

Local wor-
ship of rocky
heights.

Taklamakān.² The strikingly bold appearance presented by a number of these rocky heights must have made them objects of local worship from the earliest times. The highest among them is the conspicuous massif which rises to the east of Marāl-bāshi town to an elevation of over 7,000 feet (Map No. 15. c. 1), and this peak appropriately enough is respected as the *Mazār-tāgh* κατ' ἐξοχήν. A shrine at its north foot, above the oasis of Chār-bāgh, is a much-frequented place of pilgrimage. But others, too, of these hills are revered as the alleged resting-places of Muhammadan saints, and, if of lesser height, deserve their distinction as 'Tīrthas' by the impressive ruggedness of their cliffs as seen in the case of the Ōkur-mazār-tāgh (Fig. 344).

Termina-
tion of
Kāshgar
River.

Between the southern ends of these hill chains there extend wide stretches of low ground, much of it still partly permanent marsh, partly liable to annual inundation by the summer floods of both the Yārkand and the Kāshgar Rivers. It is in this area, the complicated hydrographic details of which could be elucidated only by a minute survey, that the Kāshgar River may be said to find at present its virtual termination. That this in earlier historical times lay further east appears very probable, both in view of what has been shown above about the irrigation once brought into the desert round Chong-tim and of what in November, 1913, I was able to ascertain as to exceptional floods on occasion reaching old beds traceable far away towards the extreme south-western edge of Ak-su cultivation.

Older line
of high road.

Like every deltaic area, this ground between Tumshuk and Marāl-bāshi must be subject to considerable surface changes, and this is illustrated by two facts which present some antiquarian interest and hence may find brief record here. I ascertained that until the time of the Chinese reconquest in 1877 the whole area between the Mazār-tāgh and Ōkur-mazār-tāgh, which now affords room for the flourishing and relatively large oasis of Chār-bāgh (Map No. 15. c. 1), was uncultivable owing to annual inundations from the Kāshgar River and extensive marshes. In consequence the high road from Tumshuk did not pass by the line it now follows past the southern end of the Ōkur-mazār-tāgh and through Chār-bāgh, but struck from the gap between the Tumshuk hills across drift-sand desert westwards to the hill chain of Bēl-tāgh. This it crossed through a similar gap, and thence, skirting the northern edge of the marshes near the now abandoned hamlet of 'Old Chār-bāgh', passed from the north-east to Marāl-bāshi on the terminal Kāshgar River course.

Reconnais-
sance to
north-east
of Marāl-
bāshi.

The evidence here afforded of a considerable change in quite recent times, affecting both the cultivated area of this tract and the line of an important high road, had its obvious bearing on the question of the ancient Chinese route to Kāshgar which my observations south of Kelpin had first raised. So, when on arrival at Marāl-bāshi I learned of the existence of some ruins where the old route passes through the Bēl-tāgh hills and of a ruined site beyond at the foot of Lāl-tāgh, I decided to spare a day for a reconnaissance in that direction. It proved a long and hot day's ride, close on

² Regarding the morphological connexion between the Mazār-tāgh hill chain on the Khotan River and this range, see above, p. 1285; *Geogr. Journal*, xlviii, pp. 113 sq.

The growth of Marāl-bāshi into an agricultural settlement of consequence seems to be of relatively recent date. The place was formerly known as Barchuk (see Yule-Cordier, *Cathay*, iv, p. 228); but I cannot trace any mention of it in early Chinese records. (The position of *Wo-shē-tē*, identified by M. Chavannes, *Turcs occid.*, p. 152, note, with Marāl-bāshi, cannot be fixed.)

The irrigation of Marāl-bāshi is principally derived from a big artificial lake known as Chong-köl and constructed by the Chinese after 1877. Its position is roughly marked on Map No. 15. B. 2. It is filled each year by flood-water obtained from the Yārkand River and to some extent also

from the Kāshgar-daryā. The bed of the latter lies so low that its water during a large part of the year can be utilized only for the irrigation of the lands reclaimed from the old marshes about Chār-bāgh. Hence whatever new land north of the river has been brought under cultivation during the ten to fifteen years preceding my visit depends on three conduits, or *nōr*, roughly constructed in wood, which carry the available canal water across the deep-cut river-bed.

There are three of these conduits, called *Ukat-nōr*, *Karaköl-nōr*, and *Tōpa-nōr*, and the new colonies opened by means of them bear the same names. The last of them had been established by P'an Ta-jên when in charge of the Yārkand district, then including Marāl-bāshi, and it was pleasant here, too, to find my old friend gratefully remembered by the settlers.