

These plateaus separate the lowlands of Siberia and the Aralo-Caspian depression from the lowlands of Mesopotamia, India, and China to the south, and together with the Aralo-Caspian depression form most of the inland drainage area of the continent. The lower terrace of the eastern plateau, which is occupied by Eastern Turkestan in the west and by the Desert of Gobi in the east, is known as the Central Asian depression; but as its altitude varies from 3000 to 4000 feet in the highest part to 2200 feet in the lowest—the depression of Lob Nor—the term must be taken as purely relative to the height of the surrounding plateau.

It has long been surmised by historians that certain parts of Asia have been growing more arid, and the phrase, “the desiccation of Asia,” has been much used in this connection. But while some employ it to denote the process of change¹ from the coldness or moisture of the Glacial period to the comparative aridity of the geological epoch of to-day, and maintain that this process is accelerated by that gradual elevation of parts of the continent which led to the separation of the Tertiary inland seas, and which is still in progress at the present time,² others take it as meaning a gradual change in climate supposed to have taken place during the period covered by history. Brückner,³ from a study of meteorological records and of the fluctuations in the level of the Caspian and other isolated lakes, comes to the conclusion that the variations of climate form a cycle of thirty-five years. Woeikoff,⁴ basing his reasoning on recent Russian investigations on Central Asian lakes, such as those of Berg on the Sea of Aral, and on the examination of the meteorological records for the town of Barnaul in Western Siberia, for which a longer series is available than for any other Asiatic station, adopts the theory that if variations are recurrent the period must extend over at least sixty years; but as records of meteorological observations date back little more than one hundred years the precise length cannot be determined for some considerable time. Central Asia he considers to have just passed through a minimum phase. Ellsworth Huntington⁵ holds that, between the recurrent glacial epochs at one end of the scale and the climatic variation at the other there is an intermediate pulsation, the beats of which are to be reckoned by thousands of years and will be coincident with regular fluctuations of rainfall and temperature throughout the world.

¹ Kropotkin, “The Desiccation of Eur-Asia,” *Geogr. Journ.*, vol. xxiii, p. 724, 1904.

² Kropotkin, “The Orography of Asia,” *Geogr. Journ.*, vol. xxiii, p. 346, 1904.

³ *Klimaschwankungen seit 1700*, Wien, 1890.

⁴ “Der Aral See und sein Gebiet nach den neuesten Forschungen,” *Petermann Mitt.*, Bd. lxxv, p. 82, 1909.

⁵ *The Pulse of Asia*, London, 1907.