CHAPTER I

GEOGRAPHICAL AND TOPOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT OF CENTRAL ASIA.

Central Asia is an extensive region extending from Persia and Bactria to the western border of China, bounded on the north by Tien-shan and on the south by Kashmir, Tibet and Kun-lun range. Though the area is quite large, it is more or less a desert with oases here and there, where various tribes settled down from time to time. Hence to speak of Buddhism in Central Asia, it is necessary to indicate the small and scattered habitable regions whereby Buddhism was propagated and, perhaps, established for a few centuries. Hence, it is necessary that a geographical and topographical account should be first given to point out the habitable areas, within which Buddhism was confined in a vast country like Central Asia. An attempt has been made in this Chapter to give an idea of the places, which became actually the centres of Buddhism. It is rather striking how the Indian monks along with Bactrian and the foreign monks passed through the desert and reached their destination for the propagation of the religion century after century.

Central Asia included the regions now known as Russian Turkestan and Chinese Turkestan along with the adjoining area. The term "Central Asia" denotes the Tarim basin without rigidly excluding the
neighbouring countries such as the Oxus region and Badakshan. The central belt of the dead heart of Asia consisted of a series of elevated and drainage-less basins stretched out in east and west. The country lies between 36° and 43° northern latitude and 73° and 92° longitude east of Greenwich. Their northern limit was well defined by the big rampart of the Tien-shan, i.e., "the celestial mountain", on the south they are separated from the high plateau of Tibet by the Kum-lun range. On the west there was the first great meridional mountain chain, the Imaos. The eastern border of the region might be placed where the Nan-shan forms the watershed towards the drainage area of the Pacific ocean. On the east it adjoins the Chinese Empire.

The Tarim basin is a pear-shaped area about 900 miles from east to west. Its greatest width from Kucha (κο-χακ) in the north to the foot of the Kun-lun glacis south of Niya (Νιγακ) is not less than about 300 miles. By far the largest area is occupied by the huge central desert of barren sand-dunes popularly known as the Taklamakan desert. On the west, north and east the central waste i.e., Taklamakan desert is bounded by the belt of vegetation along the Tizna, Yarkand and Tarim river. On the south a line of oases, mostly small stretches, along the foot of

the glacis of the Kun-lun, continued eastwards by the patches of sandy jungles watered by small streams. All the cultivated areas along the southern margin of the desert are the "terminal oases" and they occupy the furthermost ground to which water from the rivers of Kun-lun can be brought for irrigation.

The only inhabitable parts of the basin appear as mere specks in the great expanse of the whole basin. The areas left between the Taklamakan and the encircling mountains ranges to the north, south and west have geographically so much in common that they might be treated as one region. There are two clearly marked belts of oases:

i) the western and northern marginal arc and

ii) the southern marginal arc.

The cultivable area within the western and northern belts is considerably larger than the other areas. The western and northern arc contains the important oases of Kashgar (Ka-sha 凯少), Yarkand (Che-ku-ka), Kucha (ku-chih), Karashahr. The southern marginal arc stretching along the foot of the Kun-lun has only the oasis of note, viz., that of Khotan (Ku-sa-ta-

Owing to uniform aridity of the climate and comparatively small variation in altitude, all the important oases lie between 3,300 and 4,500 feet above the sea level; all the oases are strikingly similar in general features.

There were only two routes issuing out of Tunhuang and passing across the Tarim basin ended in the western lands. There was a third route from Srinagar to Gilgit and thence to Kashgar. The civilisation of Central Asia up to about the 10th century was derived mainly from India and Iran. It is for this reason the region has been described by some scholars as "Indo-European oasis" while Stein preferred the name Ser-India. The justification for this name is its civilisation was shared predominantly by both China and India. The routes through which this country received its culture and civilisation are well known as Silk-route and Gilgit Transport route.

TWO SILK-ROUTES.

From very early times important trade routes passed through the Tarim basin from the frontiers of China to the West. These became known as the Silk-routes during the first few centuries of the Christian era, as traders carrying on trade by this route made a profitable business in Chinese silk with the Roman countries in the west. There are two routes passing through the Tarim basin from the frontiers of China up to Balkh. From about the first century A.D. they were used not only for trade between China and the west but also for the dissemination of Buddhist culture from the west to the Tarim basin and China, for which reason, in course of time they came to be known as

the "Buddhist-routes" till about the 11th century.

The two principal routes parted from Tun-huang in the province of Kansu: one passed by the gate of Yu-men-kuan towards the north-west and the other by that of Yang-kuan directly toward the Tun-huang played a great part through these two routes in the history of China's cultural and commercial relation with the West. In the 3rd century A.D. it became a great centre of Buddhist missionaries. The vast number of manuscripts deposited in it and discovered mostly by the French archaeological mission of Pelliot. The manuscripts were written in diverse languages, such as Kuchean Khotanese, Syric, Tibetan and Sanskrit. This discovery establish the fact that Tun-huang was really an important meeting place of China and its western countries.

The northern route passed by Turfan. It followed the Tarim river right up to Kashgar and continued across the Pamir up to the country of Ferganah, Sogdiana and other countries in the valley of Oxus.

