

Again there was a change. The bed of the lake of Sistan was once more filled with water to a height greater than that which is now reached, but less than in the previous epoch of high water, for Zahidan was not covered as it had been before. Between the time of Istakhri and the present the Helmund was diverted from a southwestward to a northward course, and this was probably the cause of the increase in the size of the lake. This is the more probable because from historical and archeological evidence it is known that Zahidan was built soon after the time of Istakhri. To supply so large a city with water a large amount must have been withdrawn from the Helmund before it reached the God-i-Zirrah and turned in the direction of Sistan. For some centuries, until its destruction by Tinur at the end of the fourteenth century, Zahidan continued to flourish. It is probable that the lake stood at a high level for a considerable portion of this time, for it was able to form, or at least to rejuvenate, a well-defined shoreline, with broad beaches and high bluffs. During the last five centuries, since the fall of Zahidan, there has been a gradual decrease in the size of the lake and in the density of the population that surrounds it. How this could take place without a diminution in the water supply it is hard to understand. The history of Sistan, so far as it can be made out, seems to indicate a gradual desiccation of the country from early historical times down even to the present. The evidence of archeology, history, and tradition in the surrounding countries points in the same direction. At Sistan history and physiography appear to join hands, for the change from the conditions of greater water-supply during antiquity to the desiccation of to-day is apparently the change from the last fluvial epoch to the present interfluvial epoch.