

seemed to support the belief that this tradition had some substantial basis, and I felt inclined to regard the gradual change of levels consequent on irrigation deposits as a possible explanation of these repeated shifts. It would need a prolonged investigation of local conditions, particularly those connected with the supply of irrigation water, which is here largely dependent on springs, in order to arrive at any safe conclusion. But anyhow, there could be no doubt that the ruins I saw here were the best illustration of the course of decay through which the 'Kone-shahrs,' or Tatis, found along the western route to Khotan and on the outskirts of the oasis, must be supposed to have passed once. There, too, villages were deserted owing to irrigation ceasing from one cause or other; and as they were so much further away from the desert centre than the terminal oases of Dandan-Uiliq or the Niya River site, the heavy drift-sand could not arrive in time and in sufficient quantity to give protection to the ruins.

For nearly three miles we traversed the desolate remains of these village homesteads, but it was not until some miles further north that the region of low sand dunes was entered near a little wooden tomb, worshipped as the supposed resting-place of a saintly associate of Lachin-Ata. The Mazar of the latter was not in view, nor could our guides give any clear idea where we should find the ancient site previously described as in its vicinity. As we plodded on amidst the gradually rising sand dunes, the villagers I had taken along for eventual excavations became more communicative. They professed never to have seen that site, but they were well aware of its legend.

These same villagers had before shown a very matter-of-fact perception of the true cause which had led to the abandonment of their old lands. All the greater was my surprise to find that the legend they now proceeded to tell me of the 'Kone-shahr' in the desert beyond was in all substantial points the same as the one which more than twelve centuries ago Hiuen-Tsiang had heard at Pi-mo of the sand-buried city of Ho-lo-lo-kia, and which has been briefly quoted already in my account of Karadong. A holy man