

As I pondered over these observations and compared them with what could be inferred from the uniform roughness of the dwellings, and from the absence of refuse heaps, the following suggested itself as the most likely explanation. At a time when the Endere River was following a course west of its present bed, and thus bringing water to the wide open plain now covered with scrub and Toghraks mostly dead, a colony had been planted here in the hope of utilizing the chance offered for an agricultural settlement. The provision of a circumvallation and the crowding together within of numerous dwellings, all of a uniform type and manifestly provisional, point to a scheme of colonization very different from the haphazard growth of scattered holdings usual in the smaller oases.

This is fully accounted for by the special importance which the area of vegetation along the terminal course of the Endere River must always have claimed in historical times as the only possible position for a half-way station on the desert route, some 220 miles long, between Niya and the oasis of Charchan. The ruins to be described presently of older fortified stations near the east bank of the Endere River undoubtedly date from successive attempts to establish here a settlement which would help to facilitate and protect traffic on the route leading eastwards along the Taklamakan to Lop-nor, and thence to China proper. It thus seems but natural to connect the unmistakably later ruins of the fortified village with a systematic endeavour made in Muhammadan times for the same purpose. The change in the site chosen for the new settlement was, no doubt, due to a temporary shifting of the Endere River course. The attempt must have failed soon, as was shown quite clearly by the absence of all traces of agricultural development near the site and by other indications already mentioned.

In the absence of more definite evidence we cannot make sure of the immediate cause of this abandonment. Under the peculiar physical conditions prevailing, another shift of the river to where it now flows, fully five miles to the east, would have sufficed to make irrigation impossible. But that other causes might also be thought of was