

of this region. For instance, Stein, a most careful investigator, remarks: "The thought that all this fertile stretch of ground might well be brought under cultivation had occupied me as I rode along. It was therefore a pleasant sight to me when a little below Nagara-khana [nineteen miles north of Niya] . . . I came upon the head of a canal begun only two years previously under the amban's orders. . . . Close to the route runs the new canal, a modest work so far, only six to eight feet broad, yet likely to bring life and wealth to this lonely woodland. The soil is a fertile loess, and the level of the ground is so uniform that its irrigation will be easy when the jungle is once cleared away. For over eight miles we followed the canal, and I pictured to my mind the changes it is likely to bring soon to this silent scene."

When I saw the canal, five years after Stein's visit, it had already been abandoned for two or three years. The water was so saline that, after the first year or two, agriculture was impossible.

The first inhabitants whom we found on the lower Niya River were at the shrine of Imam Jafir Sadik, the most famous shrine in all Central Asia, where the Niya River reappears for the last time. There we stopped for two days while the men offered sacrifices. The shrine was founded, or perhaps revived, during the wave of migration which spread eastward from the large western oases between 1830 and 1840. In response to the reputed dream of a holy "mulla," a reforming ruler endowed it with all the land of the then practically uninhabited Niya valley. He appointed a chief sheikh and four others, one of whom was the grandfather of my informant, one of the present sheikhs. The town of