

nature is carried on by a highly civilized community, such as archaeological exploration reveals to us at these ancient oases of the Tarim Basin, human factors introduce elements of complexity which must warn the critical student to proceed warily and to look for definite historical evidence before drawing his conclusions. Where cultivation is wholly dependent upon careful irrigation and the maintenance of the latter on any scale is possible only by organized co-operation of an adequate population, as in these oases adjacent to and surrounded by the most arid of deserts, a variety of causes apart from the want of water may lead to the gradual shrinkage or complete abandonment of cultivation. Amongst them I need only mention reduction of population through invasion or pestilence, maladministration and want of security through prolonged disturbance of political conditions, etc.

In order to gauge correctly the most probable causes in each case, we need definite historical records which neither silent ruins nor learned conjecture can replace, and reliable materials of that kind are still exceedingly scanty for any period of the history of Chinese Turkestan. But even thus it is well to remember that the end of the eighth century A.D., during which the settlements of Dandan-oilik, Khadalik, and probably also the other small sites near Domoko were abandoned, was the period when the T'ang dynasty's rule in the Tarim Basin came to a close, and with it the ordered conditions dependent on an effective central administration.