

assumed formidable proportions, rising to heights between 150 and 200 feet. By the evening of January 8 the hard-frozen river was at last safely reached near the grazing-ground of Kochkar-Öghil.

Mazār of
Burhānuddīn.

I had decided first to visit Keriya, the head quarters of the District east of Khotan, before commencing other explorations, in order to secure personally the assistance of the local Amban as the indispensable condition for successful work. Kara-dong, the old site higher up the Keriya river, seemed temptingly near, but in the lonely jungle tracts along the river, uninhabited except by nomadic shepherds, it would have been impossible to raise either labourers or the badly-needed supplies. For a description of the four long marches which brought us to Keriya through the belt of Toghrak jungle and scrub accompanying the river's course in the desert I may refer to my Personal Narrative¹. The only place of quasi-antiquarian interest was the Mazār of Sayyid Burhānuddīn Pādshāhim, reached after the first march, where I was surprised to find a small but flourishing settlement of Shaikhs (see Fig. 36), attesting the widespread popularity which the saint's tomb enjoys as a pilgrimage place for the people of the oases southwards. Nothing seemed to be known of the holy man's story except that he was connected in some way with the still holier Imām Ja'far Sādiq worshipped at a famous desert shrine beyond Niya, and that like him he had fallen as a 'Shahīd'. Considering the distance, fully 50 miles, at which the Burhānuddīn Mazār is situated from the oasis of Keriya, and the wholly deserted condition of the intervening ground, I wondered whether the worship of this far-outlying shrine may not in some way represent a survival of the attraction which the Buddhist establishments of Li-hsieh or Dandān-Uiliq had once possessed for the pious. Some cultivation is carried on near the shrine, and this could be greatly extended, as there is plenty of fertile level ground as well as abundance of water.

Stay at
Keriya.

At Keriya, which I reached on January 12, I found Huang Daloi, the Amban, duly advised of my visit and its object by Pan Dārin, my Khotan friend, and full of eagerness to facilitate my explorations in every possible manner. The necessity of giving my men and camels a much-needed short rest, as well as of awaiting the arrival of the ponies which were to rejoin us from Khotan, obliged me to make a stay of five days at Keriya. Apart from numerous tasks which had accumulated during my stay in the desert, and which could only now be attended to, I used it for careful inquiries about ancient remains in the district. Of antiques none were forthcoming; for Keriya town is not itself an old place—it has acquired size and importance only since the creation of the new District of which it forms the head quarters²—and the 'treasure-seeking' profession does not flourish as at Khotan. But besides learning of a number of sites manifestly of the Tati type, I received information about a *kōne-shahr* or 'old town' in the desert north of Niya, which decided me to extend my explorations first in that direction. Abdullah, a respectable old cultivator of Keriya, told me of having seen about ten years earlier houses, evidently of a type similar to the structures of Dandān-Uiliq, half-buried in the sand some marches beyond the famous Mazār of Imām Ja'far Sādiq. Others, too, had heard stories of this 'old town', and the existence of the Muhammadan shrine itself seemed, in the light of former experience, to point to some earlier site of interest being found in the vicinity. So I did not hesitate to set out for it on the 18th of January.

During the four days' march which brought me to Niya there was little to be seen but

¹ See pp. 329 sqq.

² The district which was formed after the Chinese reconquest of 1877 out of the eastern portions of the old Khotan Amban-ship now extends from east of Yurung-kāsh town to beyond Charchan, and thus comprises a territory,

mostly desert, stretching over no less than five degrees of longitude. It is curious to note that the Chinese administration officially styles it by the name of *Pü-t'ien*, thus transferring to it the ancient Chinese designation of the Khotan oasis.