

forms of *Chārchān* and *Jurjān*, as that of a region in the extreme south or south-east of the Tārīm Basin.⁴¹ But from the way in which he associates it with the distant wastes of Lob-Katak and Sārigh-Uighur and talks of the territories east of Khotan as 'deserts which consist of nothing but heaps of shifting sands, impenetrable jungles, waste lands, and salt deserts',⁴² it appears to me very unlikely that an oasis of any importance could have existed there in his own times. Probably cultivation at Charchan rapidly declined when the cessation of free intercourse with China after the advent of the Ming dynasty in the fourteenth century deprived it of its chief *raison d'être* as an important halting-place on the long desert route connecting westernmost Kan-su with Khotan. We know that Benedict Goëz, after his long stay at Yārkaṅd in 1604, was obliged to take for his journey to Cathay the devious route via Ak-su, Turfān, Hāmi, followed by the infrequent caravans of that time, even though he had previously visited Khotan.⁴³ It is obvious that the direct and much shorter route from Khotan past Lop-nōr to Su-chou was completely abandoned by such trade as was carried on at the time between Eastern Turkeṣtān and China. Here it may be noted also in passing that the well-informed Persian trader Hājī Muḥammad, whose remarkably accurate account of a trade journey to Su-chou and Kan-chou Ramusio heard at Venice about A. D. 1550, knew only the northern route from Cathay past Hāmi, Turfān, Kāshgar, etc.⁴⁴

Charchan
resettled as
a penal
station.

From the inquiries made at Charchan, it seems to me certain that cultivation had completely disappeared there by the end of the eighteenth century, and probably for a long period earlier. It was only after the first third of the last century that the Chinese began to settle Charchan once more as a small penal station.⁴⁵ The growth of the new settlement seems to have been slow at first, and the shifty character of the original convict colonists retarded ordered development. The disturbed conditions during the Muhammadan rebellion, when the great oases westwards suffered depopulation, deprived Charchan for long years of any chance of attracting fresh settlers. But with the establishment of a much improved Chinese administration and the general rise of economic conditions in the country, the tide of renewed expansion has been steady. The convenience offered by Charchan as a base for supplies has helped to attract increased labour to the gold mines worked on the slopes of Arka-tāgh in the south-east; the oasis in turn has benefited by the market thus assured for its surplus products. Since the ancient desert route to Tun-huang and Kan-su came again into regular use for trade purposes some eight years before my visit, the commercial importance of Charchan had much increased, as all my local informants acknowledged. That there were among them four enterprising Pathān traders from Bājaur, who had found Charchan a convenient half-way station and base for their ventures extending from Khotan to Turfān and Tun-huang, was a striking illustration of the vitality of this ancient oasis, vigorously asserting itself after the latest ebb in its chequered fortunes.

SECTION II.—ANCIENT REMAINS AROUND CHARCHAN

The remains of earlier settlements at Charchan consist chiefly of extensive areas covered with hard débris to the south and south-west of that part of the modern oasis which lies on the left bank of the river. But traces of ancient occupation were met with when I first approached the oasis from the west. On crossing the bare gravel 'Sai' which extends to it, and when still close on three miles from the western edge of the present cultivated area, my attention was attracted by the raised

Ancient
canal west
of Charchan.

⁴¹ Cf. Elias and Ross, *Tārīkh-i-Rashīdī*, pp. 7, 9 note, 52, 406; in the last passage the 'river of Charchan' is also mentioned.

⁴² Cf. Elias and Ross, *ibid.*, pp. 52, 64, 295.

⁴³ Cf. Yule-Cordier, *Cathay*², iv. pp. 222 sqq.

⁴⁴ Cf. Yule-Cordier, *Cathay*², i. p. 293.

⁴⁵ Cf. also Grenard, *Mission D. de Rhins*, i. pp. 176 sq., also p. 184, where an interesting account given by an eye-witness is recorded of the early days of the present Charchan; Forsyth, *Yarkand Mission Report*, p. 32.