

and decimated the inhabitants. The same visitation having ravaged all the villages alongside these lakes, the survivors were ordered by the Chinese authorities to flit over to the left bank of the river, and devote themselves to agriculture, especially the growing of wheat, and to pastoral pursuits, more particularly the breeding of sheep. Previous to that they had lived almost entirely upon a fish diet, and by fishing. The soil does not however appear to be very favourable for cultivation, and the harvest does not yield sufficient for the people's needs. This is indeed strange, for one would think that in this locality of all others the irrigation of the fields would not be attended with any special difficulties. Although a few well-to-do families own as many as 1,000 sheep, most of them possess barely 100 each. As a rule they have to procure part of their supplies of flour from Korla, purchasing it by the barter of their sheep. The deserted villages are not occupied even in summer; the people, who are few in number, are still afraid of infection, although they are said to have been vaccinated by the authorities. When the former villagers visit the lakes for the fishing in the summer, they prefer to spend their nights in the open air; for fish still continue to form an essential part of their food, indeed without it they could not exist. The inhabitants of the whole of this region call themselves Loplik, i. e. people from Lop, just as the inhabitants of Kaschgar and Tschertschen call themselves respectively Kaschgarlik and Tschertschenlik. It is precisely in this region that the ancient name of Lop has ineradicably rooted itself.

Generally speaking, the dunes do not advance right up to the shores of the Sejt-köl, but are separated from them by a narrow strip of ground overgrown with reeds and tamarisks, with an occasional poplar. Thus the ground upon which the dunes stand lies somewhat higher than the level of the lake, though on the other hand it is to be noted that the lake has been shrinking and its *niveau* falling since its feeding-canals have been closed. Although the depth is said to reach 4 fathoms, it is as a rule much less. In the northern part of the lake there are some small sandy islands. The lake was frozen over from end to end, but it was only along the shores that the ice bore. The north-eastern shore of Sejt-köl was studded with a great number of small, shallow pools. To ride from one end of the lake to the other took a horseman, whom I sent there at a later date, an hour and a half of hard riding. Beyond and in the line of the lake's south-south-west continuation he discovered three depressions, separated from one another by »thresholds» of sand.

Immediately east of Sejt-köl there is a very small lake, or more correctly speaking a marsh, called Aghesi-köl, after the Loplik who is said to have dug the canal which feeds it. The immediate environment of this little marsh consists of flat ground, with reed thickets and several small pools, though there are no high dunes.

Daschi-köl is divided by a large sandy promontory into two basins of equal size. On the north the lake is separated from the river by a considerable accumulation of sand; and its eastern half is connected with the river by a canal. The dune which bordered the lake on the north-east has been attacked and undermined by an entering loop of the river. Midway in its crest there is a gap or gateway, as it were, the sand having been completely washed away, and through it we had from the river a striking picture of what one might be called a »lacustrine hall», its floor a polished