

Routes
through
Tāsh-
kurghān.

an important goal for travellers. From whichever side we may approach Sarīkol, there is an inhospitable belt of high mountain land to be crossed first, practically devoid of permanent habitations, and throughout incapable of furnishing supplies and places of shelter to caravans. The elevated Pāmīr region stretching westwards can never, during historical times, have permitted of cultivation. The routes which, starting from Tagharma, connect Sarīkol with Kāshgar to the north-east and Yarkand to the east, lead by a succession of high passes over barren spurs of the great meridional range with narrow uninhabited gorges between them. It is true that the difficult and rarely frequented tracts which cross the mountains between the Tāsh-kurghān and Yarkand rivers in the direction of Karghalik and Kōk-yār, pass through some of the minor Sarīkolī settlements. But the produce raised on their isolated plots of cultivable land does not suffice even for the maintenance of the small pastoral population scattered over this region. Finally, if the route be followed which leads northward past Muztāgh-Ata and then descends along the Yamān-yār river into the Kāshgar plain, as described in my *Personal Narrative*⁵, an even greater distance has to be traversed before permanent habitations are reached.

Resources
of Sarīkol.

This situation of Sarīkol, in the midst of desolate mountain tracts and yet at the junction of important routes, necessarily invests with exceptional value whatever natural resources the district possesses. Given an adequate population, and an administration capable of protecting it, these resources would, undoubtedly, be far larger than they are at present. The lower part of the Tāghdumbāsh Valley, for a distance of forty miles from below Tāsh-kurghān to the hamlet of Dafdār, shows a remarkably broad and uniform expanse of fertile ground at its bottom. Cultivation is now restricted to a small continuous stretch of the valley above and below Tāsh-kurghān, and to certain isolated settlements, such as Dafdār and Pisling, recently started at points higher up the valley where it is easy to obtain water for irrigation from side streams.

Earlier
settlements
in Tāsh-
kurghān
Valley.

But the uniform tradition of the inhabitants, as reported to me during my stay at Tāsh-kurghān, asserts that the compact cultivated area once extended much higher up the valley. In support of this belief, reference was made to the remains of extensive irrigation canals traceable along the foot of the mountains, especially on the east side of the valley, as well as to deserted village sites, such as Bāzār-dasht, found at a considerable distance beyond the limits of the present belt of village land. I believe that these statements may be accepted as based on substantial facts. On the one hand, the almost unbroken stretch of alluvial land which I passed on my route from Dafdār to Tughlān-shahr, seemed only to wait for systematic irrigation in order to yield the crops for which the climate is adapted. On the other hand, it is impossible to doubt that the periodical raids from slave-hunting Kanjūtīs and Shighnīs, to which we know Sarīkol to have been subjected before and after Yāqūb Bēg's rebellion, and which did not cease completely until the British occupation of Hunza, must have resulted in a partial depopulation of the country⁶.

From the devastating effects of these raids, the upper portions of the Tāghdumbāsh Valley, lying nearest, necessarily suffered most. But they extended also to the Tagharma Valley, which, in its well-watered central flat, about twelve miles long by seven broad, offers ample ground for agricultural settlements⁷.

⁵ See *Ruins of Khotan*, chaps. v-vii.

⁶ For the modern history of Sarīkol, compare Col. T. E. Gordon, *Roof of the World*, pp. 109 sqq., where an instructive account is given of the general conditions of the main valleys at the time of his visit (1874).

⁷ The destructive results of Kanjūtī raiding in Tagharma

are illustrated by the information recorded by Capt. H. Trotter in 1874 about a fort village in the south-east of the plain, the Tājik population of which had been reduced from fifty to four families within less than a generation; see *Yarkand Mission Report*, p. 269.