2 Dwelling with *Piren*, *Miren*, and *Parien:* Material Articulations of Memory in the Pamiri House

"Fion, have you ever been to Porshnev?" Suhrob called to me from the driver's seat, not taking his eyes off of the bumpy, winding road. I was sitting in the back, behind his childhood friend Nekruz, whom he was driving home after work. In Khorog, it was always a pleasure to have friends like Suhrob who were spontaneous and never said no to the opportunity to get out of the small city. Still being relatively new, I had never, in fact, been to Porshnev and asked what was there. "There is a holy place there. The water from the Spring is so cold and refreshing, and it's really good to drink it. Let's go, we'll show you. But be prepared, the road is a little bumpy." As what proved to be a leitmotif throughout my stay in Pamir, when a Pamiri says that the road is a little bumpy, it means it is extremely bumpy. What I had not appreciated was that the Spring was a little up the mountainside and, to get there, we had to climb a steep slope with numerous potholes, exacerbated by the low suspension of Suhrob's car. As I flew about in the backseat, Suhrob and Nekruz laughed with great joy and recounted how they had visited a funeral earlier that day with the same car which was up an even steeper slope. Miraculously, the car made it up the mountain side and we reached a neatly asphalted spot to park.

It was early evening and the sun had already disappeared behind the mountain, turning the sky to a pinkish hue. The snow on the higher mountains over in Afghanistan still remained, creating a stronger contrast to the lime-coloured *arar* trees which had already bloomed on the side of Tajikistan. As we got out of the car, I heard the loud gush of water and could even feel a slight rumble on the ground. A large grey stone structure, with steps on either side leading up to a terrace, bore the rectangular pool which the Spring water poured into. Calling me over, Suhrob and Nekruz were standing by a second, smaller pool to the right of the Spring. Handing me a weighty silver bowl, the pair proceeded to bend down and fill their bowls with the Spring water before drinking its contents. Bending down, I joined them in drinking the Spring water from the bowl they had given me. The freezing cold water rushed down my gullet, leaving a slightly sweet taste in my mouth.

Taking another sip, Suhrob pointed to the water and exclaimed:

> It's so tasty and refreshing. Do you feel how cold it is? Look, I was feeling tired and now I drank this, I have my energy back. How do you feel in this place, Fion? It feels special, no? It's so peaceful, quiet. There is a legend attached to this place: you know Nāṣiri Khusraw,

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Fig. 1: Drinking from the Spring of Nāṣiri Khusraw. Smith (2022).

> right? So he came a long time – hundreds of years – ago to Pamir. He arrived here in Porshnev and he was thirsty, so he asked a local woman to go down to the river and fetch him some water. For some reason, she said no and so he just grabs a big stick from that tree over there [points to a big, twisted tree] and drives it into the ground, then water appears and this is where the Spring comes from.[1]

It struck me how Suhrob emphasised the feelings attached to this place. From the cold, refreshing water, to the peace and quiet, this Spring was clearly an important place to Suhrob and Nekruz as both Pamiris and Ismaili Muslims. I felt Suhrob's enthusiasm for this holy place and his eagerness to show it to me.

As Suhrob and Nekruz stood for a moment's rest, admiring the view from the mountain side, I noticed there was a small building further up the stone steps, past the terrace. Holding the crest of the Ministry for Culture, the museum was still open, though there was no one to be found inside. A large timeline covered the wall to my right, detailing the lifetime of Nāṣiri Khusraw, an 11th century Is-

1 Excerpt from ethnographic fieldnotes. Re-working of conversation in English with Suhrob and Nekruz in Porshnev.

Fig. 2: A silver bowl used to drink from the Spring of Nāṣiri Khusraw. Smith (2022).

maili missionary (Shugh.: *doi*). Originally from Khurāsān, Khusraw made a pilgrimage to Mecca and settled for some time in Egypt which was at this time under the Fatimid Caliphate. There, Khusraw converted to Ismaili Islam and studied to eventually become a *doi*, returning to his homeland to spread the message of Ismaili Islam. As a *doi,* Nāṣiri Khusraw was one of many agents of Nizari-Ismaili Shia Islam who trained in the Fatimid Caliphate to spread the *da'wa* or message, before Ismaili Muslims eventually hid due to repressions (Iloliev 2008, 62–3). After being cast out of Khurāsān, Khusraw fled to Pamir, settling in Wakhān where he eventually died. Khusraw is credited for the spread of Ismaili Islam in Pamir and, as such, the Ismaili practices in this region are heavily influenced by his esoteric writings and discussions of Ismaili mysticism (Elnazarov and Aksakolov 2011; Goibnazarov 2017; 2025a, Iloliev 2008; van den Berg 2016). Many traditions associated with Nāṣiri Khusraw, such as the musical religious rite *qasidakhānī*, distinguish Pamiri-Ismaili Islam from other Jamatkhana (Ismaili congregations) whose conversion is attributed to different figures, for example Pir Said of South Asia (Goibnazarov 2017, 2025a; Smith 2024). For Pamiris, therefore, Nāṣiri Khusraw is perhaps the most important Ismaili figure who was not one of the Imams.

In addition to this timeline, a collection of books lined the walls. Browsing through, I noticed some familiar titles from Nāṣiri Khusraw, such as his famous *Safarnāma* which detailed his pilgrimage and missionary work throughout the region and greater Islamicate world. This assortment of books, the majority of which were in Tajik with some exceptions, formed the majority of the exhibition within this room. In the centre of one bookshelf, above a series of Arabic books bearing the title *Tarīkh al-Ismāʿīliyya* (Engl.: The History of the Ismailis) by Araf Tamar, sat two photographs of the President, Emomali Rahmon, meeting Aga Khan IV, engaged in discussion. Accompanying these two photographs was a book about the inauguration of the President which felt somewhat out of place in the room full of esoteric Ismaili Islamic literature. In all honesty I was a little surprised to see this collection of books here, not because the small library did not fit in with the rest of the museum, but rather that topics relating to religion, I would argue especially Ismaili Islam, had become quite sensitive in Tajikistan.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Tajikistan fell into a civil war in 1992 which lasted for five years and cost thousands of lives. While the government retained power, oppositional forces, represented by chairman of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) Sayid Abdullo Nuri, disarmed following the signing of the Peace Accord in 1997. Many key figures from the civil war then took up political positions in the new parliament, with the IRPT being one of the largest opposition parties. Nonetheless, in 2015 the IRPT was banned and labelled a terrorist organisation, after which several of its members were imprisoned or fled the country (Najibullah 2020). Since 2015, there has been an increased crackdown on Islamic practices and other forms of religious expression, including restrictions on performing pilgrimage to Mecca, Islamic education, or observing hijab for women (RFE/RL 2015; Synovitz 2017). These measures, by differentiating between a secular "state" Islam and a "non-normative" Islam which encompasses everything else which does not belong to the State's political imagination of Islam (Thibault 2013; Epkenhans 2011), lead to citizens self-regulating their own religiosity to avoid possible repercussions (Lemon and Thibault 2018; Thibault 2018). With all this in mind, I was surprised to see several books on Ismaili Studies and the theology of Nāṣiri Khusraw on display in this small museum as they were representative of a non-normative Islam, i. e. Ismaili Islam, and therefore alluding to a sensitive topic which could evoke possible repercussions.

Moving right, I crossed the threshold of an open door into a sight I was not expecting to see: a Pamiri house. Built around five pillars and a *chorkhona* (quadratic skylight), the room was lined with a felt rug and many handmade tapestries in various patterns. Every corner of the room was filled with different types of artefacts which were once used in daily life: an apparatus for making Pamiri socks from yak's wool, a large stone to grind flour, and several wooden plates

in various sizes were among the items I caught a glimpse of. This Pamiri house, which was presumably the original structure onto which the first room had been added later, had clearly been renovated and impeccably maintained compared with older Pamiri houses I had seen in the region with stained black walls from the smoke of the fire. It was, after all, a museum and was meant to be inviting and colourful.

As a piece of cultural heritage, Pamiri houses (Shugh.: *chid*) are presented to the rest of the world as a symbol of Pamir for their unique architecture and ancient history. Yet, the house is also a home. In Khorog, for example, I was often asked if I lived either in an apartment or in a Pamiri house; the two options were always presented together. While Pamiri houses have been around for far longer than apartments, many families continue to build their homes in this way, and so many Pamiri houses are much newer than the Soviet-built apartments, and the same age as recent private construction projects. The architecture of Pamiri houses is still being used; homes are still being built in this way.

