

the spot where a settlement of semi-nomadic fishermen and herdsmen of the true Loplik type is found nearest to Charkhlik, Marco Polo's 'City of Lop'.

Our march of January 11 from Lop to the south-east took me right across the delta of the Charchan River. Its condition at the time, as it was practically all dry, except for the main branch passing to the south of Lop station, and yet grazed by large flocks of sheep, seemed an apt illustration of the state which the area south of the Lou-lan Site must often have presented even while the ancient route near it was still used. By a long march on the day following we reached the head of the delta, and further up, by the right bank of the wide ice-covered main bed, the vicinity of the site near the shepherd station of Jigdalik-öghil. Next morning, starting from our camp close to the dry lagoon known as *Shāh-tokhtaning-köli*, I was taken by a guide, whom I had managed to secure from Charkhlik, to the south-south-west. For about a mile our track lay across a belt of luxuriant reed-beds growing round dried-up lagoons. Then we struck a continuous line of sand-hills, up to thirty feet high, and running, as usual, parallel to the river. The Toghraks and tamarisks, mostly dead, which covered them showed that the line, about half a mile broad, marked an earlier river-bed. Beyond, there extended an open wind-eroded steppe of alluvial loess, covered with many low 'witnesses' from four to six feet in height. It stretched parallel to the river, with a width of a mile to a mile and a half.

March up  
Charchan  
River.

Over this area fragments of coarse hand-made pottery could be picked up in plenty, but nowhere did they lie in such closeness as clearly to show the former position of a permanent settlement. In their gritty coarse substance, due to ill-levigated clay, the mass of the fragments resembled the pottery I had grown accustomed to associate with remains of the Stone Age. Yet a few pieces, like the glazed potsherd, Shāh-t. 004, and the ornamented spindle-whorl, Shāh-t. 006, described in the list below, obviously belong to a later period. My search for any trace of structural remains, or even a single coin or piece of worked metal, remained fruitless. The only 'finds' besides potsherds were a few fragments of stones which evidently had served for grinding. In the end I felt inclined to conclude, from the wide extent over which the débris was scattered and the thinness of its distribution, that the site had seen occupation, sparse but either long-continued or renewed at different times, down to the historical period. It seemed probable that similar remains might survive at other points along the Charchan River where its course had been less exposed to great changes, but that they were hidden from view by drift-sand or vegetation.

Pottery  
remains  
on 'Tati'.

Next day I marched back to Charkhlik, where a variety of tasks, as described in my personal narrative, and the need of giving my worn-out followers a chance of recovering from fatigues and exposure, urgently called me. These tasks, which included the raising of fresh supplies and transport for the long journey ahead as well as of labour for the excavations at Mirān, detained me at the Lop headquarters from the 17th to the 21st of January. It was a time of heavy strain for myself in spite of the physical rest and all the ready assistance I received from Liao Ta-lao-yeh, the Amban of the Charkhlik district. A well-bred, scholarly man, he showed genuine interest in my Lou-lan finds, and helped on the work which lay before me with whatever means the scanty resources of his few hundred homesteads could furnish. It was with deep regret that I learned a year later of his death in this dreary place of official exile. On the morning of January 22 I started back to Mirān with diggers and fresh supplies. Late on the following evening I had the great satisfaction of finding myself again by the bank of the Mirān stream, now hard frozen, and reunited to my devoted Chinese helpmate, Chiang Ssü-yeh. Besides his ever-active self he had brought up from Abdal a useful reinforcement of Lop men to help in the digging. So everything was in readiness to resume our exploration of the Mirān ruins in earnest.

Halt at  
Charkhlik.

Return to  
Mirān.