

the map eastwards, which represent old main beds of the river and still at times may be reached by its overflow. Almost identical conditions prevail at the end of the Endere river, where the small terminal colony of Endere-Tārīm has recently been abandoned, mainly because the river has been shifting its course from the so-called Yangi-Daryā or 'New Channel' back again westwards into its 'Old Channel'.

Possible
causes of
abandon-
ment of
ancient site.

With such modern changes before us, small in scale as far as cultivation is concerned, but typical in character for the difficulties which at all times must have surrounded terminal oases in this part of the Khotan region, it seems to me well worth considering whether the abandonment of the ancient site which once formed the terminal oasis of the Niya river may not partly at least have been due to some great shift in the river's end course, which the settlement for some reason or other was unable to avert or counteract. In view of this possibility, I must greatly regret that, in the midst of the incessant excavation labours which filled my stay at the site, and which rendered my presence obligatory, I could not spare time for topographical explorations to the east and west. I must, however, mention that Surveyor Rām Singh, whom I sent out to accompany Darōgha Ibrāhīm on January 28 on a part of the latter's reconnaissance westwards¹³, reported that he found plenty of dead Toghraks in depressions he passed through about 8 miles west of Camp 93, and even that he sighted living trees some two miles beyond. Both observations may be accepted at present as evidence of the river having at some period followed divergent beds in that direction.

No direct
archaeologi-
cal evidence
as to cause
of abandon-
ment.

The archaeological or historical evidence at present available is quite insufficient to allow us to form any definite opinion as to the immediate cause or causes which led to the abandonment of the site. The Kharoṣṭhī documents, it is true, seem to refer in places to difficulties about irrigation. But these are more or less constant for individual parts of the smaller oases, whether from inadequate snowfall in the mountains, destructive floods or similar causes; and of course, the localities from which those reports date have as yet to be determined. Also the indirect effect, which the final withdrawal of Chinese central authority from Eastern Turkeṣtān after Wu ti's reign may have had on local conditions generally, must remain a matter of mere conjecture. But it will certainly strike the historical student as probably more than mere coincidence that both at Dandān-Uiliq and at the Niya Site, and also, as we shall see, at the Endere ruins, the abandonment of these ancient colonies is proved by incontrovertible evidence to have followed closely upon great political changes affecting the Khotan region. That changes of this kind may, under the peculiar physical conditions prevailing in this region, exercise an immediate and very important effect upon the extent of cultivation, and the general economic conditions of the oases, is strikingly proved by the great reduction in the population, cultivation, and industrial productiveness which undoubtedly resulted in Khotan from the troubles of the last Muhammadan rising and from Yāqūb Bēg's reign, relatively short though they were¹⁴. But it would be useless to speculate at present upon the extent to which troubles of a similar kind at earlier periods may have rendered the struggle for the maintenance of irrigation more precarious, or the effect of any contemporary great shifting in the river-course more important and difficult to deal with.

Physical
evidence at
present
available.

Turning to the purely physical side of the question, it appears to me that we have at present only one absolutely clear fact to fall back upon, the shrinkage by a distance of at least

¹³ See *Ruins of Khotan*, pp. 354, 370.

¹⁴ Compare, e.g., *Yarkand Mission Report*, p. 33. Dr. Bellew, in 1874, was informed 'by a trustworthy resident of the city who had witnessed the whole revolution from the

overthrow of the Chinese to the establishment of the Amīr,' 'that the whole country [of Khotan] was now completely impoverished, and that it had lost nearly half of its male population.'