

## CHAPTER VI

### THE NIYA SITE

#### SECTION I.—RETURN TO THE RUINS BEYOND THE NIYA RIVER END

ON October 6, 1906, I left the Domoko tract and resumed my march eastwards. My next archaeological goal was the ancient site in the desert beyond the end of the Niya River where I had made important discoveries in 1901, and where I knew that ruins then reluctantly 'left over' were still awaiting exploration. Having passed along the road leading to the Keriya and Niya oases twice before, I endeavoured to cover it as rapidly as possible. But I took occasion slightly to vary the route by visiting Achma, a new and flourishing oasis to the north of the high road and some six miles from the extreme eastern edge of Domoko cultivation. It owed its existence to the sudden appearance of springs some fifteen years earlier which added so largely to the water of the Kara-kīr Yār that an area now said to support some six hundred to eight hundred households was rapidly brought under cultivation. It was an interesting instance of the successful fight with the desert which this portion of the Taklamakān edge appears to have witnessed at recurring intervals. But the account given of it by Professor Huntington and the absence of any traceable remains of earlier occupation make it unnecessary for me to enter here into details.<sup>1</sup>

Visit to  
Achma.

From my night's camp by the edge of the Shīvul marshes I visited next day a small 'Tati' with old pottery débris, known as *Jigda-kuduk*, of which information had reached me. I found it situated about four miles to the south of the Shīvul Langar, where the dune-fringed marsh approaches the bare gravel glacis sloping down from the foot of the hills about Tört-Imām and Polur. There was nothing to indicate clearly the date of occupation for this 'Tati'. But as the present edge of the Keriya oasis proved only about two miles away eastwards, it is certain that it must have once formed part of this great cultivated area and received irrigation from the westernmost of the Keriya River canals. I may note here in passing that when in March, 1908, I rode to Keriya by the high road, I found the edge of cultivation near Yaka Langar advanced fully a mile beyond the point where I had first struck it in 1901.

'Tati' of  
Jigda-  
kuduk.

The purchase of seven big camels which were to prove thenceforward the mainstay of my transport on my desert travels, along with other practical tasks, detained me at the town and district head-quarters of Keriya until October 13. Then two long marches carried me to Niya, the last

Halts at  
Keriya and  
Niya.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Huntington, *Pulse of Asia*, pp. 181 sqq. The information given to me about the rise of the new colony, *Achma* or 'opening', fully agreed with what Prof. Huntington has recorded. It deserves, however, to be noted that, in the 'old times' of pre-rebellion Chinese rule and long before the appearance of the new springs, parts of the Achma land are said to have been intermittently cultivated by people of the small neighbouring oasis of Laisu. The remarkably level expanse of the ground in the southern part of the oasis which

I saw, where reeds and tamarisk growth are being steadily displaced by fields, fully agrees with this local tradition. At that time, probably during the first half of the nineteenth century, the then scanty water of the Kara-kīr Yār is said to have been turned each year in turn into only one of the four canals now irrigating the Achma area. I have observed a corresponding procedure at several of the small oases west of Khotan, such as Moji, Zanguya, Piālma.