

As far as we were now able to see, dead forest was very general, especially toghrak, tamarisk, and jigde. The poplar trunks, which were well embedded in the sand, and so protected by it, were considerably bigger than those which still stood upright; the latter were all slender, though in a decided minority as regards numbers. During the lapse of ages, in their long struggles against the storms, most of these trees have been overthrown, nor will it be long before the last of them falls. It may however be taken for granted, that, even after the stream ceased to flow down the Kuruk-darja, and it was finally condemned to dry up, its forests did not die out all at once, or simultaneously, throughout the whole of its course; but they would die piece by piece. Trees which grew in relative depressions and those

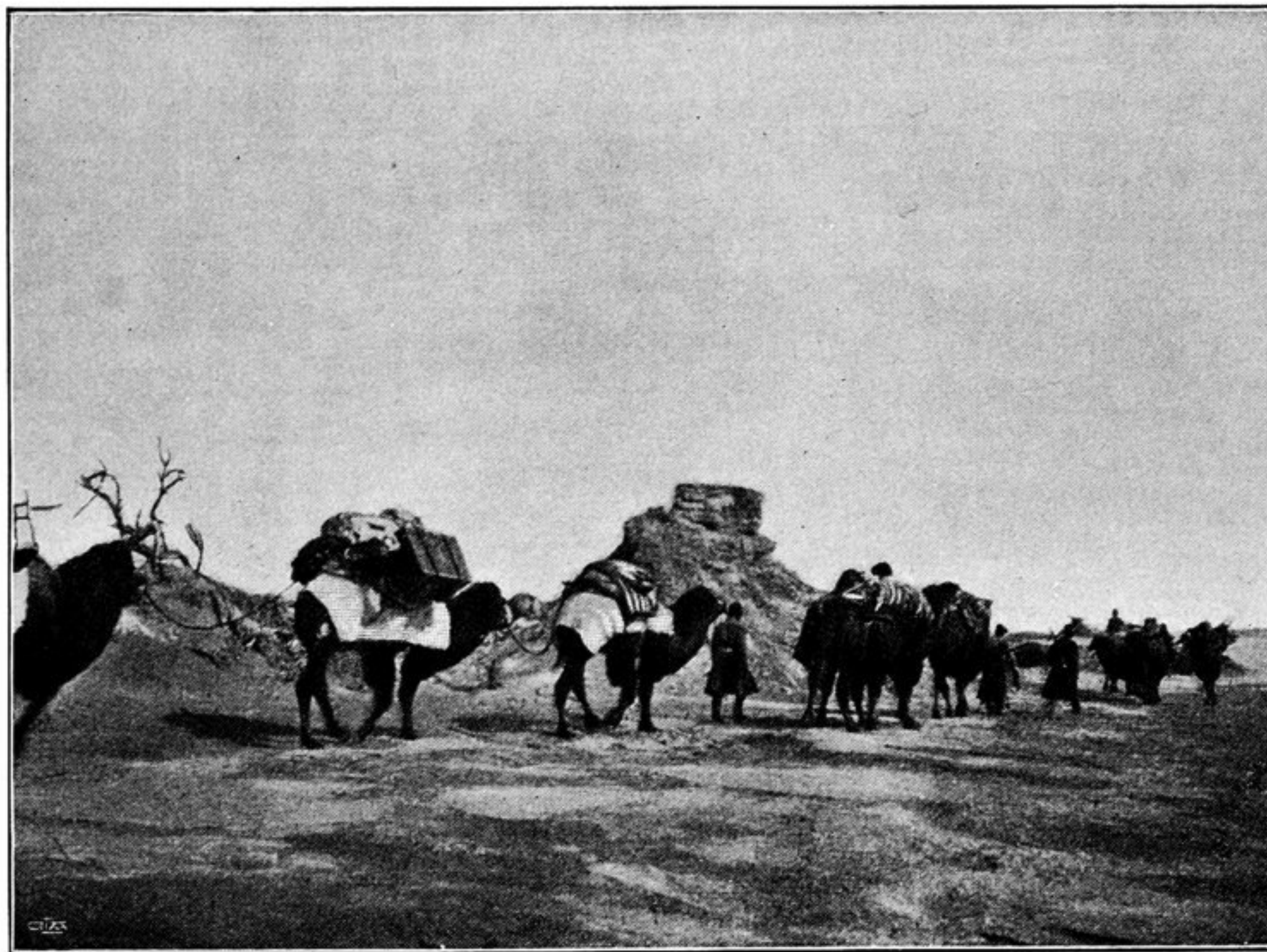


Fig. 53. A JARDANG AND A PIECE OF DEAD TAMARISK IN THE DESERT NORTH OF KURUK-DARJA.

whose roots penetrated deeper would naturally survive the longest. Probably some groups of toghraks may have preserved their vitality to a relatively late period. Quite unexpectedly we came this day upon a clump of 14 living poplars of medium size, the only ones we met with in all this ocean of desert. They were, it is true, at the last gasp, on the very verge of extinction; but there was still a faint trace of sap in their interior, for a branch here and there had put forth leaves, or rather leaf-buds. The roots of these trees must of course have reached down to the groundwater, but their ability to do so was plainly at an end, and within a short space they would be overtaken by the fate of their neighbours. They stood no doubt in a slight depression, though we were unable to perceive that it was such. Thus the poplars which remain standing beside the Kuruk-darja are clearly trees that were long able to derive nutriment from the moisture of the ground, and died at a relatively late period.