

We made Camp No. XV at Bulak-baschi, where, as the name indicates, the first springs are situated. The altitude amounts to 3922 m., indicating a pretty considerable fall of the valley down to the Kum-köl. On the 27th July, after proceeding a short distance south from the first two small pools beside the springs, we subsequently travelled for the rest of the day west-north-west along the northern edge of the drift-sand. On our right we had an uninterrupted string of marshes and pools, containing bright, fresh spring water, and all more or less connected together by means of short sounds or streams. Even when the water did not actually lie on the surface, the ground was so soft and moist that we sank into it, and consequently we had to march quite close to the edge of the sand, sometimes crossing small off-

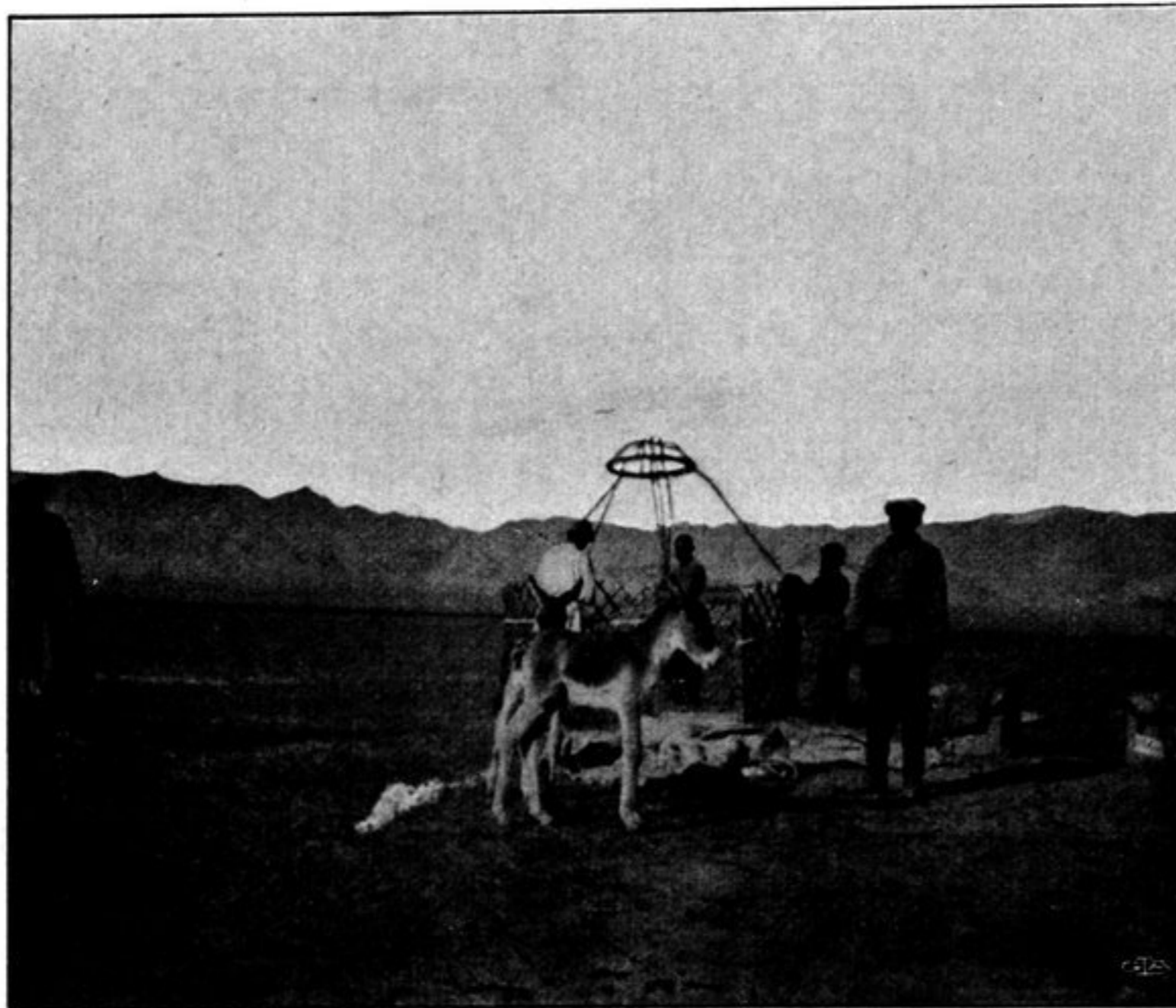


Fig. 51. VIEW LOOKING NORTH FROM BULAK-BASCHI.

shoots from it. To ride across the marshes would be impossible at that season. This paludal region derives its water from innumerable springs, which gush out some from underneath the sand, others from the faces of the terrace-like ledges and platforms of the earthy foundation upon which the dunes have accumulated, and which is soft, moist, and clothed with grass. Of the former class of feeders six were in especial of some size, each of them carrying, I dare say, a volume of $1\frac{1}{2}$ cub.m. in the second. These small watercourses are to be regarded as ordinary brooks flowing in the usual eroded channels on the surface, the peculiarity being that for a considerable part of their course they are smothered in drift-sand, which without actually preventing their flow, naturally serves in a high degree to retard it. At the points where these underground streams emerge from beneath the sand, its otherwise regular contour is cut into by a pretty deep indentation. Nevertheless the water when it emerges is absolutely as bright as crystal, and not in the slightest degree muddied. All the same there must be fine dust in the sand, but the bases of the dunes which cover the basin have been unmoved and immovable for centuries,