

still left in its deepest parts. The forest, however, and the luxuriant belt of vegetation still remain beside the Kona-darja; though the shepherds who graze their sheep there have no water except what is in the pools in the river-bottom and the wells which they likewise dig there. The new channel, the Jangi-darja, runs through a bare sandy region, with scanty grass, dwarf tamarisks, and solitary poplars. In other words, when compared with the fresh vegetation of the country we had hitherto travelled through, the tract we now entered upon is desolate and like a desert. But, since the stream itself pursues a changeable course, the belt of vegetation has no alternative but to follow its example. In fact, it almost results as an axiom, that the more changeable the river and the oftener it alters its course, the broader grows the zone of vegetation which accompanies it. In 1896 I found it, between the Atschik-darja and Schah-jar, fully a three days' journey wide. Wherever the river shifts its course for a longer distance, as it did here, the area of country which comes within the radius of its life-giving waters naturally increases, and ere long fresh vegetation and fresh woods begin to grow up beside the new stream; while the zone of vegetation beside the old channel still remains alive, indeed in some places, as here, even shows, after some time, no indication of dying away. But then there are other factors come into play, such as the ground water, the nature of the soil, the distance between the old river-bed and the new, and so forth. Lower down we shall come across other localities in which the forest left beside an abandoned arm is in process of dying, and others in which it has completely died. The scanty vegetation which we found beside this Jangi-darja had not of course sprung up subsequent to the formation of the new bed, for this is not more than three or four years old, but it already existed before that event, the roots having of course only a relatively short distance to go to reach the natural supplies of ground-water. But if the stream remains constant to its new channel, the forest will eventually spread, as well as the trees grow in size and vigour.

The new bed of the Tarim is very much narrower than the river above the bifurcation. Seldom indeed does the breadth anywhere reach 100 m.; but here it contracts in one place to barely 20 m. The eroded banks were marked with the utmost distinctness, some being vertical, others very steeply sloped, and others, where the tree-roots and the roots of the kamisch still held, even overhanging. Every now and again, however, these give way, and a big slice of the bank plunges bodily into the current, setting an immense litter of kamisch roots afloat on its agitated surface. Indeed, the quantity of drift-wood and broken branches on the Jangi-darja is especially great, to say nothing of the tree-trunks, and even kamisch stalks, which stick fast in the bottom. In a word, the surface of the Jangi-darja was covered with rubbish, and its water thick and muddy. And it is obviously the same in every freshly-formed channel, for everything that happens to

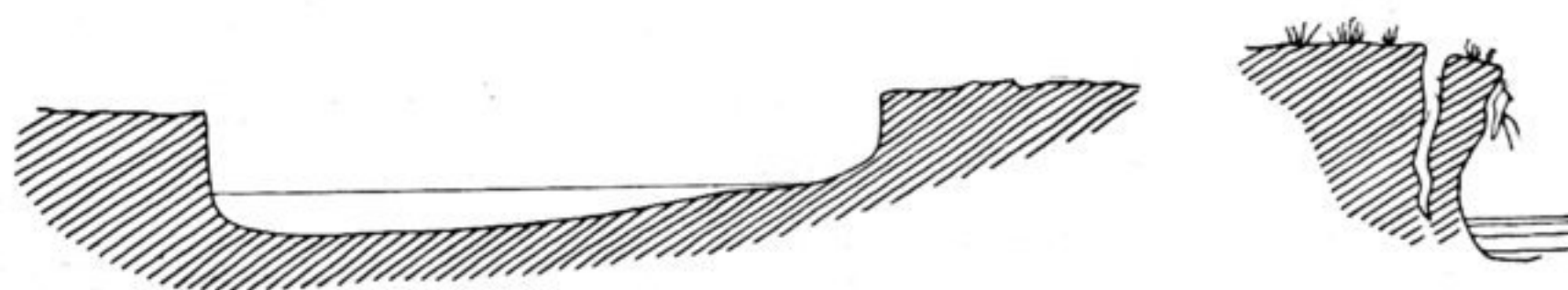


Fig. 87. SECTIONAL OUTLINE OF THE JANGI-DARJA.