

true 'Marsh of Salt,' as the Chinese of old called Lop-nor. For twenty-two miles, the whole length of the day's march, we passed at intervals through strings of isolated clay terraces jutting out from the foot of the dune-covered ridge on our right in the direction of the Kuruk-tagh.

These terraces rose to fifty feet and more in height, and on all their steeply cut faces showed horizontally deposited strata. That their isolated appearance on this level plain marking the eastern end of the ancient lake basin was somehow due to erosion, I recognized on the spot. But their peculiar significance in connection with lacustrine features of this desert region and the erosive forces at work on its surface was only brought home to me by subsequent observations farther east.

I fared similarly in regard to the curious resemblance which most of these boldly carved clay mounds bore to structures by human hand. Again and again from Achchik-kuduk onwards the men as well as myself were tempted to see in them ruins of walls, towers, and houses, until close approach dispelled all illusion about the strange form which wind erosion had produced. But not until long afterwards did I become aware of the fact that this optic deception had impressed travellers many centuries ago, and left its distinct trace in early Chinese records of this desolate region.

In a commentary, dating from the beginning of the sixth century A.D., on that famous Chinese classic, the *Book of the Waters*, M. Chavannes has found a very interesting description of the course of the Tarim River. We read there that the river finally empties itself into marshes which correspond to the lake P'u-ch'ang or Lop-nor of the *Book of the Waters*, and are situated to the north-east of Shan-shan and to the south-west of the 'Town of the Dragon.' Shan-shan, as we have already seen, corresponds roughly to the present tract of Charklik and Miran.

The 'Town of the Dragon' is described as the site where once stood the capital of a great barbarian kingdom. An overflow of the Lop-nor is said to have destroyed this town. "But its foundation walls are still preserved; they are very extensive; if one starts at