

height varying from 10 to 40 feet. South of this belt of hills comes a stony swelling, strewn with gravel, and beyond it rises the chain of the Altin-tagh. Parallel to it lies the detached ridge of the Takija-tagh, the northern slope of which was strewn with sand, the western border of the Kum-tagh . . . Our route led us along the old shore of the Lop-nor, which changes distinctly from the district of Tschindejlik. Here the stony swelling descends steeply towards the belt of salt desert. The clay terraces attain altitudes of 70 to 100 m., and more. The foot of these terraces and the beginning of the salt desert are the only parts of the desert that are at all tolerable; for here we have a zone of vegetation. In places there are pools with salt water.»

»With the view of avoiding the windings of the shore, we did the next stage from Tschindejlik (44 versts) across the continuous moist saline soil. In the middle of the day's march, at a point where the shore recedes a long distance to the south, it would have been easy to imagine oneself at sea»

»Between the district of Korot-bulak on the west and Atschik-kuduk on the east, a distance of 150 versts, the desert presents a different character. The salt morass comes to an end, and between the Kuruk-tagh and the sandy masses of the Kum-tagh its place is taken by a broad valley, clothed with the same vegetation that is peculiar to the shores of the Lop-nor. On the north the valley in question is shut in by the steep terraces which run below the border-range of the Kuruk-tagh. Similar terraces border it also in places on the south. In the district of Atschik-kuduk, to which in all probability the east end of Lop-nor (a bay of the same) extends, the valley contracts to a width of 10 versts . . . Its bottom is strewn with rather coarse sand, though farther west it becomes finer and finer, until finally it ceases. To judge from the depth of the wells here, the groundwater is struck at one saschen below* the surface».

From this description we obtain some idea of the desolate desert region which stretches south right away from the shore of the Kara-koschun. With regard to these characteristic terraces of Kosloff, which he considers to be the shore-lines of the ancient Lop-nor, I shall have occasion to describe them more in detail in a later chapter, for I crossed over them along the meridian of Atschik-kuduk. The data of altitude which I have cited above prove best that they have nothing whatever to do with the historic lake of Lop-nor.

Of the three arms into which, according to Kosloff, the lowermost Tarim divides, and of which the middle one is declared to extend farthest towards the north-east, I have only been able to discover two, apart from the numberless arms which leave the river above Kum-tschapghan. It is quite true, that the east-north-east prolongation of the Kara-koschun does consist of a »valley», or rather a depression, namely that in which runs the road from Abdal to Sa-tscheo; but when he goes on to say, that it is bordered on both sides by sandy desert, his statement is only correct when applied to the southern side, where lie the sandy masses of the Kum-tagh.** North of this depression and its salt marshes there is no sandy

* *Trudij Eksp. Imp. Russ. Geogr. Ob. po Tsentralnoj Asij 1893—95*, vol. ii. pp. 99 ff.

** I have never heard this name used beside the Kara-koschun or anywhere else in that region. But as it was introduced by Prschevalskij, it may be retained, especially as it is at any rate a distinctive term.