbed back to their grazing. Back on the hills, the sheep clustered in starburst patterns as each animal attempted to stand in the shade of another.

The *shnhbuz* and his herd.

At night, the young warriors and dogs kept watch. The men sing songs of love and war; they plot raids. They talk of their hunts with falcons and *tezi* (Afghan hounds}, which they do not consider dogs (by custom, most Muslims consider dogs unclean). Across the stillness could be heard the singing of other warriors, and the sheep seemed to know the sounds of their own shepherds' voices. At times, the shepherds entered into song competition. One would sing a familiar couplet; another from across the valley would supply the succeeding couplet. Improvisation is encouraged and insults in sexual double-entrendre are commonly flung at each other. Many are variations on the Pushtun couplet: "A young boy with a bottom like a peach sits across the river- and I can't swim." Others describe in graphic detail the myriad possibilities of love-making between man and woman, man and man, and man and animal. Such earthiness comes naturally to those who live on the land, whether nomads or farmers.

While the men play at being men, the women make and repair the tents; cook; make butter, ghee and cheeses; weave and sew; make felt; bear the children, and help raise them. In spite of their heavy work load, *maldar* women live relatively freer lives than their village counterparts, and influence most decisions concerning the group.

Both men and women feel their nomadic way of living, while threatened by the forces of change, is generally superior to that of sedentary townspeople. Since most of them return to their own land after traveling throughout the summer, they feel they have the best of both worlds. Though Mohammad Ismail Khan complained of the harsh life of the nomad and spoke with passion about government neglect and lassitude, he would not change his way of life. He put it beautifully: "Those who have both land and sheep live like kings."

Film Dialogue

I can't afford to send my children to school,
. if I did ..
*. . . **the school would always** uiaut **more money** . .*
One month 1101lley for [uel . ..
next month money for windows.

If my children go to school .
who will work with me?

Mohammad Ismail Khan

Film Dialogue

Those in power do not believe herding is *important.*

The government ***says, "He's a*** Maldar. ***he cannot be*** *trusted."*

Many present ***petitions.***

. but officials do not listen,

I ask myself .
why keep a herd'

M. I.K .

The present government of Afghanistan has a different opinion of nonsedentary people. The *maldar* have proved difficult to control in the past, and have often tipped the scales decisively in regional squabbles or fights for the throne. Few *maldar* pay taxes, many engage in smuggling, almost none perform national service. Because the state owns all uncultivated land in Afghanistan, it has the potential ability to encourage or force the *maldar* to give up their nomadic lives by prohibiting grazing in their traditional *yilaq* areas. And because political power appears to be shifting away from the *maldar,* the government is increasingly more able to realize this potential.

Many nomad groups have already settled to some degree, usually for more complex social and economic reasons than mere political pressure. Therefore a typology of the nonsedentary peoples of Afghanistan is in order. Generally speaking, the nonsedentary peoples can be divided into three categories, based on economy and settlement patterns: nomadic, seminomadic, and semisedentary.

Nomads. Few fully nomadic groups exist in Afghanistan, excluding the nonherding gypsies and itinerant gangs of workers. True nomads are herdsmen who travel constantly, searching for grass along culturally and historically predetermined routes, who depend largely on their flocks for their economic well-being, even though some may own land. There are three types of nomadic movement: (1) a generally horizontal pattern with forage centers at oases; 121 biannual long-distance moves between winter and summer camps made by *all* members of a fully nomadic group. These migrations are vertical as well as horizontal, because the route moves from lowland plains to high pasturelands; and 131 a basically vertical pattern, like that of the small groups of Kirghiz in the Pamir Mountains of Afghanistan, who move seasonally up and down with their sheep, goats, yaks, and Bactrian (two-humped) camels.

Seminomads. Seminomads are herdsmen who do some farming. Under this definition, less than 50 per cent of the whole group remains behind to farm in the *qishlaq* Iwinter quarters).

Semisedentary groups. These are farmers who also practice extensive herding, but more than 50 per cent of the group remains behind to farm. The rest travel with the herds on the annual migrations. This category also includes farmers who seasonally move with their families from villages to highland fields a few hours away, where *!almi* (unirrigatedl wheat and other highland crops are grown.

For years, most sources have estimated a population of about 2 million nonsedentary Afghans, close to the true figure if all the above categories are included; the bulk are, like Mohammad Ismail's group, seminomads evolving toward semisedentarism.

The *mald ar* camp at Aq Kupruk.

