

elaborate details as to the route by which he was supposed to have reached them in the course of his various 'expeditions'<sup>6</sup>. Doubts had already arisen as to the genuineness of the finds sold as the result of these expeditions<sup>7</sup>, and information that reached me at Kāshgar about Islām Ākhūn had greatly strengthened these doubts. But it was at Gūma that I first touched ground where it was possible to test the 'treasure-seeker's' statements by direct local inquiries.

The information which I readily obtained on the morning after my arrival from the assembled Bēgs and Yüz-bāshis (village headmen), was precise as to the existence of an extensive débris-covered area known to all as a 'kōne-shahr', close to the road between Mokuila and Moji, the next oasis eastwards. But nobody had ever heard of the discovery of 'old books' at this or any other site. Of a series of localities which Islām Ākhūn had named in the detailed itinerary of one of his desert journeys east of Gūma, and which figured in his accounts as the sites of some remarkable discoveries<sup>8</sup>, only two were known to them. These, also, Kara-kul Mazār and Karatāgh-aghzi, instead of being far away among the great sands as described by that mendacious traveller, were declared to be close at hand, on the very outskirts of the Gūma oasis. So I decided to probe this part of the alleged itinerary by immediate inspection.

For a full description of the ride which took me to the places named, I may refer to my Personal Narrative<sup>9</sup>. Here it will suffice to state that Kara-kul Mazār ('the Mazār of the Black Lake') proved to be the resting-place of an unknown saint, marked only by the usual erection of poles bearing yaks' tails, rags, and similar ex-votos. The semicircle of sandhills, on which this humble shrine rises, lies at a distance of a little over three miles to the north-east of the Gūma Bāzār. The name is derived from a small lake of saline water close by, which is fed by flood-water of the 'Tāzgun' passing on the east. Of the vast ruined graveyard in which Islām Ākhūn had alleged that he had made a remarkable MS. find<sup>10</sup>, no trace could be discovered anywhere. Karatāgh-aghzi<sup>11</sup>, which also figured in Islām Ākhūn's narrative, was found to be a flourishing new colony of Gūma, only three miles further to the north-east. I reached it by following the broad bed of the 'Tāzgun', now dry except for the water of some scanty springs rising near Gūma. The people of Karatāgh-aghzi, whom I closely questioned, knew nothing of the ruined sites which Islām Ākhūn claimed to have visited in the desert eastwards, and still less of the discoveries made there<sup>12</sup>.

Cultivation at Karatāgh-aghzi, as well as at some other small colonies further along the course of the flood-water bed, was said to have been begun only some fifteen years before my visit. In addition to the water supplied by floods, irrigation is secured from the springs which rise apparently at several points in the broad bed cut by the 'Tāzgun'. The soil, now bearing splendid crops, and partly covered with luxuriant groves of poplar, mulberry, and other trees,

<sup>6</sup> See *J.A.S.B.*, 1899, Extra No. 1, pp. xvi-xxii.

<sup>7</sup> Compare *J.A.S.B.*, 1899, Extra No. 1, pp. 57 sqq., where the question of forgery was argued with much ingenuity, but with results necessarily inadequate from want of local evidence.

<sup>8</sup> e.g., skulls with pillows of MSS. attached; sepulchral monuments full of MSS. &c.; comp. *J.A.S.B.*, 1899, Extra No. 1, pp. xvi, sqq.

<sup>9</sup> *Ruins of Khotan*, pp. 184 sqq.

<sup>10</sup> See *J.A.S.B.*, 1897, pp. 238, 253; 1899, Extra No. 1, p. xviii.

<sup>11</sup> This is the correct form of the name usually pronounced in the abbreviated form *Karatāghiz*, through a kind

of 'haplography'; *aghzi* ('mouth of', 'opening of') is a very common termination of local names in Turkestan. The form and explanation of the name given in *J.A.S.B.*, 1899, Extra No. 1, p. xvi, is based on a misapprehension; so also 'Kara Targaz' in Capt. Deasy's map.

<sup>12</sup> Their ignorance of these localities, named Aktala-tuz, Kara-yantak, Kōk-gumbaz in Islām Ākhūn's itinerary, was scarcely surprising, considering that the ingenious forger had borrowed the names for his invented sites from localities about Sampula, far away in the eastern part of the Khotan oasis. For a full account of Islām Ākhūn's manufacture of 'ancient books' and his final confession, see below, chap. xv.

Kara-kul  
Mazār and  
Karatāgh-  
aghzi.