

Hisār, it is certainly longer and leads for a considerably greater distance over ground which is devoid of cultivation or permanent habitations¹.

It is the latter fact which makes me believe that Professor H. Cordier was right in tracing by this very route Marco Polo's itinerary from the central Pāmīrs to Kāshgar. The Venetian traveller, coming from Wakhān, reached after three days a great lake which may be either Lake Victoria or Lake Chakmak, at a 'height that is said to be the highest place in the world'. He then describes faithfully enough the desert plain called 'Pamier', which he makes extend for the distance of a twelve days' ride, and next tells us: 'Now if we go on with our journey towards the east-north-east, we travel a good forty days, continually passing over mountains and hills, or through valleys, and crossing many rivers and tracts of wilderness. And in all this way you find neither habitation of man, nor any green thing, but must carry with you whatever you require².'

Marco
Polo's
route to
Kāshgar.

This reference to continuous 'tracts of wilderness' shows clearly that, for one reason or another, Marco Polo did not pass through the cultivated valleys of Tāsh-kurghān or Tagharma, as he would necessarily have done if his route to Kāshgar, the region he next describes, had lain over the Chichiklik Pass. We must assume that, after visiting either the Great or Little Pāmīr, he travelled down the Ak-su river for some distance, and then crossing the watershed eastwards by one of the numerous passes struck the route which leads past Muztāgh-Ata and on towards the Gez Defile. In the brief supplementary notes contributed to Professor Cordier's critical analysis of this portion of Marco Polo's itinerary, I have pointed out how thoroughly the great Venetian's description of the forty days' journey to the E.N.E. of the Pāmīr Lake can be appreciated by any one who has passed through the Pāmīr region and followed the valleys stretching round the Muztāgh-Ata range on the west and north³. After leaving Tāsh-kurghān and Tagharma there is no local produce to be obtained until the oasis of Tāshmalik is reached. In the narrow valley of the Yamān-yār river, forming the Gez Defile, there is scarcely any grazing; its appearance down to its opening into the plain is, in fact, far more desolate than that of the elevated Pāmīr regions.

In the absence of any data as to the manner and season in which Marco Polo's party travelled, it would serve no useful purpose to hazard explanations as to why he should assign a duration of forty days to a journey which for a properly equipped traveller need not take more than fifteen or sixteen days, even when the summer floods close the passage through the lower Gez Defile, and render it necessary to follow the circuitous track over the Tokuz-Dawān or 'Nine Passes'. But it is certainly worth mention that Benedict Goëz, too, speaks of the desert of 'Pāmech' (Pāmīr) as taking forty days to cross if the snow was extensive,

Length of
Marco
Polo's route.

¹ The total distance from Tāsh-kurghān to Kāshgar (Old Town) by Chichiklik and Yangi-Hisār is reckoned by Col. Trotter at 168 miles. Cultivated ground is reached after a march of about 111 miles at the large village of Ighizyār (compare *Yarkand Mission Report*, pp. 432 sq.). The length of the route Tāsh-kurghān-Little Kara-kul-Gez Defile-Kāshgar is estimated by me on the basis of my notes and our survey at about 190 miles, if the direct track in the bed of the lower Yamān-yār river is followed. When the summer floods render this passage impracticable, as at the time of my journey, the trying and devious track over the Tokuz-Dawān ('Nine Passes') must be taken, adding about forty-six miles to the total length. There is practically no cultivation to be

found until we arrive at Tāshmalik, about forty miles' distance from Kāshgar by the nearest route. Notwithstanding its greater length, the Gez-Kara-kul route is held to be preferable in the winter season; for the Ulūgh-Rabāt Pass, only a little over 14,000 feet in height, is then apparently far less formidable an obstacle than the Chichiklik Pass, and an easy descent in the Gez Defile is also assured at that season. But owing to the difficulties about supplies, only small parties ever frequent it.

² See Yule, *Marco Polo*, i. pp. 171 sq., with Prof H. Cordier's notes, *ibid.*, i. pp. 175, 182.

³ Compare Yule, *Marco Polo*, ii. pp. 593 sq.