This trend at first created some in-group tensions, because none of the young men wanted to remain behind to farm. Those left behind continued to live in tents, but gradually incipient farmers would dig shallow pits inside the tent for cooler comfort and construct *pise* (pressed mud) walls around the outside edges for protection against the wind. The wall grew higher, the tent was pulled down, a wood-beamed roof went up, and a mud hut was created. As this process occurred, more and more of the group became involved in agriculture, and a semisedentary pattern evolved; i.e., more than 50 per cent remained in the *qishlaq* to farm in summer.

Today, few groups live in tents in winter; most move into huts. When the groups that are to accompany the flocks move out, they often dismantle their roofs and store the beams with kinsmen or friends to prevent theft of the scarce wood.

While estimates suggest that the population of *maldar* in all categories has been relatively unchanged for several generations, this balance maintained through time may be deceptive. Although the grasslands can support only a specific number of livestock, the human population has probably increased, and the surplus population has been siphoned off, at least seasonally and particularly since World War II, to work in the cities or on regional development projects.

It was the major population shifts occurring throughout the reign of Amir Abdur Rahman (1880-1901) that brought many of the present *rna/dar* groups to Northern Afghanistan. Dissident Pushtun and Baluch groups, both sedentary and nonsedentary, were forcibly moved to northern Afghanistan from their natural habitat south of the Hindu Kush. Other groups (especially the Durrani tribe of Abdur Rahman) moved north voluntarily (with adequate economic inducements) to settle along the frontier as a buttress against Czarist Russian encroachments. As the non-sedentary peoples established new routes of migration (not always peacefully), they introduced intensive trade in the central mountains for the first time, and a series of symbiotic patterns developed.

A Dog Barks, The Caravan Passes
(Old Proverb)

In 1972, the first *rna/dar* to stop outside Aq Kupruk on return from their summer pasturelands arrived on the morning of July 26, and the last departed on September 4. (In 1965, the first group arrived on July 12. The later the *rna/dar* leave the mountain pasturelands, the better the year for both grazing and crops, which indicates sufficient water for that particular vear.) During this season the loess-covered hills surrounding Aq Kupruk are usually capped with sheep and goats, huddled together in the heat

The bazaar in Aq Kupr-uk

of the day. Many *rna/dar* groups camp near the freshly reaped wheat fields, which are also good for grazing. This traffic leaves hill summits and other areas bald of grass, but also tends to cover the ground with manure that is used as fertilizer and fuel by the townspeople. When plowed under in the wheat fields, the manure replaces much of the nitrogen lost through previous cultivation. This is one basic level of the complex symbiosis between the *rna/dar* and the settled townspeople.

Economic symbiosis. When the *rna/dar* come to the town, they sell livestock, milk and milk products (i.e., cheeses, yogurt, buttermilk, ghee or clarified butter, and *roqhon-i-durnbeh* - lard rendered from the tail of the fat-tailed sheep), leatherwork, skins. and rugs in the bazaars through which they pass; in return they purchase grains, flour, vegetables, fruits, nuts, and other items from the villagers. In this manner, the diets of both sedentary and nonsedentary populations are supplemented.

Many *rna/dar* also raise the famous *qarak u/* (mistakenly called "Persian Lamb"l lambskins for export. Lambs are slaughtered unceremoniously at birth to obtain the finest skins of black, brown, gray and the highly prized (to the Afghansl golden color. The patrician broadtail is created when the unborn lamb is "from

its mother's womb untimely ripped," killing both. Overseas tastes vary in time. In 1968, for example, the international market bought 30 per cent gray and 70 per cent black. Afghanistan therefore lost much of the market for two reasons: (1) inferior curing, dusting, and grading of skins; (2) the Soviet Union and South Africa specialized in black skins. In 1973, the percentages had reversed (70 per cent gray; 30 per cent black), and since the Afghans had better quality gray, their share of the world market jumped considerably. Improvement in the quality of Afghan skins had been the direct result of the efforts of the Afghan Karakul Institute, founded in July 1966.

In smaller villages, *maldar* often trade or sell other goods originally purchased in town and city bazaars: cloth, iron implements, sandals, tea, sugar, *gur* (unrefined molasses), guns, ammunition, and (recently) transistor radios and batteries. The transistor radio has broadened the international and national horizons of the nonliterate Afghan. Regional news and local rumors still spread by word of mouth, however.

