

At the familiar shrine of Burhanuddin I picked up *en route* the two guides who, under the Amban's order, had been sent by the Beg of Gulakhma. They looked unusually reticent and stupid, but it was too late when we found out that they knew nothing of such a route as I wished to take. Too timid to aver their ignorance, they thought it safest to guide us further and further south, where at least there was no risk from the dreaded Taklamakan. Thus, after leaving the left river-bank and crossing a belt of high sand dunes, we found ourselves, on the 23rd of March, in a wide area of swampy jungle watered from the marshes of Shivul, west of Keriya. As the local knowledge of the guides quite gave out here, we had great difficulty in extricating our animals from the boggy marsh, treacherously covered with light sand, in which the Shivul stream ends. Though there were everywhere the tracks of flocks that had grazed here during the winter, we did not succeed in finding a single shepherd to help in guiding us. Fortunately we came at last upon firmer ground, where the Shivul Darya flowed as a limpid stream in a winding but well-defined bed, about fifteen feet broad. This helped once more to guide our "guides," and ultimately, after a long and tiring march through the dusk, we arrived at the solitary little shrine of Arish-Mazar. Though the rustic Sheikh living near the saint's tomb was at first greatly alarmed by the arrival of so large a party, fodder was soon forthcoming for the tired ponies, and big fires were lit to guide the belated part of the caravan.

After the experience I had gained of the value of our guides there was no alternative but to resign myself to letting them reach again familiar ground in the oasis itself before striking off into the desert. Accordingly we made our way south-westwards, through the sandy jungle in which the water of another marsh-fed stream, the Karakir Darya, finally loses itself. The track we followed led through a maze of tamarisk-covered sand-cones, standing closer together than I had seen them anywhere on the borders of the true desert. Unexpectedly we came in their midst upon the unmistakable remains of some ancient settlement, which the few shepherds