Pamiri houses are a cultural heritage artefact with integral use of religious symbolism. Firstly, the *chorkhona* (also *xugnune chid*), a construction of concentric squares around a skylight, is thought to symbolise humanity's harmony with the four elements: air, earth, fire, and water (Bliss 2006, Blondin 2021). The *chorkhona* is an instantly recognisable symbol all over Pamir, often used as a visual symbol of Pamiri cultural identity in diaspora (Alekseeva 2015). Essentially, a Pamiri house without a *chorkhona* is just a house. Just as important to the architecture of the Pamiri house are the *pindz sitan*, five pillars which, in current times, symbolise the five members of the Prophet's family (Shugh.: *panjtani*). As the architecture of the Pamiri house predates the conversion of the region to Islam, it is believed that the pillars have Zoroastrian roots, giving way to a discourse of Aryanism stemming from early Russian ethnography which still prevails in Pamir (Oshurbekov 2014). Two of the pillars, which usually form the entrance to the Pamiri house, are joined together with a decorated wooden beam, symbolising the partnership of Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, the two grandsons of the Prophet, but also served a practical function in previous times, for example for hanging slaughtered animals. There is therefore a great degree of religious symbolism at play in the architecture of the Pamiri house, which is itself a symbol of Pamiri cultural identity.

Hearing Suhrob call for me to come and get back in the car, I turned to leave the room and was met, much to my surprise, by the plastic mannequin of Nāṣiri Khusraw which I had somehow missed when I entered the room. Dressed in mediaeval clothing with a tree branch in hand, Khusraw was accompanied by a female mannequin dressed in traditional Pamiri white clothing with red patterned embroidery (Shugh.: *sheroze*). Suhrob, emerging from the doorway and, still laugh-

ing that I had been frightened by the mannequins, looked the pair up and down and, seeing my confusion, explained that these must be to represent the story of the Spring's creation. While the female mannequin was dressed in the typical style of Pamiri brides these days, she was presumably the woman who was unable to go to the river to collect water, and the tree branch in Khusraw's hand was the staff he plunged into the ground, causing the Spring to gush forth. With these two mannequins, the connection between the Spring and this Pamiri house became clearer, almost as if the pair had wandered in for shelter after drinking the water. The plastic Pamiri woman, standing in the colourful Pamiri house, certainly reminded one that this was Pamir.

With the hour pressing on, Suhrob and I exited the museum to join Nekruz, who had already received multiple phone calls from his mother asking when he would be home. Climbing back into the car, we left the holy place and drove off, once again, up the bumpy road and ascended the mountain further en route to Nekruz's house. The sound of the gushing Spring soon faded into the distance, replaced by the chatter of Suhrob and Nekruz, and the eclectic playlist Suhrob had on loop. The evening was approaching and the pinkish hue of the sky was becoming an increasingly deeper shade of violet. Visiting the holy place had, indeed, been a refreshing experience. The coldness of the water brought a newfound energy on this day drawing slowly to a close.

2.1 Pamiri House: A Dwelling Perspective

In this chapter, I aim to examine the role Pamiri houses play in the edification of Pamiri cultural identity. As material objects, Pamiri houses represent a time before the division of Pamir and subsequent separation of countless families, giving Pamiris a connection to their heritage through the materiality of the house and thus keeping the memory of pre-rupture Pamir alive, i. e. a time when Ismaili Islam was freely practised and Pamir enjoyed autonomy. Moreover, as a home, Pamiri houses also represent the lived experience of being Pamiri, being the setting for one's own life story. Based on ethnographic observations of three Pamiri houses, namely the above house on the site of Nāṣiri Khusraw's spring, the remaining Pamiri houses in the Fortress of Roshtqa'la, and a residential Pamiri house in Khorog, this chapter argues that Pamiri houses are ultimately key parts of Pamiri lifeworlds through their interconnection between Pamiris and the environment, bound together through Pamiri cultural identity which is strongly informed by the memory of rupture.

Pamiri houses have been thus far approached by Sodatsayrova (2019, 215) in her study of educational and ethical stories in GBAO, which highlights the role Pa-

miri houses play in the edification of core values and beliefs, being the setting for educational stories shared by elders where the Pamiri house articulates belonging to a Pamiri-Ismaili community and represents a "living space" rather than a physical dwelling. Furthermore, the role Pamiri houses play as the location of religious musical expressions and other ceremonies has also been investigated by Gobinazarov (2017, 2025a), stressing the centrality of Pamiri houses to articulations of cultural and religious identity, an idea which Oshurbekov (2014) has also developed with regard to the religious symbolism of its architecture. Elsewhere I have argued that this symbolism aids in Pamiri cultural resilience and the architecture of the Pamiri house is adapted into an ornament used by Pamiri designers (Smith 2025). Building on these approaches, I would argue that the Pamiri house, as the setting for oral histories, becomes part of the narration and, closely tied to the historical figures in question, edifies a Pamiri cultural identity. Not only is the Pamiri house a widely-recognised symbol of Pamiri cultural identity, but it is also a home and, as such, is an integral part of Pamiri lifeworlds.

Ingold (2022b), in his semi-autobiographical discussion of human building and dwelling, argues for what he calls a dwelling perspective, as opposed to the building perspective he had formerly supported (e. g. Ingold 1987). Building on Heidegger's assumption that "the forms people build, whether in the imagination or on the ground, arise within the current of their involved activity, in the specific relational contexts of their practical engagement with their surroundings." Ingold (2022b, 230 – 31) sees building, i. e. constructing, cultivating, as inspired by one's environment, from which ideas, plans, etc. originate. To Ingold (2022b, 230 – 31), therefore, building is part of dwelling for, as humans exist in relation, culturally, historically, to the environment as both are part of the lifeworld, they are influenced by their surroundings and their desire or need to build is a direct result of this, i. e. "a dwelling perspective ascribes the generation of form to those very processes whose creativity is denied by that perspective which sees in every form the concrete realisation of an intellectual solution to a design problem." A dwelling perspective thus differs greatly from a building perspective which claims that "worlds are made before they are lived in" (Ingold 2022b, 222), approaching dwelling as the result of worldmaking. Conversely, a dwelling perspective lessens the role of humans and takes building as a product of the interrelation of humans and the environment in which they dwell. In this way, Ingold (2022b, 191) places greater importance on the role the environment plays in human existence, and as such emphasises the responsibility of inhabitant communities in matters of ecology and environmental care.

In this way, Ingold (2022b, 233) approaches the house as an organism, growing from the connections between humans and the environment, adding, "We may indeed describe the forms in our environment as instances of architecture, but for

the most part we are not architects." This implies that the way a house is constructed, i. e. its shape, facilities, etc., as well as the skill which goes into the building process, all stems from the lifeworld, something which Ingold (2022b, 231) attributes to the human experience of growing up "in environments furnished by the work of previous generations". I would like to further develop Ingold's dwelling perspective, focusing on the role heritage plays in the interconnectedness of the lifeworld.

As argued in the introduction, memory ties communities together through affective discourses of heritage. Here emotion, i. e. love for the community, creates an idealisation of the historical narrative which, in turn, legitimises the group's existence. This historical narrative which, in the case of Pamiri cultural identity, is based on the pre-demarcation, pre-Soviet past in which Ismaili Islam was freely practised and Russian imperialism had not yet taken root, is edified in the form of material objects, such as Pamiri houses. It is a love for the Pamiri community which is attached to the *chorkhona* and *pindz sitan*, and it is with these symbols that Pamiris grow up, surrounded by representations of their cultural heritage and reminders of their shared past. I would like to apply Ingold's approach to the analysis of Pamiri houses, placing focus on the role heritage plays in the act of dwelling as a lived experience. In my analysis which follows, I first argue that Pamiri houses are material reminders of pre-Soviet Ismaili Islam, before discussing how Pamiri houses are connected to historical figures, be they well-renowned, or familiar. Finally, I place Pamiri houses in the context of Pamiri lifeworlds, highlighting how their interconnection ultimately edifies a Pamiri cultural identity.

