

when the former became impracticable through desiccation about the fourth century of our era.

But a still more essential reason for the Tibetans to garrison Miran probably lay in the fact that at this little oasis debouch the two most direct routes leading from Central Tibet and Lhasa across the high plateaus and ranges of the Kun-lun to the easternmost part of the Tarim Basin. Thus Miran must have been for them a *point d'appui* of strategic value. Once the Tibetan power had disappeared from the north of those great inhospitable mountain wastes, Miran must have rapidly sunk into insignificance; since for whatever traffic passed along the ancient route from Khotan and the other southern oases to Tun-huang and China during Uigur, early Muhammadan, and Mongol times, Charklik offered a far better base.

Thus it is easy to understand why there is no mention of Miran in Marco Polo, whose 'town of Lop' undoubtedly represents Charklik. No doubt, when the Venetian's caravan passed the old fort on its way into the 'Desert of Lop,' the crumbling walls which looked down upon it were quite as silent and deserted as now. Once, late in the evening when the icy gale was howling its wildest, a large caravan numbering sixty or seventy camels, all laden with brick tea from Tun-huang, made its way past our desolate camp by the fort wall. The enterprising Kashgar traders who owned them were eager to reach water and fuel, and would not stop for more than a hasty greeting even though we were the first people they had met for twenty-three days past. So the whole tinkling train soon vanished again in darkness like some phantom from an age long gone by.