

CHAPTER XIII.

THE INTRICATE NETWORK BETWEEN KEPEK-UJ AND AJAGH-ARGHAN.

The river again divides at the deserted village of Kepek-uj, the empty huts of which are still standing. The arm which goes to the left will be described in another part of this work. Its upper end was on 6th May expanded into a veritable basin, thickly studded with mud-banks and alluvial deposits more or less overgrown with reeds. Here forest is again pretty common. Thus at Kepek-uj the river is deprived of a considerable portion of its volume. On 24th May the Kalmak-ottogho arm was a good deal narrower than it had been on the 6th, though it was still a noble stream, and it is not at all unlikely that the principal river is actually contemplating a shift into that same arm. Leaving it however on one side, we glided through an extremely narrow channel into the reed-grown lakes of Kurban-dschajiri and Süsük-köl. In these small lakes the river lets drop the sediment that it carries with it; the greatest depths we obtained in them were not more than 2.25, 1.38, and 1.42 m. Consequently the stream which flows out of them, through another narrow canal to the south, is perfectly transparent. On each side of this latter canal, through which we experienced the utmost difficulty in forcing our ferry-boat, the new green reeds of that year stood four meters high and were crowded together in masses of unexampled density. It was like threading our way through some watery corridor, with solid walls on both sides of us. Indeed in some places it was absolutely necessary to set fire to the dry yellow reeds of the previous year in order to see where we were going to, and to get an idea of the ins and outs of this remarkably intricate labyrinth of reeds. After that we proceeded east-north-east across the lake of Tuvadaku-köl, where I measured depths of 4.05, 4.85, 2.10, 2.30, and 3.0 m. From this lake we passed into the Balik-kumgütsch-köl, where an older hut, Muhamed-uji, was demolished the year before. Finally we crossed the lake of Jäkänlik-köl to the village of Jäkänlik, the four huts of which we found still occupied by two families, each consisting of 5 persons. The greatest depth I measured here was 1.73 m. South-east of Jäkänlik stretches the lake of Äger Kullune-köli; and south of it the large desert lake of Begelik-köl, to which on 25th May we made an excursion. This lake is described elsewhere.