



“Gumbad-E-Raisan” The Domes Of Silence In Chitral

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ABSTRACT

Gumbad Raisan “The Domes of Silence” is the title of a research-based article on burial rituals, architecture, and material culture of Rais dynasty. In sixteenth-century CE, Rais rulers ruled the northern regions of Pakistan bordering with Central Asia, in Chitral, Gilgit. The monument of Gumbad Raisan was initially documented and depicted by a local chronicler Mirza Ghufran in 1921 CE and described the burial as Dakhma. This article includes brief definitions of the word Dakhma, its origin, and the historical background. It also gives circumstantial information about the indigenous people of the eastern Hindu Kush, their religion and the ruling elites of the regions. The ancient history of this region is seemed to be muzzling, this article concludes some historical shreds of evidence of ancient history of Chitral.

KEYWORDS

Gumbad, Zoroastrianism, Dakhma, Rais, Chitral.

INTRODUCTION

Across the globe, historic architectures have an important role in reconstruction of any historical era. The old edifices enable us to understand the society, culture, and civilization the region had represented. Unfortunately, in

the eastern Hindu Kush, we have very few historical places remain through which we can sketch the history and its material culture. Chitral is a region which is located in the extreme north of Pakistan, a gateway between

Central and South Asia and surrounded with the mountains of the Hindu Kush and Karakorum. Many historical places of Chitral were demolished century before;

one of them was “Gumbad Raisan” رئیسان گنبد located in Chitral town. Gumbad is a Persian word which mean Dome whereas “Rais” were the titles of the earliest Muslim rulers who ruled the region of Chitral, Gilgit, and Badakhshan. The royal collective burial cemeteries of the Rais rulers were called Gumbad Raisan. Many people believe the collective burial monuments were located in different places in Chitral, Yasin, and in Gilgit.

“Gumbas” a village near to Chitral town was also believed as Gumbad, later the name changed into Gumbas. These collective burial patterns were located in Gumbas Broze, Saht Mulkhow, Reshun, Punyal, Bubur, Gahkuch and Yasin. In upper Gahkuch, Punyal, and in Gilgit the collective burial tombs of a similar kind are called Gumbati or Bumbati, derived from the word Gumbad [1]. The monuments of Gumbad Raisan situated in Chitral Goldoor was a tower with a dome constructed on a mount with the cellars consisting of wall niches for the burial of Rais rulers, this Gumbad later discovered and called as “Dakhma”.



Figure: 1 The location of Gumbad Raisan at “Dok Dur “ or Goldoor Chitral.

DEFINITIONS OF THE TERM DAKHMA

Nora Elisabeth Mary Boyce a British scholar of Iranian language and Zoroastrianism defined the term “Dakhma” as Indo-European language as “dafma” or “dhmbh which means to bury, grave or to forget [2]. The term “Dakhma” is defined as a circular tower constructed from stones or bricks often located on a hill, they were founded by Zoroastrian in Persian Empire. The word Dakhma was also used to the earliest funerary ritual that started in Persia. The modern definition of Dakhma is “(An Avestan: “tower of silence”), Parsi funerary tower erected on a hill for the disposal of the dead according to

the Zoroastrian rite. Such towers are about 25 feet (8 m) high, built of brick or stone, and contain gratings on which the corpses are exposed. After vultures have picked the bones clean, they fall into a pit below, thereby fulfilling the injunction that a corpse must not suffer contact with either fire or earth”[3]. The local language of Chitral (Khowar) also adopted the word Dakhma. “In Lower Chitral and Garam Chashma the word Dakhma is used for men or women who remain ill for a long time or getting ill frequently however in Upper Chitral, the word Dakhma is used for a Pregnant Women” [4], [5].

