

exposure to the desert winds had left nothing for me to dig here. But the mere fact of the area of ancient occupation stretching so far south was important. In any case there was the joyful sensation of finding myself once more among the shrivelled trunks of poplars and fruit trees which had flourished when there was still an Imperial Rome.

After regaining the route we again passed for more than a mile through a belt of big living Tograks. Most of them, by the size of their trunks and their much-fissured bark, seemed of great age, and plenty of dead trees were lying in the thickets between them. Here and there I caught sight of a narrow and tortuous channel emerging from the sand, probably cut by the last summer flood which the dying river had succeeded in pushing out to this border area of dead and living forest. But that may have been centuries ago, since the great depth to which such large specimens of the wild poplar are known to send down their roots would make them independent of occasional surface watering. We had left these trees with their bright-coloured foliage behind us, and wound our way for a mile north-westwards through a sombre maze of tamarisk-covered conical sand-hills, when I found myself once more at the spot where rows of completely bleached trunks of poplars and mulberry trees, much splintered yet upright, mark an ancient orchard or farm-yard already noticed in 1901. The sand here seemed now less heavy, and for a distance of some sixty yards I could follow the line of ancient trees planted at regular intervals.

From here the route followed by Saduk, the shepherd guide from the Mazar, who had marched ahead with the water-carrying camels, seemed to strike slightly more westwards than the one I had taken in 1901. After less than half a mile it emerged, to my surprise, upon a small open plain, about 300 yards long from south-east to north-west, where, by the side of bare, eroded ground strewn with hard *débris*, substantial rush-built fences and avenues of poplars could clearly be traced in the low sand. Near the centre of this area a small plateau rising island-