

precipitation of winter has done its work, and the steppe will soon awake to new life; spring is the best season.

Innumerable tracks of sheep and cattle are seen all around, for we are in a corner of the country where men live by grazing, not on dates. We are coming to an inhabited place, whither the roads and paths converge. A ruin on the right hand is called Kelat-i-Ali-Riza-Khan, and yonder in front of us the first village since Naibend comes at last into sight.

Ser-i-cha lies on a barren plain at a height of 4167 feet. A more wretched and colourless village cannot be imagined. Its hundred mud houses lie together in a cluster. They have all dome-shaped roofs as in Kerim Khan and Chupunun, for here there is not a tree, not a palm, to furnish timber for the construction of flat roofs. The inhabitants, it seems, number about 800. A small kanat of salt water drives a mill. We ride past fields where wheat, barley, vegetables, and cottonseed are produced, past the burial-ground and an open basin, and finally pitch our tents immediately to the north of the village.

An intelligent man gives me all the information I require about the neighbourhood. He describes all the avenues of communication which meet at Ser-i-cha, and he informs me that the plague has been raging in Khabis for a month past, and that therefore all the roads from that place are closed. Caravans coming from that direction are stopped at 2 farsakh from Ser-i-cha. Wolves, foxes, jackals, and panthers are found in the district, and also gazelles, wild sheep, and antelopes. About fifty hamlets lie more or less distant in the surrounding hills. The nearest own together 2000 camels, which are only kept for breeding, not for caravan work.

I heard about the *jambas*-dromedaries in the country farther to the east and south-east. There was no limit to their swiftness and endurance, and the rider was always tired out before his steed, which, if he is of a good breed, runs lightly and smoothly without jolting. He is fed with barley meal, not with straw and cottonseed, which would make him fat. He must be kept thin and sinewy, and therefore must live sparely.