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF DAKHMA

The earliest information available about Dakhmas was written in Avesta (Sacred Book of Zoroastrianism). It is mentioned in the Videvdant section of Avesta "Oh holy one who created all things; after the corpse of a man is placed in a Dakhma how long does it take for the place of the Dakhma to be cleansed? Evil forces jollify in the Dakhmas, especially at sunset" again it is mentioned "ignorant people increase the incidence of diseases by one third by leaving the dahmas undestroyed" [6]. In the 5th century BCE, Herodotus reports "The Persian burial rituals performed by the Magi (Zoroastrian Priests) they were kept secret but he writes that he knows they expose and make human dead bodies prey to birds and dogs, the corpse was then embalmed with wax and laid in a trench". "The Bactrians take the corpse, the sick elder to the mountains" [3]. It is also mentioned by Herodotus that "The Persians had no temples, some have been found in the shape of terrance, towers or square room. "Chahar taqs" (the secret building of four doors or gates) scattered in Persia" [6] somehow the translator of the above word "Chahartaq" چهار طاق misinterpreted the word and referred "Taq" طاق as a door or gate, Taq should be translated as Wall Niche, Arch, barrel vault, in the local language, we call it "Bilogh" Chahartaq means "Chor Biloghi" or of four Arches. A Greek geographer Starbo in 7 BCE noted "Bactria is beautiful on outside and the inside their human bones scattered all over the region" [7]. Historians are agreed that in the Persian Empire there were no graveyards in the early Iron Age. Persian civilization was influenced by Babylonian, Sumerians and Assyrians ways of living. The earlier civilization supremacy can be seen in the monuments of Zoroastrian Kings of Achaemenid period (550-330 BCE) and the Sassanid period (224-651 CE). The Achaemenian tombs of Cyrus, Artaxerxes I, and Darius have significant archeological importance in modern Iran, these tombs of Artaxerxes I and Darius are burial Chambers carved into the side of the hill rocks. It is also

mentioned in "Shah Nama Firdosi" about Kayi khisraw who was the Sassanian King of Kings (531-579 CE) "Khisraw now prepare a "Dukhma" for Piran and other Turanian Chiefs and orders Girui the son of Zarah to be put to death with torture and have his head cut off" [7]. According to Matboboev B.X research on the famous Munchoktepa Monument of Fergana "In the early middle age, the Zoroastrians of the Fergana valley put the dead in reed coffins are kept them in naus-quality cellars" [9]. "Among the Sacian (North Iranian) tribes of middle Asia there is a long tradition of collective tombs with freely accessible chambers to decompose of dead bodies (Parallel to the Zoroastrians practices)" [10]. In the above statement Karl Jettmar may refer to the Sythians or Saka's burial mounds called "Kurgans" or "Kargins" which are located in China's western border with Tajikistan. In Medieval period, historians used the word Dakhma mainly for tombs and cemeteries; they used the word "kings Dakhmas". It can be contemplated that both exposure and non-exposure burial rituals were practiced from ancient Persian dynasties. "In Zoroastrianism, four elements are considered as sanctified fire, earth, water and air. It was not allowed to put corpse to these four elements that's why it was necessary to assure and build facilities for the decomposition of the corpse" [11]. With the development in religion of Zoroastrianism, they started building Dakhmas for burial. These Dakhma were several types, personal dakhma, family dakhma, and dynastic or collective dakhma. The ruins of those monuments were later discovered in Iran, South Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, parts of Central Asia, and South Asia by different archeologists. Commonly these monuments were found in mountainous areas [12].

EMERGANCE OF PERSIAN-ISLAMIC CULTURE

After the Arab conquest of Persia in 633-654 CE and the fall of the Sassanid dynasty, Muslims emerged as a new civilization in Persia. A thousand-year civilization of the Persian

empire could not be perished so easily by the new emerging Arabs, for many centuries Islam was repulsed by the Persians but gradually the Persian population accepted it. Persian people followed their pre-Islamic traditions and rituals with conversion to Islam. Persian architecture, literature, and art were the major elements of the newly emerging Muslim civilization. During the Samanids dynasty in the 9th century CE, Islamo-Persian culture flourished and spread into Central Asia and parts of South Asia, It was centered in Khorasan and Transoxiana.