In Aq Kupruk, *maldar* usually buy wheat when they pass through in harvest season, for their own use and to sell in other towns they will visit. The last group of *maldar* to arrive in Aq Kupruk in 1972, for example, purchased all the surplus wheat they could find in the bazaar. A seven-tent group of Mohammadzai (subsection of Barakzai Durrani Pushtun) who winter near Balkh resold most of the grain in Balkh and Mazar-i-Sharif as winter progressed.

Villagers sometimes borrow money at high interest rates from the wealthier *maldar* in order to meet the expenses of such rituals and celebrations as birth, circumcision, marriage, and death. In addition, poorer farmers purchase goods on credit.

The collecting of debts as the *maldar* return through the debtor's village often leads to violence. If a small landowner cannot pay his debts, as the interest accumulates annually and the principal remains unpaid, he may lose his land title to the *maldar.* Then the farmer becomes a tenant, paying annual rent to the new owner. Usually, however, the *maldar* prefers to keep the farmer in debt, and not take title to the land. Whenever a farmer loses his land, the situation becomes and remains volatile, so the *maldar* collects as much as he can annually, and gives the farmer hope of eventually repaying his debts. Sometimes, however, if the farmer does raise enough money (usually through off-season work in towns and cities), the *maldar* may refuse to accept payment, particularly if he already has title to the land. The farmer may resist, but unless he belongs to a stronger tribal or ethnic unit, the *maldar* may drive him away, and hire other tenants to farm the land-or even leave some of his own *maldar* kinsmen on the land. This pattern of displacement at least partly accounts for some of the twentieth century rural-urban migration.

Film Dialogue

How can a poor man buy irrigated land ill *Dill' country?*
It is *too expensioe.*
If God sends rain.
. highland wheat will grow.
If not, we have nothing:
Irrigated land is *good land, but there's 110t enough of it in Afghallistall.*

M.I.K.

In 1972, none of the farmers in the vicinity of Aq Kupruk were in debt to *maldar,* although many owed money to local shopkeepers and large landholders.

In the area where Mohammad Ismail's group spends the summers, the Durrani, a wealthier *maldar* group, also own some farming land which belonged previously to local Aimaq villagers, who had borrowed large sums from the Durrani and then defaulted.

The *gerau* system of mortgage is another form of indebtedness which offers the *maldar* an opportunity to collect wheat rather than cash. A farmer will borrow a certain number of afghanis and, in return, the *maldar* collects about one-half of the wheat crop, until the debtor can repay the principal. Most outright barter occurs during the summer: wool for wheat; or *roghan* for wheat.

In addition, local villagers are often hired by *maldar* to watch over their flocks, and some shepherds, hired by and traveling with the *maldar,* will even occasionally hire villagers for at least part of the time in the *yilaq.*

Ecological symbiosis. Sheep and particularly goats have long been connected with overgrazing in the sheepman versus cattleman folklore of the American West. Recent researches, however, indicate that overgrazing usually occurs when nomadic groups are *forced to settle down* and their flocks become trapped in specific localities.

"In analyzing cases of such damage around the world, one can see that too many animals are kept too long at one spot because the population are sedentary. As government actions are impinging on the range and style of the traditional nomad, the lessons of the recent past should be remembered." 'Competition with older sedentary populations also complicates competition for land with struggles for regional political power.

In northern Afghanistan, the *maldar* and their flocks are still mobile, and serve as the perpetuators of marginal grasslands. As they move from one hillside grassland to another, sheep and goats do not overgraze, but in reality deposit tons of fertilizing manure. Withdraw this natural fertilizer from the marginal grasslands, and soil banks which have existed for centuries become unsupported semideserts or deserts. Force the nomads to settle in specific valley grasslands, usually their *qishlaq,* as happened during the grandiose Soviet scheme to make Kazakhstan bloom, and their flocks will not only overgraze, but as a result of the ecological disruptions, die out.

In spite of this and other examples of the disastrous effect of man's interference with specific cultural-ecological symbiotic patterns, well-meaning advisers-American, Russian, UNDP,

*Farvar, M.T. and J.P. Milton (eds.). *The Careless Technologi],* Natural History Press, 1972.

Film Dialogue

Gilly God kllows how many people are landless ... tuandering hUlbry alld ihirsts},

M.l.K.

