

After a ten miles' march over bare gravel and sand Siligh Langar was reached, a collection of wretched mud-hovels, with a little tank fed by a small watercourse. The tank was full and the water flowed away into the sand. Beyond Siligh Langar scanty scrub and 'Kumush' appeared again and covered the sandy soil up to Hajib Langar, another uninviting wayside station two and a half miles beyond. Then the ground began to show pebble-strewn beds of shallow ravines, and in a long dark line the trees of the oasis of Guma appeared on the horizon. It was a dreary ride of some six miles before we struck the river-bed, then dry, that marks the western edge of the lands of Guma. Beyond it I passed scattered fields and groves half-buried under drifting sand that seems to advance from the west, and at last, after riding up a steep bank, some 30 to 40 feet high, I was once more amidst fertile gardens and fields. Close to a large canal that skirts the Bazar of Guma I discovered a camping-ground just as I wanted it, in a quiet garden enclosed by a hedge of high willows and poplars. While my tent was being pitched I rode off again towards the Bazar, where the weekly market was still in full swing. The large crowds buying and selling cattle, fruit, cotton stuffs, and other local produce were an indication of the extent of the oasis. Over rows of stalls high boots of red leather were hanging, an article evidently in great demand owing to the approach of winter.

The 5th of October was given up to a halt needed for antiquarian inquiries. Among the purchases of Central-Asian antiquities made for the Indian Government by Mr. Macartney and other political officers, paper manuscripts and "block-prints" in "unknown characters" had since 1895 become more and more frequent. These and similar acquisitions, which had reached Russian and other public collections in Europe, were all supposed to have been unearthed from sand-buried sites in the Khotan region. Islam Akhun, the Khotan "treasure-seeker" from whom most of these strange texts