Samanids dynasty was a Muslim dynasty with the origin of Persian nobility. The ancient Zoroastrian culture and rituals were practiced or remained in these parts of the world for a long time. The Persian civilization influences and practices still can be seen in these regions, Persian Islamic culture spread gradually to the vast territories.

زېږ اميان تابسامانيان

کجا آن بزرگان ساسانيان
فردوسی

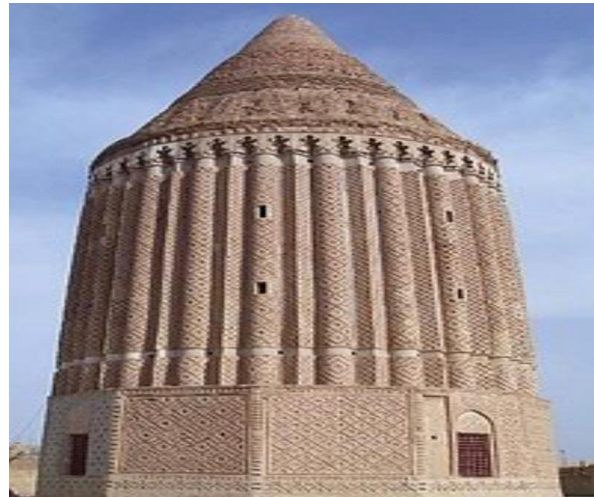


Figure 2: 14th century grave reminiscent of Dakhma of Zoroastrianism located in Khorasan Province of Iran

PRE-ISLAMIC INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF BOLORISTAN

The indigenous people of Boloristan were called pagans, infidels, non-Muslims, and kafir by many Muslim historians. This region was called Bolor or Baloristan, mentioned in the time of Abbasid Khalifa Al-Mamoon (813-33 CE) as “Bilad Bilor”. Another author of Hudood Al Alam also called this place Balor or Bulur, and says “Balor king calls himself a Son of Sun “farzand i aftab im” [13]. In 1527-28 CE Rashid Sultan invaded Boloristan with Mirza Haider Dughlat, it is written in the notes of Haider Dughlat “Balor is an infidel country, and most of his inhabitants are mountaineers, not one of them had a religion or creed, nor is there anything which they consider it right to abstain from or to avoid as impure but they do

whatever they list and follow their desires without check or compunction” [14]. Geographically Haider Dughlat depicted Baloristan as bordering with Badakhshan in north east, Wakhan in north, Baltistan on east, Kashmir on south east, Swat on South, Kabul and Laghman on southwest, and Sarikol on north east [14]. Chitral was part of Baloristan, many writers called Chitral as Bolor, Ghazir, Warshagam, and Narsat were also parts of Chitral and called Chitral or Bolor. In the early 16th century CE, this region had no religion to be recognized by any contemporary source. It can be assumed that most of the indigenous people of this region were the “steppe pastoralists”, who migrated southwards to the Hindu Kush and Karakorum mountains; they were probably followers of non-vedic animism. “The early Aryan tribes were followers of

“Hinduism” which included vedic Hinduism and non-Vedic animism” [15]. Some earliest sources and ethnographic evidences of the region suggest that most of the people who lived in this region were polytheistic and shamanistic traditional animists before Islam. This region was governed by many rulers; different small villages had their own village heads. Modern research also concludes about the Kalasha Community of Chitral that they are followers of the ancient animistic folk religion.

