

The obstacles here presented by nature to communication along the river adequately explain the close dependence of Ghārān upon Badakhshān, which is indicated both by local tradition and by the physical appearance and Persian speech of the people. The very scanty population which Ghārān could maintain on such limited patches of cultivable land as are to be found mainly at the mouths of narrow side valleys,⁹ was governed by the Mīrs of Badakhshān until the Afghān annexation in the time of Amīr Shēr 'Alī.

Communication with Badakhshān is made comparatively easy for a great part of the year by the fact that side valleys descending to the left bank both at Barshōr and Andāj give access to the Yaghurda plateau on the watershed towards the Wardōj. Across this, paths practicable for laden animals during the summer and autumn lead to the Sarghilān valley and thus to Bahārak, the old capital of Badakhshān, in a couple of marches. A route of similarly easy nature ascends the side valley in which the Shiwa lake finds its outlet to the Oxus opposite Darmārak, and from the rich pastures surrounding the lake leads over the Arghancha pass to Faizābād, the present chief town of Badakhshān. The descriptions I heard of these fine pastures to be found on the range which overlooks from the west the Ghārān and Shughnān portions of the Oxus valley made it easy for me to realize the attractions that they must have offered during successive periods to such originally nomadic rulers of Badakhshān as the Yüeh-chih, White Huns, and Western Turks.¹⁰

Easy access
to Badakh-
shān.

No detailed account need be attempted here of the three marches which carried me through the whole length of Ghārān to Shughnān. The difficulties that the ground here presented before the bridle-path was made have been fully described by Captain Olufsen.¹¹ They could be appreciated at the many points where the new roadway has been blasted from the rocks or carried on galleries (*rafak*) high above the river along otherwise impracticable cliffs. One of these was encountered close below the hamlet of Barshōr (Fig. 415), where we halted for the night of September 11th at an elevation of about 7,600 feet. It was on the second march, which brought us to Andarāb, that I first noticed, from the hamlet of Vodhgh downwards, cultivation high up on the slopes carried on by rain and snow-fall only, evidence of a climate distinctly moister than that of Wakhān. On the way to Andarāb we passed the pits situated above the hamlet of Sīst where rubies, or spinels resembling them, used to be mined by forced labour under the rule of the Mīrs of Badakhshān. The fame of their produce was far-spread in the Middle Ages, and Marco Polo does not fail to mention 'those fine and valuable gems the Balas Rubies' and correctly to indicate their place of origin.¹²

Ruby mines
of Ghārān.

SECTION III.—IN THE VALLEYS OF SHUGHNĀN

It was below Andarāb, at about 7,200 feet above the sea, our last stage before entering Shughnān, that the worst of the obstacles to communication along the Panj were encountered. In consequence of these impediments, such local traffic as there was before the opening of the

Arrival at
Khārūk.

⁹ The population of Ghārān in the years immediately following the Russian occupation, according to Olufsen, *Unknown Pamirs*, pp. 56 sq., was reckoned at about 60 households on the right bank of the river. Since then it has undoubtedly increased on the Russian side, but could scarcely exceed a hundred homesteads at the time of my passage.

¹⁰ The delights of those highlands are most happily reflected in Marco Polo's recollection of the convalescence he found there after illness; cf. Yule, *Marco Polo*, i. pp. 158 sqq.

¹¹ See Olufsen, *Unknown Pamirs*, pp. 34 sqq. For an adequate geographical account of the Oxus valley below Nut,

see Schultz, *Forschungen im Pamir*, pp. 147 sqq.

¹² 'It is in this province [of Badascian] that those fine and valuable gems the Balas Rubies are found. They are got in certain rocks among the mountains, and in the search for them the people dig great caves underground, just as is done by miners for silver. There is but one special mountain which produces them, and it is called *Syghinan*. The stones are dug on the king's account, and no one else dares dig in that mountain on pain of forfeiture of life as well as goods; nor may any one carry the stones out of the kingdom', &c. (Yule, *Marco Polo*, i. pp. 157, 161 sq.).