

Ancient mound near Tāsh-kurghān Fort.

Outside the fort, but within the ruined town walls, the accumulated masses of débris effectively hide whatever substructures of ancient buildings the ground may contain. But beyond the north-western face of the circumvallation, and at a distance of about 150 yards, there rises from the level ground of the shallow nullah that here cuts through the conglomerate plateau, a circular mound of manifestly artificial origin, which looks like a much-decayed Stūpa (see Plate XIX). The present height of the mound is above 30 feet, and its diameter over 200 feet, which shows that the original structure must have been of considerable dimensions. The mound is composed of rough stones, with layers of mortar between them, and for the sake of the latter it is being dug into by the Chinese soldiers garrisoning the fort. The manner of construction which these diggings reveal seems to agree closely with that observed in the internal structure of many an ancient Stūpa built in parts of the Punjāb and the Indian north-west frontier where stone material was readily obtainable. Yet, notwithstanding the proof of antiquity thus afforded, it appears to me doubtful, having regard to the absence of other ruined remains in the immediate vicinity, and to the situation of the mound, whether its suggested identification with the Stūpa which tradition ascribed to Aśoka would be justified¹⁷.

Legend of Afrāsiyāb.

Thus no clear indication remains of the buildings which the tradition of Hsüan-tsang's days connected with the original residence of the founder of the dynasty. But of the legends which were told of the latter a trace survives to this day in the name Afrāsiyāb, given to the high and conspicuous mountain spur which projects into the valley east and south-east of Tāsh-kurghān. We have noted already that the present tradition of Sarīkol knows king Afrāsiyāb, the legendary king of Tūrān in the Īrānian epic, as the founder of Varshadeh or Tāsh-kurghān. On the other hand, it may be remembered that the legend heard by Hsüan-tsang located the mysterious resting-place of the first king of Chieh-p'an-t'ō in the cavern of a great mountain, a hundred li, or a day's march, to the south-east of his capital. Though the legend in this form is no longer heard, it is evident that it accounts for the application of the name of Afrāsiyāb to the mountain spur rising in the position indicated by the pilgrim.

Īrānian folklore in Sarīkol.

In view of what has been explained above about the racial character of the Sarīkol population, it cannot surprise us that whatever I could learn in the way of local traditions shows close dependence on the legendary lore of Īrān. We have already seen how the name of Naushīrwān, the hero of the classical Persian epic, is introduced by popular tradition into the ancient legend of Kiz-kurghān. Other names famous in Persian romance are associated with the local tradition related to me about an ancient irrigation canal, which formerly carried the waters of the Tāghdumbāsh river from near Dafdār along the foot of the hills towards Tughlān-shahr, a large collection of hamlets opposite to Tāsh-kurghān. The walls supporting this canal, which are now breached in many places, are said to be built of hewn stones. The story goes that Shīrīn, a lady who lived at Varshadeh, told her lover Farhād that she would accept his suit if he could conduct a watercourse to the fields of Tughlān-shahr large enough to sweep down a cow. Farhād built the canal now in ruins; but though its current was not sufficiently strong to fulfil the lady's condition, Farhād attained his object by placing the hide of a cow filled with straw in the water, which easily carried it down its course.

Time did not permit me to trace the remains of this old irrigation work which, no doubt, enabled much of the fertile open ground, now wholly deserted, along the right river bank above Tughlān-shahr to be cultivated. As evidence of the large population which this tract is supposed to have once supported, I was told that a piece of ground situated between Yurgāl

¹⁷ See *Prelim. Report*, p. 11.