

Chinese route through Lop Sea-bed. enterprises towards Central Asia, across the forbidding salt-encrusted bed of the ancient Lop Sea, and the equally desolate waterless wastes around it. How, thanks to lucky archaeological finds and the scanty notices preserved in the Chinese Annals, I succeeded in tracing this route right through to its eastern end, near an old terminal basin of the Su-lo-ho in the desert of Tun-huang, has been recorded in Chapters VIII and IX.

Western-most Chinese Limes. I had now arrived on ground which had retained a special fascination for me since the explorations of my second expedition on the westernmost extension of the ancient Chinese Limes. In the desert to the north-west of the Tun-huang oasis and then again east of it towards An-hsi I traced portions, previously unexplored, of that protected line of Han times, the remains of its ruined watch-towers yielding further early Chinese records on wood (Chap. X. sec. i, iii). In the course of these labours I was able to pay a fresh visit to the 'Caves of the Thousand Buddhas', south-east of the oasis. Besides other relics I secured there a not inconsiderable addition to the collection of ancient Chinese manuscripts which I had recovered in 1907 from the great cache of its walled-up chapel, in the shape of some 570 well-preserved rolls containing texts of the Buddhist Canon (Chap. X. sec. ii).

Han Limes explored to Mao-mei. For a month from the middle of April, 1914, I was occupied in tracing and exploring the remains of the ancient Chinese Limes eastwards, first along the Su-lo-ho to its bend below Yü-mên-hsien, and then through the desert to the Mao-mei oasis at the confluence of the rivers of Su-chou and Kan-chou (Chap. XI, XII). Chinese records on wood found at ruined watch-posts proved that this portion of the Limes, which we explored over a distance of more than 250 miles, was originally constructed about the close of the 2nd century B. C. as a defence against the Huns, and was garrisoned down to later Han times.

Explorations along Etsin-gol. The friendly support of the Tao-t'ai of Su-chou enabled me to push from Mao-mei down the Etsin-gol into a portion of southernmost Mongolia and to explore remains, dating mainly from the Tangut and Mongol domination, at and near the site of Khara-khoto first discovered by Colonel Kozlov. Besides obtaining abundant remains of manuscripts and block prints in the Tangut language and Tibetan, as well as other archaeological finds, we were able to make interesting geographical observations regarding the Etsin-gol valley and its delta. At all times it had served as a highway for nomadic inroads from the north, and Marco Polo's account of it was fully verified on the spot (Chap. XIII).

Pei-shan ranges crossed into Dzungaria. Marching south from Khara-khoto through unsurveyed desert hills, we gained the city of Kan-chou and thence set out for the high ranges of the Nan-shan. There a serious accident prostrated me in the middle of July; but R. B. Lāl Singh's energy made it possible to round off, as I had intended, our topographical work of 1907 in that great mountain region by a survey of the head-waters of the Kan-chou river (Chap. XIV). We regained Mao-mei at the close of August, and thence by a month's arduous travel over ground almost wholly unexplored crossed the utterly barren ranges of the Pei-shan and the eastern extremity of the T'ien-shan (Chap. XV). Our journey beyond, along the northern foot of the latter, acquainted me with portions of eastern Dzungaria which have played an important part in the history of China's Central-Asian expansion. Finally it brought us to the ancient site of Pei-t'ing and, by an old route across the T'ien-shan known so far only from T'ang accounts, down into the basin of Turfān (Chap. XVI).

Winter's work at Turfān sites. The great number of ancient remains to be found within or close to the oases of the Turfān district reflect its importance, as fully attested by its early history (Chap. XVII). Though these sites had been the scene of very fruitful excavations by several preceding expeditions, there remained scope for profitable archaeological work and also for a detailed survey of an area of great geographical interest. During our stay, which lasted through the winter, we were able to make a close