

dunes also on the southern shore of the lake. The actual strip of moist shore was so soft that we had to exercise the utmost care when stepping upon it: sometimes the soil, which consisted of clay and dust, literally undulated like waves under the weight of the camels, and in some places there was great risk of their perishing in the ooze. In this way we approached a large lake which extended towards the north-east, and compelled us to make a detour round it before we could continue our westward march. On our left we still had the lake proper, and on our right a number of small detached pools and ponds. The country thereabouts was again perfectly barren, although in two or three places we perceived traces of hares and foxes. At last we discovered a very narrow place beside some tamarisks about a foot high, and there we succeeded in effecting a crossing, for the lake had hitherto shown no break whatever in its continuity. The depth was as much as 90 cm. at the most, and the bottom consisted of dune-sand, firm enough to bear the weight of our camels. From this point the water still continued to extend to the west, though in that direction the dunes were higher. The water-lines, small ridges, and salt rings on the shore proved that the lake had dropped more than half a meter quite recently. The strip of strand thus exposed was still very wet; besides, the lake sent out several ramifications, creeks and hollows, which had likewise been left dry quite recently.

The first impression that these sheets of water made upon me was, that they came from the above-mentioned river-branch which goes off at Schirge-tschapghan (Tokus-tarim); for as this branch is situated to the north of the lowest Tarim, it was only likely that its terminal lakes also would be situated to the north of the Kara-koschun. True, a few days later we crossed over an arm of the river which delivered into the Kara-koschun a volume of 3.5 cub.m. in the second (see p. 127); this, we assumed, was the continuation of the Jangi-ger (Tokus-tarim), and the desert lakes in question might owe their existence to a more northerly arm of the same stream. That the water had only recently come there was perfectly clear; otherwise, stationary as it was, it would have possessed a higher degree of salinity than was actually the case. Further, the vegetation, at all events the kamisch, which is easily transported and spreads quickly, would have established itself on the shores; but in point of fact we saw no kamisch except a few stalks in one or two places. Hence not only the absence of vegetation, but also the slight degree of salinity possessed by the water, were clear indications of the recent origin of the lake. The same conclusion was also pointed to by the position of the dunes. Both on the north and on the south of the lake, nay often in the very middle of the lake, they were grouped in the same way as the other dunes in the same locality. Had the lake been in existence a long time, the dunes on the southern shore would have advanced away from the water's edge, while those which rose like islands out of the water would have disappeared.

With the few data that I then had at my command, it was impossible to solve the problem as to where the water came from. It was only the excursions which I describe below that cleared up this point: the lake had no connection whatever with the Tokus-tarim arm, but was fed directly from the Kara-koschun in the south, and consequently was a northern extension of that marsh.