

Cultivation
at Shuyist.

easily sloping hill, across which the road led, all manifestly capable of cultivation and in part covered by luxuriant scrub and jungle. Yet only at two points did I come upon small plots of tilled land.

I was thus fully prepared to find Shuyist, the last village of Yārkhūn, a place devoid of resources. This expectation was not belied by the few terraced fields and low stone huts I could see from where my camp was pitched by the scrub-covered river bank, opposite to the debouchure of the narrow side-valley descending from the Rich Pass which leads to Turikhō. All the greater was my surprise at the ample supply of animals and men which I found assembled here through the forethought of Khān Sāhib Pīr Bakhsh to help my baggage onwards over the remaining marches to Wakhān. The ease with which they had been collected explained itself only next morning when, after saying farewell to that capable representative of British authority in Mastūj, I had started on the march up the valley. At first the track, quite easy throughout, led along the edge of terraces rising high above the river. Here I passed the massive watch-tower known as Tōpkhāna-i-Ziā-bēg and said to have been erected about a hundred years ago to guard against Wakhī irruptions. On terraced ground higher up I noticed the isolated holdings of Chitisar and Imkip still counted with Shuyist. But after about three miles the ground began to show a strikingly different aspect. Instead of narrow strips of boulder-strewn ground or shingle slopes, such as the previous marches from Chitrāl had taken me past in depressing monotony and with rare interruptions, I found myself crossing a succession of broad alluvial plateaus sloping gently down to the river. Very soon this open 'Maidān', as my local followers called it, widened to fully a mile or so. Arable land there was here in abundance, with plentiful water, too, supplied for irrigation by the Shusaro-gol and other side-streams which the eternal snows of the main Hindukush chain feed.

New
colonies
above
Shuyist.

Nor had this chance for colonization been neglected. For a distance of nearly four miles by the path, signs of new cultivation met the eye everywhere, jungle clearings, scattered homesteads, and fields as yet unenclosed. It is true these 'new lands' were not yet continuous, and stretches abounded of good soil left to lie as scrub-covered waste. But then the colonists, who had settled here since this reclamation was started some seventeen years before my passage, numbered as yet only some thirty families. Most of them came from Sanōghar, Turikhō, and other parts of Kāshkār-Bālā where pressure of population is now making itself felt, a few also across from Wakhān. It was from these new colonies that the numerous men and ponies, held necessary in view of the transport difficulties before us, had been collected so readily. Yet the land actually taken up by them seemed but a very small proportion, perhaps scarcely one-tenth of the total area awaiting cultivation. Riding over these fertile slopes where the luxuriant jungle is now steadily being cleared, it was easy for me to realize that I had here before me by far the most extensive stretch of cultivable ground within the whole of the Yārkhūn Valley, affording room for settlements quite as large as, if not larger than, those comprised in Chitrāl proper. Nor did it take me long to recognize the clear indications supporting the tradition which I heard from the intelligent Deputy-Hākim of Mīrāgrām and other local attendants that these recent colonists were but reclaiming ground of earlier cultivation. Everywhere on stretches of ground still awaiting reoccupation the eye could distinguish walls formed of stones which had been cleared from the quondam fields, terraces carefully levelled for irrigation, and low mounds which probably marked the position of old rubble-built habitations. The central portion of this great 'Maidān' is known by the name of *Abdullah-Khān Lasht*, 'the plain of Abdullah Khān',¹⁴ and a tradition, of which I had heard at Chitrāl, points to a rough conical boulder in a field as a mark left by Abdullah Khān for his intended 'Noghor' or fort.

¹⁴ *Lasht* is here the Khōwār equivalent of Persian *dasht*, 'waste plain', the phonetic change of *d* > *l* being typical of the East Irānian languages and common also in Khōwār

and its kindred dialects; cf. Grierson, *Pisāca Languages*, p. 109.