Researching Performing Arts in Badakhshan

Relatively few academic studies have commented on Badakhshan Province in northern Afghanistan. During the period of the political ‘Great Game’ between Tsarist Russian and British spheres of influence in the 19th century, British and Russian adventure-style officers occasionally returned with reports. Last century, a number of German, Russian, Austrian, Swiss, as well as a few Danish, French, American and Afghan researchers discussed Badakhshan in terms of various academic fields ranging from history, anthropolog, ethnomusicology, geography, and linguistics, to geology, botany, and mountaineering. All of these accounts refer to conditions prior to the Communist coup in April 1978. Recent fieldwork experiences in Badakhshan (1998 and 1999) have allowed an examination of the impact of Afghanistan’s civil war upon cultural traditions, particularly those involving performance, notably music and dance.

Bruce Koepe is a research scholar at the Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies (the Middle East and Central Asia), The Australian National University, and is currently completing his doctoral dissertation on performance traditions in northern Afghanistan.

E-mail: bruce.koepe@anu.edu.au