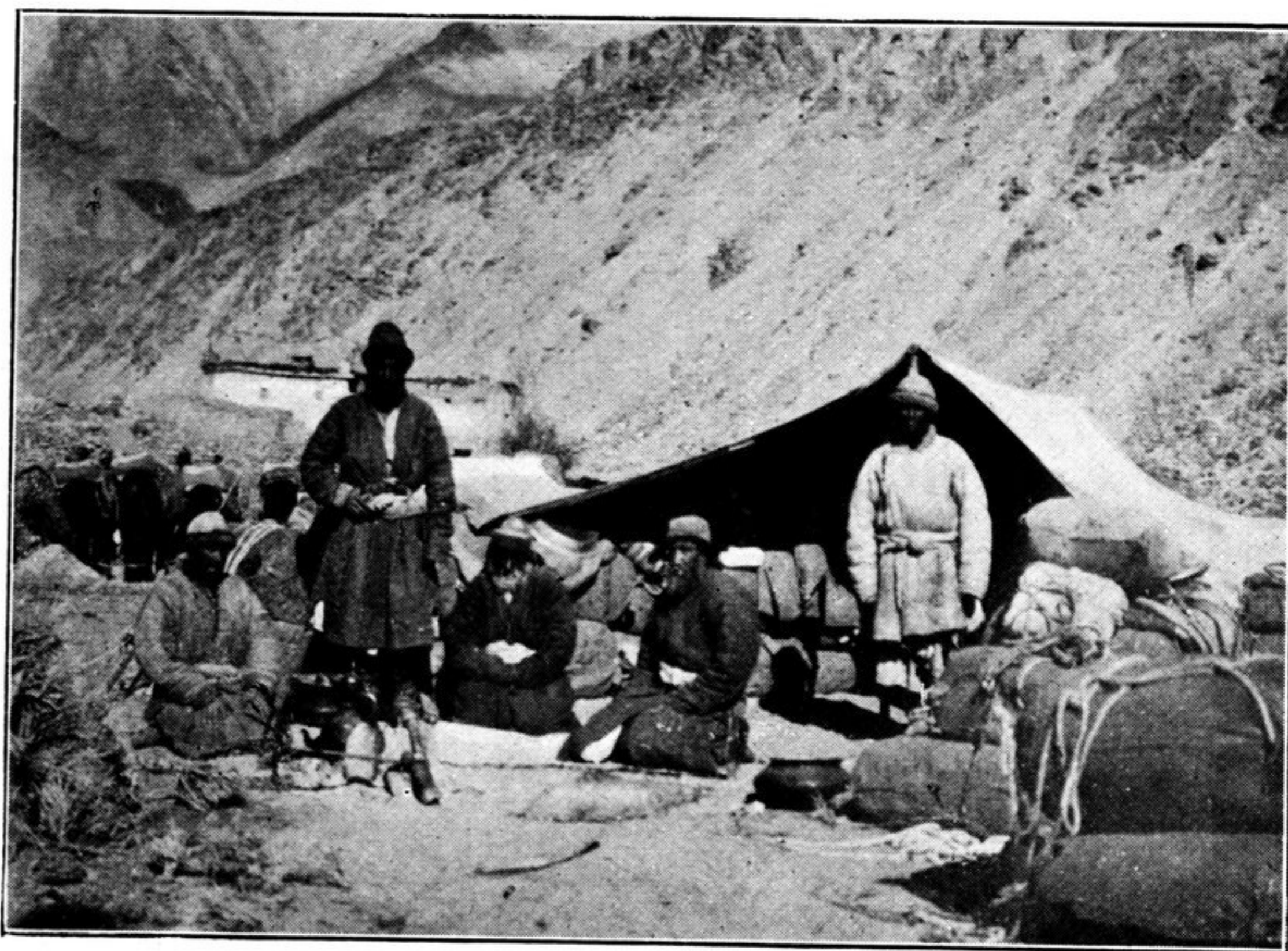


the hire of additional ponies were made with much difficulty, for, though there were many transport contractors (*kerai kish*) in Yarkand, they were unwilling to undertake any journey outside the well-known trade routes, especially such a journey as I proposed, over an altogether unknown region. I found also that many of these contractors had already made their arrangements for their annual journey to Leh, and had accepted large advances



GROUP OF YARKANDI TRANSPORT CONTRACTORS.

from traders for their prospective services, while the few who had not yet contracted had borrowed so much money that if they attempted to leave Yarkand, their animals would probably be seized for debt. Traders who engage the services of these contractors have generally to make large advances, sometimes amounting to complete prepayment, to enable the carriers to feed up their ponies, which are half-starved during the winter, and to make