

and shingle. There, beyond a stretch of easily sloping ground and about 300 feet higher, rose the old fort of Kansir at the extreme north end of the crest. Between the narrow ridge occupied by the walls and bastions and the continuation of the spur south-westwards a broad dip seemed to offer an easy descent towards the hamlet of Karkat on the Oxus.¹³

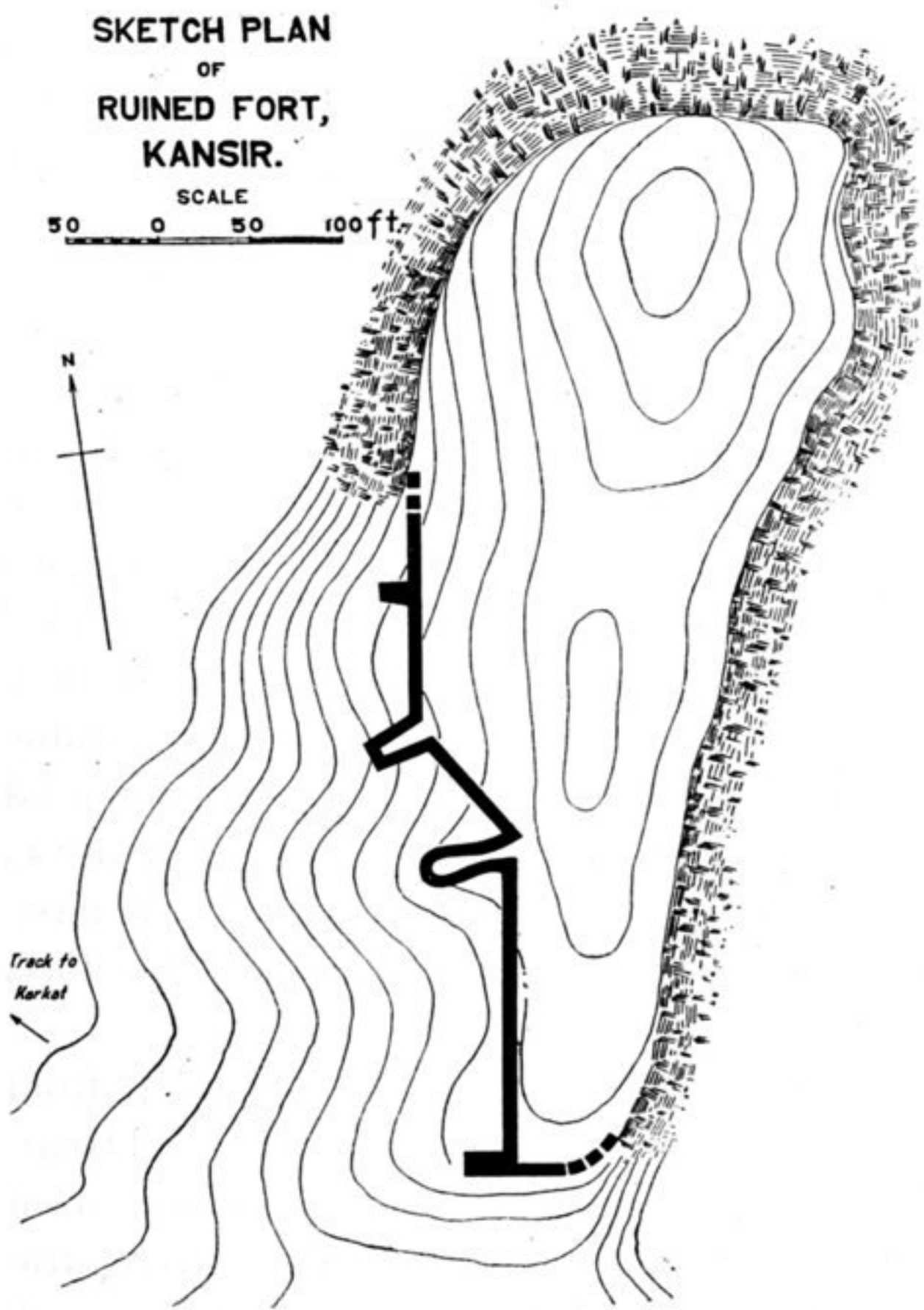
It was clearly for the purpose of guarding this approach that the little fort had been erected on this exposed height. On the north and east, where the end of the spur falls away in unscalable cliffs to the main valley of the Oxus and towards the mouth of the Pitkhar defile, some 1,600-1,700 feet below, structural defences were needless. But the slope of the ridge facing westwards and the narrow neck to the south had been protected on the crest by a bastioned wall for a distance of

Wall ruins at Kansir.

about 400 feet (see plan). Three bastions facing west and south-west, and one at the extreme southern point, still rose, in fair preservation in parts, to a height of over 30 feet. The connecting wall-curtains had suffered more, through the foundations giving way on the steep incline. Of structures inside the little fort—if the limited ground, not quite 200 feet at its widest, and the rocky surface had ever admitted of such—there remained no trace.

The ruined fortification bore a distinctly old appearance, but the only definite antiquarian indication was supplied by the construction of the walls. Outside a core of closely-packed rough stones, they showed throughout a solid brick facing 4 feet to 6 feet in thickness, with regular thin layers of brushwood separating the courses of sun-dried bricks. The size of the bricks, about 8 inches by 7 inches and 4 inches thick, furnished no chronological evidence. But in the systematic use of the brushwood layers I could not fail to recognize a peculiarity with which ancient Chinese construction in the Tārīm Basin had already made me familiar, and which I was subsequently to trace right to the westernmost confines of China proper. It was no doubt intended to assure greater consistency, particularly under climatic conditions of particular dryness.

Construction of walls.



As my subsequent explorations around Lop-nōr and on the Tun-huang Limes proved, it must have been used from the very commencement of Chinese expansion into Central Asia. But my later discoveries at Mīrān and on Mazār-tāgh have shown also that the Tibetan invaders of the T'ang period, when building their own forts, did not neglect to copy this constructive expedient of their Chinese predecessors and opponents in these regions. So, in the absence of other remains, this archaeological indication by itself is not decisive as to whether the construction of the Kansir walls was due to the Tibetan invaders of Wakhān, or to the Chinese during the few years after Kao Hsien-chih's expedition when they held the route leading to 'Little P'o-lü', or Yasīn, and to the Indus.

On the whole, topographical considerations make me inclined to favour the first supposition. The ascent from the Pitkhar defile is so steep that troops holding the crest of the spur against an

Purpose of Kansir Fort.

¹³ In the Trans-frontier map the name appears as *Kharkal*.