

The prospects for both the motor convoy and the flotilla of canoes were thus very uncertain. It would have been much easier for the former to travel in winter, when a large supply of ice could have been taken on the cars. But the cold season, when the river is ice-bound, was of no use to CHEN and myself, under present circumstances.

#### PLAN FOR BERGMAN'S WORK

But we had other plans too, for we had to utilize to the best possible advantage the short two months that had been allowed us. The most important of these plans had been inspired by the strange and exciting accounts ÖRDEK had given us of the curious discoveries he had made in the desert to the south.

About ten years earlier, he had made a scouting tour eastwards from my old lake Avullu-köl, discovered in 1896 but now dry. He had, he assured us, found wonderful things only a day's journey into the desert. In one spot he had seen a burial-place in which innumerable coffins of solid wood stood stacked one on top of the other, in two layers. He had opened several of the coffins, the interiors of which were richly carved and painted. In addition to the well-preserved corpses, clad in fine silk robes, the coffins contained a quantity of papers with writing in some curious characters and gaily ornamented.

ÖRDEK gave his imagination the freest rein, and he often came and sat down at my tent-door to tell me some new detail he had just thought of. BERGMAN and I could not help thinking, however, that these strange and seductive descriptions must have *some* foundation in fact. It was therefore decided that while CHEN and I went to Lop-nor, BERGMAN and SÖDERBOM should set off through the desert towards the region where the Avullu-köl had formerly been. They were to take a couple of servants and ÖRDEK as guide, and put their baggage on the few pack animals that were to be got in those parts, that had been sucked dry by the war.

#### CONTINUING EASTWARD

Before we left Korla, Colonel SALOMAKHIN had promised us that he would have 100 *puds* of petrol and 6 *puds* of oil sent there for our account within six weeks. I now wrote to the commandant at Korla, Captain DEVIASHIN, reminding him of this promise and asking at the same time that 4 *puds* of oil, to begin with, should be kept in readiness for us. The letter was entrusted to URAYIM to deliver.

When we started off on April 28th the »flagship» of our fleet remained unaltered. On board the other double canoe CHEN continued his observations