2.1.1 Being *Tar Chid* in GBAO

In Shughni, house is called *chid* which, like the Tajik *khāna* and related languages, can refer to the structure of the house, the roof, or the place of dwelling. Being at home, or *tar chid* (occasionally expressed with the Russian *doma*), can mean a variety of things in Pamir. Firstly, I would contend that dwelling in Pamir means that you are never alone. While single-parenthood has become increasingly common due to labour migration and the sweeping arrests and exile which followed the events of 2021 and 2022, it remains relatively uncommon to live completely alone in Pamir as the presence of extended family and a general sense of community prevails. Especially for families who live in Pamiri houses, most aspects of daily life are done communally. Sleeping, for example, is a communal experience and it remains very common for multiple family members to sleep in the large room of the Pamiri house on rolled-out *kurpacha* mats.

Secondly, dwelling depends very much on the season. In the winter months, when the sun disappears already at 3pm in some neighbourhoods, and does not shine at all in places like UPD which sit at the foot of the mountain, temperatures are extremely cold and, outside of the working times, the majority of people stay at home. In the spring and summer, men construct their homes. While Sundays are a day off, most men will either construct their own houses, or assist their friends or relatives in construction. Assisting in *remont*, which is the Russian term used in GBAO for any DIY construction work, can be an enjoyable experience, accompanied by *palau* and occasionally beer. As construction is therefore only done in freetime and in good weather, some men work for several years on their houses before finishing construction. Building, just like dwelling, is therefore a communal activity in which Pamiris interact with other Pamiris and the materiality of the environment around them.

Not only bad weather, but also growing costs can lead to delayed construction, even bringing complications to family planning. As Nekruz once remarked:

> A few years ago, I wanted to get married so I sat down and calculated how much it would take to build a house. I had the number in my head and so I started to save. But each year, the cost of materials kept increasing and the number kept getting higher. So now, I'm getting married in a few months and we are only just finishing the construction of my parents' house, but it could be that the guests have to walk on tarpaulin as we might not have floors by then.[2]

Part of the expense in home construction is the shortage of wood in Pamir, which was not always the case. Traditionally, several *arar* trees would be planted upon the birth of a son, with the intention that, around 20–25 years later, the trees would have reached full height and be ready to use for the construction of the son's own house. While this practice seems to have waned, Pamiri houses continue to be constructed using the symbols of the *chorkhona* and *pindz sitan*, which are made entirely of wood.[3] The construction of Pamiri houses highlights, not only the communal experience of building a home, but also the necessity of materials and thus Pamiri houses offer an interesting case study for examining the materiality of dwelling.

In a traditional sense, Pamiri houses are made from locally-grown wood which has been purpose-grown for this specific use. They are also made by the

2 Excerpt from ethnographic fieldnotes. Re-working of conversation in English with Nekruz in Yomj.

3 There is also a trend to construct the symbol of a *chorkhona* using plasterwork and a flat light fitting, creating the shape but without the incorporation of natural light and using very little, if any, wood.

hands of the son and his friends and relatives, all helping out in their spare time. The construction is therefore dependent on the availability of the hands, materials, and good weather. This reliance on materials and labour highlights the interrelation between Pamiris and the environment, be it in an ecological or social sense. If all these conditions are met, the house is constructed, with the *chorkhona* and *pindz sitan* taking their predestined positions within the walls of the house. The architecture of the house is therefore deeply influenced by generations of houses before it, with the requirements of form, materials, and skills all being passed down over centuries as key to the edification of Pamiri cultural identity. The son and his helpers therefore construct these symbols within the house itself, making both a home, and a symbol of Pamiri cultural identity. It is within these walls that the son's family will live, and this will be the setting of family stories and other tales of Pamir and their heritage. The son and his helpers are therefore creating a home for the family, with walls for privacy and shelter from the cold, which exists in relation to the community, environment, and Pamiri heritage.

2.1.2 Religious Sensations in the Pamiri House

While Pamiri houses can be approached as material objects, manifesting symbols of cultural identity which help to edify a sense of being-in-the-world, the very symbols themselves present a challenge to this materialistic approach as they point to a sense of religiosity. Borrowing from Meyer and Houtman's (2012) differentiation between spiritual and religious, spiritual, traditionally, denotes an immaterial connection to a 'transcendental "beyond"', whereas religious points to a "sphere of possibilities", to which belongs materiality. In terms of religious aesthetics, Meyer (2006) argues for a sensational reading of religion, stressing the role senses play in religious experiences. To experience the transcendental fully with all senses is to see and hear, but also taste, smell, touch, and be touched in what Meyer calls "sensational forms": proscribed modes of inducing religious feelings and how to 'feel' the divine. Through such sensational forms, feelings are given a religious meaning and become reproducible; connecting religious subjects with the transcendental, and also with each other by way of a collective religious identity. Religious aesthetics, according to Meyer, fine-tune such sensitivity to sensational forms, creating style in modes of aesthetics and teaching religious subjects how to see, touch, hear, etc, thus proscribing how the subject should experience and feel the transcendental. By dealing in sensational forms and proscribed experiences and feelings, the subject's senses are more susceptible to such grammars and sensory regimes, meaning that a heightened sense of self and being-in-the-world are produced in such structured processes. In this way, collective reli-

gious identity is also formed and strengthened as other religious subjects become identically versed in grammars. Therefore, the sensory experience of the Pamiri house is a grammar which is reproduced in the building process, edifying a Pamiri cultural identity which is strongly linked to an Ismaili Muslim religious identity.

Nonetheless, Pamiri houses not only evoke religious sensations through their use of heritage symbols, but also through their interconnection with the lifeworld. To hold a religious belief is to live in connection to the beyond or hereafter, something which is not of this world. This place, which is often understood as outside of this world, i. e. another realm, represents an area outside of human comprehension occupied by *Xutho* (Engl.: God/Allāh). In contemporary Ismaili Islamic theology, which is greatly influenced by Nāṣiri Khusraw's metaphysical texts, this place is considered to be a whole realm which *Xutho*, as the "Universal Intellect", occupies completely and is separate from the universe in which we live (Nanji 1987). In Pamiri lifeworlds, therefore, the lifeworld itself does not halt at the physical but can transcend the material realm, existing in interconnection with not only this environment, but also the spiritual world. Mittermeier (2010) approaches the spiritual through the lens of dream interpretation, viewing spirits and other (Islamic) characters featuring in dreams, visions, etc, as an extension of the social interconnection of this world. To connect this to a dwelling perspective, which I argue fully encapsulates the lived experience of Pamiri houses, means that we need to view the lifeworld not simply in physical terms, but also with the possibility of interconnection to a higher spiritual plane. Only then can we gain a closer understanding, not only of Pamiri lifeworlds, but also of Ismaili Islam as a lived experience throughout the global Jamat. Therefore, Pamiri houses edify Pamiri cultural identity, not only through their use of heritage symbols which preserve the memory of rupture, but also by the way they transcend the temporal and physical through their connection with the past and the spiritual realm.

2.2 Nāṣiri Khusraw and Pamiri Cultural Identity

In its essence, the Spring of Nāṣiri Khusraw represents a connection between Pamiris and the ecological environment. While the climate of Pamir is quite dry, with glacial melt being a greater water source than precipitation (MSRI 2020), there are mountain Springs all over the region, all put to some kind of use. Along the Dushanbe-Khorog road, for example, there is a large waterfall which drivers often jokingly refer to as a *moyka* (Russ.: car wash), driving their cars down a small ditch beside it to clean-off the dust from the journey, and another Spring over which a vendor has built his stall to keep the drinks cool in hot weather. Furthermore, many Springs and other natural pieces of the environment such

as trees are associated with miraculous stories of religious figures (Oshurbekov 2014), just like the Spring in Porshnev.

Perhaps most striking about the excursion to the Spring of Nāṣiri Khusraw was the feeling of being in a sacred place. As Suhrob commented, the place felt peaceful and quiet, while the act of drinking the water brought a new energy and vitality. There was a specific experience attached to the place, and certain feelings which accompanied this. For Suhrob and Nekruz as Pamiris, those feelings pertained to a religious experience, i. e. the experience of visiting a sacred place. It is such feelings, I argue, which make the place a sacred place. The experience of interacting with a religious object, in this case the Spring, is meant to edify the idea of being Ismaili, which is in turn connected strongly to being Pamiri.

