

seemed in no way to differ from the fine 'sand' which was seen outside the little oasis and along the edges of the torrent bed heaped into bare dunes and hillocks of varying height. It was a striking demonstration how easily irrigation could transform this seemingly sterile waste into rich agricultural land.

Drift-'sand'  
at Hāsa.

On my ride to Kara-kul Mazār I had been shown the little hamlet of *Hāsa*, only about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles to the south-east of Gūma Bāzār, where dunes 20 to 30 feet high, advancing from the north, are gradually overwhelming the villagers' holdings. I regret I did not think then of securing specimens of this 'sand' for microscopical examination. But every topographical consideration points to the conclusion that these destructive dunes were composed of the same 'sand' which extends round the northern edge of the oasis, and which proves so fertile wherever it can effectively be brought under irrigation. My observations of that day around Gūma have been confirmed by those subsequently made at other oases. They showed clearly that extension of cultivation on one side may proceed simultaneously with an advance of the dunes over arable land on the other, and that in this constant struggle between oasis and desert the facilities for irrigation, depending on human activity perhaps as much as on natural level and available water-supply, form the determining factor. We shall have frequent occasion to return to these points when discussing the changes during historical times in the conditions of oases further east.

The view of the newly reclaimed lands of Karatāgh-aghzi, and the fact of a belt of jungle extending along the flood-water channels for a considerable distance further northward, naturally suggested inquiries whether remains of old settlements could not be traced in that direction. But all information I could gather from cultivators and local headmen was in the negative. I am all the more inclined to accept this testimony because it agrees with the experience gained by Captain Deasy on a curious expedition, the full story of which I learned subsequently<sup>13</sup>.

Fiction of  
ancient site  
beyond  
Gūma.

It appears that Captain Deasy, having been in Mr. Macartney's company about the time when Islām Ākhūn, early in 1898, furnished to the latter the above mentioned itinerary, together with some of his remarkable 'finds', was induced to propose to the 'treasure-seeker' a visit to one of the old sites described by him beyond Gūma. Islām Ākhūn, though in reality he had never been to any such sites, could not refuse to act as guide without the risk of arousing suspicions about the truth of his story, and thus spoiling the market for his 'finds' among the Europeans of Kāshgar. So much against his will the impostor had to start for the desert from Gūma in April, 1898. Recruiting two local 'guides' who knew as little of ancient sites as himself, he conducted the party for two weary marches north of Karatāgh-aghzi into the desert. Nothing, of course, was found in the belt of sandy jungle and among the dunes beyond; and when the supply of water carried began to run low, Islām Ākhūn thought it safest to abscond during the night and to return to Khotan<sup>14</sup>.

On the basis of the above inquiries I consider it safe to assume that no ancient remains exposed to view exist in the vicinity of Gūma except those beyond Mokuila, which will be

<sup>13</sup> I gathered the first details of this abortive treasure-seeking adventure from Miān Jaswant Singh, who, before serving as follower of my surveyor Rām Singh, had accompanied Captain Deasy's party in a similar capacity (see *Ruins of Khotan*, p. 8). When subsequently I had the chance of making Islām Ākhūn's personal acquaintance and succeeded in extracting from this versatile rogue a full confession of his various frauds (as related below in chap. xv), a clearer light was thrown on the motives, and on various amusing incidents, of the adventure. The facts of this fruitless trip into the

desert have since been briefly related in Captain Deasy's book *In Tibet and Chinese Turkestan*, pp. 161 sqq.

<sup>14</sup> It was, perhaps, in order to compensate himself for these unwonted hardships that Islām Ākhūn forged a note pretending to be in Captain Deasy's handwriting, with which on his return he obtained some money from the Afghan Aksakāl of Khotan! For this impudent fraud he received, however, condign punishment from Chinese justice, by having to wear the wooden collar for a considerable period, as related in Captain Deasy's pages.