

certain that the bridge across the river *So-i*, i. e. the Gilgit river, the timely destruction of which played so decisive a part in Kao Hsien-chih's successful operations against the Tibetans, must have stood in the close vicinity of the present Gūpis. The modern wire suspension bridge giving access to Yāsīn crosses the bed of the united Gilgit river almost opposite to Gūpis Fort. But in view of the considerable width of this bed,¹ of the big volume of water carried by the river during the greater part of the year, and of the materials available in this region, it is unlikely that any bridge other than a mere rope-bridge could have been constructed here before the days of modern engineering.

Rope-bridge
across
Gilgit river.

A rope-bridge of the old type such as is usual between Kashmīr and the Hindukush, constructed with ropes of twisted twigs, actually existed at Gūpis before 1895, and it is probably to a bridge of this kind that the Chinese record contained in Kao Hsien-chih's biography refers where it speaks of a 'pont de rotin'.² It is true that a rope-bridge would not have been practicable for the horses, or rather ponies, of a mounted force such as the Chinese account mentions as forming part of the Tibetan troops. But animals might be swum across the river, as they are elsewhere at the present time. Nor should the possibility be excluded of a bridge of a somewhat more substantial kind having been available at a point above the junction of the rivers of Yāsīn and Ghizar (Fig. 37). There only the latter would have to be crossed in order to gain access to the Yāsīn valley. In such a position, about four miles above Gūpis Fort, a rickety bridge constructed of poplars was maintained until recent years across the Ghizar branch of the river, though liable to be carried away by summer floods.³

March to
Yāsīn
village.

An easy march of some thirteen miles on August 25th brought me from Gūpis to Yāsīn, the chief place of the valley. The openness of the ground at the bottom of the valley was the more impressive for the extreme steepness and height of the bare rock walls which confine it on either side. Much abandoned cultivation below the hamlet of Gindal bore witness to the vicissitudes

¹ The present suspension bridge has a span of close on 180 feet, and is placed at a particularly narrow portion of the rock-bound bed where the left bank could be made practicable only by a good deal of blasting.

² Cf. my note in *Ancient Khotan*, i. p. 10, note 8. For facility of reference I may quote here the passage of the biography relating to the bridge as translated by M. Chavannes, *Turcs occid.*, p. 153, note: (Kao Hsien-chih) ... 'ordonna en toute hâte à (Si) Yuen-k'ing de détruire le pont de rotin qui se trouvait à une soixantaine de li de (la capitale du) *Pou-lu*; vers le soir, quand il venait à peine d'être détruit, de l'infanterie et de la cavalerie tibétaines arrivèrent en grand nombre, mais il était trop tard pour qu'elles pussent atteindre leur but; ce pont de rotin avait la largeur d'un chemin de tir à l'arc; le construire avait été l'affaire d'une année entière; le *Pou-lu* s'était autrefois laissé tromper par les Tibétains qui avaient emprunté sa route et c'est alors qu'on avait fait ce pont.' M. Chavannes in a note points out that another version of this record contained in the *T'ang shu* states: 'la longueur du pont était d'une portée de flèche.'

³ It deserves to be pointed out that after the subsidence of the summer floods, some time in September, and until the following spring, it is possible to gain Yāsīn from the Gūpis side by fording one river after the other a little above their confluence where a level tongue of alluvium separates

them. It is with special regard to this fact that I assume it to have been possible for Kao Hsien-chih, as explained in *Serindia*, i. p. 54, note 3, to effect his return from Little P'o-lü to the uppermost Āb-i-Panja valley by the route leading through Gilgit and Hunza, notwithstanding the preceding destruction of the bridge across the Gilgit river below Yāsīn.

Kao Hsien-chih's biography (cf. Chavannes, *Turcs occid.*, p. 153, note) distinctly tells us that after pacifying the whole of Little P'o-lü, i. e. Gilgit and its dependent tracts as well as Yāsīn, the Chinese general carried out his retreat during the eighth month of the Chinese year, i. e. between the middle of September and the middle of October. He did not rejoin the troops left behind near Sarhad, in uppermost Wakhān, until the ninth month, and gained the Pāmīrs only at the close of that month.

For the difficult march as assumed by me (see also below, p. 52) from Gilgit up the Hunza gorges to the Chapursan valley and thence across the Irshad pass to the Āb-i-Panja, the season indicated by the eighth Chinese month was certainly most suitable. But Kao Hsien-chih could not have availed himself of it if the destruction of the bridge near Gūpis, so opportune a measure against the attempted Tibetan counter-attack, had also prevented him from descending to Gilgit a few weeks later.