

Modern
local
history.

From the time when the Hindukush region passed out of China's sphere of interest in the eighth century reliable historical records concerning Yāsīn and the adjoining valleys fail us for nearly a thousand years. The account of local history which Colonel Biddulph and others have gathered from oral tradition assumes a definite shape only with the advent to power, towards the end of the seventeenth or early in the eighteenth century, of the family, apparently of Badakhshān origin, from which are descended both the Katūr rulers of Chitrāl and the Khushwaqts originally established in Mastūj.¹⁰ The Khushwaqt branch appears very soon to have asserted its power over Yāsīn also; and owing to the superior capacity for war or for intrigue possessed by many of its members, the whole of the Gilgit valley likewise passed at different times under its temporary domination. There is no need to examine here the tangled web of a story in which struggles, marked uniformly by treachery and murder and waged between close relations or with members of the rival house of Chitrāl, prevailed right down to the close of the nineteenth century.¹¹ A few points, however, deserve mention. It is interesting to note that, as I have had occasion to point out elsewhere, we owe the earliest exact record connected with Khushwaqt rule in Mastūj and Yāsīn to Chinese intervention in 1749.¹² Traditions of Chinese or 'Kalmak' invasion still survive in Yāsīn, but are too vague to be fixed chronologically.

Advantages
of geo-
graphical
position.

Significance attaches to the fact that though the Yārkhun valley below and above Mastūj is the original seat of the Khushwaqt branch, yet Yāsīn was always preferred by them as a residence.¹³ This preference is fully accounted for by the advantages which Yāsīn offers by its geographical position and natural features. The fact that in its main valley open ground of comparatively great width extends for a distance of about forty miles would alone suffice to give it importance. There are here none of those narrow defiles, formed by precipitous spurs of rocky or vast debris shoots, which in other great valleys to the south of the main Hindukush greatly reduce the area of arable ground and render communication between them difficult. The glacier-fed waters of the Yāsīn river and its side streams make irrigation easy, and if considerable portions of the available ground are now left uncultivated, the cause is certainly not want of water but an inadequate population. The same high flanking ranges, showing peaks over 20,000 feet in height, which assure this abundant supply of water, also protect Yāsīn against attack on all sides except the south. There, too, as the account of Kao Hsien-chih's expedition shows, the Gilgit river, unfordable for the greater part of the year, serves as a very effective obstacle to invasion, especially as the extremely precipitous spurs on either side of the outlet of the Yāsīn river form flanking defences of exceptional strength.

Fertility
of soil,

That Yāsīn could, and once did, support far more than the present population, estimated at about five hundred families or about 4,700 souls, is proved by the extent of the ground capable of irrigation and by the fertility of the soil. The fact that the whole of the main valley from Darkōt village down to the point where it debouches opposite Gūpis lies at the moderate elevation of between 7,000 and a little over 9,000 feet would alone account for this fertility. But the north

¹⁰ Regarding this ruling family and its branches, cf. Biddulph, *Hindoo Kush*, pp. 150 sqq.; for the historical relations between Mastūj and Chitrāl, see also *Serindia*, i. pp. 41 sq.

¹¹ The succinct account contained in Biddulph, *Hindoo Koosh*, pp. 151 sqq., is usefully supplemented by the details relating to the period following the Sikh occupation of Gilgit given in the chapter on 'Gilgit History', in Drew, *Jummoo and Kashmir*; see particularly pp. 436 sq., 444 sqq., 450 sq.

Much exact information about the events of the latter half of the nineteenth century concerning Chitrāl and Gilgit is recorded in official Gazetteers, Mission Reports, &c. which are not yet accessible to the public.

¹² See *Serindia*, i. p. 33, relating to the notice in Klaproth, *Magasin asiatique*, i. p. 96.

¹³ Cf. Biddulph, *Hindoo Koosh*, p. 59. The permanent establishment of the Khushwaqts in Yāsīn dates from Ferāmorz, the son of the founder of the branch; cf. *ibid.*, p. 151.