

illustration of the observation well known to students of geography that defiles in valleys often form more important ethnic and political boundaries than watersheds, when these are crossed by relatively easy passes and routes.

Easy communication
towards
Wardōj
drainage.

'As far as local tradition and scanty historical data allow us to go back, the tract comprising the upper Wardōj valley which drains into the Kokcha river of Badakhshān, and the tract of Ishkāshm, extending along the main Oxus where it makes its great bend northward, have always formed a separate small hill chiefship or canton, distinct from Badakhshān on the west and from Wakhān . . . on the east. The reason for the separation of the Zēbak-Ishkāshm tract is that, whereas the broad spur which descends from the Hindukush towards the Oxus at Ishkāshm and divides it from the Wardōj drainage is crossed by a remarkably easy saddle, there are in the river valleys both towards Badakhshān and Wakhān narrow defiles to be passed, which form serious barriers. The same is the case northward [in Ghārān]. . . .²

Ishkāshm
a distinct
chiefship.

'Ishkāshm-Zēbak as well as Wakhān were ruled as distinct chiefships usually by relatives of the Mīrs of Badakhshān, being held on a kind of feudal tenure from the far more important and powerful principality of Badakhshān. This time-honoured arrangement was duly noted by Marco Polo when he passed here about 1273-4, on his way to "Vokhān" and the "Pamier".³ At present the Zēbak tract and the greatest portion of Ishkāshm, being south of the Oxus, are included in the Afghān province of Badakhshān. . . . Ishkāshm, on the right or northern bank of the Oxus, is reckoned to extend upwards to the rocky defiles above the village of Namadgut and downwards to the hamlet of Malwāch, where the gorges of Ghārān are entered.'

Ruined
fortress
below
Namadgut.

My stay at Namadgut on September 7th and a portion of the following day was devoted to the survey of the ruined fortress situated about a mile and half below the central hamlet of Namadgut and known as Qala-i-Qa'qa. This name connecting the stronghold with the legendary hero Qa'qa of Arab tradition suffices to show that genuine local knowledge of its origin has been lost. It occupies an isolated rocky eminence rising above the right bank of the river and separated from the foot of the range to the north by an open plateau about half a mile wide, a continuation of the alluvial terrace of Namadgut. The eminence is formed by two ridges closely adjoining and both lying in an approximately east to west direction, as seen in the sketch-plan, Pl. 49. The northern and larger one rises at its eastern extremity to a height of about 400 feet above the river and about 225 feet above the plateau at its foot. Buttressed there by very precipitous cliffs the ridge gradually descends westwards, falling off steeply on its northern side, while the southern side shows a succession of terraces (Fig. 412). The total extent of this ridge is a little less than half a mile.

Natural
strength of
position.

The southern ridge, seen in Fig. 412, is shorter than the other but of more uniform steepness. It is separated from the northern one by a trough-like depression, and at its western extremity projects somewhat beyond it with rocks forming a kind of natural ravelin. The narrow top of this ridge attains a height of some 350 feet above the river. The descent to the latter from the narrow terraces which line the foot of both ridges (Fig. 414) is very precipitous throughout and in many places rendered impracticable by sheer-faced rocks. The whole eminence is protected by steep cliffs along the greater part of its perimeter and on one side of this by the deep fosse of the river, here unfordable at all seasons. It thus forms a position very strong by nature; in the days before the invention of fire-arms it might, if adequately defended, have well appeared unassailable. The care and labour bestowed on its defences by human hands show how much these advantages were appreciated.

² See below, ii. pp. 876 sq.

³ See Yule, *Marco Polo*, i. pp. 170 sqq. Cf. also *Serindia*, i. p. 65.