The story of the Spring was known to everyone I asked: it is a legend which is deeply ingrained in the history of Pamir. The Spring is therefore a good example of how closely oral histories and materiality are connected. It would be one thing to have the story of Nāṣiri Khusraw's arrival in Pamir, but the existence of the Spring which is freely accessible adds an extra layer to the narration, offering the opportunity to share in the experience of Nāṣiri Khusraw. By drinking the water, one can quench one's thirst just as Nāṣiri Khusraw did many centuries ago. This act, which is accompanied by taking the heavy metal bowls and dunking them into the water, allows visitors to interact with the materiality of the site, creating a type of experience which, for many, is religious as a physical act.

This brings us to the next point: there are conflicting plans at work in the Spring. The small museum on-site is, as a state museum, part of the larger Tajik national historical narrative. Nāṣiri Khusraw, as an 11th century Persian-speaking historical figure, is held-up by Tajikistan as a literary hero and celebrated for his contribution to wisdom and knowledge. According to the official state narrative in Tajik, Nāṣiri Khusraw is described as a "*shāir va mutafakkiri buzurg*" (Engl.: poet and great thinker) (MFA Tajikistan 2020). In such instances, no mention is made of Nāṣiri Khusraw's status as a *doi* or his missionary duties, but rather the focus is placed on his literary works. In this way, the figure of Nāṣiri Khusraw fits well into a national narrative which bases the nation's existence on a strong literary and scientific tradition (Shozimov 2004; Epkenhans 2016a). Just like other Persian-speaking poets such as Ferdowsī and Rūdakī, Nāṣiri Khusraw is placed within the Tajik national historical narrative which traces the nation's roots back to what is often referred to as the Islamic Golden Age. However, this period, at least in official discourse in Tajikistan, is void of references to Islam and the focus is rather placed on a perceived Tajik ethnogenesis (Epkenhans 2016a).

As a national figure, it is no surprise that Nāṣiri Khusraw would have a museum dedicated to his memory. Museums, as a piece of cultural infrastructure, are

commonly used to edify a national identity (Hall 1999), utilising material objects which aim to convey the cultural memory selected (Assmann 2008, 2011, 2013), and thus the museum's purpose here is clear: to tell and teach the Tajik national narrative on Nāṣiri Khusraw. However, the Tajik narrative is not the only narrative present in this site. The Spring, after all, is a site of great religious significance to Pamiri-Ismailis and evokes feelings which are much deeper than the connection felt to the Tajik nation. Instead, the feelings remind the visitor of their connection to Ismaili Islam, i. e. their belief in the miracle of the Spring's origin and the legitimacy of Nāṣiri Khusraw as an Ismaili *doi.* As Iloliev (2008) points out, shrines and other sacred sites in Pamir, stemming from the grave or site of a miracle associated with a revered Ismaili figure, were constructed both to allow visitors to receive blessings or *barakat*, and to pay their respects to the saint. Furthermore, the museumisation of such sites was done specifically to preserve such religious beliefs, protecting Ismaili Islam from rising Sunni Islam in post-Soviet Tajikistan (Iloliev 2008). Therefore, the very presence of the Spring speaks to the religious feelings attached to it, i. e. that this site was felt to be of religious significance.

Here, the feelings attached to the Spring are of utmost importance. For Suhrob and Nekruz, the Spring is a sacred place and is connected to their own belief in Ismaili Islam. Both actively practising, Nekruz was heavily involved in jamoatkhona activities, while Suhrob never missed his night prayers before sleeping and took great pleasure in discussing the philosophies of Nāṣiri Khusraw and other Ismaili theologians. By being in this sacred place and drinking the water of the Spring, the pair and many Pamiris like them were involved in a religious experience which was strongly connected to their Pamiri heritage. While Nāṣiri Khusraw was a *doi*, his importance is perhaps less so in other parts of the Jamat who attribute their Ismaili heritage to other figures. Though not a Pamiri himself, the relatively young age of the term notwithstanding, Nāṣiri Khusraw spent the rest of his life in Pamir and endeavoured to spread Ismaili Islam in the region. For Pamiri-Ismailis like Suhrob and Nekruz, therefore, Nāṣiri Khusraw is a much-revered figure and, by extension, his Spring.

While the Spring has been museumised by the state, and placed within a discourse of nation-building and belonging, the planned intention of the museum from the side of the Ministry for Culture cannot stop the feelings which the Spring evokes. As a historical figure, Nāṣiri Khusraw fits into the Tajik national narrative and the Pamiri-Ismaili historical narrative simultaneously. The architecture of the museum intends to legitimise Nāṣiri Khusraw as a Tajik national figure by way of his contributions to science and knowledge, i. e. with the small library and the addition of the photos of the President to show a Tajik national belonging. However,

feelings are more difficult to regulate and the religious significance of the Spring is far more palpable for Pamiri-Ismailis.

And this is where the Pamiri house fits in: perhaps at one point intended to be a touristic example of Tajikistan's cultural diversity, as was common with various international events and campaigns (Goibnazarov 2017, 2025a), in current times, the Pamiri house's symbolism is stronger than ever. To a Pamiri-Ismaili visitor, the presence of the Pamiri house on this site ties Nāṣiri Khusraw even more closely into the narrative of Pamiri cultural heritage and the times before the ruptures of the past centuries. By having a mannequin representing him, standing next to a female mannequin in Pamiri traditional costume, inside of a Pamiri house, the role of Nāṣiri Khusraw in the pre-rupture history of Pamir, i. e. a time before foreign imperialism when Pamiris lived under the authority of Ismaili leaders, is conveyed to visitors who have just drank the fresh, clean water and felt some kind of religious feelings.

As a result of Nāṣiri Khusraw's missionary work in Pamir, a system of leadership grew which lasted until the eventual creation of the Soviet Union in the 1920s. The *piren*, religious authorities versed in the theology of Nāṣiri Khusraw and tasked with all religious matters, now worked alongside the political leaders of Badakhshān, *miren*, who held great importance within the region, conducting their own international relations and governing over the land. These figures, just like Ismaili Muslim religious figures, are strongly connected to Pamiri cultural identity and reminiscent of the times before the ruptures of the 20th century. The second Pamiri house which we will deal with is connected to one of the last leaders of the region before the Bolshevik Revolution: Azizkhān.

2.3 Roshtqa'la Fortress and the Legacy of Azizkhān

My phone buzzed on the floor beside my bed. Still half asleep, I fumbled for the mobile and answered it, trying to suppress my yawn. It was Alimamad, whom I had arranged to have *palau* with later at the popular place, Uzbekiston. "Fion, I'm sorry but I need to rearrange. We have to go to Roshtqa'la for a meeting. Can we see each other when I return?…Unless, of course, you'd like to join me." Looking at the time and making a quick decision between getting up or staying in bed, the wish to leave the confinements of Khorog outweighed any desire for comfort. I quickly showered, dressed, and was on the street waiting 20 minutes later, in time for Alimamad and his two neighbourhood friends to pick me up.

Leaving Khorog by way of the road passing the Botsad (botanical gardens), we drove slowly along the Shohdara, following the amble of the river and passing the first signs of Spring after a long winter. I had been to Roshtqa'la once before, in

summer, but had not appreciated just how beautiful this district is. "Roshtqa'la is not as heavily visited as the other parts of Pamir. There are a few trekking routes but they are quite challenging so not many people go there. Which is a shame because Roshtqa'la is just as beautiful as other areas, and it has some interesting things to see," commented Alimamad as he drove slowly along the bumpy road, trying not to damage his tires. One such sight was right beside our destination. As our car climbed up the steep mountain side on the outskirts of the town, following the narrow dirt track, Alimamad and his friends discussed their meeting briefly. It was decided that Rustam, the younger of the pair, would keep me company while Alimamad and Khushruz talked business with a local farmer. After parking the car, Rustam and I walked back down part of the road, searching for a route to the Fortress and greeting a friendly, elderly woman along the way who offered us milk.

