

Local tradition in Sarikol uniformly asserts the great antiquity of Tāsh-kurghān town, known by its old name as *Varshadeh*, and ascribes its foundation to Afrāsiyāb, the king of Tūrān, who figures so prominently in Persian epic legend¹⁴. The fact that I could not hear of finds of old coins nor of other antiquities at the site in no way discredits the traditional belief in its early date; for the continued occupation of the site must have resulted in any ancient remains becoming deeply buried beneath accumulations of rubbish, from which the scanty rainfall of this region is quite insufficient to bring them again to light. Nor need we feel in doubt about the identity of Tāsh-kurghān with Hsüan-tsang's capital of Sarikol, on account of the discrepancy which the actual circumference of the walls shows from the measurement of twenty li, or about four miles, recorded by the Chinese pilgrim. In days of greater population and prosperity the area occupied by the town must have extended further, either over the lower portions of the plateau already referred to, or over part of the adjoining plain.

Local traditions of Tāsh-kurghān.

This difference in extent renders it difficult to arrive at any definite opinion as to the position which the royal palace and the various structures mentioned by Hsüan-tsang are likely to have occupied. We have already seen that the palace, in which, according to the legend above reproduced, the Han princess with her miraculously born son was supposed to have been established, is said to have had 'an enclosure of some 300 paces'. If double paces are meant this measurement would curiously accord with the circumference (about 1,300 ft.), shown by the present fort built within the ruined town, probably on earlier foundations.

Structures mentioned by Hsüan-tsang.

'When Aśoka Rājā was in the world, he built in the very centre of this palace a Stūpa. Afterwards, when the king changed his residence to the north-east angle of the royal precinct, he built in the position of this old palace, for the sake of Kumāralabdha (T'ung-shou), a convent remarkable for the height and largeness of its towers and pavilions. The statue of Buddha (placed in this convent) was of majestic appearance. The venerable Kumāralabdha was a native of Takṣaśilā. From his childhood he showed a rare intelligence, and in early life gave up the world, &c.'¹⁵ Hsüan-tsang then records the spiritual excellences which made Kumāralabdha renowned as a great teacher in the north, like Aśvaghosha in the east, Deva in the south, and Nāgārjuna in the west. 'The king of this country (Chieh-p'an-t'o), therefore, having heard of the honourable one and his great qualities, raised an army, made his troops attack Takṣaśilā and carried him off by force. He then built this convent and thus manifested the admiration with which he (Kumāralabdha) inspired him.'

The account here given is of interest as showing that even little Sarikol, in its alpine isolation, could boast of a tradition connecting one of its convents with a great luminary of the Buddhist Church in India¹⁶. But it does not help us to fix the position of the convent itself, or the old palace, the site of which it was believed to mark. I had no opportunity of visiting the interior of the Chinese fort, and I doubt whether in this great pile of solid clay and sun-dried brick, which the building operations of successive ages have helped to raise to a height of sixty to eighty feet above the ground level of the adjoining old town, the remains of any ancient structure, however imposing originally, could now be traced without extensive excavations.

¹⁴ Compare *Yarkand Mission Report*, p. 269.

¹⁵ I follow Julien's translation, *Mémoires*, ii. pp. 213 sq., which seems more exact than that of Beal, *Si-yu-ki*, ii. p. 302.

¹⁶ The somewhat violent procedure by which the ruler of Chieh-p'an-t'o is said to have possessed himself of the person of the great doctor curiously reminds one of the stories told

along the Afghān frontier of the queer methods by which Pathān clans made sure of retaining much-venerated 'Pirs'. Compare, e.g. in Darmesteter, *Lettres de l'Inde*, the story of the saint who was murdered in order that the village which he had blessed with his presence while alive might more securely enjoy in the future the miracle-working benefit of his dead body.