

greater part of it consisted of scrubby kamisch and tamarisks, amongst which the toghraks formed small groves. All the same there can be little doubt that large areas of this great kamisch-field were once under water, and that the poplar-groves then stood on the islands and promontories. To both features we have a parallel at the present time in the Kara-köl and several other lakes. Another proof of the former extension of the lake in this direction is the great quantity of mollusc-shells which we observed all day, a far greater quantity than on the day before. Fragments of hard, burnt clay pottery, red and purple, were now so common that we no longer paid any attention to them; we came across them incessantly, but it was seldom that they exceeded 2 dm. across. They constituted irrefragable evidence of the presence of human beings in that part of the desert, and at Camp No. XVI we made the interesting discovery of some ruins, which are described towards the end of this present volume.

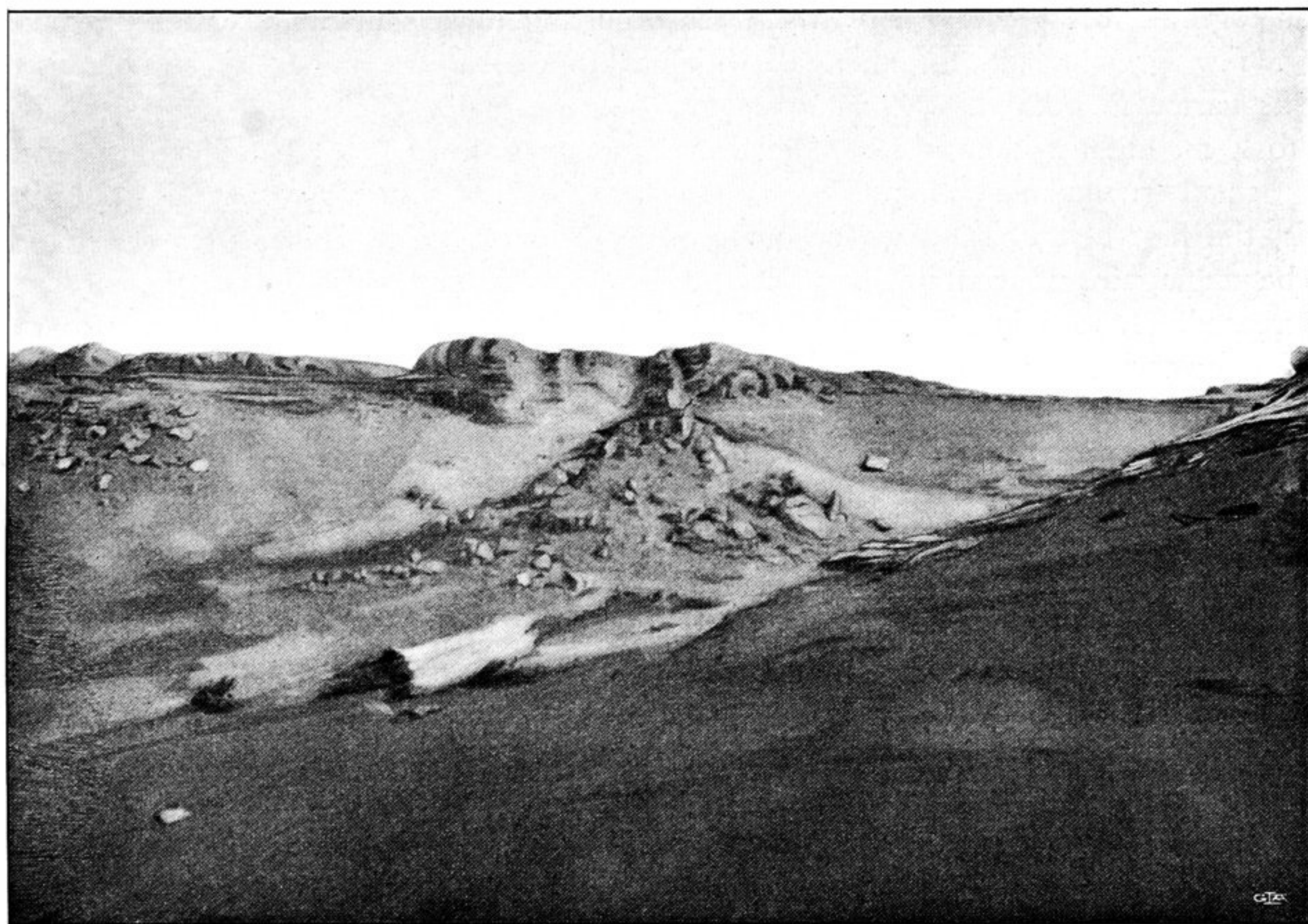


Fig. 140. OLD BED OF THE TARIM IN THE MIDDLE OF THE DESERT OF LOP.

From this place, the ancient Lâu-lan, I attempted on the 29th March to proceed south-south-west, but found it impossible owing to the jardangs, and had therefore to keep to the south-west. We were only able to win a little ground to the east by going through the gaps which occurred at intervals in the ridges. For some distance after leaving the camp beside the ruins we followed a gully, sculptured with great distinctness and resembling a river-bed, for a number of toghraks were growing on its bordering terraces on both sides. Yet as the ground on the other side