

ore.<sup>14</sup> These were, apart from the cemeteries, the first relics of former human presence that we had found since leaving the Yārdang-bulak springs. We then had to make our way again across a maze of small reticulated Yārdangs before we regained the right bank of the Kuruk-daryā, which was here fringed by high tamarisk-cones, mostly dead (Fig. 337). Where the bed made a turn to the north-west we found a row of live Toghraks growing within it. Their presence suggested that there was drainage near the surface. So we halted here, after having covered twelve miles of rather difficult ground. On digging a well in a hollow of the bed water was reached at a depth of only five feet. It proved undrinkable, but less salt than that of the well dug to the south-east of L.T.

Patches of wet soil and light *shōr* were again met with next day, when our march was continued up the bed of the dead river. Another piece of coarse pottery was picked up on the right bank near the point where Lāl Singh's plane-table had marked a small 'Tati'.<sup>15</sup> The bed here had an average width of about 250 yards and was lined in most places by steep banks 25 to 30 feet in height. After we had covered some three miles on the left bank the ground previously much furrowed by Yārdangs turned to a bare plain of clay uniformly eroded. This difference, I thought, might be accounted for by the area of *shōr* and scrub found to the north at the mouth of the Yārdang-bulak valley; for this would keep off coarse sand and thus deprive the prevailing north winds, at this point, of much of their corrosive force. After a march of about six miles living tamarisks on small cones became increasingly frequent, proof that we were nearing the southern edge of the vegetation belt which marks the terminal basin of the drainage east of the Charchak hills. Three miles farther we turned off to the north-west, skirted the edge of the gravel Sai descending from the last offshoot of the Charchak-tāgh, and finally struck the thin line of tamarisk-cones that extends along the end of the above-mentioned drainage.<sup>16</sup> Here we came upon our old track to the west of Camp ccxlii and by prolonging our march made our way back the same day to Yārdang-bulak. The more westerly route that we now followed led up the big Wadi which gathers all the drainage east of the Charchak-tāgh. Its great width and its steep banks, undercut in places by the current, clearly marked the great volume which, on occasions of exceptional rainfall, may descend here towards the Kuruk-daryā. It is this drainage that probably accounts for the subsoil water which we had struck at points in the bed of the latter.

Return to  
Yārdang-  
bulak.

A few general observations on the physical features of this portion of the Kuruk-daryā, or Kum-daryā as it is also known to the Singer hunters, may conveniently be noted here. Our survey has shown that its course is confined, as far down as Afrāz-gul's Camp ccl. a, to a single bed. The northern curves of its meanders keep in the main within two miles or so of the foot of the Mesa-marked 'coast-line' of the glacia. The width of the riverine belt, as marked by dead jungle and scrub, nowhere exceeds about five miles. It is improbable that any extensive grazing grounds ever existed here during historical times, still less cultivation on any considerable scale; for the difficulty of maintaining canals on this ground, where the fall of level is so very slight and the area capable of irrigation so confined, must have been quite as great here as it now is along the lowest portion of the Tārīm. The absence of any large agricultural settlements is sufficiently proved by the fact that notwithstanding the extensive stretches of completely bare ground that

Ancient  
riverine  
belt.

<sup>14</sup> C. ccxliii. 01-2. Two frs. of pottery, coarse red, badly burnt, corroded. (From 8 miles SW. of C. ccxliii, Kuruk-daryā.) Gr. M. 2¼".

C. ccxliii. 03. Lump of copper ore(?). (From 8 miles SW. of C. ccxliii, Kuruk-daryā.) Gr. M. 2½".

<sup>15</sup> C. ccxliv. 01. Fr. of pottery, coarse gritty, burnt reddish-grey. Corroded. Gr. M. 2½".

<sup>16</sup> Through an error of compilation which escaped my attention, Map No. 29. A. 3 shows a patch of vegetation on sandy soil to the west of our route before this crossed that by which Lāl Singh had gained Yaka-yārdang-bulak; it ought to mark here only scant tamarisk-cones to the west of the salt-encrusted ground.