

I thought it quite worthy to figure in old traditional belief as the legendary central lake from which the four greatest rivers of Asia were supposed to take their rise. Hsüan-tsang's narrative reflects this belief in curious mixture with a correct record of locally observed facts. The clearness, fresh taste and dark blue colour of the lake are just as he describes them. What the Kirghiz told us about its shores swarming with aquatic birds in the spring and autumn, and about their eggs then to be found in plenty amidst the thin scrub of the shore, agrees accurately with the pious traveller's account. Nor can it surprise us that the imagination of old travellers passing this great sheet of water at such a height, and so far away from human occupation, should have credited it with great depth and with hiding in it 'all kinds of aquatic monsters' such as Hsüan-tsang was told of.

Marco Polo's account of the 'Pamier' makes it equally clear that his route led him past the great lake. His graphic description is so accurate in its details that I cannot forgo quoting it in full. "And when you leave this little country (Wakhan), and ride three days north-east, always among mountains, you get to such a height that 'tis said to be the highest place in the world! And when you have got to this height you find a great lake between two mountains, and out of it a fine river running through a plain clothed with the finest pasture in the world; insomuch that a lean beast there will fatten to your heart's content in ten days. There are great numbers of wild beasts; among others, wild sheep of great size, whose horns are good six palms in length. From these horns the shepherds make great bowls to eat from, and they use the horns also to enclose folds for their cattle at night. Messer Marco was told also that the wolves