

in height, and then the river spreads broadcast over the surface forming wide lagoons or marshes, belted by reeds and tamarisk brushwood, till the waters again find a defined channel between banks. And this occurs at intervals over an extent of some three hundred miles beyond which the river flows in a clear channel five days' journey in length to the Lake Lob.

The greatest portion of this desert tract is an unmitigated waste with a deep coating of loose pulverulent salines on which only the wild camel finds a footing. Horses cannot traverse it owing to their sinking knee-deep in the soft soil; whilst to man the dust raised proves suffocating, and the glare from the snow white salts blinding.

The only parts that are inhabited are the immediate banks of the Tárím River, and the angles of junction formed by its tributaries from Kúchá and Karáshahr. The latter is a considerable river called Káidú. It drains the Yuldúz valley and at Karáshahr falls into the Lake Baghrásh—the Bostáng of the maps. From this it issues to the south and, winding round the west of the Kúrúgh Tágh sand hills which separate its lake from that of Lob, at seven days' journey from the city joins the Tárím. At its point of junction a road goes across the desert to Khutan, but to the east of it are the lagoons and marshes abovementioned. For two or three hundred miles on this part of its course the Tárím River is the seat of some primitive tribes who dwell in reed huts on its banks and in boats upon its stream. They will be described hereafter under the head of inhabitants of the country.

It may be here noted as a remarkable object on this desert tract that on the road to Khutan south of this peopled district of Lob is the site of an ancient city of that name now buried in sand; and at three days' journey further to the south are the ruins of Katak, another ancient city of this region, which has been overwhelmed by the shifting sands.

During our stay in the country we had an opportunity of witnessing the manner in which such a catastrophe is brought about. Whilst the embassy was halted at Yangi Hissar we paid a visit to the shrine of Ordám Pádshah in the Kúm Shahídán or "Martyrs' Sands" on the verge of the desert, and there saw some buildings actually undergoing the process of submergence by the shifting sands.

It is effected in this wise. During the spring and summer months a north or north-west wind prevails. It blows with considerable force and persistence for many days consecutively. As it sweeps over the plain it raises the impalpable dust on its surface, and obscures the air by a dense haze resembling in darkness a November fog in London; but it drives the heavier particles of sand before it, and on the subsidence of the wind they are left on the plain in the form of ripples like those on a sandy beach washed by an ebbing current.

In process of time under the continued action of this wind the ripples grow in size, and at the same time progress gradually over the plain in the direction of the wind. As they grow in size the more defined and uniform becomes their shape, and the more exact their direction with that of the wind.

At Kúm Shahídán these moving sands presented a most remarkable uniformity in their direction and in the regularity of their wave lines. The wave lines were formed by a series of three to six or more semilunes ranged over the plain in rows one behind the other in the direction whence the wind blew, that is, to the north or north-west.

All the semilunes in every series and in all the rows exactly resembled each other in every particular except dimensions, and all faced the direction to which the wind blew, that is to the south or south-east.

Each semilune towards the north or north-west sloped up gently from the plain, and reached its greatest height—from twelve to sixty or eighty feet—in the centre of the curve which faced to the south or south-east. From this centre the loose sand sloped down gently along