

present delta will stabilize and become less intricate. No old forests exist in the present delta though there are some along dry river courses to the south of it. The Lou-lan station is still as dry as it was before the return of the water into Qum-darya, the nearest point where drinking water is obtainable being situated about 7 km. from the ruined station.

As to the situation of the lake Lop-nor of Lou-lan's time we know only that it must have been somewhere in the large salt-encrusted area.

STEIN rightly emphasizes the importance of the ruined fortress at Merdek when trying to reconstruct the hydrography of Lou-lan's time (Stein 1921, p. 453). The existence of a ruin here proves that a branch of the Tarim must have flowed close to the line of the Ilek (i. e. the easternmost branch of the old lower Tarim) during the earliest period of Chinese control of the Tarim Basin. This explanation is much more reasonable and presents itself more readily than HERRMANN'S construction of a "River of The South" passing Merdek in a west-easterly direction. The river course assumed by STEIN need not have been very large, only something like my Small River. Under the present hydrographical conditions all the north-southerly beds of the lower Tarim are dry, the whole amount of water following the Qum-darya.

The correctness of STEIN'S explanation of the source whence Merdek drew its water supply was endorsed by my discovery of "The Small River" in 1934. As will be described in detail in the following I found this narrow river course branching off from Qum-darya far above the true present delta, taking a south-south-easterly course, and probably never reaching a terminal lake. It approaches the now dried-up beds of the lower Tarim to within 8 or 10 km. The archaeological remains found along this branch prove that it existed at the time of Lou-lan. To a certain extent it must have flowed parallel to the branch which watered Merdek.

At the end of the chapter on ruins there is a further discussion on hydrographical questions.

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In Lou-lan there existed a flourishing mixed culture during a few centuries around the beginning of our era.

This culture arose thanks to favourable geographical circumstances which gave Lou-lan a key position on the shortest line of communication between China and the West, the so-called Road of the Centre, a part of the Silk Road along which China exported above all her precious silk materials, and along which she received many cultural influences from Western countries, and from India, among other things, Buddhism. However, the life-giving water in the lower Tarim river, which alone made settlements possible here, changed its course and came to follow another bed. Lou-lan had to be abandoned. The desert spread its deadly hand over everything that the population had left behind when they moved away. Soon Lou-lan was