IDENTITIES OF THE FIRST MUSLIM RULERS IN THE LAND OF PAGANS

Probably in the mid 16th century CE, Rais rulers invaded the region of Chitral. Rais rulers were bearers of Parthian-Islamic Culture, who introduced Islamic rule and Islamic administrative setup under one ruler state. They called themselves Shah, Rais or Wali of the region. The Raisa Rulers who ruled this region were Muslims by religion and they were not indigenous. They ruled the region of Chitral not more than two centuries; there are very few tribes in Chitral who claimed to be descendants of Rais. Many writers contradict the origin of Rais rulers, Rais called themselves “Sikandri” the descendent of Alexander the Great but Alexander had no heirs. The rulers, who claimed to be the descendent of Alexander the Great, ruled the region of Chitral, Hunza, Nagar, and parts of Badakhshan [16]. Before Timurids took over Badakhshan in 15th century, the local dynasty of Badakhshan were claiming descent from Alexander the Great. It is also ascertained, in 13th Century many people who migrated from the region of Alexandria Egypt to Central Asia also called themselves “Iskandari”. But it is still unclear that why Rais rulers called themselves Sikandari. Rais dynasty introduced many Islamic preachers to this region and Islam flourished in Chitral during the rule of Rais dynasty. Many Muslim courtiers also came to this region during Rais era. Gumbad Raisans was the first Islamic burial prototype started by the Rais ruler in the

region of Pagans. Later they were changed with the development of the religion. Some of the Rais rulers names who ruled Chitral and Gilgit were:

- Shah Baber son of Shah Qazil ruled this region Circa 1630 CE
- Shah Rais son of Shah Baber ruled this region Circa 1660 CE
- Shah Nasir Rais Son of Shah Tahir ruled this region Circa 1670 CE
- Shah Mahmood Son of Shah Nasir Ruled this region Circa 1741 CE
- Shah Abdul Qadir Son of Shah Mahmood ruled this region Circa 1762 CE

It is mentioned in Nayi Tarikh Chitral by Ghulam Murtaza while writing about “Syed” family of Rech Chitral who were the descendants of Shah Wasi “Syed Wasi Muhmmad came to Chitral during the regime of Rais rulers. He was married to the sister of Shah Babar, her name was Saman Begam. Shah Baber was the ruler of Gilgit his name cannot be found in the names of the Rais rulers who ruled Chitral” [17]. Before that Mirza Ghufuran in Tarikh-e-Chitral Farsi says “after a lot of efforts I ascertained these names of Rais rulers who ruled this region are Shah Abdul Qadir, Shah Mahmood, Shah Nasir, Shah Tahir, Shah Akber, Shah Nizam, Shah Karam, Khan Rais, Jan Rais, and Shah Nadir” [16]. In New Tarikh Chitral, Ghulam Murtaza (Son of Mirza Ghufuran) gives brief details about these Raisa rulers and discussed the events of their era but the dates mentioned in Nayi Tarikh Chitral contradict with some contemporary sources, even the dates contradict with Mirza Ghufuran’s Tarikh Chitral Farsi (1921 CE). In Nayi Tarikh Chitral written by Ghulam Murtaza in his preparatory notes stated “In 1940 CE when Mehtar Nasir Mulk was ruling Chitral, he started research on the

earlier dynasties before Katoor”[17]. The first two Chapters of Nayi Tarikh Chitral was based on a research of Mehtar Nasir ul Mulk. Mehtar Nasir ul Mulk work on history has mostly relied on the history of Hashmat Ullah Khan “Tarikh Jammu”. There are six other historical documents available in the house near Gumbad Raisan with the descendants Baba Adam 1741 CE, a Qazi (Muslim Judge) during Rais rulers. One of his descendants has been interviewed and he said “my grandfather told us these documents were twelve Mehtar Nasir ul Mulk took them and only six of them were given back to our family” [18]. Another Chronicler Wolfgang Holzwarth’s research on Chitral history is considered as most authentic research amongst the modern researcher, he stated “The first and second chapter in Nayi Tarikh Chitral on the country and on ancient history is written by Nasir ul Mulk. In writing the second chapter the author does not try to present ancient history within a narrow and unbroken chronological frame but restricts his account to a few glimpses and dates supported by his research. This is the style of Nasir ul Mulk works” [19]. Holzwarth Work on the ancient history of Chitral and Gilgit through the contemporary sources was of a good standard and his access to different contemporary sources make his work the most astonishing work on the history of Chitral however his work contradicts some oral traditions, local historians and couldn’t avoid confusion amongst the era of Shah Babar, Shah Rais, and Shah Nasir. After the Rais dynasty, this region was ruled by the descendant of Sangeen Ali I. Siyar in his Shah Nama says,

