

already in ancient times, as it is still now, the chief line of communication between the Indus Valley and the Pāmīrs.

In my *Ancient Khotan* I have shown how the route which runs up the Yasīn Valley to the Darkōt Pass and thence crosses the Hindukush main range by the Barōghil saddle to Sarhad on the Oxus, was used in A.D. 747 by the Chinese general Kao Hsien-chih for his successful expedition across the Pāmīrs to Gilgit.¹¹ Below I shall have occasion to discuss the northern portion of this route from personal observation. The fact that it was used in 1895 as the line of progress for the Pāmīr Boundary Commission from the British side sufficiently attests its modern importance.

Fa-hsien
crossed
Darkōt
Pass.

The assumption that Fa-hsien, too, followed this route is strongly supported by the statement already quoted from his narrative that he and his party travelling from Chieh-ch'a or Kāshgar 'succeeded in getting across and through the range of the Onion mountains', i.e. to Darēl, 'after being on the way for a month'. Having personally travelled along the whole of the ancient trade route which leads from Kāshgar across the Tāghdumbāsh Pāmīr to Sarhad and thence by the Barōghil and Darkōt Pass to the head of the Yasīn Valley, I can vouch for the fact that the ordinary stages on this journey, as indicated by the local conditions of travel, which cannot have undergone any material change since ancient days, are reckoned at twenty-four or twenty-five.¹² Adding to these the five marches which, judging from the maps, seem needed for covering the distance between the foot of the Darkōt and Mankiāl, the chief place in Darēl, we arrive exactly at the total which Fa-hsien's itinerary indicates. This agreement deserves attention all the more because there is no other equally short or practicable route between the two points of Fa-hsien's journey.¹³

Fa-hsien's
itinerary.

From Darēl Fa-hsien made his way to Udyāna by the difficult track along the narrow valley of the Indus, and the description which his narrative gives of it is both graphic and consistent with modern accounts of these gorges. 'The travellers went on to the south-west for fifteen days (at the foot of the mountains, and) following the course of their range. The way was difficult and rugged, (running along) a bank exceedingly precipitous, which rose up there, a hill-like wall of rock, 10,000 cubits from the base. When one approached the edge of it, his eyes became unsteady; and if he wished to go forward in the same direction, there was no place on which he could place his foot; and beneath were the waters of the river called the Indus. In former times men had chiselled paths along the rocks, and distributed ladders on the face of them, to the number altogether of 700, at the bottom of which there was a suspension bridge of ropes, by which the river was crossed, its banks being there eighty paces apart. . . . After crossing the river, (the travellers) immediately came to the kingdom of Wu-ch'ang, which is indeed (a part) of North India.'¹⁴

Fa-hsien's
account of
Indus
gorges.

Though this portion of the Indus Valley below Darēl has never been visited by a European, it is certain that the difficulties presented by the succession of deep rocky defiles in which the great

¹¹ See *Ancient Khotan*, i. pp. 8 sqq.

¹² This figure is made up as follows: Kāshgar to Tāsh-kurghān via the Chichiklik plateau, eleven or twelve marches (see Forsyth, *Yarkand Mission Report*, pp. 431 sqq.; done by me in six forced marches in June, 1906, as described in *Desert Cathay*, i. pp. 97 sqq.); Tāsh-kurghān to Wakhjīr Pass, five marches; thence to Sarhad five marches, and across the Barōghil to the south foot of the Darkōt three more. Travelling with light baggage some days could easily be saved and utilized for rest at convenient halting-places like Tāsh-kurghān and Sarhad.

¹³ As Fa-hsien had gone specially to Kāshgar to attend

the great quinquennial assembly held by its king, usually in the spring (see Legge, *Fā-hien*, p. 22), he was not likely to have reached the Barōghil before the melting snows had closed the route through the Mastūj River gorges for a descent to Chitrāl. It is quite possible that this circumstance determined his choosing the route via Darēl in spite of the increased difficulties subsequently to be faced in the Indus Valley. Otherwise he would have found it far easier to reach Udyāna through Chitrāl and Dīr, the route described in my own narrative.

¹⁴ See Legge, *Fā-hien*, pp. 26, 28.