

Abdal, on Lop-Nor, twenty miles to the north, come in summer to cultivate the reedy fields, and, by using all the water available in spring, raise grain for about fifteen families. The fields can be cultivated only once in three years, for in a single season of irrigation, a cake of clay two or three inches thick is deposited — a cake so stiff that crops cannot grow in it until it has been softened by two years of sun and rain. The natives think that the clay is gathered after the river begins to spread over the huge gravel flood-plain, ten miles long and one or two wide. In reality, the river is charged with fine clay when it leaves the mountains, where it is said to be equal to the river which supports the large village of Charklik. On reaching the flood-plain, the water sinks rapidly into the coarse gravel, but, as the current is swift, the fine clay is borne along, until at Miran the river is literally a stream of mud.

Formerly, conditions must have been far different. The old Buddhist Miran was neither a hamlet, such as to-day might be located here, nor a village like old Wash Sheri, but a town. It covered an area of at least five square miles, all of which, judging from the canals and pottery, and still more from the number and location of public and religious structures, must have been thickly populated. The houses, being made of clay, have disappeared, with two exceptions. Thirteen other structures remain, of which one is a fort, four hundred feet square; one is a lamasery, the outer walls of which are adorned with clay reliefs of Buddha; two are stupas, or shrines; and the other nine are solid rectangular masses of sun-dried brick, capped in most cases by the walls of what may, perhaps, have been monastic dwellings, or Buddhist