

vaulting. The enclosing walls are of very solid construction and even near their top fully 6 feet thick. At some points the circumvallation has been strengthened by oblong bastions. Apart from small rooms built in places against the enclosing wall, the interior contains a number of detached structures, all badly decayed. Most of these are of oblong shape and divided into rooms of small size; but a few at the north-eastern end are irregular ovals. Fig. 388 shows the rough masonry of these structures, which, no doubt, served as habitations when regard for safety compelled occupation of the fort. That the period of occupation was not continuous may be concluded from indications of repeated repairs. Local tradition ascribes the fort of Hissār, like the other defences to be noticed farther on, to 'Kāfir' occupants of Wakhān, i. e. to pre-Muhammadan times.

Antiquity
of walls.

In spite of the hardness of the mud plaster in which the rough slabs of stone are set, it would be difficult at first sight to credit this statement of great age, were it not for the extreme aridity of the Wakhān climate, which equals that of Sarīkol.⁴ It must also be borne in mind that the construction of the walls here, as at the other old Wakhān strongholds examined, rough as it looks, is yet distinctly superior to that found in the houses or rather hovels occupied by the present population. Here, as at the other sites, I was strongly reminded of structural features made familiar to me by the many ruined dwellings scattered on the hill-sides in Swāt and in neighbouring parts of ancient Gandhāra. These undoubtedly belong to Buddhist times, and for the most part show masonry quite as rough. Yet climatic influences on the Indian North-west frontier are undoubtedly far more destructive than those to which the ruins of Wakhān are exposed. Unfortunately at none of these sites was it possible to secure coins or other datable relics.⁵ What scanty pottery debris could be picked up at Hissār did not include any decorated pieces. But some of the plain potsherds showed a fine brownish surface and well-levigated clay, such as are unknown to modern local manufacture. To the question who are meant by the 'Kāfirs' to whom local belief invariably attributes these ruined fastnesses, I shall have to return farther on.⁶

Ruined fort
of Zangibār.

About a mile to the west of Hissār lies Zang (about 9,700 feet above sea-level), which comprises some forty households and is the largest village on the Russian side of Wakhān. Its terraced fields and tree-hidden homesteads stretch along a broad glen well watered by springs. To the west of Zang a steep spur rises to close on a thousand feet above the village, and at its southern extremity bears the ruins of a small fort forming an irregular oblong of about 60 yards by 25 and known as Zangibār (Fig. 395). The interior, as the sketch-plan in Pl. 46 shows, is filled with the remains of dwellings built, like the enclosing walls, of unhewn stone slabs. Up to a height of about 6 or 7 feet these are set in fairly uniform courses with hard mud plaster, while above them much rougher stonework indicates later repairs. A small square bastion projecting on the northern face and provided with loopholes appears to have been originally an isolated tower to which the rest was subsequently added. The villagers attributed the construction of the fort to 'Kāfirs', but acknowledged that during their fathers' times it was occasionally sought as a place of refuge when raids of Kirghiz or Shughnānīs threatened. The absence of pottery debris suggested temporary occupation for short periods only.

Wakhī
emigration.

The scarcity of land capable of irrigation under existing conditions, together with the oppression prevailing on the Afghān side of the valley, accounts for the numerous Wakhī emigrants to be found nowadays to the south of the Hindukush.⁷ Most, if not all, Wakhīs belong to the Ismailia

⁴ See my remarks on the old walls of sun-dried bricks at the forts of Kansir and Kiz-kurghān, *Serindia*, i. pp. 69, 75.

⁵ It ought to be borne in mind that the factor which in India, as probably elsewhere also, is responsible for most of the finds of coins and similar relics at old sites, viz. occa-

sional heavy rainfall, is practically unknown in Wakhān and in Sarīkol also.

⁶ See below, ii. p. 869.

⁷ I had found Wakhī colonies in Guhyāl (cf. *Ruins of Khotan*, pp. 45 sqq.), in Mastūj (cf. *Desert Cathay*, i. p. 41