

thus effected furnished strong grounds for the belief that the area over which the Kucha oasis extended in T'ang times must have demanded for its cultivation means of irrigation greatly in excess of those now available.

The conclusion seemed clearly indicated that the discharge of the two rivers feeding the canals of Kucha has considerably diminished since the Buddhist period. But here as in the case of the Khotan oasis, which in many respects shows aspects curiously corresponding to those of Kucha, antiquarian evidence does not allow us definitely to answer the questions to what extent this diminution was the direct cause for the abandonment during historical times of once irrigated ground and by what stages it proceeded. But the fact itself of the reduced volume of water in these rivers deserves to be kept in view when considering the much-discussed problem of 'desiccation' in Central Asia.

On my first brief visit to Kucha in January 1908 I had started from here for the difficult and in some ways distinctly risky journey which carried me south from the Tarim across the forbidding wastes of the Taklamakan to where the Keriya river dies away amidst the dunes. In *Desert Cathay* I have fully recorded the anxious experiences we went through on that rather adventurous journey, and even if I could spare room here to relate them afresh it would mean too great a digression from the ground that concerns us here.

By the beginning of May I started from Kucha westwards, not without regret at having to leave the verdure of its fine orchards and its attractive people, genial and polite, just as the Chinese records describe them in ancient times. Afrazgul Khan was sent to map the old and shortest route to Aksu