

They told me that Indian corn, one of the great staples of Chinese Turkestan, will not grow at all. It is replaced by a large-grained variety of white millet. Wheat fares better, but only the first year. If a given field is cultivated two or three years in succession, it becomes worthless. Evidently, the permanent occupation of the lower Tarim and Konche regions by a fixed agricultural population is, under present conditions of irrigation, impossible even at Kara-Kum, the site farthest upstream. At Lulan, over two hundred miles farther downstream, where evaporation has had still more opportunity to concentrate the salt in the river, conditions must be much worse. The complete failure of the Chinese attempts was not due to misgovernment, or to war, or to lack of settlers eager for land; but entirely to the extreme salinity of the rivers.

Turning now to the past, we find that though the difficulties of the present prevailed in early times, they were much less acute. At one period or another, as is proved by the pottery which I found, a permanent and somewhat dense population occupied a tract extending at least a hundred and twenty miles east and west along the dry bed of the rivers, and having a width of from ten to forty miles. The people were not shepherds, for keepers of sheep do not carry large quantities of breakable pottery with them from place to place. They must have been permanently settled, and presumably they practiced agriculture. The date of the densest population is uncertain, but from the absence of structural ruins over a large part of the pottery-strewn area, it is probable that the pottery represents a very early time, possibly some centuries before the Christian era.