

# Documentation of Three Forts in Gilgit-Baltistan

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## 2. Mir's Winter Palace, Gulmit, Hunza

Gulmit (altitude 2500 m) is headquarters of Gojal Tehsil, in upper Hunza region. Gojal, the area along the upper Hunza River between Central Hunza and the Khunjerab Pass, lies in the heart of the Karakoram where glaciers course right to the Karakoram Highway's (KKH) edge. Outside Baltistan, Gojal is the Karakoram's most extensively glaciated region. Gojal contains some of the Karakoram's most dramatic scenery, and certainly the most accessible. Gojal with a population of more than 15,000 is home to Wakhi people who centuries ago settled in the area after migrating from Pamirs.

Gulmit has had a historical significance in the history of Hunza. It is believed that Mir Qutlugh the first Mir of Gulmit Gojal constructed a simple watch tower to monitor the area in 15th century. He was the first Wakhi ruler to establish rule in Gulmit, threatening the Mirs of Hunza. He then constructed Ondra Fort above Gulmit on the top of Ondra plateau. This fort which once overlooked settlements of Gulmit and Ghulkin, now lies abandoned in a ruinous *Location map of Gulmit* state on top of the hill.

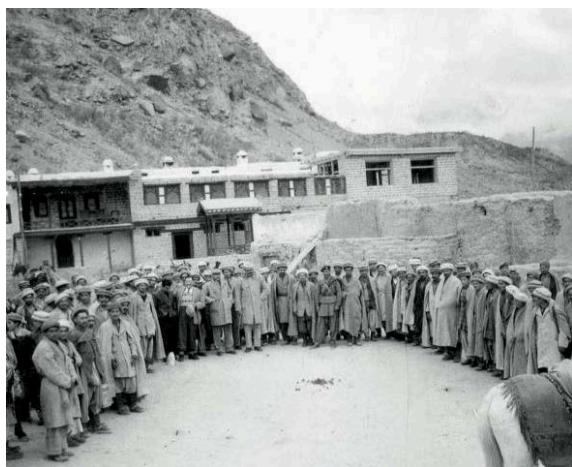


*Location map of Gulmit*

When Gojal came under the rule of Mirs (rulers) of Hunza, they turned it into their winter capital. Gulmit and the area around it have always been favoured for farming and raising livestock. Compared with central Hunza, there is larger percentage of arable land available, the trees and crops are good, the water for irrigation abundant and the climate is sunny and sheltered. Major portion of revenues to the rulers, which in those days used to be in the form of agricultural produce and cattle, came from this part of

the state, thus by turning it into their winter seat, the rulers ensured adequate supply of food during the stark winter months.

In 1852 disaster flushed away most of the lower part of Gulmit. Around 1870 Mir Ghazan Khan - I constructed the Winter Residence at Gulmit - locally known as Mirs Malaa - so that he could stay there during his visit to the area in autumn and winter seasons. It was a single storeyed structure then. In 1960, Mir Muhammad Jamal Khan improved the Residence and added the first floor with renovation of the ground floor in preparation for the visit of the then president of Pakistan, General M. Ayub Khan. President Ayub Khan stayed in the Residence for few days. Mir's Winter Residence remained the camp office and residence of the Mirs till 1974, when state of Hunza was abolished by the Government of Pakistan.

