

allowed to overflow the canal bank showed that the supply was more than abundant for the land actually in cultivation. It had been occupied exclusively by Wakhī immigrants from the uppermost Āb-i-Panja who had drifted across the Wakhjīr pass in small batches. What with assured local produce and summer grazing on the Tāgh-dumbāsh near by offering abundant facilities for raising flocks, they were all said to have grown into 'Bais' or people of comparative substance. The ground beyond the northern point at which Dafdār cultivation now ends presents the same character of an easily irrigated alluvial belt, and, in view of the ample water-supply available, further extension of cultivation seemed certain, given conditions of tranquillity.

Not far from the actual edge of the cultivated area, there was a bifurcation of the old canal. The lower branch, according to the statement of Rashīd Bēg and other Sarīkolīs accompanying me, could be traced past the grazing grounds of Rang and Taghash down to Tāghlak-gumbaz. The other branch, which was said to continue to below Toghlān-shahr opposite Tāsh-kurghān and which under Rashīd Bēg's guidance I proceeded to follow, kept a course, as it proved, high up on the alluvial fans at the mouth of the successive side valleys. From the start it could be traced quite easily across the gentle slope of these fans as a continuous terrace usually about ten feet wide. It showed up with still greater clearness where, with a carefully adjusted alignment, it wound round the sides of the shallow ravines that carry down the drainage of the side Nullahs descending from the east. There, owing to the less easy slope, supporting walls were needed to carry the canal, and these, carefully built of large unhewn stones, were found in many places still standing to a height of six to eight feet.

Line of  
old canal  
traced.

About two miles below the northern limit of Dafdār cultivation we came upon a particularly well-preserved bit of the ancient canal, where it bends in a narrow loop round a small sheltered Nullah. Here the original dimensions of the canal bed were still to be seen with perfect clearness. The width between the tops of the embankments on either side measured 17 feet. The present depth in the centre was about 2 feet 4 inches. Making no allowance for the silting up that undoubtedly must have taken place since the canal fell into neglect, and assuming a current of one foot per second, approximating to that actually observed at Dafdār, these measurements would suggest a volume of over twenty cubic feet per second. I noted that, with the exception of a breach of about ten feet at the point of crossing the drainage bed, the stretch of canal that winds round the small Nullah, about 100 yards in length, was practically intact. For some two and a half miles farther the canal could be traced very clearly across the gently sloping 'Dasht' of Shilbili. As its line passed into ground of an increasingly fertile character, Rashīd Bēg pointed out small distributary channels branching off at right angles, and his trained eye was probably also right in recognizing lines that once divided fields.

Original  
dimensions  
of canal.

Such remarkable preservation might, perhaps, at first sight suggest doubts as to the antiquity of the irrigation system represented by the 'Faryād-ariki'. But quite apart from the popular Sarīkol legend which attributes to it a quasi-mythic origin, the extreme dryness of the climate in this mountain region must be borne in mind. An illustration of this is to be found in the condition of the ancient mountain fastness now known as Kiz-kurghān and situated at the great bend of the river some eight miles above Pisling as I observed it in 1906.<sup>8</sup> This was already a ruin of great antiquity in the days of Hsüan-tsang, who records at length the legend connecting it with the fabulous descent of the dynasty then ruling Sarīkol. When describing these remains I pointed out that nothing but the exceptional dryness of the climate throughout historical times 'could account for their survival in so exposed a position from so early a date'.<sup>9</sup> We have an indirect

Aridity of  
Sarīkol  
since  
ancient  
times.

<sup>8</sup> See *Serindia*, i. pp. 73 sqq.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, i. p. 75. The walls, constructed of sun-dried

bricks and standing above extremely precipitous slopes, rise still to a considerable height. The Juniper brushwood used