

observation in the case of Zamr-i-ātish-parast above.¹ No indication of date can be drawn from the pottery, since it is all plain, of a red clay; nor did I learn of any datable finds. But local tradition ascribes great antiquity to the site and alleges its identity with the Sipand-kōh mentioned in the Shāhnāma's story of Rustam.² I have not been able to verify this statement. The very solid construction of the walls and the far-advanced decay that they have nevertheless undergone seemed to point to considerable antiquity. Even were rainfall frequent, which it certainly is not in these barren hills bordered on the east by a wide desert belt, a long period is needed to reduce such cemented masonry to mere heaps of rubble.

View from
hill-top.

The top of Ghāla-kōh commands distant vistas over the isolated peaks and ridges into which the range skirting from NW. to SE. is broken up at this end, and over the much-eroded slopes where side spurs have 'matured' into bare hummocky peneplains. A veil of dust haze, like that which I had seen so often lying over similar landscapes at the foot of the K'un-lun or the range above Kāshgar and Yārkan, hid the plains of ancient Drangiana far away to the east. If the atmosphere had been clearer, so my shepherd guide assured me, I could have sighted there those two westernmost affluents of the terminal lagoons of the Helmand, the Harūt and Farah rivers, whose ancient names *H'arenaiuhaiti* and *Fradatha* (the *Pharnacotis* and [O]*Phrados* of Pliny) I had first traced as a young student in the Avesta.³ Since Afghānistān was by the decree of Fate to remain closed to me, it was a satisfaction to have at least been able to approach so near to a region which from early days had interested me. The whole landscape under that grey pall bore a very desolate look. Yet abundant grazing was said to be found on those bare slopes for a short while, if there had been adequate rain in the spring. Snow, I was told, usually lay for two weeks or so each winter on the top of Ghāla-kōh.

Descent
into Sīstān
basin.

On November 28th we resumed the journey towards Sīstān. Two long marches, in the course of which we covered some 65 miles, brought us to Bandān, where we struck the high road coming from Birjand. All the ground crossed was desert; but before the route left the wide level valley below Duruh to ascend over a gently sloping gravel glacis to the down-like plateau on which are situated the wells of Khwāja-i-dū-chāhān, I was interested to note a large flat area of hard-baked clay with marks of shallow water channels. Cultivation is carried on here in patches on occasions when exceptional rainfall in the spring causes floods to spread over this tract and to soak it for a time. It is exactly in this manner that intermittent cultivation is practised on inundated ground within the riverine belt of the lower Tārīm below Shahyār.⁴ The broad valley down which the track led from the wells of Dū-chāhān, with its dry sandy stream-bed, tamarisk-cones, and patches of ground scoured by wind-erosion, had made me feel as if I were once more in the Tārīm basin. So the change to the groves of date palms lining the flood-bed which the road follows for the last few miles down to Bandān was all the more striking. Together with the warm night passed at this desolate roadside hamlet it brought home the comparative vicinity of Sīstān to India and the shores of the Arabian Sea.

March to
shore of
Hāmūn.

Yet our march of November 30th, which brought us over a vast fan of detritus and gravel down to the shore of the Hāmūn, the great terminal basin of the Helmand, was of a kind to bring back vivid memories of a familiar desert region of innermost Asia. For the ground over which we travelled here for more than 32 miles was just like that over which the approach lies to the shores

¹ See above, ii. p. 870.

² Cf. Nöldeke in *Grundriss der iran. Philologie*, ii. p. 168, where the Avestic hill-name *Spentōdāta*, Yt. xix. 6, is referred to.

³ Cf. my paper on 'Afghānistān in Avestic Geography',

Academy, May 16, 1885, p. 349; *Indian Antiquary*, 1886, p. 22.

⁴ See above, ii. pp. 819 sq. I may note here that our Duruh guide talked of an old site, apparently of the 'Tati' type and known as *Shir-kōha*, which he placed 'about two Farsangs' to the SE. of the area above mentioned.