



Fig. 8. Abdurahim from Shindi, my old guide from 1900

party was eight men strong. They had enough petrol to take them to Tun-huang and back, and eleven gallons of lubricating oil.

When the motor convoy set off eastward I had given YEW and KUNG, as its responsible leaders, the following instructions. On reaching a point due south of Alt-mish-bulaq, on their way back from Tun-huang, they were to send a reconnoitring party to the northern shore of Lop-nor to see if CHEN and I were still in the neighbourhood with our flotilla.

The whole plan was adventurous and, I freely admit, rather rash. It was easy enough for CHEN and me, as long as we had flowing water under our canoes and the river continued eastward, to go on in this direction — i. e. as far as the region where the Qum-darya runs into Lake Lop-nor. But what would happen to us if the motor convoy never came back? According to our calculations, and under normal conditions, the petrol supply ought to last as far as the lake into which the Su-lo-ho runs, not far from Tun-huang, and back to base camp No. 70 near Yardang-bulaq. But who could say whether the ground would not prove so soft and sandy that twice the normal amount of petrol would be consumed? In this case the cars would be able to get to Tun-huang, but not to return; and it would be impossible for YEW and KUNG to let us know. And if CHEN and I, on the completion of our work at Lop-nor, failed to make contact with the motor convoy, we could not expect much help from the other groups.