

at night, so that a good deal of the features of the country escaped his observation, and the description of his itinerary is incomplete. Between Hami and An-si there exist two nearly parallel roads, both practicable for wheeled vehicles, a proof that the mountains along this route are of no great importance.

The first few days the journey led across sand and saline depressions. At forty versts from Hami all vegetation came to an end, and in front of the traveller lay the perfectly barren Desert of Hami, which occupies the space between Tien-schan and Nan-schan. »On the west this desert is connected with the Desert of Lop and on the east with the central parts of the great Gobi.»

»Along the line of travel we selected, that is straight across it transversely, this desert rises in the middle into a vast swelling (120 versts in transverse section), with an average of about 5000 feet above the level of the sea, and culminating in 5500 feet (1680 m.) near the well of Ma-lan-tschuan. On its northern and southern borders it is fenced in by the two divisions of the Bej-sän mountains, which however are of no great altitude. Between the northern edge of this swelling and the Tien-schan stretches a somewhat undulating barren plain, with an upward slope north and south. Southwards it slopes down from the foot of the Tien-schan, and having got down to its lowest absolute level (2500—2600 feet) in the oasis of Hami and the sparsely grown vicinity, it begins to rise again towards the mountains of Bej-sän, near which, beside the spring of Ku-fi, it attains again an elevation of 3700 feet. Similarly there extends from the southern edge of the middle swelling of the Desert of Hami, from the southern foot of the Bej-sän mountains southwards, a perfect plain, with a considerable drop (about 1000 feet) towards the bed of the Bulundsir, and from there right away to the foot of the Nan-schan it maintains the same absolute altitude of 3700 feet. It is on this last-mentioned plain that the city of Sa-tschou is situated.»

»Such are, broadly speaking, the main features of the topographical relief of the Desert of Hami, that is along its minor axis, a distance, reckoning from the southern foot of the Tien-schan to the northern foot of the Nan-schan, of little more than 300 versts. Our route from Hami to Sa-tschou measured 346 versts, and was traversed in 14 days, inclusive of two days of rest.»

»On the third and fourth days out from Hami the desert presented itself in all its wild and terrible reality. In that part it consists of a somewhat undulating plain, with occasional elevations of loess in the shape of walls, table-topped mounds, and towers* scattered over it; the surface is covered with gravel and pebbles. Of vegetation there is not a trace.»

At the salt spring of Ku-fi the road divides, one branch going to Sa-tschou, the other to An-si.

»Choosing the Sa-tschou road, we advanced about 20 versts along it, and then came quite unexpectedly upon the Bej-sän mountains. According to Chinese accounts, these mountains extend from Kara-schahr in the west, forming perhaps the eastward continuation of the Kuruk-tagh, and unite in the east with the southeastern range of the Tien-schan.»

* Compare the *jardangs* of the Desert of Lop.