

of Chinese control over the Tarim Basin. Insignificant as was the ruin itself, its date invested it with a definite antiquarian and geographical interest; for its existence at this place proves that a branch of the Tarim must already in the early centuries of our era have flowed close to the present line of the Ilek, and this is a fact that was worth establishing in view of much-discussed theories about earlier wanderings of the Tarim and its terminal lake beds. Whether the deep Nullah, passing close to the south of the ruin and in line with the marsh known as Bayi-köl, went back to the time of its occupation, it was impossible to determine. But it was said to have received water during the summer floods until quite recent years.

We observed an unmistakable effect of this when, digging down in the centre of the circumvallation where some withered Toghrak posts lay exposed, we came upon moist sand at a depth of only four feet. It was clear that none of the usual *débris* in perishable materials could here have survived subsoil moisture. And in fact, on subsequently clearing the gate passage, which once led into the small fort from the south, I found that the massive Toghrak posts originally flanking it had completely rotted away, except for three or four feet on the top where they showed marks of having been exposed to fire. To the vicinity of water was due, too, the complete absence of wind-eroded ground near the ruin, and the consequent want of the usual *débris* in hard materials. Nor did the search which I made around that day and on the following morning reveal the survival of any other structural remains.

Therefore, satisfied with the chronological evidence which our rapid work at Merdek-shahr had yielded, I was free by mid-day of January 7th to start again southward. The main object drawing me back was, of course, the excavation of the ruins of Miran. But before settling down to this task I decided to visit the ancient site which Roborowsky's survey, as embodied in the Russian Trans-frontier map, marked under the name of Kötek-shahri, near the terminal course of the Charchan Darya. Regard for the men whom all these weeks of hard work in the wintry desert had tried severely, and whose supplies were