The southern route starting from Tun-huang passed by the gate of Yang-kuan and proceeding westward reached the country of Shan-shan (Lou-lan). From Lou-lan it went along the course of the river Tarim up to Yarkand and crossing the Pamir reached the country of the Yue-che (Balkh) and Parthia (Ngan-si).

Huien-tsang in 629 followed the northern route

twenty years later on his way back to China he took the southern route.

**GILGIT TRANSPORT ROUTE.**

The Gilgit transport route was not so easily traversible and hence it was not much used either by the traders or by the Buddhist monks. For certain advantages Stein selected this route from Srinagar through Gilgit and Hunza and over the Taghdumbash Pamir leading to Kashgar.

Hsiuen-tsang followed this route on his way back from India to China. He crossed the Hindukush mountains by the Khawak Pass, and advanced through Khost to Kunduz. He then, instead of taking the northern i.e. the Samarkand route by which he had come travelling in an easternly direction. He negotiated the difficult paths, over and down the mountains and then passed by the Wakhan, and reached Lake Victoria. He then made his way to the Wakhjir Pass along the water shed of the Oxus and Yarkand rivers and proceeded through the Tashdumbash Pamirs to Tashgurkhan. Traversing the foot-tacks on the west of the huge mountain Mustagh-Ata and passing over region Osh (Wu-sha) he reached the plain of Kashgar. Then he followed the well-known route from Kashgar through Yarkand to Khotan.¹

Kashgar (Ka-sha 亖"") lies in the west of the Tarim basin. It is a commercial city of Chinese Turkestan with a population of about 80,000. The river of Kashgar flowing 500 metres in Eastern Turkestan to Yarkand.²

---

¹. Watters, on Yuan Chuang Vol.II p.343; Chavannes, Song-yun p.23n; Stein Sand-burnfed ruins of Khotan pp. 60, 72.
Kashgar had different names at different periods. The form Kashgar is found in Muhammadan sources from the earliest period when the Arab conquest reached this part of Central Asia. The name Su-leh is found in Chinese Buddhist texts. Hiuen-Tsang described this country as about 5,000 li in circuit with many sand-heaps and little fertile soil; it yielded good crops and had a luxuriance of fruits and flowers. It produced fine woollen stuffs and fine woven rugs.¹

Kucha (Ku-chih 阿富 ): The town of Kucha lies between Kashgar and Turfan, somewhat to the west of Karashahr. Hiuen-Tsang described it as abounding in millet, wheat, rice, grapes, pears, plums, peaches, and apricots. It had also gold, copper, iron-ore, and tin. Its Rivers:

Kucha situated at the point where the two rivers Muz-art darya² and the Kuch-darya debouch close together from the Tien-Shan foot-hills. The Muz-art-darya by far the larger of the two, is fed mainly from the glaciers which descend from the Khan-tengri mountains the highest in the whole Tien-shan range.³

The importance of Kucha is much increased by the advantages it draws from its position in the geography of the Tarim basin the mountain rampart

2. Darya means river.
of the Tien-shan rising to the north, and the
great desert of drifting sands of the Taklamakan
in the South. Agricultural settlements of size are
to be found among the foot-hills of copper lead and iron at-test valuable mineral
resources. More important still is the fact that
from the Tien-shan a series of wide lateral valleys
viz., those of Yulduz and of the Tekes and Kunges
rivers which provide not only rich grazing grounds
but also in their lower portions large areas suitable
for cultivation.

Yarkand (Che-ku-ke): Hiuen-
tsang describes this country and its capital as being
about 1,000 li and 10 li in circumference respectively.
It had natural barriers and on its south-west at a
distance of about 500 li across the Sita river was
situated Kashgar wherefrom Hiuen-tsang over a large
sandy mountain range to reach this country.

Karashahr (Yen-ki): Along with the northern
belt of oases was the subsidiary the basin of
Karashahr which lies at the extreme north-eastern
corner of the Tarim basin. It is divided from the
plains of the Tarim by the westernmost hill-range of
Kuruk-tagh, which encircles it on the south and the
considerable portion of its area is occupied by the
large fresh water lake of the Baghrash-kol. In this
lake is collected the water brought down by the
Karashahr river from the high plateaus of the central
Tien-shan. An abundant water supply and an apparently

less arid climate assure to Karashahr opportunities for extensive cultivation.

Khotan (ku-sa-ta-na) ¼ ½ ¾ ¾ ½ ¾ ¾

In the southern marginal belt of the basin, stretching along the foot of the Kun-lun from Karghalik to the Lop tract, conditions differ in various ways. Here exists only one oasis of real importance viz., Khotan, and the rest in most cases are separated from one another by considerable expense of the desert. The oasis of Khotan has from early times been the largest and the most important cultivated territory in the south of the Tarim basin. The oasis owes its natural wealth and its importance entirely to its geographical position. The fertile loess which it occupies extends for an unbroken length of 40 miles along the foot of the outer hills of the Kun-lun range and is at all times assured of ample irrigation from the Yurung-kash and Karakash rivers.

