

CHAPTER I.

ANCIENT TRAVELLERS.

In Vol. III of this work I have collected all the scanty material about the eastern and western parts of the Transhimalaya so far as this great orographical system was known before my journey in 1906—1908. In the latter half of the same volume I described the eight lines on which I crossed the central parts of the Transhimalaya, as well as my journey along the central lakes which form a latitudinal depression at the northern base of the same system. Vol. IV is to be regarded as a direct continuation of Vol. III as it contains the rest of my last journey in Tibet.

In the present volume I am going to give the history of exploration in the Kara-korum Mountains.

This gigantic system, which possesses some of the highest peaks on the earth, makes its appearance earlier in history than the central parts of the Transhimalaya, and still less than a century has passed away since the Kara-korum was looked upon as a special mountain system. I will follow the same method as in Vol. I, where I proceeded from general, in the beginning very vague, notions about the geography of Central Asia to an uncertain idea of Tibet which in the course of the last two centuries, by and by developed into a more and more detailed and correct knowledge of this country. As regards the Kara-korum, I will have to go back to the very first narratives in which we are able to trace, if not the existence of a great mountain system, at least that of a comparatively broad belt of mountainous land between Eastern Turkestan and India. In connection with the earliest information I will, at a few places, have to return to travellers and cartographers who have been dealt with already in the first three volumes of this work. This is sometimes necessary for the continuity of the history of exploration. It will be the case more especially so far as Vol. III is concerned, and could not be avoided, remembering the intimate connection between the Transhimalaya and the southern Kara-korum.

In the first chapters of this volume, which, as I have already said, are of a more general character, I will also at a few places touch upon regions which do not belong to the Kara-korum, but which should not be missing in a historical account.