

domination or possibly even somewhat earlier. Their local attribution to 'Kafirs', *i.e.* unbelievers, gives expression to a traditional recollection that they date back to times preceding the introduction of Islam.

Some idea of the labour which the construction of these strongholds must have implied can be formed from the fact that at one of them, known as Zamr-i-atish-parast ('the Zamr of the Fire-worshipper'), the successive lines of walls with their numerous bastions and turrets solidly built with rough stones or large sun-dried bricks ascend the slopes of a precipitous spur over a thousand feet high and have a circumference of more than three miles. The extent and remarkable solidity of such defences, even though they may have been intended only to afford temporary refuge in times of danger, clearly shows that at the time of their erection Wakhan must have possessed a population and resources greatly in excess of those to be found there at present. According to the figures supplied to me, the Russian portion of Wakhan counts about 200 households; though these are usually large, the total population on that side of the river is not likely to exceed 3000 souls. The need for such places of safety is accounted for by the fact that Wakhan, owing to the openness of the valley and its position on a great line of communication, must have always been exposed to invasion, and particularly, as modern history shows, from the west.

The dryness of the climate explains the remarkable state of preservation of Wakhan's ruins. To what cause the longevity I noticed among its inhabitants may be due, I do not know. A curious instance of this was afforded by the chief 'Pir' or spiritual head of the Ismailias, a Muham-