

Tenacity of local worship in Khotan.

It was of no small interest to me to be met thus on the very confines of Khotan by a striking instance of that tenacity of local worship which my subsequent researches showed for almost all sacred sites of Buddhist Khotan. Remembering how helpful it had been to me in Kashmir, and elsewhere in the north-west of India, to find the position of ancient Buddhist or Hindu shrines I was in search of almost invariably marked by Muhammadan Ziārats, I felt justified in accepting this observation on my very entry into Khotan territory as an auspicious omen.

Continuity of physical conditions.

But it was also a comforting assurance to me thus to receive further convincing evidence how limited in reality are the changes which the physical conditions of the ground traversed by the western route to Khotan, and the direction of this route itself, are likely to have undergone during historical times. All along the route from Karghalik onwards we have found that the ancient remains still traceable lie close to the line of the actual road. Nowhere did I meet with any antiquarian indication to support the oft repeated assertion that the area of sandy desert has materially advanced to the south during recent periods. Here, near the very end of the route, we have direct evidence that the curious zone of drift-sand traversed immediately before my entry into the Khotan oasis bore the same natural aspect as in Hsüan-tsang's time and probably for long centuries earlier. Proofs of such continuity cannot be otherwise than encouraging to the student of the historical geography and ancient culture of this region; for they assure him that through whatever changes the population, its political conditions and civilization may have passed, the natural *milieu* and its determining physical factors cannot have altered so much during historical periods as to vitiate seriously any conclusions that may be drawn from ascertained antiquarian facts.