

other hand, plenty of young Toghraks were growing up among the ruins, indicating the relatively small depth of subsoil water. It was interesting to note at different points a number of big Toghraks, declared by the villagers to be very old, which were still in vigorous life. There could be no doubt that these trees were far older than the ruined dwellings. Their presence in this area, after what I had seen at Malakalagan, distinctly suggested that the ground occupied by the ruin of 'old Domoko' had previously, at no very distant period, been occupied by desert jungle. And with this the fact that most of the dead fruit-trees seemed but of small size and modest age curiously agreed.

The villagers accompanying me, as well as the people I subsequently examined on my return to the oasis, all agreed in asserting that the gradually increasing difficulty of conducting the irrigation water sufficiently far had caused the cultivation of the Domoko oasis to be shifted from this old area to the lands along the Khotan-Keriya road within the memory of living men. Local tradition, in fact, maintained that in the case of Domoko such shifts of the cultivated area, backwards and forwards, had occurred already five times and a sixth was to follow. Whatever the basis of this tradition may be, the explanation given by the villagers as to the cause of these shifts seemed sufficiently matter-of-fact. They attributed the abandonment of 'old Domoko' not to any diminution of cultivation or of the water-supply available for it, but simply to the fact that the particular area could no longer be reached by the water carried in the irrigation canals.

Cause of abandonment.

The lands of Domoko, as far as I could ascertain, at all times depend for their water on the Domoko Yār, fed mainly by springs. These may be supposed to bring again to the surface the water which the Sai absorbs higher up from the Nūra river and neighbouring mountain streams. That the level or position in which springs of this kind appear is here subject to considerable changes within short periods I had occasion to learn subsequently in the case of Kara-kīr, a small oasis just east of Domoko. There the fresh appearance of abundant springs north of the Khotan-Keriya road some ten years before my visit had promptly been followed by the creation of a new colony, with irrigable land sufficient for 700 to 800 households. With such evidence before me it seemed possible to assume that the position of the Domoko villages might have been similarly affected by earlier changes. But a gradual alteration of ground-levels consequent on irrigation deposits also suggested itself as a possible explanation of the alleged shifts. Nor did the villagers' assertion induce me to overlook the possibility of a diminution in the available quantity of water being the true cause.

Irrigation of Domoko oasis.

It was clear that a prolonged and detailed investigation of all local conditions, particularly those connected with the supply of irrigation water, would be needed in order to arrive at any safe conclusion as to the cause or causes at work here. But, however that may be, I could feel no doubt as to the archaeological interest of the ruins I saw here. Modern as they are, they furnish the best illustration of the course of decay through which the 'kōne-shahrs', or Tatis, found along the western route to Khotan and on the outskirts of the oasis, must be supposed to have passed. There, too, village sites were deserted owing to irrigation ceasing from one cause or another, and as they were so much further away from the desert centre than the terminal oases of Dandān-Uiliq or the Niya Site, the heavy drift-sand could not arrive in time and in masses sufficiently large to give effective protection to the ruins.

Archaeological interest of modern ruins.

For nearly three miles we traversed the desolate remains of these village homesteads, but it was not until about two miles further to the north-west that the region of true dunes was entered near a little wooden tomb known as Supuji Mazār, and worshipped as the supposed resting-place of a saintly associate of Lachin-atā. The Mazār of the latter was not in view,

Desert beyond abandoned settlement.