

and the tamarisks are largely dead, although a few still survive on mounds thirty feet high; and finally, from the area of finely comminuted pottery to and beyond the mealing-stones the poplars are mere stumps five or six feet high, or have been broken off by the wind even with the ground, and the tamarisks have practically all perished, after in some cases forming mounds fifty or sixty feet high.

The desiccation of the Niya ruins, like that of the Chira group, cannot be explained by the encroachment of sand, the diversion of tributaries, or the lowering of the level of ground-water by erosion. There is not the slightest evidence that the ancient irrigation system was better than, or different from, that of to-day. Here, just as at Dandan-Uilik, it would be the height of folly to carry water seventy miles into the desert, when it might be employed to vastly greater advantage where it is now used at modern Niya. The growth of the present town cannot possibly have caused the abandonment of the ancient site; for it has grown up within a century, while the old town was abandoned sixteen centuries ago. Furthermore, as modern Niya is barely half as large as the old Buddhist oasis, and as it uses all the water available, its water supply would manifestly be scarcely half enough for a town such as that of antiquity. Indeed, even if modern Niya were non-existent, a river of the present size could not so much as reach, much less irrigate, the main ruins. At least, it did not reach them when it was free to do so if it could. Up to about 1840, the population of Niya amounted to only a dozen or fifteen families at most, and the consumption of water was negligible. The river ran freely as far as it would; but even so, it did not