In the south the oasis is bordered by a mountainous region, which in some respects, is more barren and forbidding than the desert itself.

Cotton, Wheat, Rice, millet, oats, and Indian corn are the main agricultural products, cotton production being the largest in the area. India corn being grown almost everywhere as a second crop. Fruit

Fruit trees abound all over the oasis. The mining of oriental jade might well be mentioned among the industrial occupation of the Khotanese. Silk is another important product of this country. Paper making was a speciality of the people of Khotan. It is manufactured exclusively from the bark of a mulberry tree.

Unlike other oases of the Tarim basin where urban life is concentrated in a single town, Khotan possesses three centres which may be designated as towns, viz. Khotan or Ilchi, Yurungkash and Karakshash. In size and commercial importance these three towns do not differ greatly but as the seat of local administration Ilchi occupies the first place and consequently is given the general designation of Khotan.

Fa-hsien tells us that it was "a pleasant and prosperous kingdom with a flourishing population living in widely scattered groups of homesteads, which in Khotan as in other cases constitute the villages".

Hiuen-Tsang describes the country as about 4,000 li in circuit, the greater part of which is full of sand gravel, the cultivable land is very limited. The latter is suitable for the cultivation of cereals and produces abundance of fruits.

The southern oases:

Excepting Khotan, the oases of the southern belt are "terminal oases" i.e., they occupy the furthest ground where water reaches from the Kun-lun for cultivation. Their location is primarily determined by the presence of fertile loess soil, which
owes its existence to the moisture brought thereby the summer floods. "Terminal oases" are liable to changes in location and extent in different periods.

The last of the regions comprised within the Tarim basin is the terminal depression of Lop, the smallest in extent and particularly well defined. It may be appropriately described as containing the terminal course of the Tarim with its fringe of laggons, the marshes in which its waters are finely lost. In accordance with the traditional application of the name Lop, itself of very ancient origin, east of the Tarim's final course, is an outlier of the Taklamakan desert.

Apart from the people in these tiny oases and the survivors of the scanty nomadic population of Lopliks (Lop people) fishing and hunting along the terminal Tarim, the whole region is now wholly uninhabited.

Lou-lan (Na-fo-p'o 納弗蒲) lies to the east of Khotan. Its northern limit was the barren hills of Kuruk-tagh; Taklamakan in the west; the terminal basin of Su-ho-lo in the east; the ranges of Altin-tagh an easter extension of K'un-lun in the south. Lou-lan stood beside the lake Lop-nur.

In the record of his travels Fa-hien gives the following distances about Lou-lan: From Shan-shan or Lou-lan to Tun-huang about 17 marches or 1,500 li i.e., about 150 miles. He describes the kingdom of Shan-shan as country rugged and hilly, with a thin and barren soil. The king professed Buddhism

---

2. 10 li to a mile has been taken according cunninghum's Ancient Geography ed. by S.R.Majumdar P. IXXX.
and there were in the kingdom more than 4,000 monks, who were all students of Hinayāna.

Hiuen-tsang in his description "to the east of Niya", says that it was all desert. About 400 li to the east it was the old Tu-ho-lo country. About 600 li further to the East, the pilgrim visited Che-mo-ta-na, old country with Me-mo land with lofty city walls without an inhabitant. About 1,000 li to the north-east was the old country of Na-fo-po, which also known as Lou-lan.

In the Han Annals, the name of the country is given as Shan-shan. The Chinese name Na-fo-po given by Hiuen-tsang seems to be the same as Nob of the Tibetan documents. Shan-shan is a pure Chinese name to replace the old local name of Lou-lan. Lou-lan was evidently a Chinese transcription of the original name of Kroraina found in the Kharosthi documents.

The Chinese Annals give a fairly detailed account of ancient Kroraina. At the time of the Former Hans, the country was known as Lou-lan, but the name was changed by the Chinese into Shan-shan. The neighbouring territories such as Tsu-mo (cherchen) Ching-chuch (Niya) were all the dependencies of the state of Shan-shan.

In the Kharosthi documents occur the names of the least five kings of a dynasty which reigned in

1. Che-mo-ta-na the original name was Calmadana.
Kroraina in the 3rd Century A.D. These are: Pepiya, Tajaka, Amgoka, Mahiri and Vasmana. They used the royal titles of the Kushanas, such as Maharya, Raytireya, Devaputra etc.

Niya (Ni-jang) lay on the extreme edge of the Kingdom of Khotan, which being in the height of its power, extended its dominion up to Ni-jang (present Niya) in the east. In his description of the country, east of Pima, Hiuen-tsang records that he crossed a sandy desert and after about 200 li he came to the town of Ni-jang. This city he writes, is about 3 or 4 li in circuit and the soil of the country warm and soft. There are no roads or paths leading to the city.

Turfan (Ko-cho) though lies to the north of Lop depression quite detached from the Tarim basin, it bears many of its physical features making it appear as its small reproduction. It is enclosed in the north by a snowy portion of the T'ien-shan and in the south and east by barren hills and plateaus of the Kuruk-tagh.

I. Kharosthi documents edited Rapson and Boyer Vol. 3.