

## CHAPTER IX

### HISTORICAL NOTICES OF LOP, SHAN-SHAN, AND LOU-LAN

#### SECTION I.—MARCO POLO'S LOP AND HSÜAN-TSANG'S NA-FU-PO

Charkhlik  
Marco  
Polo's Lop.

IN tracing early records of Charkhlik we cannot expect help from the name of the resuscitated oasis, for that is of avowedly modern origin.<sup>1</sup> But if we keep clearly in view the central fact that this oasis must have been, in old days as now, the chief place where a settled agricultural population could maintain itself near the southern edge of Lop-nōr, it is easy enough to recognize that Charkhlik must be meant by Marco Polo's town of Lop. His first reference to it and the 'province called Lop', which he reached after quitting Charchan, we have already discussed.<sup>2</sup> 'Lop is a large town at the edge of the Desert, which is called the Desert of Lop, and is situated between east and north-east. It belongs to the Great Kaan, and the people worship Mahommet. Now, such persons as propose to cross the Desert take a week's rest in this town to refresh themselves and their cattle; and then they make ready for the journey, taking with them a month's supply for man and beast. On quitting this city they enter the Desert.'<sup>3</sup>

Marco  
Polo's  
'province  
of Lop'.

Marco Polo's subsequent description of the route which took him through this desert to 'the city called *Sachiu*' or Sha-chou we shall have occasion to trace in detail further on. There is no doubt that he travelled along a line practically the same as that now followed by the caravan track through the desert from Charkhlik to Sha-chou or Tun-huang.<sup>4</sup> It is equally certain that by the 'province called Lop' he must mean the aggregate of inhabited places near the Lop-nōr marshes and on the lower Tārīm, just as the term *Lop* or *Lob* is used at the present day throughout Eastern Turkestan.<sup>5</sup> Now for the location of Marco's town of Lop, which shared the name of the 'province' and may be assumed to have been its chief place,<sup>6</sup> three sites come into consideration. These are, proceeding from west to east, Vāsh-shahri, Charkhlik, and Mīrān. They are the only places of this region where physical conditions would permit of cultivation having existed within historical times to the extent presupposed by a town, however small.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Hedin, *Reisen in Z.-A.*, pp. 108, 169. The traditional derivation of the name there given, from a *charkh* or 'spinning-wheel', which the first new settlers are said to have found among some ruins there, is plausible enough. The Persian term *charkh* is well known in the Turkī of the Tārīm Basin; see Shaw, *Turki Language*, p. 98. I have adopted the traditional spelling of the name, though in actual local pronunciation it sounds usually more like *Charkhlik* or *Chākhlik*. The latter form is due to *r* becoming almost inaudible, in accordance with a phonetic change common in Turkī speech from Khotan eastwards, and to complementary lengthening affecting the preceding vowel.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 308.

<sup>3</sup> See Yule, *Marco Polo*, i. p. 196.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. below, chap. xiv, sec. iii.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Forsyth, *Yarkand Mission Report*, p. 51; Yule,

*Marco Polo*, i. p. 195; Hedin, *Reisen in Z.-A.*, p. 109. It is true that present local usage in this tract restricts the name *Lop* to a small fishing settlement situated near where the terminal course of the Tārīm makes its great bend to the east (Map No. 57. B. 2). But the general use of the term *Loplik* or 'people of Lop' for the descendants of the riverine population of fishermen, a use shared by themselves, conclusively proves the age of the wider application of the term. The Mongol name *Lop-nōr*, 'lake of Lop', adopted by Chinese and European cartographers for the whole complex of the terminal marshes of the Tārīm, also presupposes this general application.

<sup>6</sup> Cf., e.g., Marco Polo's distinct mention of 'Cotan' and 'Cascar' as the greatest town of the 'provinces' of Khotan and Kāshgar; Yule, *Marco Polo*, i. pp. 181, 188.