

extensive, can offer but little variety of scenery. Nevertheless, there are broad geographical features which divide this ground into several well-marked zones, and our rapid survey must take these in succession.

We may start from the mountain barrier in the west, not merely because it was from that side that the earliest influence of the classical world, of India and of Persia passed into innermost Asia and thence into China, but also because the mountain barrier to be crossed there has attracted more interest than the rest of the encircling ranges. I mean the great meridional range which from the high open valleys adjoining it westwards may conveniently be referred to as that of the Pamirs. It joins the T'ien-shan on the north to the ice-clad Hindukush on the south, and was known already to the ancients by the name of *Imaos*. Ptolemy in his 'Geography' quite correctly describes it as the range dividing the two Scythias, *intra* and *extra Imaon*. These terms closely correspond to the Inner and Outer Tartary of our grandfathers' geography and find their equivalents in the Russian Turkistan and Chinese Turkistan of our own. On this range lies the watershed between the drainage areas of the Oxus and the Tarim rivers. But it is of interest to observe that the line of greatest elevations, culminating in peaks rising to over 25,000 feet, stretches to the east of the watershed (Fig. 1).

To the high plateau-like valleys of the Pamirs which extend to the west of this line and for the most part are drained by the headwaters of the Oxus and its main tributaries, it is unnecessary to make more than passing reference. We shall visit them in later chapters and then have occasion to mention the routes which have served since ancient times