

reached a height of well over 10,000 feet. They are screened from the south by the peaks of Khangol and Mohur-shan (the latter 8,412 feet by triangulation), and this helps to explain why Lāl Singh's triangulation did not reach them. I have, however, little doubt that future exploration will prove them to be the highest, not only in the central range, but in the whole of the Kuruk-tāgh region. This belief is supported by the Chinese name which I heard from Muḥammad Bāqir's mouth as *Hsi-ta-shan*, 'the western big mountain', but which might well be *Hsieh-ta-shan*, 'the snowy big mountain';³ for the snow I noticed lying in the higher gullies of the northern face would probably remain there for months longer.

A mile or so beyond the point mentioned we emerged upon the edge of a wide peneplain gently rising towards the south-west. As we moved up it along the flood-bed draining into the Chong-aghiz, it was seen to be flanked on the east by a high spur of the Hsi-ta-shan and on the south-west by the lesser massif of Sherzak. The former is known as Khangol and has given its name to the grazing ground called Khangol-yailak, formerly much frequented by Mongols. There we pitched camp at an elevation of about 5,100 feet. According to what Muḥammad Bāqir remembered to have heard from his father, some forty Mongol families used to graze their herds and flocks here and elsewhere around Hsi-ta-shan all through the year, before the troubles of the Muhammadan rebellion induced them to seek safer ground in the T'ien-shan. Now rarely more than two or three Mongol 'tents' visit this neighbourhood or the adjoining Sherzak-yailak, though coarse grass as well as groves of elms were plentiful where we camped, and water was probably obtainable at no great depth in the flood-bed. It was clearly not desiccation that was responsible for the abandonment of this grazing ground.

Grazing at
Khangol-
yailak.

After a cold night with a biting north wind and a minimum temperature of 24 degrees F. below freezing-point, we moved next morning up the gradually narrowing peneplain to the south-west to gain the pass by which camels could be taken to the head-waters of the Shindī river. We reached it after a march of about six miles, having crossed on the way two low but steep rocky ridges running parallel to the bold heights of Khangol, and offering a full view over the almost imperceptible watershed towards the head of the Sherzak valley. The Sherzak-ghol drains towards the Baghrash Lake to the north-west (Map No. 25. D. 1, 2), while the Bēsh-kara-choka-dawān, by which we next crossed a narrow saddle of the Khangol spur, gives access to the head-waters of the Shindī river draining to the head of the Kuruk-daryā bed and thus into the Lop basin. Thus this end of the Chong-aghiz valley on the western flank of Hsi-ta-shan marks an important orographical point where three main divides of the Kuruk-tāgh meet.

Watershed
towards
Baghrash
Lake.

The aneroid indicated for the pass an elevation of about 5,800 feet, and by climbing over a bad shale slope to the steep crest overlooking it from the north we obtained a distant view over the Kharzak valley to the south and towards another rugged spur, known as Khangol-choka, descending from Hsi-ta-shan south-eastwards (Fig. 338). Disintegration and erosion appeared to have advanced much farther on this side of the range than on the northern, while the growth of vegetation in the valleys proved markedly poorer as we descended to the south-east. The winding stony bed which had to be followed was difficult in places, and at a point about two miles below the pass became so narrow that the camels could barely be passed through. Beyond, the valley widened and the cañon cut by the now dry Kharzak stream could be avoided by keeping to an open stony

Pass of
Bēsh-kara-
choka.

³ Here I may conveniently note that the use of Chinese designations for a number of conspicuous peaks to the west of Singer, such as 'Mohur-shan', 'Hsi-ta-shan', 'Dunda-shan', 'Jobi-shan' (clin. height 6,380, Map No. 29. A. 2), is ascribed by Singer tradition to Chinese surveyors who visited at one time this part of the Kuruk-tāgh in order to determine

the best route from Turfān to Lop.

The presence farther west of Mongol local names (see Map No. 25. C, D. 1) is, of course, due to the grazing carried on there by Mongol camps, which were once far more numerous; see above, p. 726.