…s of narrow track much of it ha… out of … ces along the banks of the Indus. For a few mo… summ… t cut as possible, from Chilas to Balakot by wa… This must be one of the most extraordinary main ro… tly one jeep wide and rising from 3,000 feet at Chilas … the Babusar Pass. I flew in to Gilgit but, because of cloud (no … repared to risk flying blind into Nanga Parbat), I had to come … by jeep. It took thirty-six hours to cover the 200 miles to Balakot along a track thronged with jeeps, camels, donkeys and human porters. My jeep carried five passengers and half a ton of rice. Its radiator leaked and its starter would not work. Twice on the journey we ran out of petrol, and had to borrow or beg from others. Sitting in the place of honour on the outside I often had an uninterrupted view of the Indus and Kagan rivers, the latter on occasions more than 5,000 feet sheer below the ledge which passed for a road.

The jeep road from West Pakistan to Gilgit continues northwards for… ty miles to Hunza where it stops. Another 100 miles on, and the crossing of a pass only a little higher than the Babusar Pass, and the road would reach China. Indeed, this is the only possible line of direct communication between China and Pakistan. However, I could find no evidence while in the Northern Areas to suggest that there is a serious plan to open up such a road; and it was clear that at present, beyond meetings of frontier patrols, there is no contact at all between China and this northernmost region of Pakistani administration. The traders who used to come down from Kashgar have not come since 1950.

While awaiting a Kashmir plebiscite and the final settlement of the international status of the Northern Areas, the Pakistani administration has initiated a number of projects for the economic development of the region. There is, for example, a trout hatchery near Gilgit which may well turn these valleys into a fisherman's paradise. In 1964 the Gilgit hydroelectric power station, with 400 kW output and German equipment, was opened. There are irrigation schemes in hand to increase the region's very limited area of land capable of cultivation. Subsidised air freight fills the shops in the Gilgit and Skardu bazaars and brings out the local exports of dried apricots, almonds and other agricultural produce. It is intended soon to open a tannery near Gilgit. All this is without doubt welcomed by the Gilgitis and Baltis, who would certainly vote for Pakistan were the opportunity presented to them.

FURTHER EXPEDITIONS TO THE VALLEYS OF THE ASSASSINS

P. R. E. WILLEY

In September of 1966 I returned from leading my seventh expedition to Iran. During this time I was engaged in research into the location and history of the castles of the Nizari Ismailis or "Assassins". My first expedition had taken place during the summer vacation of 1959, with a team consisting mainly of Oxford undergraduates. Our plan had been to follow in the footsteps of Freya Stark, but in the course of our travels we succeeded in discovering the site of Maymun-Diz, where in 1256 the Assassin dream of the domination of Islam, which had lasted for over 2… years, was shattered for ever by defeat at the hands of Hulagu Khan and his Mongol armies. This first discovery was to open a new chapter in my life as a public school housemaster and to take me thousands of miles into remote country in search of further Assassin castles.

The Assassins were a branch of the Ismailis who under their leader Hasan-i-Sabbah succeeded at the close of the eleventh century in taking possession of a number of fortresses in various parts of Persia and Syria. Their headquarters were situated at the castle of Alamut in the Elburz mountains north of Tehran, and here were trained under the influence of hashish the fearless and resourceful *fida'is* or disciples who were sent out to spread terror and confusion among the leaders of the orthodox Sunni Moslems by assassination with the dagger. So effective were these methods that it seemed at one moment as though medieval Islam might indeed be brought under the control of this powerful and radical religious-political movement. But after the Mongol victory their importance immediately disappeared, and eventually many adherents of the faith moved to India. Here the sect increased rapidly through the centuries, both in numbers and respectability; it is now headed by the Aga Khan, whose only link with the old Assassin chiefs at Alamut is a historical and religious one.

During the summers of 1960, 1961 and 1963 I continued to explore the castles in Alamut and the neighbouring mountain valleys and was able to give an account of what had so far been achieved in my book *The Castles of the Assassins*. In 1965 it was clear that the time had come for me to transfer my attention to the mountainous province of Khorasan in the East of Iran, where it was known that a large area had been under Assassin control and had indeed formed the third part of the loosely constructed Assassin State—Syria and Alamut itself forming the other two provinces. But a sudden and violent outbreak of cholera in the area forced me to change my plans at the very last moment and instead my expedition moved south, where we were able to do some very useful exploratory work on the

isolated Assassin fortress of Kh[illegible]ze, or Gird Castle, which together with Shah-Diz had defied the [illegible] the [illegible]y of Isfahan.