A lorry arrives in Aq Kupruk.

along with foreign-trained Afghans- having learned no lessons from the experience of others, recommend settling the nomads. Hopefully, saner heads will prevail and permit the continued logical evolution from nomadism to seminomadism and eventually to semisedentarism. (Apparently no group has become completely sedentary.) This is not to say that intelligently conceived and implemented programs to supplement land reclamation, as well as improved agricultural practices, could not benefit both villagers and *rna/dar.*

Drought is an environmental factor that has accelerated settlement among the *rna/dar,* at times dramatically, because of the loss of livestock. The droughts of 1970-71 wiped out a large portion of the Mohmand's flocks which usually grazed in the central mountains. Fortunately, the Mohmand of Ismail Khan and their flocks were able to move back across the Siah Band early both years (June), and stayed constantly on the move, returning to the *qish/aq* by August 1. In spite of this, they lost about 20 per cent of their sheep and goats. Many sedentary and nonsedentary peoples in the regions most affected by drought lost as much as 90 per cent of their flocks, often through a combination of selling at high prices to speculators from Kabul early in the drought and then being forced to eat the rest to survive.

Film Dialogue

God has been kind to me. I have four sons.
Qlle looks after his sheep . . .
... the others work with me . ..
. . alId sometimes with other people.

M.I.K.

Among those hardest hit by the droughts were some smaller groups who lost their entire flocks and either attached themselves to larger groups as *hamsaya* (clientsl or hired themselves out as shepherds. While many of these nomads have been forced at least temporarily to settle, evidence now clearly indicates that nomads settle down only if they have lost their flocks; and even then, they

usually prefer to work for others as shepherds-or seasonal agricultural laborers—in the hope of earning enough money to buy a small herd to begin again, rather than settling on a farm. At the other extreme, wealthy *maldar* may own land (and even buy tractors) and eventually build *qalah* (fortress- type, walled compounds) in the *qishlaq,* but will make the annual trek as long as they are physically able.

An interesting sidelight to the drought disaster was that several nonsedentary groups bought or hired lorries to move at least part of their flocks to search for grass outside the affected areas. The pattern is not totally new, because as early as the late 1950s, some nomads had purchased lorries which they used to transport goods during the off-movement seasons to supplement their incomes. Then, during times of migration, they moved some heavy baggage, older people, and young children by lorry along the main roads to points near their *yilaq.* This is still rare, however; motor vehicle traffic is precluded by migration routes through the central mountains and by the seasonal floods.

The post-World War II road network has made it possible for trucks to transport most agricultural and nonagricultural items sold in town bazaars and in the countryside zones of relatively easy accessibility. As the road network improved, the Afghan government encouraged the nonsedentary caravaneers (now obsolete along the main roads) to buy trucks and continue hauling goods, but in motor vehicles rather than on camels. As a result, many trucking and transport companies are owned by wealthy *maldar* khans.

Sociopolitical patterns. Forced migrations to the north in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries brought about shifts in social and political patterns that still affect nomad-villager relations. Initially the government granted land to many of the groups forced north and encouraged others to migrate voluntarily. Many were farmers, but most transplanted *maldar* preferred to continue their nomadic existence, although a few did adopt seminomadism.

The nonsedentary migrants caused changes in the villages through which they passed, made accommodations with other *maldar* as they sought to establish rights to summer pasturelands and reached arrangements with villages adjacent to their winter quarters. Often the adjustments were violent, and some of the feuds engendered then occasionally flare up today. Enmities still exist with the Uzbak, Tajik, and Hazara, who owned much of the land granted to the *maldar.*

Tribal, feudal warfare in Afghanistan has many positive functions, unlike depersonalized, sophisticated civilized warfare with its potential for mass murder. Students of violence often ignore the relationship between leisure time and warfare in the ecological cycle of past and present peasant-tribal societies:

> The link between Norman warfare and Victorian foxhunting is perfect.. .. Look at the Norman myths about legendary figures like the Angevin kings. From William the Conqueror to Henry the Third, they indulged in warfare seasonally. The season came around, and off they went in splendid armour which reduced the risk of injury to a foxhunter's minimum. Look at the decisive battle of Brenneville in which a field of 900 knights took part, and only three were killed:
>
> *T.H. White, *The Ollee and Future Killg*, Dell Printing, December 1964, p. 235.

In nonliterate societies (and literate as well?), tensions within the group account for much external aggression. During the peak agricultural season, or when nomads are on the move, everyone is busy. In spite of this, tensions rise within the group, but work tends to sublimate the incipient violence; in fact, such tensions may actually *increase* the work rate by diverting energy to the task at hand. Often, intense rivalries spring up between brothers and male cousins, who are always real or potential rivals for the hands of the limited number of female cousins. Even the term for intense hatred in Pashto is *tuburghanav*, derived from the root *tubur*, cousin. (However, since most Pushtun cannot read or write, they deny any connection between the two words.)

