

second question, which touched upon the past of the site and had a direct antiquarian bearing, might have been a more difficult matter. But fortunately I was in time with my inquiries; the commencement of the excavations did not reach back further than the memory of a generation still living.

Origin of excavations.

The statements which I collected from a number of intelligent old villagers both at Yōtkan and in the vicinity, and which I took every opportunity to test during my stay, threw light on a number of interesting points and were fully accordant in essentials. From them I ascertained that no finds of any kind indicating that an ancient site was buried here below the ground had been made until the time of Niāz Hākīm Bēg, still well remembered throughout Khotan as the first governor under Yāqūb Bēg. Two or three years after his appointment, which took place about 1866, the small canal conveying water from the Kara-kāsh river for the irrigation of the Yōtkan fields began to cut for itself a deeper bed in the soft loess, that is, to turn into a 'Yār'. This is the origin of the ravine, which begins about one-and-a-half miles to the west of Yōtkan at the village of Chalbāsh, and after passing Khalche and the Yōtkan site joins the 'Yārs' of Kāshe about a mile to the north-east.

The 'Yār' of Yōtkan.

The archaeologist has good reason to feel grateful to the Yōtkan-Yār, for without its formation the remains of the old Khotan capital might have been left buried for ages to come. It was only when the flood-water escaping in the newly-formed ravine had created a small marshy depression (*kul*) a little to the south-east of Khalche, that the villagers accidentally came across little bits of gold amidst old potsherds and other débris. The latter objects possessed, of course, no interest for them; but the gold naturally excited the cupidity of the villagers, many of whom had, like the rest of the poorer agricultural population of Khotan, at one time or another tried their luck at 'prospecting' for jade in the river-beds or else at gold-washing on the Yurung-kāsh and in the mountains. So they set to work washing the soil near the incipient Yār, and the proceeds were so rich that they came to the governor's knowledge.

Niāz Hākīm Bēg's excavations.

Niāz Hākīm Bēg was an administrator of considerable enterprise. He sent to Yōtkan large parties of diggers, whom he employed like the men I found working for small capitalists in the jade-pits along the Yurung-kāsh bed³. The owners of the fields which were gradually cut away by these 'washings' received compensation. Subsequently the excavations were continued by private enterprise, the usual arrangement being that the owners of the soil and the diggers share the proceeds equally. The earth excavated from the banks has to be washed, just like the old deposit of gold-carrying streams. The larger supply of water needed for this purpose caused the Yōtkan canal to cut its bed deeper and deeper until it formed the existing Yār, the bottom of which is from 29 to 30 feet below the level of the fields (see Fig. 26). Finally the canal had to be diverted to a higher level; but springs came to the surface at the bottom of the ravine, and these with others rising within the excavated area account for its swampy condition. In the recollection of old villagers the land of Yōtkan was everywhere a level flat; there were no springs or swampy ground—nor any knowledge or tradition of the 'old city' (*kōne-shahr*) below.

Earliest notice of excavations.

We shall see presently that this negative fact has its antiquarian interest; and it may, therefore, be useful to point out that the accidental discovery of the Yōtkan site, about the date indicated by the villagers' statement, can be established independently by a record made as long ago as 1874. The still useful notes which Pandit Rāmchand, one of the native surveyors with Sir Douglas Forsyth's Mission, collected when passing through Khotan in the spring of

³ See *Ruins of Khotan*, pp. 253 sq.