

shepherds from Yangi-hissār and other small oases by the high road west of Korla regularly graze their flocks along the Inchike and Charchak river-beds.

Desert  
north of  
Charchak-  
daryā.

From our next camp at Mukhtār-chöl (Map No. 45. c. 3) we subsequently pushed a net of systematic reconnaissances into the desert north of the present jungle belt of the Charchak-daryā in order to test the equally positive assertions about an extensive old town which two other Korla hunters, who had joined later, declared that they had seen in that direction some seven years earlier. Here two old river-beds were met with, lined by the usual rows of Toghraks and tamarisk-cones mostly dead; beyond extended a bare clay steppe where the drift-sand lay only in small dunes and where the view was quite open and ranged far towards the foot of the mountains. In the end I was able to establish with certainty that those elaborate reports, too, had no more substantial foundation than the existence of a rude log-built hut almost buried between tamarisk-cones, evidently an old 'Öghil' of herdsmen, and the occurrence of a few fragments of coarse pottery and slag found on ground slightly eroded some 10 miles north of Mukhtār-chöl. There was no indication of great age about any of these remains, while, on the other hand, I found ocular evidence that this ground was being still regularly visited by men in search of fuel from Charchi, a small oasis on the high road. Close examination of the physical conditions convinced me that no permanent settlement on any scale could have existed on this ground within historical times.

What still continued to puzzle me was how to account for the psychology and conduct displayed by my would-be guides. Their assurance about what they believed that they had seen appeared to be quite genuine, and they all stuck stoutly to their story, undisturbed by the fact that the location of their respective 'old towns' avowedly differed. There was no obvious reason for conscious imposition, since no reward for their guidance had been offered or asked for in advance. At last the clue to the mystery revealed itself in a folk-lore belief ascertained after careful sounding. All the Korla folk were under the spell of the old tradition, which elsewhere too haunts the outskirts of the great desert, about 'old towns' buried by the sands and full of hidden treasure. With this tradition is firmly coupled a belief that the demons guarding such ruins prevent those who chance upon them from ever seeing them a second time. Mūsā Hājī and his fellow-hunters had manifestly tried their luck in searching for the ruins of their local *kötek-shahri* at different times and in different areas of the desert. In offering their guidance they had acted quite *bona fide*, prompted by the hope that my supposed 'Wilāyatī' magic would overcome the evil genii hiding the walled town of which their own imaginative eyes had before caught merely a glimpse—always during, or immediately before, a dust-storm! That I, too, failed to secure them a chance of discovering all those hidden treasures was a source of genuine disappointment for them. The tradition accounting for all this is obviously but a survival of old popular legends like that which Hsüan-tsang had heard at P'i-mo, west of Khotan, and the localized form of which he records in his story about the sand-buried town of Ho-lao-lo-chia.<sup>11</sup>

## SECTION II.—FROM THE INCHIKE RIVER TO KUCHĀ

Ruins of  
Gumbaz.

Meanwhile the efforts of a sober-minded Korla Yüz-bāshi had secured a shepherd guide who knew the exact position of the previously reported 'Gumbaz' near the Inchike river. For this I set out on January 9, and, after crossing again the dune belt south of the Charchak bed, reached the ruins on the following day. They proved to be situated amidst dunes with plentiful remains of *kötek*, or dead forest, at a point about 2 miles north of the Inchike river (Map No. 45. A. 4). It soon became clear

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Julien, *Mémoires*, ii. p. 245; Watters, *Yuan Chwang*, ii. p. 298; *Ancient Khotan*, i. pp. 455, 460.

For early notices of these traditions current in oases along

the Taklamakān about supposed ruins of a *kötek-shahri* or *shahr-i-katak*, cf. Elias-Ross, *Tārīkh-i-Rashīdī*, p. 295, also note, p. 11 sq.; *Forsyth Mission Report*, pp. 27 sq.