

not be very far removed from that of the fortress above Yamchin, and on the strength of some of the structural features noted I should be inclined to assume a somewhat earlier date for the 'Castle of Qa'qa'.

Traces of
Buddhist
worship.

By the morning of September 8th the survey of the old stronghold was completed and a visit paid to the much-frequented Ziārat of Hazrat Shāh-i-mardān, which lies close outside its northern front. I have previously had occasion to mention the series of natural stone blocks placed there, which by their shape curiously resemble miniature Stūpas, and to point out their significance as probable proofs of lingering respect for what in Buddhist times would certainly have been objects of worship.⁷ On the march down to Nut, the Russian military post facing Ishkāshm, I noticed between the villages of Kazi-deh and Run a wide 'Dasht' where traces of ancient cultivation were said to be visible and which was being reclaimed by means of new canals. Below the village of Putur a steep spur descending to the left bank of the river was pointed out as the traditional boundary on that side between Wakhān and Ishkāshm.

Halt at
Nut.

At Nut I was most kindly received by its cultured commandant Captain Tumanovich, and was able to utilize a day's halt in collecting more linguistic and anthropometrical materials concerning the population of Ishkāshm (Fig. 441). The high position of the Nut post, about 8,400 feet, and some 400 feet above the river, near where abundant springs issue from the hill-side, afforded a fine view over the wide open valley on the opposite side of the Oxus (Fig. 400). There the cultivated terraces, among which the numerous hamlets collectively known as Ishkāshm are scattered, seemed to extend close up to the remarkably easy saddle or rather plateau which gives access to Zēbak and the valley of the Wardōj river draining into Badakhshān. It was easy to visualize, as it were, the reasons that have linked Ishkāshm so closely in language with the hill tracts across that saddle and made the whole of them an apanage of the great territory westwards, the old Tukhāra country. To me it was a satisfaction, though at the same time a tantalizing one, to have seen at least from a distance the mountains of Tokhāristān.

Fort above
Sumjin.

On September 10th I started from Nut for the journey down the Oxus to Shughnān. Where the river makes its turn to the north within a couple of miles from Nut, its valley contracts greatly. Yet stony plateaus on the right bank leave a comparatively easy passage down to the hamlet of Malwāch, about 12 miles from Nut, and this explains why the dozen or so of homesteads found on this bank as far as Malwāch are reckoned as belonging to Ishkāshm. At a distance of about 7 miles from Nut and close above the hamlet of Sumjin a bold rocky spur projects from the east into the bottom of the valley. Its end, about 500 feet above the river, carries a small fairly level plateau which towards the river bending round its foot falls off with almost sheer precipices. The top is occupied by a roughly polygonal enclosure (see sketch-plan in Pl. 46) of walls built of rough stone slabs, practically without any plaster. In a few places loopholes about 1½ feet high survive in the decayed masonry. Nothing is known to local tradition about the origin of this 'Qala of Sumjin', but there can be little doubt that it is distinctly later than the strongholds near Yamchin and Namadgut. It may have been rapidly constructed as a 'chiusa' to defend the route from Ghārān perhaps against a Shughnī invasion.

Difficult
route
through
Ghārān.

At Malwāch hamlet we entered the succession of narrow defiles through which the Oxus, locally known as Panj, makes its tortuous way down to Shughnān. This portion of the Oxus valley, constituting the tract of Ghārān, was most difficult of access both from the south and north before Russian engineers had constructed a narrow bridle-path. Many of the precipitous spurs which descend to the right bank of the river were until then quite impracticable for animal transport.⁸

⁷ Cf. *Serindia*, iii. p. 1303.

⁸ For a graphic description of these difficulties before the road was made, see Olufsen, *Unknown Pamirs*, pp. 33 sqq.