

six palms in length. From these horns the shepherds make great bowls to eat from, and they use the horns also to enclose folds for their cattle at night. [Messer Marco was told also that the wolves were numerous, and killed many of those wild sheep. Hence quantities of their horns and bones were found, and these were made into great heaps by the wayside, in order to guide travellers when snow was on the ground.]

'The plain is called *Pamier*, and you ride across it for twelve days together, finding nothing but a desert without habitations or any green thing, so that travellers are obliged to carry with them whatever they have need of. The region is so lofty and cold that you do not see even any birds flying . . .'<sup>13</sup>

Accuracy of  
M. Polo's  
description.

This record has rightly been called by Sir Henry Yule one of the great Venetian's 'most splendid anticipations of modern exploration', and Captain John Wood's narrative 'the most brilliant confirmation in detail of Marco's narrative'. Therefore only a few remarks need be added to the pages in which Marco Polo's great commentator and Professor Cordier have discussed it.<sup>14</sup> A sense of this being 'the highest place in the world' strangely impressed me also, as my eyes, passing the extremity of the lake (Fig. 391), turned during that day of halt towards the distant and perfectly open vista which extended across the imperceptible watershed eastwards. The excellence of the pasture afforded by the Great Pāmīr was attested by reports of big flocks of sheep belonging to traders which were annually brought up from the Wakhān side. At the time of my passage they were grazing in the side valleys descending to the lake from the north. Marco's 'wild sheep', the *Ovis Poli* justly named after him, still have favourite haunts in the heights above the lake. We met a herd of them close to the Bāsh-gumbaz pass, and on small grassy patches lower down came upon numerous horns and bones of others which, when driven down by the winter snow on the range, had fallen victims to wolves. During our halt Afrāz-gul's rifle promptly secured a fine head in the Kög-ütek-jilga to the north to serve me as a souvenir.<sup>15</sup> That halt, on August 27th, helped also to bring home to me the truth of Marco's remark on the cold of this Pāmīr. The minimum thermometer showed a temperature of 12° Fahr. below freezing-point, and with an icy wind sweeping along the lake shore at 13,990 feet above sea-level, it felt bitterly cold all day in spite of the sun shining from a speckless sky.

'Northern  
route' of  
Kao Hsien-  
chih.

Apart from the interest attaching to those old travellers' accounts, my visit to the Great Pāmīr enabled me to gather local information throwing light on a Chinese historical record and strikingly confirming its accuracy. In describing Kao Hsien-chih's famous expedition of A. D. 747 across the Pāmīrs and Hindukush, the T'ang Annals specially mention the concentration of the Chinese forces by three routes from east, west, and north upon the point on the Āb-i-Panja marked by the present Sarhad, from which that great leader then forced his way across the Barōghil and Darkōt passes. When previously discussing the details of this remarkable military exploit,<sup>16</sup> I had shown that the routes from the east and west, i. e. down and up the Āb-i-Panja valley, were clear beyond all doubt. But of a northern route which would have brought a portion of the Chinese general's force to Sarhad from the side of Lake Victoria no definite evidence could be traced in maps or books. Lord Curzon, it is true, in his celebrated monograph on the Pāmīrs had with characteristic thoroughness noted some vague and divergent indications which pointed to a pass giving access to the Āb-i-Panja from Lake Victoria.<sup>17</sup> Yet he also recorded that in August 1895, 'some members of

<sup>13</sup> See Yule, *Marco Polo*, i. p. 171.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, i. pp. 172-8.

<sup>15</sup> Schultz, *Forschungen im Pamir*, p. 72, refers to the Zör-köl neighbourhood as being known to hunters for bears and panthers.

<sup>16</sup> See *Serindia*, i. pp. 53 sqq.; also *Geogr. J.*, 1922, February, pp. 117 sqq. For M. Chavannes's translation of Kao Hsien-chih's biography in the T'ang Annals, see *Turcs occid.*, p. 152, note 1.

<sup>17</sup> See Curzon, *Pamirs*, pp. 56 sqq., where those earlier