

CHAPTER VIII

TO THE SOURCE OF THE OXUS

THERE could be no doubt about our now nearing the Pamirs when, after a cold night with the thermometer sinking to a minimum of 25 degrees below freezing-point, we started across stony and partly marshy ground for the low saddle known as Dasht-i-Mirza Murad. By crossing it the route cuts off a southern bend of the now much broadened Oxus Valley. A ten miles' ride over alluvial plateaus still retaining snow in great patches brought us to a low spur from which I first sighted north-eastwards the rolling downs of the Little Pamir. In the clear air of this high elevation our day's goal, the Kirghiz camp at Bozai-gumbaz, seemed quite close. There the head-waters of the Ab-i-Panja meet the stream coming from Lake Chakmaktin on the Little Pamir. In the distance far away to the east I rejoiced to greet again the snowy peaks guarding the approach to the Wakhjir Pass and the source of the Oxus.

But at this point of my return to the 'Roof of the World' there was an archaeological object to claim my attention. The fairly well preserved little structure of which I had heard before is known as Karwan-balasi, from the local tradition which believes it to have been built as a tomb for a merchant's son who had died here in old times. The ruin shows a small cella, about nine by ten feet outside in ground plan, solidly built of flat slabs set in mortar and at a height of about twelve feet surmounted by a now broken dome (Fig. 5). The orientation of the cella towards the south-west, *i.e.* the direction of Mecca, with a doorway from the side opposite, makes it practically certain that it was erected in Muhammadan times. All