

Opposite to the eastern end of the main circumvallation a small rock island rises between forking branches of the Yamchin gorge (see Pl. 47 and Fig. 409). Of these two the eastern one is no longer reached by the stream, though it was, no doubt, once eroded by it. The isolated rocky eminence lies well below the level of the spurs flanking the Yamchin gorge on either side, and is curiously shaped like an arm bent at right angles. Its top, nowhere more than 40 yards wide and less in most places, bears the walls of a small fortification known as *Zulkhomār*. Its walls, though very massive, have suffered much decay, probably through the steep slopes offering little room for secure foundations. Their construction corresponds in all respects to that of the main stronghold. The approach seems to have led up from the ravine to the south-eastern extremity of the fort, which faces the tower ii of the lower line of walls of the main stronghold.

Outlying
fort of
Zulkhomār.

No direct archaeological or other evidence is at present available as regards the date of this remarkable stronghold. But the extent, solidity, and general character of the defences distinctly point to pre-Muhammadan times, and this is borne out both by the name and by local tradition. The name 'Zamr-i-ātish-parast' is of special interest because it indicates some recollection of Zoroastrian fire-worship, such as even this eastern extreme of ancient Irān is likely to have known. Captain Wood records of the 'three Kāfir forts' of Hissār, Zamr-i-ātish-parast, and Namadgut that the natives believe them 'to have been erected by the Guebers or Fire-worshippers',¹⁴ and rightly refers to a Wakhī custom which indicates 'lingering remnants of Zoroastrian creed'.¹⁵ It would scarcely be safe to deduce more from this statement than that local belief at the time attributed those strongholds to 'Kāfirs' or unbelievers, just as it does now, and identified these with followers of the ancient pre-Muhammadan creed of Irān. But in any case we may credit it with a far closer approximation to historical likelihood than the theory elaborated at length in a more recent European traveller's book which seeks to identify those 'Kāfirs' with the Siāhpōsh of Kāfiristān.¹⁶ The Wakhīs certainly know of these modern Kāfirs and have heard of the murderous raids they used to make, down to the last century, into the valleys north of the Hindukush adjoining their own. If asked about the 'Kāfir' builders of those strongholds, they would obviously prefer to identify them with those at one time dreaded tribes than acknowledge that their own ancestors could have ever been 'Kāfirs'. Considering all we know now about the primitive state of civilization prevailing among those barbarous hillmen of Kāfiristān, a theory which would credit them with a lasting reign over Wakhān and the construction of such elaborate fortifications scarcely calls for serious critical examination.

Alleged
'Kāfir'
origin of
fortifica-
tions.

Without systematic excavations no attempt can be made to ascertain the exact period to which Zamr-i-ātish-parast and the closely corresponding fortifications of the 'Castle of Qa'qa' near Namadgut owe their construction. But certain general observations may safely be offered even in the absence of chronological or other definite data. The extent and solidity of the defences clearly show that at the time of their erection Wakhān must have possessed a population and resources greatly in excess of those to be found there at present.¹⁷ The extent of cultivable land can scarcely

Want of
chronolo-
gical data.

¹⁴ Cf. Wood, *Source of the Oxus*², p. 218.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* He thus mentions the unwillingness to blow out a light by the breath, a characteristic trait which was observed by him also in Badakhshān.

¹⁶ See Olufsen, *Unknown Pamirs*, pp. 173 sqq., with much of conjectures unchecked by available historical knowledge. The need of critical caution applies also to the description given on pp. 183 sqq., of the 'Siaposh fortress at Yamchin', as appears, e. g., from a comparison of the plan in Pl. 47 with the estimated circumference 'of about 12 kilometres' for the walls.

¹⁷ I am not aware whether an official Russian census of Wakhān is available. I may therefore note here the number of homesteads as indicated to me by Qāzī Qadam Shāh, of Shītkharw, a well-informed notable, for the five Aksakālships of Wakhān: Langar 44, Zang 40, Warang 36, Putup (including Yamchin) 34, Shītkharw 36.

The number of individuals in a single homestead might, I was told, vary from 5 to about 30. Assuming an average of 10, these figures suggest for the Russian portion of Wakhān (above Ishkāshim) a total approximating 2,000 souls.

The population on the Afghān side, including the Sarhad