

The first, lying farthest east, is embraced on the one side by the ramifications of the Gentej and Changaj and on the other by the In-schan. The second, or middle, division is contained between the Altai of the Gobi and the Nan-schan. The third basin, in the west, lies between the Tjan-schan (Tien-schan) and the border-ranges of Western Tibet. The eastern basin is separated from the middle basin by a mountainous tract, forming a continuation of the Altai of the Gobi and uniting the Tjan-schan with the Nan-schan. The deepest parts of each of these three depressions occur near their northern borders; towards their southern boundaries they are all alike very much higher . . . Here however the sandy deserts are not found in the low-lying tracts, but occur on the higher uplands that foot the southern mountain-ranges, the In-schan and the Nan-schan. Our maps show an immense expanse of sand south of the Tarim in the western basin; beginning in the neighbourhood of the city of Jarkent, it extends eastwards past the towns of Chotan, Kerija, and Tschertschen to Sa-tscheo. Along this stretch there is only one locality that forms an exception to the rule we have indicated, namely the region round the lake of Lop-nor. In the middle basin the widest expanse of sand occurs between the Edsingol and the range of the Ala-schan. On the south it extends nearly as far as a line drawn through the towns of Ljan-tschou, Gan-tscheo, and Gao-taj at the foot of the Nan-schan; but on the north it does not approach anything like so far as the latitude of the lake of Gaschiun-nor. Still farther east come the sandy deserts of Ordos, extending south-eastwards as far as the mountain-range that separates Ordos from the provinces of Schan-si and Schen-si. In the eastern basin drift-sand is encountered between the district of Ude in the north and the foot of the In-schan in the south.»*

From Obrutscheff's account of the sand-dunes in the desert-regions that he visited we gather the impression, that they are in no way comparable, in respect of either size or distribution, with the sand-dunes of the Takla-makan. His accurate and detailed descriptions suggest that, with the exception of the Kum-tagh, they as a rule barely exceed a medium altitude. Speaking of the belt of dunes between Siao-tschoo and Ning-tschoo-ljang in southern Ordos on 13th February 1893, he says:

»The sand occurs at first in the shape of hills; then the road crosses over a belt of sand-dunes (barkhans) 2 to 2¹/₂ versts broad. The individual dunes ascend to an altitude of 2¹/₂ sashen, and are clearly somewhat mobile, quickly changing their position under the influence of one wind or the other. A strong south wind, which blew all day from early in the morning, shifted at about 3 o'clock to the south-west, and not only altered the finer lines on the superficies of the dunes, but actually re-shaped their crests, by endeavouring to dispose them from north-west to south-east» . . .**

Writing on 12th December 1893 about pretty nearly the same region, he says: »From this depression the road gradually penetrates a series of sandy hills, which, according to the information I received, stretch from west to east for a distance of 200 versts, that is from the Yellow River far into the interior of Ordos, and on the

* G. N. Potanin, *Tangutsko-Tibetskaja Okraina Kitaja i Tsentralnaja Mongolija*, 1884—86, vol. I. pp. 96 ff.

** V. A. Obrutscheff, *Tsentralnaja Asija, Severnij Kitaj i Nan-schan 1892—94*, vol. I. p. 217.