

I reached Singer by the route already surveyed in 1907 and, after securing there Abdurrahīm's youngest brother as guide, I proceeded westwards to examine localities where traces of earlier occupation were reported. Passing thus from P'ō-ch'êng-tzu to Shindī I was able to map interesting and as yet unsurveyed ground in the mountains; their rugged ranges and deeply eroded valleys were in striking contrast with the worn-down uplands met in the Kuruk-tāgh further east. The Khangol peaks passed on this route seemed to exceed 10,000 feet and probably represent the greatest elevation of the Kuruk-tāgh. ⁷⁰

I then made my way south-eastwards over barren gravel plateaus to the salt spring of Yārdang-bulak at the south foot of the Kuruk-tāgh and by the second week of March entered the waterless desert to the south. Besides exploring certain ancient burial grounds I completed the survey of the Kuruk-daryā, the dried-up river-bed which once carried the water of the Konche-daryā to the Lou-lan sites and the ancient delta to the south. ⁷¹

The day after my return to Yārdang-bulak I was rejoined by Afrāz-gul whose safe arrival at this appointed desert meeting place I had been eagerly awaiting. Some anxiety about the safety of the overdue little party was justified by the truly forbidding nature of the ground he had to traverse and the length of the strain put on our brave camels. Afrāz-gul had carried through the difficult programme laid down by me with remarkable completeness and intelligence, his success on this survey alone fully justifying the award to him two years later of the Macgregor Silver Medal by the Intelligence Department of the Indian General Staff.

Guided by a third brother of Abdurrahīm he first gained Āltmish-bulak by the most direct track leading due south of Deghar. ⁷² Thence he surveyed certain ancient remains in the extreme north-east of the once-watered Lou-lan area for the examination of which I had been unable to spare time a year earlier. Replenishing his supply of ice from the salt springs, he struck out to the south-east for the point where my explorations of the preceding year had shown the ancient Chinese route from Lou-lan to Tun-huang to have entered the salt-encrusted bed of the Lop sea. ⁷³ From there he traced its shore-line to the south-west, making plenty of interesting observations on inlets and terminal flood-beds once carrying water from the Kuruk-daryā. Finally he reached, at Chainut-köl, the northern edge of the area in which the spring floods of the dying Tārīm spread themselves out to undergo rapid evaporation in lagoons and marshes. ⁷⁴ He arrived, as I had intended, just before the usual inundation could interfere with his progress to ground affording some scanty grazing for his hard-trying camels.

After a few days' rest he turned northwards into the wind-eroded desert and striking the line of the southernmost branch of the 'Dry River' traced more remains of the ancient settlement discovered along it a year before. Finally after crossing my route of December, 1906, in an area of formidable dunes, he gained the main riverine belt of the Kuruk-daryā along the foot of the outermost Kuruk-tāgh. ⁷⁵ From this exceptionally difficult exploration which had kept Afrāz-gul and his three plucky companions from contact with any human being for a month and a half, he brought back, besides interesting archæological finds, an accurate plane-table survey and careful records of topographical details such as I could not have hoped for from any of my surveying assistants employed on this or my previous expeditions.

From Yārdang-bulak we moved westwards to the point known as Ying-p'an where the ancient bed of the Kuruk-daryā is crossed by the Turfān-Lop track. There a short halt was made in order to explore interesting remains at and near a fortified station situated at the debouchure of the dried-up stream of Shindī and occupied during the early period when it guarded the ancient Chinese high road from Lou-lan. The same opportunity was used also for surveying the belt of drift-

⁷⁰ See Sheets Nos. 29. A. 1, 2, B. 1; 25. D. 2. The hypsometrical height measurements taken by me on this route had not been worked out at the time when these map sheets were compiled.

⁷¹ See Sheet No. 29. A. 2, 3, B. 3; cf. above p. 28.

⁷² See Sheets Nos. 28. D. 3, 4; 29. D. 1, 2.

⁷³ See Sheet No. 32. A, B. 3; cf. above p. 30.

⁷⁴ For Afrāz-gul's route from Āltmish-bulak as

marked by Camps C. ccxxxvii a — ccxli v a, see Sheets Nos. 32. A. 3, 4, B. 3; 29. D. 4; 30. C. 1. The details of Afrāz-gul's plane-table traverse are on this route as on all his independent surveys supplemented by a full and exact record of topographical features in the form of a route report in Urdu from which I hope to publish extracts.

⁷⁵ See Sheet No. 29. A, B. 3, C. 3, 4.