

## CHAPTER III

### FROM THE OXUS TO KHOTAN

#### SECTION I.—EARLY ACCOUNTS OF WAKHĀN

THE long-stretched valley of Wakhān to which I descended on May 19, 1906, across the Barōghil saddle, had appeared to me from the first one of the most interesting stages of my journey. It was not merely that I touched here the easternmost marches of true Īrān and the headwaters of the River Oxus, which ever since my youth I had longed to follow down to regions of fascinating historical interest: I knew also that I stood here on what from earliest times must have been a main route linking Western Asia, and through it the classical world, with innermost Central Asia and thus the Far East.

Geographi-  
cal impor-  
tance of  
Wakhān.

Nature itself, as it were, seems to have intended Wakhān to serve as the most direct thoroughfare from the fertile regions of Badakhshān to the line of oases along the southern rim of the Tārīm Basin; for along the whole of the Āb-i-Panja Valley from Ishkāshim where the Badakhshān route joins in, right up to Sarhad, a distance of close on a hundred and twenty miles, travel is facilitated by the remarkably easy nature of the ground and the presence of cultivation. Beyond Sarhad, it is true, the Āb-i-Panja is confined to a narrow gorge which provides two trying marches. But further on the road lies open past the Little Pāmīr to the Wakhjīr Pass which for a considerable part of the year gives easy access to Sarikol, the westernmost inhabited valley on the headwaters of the Yārkan River. The importance of Wakhān as a thoroughfare from west to east is still further increased by the fact that the two difficult marches above Sarhad can be avoided by the somewhat longer alternative route which ascends the northern branch of the Āb-i-Panja to the Great Pāmīr and thence crossing the Little Pāmīr reaches Sarikol by one or another of the passes, all lower than the Wakhjīr.

Early  
Chinese  
notices of  
Wakhān.

To the position of Wakhān on the most direct routes linking the Oxus and Tārīm is owed the relative abundance of early notices dealing with it which can be gathered from the records of Chinese annalists and travellers. The oldest of these is probably furnished by the Annals of the Former Han Dynasty. These mention *Hsiu-mi* 休密 as the first of the five territories ruled by Jabgus (*Shih-hu*) which belonged to the great Yüeh-chih nation after its conquest of the regions south of the Oxus. That *Hsiu-mi* is but an earlier transcription of the old name of Wakhān which appears as *Hu-mi* 護密 in the T'ang Annals is rendered probable by a notice of the *Pei-shih*. This, while reproducing the statement about the ancient Yüeh-chih territory, distinctly indicates that it lay to the west of So-ch'ê or Yārkan.<sup>1</sup> According to the *Pei-shih*'s record which dates from the early part of the 7th century, the territory then bore the name of *Ch'ieh-pei* 伽倍. The name of its capital is still given as Ho-mo 和墨, the same as in the Han Annals.

Sung Yün's  
description  
of Wakhān.

The first actual description of Wakhān is given in the accounts of Sung Yün and his fellow pilgrim Hui-shêng who in A. D. 519 passed down the valley on their way from Sarikol to Udyāna.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Chavannes, *Pays d'occident*, p. 44 note, and Marquart, *Ērānshahr*, p. 225, where the early names of Wakhān have been lucidly discussed. The identification of *Hsiu-mi* with *Hu-mi* was first suggested by Cunningham, *J.A.S.B.*, xiv.

p. 433. Cf. also Yule, *J.R.A.S.*, N. S. vi. pp. 111 sqq.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Chavannes, *Voyage de Song Yun*, p. 23; also Marquart, *Ērānshahr*, pp. 223 sq.