

and the minimum minus five, which is probably unusually high, since I found a temperature of minus two in March. Snow never falls: at least, my host at Doksun said that during the forty years of his life he had never seen any there, although it falls yearly on the mountains round about. Rain, he added, is almost equally rare. Once or twice each summer it falls in sufficient quantity to wet the ground, though not to run. Once in ten years or so, there is a cloudburst, and raging floods ruin fields and houses.

In order to see as much of Turfan as possible in a short time, I undertook to go around the periphery of the basin with the horses, sending the camels to the capital, also called Turfan, to be sold. It proved impossible to go south of the lake because there is no water, but north of it there was so much water that three horses once became almost inextricably stuck in the mud, and we were forced to follow a very crooked route. At Deghar, the most eastern village of Turfan, we found a queer anomaly. Although the village lies in an almost rainless region at the foot of some of the highest sand dunes in the world, it not only has suffered from occasional floods, but the houses have to be rebuilt every five years because they sink into the mud. The plain of Turfan is so flat that in spring underground water from the mountains converts hundreds of square miles into impassable muck. It might be expected that plants would grow abundantly, as in the zone of vegetation of the Lop basin. So they do, to a certain extent, and have done much more extensively in the past. On the whole, however, the water dries up so early in the season that only camel-thorn and a few reeds can flourish.