

Desert route
unknown to
Mīrzā
Ḥaidar.

Goës follows
Hāmi route.

Desert route
forsaken by
traffic.

This record is the last which I can trace, in the Western sources at present accessible to me, of the use of the Lop desert route until quite recent times. The fact that Mīrzā Ḥaidar's *Ta'rikh-i Rashīdī* does not mention it may, in view of the author's thorough familiarity with the Khotan region, be safely assumed to show that such scanty trade as continued in his time to pass from the Tārīm Basin into China found its way there by the road through the northern oases. We have direct proof of this in the century following; for when in A. D. 1605 Benedict Goës set out from Yārkanḍ for 'Cathay' with one of the rare caravans which still went there, after intervals sometimes longer than a year, he had to go to Su-chou by the route leading, just as the present Chinese high road does, through Ak-su, Turfān, Hāmi.¹³ The fact is all the more significant as Goës himself had before visited Khotan and secured there the jade which, as he explicitly states, formed the general trade investment for those rare caravans seeking admission within the 'Chinese wall' of once more secluded China. It is obvious that the direct and much shorter route from Khotan to Su-chou through Lop must by that time have completely dropped out of use for trade purposes.

It is difficult to believe that all knowledge of the short cut through the desert to Tun-huang could ever have completely disappeared among the hardy hunters and herdsmen, the ancestors or predecessors of the Lopliks, who lived their nomadic life on the lowermost Tārīm. Nor did the existence of such a route escape the attention of the Chinese administrators who immediately after the conquest of Eastern Turkeṣtān under the great Emperor Ch'ien-lung, about the middle of the eighteenth century, set about to secure systematic knowledge of the topography and resources of the 'New Dominion' (Hsin-chiang).¹⁴ A line of route evidently corresponding, in part at least, to the Lop desert route appears, in fact, in the Chinese cartographical presentation of the Lop-nōr region which has been reproduced by Dr. Wegener and Herr Himly from the 'Wu-chang-fu map', and which has been used, extensively if not always critically, in the multifarious controversy about the 'Lop-nōr problem'.¹⁵ But the only references to it that I can trace in the Chinese geographical descriptions of the 'New Dominion' accessible to me are extremely brief, and confirm the impression derived from other indications that Chinese knowledge of the whole Lop region in the period between Ch'ien-lung's conquest and the Muhammadan rebellion in 1863 was very limited and hazy.¹⁶

¹³ Cf. Yule, *Cathay*², iv. pp. 218 sqq.

¹⁴ Regarding the surveys effected by the Jesuit Fathers under imperial orders, cf. Richthofen, *China*, i. p. 690. Much geographical information then collected in the newly conquered territories is to be found in the *Hsi yü wen kian lu*, published A. D. 1778, from which extracts first became accessible in Timkowski's *Voyage à Peking*. A passage quoted by Ritter, *Asien*, v. p. 329, from the translation of this text refers to the hydrography of the region east of Lop and, vague as it is, implies that the Chinese then knew of the existence of routes through it. It also shows a fair knowledge of the economic conditions prevailing among the contemporary Lopliks.

¹⁵ See Wegener and Himly, *Nord-Tibet und Lob-nor Gebiet*, *Zeitschr. der Gesells. für Erdkunde*, Berlin, 1893, xxviii; also reproduced in Hedin, *Central Asia*, ii. p. 282. It would serve no useful purpose here to investigate how far the local names which this map shows along the route, and which may have been compiled from very varying sources, can be brought into relation with the actual topography of the route. For some remarks of Himly on these names cf. Hedin, *Reisen in Z.-A.*, p. 145, note 2.

¹⁶ The *Hsi yü shui tao chi*, a geographical work published

in 1823, states in connexion with a very summary account of the Lop tract, then paying tribute to the commander of Turfān: 'Eastwards one reaches Tun-huang and Su-chou. The new description of the dominion says: "From the Khara-nōr in the territory of Sha-chou one may go straight westwards and reach the Lop-nōr by a small track; the journey need not last a month"; then follow quotations from the Han Annals, etc.; cf. Himly's extract in Hedin, *Reisen in Z.-A.*, p. 154. The same text (quoted by Himly, *ibid.*, p. 145, note 2) discussing the Khara-nōr, through which the Su-lo Ho passes north-west of Tun-huang, mentions that the lake is connected westwards with Lop-nōr by two routes, one southern, one northern.

M. Cordier in his note on Yule, *Marco Polo*, i. p. 206, quotes the following from Palladius, *Journal. N. China Branch*, *R.A.S.*, N.S., x. (1875), p. 5: 'In 1820, or about that time, an attempt was made to re-establish the ancient direct way between Sha-chow and Khotan. With this object in view, an exploring party of ten men was sent from Khotan towards Sha-chow; this party wandered in the desert over a month, and found neither dwellings nor roads, but pastures and water everywhere.' No doubt, in the original Chinese