رئيسان شد ند از جهان نا پد يد به سنگين علي
خيل نوبت رسيد

مرزا سير

“Rais are vanished from this world (region) and the descendants of Sangeen Ali regime had come, this is the principle of nature that no one could remain in the same position forever” [20]. Later the Katoor and khushwakht rulers adopted and continued the Islamic reforms

which were introduced in this region by Rais rulers. The collective burial tombs of Dakhma or Gumbad were never followed in the region of Chitral after the end of Rais rulers. It also gives an idea of ethnological differences between the Rais, Katoor, and Khushwakht dynasties.

HISTORIANS AND ARCHEOLOGISTS WORK ON COLLECTIVE BURIALS IN CHITRAL AND GILGIT

When we look to the local sources of Chitral, Shah Nama of Mirza Siyar is the earliest source of mentioning “Gumad Raisan”. Mirza Siyar pointing the location and says “Gumbad Raisan is situated between Chew (Chew Dok or Chew Bridge) and Bazar (Jang Bazar) [20]. Mirza Siyar mostly ignored Rais dynasty in his Shahnama but while discussing the war between Mehtar Shah Nawaz and Shah Khair Ullah (Descendants of Sangeen Ali I Circa 1680 CE) [21], which was held in Gumbad Raisan Circa 1766 CE, Mirza Siyar deliberately illustrated the event through the couplets in his Shah Nama Siyar. In the early 20th century, another local Chronicler Mirza Ghufuran depicted Gumbad Raisan as “Dhakhma” which was located in Goldoor a village attached to Chitral Gol national park. Mirza Ghufuran wrote in 1919 CE “The sepulchers of Rais Rulers were located near to the northern part of Chitral city Nala (stream), the Rais rulers were considered as Muslim but I’m surprised that their burials are discovered as “Dakhma” a cellar with wall niches about the size of human bodies on each side. The corpses of the Rais rulers were placed in those niches. When the new rulers were about to die, they took the previous ruler’s bones from the niches and put their bones into the ground (An Ossuary, in early ages Zoroastrians used a deep well for it and called it austudan) and the new corpses were placed in the niches. This Dakhma had one door, from the ground four stairs are made to go to the cellar. The dome was made up of bricks and one manuscript of the holy Quran was placed in the small niche in the doom, sepulchers

keepers were appointed there and lands were given to them to cultivate (The descendants of those Gumbad keepers still lives in Goldoor). This place was called Gumbad Raisan, today we can only find the ruins of that dome, the door of the Dakhma is obdurate, only the bricks can be found in the ruins that are of the best quality. (Later those bricks were used in the building of Shahi Mosque Chitral)” [16]. It can be surmised from the above statement that Mirza Ghufran had visited that Dhakma before it was demolished. There is an oral tradition that this Gumbad was demolished on order of the Mehtar H.H Shuja Ul Mulk of Katoor dynasty possibly before 1912 CE, Mirza Ghufran also found documents regarding the genealogical tree of Rais rulers inside Gumbad Raisan. Mirza Ghufran called the Gumbad as Dakhma and later the similar collective burials were called Dakhma in Chitral. German anthropologist Adolf Friedrich named the collective burials of this region as “Totenhaus” (house of the dead) [22]. Professor Karl Jettmar called them “collective tombs of the Islamic period”. In some other place Karl Jettmar mentioned the impact of the Sacian (North Iranian) tradition of collective burials [10], [23], [24]. Dr. Ahmad Hassan Dani writes “The origin of the medieval Gilgit rulers inlined to the fictitious story of the Sussanian Prince Azur Jamsheed who fled his country on the advance of the Arabs. If this story has any truth, the medieval rulers of Gilgit should be Zoroastrians at least in the beginning. Another evidence comes from the survival of many Gumbad Raisan (One Such multiple burial tombs can be seen at Bubur and Second at Yasin- Professor Jettmar), which is a collective burial of the bones after exposure. This old practice was followed by the rulers right up to the nineteenth century even they had accepted Islam” [25]. It can be assumed that