On the off-economic seasons, long hours of boredom can result in violence. Folktales can be told and folksongs can be sung only so many times; working gear can be repaired for only so long. No movies exist in the countryside, nor do friendly neighborhood bars. The transistor radio grows boring. Suppressed violence needs an outlet. How much better for group survival if this violence can be channeled away from the camp or village, in a process of externalizing internal aggressions. Relatively few people are killed in feudal warfare, and the safety valve aspect cannot be underestimated. Group unity, threatened by personal violence, is maintained, and the bored human mind has an outlet for its passions.

Shifts in marriage patterns both promote evolution away from nomadism and reflect the changes that have occurred. The preferred female mate in Afghan society is the father's brother's daughter, or as near that relationship as possible, or the father's brother's son. Only a limited number of brides and grooms were available in the groups sent north, so prospective bridegrooms (or their go-betweens, *wasta)* periodically returned to the land of their fathers south of the Hindu Kush in search of marriageable relatives. The southerners, however, were reluctant to give daughters to men, no matter how close the blood ties, who lived literally hundreds of miles from their hearths. Links of rights and obligations, locally valid and functioning, were broken; and often the bride-seekers returned north without brides. Very quickly the Pushtun and Baluch eligible males began to take non-Pushtun or non-Baluch wives, particularly Tajik and Uzbak. Rarely-if ever- did a Pushtun woman marry a non-Pushtun. This mild miscegenation affected the political patterns between them.

Initially, the Pushtun and Baluch groups *heldjirgah* (Pashto term for camp or village council) separate from the local *majlis* (term used in north). Gradually, however, joint sessions were held to discuss water rights and distribution, and to settle local disputes over grazing, women, etc. The Pushtun dominated the proceedings, and by the civil war of 1928-29, Pushtun dominance in most of the Turkestan plains and foothills was accepted. Pushtun elements dominated the first 11 Parliaments after the 1931 Constitution; theoretically elected, they were actually appointed by the government. A challenge to this dominance arose during the constitutional period from 1964-1973, and the two elections held in 1965 and 1969 saw a rise in the number of non-Pushtun representatives sent to Parliament from the north. A close look at developments in the village and regional power structures will help to explain this decline in *rna/dar* political strength.

Main street in Aq Kupruk.

Aq Kupruk and the Afghan Government

The geographic location of Aq Kupruk made it an important commercial and political center on the main north-south route of northern Afghanistan for centuries. The trail along the Balkh River leads from old Balkh-the ancient Bactra, called the Mother of Towns- to Bamiyan, another well-known religious and commercial center of the Kushan (Buddhist) period. The seminomadic peoples still traveling these old routes, over terrain unsuited for motor traffic, have benefitted Aq Kupruk's political status.

But the town was demoted by a 1961 administrative shift. Buina Oara, renamed Sholgara, became capital of a subprovince (Wolus Walil) of the same name and Aq Kupruk became center of the district.

In 1964, a complete overhaul of the administrative system of Afghanistan occurred, creating 28 new provinces in an attempt to decentralize and speed up economic and political development. The provinces varied greatly in size; the more accessible the area to roads and telecommunications, the smaller the province. Geographic regions with forbidding zones of relative inaccessibility were the largest and least populous. Both Aq Kupruk and Sholgara remained in the shrunken Balkh Province (formerly called Mazar-i-Sharif Province) after the realignment, but in 1972 the district governor's staff no longer had a judge. It consisted of six police plus a commandant, a tax collector, a statistician-clerk, a telephone operator, and a battery-powered telephone.

Subprovincial and district governors have controlled their administrative units with few checks from the center. Often, they act like little tyrants, frustrated because they were away from Kabul (or other urban centers). For example, in 1962 the people of Aq Kupruk genuinely hated the district governor *(alakadar),* a Mohammadzai (lineage of the former royal family) Durrani Pushtun. He had the Pushtun's classic contempt for all non-Pushtun, and slapped around anyone who displeased him. He would sit by the window of his office and fire his pistol across the river to frighten the villagers.

In 1965 Aq Kupruk's *alakadar,* whom people liked, decided to have a three-day Jeshn (Independence Day Festival) but was opposed by his Pushtun police commandant on the grounds that his five-man police force could not control large crowds. The *alakadar* held the long celebration, which was without incident, and gained in popularity.

