

it passes most of the gold brought down from the pits in the Arka-tāgh and nominally reserved for official purchase only. Illicit acquisition of such gold meant profit, as did also the smuggling of opium into Kan-su, for which Charchan offered a safe base.

On my arrival at Charchan I learned from native traders that a small but well-armed party of these people, incensed at the detention by the Charkhlik district magistrate of a large consignment of smuggled opium, had about a fortnight before set out for Charkhlik. After committing some outrages *en route* they were reported to have attacked and captured the unfortunate magistrate. The Chinese sub-divisional officer of Charchan had been helpless to prevent the outbreak and, being overawed by the set of 'revolutionaries' who had remained behind, was evidently sitting on the fence. He considerably provided me with two recommendations for the Charkhlik Ya-mên. One was addressed to the helpless Amban, on the assumption that he had by some means regained freedom and authority, and the other to the leading spirit of the local 'revolutionaries', a Ssü-yeh or petty official out of employment, who had started for Charkhlik on learning of the success of the *coup* and who was shrewdly guessed to have been installed in office instead of him.

Revolu-
tionary
coup at
Charkhlik.

We started from Charchan on New Year's Eve, 1914, and did the desert journey of about 142 miles to Vāsh-shahri, the westernmost inhabited place of the Charkhlik district, in seven marches. The route followed was the usual one for caravans, leading along the left bank of the Charchan river as far as Lashkar-satma (Map No. 22. D. 3, 4; 26. A, B. 3). Down to this point it was new to me, but as it has been followed by other travellers and fully recorded,¹¹ no description is needed.

Route along
Charchan
river.

As regards points of antiquarian interest I may note that the small mound known as *Tim* and situated about 10 miles below Tattran (Map No. 22. D. 3) was visited by me on my second journey and then recognized as probably representing the remains of a Stūpa base.¹² Its position near the left bank of the river proves the existence here of a small settlement in Buddhist times, and this well agrees with the wording of the Chinese itinerary of T'ang times, previously discussed, which seems to indicate that at that period, too, the route coming from Hsin-ch'êng or Vāsh-shahri crossed to the left bank of the river somewhere about Lashkar-satma and followed it to Chū-mo or Charchan.¹³

I found that Tattran, now the only inhabited place between these two localities, had increased to about 25 households against the 8 or 10 which it included in 1906 according to the statement of my old guide, Ismail 'Pāwān', a descendant of the original founder of the little colony and now once again with me. There was said to be abundance of water at all seasons for a further extension of the cultivated area. But two abandoned canals showed that special difficulties exist here, owing to the rapid silting up of the channels, which cannot be cleared with the necessary regularity, owing to the inadequate supply of labour available.

Increase of
cultivation
at Tattran.

After leaving Tattran we did not meet with a single wayfarer, which struck me as strange at the time and left me in doubts as to the situation we might find at Charkhlik. But when approaching on January 6th the jungle belt which from the west screens the ruined site of Vāsh-shahri (Map No. 26. c. 3), we found the route guarded by a large party of armed Muhammadans who at first from a distance mistook us for a fresh batch of 'revolutionaries' and were preparing to resist (Fig. 106). Fortunately the mistake was promptly cleared up, and from Rōze Bēg, the headman of Vāsh-shahri and an old acquaintance, I learned the queer story of the course that events had

Arrival at
Vāsh-
shahri.

¹¹ See, e.g. Hedin, *Reisen in Z.-A.*, pp. 170 sqq.; also for the section from Lashkar-satma to Charkhlik, *Desert Cathay*, i. pp. 331 sqq.

¹² Cf. *Serindia*, i. p. 304.

¹³ Regarding this T'ang itinerary and the identification of the localities it mentions, see *Serindia*, i. p. 306, and

M. Chavannes' Appendix A, *ibid.*, iii. p. 1331.

For a more direct track from Charchan to Vāsh-shahri, which Marco Polo seems to have followed and which probably led through the sandy desert south of the river's right bank, cf. *Serindia*, i. pp. 308 sq.