Gumbad Raisan was the manifestation of the merged custom, ritual, and architecture of Persian Islamic identity. It was the first Muslim burial model introduced in the region of Pagans by the Rais Rulers, which were later adopted by other elites of the region the ruins of such mausoleums can be seen in Upper Gahkuch, Punyal other parts of Gilgit as well. They never exposed the corpse to birds and dogs like Zoroastrian rituals but they were only placing the dead bodies in underground cellars to be decomposed. Some burial complex of Muslim rulers of Kokand Khanate rulers of Ferghana Uzbekistan later in the 19th century had also adopted the term Dakhma for their collective burial and known as “Dakhmai-Shakhan” [9]. “These burial rituals were only performed by the rulers (Rais) later some elite class also adopted from them and performed the Dhakhma, these Dakhma were located in Sakht Mulkho and many other places in Chitral” [26]. Some of the primary sources on Chitral history ignored Gumbad Raisan which had significant archaeological importance in Chitral, Britishers during their Colonial rule in their intelligence notes and gazetteers from Dr. G.W Leitner (1866 CE) to Lieutenant B.E.M Gurdon (1903CE) ignored the facet of Gumbad Raisan, Maybe the Rais identities had no importance for British Raj or probably Britishers did not want to highlight Central Asian influences in region of Chitral. “Chitral was an area closely connected and deeply linked with Central Asian amirates and khanates for many centuries. The people of this area looked towards Kashghar, Bukhara, Tashkent, Samarqand, and Kabul at time of peace and crisis... The British influence closed all the doors opening to the west and north. It linked Chitral with east and southwest, providing for its new relation with Kashmir and India” [27].



Figure 3: Dom Ra Gumbati burial during 1964 by K.Jettmar -

CONCLUSION

The Gumbad Raisan situated in Goldoor was a grand collective dynastic Dakhma of the Islamic model of Rais Rulers introduced in the land of Pagans. It was the manifestation of merged Persian Islamic rituals and architectures. In Chitral, the ruins of collective burial tombs cannot be seen or recognized in modern days but in the areas of Punyal, Upper Gahkuch and Yasin the burial traditions of Islamic models of Dakhmas or Gumbati probably adopted and followed by people and courtiers close to Rais rulers and the ruins can be seen in the area. It can also be assumed that the Rais ruler introduced the Islamic model of burial in Gilgit region as well, before that in Gahkuch and Punyal there were traditions of putting dead bodies in caves and rivers. Those mausoleums of early Islamic burials found in the region of Gilgit were made up of stones, wood, and clay but Gumbad Raisan in Chitral Goldoor was made up of bricks of high quality and it was a prominent architecture of their time, which gives a depiction of the social status of belonging of those cemeteries. Gradually the people of this region shifted to the burial of proper Arabic or Islamic style. Chitral was a gateway between Central Asia and South Asia, this place had invaded and influenced by many different civilizations and trade caravans from time to time. Many archeological findings of rock carvings and graveside give evidences that this place was the passage of many different ethnic groups.

Further, the combination of linguistic, anthropological, and archeological researches can give clearer descriptions. Systematic excavation and archeological research should be performed to understand the cultural history of the eastern Hindu Kush.

بدہ ساقیا، بر من آب تاک
تودہ خاک
کز ان آب بہتر ندید است کس
بس
کہ خوبی دنیا ہمان است
مرزا سیر

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