

If space permitted, it might be interesting to give a detailed account of a journey to Shahidulla from Leh over the highest passes in the world. Suffice it however to say that the journey of 240 miles was accomplished in 15 marches, with no other accident than the loss of eight baggage animals, and this with 300 souls and 400 animals in camp. The Glacier Pass of the Sasser, and the icy region of the Shyok Valley and the Karakorum Pass were fortunately crossed without snow, which however attacked us on the northern side, and accompanied with an eager nipping air added much to the discomfort inseparable from travelling sustained for many days at an elevation varying from 15,000 to 18,000 feet. Some idea of the cold may be formed from the fact that our minimum thermometer recorded a temperature of 15° below zero inside a tent, whilst in Captain Biddulph's camp it descended to 26° below zero in the open air.

At Shahidulla we were met by Yuzbashi Mahomed Zareef Khan, a Captain of the Amir's army, who had been deputed with some soldiers to await our arrival, and who gave us a hearty welcome. Here too we were joined by Ibrahim Khan, whom I had sent ahead to Yarkand to report our approach. After a halt of four days at Shahidulla, during which time Captain Trotter and his subordinates explored the surrounding country, and Drs. Stoliczka and Bellew paid a visit to the jade mines at Balakchi, Lieutenant-Colonel Gordon moved on with the chief part of the camp to Sanju, the nearest village in the Yarkand plain, and Syud Yakub Khan joining us two days after we followed over the Grim Pass. This Pass was not crossed without great difficulty owing to a fresh fall of snow. The ascent for the last 100 feet to the summit was up a wall of ice. The Kirghiz who had met us at Shahidulla, their farthest point, rendered great assistance in roughing the ice with pickaxes, laying down felts, and dragging the animals up. It was impossible for men or beasts to keep a firm footing on the icy zigzags, and many were precipitated over the snowy sides some hundreds of feet below. The loss amounted to eight mules and three ponies, none of the horses belonging to the Cavalry escort being in the number of casualties. When we reached Sanju on the 30th October, we found the country just beginning to put on its wintry appearance. The yellow look of the leaves and the frosty ground reminded us of European lands.

Here we were met by a special messenger bearing a letter of welcome from the Atalik Ghazi. Another letter came at the same time to Syud Yakub Khan, congratulating him on the success of his mission to Constantinople. I mention this to notice the manner in which such letters are received. The recipient taking it in both hands raises the letter to his forehead, and stands with his face in the direction whence it was sent, while he reads it most respectfully. He then presses the seal upon both eyes, and having folded it up, places it in his turban. This is a literal fulfilment of the Persian saying, "on my head and eyes" and seems to have been a custom in Eastern Turkestan from a very early time.*

After a halt of two days at Sanju we resumed our march towards Yarkand on the 2nd November crossing low ranges, long flats, and stony desert here and there at long intervals intersected with streams from the mountains, on the sides of which and wherever water-courses could be carried signs of cultivations were abundant.

On the 5th November we reached Kargalik, the first place of importance we had seen, and were struck by the signs of prosperity and civilization exhibited to us at every turn. An eating-house, with its clean table and forms and piles of China plates and bowls, at once took us back across the seas to the recollection of many a country restaurant in France. We were conducted through the bazaar to quarters built expressly for our accommodation; much to our gratification we found them far superior to anything we expected to find in the country, and our surprise at the neatness of the carpentry and clean regularity of the walls was surpassed by the comfort of the apartments and their good though somewhat scanty furniture. Thick felts and handsome carpets from Khoten covered the floors, and high backed chairs but no tables were provided. Fire-places, like our own, warmed the rooms without filling them with smoke, roof ventilators completing our requirements. The quarters for

* In Remusat's History of Khoten this is alluded to as a custom in the 6th century. *Quand quelqu'un recoit une lettre, il la met d'abord sur sa tête avant de la décacheter*, p. 17.