

the fights in 1904 at Guru and on the Karo-lā, had revealed as the typical and time-honoured Tibetan scheme of defence — to await attack behind a wall erected across the open ground of a valley.¹¹

Heights
flanking
Pitkhar
defile.

There remained the question whether the defile of Pitkhar was capable of being turned by an attack on the flanking heights such as the Chinese record seemed plainly to indicate. The possibility of such a movement on the east was clearly precluded by the extremely precipitous character of the flanking spur, and still more by the fact that the summer flood of the Āb-i-Panja in the very confined gorge above Sarhad would have rendered that spur inaccessible for the Chinese operating from the northern bank of the river. All the greater was my satisfaction when I heard from my Wakhī informants of ruins of an ancient fort, known as *Kansir*, and situated on the precipitous crest of the flanking spur westwards, almost opposite to Pitkhar. During the single day's halt, which to my regret was all that circumstances would allow me at Sarhad, I was kept too busy otherwise to make a close inspection of the ground where the Tibetan post of Lien-yün might possibly have been situated. Nothing was known to the well-informed and obliging Sarkad Ak-sakāl, Mubārak Shāh, or other local informants about old remains on the open and partly water-logged plain which adjoins the river at the mouth of the valley coming from the Barōghil; nor were such likely to have survived long on ground which was liable to inundation from the Oxus, flowing in numerous shifting channels with a total width of over a mile. Yet the Annals distinctly tell us that 'at the foot of the rampart [of Lien-yün] flowed the river of *P'o-lé* Valley'.¹²

The Oxus
ford at
Sarhad.

Even if the exact position of Lien-yün remained undetermined, my short stay at Sarhad sufficed to convince me how closely local conditions agreed with the details of Kao Hsien-chih's exploit in crossing the Oxus. The river at the time of the summer flood must, indeed, present a very imposing appearance as it spreads out its waters over the wide valley-bottom at Sarhad. But the very separation of the waters makes fording always possible even at that season, provided the passage takes place in the early morning, when the flood due to the melting snow and ice is temporarily reduced by the effect of the night's frost on the glaciers and snow-beds at the head of the Āb-i-Panja. The account in the Annals distinctly shows that the river passage must have been carried out at an early hour of the morning, and thus explains the complete success of an otherwise difficult operation.

Ascent to
Kansir Fort.

I was able to trace the scene of the remaining portion of the Chinese general's exploit when, on May 21, I visited the ruined fortifications reported on the steep spur overlooking the debouchure of the Barōghil stream from the west. After riding across the level plain of sand and marsh and then along the flat bottom of the Pitkhar defile for a total distance of about three miles, we left our ponies at a point a little to the south of some absolutely impracticable rock faces which overlook Pitkhar from the west. Then, guided by a few Wakhīs, I climbed with Naik Rām Singh to the crest of the western spur, reaching it only after an hour's hard scramble over steep slopes of rock

¹¹ In *Ancient Khotan*, i. p. 9, I have already called attention to the curious parallel to the battle above Lien-yün presented by the attempts which Tibetan strategy made in 1904 to bar the advance of the Tibet Mission Force. Both at Guru and on the Karo-lā the relatively large Tibetan force was content to hold the open ground of the valley in strength, taking up its position behind stone walls, while leaving it free to their opponents to occupy the commanding heights. The bravery with which the frontal attack was faced could not avail under such conditions to avert disaster.

¹² This name *P'o-lé* 婆勒 is, as M. Chavannes has

pointed out, *Turcs occid.*, p. 154, identical with *So-lé* 娑勒 which figures as a town in Hu-mi or Wakhān, *ibid.*, p. 150, and also (in the form of *So-lé-so-ho*) as the head-quarters of the Po-ho district in the list of administrative divisions established after A. D. 658 (see above, p. 61). The two initial characters 娑 and 婆 are often confused in Chinese texts. The form *So-lé* might, perhaps, be an attempt to reproduce the first part of *Sarūgh-Chupān*, an old designation of the Sarhad tract which is found already in the *Tārīkh-i-Rashīdī*, pp. 354 sq.