The Fortress, sitting atop of the hill overlooking the town, was partially fenced with a small gate entrance, giving the impression that we were walking into someone's property rather than an ancient heritage site. As we climbed up the rocky hillside, no small feat considering I was not wearing practical shoes nor used to such terrain, we approached the Fortress which appeared to be a collection of very, very old Pamiri houses. The *pindz sitan* were still supporting the *chorkhona* roof, covered with dust, after all this time. Rustam had managed to climb down the assortment of rocks to get a better view of the house from the inside. I slowly made my way down, grabbing at the rocks and the side of other ancient houses to keep my balance, much to Rustam's amusement. "We're used to it," he said with a grin. I, however, was not.

After descending the rockpile, I joined Rustam at the entrance to the house and peered into the dark stone structure. While the interior of the house has been eroded over time, the jet-black pillars still stood strong. Jet black pillars are a common sight in Pamiri houses of this age: the reason being the smoke which would have been produced by the fire. Typically, Pamiri houses had no windows to keep the heat of the fire in during the winter months, which meant that the only exit for the smoke was the *chorkhona* right above the fireplace. There is even a popular saying in Pamir derived from this arrangement: "*dud beh az sarmo*" (Engl.: smoke is better than the cold). The traces of the smoke were, just like the pillars, still there after all these years. It was almost like a small reminder of the life which had once occupied this empty house.

While this house had a high wall which I did not wish to climb over for fear of destroying something, there was another house adjacent to it which was easily accessible. Although I was admittedly irritated when people assumed I was a tourist, because fieldwork is no holiday and actually quite stressful in a place like Khorog, I felt very much like a tourist at that moment, walking into this ruined house and

photographing what I saw. From the perspective of a tourist, it was an exciting experience to be able to walk around a building which was hundreds of years old. It was an immersive experience, to interact with a historical object so closely. But as an anthropologist, I felt uneasy to freely walk around such a precious object, scared that I would damage something. By interacting with the object I was researching in such close proximity, I ran the risk of destroying a piece of cultural heritage which was already so greatly endangered. The weight of this risk controlled my movements and made me tread lightly, not touching anything.

Looking out of a hole in the wall, I saw a radio mast not far from this site and was caught by the juxtaposition of the ancient and modern. An aeroplane passed overhead and the sound of the jet engine contrasted starkly to the cows mooing in the background or the eagle squawking somewhere up the valley. Outside, Rustam's mobile phone rang and I could hear him trying to convince Alimamad to drive back down the mountain to collect us, saving us the steep climb back up. Thus ended my short journey into mediaeval Shughnān and it was time to return to the present.

Fig. 3*:* View from Roshtqa'la Fortress towards a telecom mast. Smith (2023).

2.3.1 Memory and the Destruction of Cultural Heritage

On the drive back we discussed the Fortress in more detail. Time and time again, I was impressed by just how much Alimamad knew about his region. Not only was he a great storyteller but he had an encyclopaedic knowledge of Pamir.

> You know why it's called Roshtqa'la? So qala is Fortress and rosht means red in Shughni. So this was the capital of Shughnān and there was a battle between an Afghan invader. They say that the Afghans threw the people onto the rocks and the blood ran down the mountain, colouring everything red. And so it was called Roshtqa'la. What you saw today is only a very small part of the Fortress, from the 9th century. The walls of the Fortress are completely gone and there are just a few houses left. This is because it was destroyed by the Soviets. They wanted to destroy the memory of the person, in this case Azizkhān, who was one of the last kings of Shughnān. They tied the castle to a person, but in reality they destroyed our heritage. I really can't find the words to describe the destruction they caused.[4]

As Alimamad sees it, the Soviets, by destroying the Fortress of Azizkhān, tried to eradicate not only his memory but the very Pamiri heritage he as a historical figure represents. Alimamad's statement would suggest that a collective memory surrounds the story of Azizkhān, closely connected to the materiality of the Fortress.

This was not the first time I had heard of the figure Azizkhān. Initially, it had been difficult for me to place him in my own historical understanding of Pamir, until I came to the realisation that there were multiple Azizkhāns and often it was not articulated which Azizkhān was being referred to. According to Middleton's (2011, 31–2) retelling of the Pamiri legends, the former Azizkhān was a much respected leader, earning the title of *mingbāshī*, meaning leader of thousands, who was then replaced by "Azizkhan Abodillokhon", his nephew "who was also much loved by his people because he sent messages to the Russian Tsar, asking for help against the Afghans who were still making people's lives miserable and also against the Bukharans who had just taken over other parts of Badakhshan." This favourable representation of the latter Azizkhān, derived from oral histories collected by Toji Kurbonkhonova and Muboraksho and adapted for an English-speaking readership, appears to be based on his pivotal role in warding off Afghan offensives to the region.[5] As these oral accounts would suggest, Azizkhān was something of a saviour.

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4 Excerpt from ethnographic fieldnotes. Re-working of conversation in English with Alimamad in Roshtqa'la.

5 In such oral narrations, the Afghans were from the more southernly areas of Afghanistan, with the centre of power in Kabul and were represented by the Emir of Afghānistān (Kābul before 1855) who was of the Muḥammadzaī/Bārakzaī Dynasty. This does not refer to communities living

However, Mastibekov's (2014) comprehensive study of the role of Ismaili leaders in Tajikistan offers a more detailed analysis of Azizkhān's rule and personality. Firstly, Mastibekov (2014, 54) attributes the Tsarist Russian title of *mingbāshī* of Badakhshān exclusively to the elder Azizkhān (ca. 1849–1940) who, with his counterpart Amānbīk in Wakhān and *pir* Yūsuf Alī Shāh was responsible for ending expensive taxation collected by the Emirate of Bukhārā. Nonetheless, Azizkhān has gained notoriety among Russian sources for two letters attributed to him which requested assistance from the Emirates of Bukhārā and Afghānistān asking for protection from Russia, an opinion which Mastibekov (2014, 68–9) does not share, given the struggles Badakhshān had had in freeing themselves from Afghan rule, as well as Azizkhān's own personal vendetta against the Emir for the murder of his relatives. In any case, these letters were used to denounce Azizkhān in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution and he was exiled to China, before later returning to Pamir when he was later exiled to Siberia in Stalin's Great Terror upon accusations of religious activities as a blind elderly man, where he died in 1940 (Mastibekov 2014, 69).

In Mastibekov's (2014, 70) collected oral accounts, Azizkhān is portrayed favourably "as an honest, pious, brave and loyal man." In his discussion of migratory changes to Western Pamir, Mastibekov (2014, 70–1) highlights the increased population of the Ghund and Shohdara valleys is attributed by Pamiris to Azizkhān's leadership. According to accounts collected by Mastibekov from older generations, Azizkhān redistributed land to the needy, and endeavoured to curb the widespread use of opium which had ravaged the region. Similarly, I had also heard positive accounts of Azizkhān and had understood that he was seen as a strong ruler who had protected the Pamiris against various offensives from the Emirate of Afghānistān. Conversely, Afghans were portrayed in such narratives as evil, raping women, pillaging villages, and taking slaves. I had come to understand Azizkhān was revered in Pamir as a kind of pre-Soviet hero.

If Alimamad's claim that the Soviet's destroyed the Fortress to ruin the memory of Azizkhān is true, this would suggest that the leadership was concerned with Azizkhān's status as a historical figure and potential hero of Pamir. It is worth noting here that the Soviet leadership went to great lengths to blacken the name of Azizkhān, even after his death in 1940. As Mastibekov (2014, 107) highlights, in the Russian-language book *Niso*, published in 1953, Azizkhān is portrayed as a cruel Basmachi leader, fighting against Soviet rule, far from the reality of the Ismaili political figure he had been. In his postcolonial historical analysis, Mastibekov (2014,

in Badakhshān, including Shughnis, Wakhis, etc., on the left side of the river. Instead, Afghan in this sense denotes a foreign invader.

107–8) places the example of Azizkhān in the wider discursive landscape of Soviet repression, arguing that he was one of few recognisable *kulaks* and thus represented the ideological Soviet endeavour to dismantle the previous land-owning elites, adding that this Soviet historical fiction was propagated as reality and remains in popular consciousness. The added suffering of Azizkhān's fictional wife Niso, suicidal after being forced to marry a tyrant, no doubt added to the bad reputation that was suggested by the novel. The novel and oral accounts collected by Mastibekov suggest a disparity between official and unofficial historical narratives, which would explain why Azizkhān has come to be a controversial figure in Pamir.

