

CHAPTER VIII

THE SAND-BURIED RUINS OF CHIRA

WHEN I returned from Imamla to the Karatash valley it was almost the middle of September. The hot summer was over, and it was time to go down to the zone of vegetation and the sandy desert of Takla-Makan. So I rejoined Mr. Barrett, and together we traveled down the Karatash River to Chira, a prosperous town of about ten thousand inhabitants. Here, as everywhere in the zone of vegetation, most of the people are farmers. One rarely sees finer fields or better fruit than those of Chira. Luscious little white peaches, dark crimson nectarines, grapes of various sorts, melons that melted in one's mouth, and delicious watermelons, both red and yellow, could be bought for a song. The air was so dry that one could indulge in them freely without harmful consequences.

At Chira, Mr. Barrett and I, having finished our work together, undertook separate expeditions. He devoted his attention chiefly to the physiography of the mountain border of the Lop basin; I mine to a study of the climate of antiquity. The best point for beginning my investigations seemed to be a group of ruins, Uzun-Tetti and others, which lie in the zone of vegetation a few miles north and east of Chira, and another group, Dandan-Uilik and Rawak, which lie far out in the sandy Takla-Makan desert, fifty or sixty miles north of Chira. Stein, the only archæologist who has visited the region, describes Dandan-Uilik, the chief of the