

Evidence
of earlier
agricultural
settlement.

Finds yielding chronological evidence could not be expected in such graves, and for the collection of anthropological measurements on the bodies here buried neither time nor the requisite labour was obtainable. Yet, even without more definite evidence as to date, there was antiquarian and geographical interest in the discovery of these remains; for it was safe to conclude from them that at a period not very remote, when the Charchan River followed a more southerly course (perhaps the one marked by the line of marshes which our route was skirting), a settlement at least partly agricultural had been able to maintain itself here for a time under physical conditions probably resembling those about Tatan. Now, with the shift of the river northward and the probable progress of desiccation in the meantime, the adjoining ground had undergone a dismal change. Extensive stretches of soil we had to cross close to the remains of the old settlement were found encrusted with hard cakes of salt, and salinity proved so prevalent everywhere as to preclude any thought of renewed occupation.

Wells of
Yaka-
toghrak and
Chingelik.

On November 28, the sixth day after leaving Charchan, our route finally diverged from the river near the deserted station of Lashkar-satma, and, striking south-eastwards across a belt of high and sterile dunes, brought us to the desert halting-place called Yaka-toghrak (see Map No. 50. D. 2). Its well of brackish water proved unfit for human consumption, and this probably is the case also with water obtained by digging at the patch of desert vegetation lying close to it on the east and known as Chingelik. The physical conditions are such that the nearest route from Lop-nör and Charkhlik to the Charchan River must always have followed this line. Hence, having regard to what we shall presently prove as to the old localities further east on this route, I consider it quite safe to identify the wells of Yaka-toghrak and Chingelik with the 'wells T'ê-lei' 特勒井 which the itinerary of the T'ang Annals mentions on the way to the Chü-mo (Charchan) river from Hsin-ch'êng 新城 ('the New Town'), 'which is also called the town of Nu-chih 弩支.'

Vāsh-shahri
Site identi-
fied with
'New Town'
of T'ang
itinerary.

That Hsin-ch'êng must correspond to the present small oasis of Vāsh-shahri, or rather to the ruined site crossed by the Charkhlik-Charchan route some six miles west of it, is made quite clear by the distances and bearings recorded in the T'ang itinerary, and has been correctly recognized by Dr. Herrmann.⁵ The itinerary tells us that '300 li to the south of the sea P'u-ch'ang (or Lop-nör) is the garrison of Shih-ch'êng 石城, "the Stone Town", which is the same as the Lou-lan kingdom of Han times and is also called Shan-shan. This is the place where K'ang Yen-tien was commissioner of the garrison, and in this quality entered into communication with the Western Countries. 200 li further to the west one arrives at Hsin-ch'êng, "the New Town", which is also called the town of Nu-chih; it was constructed by (K'ang) Yen-tien.^{5a} Further to the west, one passes the wells of T'ê-lei (the wells of the Tegin); one crosses the river Chü-mo, and after 500 li one arrives at the garrison of Po-hsien which is the ancient town of Chü-mo.' It has been seen above that the terminal point of the route to the west can be located with absolute certainty at Charchan. It is equally certain that the 'Stone Town' of T'ang times, then the chief place of Shan-shan or the ancient Lou-lan from which the route starts, is represented by the present oasis of Charkhlik.⁶ The western bearing and the distance of 200 li given thence to the 'New Town' take us exactly to the ruined site of Vāsh-shahri, which, as Maps Nos. 53, 57 show, lies close on 50 miles by measured road distance to the west-south-west of Charkhlik.

Ruined site
of Vāsh-
shahri.

I halted some four miles further west, close to the point where the Keriya and Charkhlik district borders are supposed to meet. Then on November 29 I surveyed at leisure the débris-strewn area which marks the position of the earlier settlement, with the help of guides and labourers

⁴ Cf. Chavannes, *Voyage de Song Yun*, p. 13, note; also above, p. 298, and Appendix A.

⁵ See Herrmann, *Seidenstrassen*, p. 100.

^{5a} For this settlement in A.D. 627-49 of the Sogdian chief

K'ang yen-tien, see now Pelliot, *J. Asiat.*, 1916, jan.-fév., pp. 118 sqq.]

⁶ Cf. below, p. 320; also *Desert Cathay*, i. p. 345.