The *alakadar* in 1972 was almost a carbon copy of the 1962 version. He held the local people in contempt, and his constantly flaring temper always meant boxed ears. He was a Durrani Pushtun of the Barakzai subtribe and had been in government since graduating from high school. Though he had traveled only as far as Peshawar outside Afghanistan, he had served as *alakadar* in the provinces of Kandahar, Taliqan, Uruzgan, Kunduz, Ghazni, Paktya, Ningrahar, Laghman, Baghlan, and Samangan. His family lived in Mazar-i-Sharif and in 1972 visited him almost every week on Friday. His office hours were quite flexible, usually from about 9 A.M. to 1 P.M. in the summer, and he held court under two large chenar trees high over the river bank. The *alakadar* had been in Aq Kupruk only eight months as of August 1972, and he was hoping for an early transfer. The people of Aq Kupruk shared this hope.

The Village power Structure

Distrust of the central government is thus one traditional characteristic of political attitudes in Aq Kupruk. In fact, villagers are fundamentally noncooperative creatures outside of their own immediate kin groups. They will build farm-to-market roads and bridges, or improve regionally oriented irrigation systems if forced to do so by the government or paid for labor rendered, either in kind or cash. Only those who benefit directly will help with the annual cleaning and repairing of main canals on either side of the river. Seldom can villagers be persuaded to work for what to them is an abstract goal, which may be beneficial only for future generations. They want to benefit *now.* The town's loose-knit power structure works to perpetuate this noncooperation while keeping the central government from interfering.

The headman in Aq Kupruk is called *qaryahdar.* * Theoretically, he is elected every three years, but approval by the central government is mandatory and this limits the number of potential candidates. By local tradition, a Tajik usually-though not always-alternates with an Uzbak. The headman is the main link between the people of Aq Kupruk and government officials, as well as with outsiders who come into the area. Assisting the *qaryahdar* are the "ward leaders," usually referred to as *erbob,* all influential men in their physical prime (40s-50sl, informally accepted by various sections of the village. Four of the seven *arbob* in 1972 had been previously elected *qaryahdah.* Their power is based on personal wealth (land, livestock, shops, and, increasingly important, cash to

* In other parts of Afghanistan, the common term is *malik*.

Annual repair and clearing of canal feeding mill alongside Balkh River.

lend) and charisma. The number of *arbob* varies from time to time for a strong man may not have a strong son or relative to replace him, and his family and group may gravitate under the political wing of another *arbob*. The *arbob* represent their immediate relatives and neighbors and often accompany the *qaryahdar* to government offices if the matter under consideration involves their **"wards."**

The people of Aq Kupruk recognize an informal *mejlis-i-risb-i-safidan* (literally the terms mean "white beards") consisting of four Saadat elders to whom they take problems concerning land or water disputes, debt repayment, family squabbles, and other disagreements which they wish to hide from the government. In fact, the ideal is to prevent government involvement in all but serious outrages which threaten to disrupt the group, such as murders and reneging on large debts.

Another recent village institution is the "gang," loosely referred to as *muzdur* (workers, or a work group), led by a *dawaq*. Several such gangs exist in Aq Kupruk, rivaling the influence of the "white beards." This new political manifestation began to take form during the mid-1950s, when the Afghan military: as part of its modernization process, reached farther afield to draft young men. Young villagers were also influenced by the government while participating in large-scale development projects and while attending secular schools, which dangled new ideas and aspirations before them.

"The Afghan army, air force, police, gendarmerie, and labor corps essentially **consist of conscripts.**

The *dawaq* are consulted informally by the *qarayahdar* and the *arbob* when special work (like cleaning and repairing the canal) is to be done, and they bring their gangs together to help out.

In the 1965 and 1969 elections, the various "gangs" began to show their strengths and supported the winning candidates. In 1965, a Pushtun from Kishindi was elected *wakil* (representative to the *Walesi Jirgah*, Lower House of Parliament); a Pushtun from Mazar-i-Sharif became Senator for Balkh Province to the *Mesh-reno Jirgah*, Upper House. In 1969, however, an Uzbak from Sholgara became became *wakil;* and a Tajik from Balkh, Senator. The true local power elite began to emerge from behind the mud curtain. When elections are held under the Republic's new constitution, the gangs, in association with the rising urban middle class, may continue to shift local power away from its traditional, kin-oriented base, but opposition will be stiffer than ever as the rural establishment feels itself threatened.

