

former bed was marked by a lagoon of fresh water communicating with the actual river-course, yet keeping its water clear of the mud which discoloured the latter. It seemed a favourite haunt of wild duck, of which hundreds were disporting themselves on this pretty sheet of water. That my camp was placed within 200 yards of its bank seemed in no way to disturb the birds. Their loud calls sounded strange to me after the stillness of my desert camps.

I knew from Dr. Sven Hedin's account that the ruins I had come in search of lay in the desert, within a march to the north-west of Tonguz-baste. Mullah Shah, an experienced shepherd who was to guide us, turned up late at night, and after prolonged protestations of ignorance, acknowledged that he had twice visited Karadong. With him came another shepherd, Muhammad Shah, "the hunter" (Merghen), an active young fellow who had also once seen the place. He was to help Mullah Shah, his 'Ustad,' or master, in finding the track. This turned out no easy task. The morning was very hazy, and by the time the water-tanks had been filled and a depôt made of supplies not immediately needed, a stiff north wind sprung up which by degrees developed into a regular 'Buran,' the first of the season. We followed for about seven miles a course almost due north, until we passed the westernmost of the former river-beds above mentioned, near a little pool, known as Toldama, retaining some flood water. Then our guides struck to the north-west.

So far we had marched in a whirl of dust. But now, with the increasing force of the storm, the air became so thick that it was difficult to see even for a hundred yards. The assurance with which Mullah Shah and his pupil continued to guide us was doubly welcome under such circumstances. With the sand driving into my face and accumulating under the eyelashes in spite of goggles, it was difficult to see much of the route. But I noted that after a couple of miles the scattered groups of Toghraks were left behind and the sand dunes rose in height. After plodding on among them for another hour, our guides declared that we were near the tamarisk-covered copses that have given the site its name, Karadong ("the Black Hillocks"). But as in the blinding dust they