

earliest reference to the Charchan oasis by its modern name, and that the name 'Nob' occurring in the above-quoted documents manifestly supplies the long-sought phonetic link between the form 'Na-fo-po' used by Hsüan-tsang when describing the Lop-nor tract, and the 'Lop' of Marco Polo which Sir Henry Yule had already recognized as its mediaeval derivative. If the site of Miran, as the wording of the tablet first quoted strongly suggests, was known to the Tibetans as 'Great Nob,' it appears very probable that by 'Little Nob' they meant Charklik. This distinction would closely correspond to that which the Han Annals indicate between the two main places of Shan-shan or Lou-lan, Yü-ni, 'the Old Town,' to the east, and I-hsün or 'the New Town,' these two being now represented, as I believe, by the sites of Miran and Charklik respectively.

Whatever details of historical interest may yet be gleaned from this rich garner of documents, it can be considered already certain that the occupation of the Miran fort, and in all probability also its construction, must belong to the period of Tibetan domination in Chinese Turkestan and the regions immediately eastward. Scanty as our historical materials for this period as yet are, we know that it must have extended from the downfall of Chinese power westwards in the last third of the eighth century to about the latter half of the ninth century A.D. The total disappearance of Chinese influence and control in the Tarim Basin, which marks this epoch from its commencement and largely accounts for its obscurity, is reflected by the significant fact that, among the odd thousand of written pieces which the excavation of the Miran fort yielded, not the slightest scrap of Chinese writing could be discovered.

But, curiously enough, towards the close of my diggings there came to light, from an apartment adjoining the inner face of the north rampart and filled only with a shallow layer of rubbish, a non-Tibetan record of considerable interest. It was a crumpled-up packet of paper which when opened out resolved itself into a large sheet nearly one foot square, and two torn pieces of another covered