

I did not give my men a chance of wasting time at the Sheikhs' flesh-pots, but pushed on the same day, October 18th, to the farthest point where water was obtainable. The customary sheep bought from the sacred establishment and returned to it as an offering sufficed to allay any religious scruples. The Niya men were quite content to pay their respects to the saint's tomb from across the small lake which fringes the foot of the hillock. Most of their land is held from the shrine, and I could only conjecture that, perhaps, the tithes they have to pay to the Sheikhs were not calculated to develop in them such feelings of special awe and attachment as may animate pilgrims attracted from afar.

At Tülküch-köl, four and a half miles below the Mazar, a fertile little oasis, cultivated by some fifteen men, had been cleared in the luxuriant jungle. There we pitched camp near the last of the small lakes which give to the place its name, and which the river of Niya feeds during the summer floods before finally losing itself in the sands. The filling of the four water-tanks and of most of the twenty-five goat-skins I had brought from India was accomplished in the evening. But the selection of supplies to be stored here in a depot, arrangements with the local shepherds about our ponies' grazing, etc., kept me busy far longer. In order to economize water and transport, and also to save my learned Chinese secretary weary tramps over high sands, for which his previous career had not given him physical fitness, I was obliged to leave him behind in charge of the depot.