

About two miles from the village I crossed by a bridge the fairly deep stream formed by the united waters of the Yars of Yotkan and Kashe, and on the other bank of the ravine reached the lands of Halalbagh, a collection of large hamlets which I was anxious to see once more, as a local tradition connects the site with the pre-Muhammadan rulers of the country. Close to the central hamlet there stretches a marsh, known as Aiding-kul, covering about a square mile. It is overgrown with reeds and fed by copious springs which form quite a little stream at the northern end where the marsh drains towards the Yurung-kash.

Islam Beg secured me here a very intelligent guide in the person of Ibrahim Mullah, a man well known for his learning and piety. Though eighty-six years old at the time of my visit, he was still quite active. His comfortable embonpoint and his showy silk dress well-lined with fur showed plainly that, despite Koran and pilgrimages, he had not neglected the good things of this world. Ibrahim Mullah owns Turki 'Taskiras' of the various Imams who are worshipped at the most popular of Khotan Mazars, and soon showed me in them chapter and verse for his assertion that it was at Halalbagh that there once stood the city of the 'Khalkhal-i Chin-u-Machin,' the legendary heathen ruler of Khotan. According to the popular tradition recorded in these texts, the four Imams whose blessed bodies now rest in a famous Mazar at Hasha, killed this opponent of Islam, and his city became a waste. The shrine of Kum-i-Shahidan, about half a mile to the west of the marsh, is supposed to mark the spot where three hundred and sixty faithful followers of the Imams found martyrdom in the final struggle.

According to Ibrahim Mullah, Mirza Abu-Bakr, the ruler of Kashgar and Khotan in the early part of the sixteenth century, had the old site excavated for the sake of its hidden treasures. He brought river-water to the place to enable his workmen to wash the soil,—just as is now done at Yotkan,—and in the hollow left by his diggings there formed the marsh of Halalbagh. No old remains of any kind are now found, and it is thus difficult to judge whether there is any historical foundation for the story. Mirza