

the Chinese border on the Pāmīrs.⁹ Long after nightfall the same day we reached my old camping-place at Murkushi, where the two available routes to the Tāgh-dumbāsh Pāmīr, via the Kilik and Ming-taka passes, diverge. Here I found Surveyor Muḥammad Yāqūb and Naik Shamsuddīn of the 1st Sappers and Miners, who had safely arrived with our heavy baggage by the route via Gilgit and Hunza.

Though the Kilik pass which I crossed in 1900 is certainly the easier, except during the months of deep snow, I decided for the sake of seeing new ground to take the route across the Ming-taka pass.¹⁰ It leads up along the moraine of a glacier considerable in size (Fig. 62) and offers splendid views towards the maze of fantastically serrated peaks to the south (Fig. 63). As this route, too, is well known, there is no need to describe here the ascent, which by midday of September 7 brought my now reunited party to the top of the pass (Fig. 65) and thus to the border of Chinese Turkestan. Our mercurial barometer indicated for the Ming-taka pass an elevation of 15,650 feet. In the open high valley beyond, with its true Pāmīr character, I found myself once more on ground with which my two previous journeys had made me familiar. But how easy seemed the routes I had then followed, by comparison with the tracks which had brought us this time to the westernmost corner of China! Barely five weeks had elapsed since I left the Kashmīr valley, and during this period of strenuous marching with only two days of halt, we had crossed fifteen passes between 10,000 and 17,500 feet in height. The total distance we had marched amounted to about 520 miles, and of this nearly four-fifths had of necessity been done on foot.

Crossing
Ming-taka
pass.

SECTION IV.—IN THE VALLEY OF TĀSH-KURGHĀN

The four rapid marches which carried me on September 8–11 down by the Tāgh-dumbāsh river to Tāsh-kurghān, the Sarīkol 'capital', led necessarily over ground already familiar to me. In *Ancient Khotan* and in *Serindia* I have fully discussed the early notices bearing on the history of Sarīkol and such ancient remains as I was able to trace on my preceding visits.¹ Similarly a descriptive account of the chief geographical features presented by the main valley and of its present population will be found in the corresponding chapters of my personal narratives of those journeys.² Hence I am able to restrict the record of my third passage through Sarīkol to brief notes on some antiquarian remains not previously noticed and a few supplementary observations of a geographical interest.

Descent by
Tāgh-
dumbāsh
river.

Taking my observations as they occurred in the course of my route, I may first briefly mention that, descending along the Tāgh-dumbāsh or Tāsh-kurghān river, as it flows in its initial stage from west to east, I came upon a mark of former extensive glaciation at a point known as Tōke-sakrik, some three miles below Payik-karaul;³ a big terminal moraine here fills the mouth of the side valley that descends from the high snowy range on the south. The appearance of this old moraine is such as to leave no doubt about its being, geologically speaking, of quite modern date. Yet within two miles below it, at an elevation of about 12,000 feet, I found further confirmation of what I had before had occasion to observe, that cultivation once extended much higher up the valley.⁴ On the small grass-covered plain of Chādir-tāsh old terraced fields had in recent years been tilled again by Kirghiz for a brief period, and on the opposite (left) river bank,

Resumed
cultivation
on Tāgh-
dumbāsh.

⁹ See *Ruins of Khotan*, pp. 53 sq.

¹⁰ The name *Ming-taka* (usually but wrongly spelt *Mintaka*) applies properly to the valley (Ming-taka Jilga) that is followed from the pass to the north-east down to its junction with the Tāgh-dumbāsh river. It means literally

the ' [valley of the] thousand mountain-goats '.

¹ Cf. *Ancient Khotan*, i. pp. 22–40; *Serindia*, i. pp. 72–6.

² See *Ruins of Khotan*, pp. 57 sqq.; *Desert Cathay*, i. pp. 89 sqq.

³ See Map No. 3. c. 2.

⁴ Cf. *Serindia*, i. p. 73.