

Camp 121.⁷ It clearly proves, as already pointed out in *Serindia*, that a wide belt of ground here, stretching from west to east, must have been fit for at least nomadic occupation during a prolonged period in prehistoric times. A variety of physical circumstances connected with the effects of wind-erosion makes it impossible to draw definite conclusions as to the chronology of this prehistoric occupation.⁸ But there can be no doubt that it presupposes the presence of running water in the several ancient river-beds traced here, though not necessarily in all of them at the same period. The considerable geographical interest of these ancient river courses, which the surveys of my second and third journeys in the Lop Desert have shown to be all derived from the Kuruk-daryā, has been briefly indicated already in *Serindia* and will claim our special attention farther on.⁹

Prehistoric occupation.

It is from this geographical point of view that particular importance attaches to the definite antiquarian evidence furnished by the exploration of the L.M. site. This evidence, as recorded above, clearly proves that a regular settlement, approximately contemporary with the Lou-lan station L.A., must have existed at the site during the early centuries of our era. That it was at least partly agricultural cannot be doubted, considering the character and distribution of the ruins and the fact that cereals have been picked up at one of them.¹⁰ It is equally certain that the settlement obtained its water-supply from the river course, the dry bed of which was clearly traced within the area occupied by the ruins.

Occupation contemporary with that of L.A.

That this water came from the Kuruk-daryā was established by the discovery made by Afrāz-gul a year later, on his journey from the Chainut-köl lagoon to the Yārdang-bulak springs at the foot of the Kuruk-tāgh. An abstract of the observations recorded by him on this journey is given below in Chapter XX. But it will be convenient to anticipate here the result of the search that he made, in accordance with my previous instructions, on March 9, 1915, for other ruins in the vicinity of L.M. Starting from our old camping-place near L.M. III he made an extensive reconnaissance to the east and north-east without coming either upon ruins or dry beds. But after resuming his original direction of march to the north-west for about two miles he found a group of three dwellings substantially built in timber and wattle after the manner of those at L.M. In two of these ruins, as his sketch-plan of L.R. showed, the arrangement of the quarters was still partly traceable. But the rooms left exposed held much sand, while others to the west appeared to be completely covered by it. Afrāz-gul, having only three companions and little time to spare in view of the trying desert crossing before him, was unable to clear any of the quarters. But the small objects in bronze, iron and glass (see List under L.R.) which were picked up on the eroded slopes near them clearly show these ruins to be of the same date as L.M. A mile beyond the ruins, Afrāz-gul's farther route to the north-west crossed a well-marked river-bed about 100 yards wide with a depth attaining to 50 feet, but partly filled with dunes. As his plane-table survey shows (Map No. 29. c. 4), this old river course was last seen by him winding from north to south-east at a point about 2 miles from L.R. Farther on, high dunes covered the ground to an increasing extent and observation of underlying features became very difficult or impossible.

Ruins L.R. and old river-bed NW. of L.M.

When considered in conjunction with what the examination of the ground from near L.K. has shown us, the supplementary evidence thus gathered at L.R. appears to me to prove conclusively that a string of small sites stretched, in the early centuries of our era, from L.R. to L.K. along a line nearly ten miles in length. These clearly mark a southernmost extension of the Kuruk-daryā delta which, in the period preceding the abandonment of the Lou-lan Site and of the early

Southern limit of Kuruk-daryā delta.

⁷ See *Serindia*, i. pp. 356 sqq.

⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, i. p. 357 sq.

⁹ See *ibid.*, i. pp. 355 sq.; below, pp. 205 sq., 210.

¹⁰ See L.M. 0137-8. The two grains of what seems a species of Indian corn were brought back by Afrāz-gul

from his reconnaissance, without an indication of the exact find-place (probably the refuse heaps of L.M. I. or II). That there was cultivation in the vicinity is proved at L.K. by the beams of Eleagnus and White Poplar wood found in the eastern group of quarters; see above, p. 188.