

Some parts of the Tarim which we traversed after leaving Bulung-su, are said to have been formed about sixteen years ago. Previous to that the river had for a long period — my informants thought it was fully fifty years — followed its old bed along the edge of the desert. Previous to that, again, it must have flowed along the same path it now pursues. That is to say, it oscillates backwards and forwards from the one bed to the other. On the whole I do not doubt but that these statements are in agreement with the real facts. That the river is very undecided and unstable is sufficiently proved by the presence of its marginal lakes; for they too are extremely transitory and inconstant, and speedily fill with mud, dust, and decaying vegetation.

May 27th. We left the Jäkänlik-köl by an arm issuing from the lake which was embedded amongst the thick reeds and carried a deep and limpid stream. Passing on the left Markat or Markatdake-kona-uj and on the right Schah Niasikadasi, we again entered a chain of lakes and marshes, with the hut of Ghapan-uji on the left. In an expansion at Markat I measured successively depths of 14.0, 11.85, and 10.25 m. This depth 14.0 m. is the very greatest that I sounded anywhere in the Lop region, and more than twice as great as the deepest sounding that I obtained in the Kara-koschun, the extensive terminal basin of the entire Tarim system. This depression is probably a trench, which has some time or other been hollowed out by the wind and has never subsequently been filled up by sedimentation. On the right we left the lake of Selimi-tschojogho-köl, and beyond it appeared firm ground with an occasional poplar; and still farther away the Katik-arik arm, which supplies Begelik-köl with water, enters the old bed of the Tarim. We were here farther from the high sand than we had been before, and it was only occasionally that we caught glimpses of it, as for instance on the nearer side of the Ku-tutu-köl. Beyond the large island of Avul-akmasi there appeared wide reed-grown expanses of water. Owing to the height of the reeds it was difficult to see how big the lakes were. All that could be mapped with certainty was the actual route of the ferry-boat and the situation of the endless beds of reeds, some near at hand, others farther away, which shut in the view to right and to left. We reached the Geremdake-köl through the Ismaile-arighi. Beyond an island of firm ground, that is to the north of our route, stretched the lake of Avul Nias Bekne-kölughu. Then came on both sides several islands of firm sedimentary matter, overgrown with vegetation, or rather pieces of almost primeval soil; this was especially the case at Schidak-mähalläsi, where there was also a flourishing and shady poplar grove. Here it was plain that the river was endeavouring to expand its channel by filling the lake. The depth was everywhere slight, generally not more than 1 m. But upon our waterway widening out in the lake of Ghilange-kölu, the depth increased to 3.82 m. and 7.20 m. On the south shore of this lake stands the homestead of Ghilangdake-uj, which was inhabited about forty years ago. All this time there was a current, though in the lakes it was extremely sluggish, often indeed imperceptible. In places the reeds formed thick green clumps like islands, with patches of white water-lilies swimming amongst them. I was assured, that if I were to travel north from this point, I should only cross two watercourses, namely the Ara-tarim and the Ilel of the Kontsche-darja; consequently there could not be any intricate network of canals in