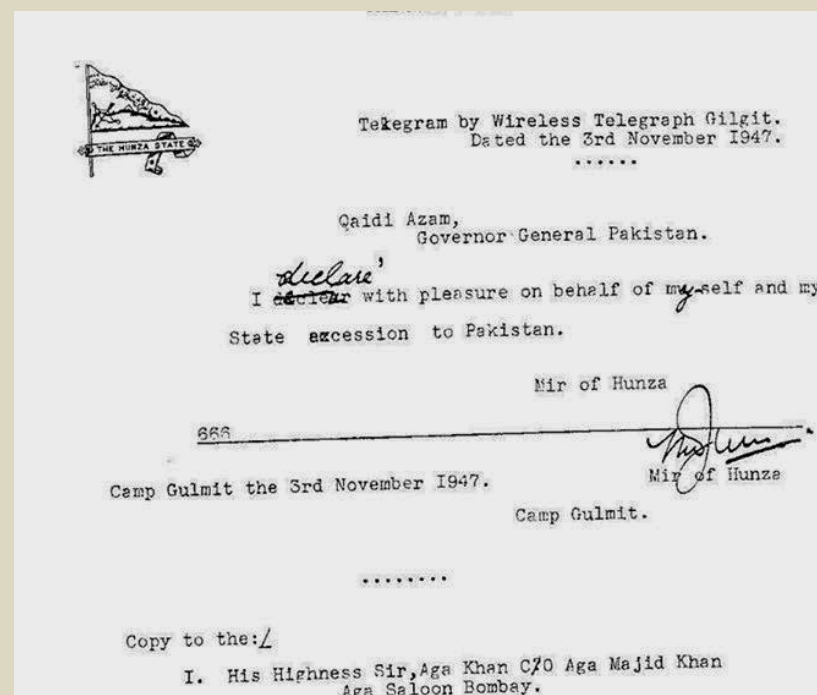


*visible in the background*

*Mir Jamal Khan of Hunza and area dignitaries photographed with the President of Pakistan in Gulmit polo ground in 1960. Mir's Winter Palace, where the President stayed during his visit, is*

Mir's Palace is at a prominent location facing the historic polo ground. This area of the town was washed out in a major landslide in 1852, and was then gradually re-built. Although polo is no longer played in the area, the ground still serves as the town's main public square. Located at the northern end of this open area, Mir's residence is built on a large piece of terraced land covering around 3,100 square metres. The main building is located at

At the time of partition of India in 1947, Gulmit attained a prominent position in the struggle for independence of the state of Hunza from Dogra Raj. It was here at his winter camp in Gulmit, that Mir of Hunza declared accession of the state to Pakistan in November 1947. Locally, in addition to the 14<sup>th</sup> August, being the Pakistan Day, 1<sup>st</sup> November is also celebrated as the day of independence.

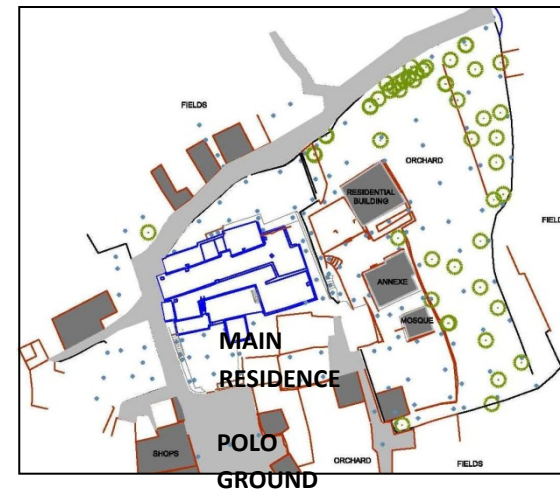


the highest point towards the western end and town side of the plot, while the eastern part has a terraced orchard having a small historic mosque and two annexes serving as residential quarters. The property is shared by Mir Ghazanfar Ali Khan with his younger brother Amin Khan.



*Satellite image of Gulmit showing location of Mir's Palace*

The Palace, as described earlier has been built in two stages. The ground floor, built around 1870, covers an area of 410 square metres. It is built around a central hall, traditionally known as *ha*, about 7 metre square and little over 3 metres high. Rooms are built around its three sides, while its front faces the courtyard. This courtyard also serves as the Mir's court to hold large gatherings. As in traditional construction, the walls are thick, made of rough hewn stone masonry,



the openings are few and small, with ample storage areas. The upper floor is accessed through an interior ladder and an outside open staircase.

*Site Plan showing Mir's Palace and surroundings*

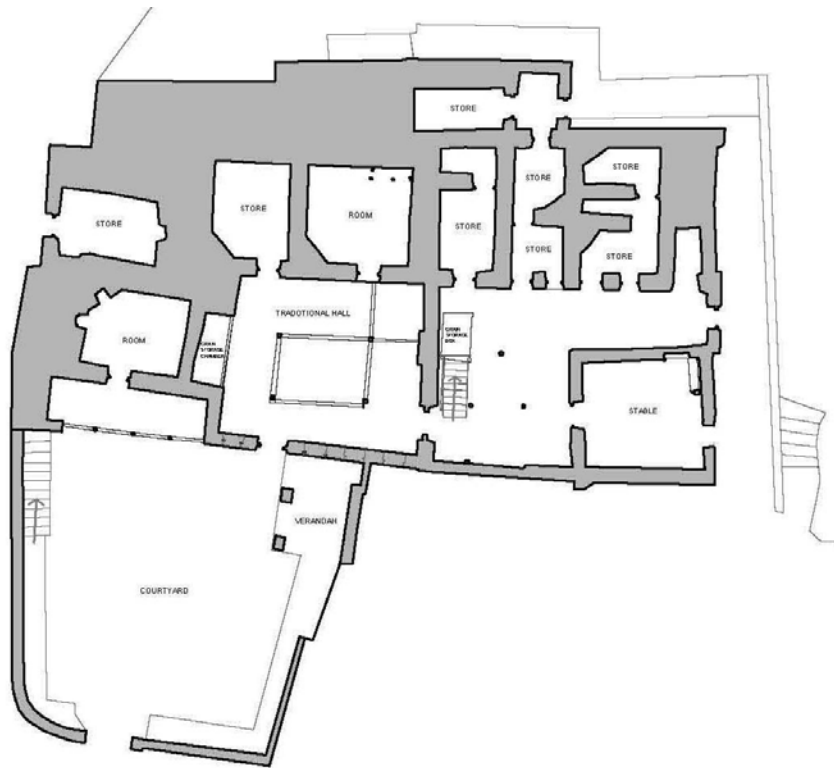
The upper floor was added around 1960 and comprises six sets of suites placed around a central terrace, which is right above the central hall below. The suites have been designed as two connecting rooms or a single room of about 4 metres square with a smaller room attached as a bath room. Each room has a fireplace and wooden doors and windows. There is one larger lounge termed as hall, a connecting corridor and a sun room towards the south.