Qaleh Khan-e-Lenjan, to give [illegible] name, lies seventeen miles as the crow flies to the sou[illegible] castle crowns the top of a long mountain ridge round [illegible] flows on its way to the city. It thus dominates the bend in the [illegible] and the broad fertile valleys it irrigates—a pattern we were to find constantly repeated in our discoveries in Khorasan in 1966. The fortified area is 1,460 feet long and 1,140 feet above the floor of the valley at its highest point. At the narrowest neck the ridge does not exceed ten feet in width and at its tip it drops away to a relatively accessible lower fortress. Judging from the pottery we recovered on the site it seems probable that the most important occupation period of the castle was round about A.D. 1100, when the Assassins were known to be in possession of Shah-Diz, the great palace-fort literally overlooking the city of Isfahan, the enemy capital. The earliest recovered pottery is ninth and tenth century, which again fits into the known pattern whereby the Assassins took over, usually by trickery, an already existing castle and either rebuilt or enlarged it. Some of the buildings were probably used quite recently.

The fortress consists of the High Citadel, the Central Fortifications and the Lower Fortress. The High Citadel comprises the area of the summit ridge, here running NW–SE, and measures 291 feet along its axis and fifty-three feet across its greatest width. The cliffs to the north-east and south-east are almost a sheer drop of between 500 and 700 feet. The main building is a keep in the form of a rectangular tower (thirty by eighteen feet overall), with walls five feet thick, plastered externally with mud and internally with a gypsum type of plaster. The citadel's main use was probably that of a look-out post, for it commands views of up to ten miles to the south and six miles in other directions except to the north-west where the mountain ridge behind blinds it. The High Citadel may have been used as a final defensive position where the desperate *fida'is* would make their last stand (Juvaini relates such an incident in the closing phases of the seige of Maymun-Diz), but there are few traces of other supporting buildings in the vicinity.

The Central Fortifications guard the main approach to the High Citadel and provide the garrison buildings. These consist of a substantial block-house, a great cistern which may also have carried a gate-house above, two redoubts and further garrison buildings. These are all enclosed by curtain walls and turrets. The Lower Fortress forms an entity in itself: stone walls have been built round the perimeter so that the whole forms a Bailey. The main building is the Keep, probably the residence of the ruling governor, which commands a splendid view of the valley, and there are the remains of numerous other buildings which served either as barrack blocks or residential quarters. The whole complex is built on a much larger and more magnificent scale than the castles in the Alamut Valley and great attention was paid to solving the problems of international communications.

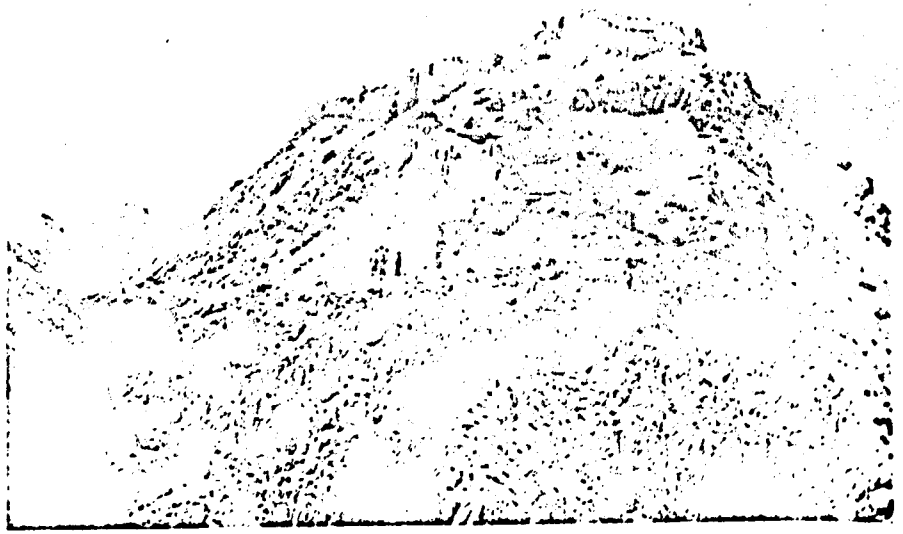
The site of Qaleh Khan-e-Lenjan has been known for two or three years and the Lower Fortress has been visited, notably by Dr. Minasian

of Isfahan who has done a great deal of work on Shah-Diz, the more famous sister-fortress at Isfahan, and Dr. S. M. Stern of All Souls', who has given me much valuable assistance in my own work. But we were able to make the first fairly complete surface record, under the patient and skilled direction of Miss Elizabeth Beazley who accompanied me as architect, and to explore the Central Fortifications and High Citadel, which demanded of my team no mean skill and courage. It is clear that the castle played an important part in the Assassin occupation of the area though we have yet to establish its precise relationship with Shah-Diz.

