

whom our Darogha had succeeded in discovering called Aktaz or simply 'Tatilik' (ruins). On several small pieces of open ground, showing evidence of considerable erosion, pottery fragments abounded and foundations of mud-walled houses could be distinguished. But the latter had been levelled to within a few inches from the ground, and the few small objects, such as a ring of brass picked up by my men, gave no clear indication of date.

Ultimately we emerged on cultivated land at the village of Malakalagan, which had been formed about fifteen years ago by people from Domoko, the main oasis due south on the Khotan-Keriya route. The reclamation of desert soil going on here was a sight as cheering as it was instructive. Small irrigation cuts were seen winding along the old tamarisk-covered hillocks of sand that had not yet been levelled down, while between them extended carefully-fenced fields. Here and there the Toghraks of the desert jungle had been spared, particularly near the huts of the settlers. But it was clear they would soon disappear in a hopeless minority by the side of the avenues of young poplars, Jigda, and other fruit trees that were rapidly growing up along all irrigation channels.

My previous information had clearly indicated the ruined site I was in search of as being situated in the vicinity of the Mazar of Lachin-Ata. The people of Malakalagan, whom I closely questioned, did not deny their knowledge of this popular desert shrine, but none of them would acknowledge ever having visited the 'Kone-shahr' near it. Our wanderings of the previous two days had left me no illusions as to the capacity of our two worthy guides. Yet as better were not to be got and time was getting more than ever precious, I decided to set out with them on the morning of March 25th. Old Turdi, after a long absence on mail duty, had just joined me from Khotan, and I could rely on the old "treasure-seeker's" instinct and experience coming to the help of whatever local knowledge the Domoko guides might prove to possess. Turdi had brought along two more water-tanks previously left at Khotan, and as I took the precaution of having all six tanks filled before the start, we were safe from immediate risk. The three days' Odyssey