*Views from the Palace towards the lake and the settlement*



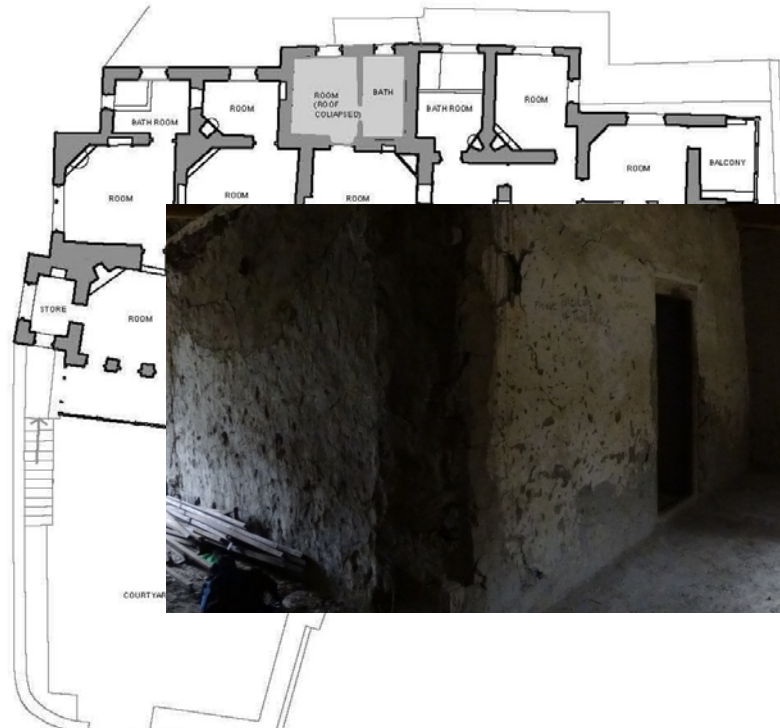
*Front (south) elevation*



*Ground Floor Plan*



*Cross section of the Palace*



*Northern façade of the Palace*

*Interior view of the Ground Floor*





*Southern (main) facade of the building showing courtyard in the foreground.*



These rooms are also built in stone masonry but the walls are comparatively less thick, about 60 cm, and have larger openings on all sides. The interior walls of the hall are wood panelled, while the exterior walls of the sunroom are entirely made of wood.

*Interior of the ha at Ground Floor*

The roofs are wooden as in traditional construction. The rooms at upper floor are of varying height, increasing from front to back, thus providing a terraced roof at the top.

Apparently, once the upper storey was built, this became the principal residential floor, while the major portion of the floor below was left to house the cattle and to be used for storage purposes.

*Another view of the ha at G Floor*

*Interior of the lounge at First Floor*



*View of the First Floor having rooms around the terrace*



The Palace is in fairly good structural condition although lack of maintenance and regular upkeep is showing its signs. Part of the top roof at northern end has collapsed, and the woodwork on the exterior is in need of maintenance. The Palace is presently not occupied.

Given Mir's Palace's historic significance and its position in a unique setting, this site was identified by AKCSP during their Heritage Tourism Circuit studies. The building which reflects both traditional and colonial architecture with pristine adjoining garden provides a perfect space which could be transformed into a residential retreat. Apart from this Palace's historic value, Gulmit also offers great views of Ata'abad Lake which is now a permanent feature of the area. Similarly Gulmit's proximity with Pamirs and the Chinese border, combined with its historic neighborhood with spectacular scenic cultural and natural beauty, all lending a great potential for social and

economic development that could bring prosperity to the entire region.



*One of the rooms at Ground Floor presently being used as a store*





*Historic mosque in the Palace orchard*

*A small residential quarter within the orchard*

