

of irrigation during historical times without the climate of the basin as a whole having undergone any appreciable change.

But let us now resume, however rapidly, our survey of the part which the Tarim basin by its geographical function as a great 'corridor' played in later phases of Central-Asian history. For more than three centuries our knowledge of this history is very meagre indeed; for with the disappearance of Chinese political control our chief sources of trustworthy historical information about the 'Western Regions' for the most part dry up. While China itself was divided between rival dynasties, several of them of foreign origin, the Huns in the course of the fourth century had started westwards on the great move which ultimately led them to water their horses on the Danube, Rhine and Po. After an interval the whole of the Tarim basin, together with vast territories to the north and west, passed for about a century under the domination of a branch of the Huns, known in Western Asia as the Hephthalites or White Huns.

Neither this domination from outside nor the period of contested sovereignty within, which preceded it, appears to have seriously affected the firm footing which Chinese civilization had acquired in the oases or to have interfered with the steady flow in the opposite direction of Buddhist doctrine and literary as well as art influences from easternmost Iran and India. The closeness of the religious and intellectual relations thus established is reflected in the accounts left to us of the journeys of Chinese Buddhist pilgrims, who at this period made their way right through Central Asia to the sacred places of Buddhism in distant India.

By the middle of the sixth century a fresh wave in the