

was able to take exact anthropological measurements alike of Iranian-speaking hillmen from across the Hindukush and of wild-looking refugees from Kafiristan. They were the last heathen remnant of those Kafir tribes who in their mountain fastnesses had held out for centuries against Afghan conquest and forcible conversion to Islam.

The survival of much ancient lore in customs, traditions, crafts, and even in domestic architecture, makes Chitral and the adjacent valleys a fascinating field for the student of early Indian civilization. But a variety of cogent practical reasons urged me onwards to the Oxus and the 'Roof of the World'. Rapid as my marches up the Yarkhun river and through Mastuj had to be, I was able to trace and survey here an interesting series of early Buddhist rock carvings, sites of pre-Muhammadan forts, etc. It was curious to note how often local tradition connected the latter remains with dimly remembered periods of Chinese overlordship. The tenacity of such local tradition in a secluded mountain region is significant in view of that temporary extension of imperial Chinese power across the Pamirs and even south of the Hindukush under the T'ang dynasty to which I have briefly referred in the preceding chapter.

It was on far more interesting ground that I was soon able to verify the accuracy of those Chinese annalists who are our chief guides in the early history and geography of Central Asia. Years before I had studied their record, of course in translation, which relates to the Chinese expedition under Kao Hsien-chih which, as already mentioned, in A.D. 747 successfully invaded the territories of Yasin and Gilgit then occupied by the Tibetans. I had then been induced to assume that the route taken by the Chinese