The Maldar and the Government

What does this shift toward government influence in the villages mean for the *maldar?* It could bring tighter organization to the towns than the present kin-based structures allow, and thus provide more formidable opposition to the nomadic peoples on certain important issues. Experience has shown, for example, that when villagers have strong local organizations under equally strong leaders, they can force the *maldar* to shift their migration routes. Such an incident occurred west of Ghazni in the eastern Hazarajat in 1972. A group of Pushtun nomads paid 20,000

The *nuildar* camp.

afgha nis for gra zing rights on the hilly meadow s west of an Hazara village . As the flocks of th e sedentary Hazara grew, th e local popula ce decided to reclaim th e meadow s. The *majli s* (council) collected afghan is 20,000, gave it to the *maldar* and asked th em to find other grazing lands. The nomad group at fir st refused, but left aft er a show of armed for ce by the Hazara and a short skirmish in w hich one *mald ar* was wo unded in the leg.

As marginal grasslands in the north we re put und er the plow by modest governm ent-supp orted irrigati on progr ams, *maldar* ofte n return ed from th eir summer pastur es *(yilaq)* to find th eir *qishlaq* occ upied by newl y arrived villagers. Unlik e the nomadic trib es of the Zagros in Iran , Afghan nomads had traditi on al rath er than legal grazing rights, ofte n gained thr ough warf are with other nom adic group s.

In th e past, when violence erupted betw een nomad and villager for con trol of the land , th e governm ent ofte n used the army to supp ort th e villagers. The nomad s, th erefore, mov ed back deeper into the foothills and established new w int er quarters. The more far-sighted khans asked th e government for permission to farm part of the *qishlaq ,* and th e governm ent usually sold - or gave - title to th e land. These group s began to develop into semi nom ads, and , initia lly, only a small group rem ain ed beh ind in spring and summe r. Thus part of th e *qishlaq* was saved as pastureland, and th e group became economically mor e diversified.

In th eir *yilaq* area in th e Siah Band, th e M ohmand Pushtun of Moham mad Ismail Khan are also facing economic pressure from nearby Aimaq villagers. Severa l Aim aq, high in th e power elite, own th e high valley pasturelands used by the Mohma nd Durrani, and Turkoman *maldar* groups , each of wh om pays specific amounts in return for right s to pastur e. In recent years, the Durrani have been purchasing title to th e grasslands from the resident Aimaq ow ners, who w anted cash at once, instead of th e annua l payme nts ; th is process is tend ing to stabilize a previou sly explo- **sive situation .**

Film Dialogue

Look Brother . .
. .. those in power sell good lands . . .
to those who work for them.
Some men own 1,000 acres or more . . .
while others have nothing,

M.I.K.

Film Dialogue

Those who have land and can make a decent ***living . . .***
. _. should send their sons and daughters to school,
The children .
*. . **at least would come** to know **themselves**.*
To learn to read, write alld think ..
will make them . . .
. . better human beings.

M.I.K.

Competition between the *maldar* and Aimaq for the mid-range grazing lands (between the high valley pastures and the lower valley *lalmll* continue. however, and the boundaries fluctuate with the amount of annual rainfall; the more the precipitation. the higher the *lalmi* crops can be grown. The Mohmand, not owning grasslands yet. now look on the Durrani and Turkoman, rather than the sedentary Aimaq, as their chief competitors.

The Mohmand. Durrani, and Turkoman *maldar* are stronger groups than the Aimaq villagers, whose headmen nevertheless adroitly play the three seminomadic tribes one against the other. Violence does occur - usually over women. livestock rustling, and enfringement of *maldar* sheep and goats in the villager's wheat fields but before the *maldar* depart in July. a joint *jirgah* composed of leaders from all four groups attempts to settle any outstanding problems.

As Ismail Khan has said. the Mohmand and most other *maldar* want to continue their way of life. They want to keep their flocks and their land as well. but in the future this will probably require an increased cooperation with the local and centralized governments of the sedentary peoples of Afghanistan. Two of the Khan's four sons attend school in Sholgara during the winter months, and their father hopes they will enter government service. If they do, they may some day be able to influence government decisions affecting their people, and give future generations a chance to adapt their mobile life styles to the changing symbiotic pattern of Afghan culture.

