

Abu-Bakr, about whose doings we are well informed by the *Tarikh-i-Rashidi*, the interesting chronicle of Mirza Haidar, his nephew, certainly carried on treasure-seeking operations on a great scale at various old sites in his dominions. But whether Halalbagh was really among the places he exploited, or whether his reputation alone induced the local literati to connect with his name the supposed origin of the Aiding-kul marsh, can scarcely be decided without tracing old remains at the site or earlier evidence of the tradition. The mound called 'Nagara-khana' ("the hall of kettle-drums") which rises to a height of about twenty-seven feet close to the southern edge of the marsh, is popularly supposed to represent a remnant of the ancient city wall. But on close examination it proved to be a natural bank of loess, without a trace of brickwork or other mark of artificial construction.

The rigour of winter was now setting in rapidly. So I was glad to avail myself during the short halt at Khotan, which the final preparations for the desert journey demanded, of the shelter offered by Tokhta Akhun's suburban residence. In its dimly lighted but tolerably warm rooms I was hard at work writing up accounts of my geographical and antiquarian observations for despatch to Europe, and carefully sorting and re-packing the baggage. In order to keep the camels, on which we should have to depend entirely for the difficult marches through the sands, as lightly laden as possible, I decided to leave behind in charge of Badruddin, the Afghan Aksakal, a depôt of all stores and materials not immediately needed. The elimination was no easy matter. On the one hand it was impossible to estimate the length of time during which my explorations would keep me away from Khotan; on the other it was clear that in the inhospitable regions in which we were to pass the winter, any deficiency in the necessary supplies and equipment might have a very serious effect on our health and thus hamper my movements. It was largely through the care bestowed on transport and supplies, that I was subsequently able to carry my operations so much farther from the Khotan base than originally anticipated.