Given the demonstrated efforts to denounce the memory of Azizkhān, it would be fitting for the Soviets to destroy a material object connected to his memory. The destruction of cultural heritage is a well-discussed topic in Central Asia, perhaps most notably with the Taliban's destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan under the leadership of Mullah Omar in 2001. Such iconoclasm, be it performative (Falser 2011), cultural (Flood 2002; Flood and Elsner 2016) or political (Atai 2019), was also practised here in the example of the destruction of the Fortress of Roshtqa'la, but not necessarily because of its relation to the memory of Azizkhān. The Fortress, after all, had existed for hundreds of years until the political career of Azizkhān began in the late 19th century.

Regardless of the circumstances surrounding the destruction of the Fortress of Roshtqa'la, the Fortress is, at least in present times, strongly connected to the memory of Azizkhān and the times before the rupture. Thinking back to Middleton's (2011) adaptation of the story of the Fortress, there appears to be an uncertainty in such oral histories. Just as I was initially confused, trying to place Azizkhān in a vague oral chronology of Pamir, so too does Middleton's adaptation highlight the confusion which the vagueness of oral histories can lead to. For the story of Roshtqa'la, dates and names of invading Afghan rulers often do not survive the oral transmission. Instead, the Fortress itself has stood the test of time. Therefore, I would argue that narrations of Azizkhān have survived particularly for this reason: because of the Fortress's materiality.

2.3.2 Surviving Materiality in Pamiri Houses

Roshtqa'la Fortress is a piece of Pamiri cultural heritage and, as such, an important point in Pamiri lifeworlds. It should be noted here that the importance of this Fortress is relative to Pamiris from Shughnon or neighbouring areas, with similar fortresses being of more importance to Pamiris elsewhere, for example Yamchun in Ishkoshim. Nonetheless, Roshtqa'la belongs to a series of cultural heritage sites

which lie within Pamiri lifeworlds. As a cultural heritage site, Roshtqa'la allows Pamiris to connect with their past. Just as I climbed down the rockpile and peered into the ancient Pamiri house, so too can Pamiris visit the site and get a glimpse of how life was for their ancestors. The materiality of such heritage sites thus invites Pamiris to interact with the materiality of the Fortress, forming their own perception of the collective past of Pamir.

While it is still named a fortress, almost nothing remains of the original structure and the materiality with which visitors interact is actually that of the Pamiri houses on the site. While I could not ascertain how old the Pamiri houses standing on the site actually are, reserving a slight suspicion that they are much more recent than perceived, the fact is that these Pamiri houses are all that remains on the site, and are therefore understood as being part of the Fortress, even if that is not the case. It is fitting, therefore, that the object to survive the periods of rupture is a very symbol of Pamiri cultural identity. On this site, the Pamiri house becomes a timeless object which, though blackened from the smoke and weathered over time, reminds visiting Pamiris of their own Pamiri houses. The symbols of the *chorkhona* and *pindz sitan*, with which they have grown up, have remained unchanged since the time of the Fortress, however long ago the construction of these houses actually was. By experiencing this materiality, Pamiris are not exactly transported back in time, but are rather reminded of their own heritage and perhaps of its resilience in the face of ruptures.

Furthermore, being tied to the memory of Azizkhān, the Fortress in Roshtqa'la represents a time before the rupture which severed Pamir and continues to seperate families and communities until the present day. Although negative portrayals of Azizkhān continue to exist, and my interest is not to attach a positive or negative value to his name, his role in brokering protection from the invading Afghan forces is still recalled and thus he is remembered fondly by many. Whether Azizkhān was, ultimately, a hero or villain is still up for debate, but he is attached to the pre-Soviet time, i. e. a time when Shughnān and greater Badakhshān held great political importance. The Fortress therefore serves as a reminder of the many *miren* who ruled the region before they were ousted following the Bolshevik Revolution.

The Fortress's destruction and decades of neglect are also somewhat lachrymose when viewing it as a piece of Pamiri cultural heritage. The Fortress's derelict state, sitting atop a pile of rocks with a simple gate for protection and no visible archeological maintenance, highlights just how far away the time of Azizkhān and the *miren* is, and how much Pamir has changed since then. Just as the materiality of the Fortress can help Pamiris to feel a connection with the past, experiencing their heritage, it can also remind them of the distance between the past and the present. This would fit into Alimamad's disdain at the Fortress's destruction: the

Soviets not only destroyed a piece of cultural heritage, but severely damaged the actual connection to that time that Pamiris feel, pushing the past further and further into the past.

There are therefore many subjective ways to read the Fortress of Roshtqa'la. Ultimately, the way the Fortress is perceived is dependent on the ideas which are attached to it, similarly to how Azizkhān is remembered. For many, like Alimamad, the Fortress is strongly connected to the memory of Azizkhān, thus making the Soviet destruction of this an attempt to erase his memory. For others, the Fortress is reminiscent of the days before the rupture, when Pamiri houses were the norm and apartment blocks would have been inconceivable. In any case, the site's sorry state in the present day highlights just how effective the endeavours of the Soviets were in wiping away traces of Azizkhān and the *miren.*

While the historical figures of Nāṣiri Khusraw and Azizkhān are long gone, Pamiri houses continue to exist all over the region. As homes, Pamiri houses are lived in and are the centre of daily life and interconnection of multiple generations. The last case study looks at a Pamiri house which is still lived in, showing in a final step that Pamiri houses, while artefacts of cultural heritage, are the setting of Pamiri life stories and can be just as strongly connected to familiar legacies as tales of *piren* and *miren.*

2.4 Being at Home in Gulbegim's House

Following a muddy, rocky path which led us up the foot of the mountain, we sought a small yellow gate our contact had told us about. This particular area of Khorog, called Novaiy, resembles a maze of snaking pathways, gradually climbing the mountainside. After reaching yet another dead-end and still with no yellow gate in sight, a friendly gentleman from an upper window waved and pointed us in the right direction, correctly assuming that we were in search of the old Pamiri house. Finding the yellow gate, we knocked and an elderly woman appeared and, together with her daughter, welcomed us inside. Crossing the courtyard which was the entrance to the house, I noticed the pale blue paint over white plaster walls, creating the pattern of a *chorkhona* and acting as a backdrop for the wooden pillars holding up the covering from the rain. Quickly, we left the bright spring sun outside and entered into the dark, cool room of the Pamiri house.

The elderly woman, introducing herself as Gulbegim, ushered us to a table she had prepared of bread, homemade jam, and green tea. The room was sparsely decorated with a few rugs for warmth and a pile of neatly folded *kurpacha* in the corner nearest the door. The *chorkhona* let limited light into the otherwise dimly lit room, assisted by two or three electric light bulbs hanging from the ceiling. The

pindz sitan stood proudly in their predestined positions, with a small calendar hanging from Ḥusayn's pillar which we had just walked past upon entering the room. As I looked around, I failed to find a photograph of *Hazar Imom*, with a large clock hanging on the pillar which typically held his photo in a Pamiri house. Taking our seats, her daughter, a woman of around 40 years old wearing thick Pamiri socks, poured the tea while her mother began to tell her story:

> This house is more than 200 years old and belonged to my husband's family. Today, I live here with my 44-year-old son who is not married. My husband died several years ago and our four daughters are all married and live with their families. I came from the other side of Khorog, from UPD, but when I got married, I left my father's house and came to live with my husband's family. [...] Two families used to live in this house, and the animals lived here too. Over there, [pointing to a small door under a countertop] the sheep would sleep, and in this corner we had a cow. [...] We also had some chickens too. [...] Everyone would sleep here together with the animals. [...] We used this room for everything: eating, sleeping, we would even slaughter the animals and hang their carcasses from the beam [she points to the beam connecting the pillars of Ḥasan and Ḥusayn]. We did everything here in this house.[6]

Our host had clearly told this story many times before. Having heard about her house from a contact, it was understood that she regularly accepted tourists into her home and shared her little piece of history with them.

