

seen. Gradually the jungle area became more and more invaded by drift-sand; clumps of trees which had withered and died showed themselves more frequently; and at last, some eight miles below the Mazar, the forest changed to a wide expanse of low sand-cones thickly overgrown with tamarisks and a hardy shrub known as Ak-tiken. Groups of dead poplars and other trees rose between, their large stems now gaunt and twisted by age, bearing evidence of a time when the river carried life further into the desert. From a high sand-hill close to my camp I could see how the scrubby jungle spreads out between the great ridges of sand that mark on the east and west the commencement of the true desert. The breadth of this area was here fully four miles, and at various points it formed bays that indent still further into the true desert. The old course of the river must have extended towards the north-west; for in that direction the jungle-scrub could be seen for a considerable distance spreading over ground, nowhere broken by high ridges of sand.

The surmise I formed, that the ancient site would be reached by following these traces of the former river-course, was confirmed by the next day's march. This also showed, for the first time in my experience of the desert, that the distance given by the local guides was exaggerated. I had been told that the ruins to be visited would be reached in three marches from Imam Jafar's shrine. In reality we reached the southern edge of the area containing them by a second easy march of about fourteen miles on the 27th of January. It lay all along in the direction—more exactly N.N.W.—in which on the previous evening I had sighted the continuation of the old river-bed. For the first five miles or so the patches of dead forest were so thick that we had often to pick with care a way for the camels. Tamarisk brushwood still grew vigorously amidst the dead trees, chiefly Toghkak. The time when the latter flourished equally cannot have been very remote. For many of the lifeless trees still retained their branches, unlike the shrivelled skeletons of trunks seen elsewhere. A dry channel, about 4 feet deep, could be traced for some distance, winding