In 1966 the danger from cholera had subsided and I was able to set out once more with another expedition, half British, half Iranian, for Khorasan. Two members of the 1965 expedition accompanied me again—Ivor Newby, my deputy leader and photographer, and Andrew Dobson, surveyor, and we were joined by Nicholas Stainforth, Stephen Remington and David Lewis. The Iranian contingent was made up of Mr. Zahedani, our supervisor from the Museum of Iran Bastan in Tehran, and Mr. Ghobad Vassei, a well-known Iranian mountaineer. Our vehicles and much equipment were lent to us by the National Iranian Oil Company and the Iranian Oil Operating Companies. Our aim was to locate, survey and photograph Assassin castles in the south-eastern area of Khorasan with special reference to three castles reported by Professor Herzfeld in 1926 to be near the town of Qa'in and which, according to Professor Herzfeld's informants, were of massive proportions. The medieval name of this province was Quhistan, or region of mountains, and it contained within its borders part of Western Afghanistan including the ancient city of Herat. The average height of the area above sea-level is some 4,500 feet: the highest valleys are 7,000 feet. Large parts of it are now arid desert and mountains, although at the time of the Assassins the irrigation system was probably sufficient to support a considerable population in the valleys. There is one main dust road, corrugated and indescribably uncomfortable to travel on even in Land Rovers, running south from Meshed to Birjand and thence to Zahedan in Baluchistan. Our journey took us first across the top of the great salt desert from Tehran to Meshed. On the way we examined the great Assassin fortress of Gird Kuh, which according to a picturesque but improbable legend held out for some thirty years after the main Assassin castles had surrendered to the Mongols and eventually capitulated solely because the garrison was unable to replace their worn-out clothing! After a reception by the Governor-General of Khorasan in the Shrine Residence of Meshed we quickly moved south to Qa'in where we at once set to work to survey the imposing castle which, like so many other Assassin fortresses, dominates the town and surrounding valley. At the time of the Assassin uprising in 1090 the district around Qa'in was already seething with discontent at the abuses practised by the local Sunni governors, and under the competent leadership of Husayn Qa'ini the town soon became the centre of Assassin activities in the area and the castle the residence of the Assassin governor. General directives were probably sent from Alamut but in a short time Quhistan became an important and increasingly independent part of the Assassin state.

The castle itself stands upon a promontory of rock 810 feet high and is

WESTERN OUTER WALLS OF THE SMALLER CASTLE AT SERDOUS. ITS LOCATION, OVERLOOKING A FERTILE VALLEY WITH WATER, IS TYPICAL OF AN ASSASSIN CASTLE..



THE CASTLE AT QA'IN, TAKEN FROM THE DAUGHTER FORT OF CHEHEL DUKTAR.

facing page 158

THE INHABITANTS OF SARAB ARE NOTED FOR THEIR LONGEVITY; THIS OLD MAN, SEEN WITH HIS WIFE, IS REPUTED TO BE 130.

THREE WISE MEN OF QA'IN, SPINNING THREAD; THE TWO ON THE LEFT ARE OVER 100.

divided into three sections, to which we now gave the traditional names of the High Citadel, Central Fortifications and Lower Fortress. In this respect it is similar to Qal'eh-i-Khan-e-Lajan, but the angle of slope is gentler and the castle is in consequence somewhat easier to explore. It is also bigger, and apart from [illegible], now largely submerged by the waters built up behind the new dam at Manjil and which was really a city, this is the largest Assassin castle I know. From the outer fort called Chehel Duktar, situated on the mountains to the south of the castle, it is a most impressive sight. The High Citadel is probably the oldest part. It is bean-shaped and about 800 feet along its central axis. The width is more or less uniform at fifty–sixty feet. Apart from the north-east side, where the main entrance is protected by a massive bastion, the mountain slopes sharply away. The curtain walls are eight feet thick and strengthened at intervals by turrets. The High Citadel has its own water supply consisting of great cisterns. The inside measurements of a typical one were 15½ feet long 8½ feet wide and 12 feet deep. They are plastered with the gypsum compound still used today and were roofed over. Perhaps the finest examples of water cisterns are at Gird Kuh near Damghan, but Qa'in is not far behind. There are extensive remains of buildings in the High Citadel area, but in the time available we were unable to do more than make a rough ground plan.