2.4.1 Dwelling with the *Parien*

Looking around the room, which was probably the largest Pamiri house I had ever been in, it was hard to imagine there would be space for two families, let alone a small herd of farm animals. In fact, it was difficult to imagine such a time at all as the inside of the house had changed a little. While the *pindz sitan* and *chorkhona* were visible, the walls had been covered with hard plaster several decades ago and painted with thick, shiny white and brown lacquer so the original wooden frame of the house was no longer exposed. Perhaps noticing my attention to the walls, Gulbegim explained:

> As you can see, the house has not been renovated much. The only change we made was the water used to be under this step here [she kicked her heel against the step she was perched on], but now we are building a shower and bathroom in a separate room in the garden. Many years ago, after my husband passed away, we wanted to renovate the house but

6 Excerpt from ethnographic fieldnotes. Tour in Russian, Tajik, and Shughni by Gulbegim in Khorog.

> one night I had a dream. In my dream, a person came to me, dressed in white. I don't know who he was. He came to me and took my hand, saying, 'do not change my house.' When I woke-up, I told my mother-in-law about the dream and we decided not to renovate the house. This is a very special house, you see. I believe it is a spiritual place. There are spirits here; I hear them sometimes. I like that the spirits are here and I believe they were protecting me and my mother-in-law. It was like they were saying, 'we will protect you, but please do not disturb our house.'

Gulbegim's eerie story sent a shiver down my spine and I can still feel the goosebumps rising on my arms and legs as I write. Perhaps it was the dim light of the Pamiri house, or maybe the relatively cool temperature, but I could see why one would feel a presence of some kind.

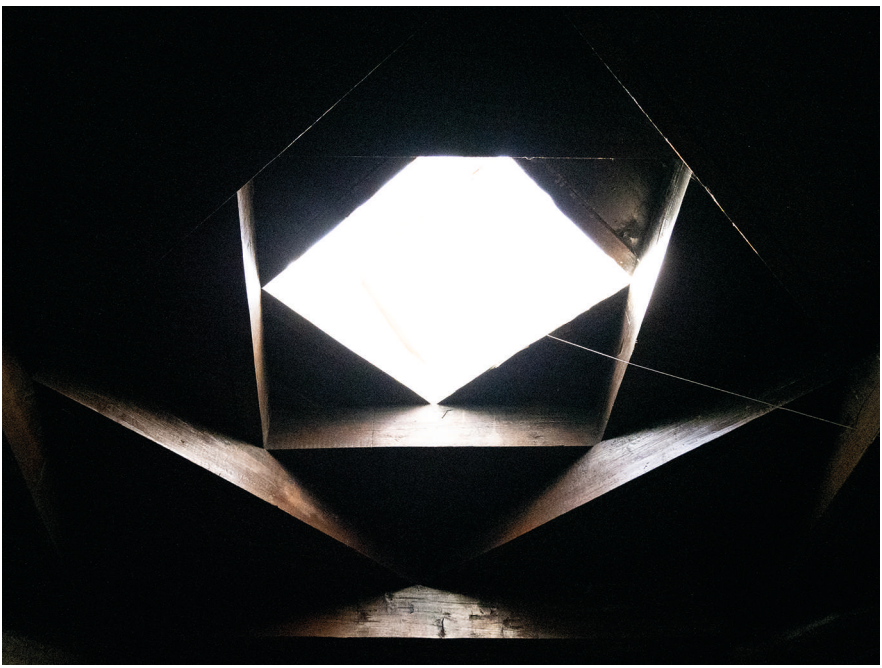

Fig. 4*:* A Chorkhona in Shughnon. Smith (2022).

Parien, as Gulbegim called them, are spirits which play a big role in Persianate literature, folklore, and popular culture in Pamir. Stemming from the Avestan name for "a class of female demonic being", a *pari* is a supernatural being which often appears alongside the Islamic spirit *jinn* and has lost much of its negative connotations, portraying a more benevolent character since Middle Iranian (Adhami 2010). This process of de-demonisation (Asmussen 1982), has led to *pari*

and their counterparts of *div* and *jinn* being understood as independent beings capable of free thinking and moral complexity, which Lasman (2021, 37) sees as rooted in the shift from polytheism to monotheism as these beings were adapted for Persian literature, appearing thereafter in close proximity to the Islamic *jinn* which appear in the Qurʾān and Ḥadīth. In Pamiri folklore, a *pari* is often a female spirit,[7] but the terms are often interchangeable and I did not get the impression that the *parien* Gulbegim referred to were necessarily female, but rather a kind, welcoming spirit. Perhaps this is why Gulbegim used the term *pari*, to denote that the spirits were not to be feared, but rather welcomed.

While I am indeed open to the possibility of the existence of *parien*, what interested me more in this moment was the feeling which the house triggered in me. This eerie, creepy feeling I felt when Gulbegim was speaking reminded me of the ghost stories I had heard as a child. The idea that a spirit of some kind could be in that very space but remain invisible, only revealing itself audibly or in dreams to its tenants, was admittedly somewhat scary. This fear that I felt, though quite mild, was clearly not experienced by Gulbegim who had become accustomed to the spirits and viewed them more as co-inhabitants of the house, or even as landlords, if not family. In fact, Gulbegim believed that the spirits had been protecting her and her family all this time. The feeling I felt in this moment was material as it affected my body by giving me goosebumps, creating a cold chill which went up my spine to the back of my neck. In this way, the spiritual briefly became tangible. The imagination, or the actual existence perhaps, of the *parien* had a physical affect on my body and, I assume, the bodies of my companions. But not Gulbegim, she was perfectly at ease in this house, surrounded by spirits. Perhaps she associated the spirits with other physical sensations. After all, she was used to living with them in the same house, dwelling together. Perhaps, still, she was more connected to the spiritual realm, the not-of-this-world.

2.4.2 The Museumisaton of the *Chid*

While this should be quite clear, given that Gulbegim was at home and I was a guest in her house, the point of how this Pamiri house is experienced from different perspectives deserves a closer look. To Gulbegim, this house is her home, i. e. a familiar, safe space offering a relative level of intimacy. While we were guests in her home, she tried to make us share this feeling of home by offering us tea and bread in an act of hospitality. This hospitality extended to us sitting for perhaps an

7 See Middleton 2011.

hour in the room where her and her family eat, sleep, and live. By welcoming us into her home, Gulbegim had opened her private space to us and allowed us to experience the house from her perspective, i. e. as a home.

However, the moment we began the tour, the private house became a museum and Gulbegim was our guide. The site of dwelling for her and her family was suddenly open to us very curious strangers. This was all unofficial, Gulbegim's house was not a museum in the eyes of the Ministry for Culture or any other organisation or public body. While there are many unofficial, grassroots museums throughout GBAO, stemming from similar houses or interesting personal archives,[8] these rarely appear in tourist information brochures etc. Rather, Gulbegim had taken the opportunity presented by tourism to earn a little extra money on the side by giving visitors a tour of her home. We had come to know about the house through a friend of a friend, but presumably others knew about Gulbegim's house as it is considered to be one of the oldest houses in Khorog, and therefore word of her house was largely shared to tourists through unofficial channels such as word-of-mouth, possibly with the Pamir Eco-Cultural Tourism Association (PECTA), a non-profit tourism group in Khorog which offers information and guidance to tourists, facilitating visits. From the perspective of us visitors, we saw the house as an object and received much information about its age, preservation, and structure. The objectification of the house meant that, had it not been for Gulbegim's narrative, we would have viewed the house as perhaps a piece of architecture, or cultural heritage, connecting us to past times and informing us about life before the ruptures of the 20th century. In this sense, the house embodied a cultural memory, being represented as an example of Pamiri cultural heritage. This was, of course, what had brought us all the way to the heights of Novaiy; we wanted to see an old Pamiri house. We sought a connection with the past, but on a very superficial, touristic level.

As a guide, in turn, Gulbegim would be expected to place the house within the greater history of Pamir, and present any points of interest in its architecture. But that was not the case. Gulbegim's story pointed our attention away from the *pindz sitan* and *chorkhona* to that eerie feeling and a potential presence of spirits. This experience of chilling unease would not have been as strong, had Gulbegim not told us about her dream and the voices she would hear in her house. The story which Gulbegim shared with us totally changed how we experienced the house and opened us up to both the feeling of unease, but also the warmth and comfort of the family setting. Feelings of home mixed with unease were perhaps a strange

8 Such community-based museums are a current research interest of Goibnazarov.

cocktail but it gave us a very full experience of the house, far more than a normal museum visit would.

