

the coarse 'Kham' of the country. The custom which prompts pilgrims to leave behind these tokens of their devotion prevails equally at Muhammadan and Hindu pilgrimage places throughout India. I thought at the time how curious an archæological find this exhibition of textile samples would make if it were safely buried beneath the sands and laid bare again after centuries.

The pilgrims' path to the tomb winds round the hill, and on its inner side are everywhere little heaps of earth arranged like graves. They are intended to symbolise the resting-places of the 'Shahids,' the faithful Muslims who fell here with Imam Jafar Sadik, their holy leader, fighting the infidels of 'Chin and Machin,' *i.e.*, Khotan, as related in the Taskirah or legendary of the shrine. More curious to me, however, was the observation that the hill, which rises about 170 feet above the lake, does not consist of sand but of stony detritus overlying reefs of salt. The latter crops out at several points and is of greyish-white colour. The presence of rock-salt, and of the gravel which covers it, is remarkable enough in this locality. Both to the west and east of the riverine belt there is nothing but sand. If the sanctity of the hill goes back to pre-Muhammadan times, as is likely enough in view of what has been observed of other pilgrimage places in this region, this natural peculiarity would suffice to explain it.

From the hilltop we enjoyed an extensive view over the desert northward. The forest, which marks the extent of the river's fertilising influence, seemed to die away some six or seven miles beyond the Mazar. The stream, before losing itself in the sand, takes a turn to the north-west, and that direction, too, my guides indicated for the ancient site.

It took a long time to get my caravan into marching order on the morning of January 26th. The men went in turns to pay their respects to the saint's tomb on the hilltop, and later on the filling and securing of the water-tanks that were to supply us at the "old town" caused further delay. No water is to be got by digging at the site I was about to visit, and accordingly I knew that we should have to depend for a lengthy stay on the tanks.