

crossed what was undoubtedly an ancient river-bed, about ninety yards broad and twenty to twenty-five feet deep, with many dead Toghraks on its banks. It appeared, from its direction, to have been connected with the winding bed I had noted near L.C. and some distance beyond.⁶

Effects of
wind-
erosion.

From where the pottery debris ceased the ground became easier, being less furrowed by Yārdangs, and open depressions with comparatively flat ground facilitated progress for the camels. Here and there patches of dead reed-beds, laid quite flat, were found in these depressions. After having covered about seven and a half miles of march we crossed another winding river-bed, coming from the west and apparently divided into two or three branches. It made a short sharp bend just where we passed the main branch, and here its western bank, lying against the direction of the prevailing winds, was being breached by them in exactly the same way as the walls of the ruined towns near An-hsi and Ch'iao-tzū.⁷ It occurred to me that the open depressions previously referred to might mark the beds of lagoons once formed by those branches of the dying Kuruk-daryā. Owing to their bottom lying twenty to twenty-five feet lower than the adjoining ground they were less exposed to the direct force of wind-erosion. Snail shells were scattered about them in abundance, and at one point near such a depression I found a couple of tamarisk-cones still showing some live branches on their tops.

March
across
difficult
Yārdangs.

The crossing of the difficult belt of Yārdangs running at right angles to the direction of our march had much retarded the camels. We were therefore obliged to pitch camp at dusk near a narrow winding river-bed with plentiful dead Toghraks on its banks. About two miles before reaching it we had sighted far away to the west a small hillock which might mark the ruin of a Stūpa or tower, with a low bank to its right which might be taken for the remains of a wall. But the evening light on such ground is apt to be deceptive, and the search made by us in 1906 from L.B. had shown nothing to suggest the existence of such a ruin in that quarter. A diversion in that direction would have cost us a day, and this I could not now spare. Nevertheless the observation may be recorded for the notice of any future investigator of this dead land. All day the low barren range of the southernmost Kuruk-tāgh had been visible in the distance, and the landmark which a low reddish ridge afforded to Abdurrahīm's keen eyes had allowed us to steer straight for the point where we should find Lāl Singh's fourth cemetery.

Abdur-
rahīm's
experience
of Kuruk-
tāgh.

I had taken the opportunity of this first march in the company of Abdurrahīm for a long talk about his observations and experiences on the many hunting expeditions which, since early youth, he had made into the Kuruk-tāgh. I found him as intelligent and communicative as he proved thereafter obliging and helpful. Brought up in the isolation of Singer, where his father, a hunter from Deghar in the Turfān basin, had first established a tiny colony, he seemed to combine the intelligence and good-natured politeness of the Turfān people with the brave self-reliant spirit of the lonely desert hunter. Lāl Singh had frequent occasion to benefit, at a later stage of our travels, by Abdurrahīm's keen topographical sense and lifelong experience of the stone and gravel wastes of the central and western Kuruk-tāgh. The detailed information he was able to communicate to me about a vast stretch of ground, all waterless desert but for a few springs, mostly salt, helped me greatly in planning the expeditions which Lāl Singh carried out in the winter and spring of 1914-15. In the course of these he explored extensive portions of the Kuruk-tāgh which had never before been surveyed or even visited, and carried his triangulation from the Lop desert to Korla.⁸

⁶ The bearing of the river-bed where we crossed it near the Stūpa was ENE. The more northerly connexion conjecturally shown for it on Map No. 29. D. 3 is doubtful. Lāl Singh, from whose plane-table it has been entered, was not

aware at the time of the more probable continuation traced by Afrāz-gul and myself near L.C.

⁷ See *Serindia*, iii. pp. 1095 sq., 1102 sq.; Figs. 239, 240.

⁸ See below, Chap. xx. sec. i.