

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE BAJIRS.

In the preceding chapters I have spoken of two or three excursions which I made to the desert lakes, for the purpose of ascertaining the best point to start from when crossing the sandy desert, that is to say, where the best use could be made of the level floor of the bajir depressions. But I obtained no positive result, for the conditions south-west of all these desert lakes were precisely the same: there was at least one bajir forming a continuation of each lake, so that it was immaterial where we made our start. After having myself visited, or had reconnoitred for me, all the large lakes, I finally chose a new route, by way of a lake which I had not seen, namely the little Tana-baghladi-köl.

Upon the purely practical side of my preparations for this journey I need not dwell, because I have already described them in the popular account of my travels. I will only say here, that we carried with us from the river a plentiful supply of ice, for we did not expect to find water in the interior of the desert, as also a supply of fuel, for in all probability the desert would be absolutely barren. The caravan consisted of seven camels, four men, and two dogs, though we also took with us one horse by way of experiment. The men tramped the entire distance on foot, and I only rode along the bajirs.

From what we had already seen of the desert from the river — a region majestic in its desolation and studded with the lofty dunes which I have already described — we fully anticipated a hard and difficult journey; indeed I was quite prepared to lose the whole of my caravan, as I did in the Takla-makan in 1895. That the expedition turned out beyond expectation successful must be attributed to the prevailing wind, and the advantageous manner in which it had disposed the big sand-waves.

According to the large map of the boundaries of Russian Asia, issued by the Topographical Division of the Russian General Staff, the distance from the Tarim at Tana-baghladi-köl and the imaginary town which Roborovskij heard speak of, and placed on an older bed of the Tschertschen-darja, amounted to 230 km., and from this latter point to Tatan was another 64 km.\* It is true, I hoped that we should

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\* According to the map which General Pjevtssoff gives in his book on his Tibetan expedition, the distance between the Tarim and Tatan is also 294 km.