

districts south of the Kuruk-tagh was only fugitive, it is true, still the information he gave regarding them was so important, and so interesting, that it led me to think the region would be worth a more searching exploration, and in especial that an accurate mapping of the Kum-darja could not fail to contribute towards the solution of the Lop-nor problem. Perhaps by following this old river-bed eastwards one might discover the former lake of Lop-nor, which was long known to the Chinese, and the former existence of which in this part of Asia was demonstrated by Baron von Richthofen in a brilliant way to be a necessity both on historical and on geological grounds.

In the account* of his journey Kosloff writes thus regarding the Kum-darja: »After travelling about 25 versts from Altmisch-bulak, we at length reached the bed of the Kum-darja. It extends from west to east, along the southern foot of the Kuruk-tagh. In some places it is choked with coarse-grained sand, in others it is perfectly open, allowing us to form some conception of its dimensions and character. This trough-like depression is 15 to 25 saschen wide; now runs almost straight, now serpentine; and its bottom consists of saline ground as hard as stone. The banks are in some places high, in others low. Occasionally the depression is choked with a layer of gravel fully a foot thick, and is joined by many similar dry torrents from the north.

Dead trees (poplars) lie scattered about in the deeper parts. Animal life is entirely absent: we saw no other signs except old traces of a stray antelope and the dried up skeleton of a buzzard (*Buteo*). For as far as we were able to see with the glass to the south-south-east there appeared several similar terraces, apparently river-terraces, which probably belonged to branches of the old river. My guide crossed other similar terraces to the south of the spring of Jardang-bulak whilst on his way from Kisil-sinir to the Kontsche-darja. But he saw no hills of drift-sand along that route; nor did I see any either at the place where I struck the Kum-darja.

After glancing in this way at a long stretch of the Kum-darja, we turned towards the north-west.»

With regard to the point higher up in the same bed, where Kosloff crossed it somewhat later, he only says, that the river-bed there was »dead», and had a forlorn look, and that the banks, which were not yet obliterated, were in part high, in part low. Ancient and dead poplar-trees lay scattered throughout this old river-bed, and many others were still standing upright.**

Scanty though this information is, it is nevertheless quite sufficient to establish the existence of an ancient river-bed, on the banks of which forest formerly grew. Our knowledge was thus restricted to three points of the Kum-darja, separated from one another by considerable distances; but of these intermediate distances, as of the point where the old watercourse ended, we knew nothing. This then was what I set myself to find out. By a pure chance I happened to meet with the camel-hunter Abdu Rehim of Singer (Kosloff's Kisil-sinir), who took part in Kosloff's

* *Trudij Ekspeditsij Imp. Russ. Geogr. obschtschestva po Tsentralnoj Asij, 1893—95, vol. II. p. 67.*

** *Op. cit., p. 74.*