

away in the sand. For a detailed description of the scenery passed through and observations on geographical features I may refer to my Personal Narrative¹¹. Among the latter I may note here that the Niya stream, just like the Keriya Daryā, gathers volume from the springs and marshes below the oasis. These are, of course, fed by the water which has been absorbed higher up by irrigation and comes to the surface again lower down. In view of the ample ground available for cultivation from below Mūsa-Bēgim, where the jungle belt widens out to eight miles and more, I was particularly interested in the new canal which had been begun here two years before by the Keriya Amban's orders, and which could be followed along the well-marked pilgrims' road for a distance of over eight miles. The ground is everywhere fertile loess, and so level that the creation of a large colony would be easy if the effort were persisted in and an adequate population assured. Further to the north the route lay in parts along old beds of the river, all lined with luxuriant Toghrak jungle, while elsewhere patches of dead forest indicated ground which the shifting of the stream eastwards had long ago deprived of its subsoil water.

The actual river-course, where met again some six miles south of the Mazār, had dwindled down to a narrow band of ice scarcely 20 feet in width, and further on was rapidly diminishing through branches sent off on either side. Yet the trees and shrubs around seemed to increase in size and luxuriance. It was evident that here, near the river's end, the fertilizing power of its water, freely spread out during the summer floods, was strongly reasserting itself—an apt illustration, it seems to me, of the advantages which the position of a terminal oasis must always offer for cultivation.

After the days spent in this lonely woodland the collection at the Mazār of Mosques, Madrasahs, and houses for Shaikhs and pilgrims, humble as the structures are, looked impressive. It attests the popularity of the saint, whose supposed tomb occupies the top of a prominent ridge to the west of the settlement. A group of small lakes divides the latter from the hill, which rises to a height of about 170 feet. On ascending it I was much struck by various signs of the pilgrims' devotion, and of the care taken to foster it. The fine old trees at the foot of the ridge, and the large number of rough wooden arches passed by the path winding to the top, are hung with the largest and most motley collection of votive offerings I ever saw in India or Turkestan. The variety of the materials represented among the rags originating from widely distant parts of Asia and Europe which make up the mass of these ex-votos, would make this exhibition of textile fabrics a most instructive archaeological find if it were safely buried beneath the desert sand and excavated after long centuries. Little heaps of earth arranged like graves, and covering the slopes of the hill in thousands, symbolize the resting-places of the Shahīds who are supposed to have fallen here with Imām Ja'far Sādiq, their holy leader, in his last fight against the infidels of *Chīn-u-Māchīn*.

Mazār of
Imām
Ja'far Sādiq.

In the long *Tadhkirah* of the warrior saint, from which M. Grenard has translated full extracts, it is not possible to trace any special reference to the site where his worship is now localized, except that the legendary makes him succumb in the desert. This makes it appear still more probable than it would be *a priori* that the sanctity of the hill goes back to pre-Muhammadan times. I was hence particularly interested to find that a striking natural peculiarity allows us here to account for this sanctity. While the forest belt of the river is everywhere else bordered by high ridges of sand, such as I have noticed in connexion with the marches from Dandān-Uiliq to the Keriya river, I found to my surprise that the soil on the slopes

Legend of
saint.
Origin of
local
worship.

¹¹ See *Ruins of Khotan*, pp. 345 sqq.