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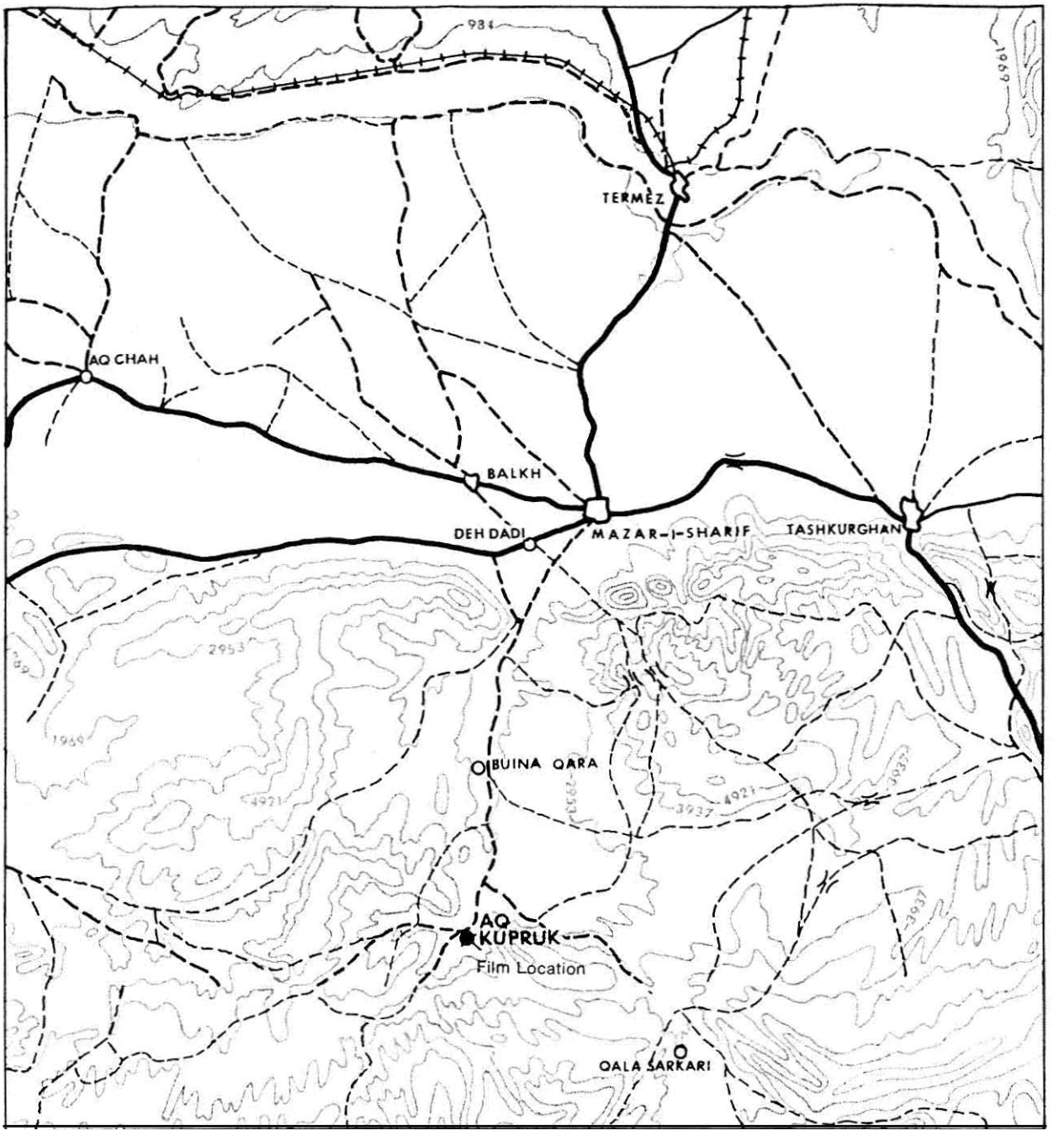
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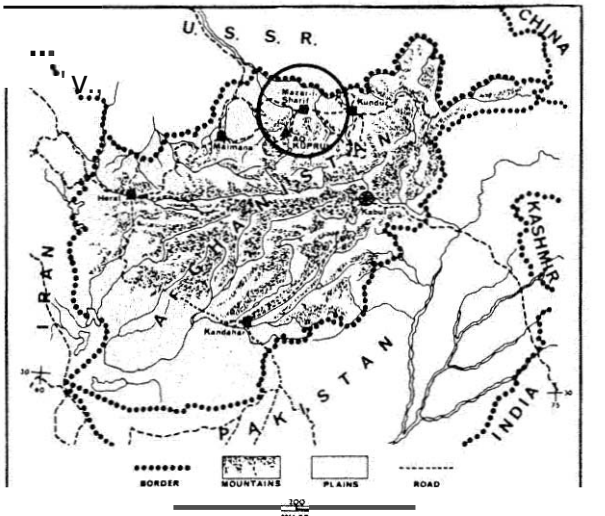
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