

from Marāl-bāshi. After inspecting a few ancient sites an attempt to cross the desert had to be abandoned at the end of several days owing to the exhaustion of the camels. Returning to Khotan a fresh start was made with the Lop desert as goal. The caravan route between the foot of the K'un-lun and the Taklamakān was followed. With periods of halt at certain sites—Niya, Endere, Charchan, Vāsh-shahri, Charkhlik, and Mīrān—all contributing fresh material, the last yielding the painted dado reproduced in plate III, the route led towards the desert sites of Lou-lan, many of which were investigated. In an ancient cemetery the contents of the graves included wonderfully preserved figured silks, dating back to Han times, with designs of weird animals prowling through scrolling clouds.¹ The journey was continued north of Lou-lan and across the salt-encrusted dry bed of the ancient inland sea of Lop to the oasis of Āltmish-bulak. After the very trying time in the desert a much-needed four days' rest was taken and preparations made for a further desert journey in search of the ancient Chinese trade route, 'the Route of the Centre', between Lou-lan and Tun-huang. The references to this route in Chinese records were too vague to afford any real guidance and the desert through which it lay 'had long before the dawn of historical times ceased to offer any possibilities of human occupation', but the 'early Chinese wayfarers peopled those forbidding wastes with "plenty of demons and strange beings"'. On 25 February 1914 the expedition set out. Absorbing incidents of this journey, when in spite of forbidding conditions the route was traced beyond doubt, are fully recorded in *Innermost Asia*. From the severe sufferings of the camels, sympathetically recorded, the endurance of the human members of the caravan can be inferred.

At Tun-huang and even before reaching that oasis, definite traces of the old defensive Chinese wall were found and followed for a long distance, running parallel with the Su-lo-ho river and turning north-east along the course of the Etsin-gol. Nearing the delta of this river, which discharges into a lake, the ruined site of Khara-khoto, lying a short distance to the east, was visited and explored. Many of the ruins had been thoroughly examined by the Russian explorer, Colonel Kozlov, in 1908 and very many manuscripts and other remains were carried by him to Russia. But much remained, and Stein found numbers of extremely interesting drawings and prints on paper, now in the British Museum,

¹ Cf. Andrews: *Ancient Chinese Figured Silks*. Reprinted Vol. III, plates xxxii-xlii. from the Burlington Magazine, and Stein: *Innermost Asia*,