The Central Fortifications, built on a saddle of the promontory, form the Achilles heel of the castle and were accordingly fortified with a double outer wall. The path leading from the Lower Fortress to the High Citadel passed through two gate-houses. These had clearly been constructed at a later date as the walls were not bonded into the main fortifications. A notable feature was the existence of two or three sally-ports which led down a narrow defile to the floor of the valley below. The Lower Fortifications enclosed a great residential area, filled with the rubble of shattered buildings.

The castle had been evacuated and then destroyed on the orders of Hulagu Khan along with all other Assassin fortresses after the surrender of the last Grand Master, Rukn-ad-Din, at Maymun-Diz, but we were told a fascinating variant of the legend of the Trojan Horse whereby, probably before the Assassin era, the Governor of Herat had been enabled to gain possession of the castle. The rivalry between Qa'in and Herat is a long-standing one and there are still traces of this today. Four separate cisterns provided the water supply in this area, and at the end of the ridge well-preserved stables marked the end of the old mule-track. Defensive mangonels were probably set up at this point though we did not find the piles of spent mangonel shots we had discovered at one point at Gird Kuh. Nor has Qa'in the elaborate outer defence system of encircling walls and forts that are so striking a feature of Gird Kuh, but it must be remembered that the latter castle is completely isolated—the nearest Assassin castle was at Alamut itself some three hundred miles away—whereas Qa'in overlooks and controls the broad valley in which the town is situated. Even now the immediate area round the town is fairly fertile. It has a population of 7,000 and there is plenty of good water. Assuming that the Assassins, who were excellent agricultural engineers, had made the best

use of the available water supply, the Qa'in basin would have been the centre of a thriving community, well fortified and remote enough to discourage hostile expeditions sent against them.

We had clearly come across the centre of the old Assassin province of Quhistan and our finds of pottery confirmed us in this belief. Now we turned our attention to the surrounding countryside. Although we found some of the place names given by Professor Herzfeld's informants to be not entirely correct, conversation with the local headmen produced the information that more castles lay to the east of Qa'in, though their exact location was obscure. In the end we had to rely on relays of guides to take us to our destinations.

Our convoy of three Landrôvers first headed west to the village of Sarab, a name mentioned by Professor Herzfeld. There we found the ruins of a smallish castle overlooking the rim of Dasht-el-Kevir, the great salt desert that occupies most of the central part of Iran. We had already skirted this invading salt sea on our route out from Tehran to Meshed, and the sight of it can offer comfort to no man. Seen from the heights of the surrounding hills its edges are flecked with a white scum, the glare is intense and the shrivelling heat made me think of Dante's Inferno. The inhabitants of Sarab are noted for their longevity, and we were introduced to a dignified old man of 130 who in turn presented us to his second wife, a mere chicken of 100. From Sarab we returned to the village of Sedeh on the main Birjand–Meshed road, admired its Shah Abbas castle, which had nothing to do with the Assassins, and then headed east towards the Afghan border. The road soon petered out, and although we kept mostly to dried-up river beds the going soon became very difficult. No vehicle had passed this way before, but the villagers were only too willing to clear a track for us and temporarily remove obstructions like overhead irrigation pipes. As we climbed upwards into the mountains we came across villages that had been semi-fortified for generations as a protection against invading Afghan bands or marauding private armies. We could not have been given a more friendly reception despite the poverty of the inhabitants or the serious shortage of food and water. The aspect of the countryside, apart from the all too infrequent villages, is utterly arid and desolate. Innumerable flocks of goats consume the sparse vegetation that has survived the consequences of natural desiccation during the course of the centuries. Firm soil occasionally gives way to treacherous sand, and the sight of abandoned villages is a frightening one. But there is one great hope for the future. In almost every village we met a member of the recently formed Literacy Corps, young men who spend the last eighteen months of their national service teaching the village children, planning and carrying out agricultural and constructional schemes and acting as advisers to the village elders. They are splendid representatives of young Iran, and their work cannot be too highly praised. The Governor of the Province, who is a tough and realistic soldier, sees these problems clearly, and his plans for the future development of the area are largely concerned with better conservation and utilization of water. Land reform at the moment plays little part in Khorasan; effective economic measures must come before political reform however desirable the latter may be,

and the big landowners must be made to discharge their responsibilities. They have the means to improve the standard of living, and fragmentation of estates would in these circumstances be a positive disservice.

