

this did not prevent our sleuths from saying they must make sure we had not stuffed the birds with gold!

The day brought us one minor victory. We had received orders to take all our luggage, every scrap of it, to SHENG TUPAN's yamen. All the boxes containing personal effects, instruments and so on were stacked in one room. In two others, on long tables, we had an exhibition of all the things we had found in the graves at Lop-nor. There, in long rows, lay all the apparently insignificant scraps of silks and stuffs, caps, shoes, sandals, wooden or clay bowls, trays, bows and arrows, ritual and symbolical objects. To the uninitiated eye the whole collection looked like rubbish flung on a dust-heap.

And now the display began — a little comedy staged by our shrewd sympathizer Mr APRESOV.

SHENG TUPAN went round the exhibition most thoroughly, with a serious expression, clearly determined to let nothing escape him. He stopped a little while at each object, taking it up, turning it over, examining it from all sides, and asking the most searching questions. YEW, CHEN and I went round with him and answered everything.

I myself was most nervous about our private luggage, which contained all my diaries, sketches and maps, as well as the maps of the lakes on the southern bank of the Qum-darya that CHEN had drawn during the summer. In YEW's and KUNG's boxes were their own and BERGMAN's maps of the northern motor-road through the Gobi, and BERGMAN's maps of the river-arm flowing southward from the Qum-darya, one of our important geographical discoveries. The adjutants had already threatened to prohibit the taking of any of these materials out of the province, which would simply mean that the whole journey had been made in vain. I had expressed my anxiety to Mr APRESOV, and he, with his customary goodwill, promised to speak to SHENG TUPAN. He now came up to me during a pause and whispered:

»None of your private luggage is to be opened. All the boxes will have official labels and SHENG TUPAN's stamp, certifying that there is nothing in them to which exception can be taken, and no contraband. Then your boys can load the boxes onto the lorries and drive them away.»

The inspection was over. SHENG TUPAN assumed a theatrical attitude, made a gesture over the table with his right arm and said:

»Gentlemen, these things have no value for us and are of no interest whatever to my province. You may pack them all up in your boxes, and you will receive a special pass from me entitling you to take your discoveries and the rest of the luggage over the frontier.»

We had been long enough in Sinkiang to know that it was not for our own sakes, but for Mr APRESOV's that the Governor-General had treated us with such generosity. We were in his eyes nothing but an unwelcome gang of spies, who had caused him anxiety and inconvenience.