

third century A.D. Yet my own finds in the ruined fort of Endere in 1901 had established the fact of this site having been occupied at the beginning of the eighth century A.D. and abandoned to the desert soon after. Assuming Sadak's statement to be true—and he as well as his father Samsak, a queer-looking old shepherd, clung to it stoutly, in spite of all my critical questionings—there was here an interesting archaeological puzzle which could only be solved on the spot, and which, as I shall soon have occasion to show, has a wide historical bearing.

The necessity of saving our hard-worked camels and men any additional trials and risks, and also of effecting an early junction with the heavy baggage portion left behind at the Niya oasis, would not allow me to strike across the desert to Endere by any other route than that explored in 1901. So my description of these marches may be brief. The first two led across a dreary succession of high ridges of sand absolutely bare. The intervening belts of level ground, covered with scanty scrub, mostly dead and marking ancient river-beds, were equally desolate. All the way we were faced by a cutting north-east wind which kept us in a dust-laden and depressingly foggy atmosphere. So it was not surprising that, when on the evening of November 2nd we arrived by the dying course of the Yar-tungaz River, all trees in the narrow jungle belt lining it had already shed their leaves and stood in wintry bareness. The contrast with the autumnal splendour of the forest passed through only three days earlier was most striking.

Marching down the river where it gradually loses itself in a deltaic maze of dry water-courses and widening Toghrak jungle, we reached next day the small terminal oasis of Jigda-bulung. My old host Abdul Karim Akhun, the owner of the main farm, was still there to welcome me, bent by increased age, but yet hale enough to look after his property. He was complaining of bad harvests caused, as usual, by the vagaries of the river; which, after threatening to shift westwards at the time of my former passage, had for the last few years returned once more to its old bed.