

ran the same ancient route from Lop-nor to Sa-tscheo which Marco Polo travelled by six hundred years before me». The foregoing investigation shows however that in Marco Polo's time the Kara-koschun did not exist at all, and the question as to which route he travelled by between »the town of Lop» and Sa-tscheo is not yet settled. Since the hydrographical relations six hundred years ago were quite different from what they are now, it is extremely improbable that Marco Polo's route coincided with the existing road; its western part at any rate lay farther to the north than it does now. This fact is alluded to in the following passage of Himly's essay: »Nach dem *Shui-king-tshu* sammeln sich die Gewässer des Yao-tsö (i. e. Lop-nor) im Nordosten von Shan-shan, im Südwesten von Lung-thshöng (the Dragon Town).» With regard to the destruction of this place, the Chinese work goes on to say, »Das P'u-thshang-Meer strömte über seine Ufer und verheerte das Land, die Grundmauern der Stadt sind noch vorhanden. Im Zeitraume Tshi-ta (1308—11) wurde das am Morgen am West-Thor zuerst auftretende, am Abend durch das Ost-Thor entgegen fließende und das über die Ufer fließende Wasser durch den Wind gleichsam zu der Gestalt eines Drachen zusammengeweht».* The great lacustrine change, which happened, in conjunction with an exceptionally violent north-east storm, in 1308—11, took place 35 years after Marco Polo's journey (1274). The Dragon Town was destroyed to its very foundations by the overwhelming waters. This town was situated south-west of, or on the south-west shore of, the Yao-tsö (*tsö* = »marsh»), the then lake of Lop-nor. It may be regarded as probable, that the road from »Ciarcian» (Tschertschen) passed at that time through the Dragon Town.** The Chinese word for »dragon» is *loo* or *lou*, and Himly discerns a certain resemblance between this word and Lob and Lâu-lan.

Kosloff supposes that in the future the Tarim will return to the bed of the Ettek-tarim, and at the same time the Lop-nor (i. e. the Kara-koschun) will move to the south-west, and become joined to the Kara-buran, but »it (the lake) is hardly likely ever to desert the salt depression in which from antiquity the water of the Lop-nor has found a resting-place.» Both Bogdanovitsch and myself have expressed the opinion, that in time the Kara-koschun will travel up the river. But the state of affairs which I found to obtain in the years 1900 and 1901 has shown that this view is wrong; at any rate it was wrong then, for the lake was, as we have seen, spreading northwards, towards its old depression. It is however an incomprehensible sort of proof to say in one and the same breath, that the lake will probably move to the south-west and yet that it will at the same time never desert its ancient basin!

In the discussion to which I was invited in the Topographical Section in St. Petersburg, and at which the Russian geographers who were present attempted to defend the honour and dignity of the Kara-koschun and its right to be called the

* *Ein chinesisches Werk* etc., p. 61.

** This is at any rate more probable than the assumption I first made, that the town of Lop was situated to the south of the present Kara-buran. But it is as yet impossible to determine its position with certainty; for just as the foundation walls of Merdek-schahr, which still exist beside the Merdek-köl, might answer to the Dragon Town, so might the ruins south of Kara-buran, on the road to Tscharklik, answer to the »town of Lob». The fact of Marco Polo not mentioning the Lop-nor suggests rather that the route he followed went south of the lake, though his silence on this point cannot be regarded as any sort of a proof.