As she spoke, she ordered her narrative in relation to the house and what happened inside of it, rather than any key historical events outside. For the hour or so that we sat with her, there was no mention of the Soviet times, the civil war, or the *Didor.* None of the key events which feature so heavily in other narratives presented here were referenced in Gulbegim's narrative. Instead, the house was given a central role and she arranged her narrative in relation to the house itself. The time before entering the house and living in UPD, the time of sharing the house with the animals and another family, her daughters leaving the house, the death of her husband, the changes to the house; all these points featured in Gulbegim's history, creating a narrative which very much existed only inside of the house. In her role as our guide, it was as if history outside of these walls was irrelevant from Gulbegim's perspective and the house had a greater significance in her life than any ruptures which had taken place outside. The house, therefore, ordered Gulbegim's narrative as the ruptures in her life which she shared with us were tied only to the house.

The visit to Gulbegim's house highlights the role Pamiri houses play in the edification of Pamiri cultural identity through their materiality. To experience the warmth of the home coupled with the eeriness of spirits allowed us as visitors to get a short glimpse of Gulbegim's lifeworld, situated in the house. By sitting in her home, drinking tea, and listening to the story of her life, we could experience for a short time her connection to the house and the importance it held in her life. Through Gulbegim's narrative and the close reference it held to the house, we were able to briefly live the memories of past times she shared with us by sitting in her home and drinking tea. Just like the houses in Roshtqa'la and Porshnev, Gulbegim's house incorporated the same architectural symbolism but, as a home, offered the lived experience of the Pamiri lifeworld which the others did not.

As the *choynak* ran dry and our time together came to an end, we each gave Gulbegim 10 somoni as our contact had instructed us. As is customary, Gulbgeim at first rejected the payment, before accepting it after our persistence. 10 TJS, just under 1 EUR at the time, was half the standard rate of 20 TJS for visiting any museum as a foreigner, reflecting instead the local rate which would lie between 5 and 10 TJS. In this unofficial act of payment, we returned to our role as visitors to the museum and Gulbegim as our guide. This house was not an official museum, but it became a museum in the brief timespan of our visit. Whereas the other two case studies held an official status as heritage sites, this museum was unregulated and came and went with its visitors. The 'pop-up museum' of Gulbegim's

house therefore existed outside of the official history of Pamir and offered visitors an alternative, localised perspective on past times.

Gulbegim's house was by no means in conflict with the official narrative, in fact she did not mention any key events other than those important to her, her family, and the house itself. Instead, Gulbegim offered her life story which was in constant relation to the house. This final case study therefore stresses the importance of Pamiri houses within the lifeworld, being key points of interconnection between Pamiris with the environment. For Gulbegim, the house itself is a character in her story, almost personified by the spirit visiting her in her sleep. The organism of the house is one of Gulbegim's most important points in the lifeworld and it defines her experience of being Pamiri, with little reference of the ruptures happening outside of those walls.

In contrast to the houses in Roshtqa'la and Porshnev, there are no articulated references to a broader Pamiri history. The *chorkhona* and *pindz sitan* are everpresent, but these are simply parts of the structure of the home rather than symbols of Pamiri cultural identity. This is due to Gulbegim's positionality: she is viewing the house from the inside looking out. Her perspective, or rather, the perspective of the house, is not subject to the discourses of nationhood and belonging involved in the heritage sites of Nāṣiri Khusraw's Spring or the Fortress of Roshtqa'la. Instead, it is Gulbegim's own memories which are attached to the house and, while countless other Pamiris share her experiences, the scale of the lifeworld shrinks for some time upon entering the house. This shift in scale, caused by the intimacy and privacy of the house, is what distinguishes a Pamiri house from a home.

2.5 Embedded Memory in the *Chorkhona* and *Pindz Sitan*

Exiting Gulbegim's house, we made our way back down the steep slope of Novaiy and I returned soon after to my temporary home above a supermarket in Gulaken, a "modern" apartment rather than a Pamiri house, where I was grateful for the peaceful privacy to gather my thoughts. While this apartment was not my home, it had become one through my act of dwelling. Back then, I understood Khorog in relation to that apartment. Later that day, I would call a taxi and describe my location in relation to other points in the apartment's surroundings: the supermarket, Chorbogh park, the car bridge which went over to Shosh. To a taxi driver, my own home existed only in connection with other things around it.

It is therefore not fully accurate to limit a concept of dwelling in Pamir to Pamiri houses as an architectural object, but rather Pamiri houses as a location of dwelling. Just like Pamiri houses, the apartment in which I lived was built by skil-

led hands, deriving from a need for shelter, organically growing out of the environment around it. The wooden beams making up the ceiling were not assembled in a *chorkhona* formation but they still created a roof over my head and shelter from the wind, rain, and snow. While there was no fire burning in the centre of the apartment, there was a central heating system, powered by the River Ghund through Pamir Energy's hydropower plant, which brought me warmth during the cold winter months. The lack of *pindz sitan* was more than compensated for by the numerous memorabilia displaying the face of *Hazar Imom* and portraits of ʿAlī. In essence, my apartment was a Pamiri house in the sense that it was the location of a Pamiri form of dwelling which edified a Pamiri cultural identity and way of being-in-the-world, existing in constant interconnection to the Pamiri lifeworld around it.

The interconnection of Pamiri lifeworlds is realised through the materiality of the Pamiri house. In its architecture, references to a far distant past and supposed origin of the Pamiri people are materialised in the physical symbols of the *chorkhona* and *pindz sitan*. Yet, these symbols in current times are read as religious, being the material reminder of *Xutho* and the five members of *panjtani*. These symbols not only simultaneously edify a Pamiri cultural identity which is closely linked to a distant Zoroastrian past and Ismaili religiosity, but are the material memory of rupture, i. e. the conversion to Ismaili Islam and subsequent re-purposing of symbols which took place within the context of Nāṣiri Khusraw's missionary work. Just like the old Pamiri houses which have withstood countless ruptures in GBAO, the very *chorkhona* and *pindz sitan* have withstood the rupture of religious redirection and remain the most important elements of the architecture of the Pamiri house. The Pamiri house therefore exists not only within the interconnection of the environment, but also with the past and the imaginations of heritage which preserve its memory.

Taking the architecture of the Pamiri house as a symbol of Pamiri cultural identity allows us to question our epistemological approach to rupture. The shift from Zoroastrian to Ismaili is viewed as overwhelmingly positive in Pamir, with Nāṣiri Khusraw being revered as a saviour to the Pamiri people for bringing them closer to Islam by way of the appropriation of non-Islamic symbols. Rupture, therefore, is not necessarily negative but rather a shift in value systems caused by the sudden need for redirection. The memory of this rupture is embodied in the *chorkhona* and *pindz sitan* which, in turn, exist in interrelation to the house and greater environment. Perhaps these architectural features highlight the position rupture takes in dwelling, i. e. they show that ruptures are ever-present and make up a central part of the Pamiri lifeworld.

As we have seen from the three case studies presented in this chapter, the materiality of the Pamiri house not only edifies a sense of Pamiri cultural identity

and being-in-the-world, but it also has a profound effect on the body. These feelings exist outside of any planned state-level museumisation of the Pamiri house as feelings are essentially unregulatable and, while shared by others, are unique to the individual experiencing them. In this way, the religious feelings evoked by the Spring of Nāṣiri Khusraw are not halted by the presence of the shield of the Ministry for Culture and photographs of the President, and the Ismaili beliefs and practices are preserved. So too can the spirits in Gulbegim's house be awakened in oral narrations, their presence felt in fleeting bursts of goosebumps, reminding the visitor of a connection not only to the Pamiri lifeworld as is, but to the hereafter or not-of-this-world. For in Pamir, dwelling is not necessarily contained to the physical, human realm.

It is, therefore, materiality which preserves memory, linking the individual with the past through the physical. While ruptures within the Pamiri community are embedded in the materiality of the Pamiri house, so too are memories of deceased loved ones who dwelt, or perhaps continue to dwell, within. Just as the memory of Nāṣiri Khusraw and Azizkhān are tied to the materiality of the Spring and Fortress respectively, the memory of Gulbegim's husband and other relatives are ever-present within her house. Pamiri houses therefore offer the potential to shift scale when approaching rupture as, while rupture can be a ground-breaking, catalytic event throughout a community, so too can the passing of a loved one shatter one's own lifeworld.