Information about the castles we were seeking was plentiful, and each new day seemed to bring to light another castle. It soon became clear that the whole area, especially the more remote mountain valleys, had been strongly fortified. Some of the castles had been almost completely destroyed by the Mongols; others had been recently quarried to provide building materials for new schools and bath-houses erected by the villagers under the direction of the Literacy Corps. But the larger fortresses, although badly damaged, are still an imposing sight. Again and again we were astonished at the intricate system of water storage cisterns—huge vaulted chambers cut out of the solid rock and lined with plaster. Four or five interconnected cisterns normally formed the basic plan, and in addition springs had often been diverted from some miles away to bring fresh piped water into the castles. These castles were often of much the same size as, for example, Warwick; and the ones we discovered at Unik, Ahangeran and little Tabas all conformed to the same basic pattern—a castle dominating and protecting an enclosed valley amply provided with water and thus able to be the centre of an economically viable and independent community, jealous of its position, infused with a new and radical political and religious faith and yet conscious of belonging to a much wider movement. Allegiance to Alamut there certainly was, for Alamut had imposed not only the central faith but had set the example of the physical organization of the component parts of the Assassin state centred around the castles, but there must have been plenty of scope for local pride and initiative as well.

At the end of our stay in this part of the province we called on the Mullah of Khosk, a local Ismaili leader of great importance. Sitting in his vineyard we discussed the present position of the Ismaili communities in the area. There are still some thriving Ismaili villages although their number is slowly dwindling; their inhabitants are the descendants of men who took part in the Assassin uprising and they still cling tenaciously to their faith in the midst of a largely hostile world. We were told also of Arab communities living in the district of Sunnikhane. Most of the communities we visited gain a precarious living by carpet-making—Birjand is the local centre of the trade—or sometimes earning a handsome profit from illegal opium-smuggling across the frontier. The government is bringing industry to the region by building sugar factories and service roads.

Our last visit in Khorasan was to Ferdows, where there are two Assassin castles of considerable significance as well as the remains of a Mongol palace which compares most unfavourably with contemporary Assassin buildings. We returned to Tehran by way of a storm-tossed and most uninviting Caspian Sea and were able to round off our expedition by the discovery of the site of the important Assassin stronghold of Sarjahan near the great tomb-mosque of Sultaneyeh. This was probably the westernmost fortress of the Alamut complex, including Samiran, and although the castle itself is almost a complete ruin we were rewarded by

the numerous and varied sherds of pottery and glass we were able to recover from the site. A fleeting return visit to Alamut along the new road from Qazvin, which still picturesquely ends in the middle of the river, rounded off the expedition. We had covered over 3,000 miles in Iran, taken over 1,000 photographs, and made four major survey plans.

Nevertheless, as far as Khorasan is concerned we had still only scratched the surface of what must now be regarded as a very significant part of the Assassin State. And in addition we must begin, I think, to reassess our picture of the Assassin movement as a whole, which for far too long now has rested on the legends purveyed by von Hammer in his *Geschichte der Assassinen* published in 1818. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that these men were not mere drug addicts or cruel Islamic revolutionaries who had banded themselves together in a secret society. On the contrary their buildings bear witness to their intelligence and resourcefulness, their husbandry to their awareness of economic facts, and their way of life to a vigour and freshness rare in any period of history. Their use of assassination as a political weapon must also be viewed against the prevailing climate of opinion of the times. Human life, then as now, counted often for very little in the propagation of an ideal. And as I said in the *Castles of the Assassins*, it is undeniable that at a time when Islam was weakened and disrupted by internal conflicts as well as by a pervading apathy, many believed that the strong leadership, order, and discipline offered by the Nizari Ismailis would bring badly needed peace and unity. Nor was their art negligible in the field of ceramics and literature. The library at Alamut, subsequently destroyed by the Mongols to prevent the spread of "heresy", testifies to a high degree of culture. The time has surely come for a scientific reappraisal of our highly coloured, and for the most part wildly romantic notions. If my expeditions have contributed in some small measure towards such a reappraisal I shall be well satisfied.