

CHAPTER XVIII

AT RUINED SITES OF TURFĀN

SECTION I.—AMONG THE RUINS OF ANCIENT KAO-CH'ANG

FOR six days after my arrival near Turfān town I was kept busy there by many practical duties, including an exchange of visits with the local Chinese officials, whose goodwill it was important to secure, and by the disposal of the accumulation of more than three months' mail, which awaited me there. During these days I was able to pay a preliminary visit to Yār-khoto and rapidly to inspect a cemetery site lying beyond the 'Yār' to the west of the ruined town, where half a dozen old Chinese graves were said to have been opened by Mr. Tachibana. Those I inspected showed no signs of having contained objects of special archaeological interest beyond much-decayed remains of skeletons wrapped in coarse fabrics; but the examination of the small tomb chambers cut into the hard clay of the Sai, and of the narrow approaches leading down to them, furnished useful indications for the work which I was subsequently to undertake elsewhere.

Soon after my arrival at Turfān I had the satisfaction of being rejoined, after two months of separation, by Naik Shamsuddīn and Li Ssü-yeh, who had left us at Mao-meï, and by faithful Ibrāhīm Beg, who in their company had safely transported all the antiques deposited half a year before at An-hsi. Towards the end of my halt near Turfān Lāl Singh also arrived, after crossing the mountains by the Ku-ch'üan-tzü route with the camels. Favoured by clear weather, he had been able to survey that portion of the range which previously, on our journey to Guchen, had remained invisible. With my party reunited, except for Surveyor Muḥammad Yāqūb, I moved my camp on November 1st to Kara-khōja, which, by its conveniently central position and the easy access it afforded to a series of important sites, appeared the most suitable base for the winter's work in and around the Turfān basin. The house of Nizar 'Alī Dōgha (Darōgha), the local headman, provided a safe place of deposit for our cases of collections and for spare baggage, as well as fairly comfortable quarters.

Reunion of
detached
parties.

My first stay at Kara-khōja, which extended to November 14th, was mainly taken up with a series of preliminary tasks connected both with our archaeological and our topographical work. With regard to the latter it was important to make very careful arrangements for transport, supplies and guides, so as to enable Lāl Singh to carry out, in the face of serious physical difficulties and within the available limits of time, the survey operations assigned to him in the desert region of the Kuruk-tāgh. He was to reach Singer, the only inhabited spot in that vast area of barren ranges and plateaus, by a new route; and after establishing there a base for triangulation, to carry this south-eastwards to Āltmish-bulak, or if necessary beyond into the Lop Desert, with a view to connecting his system of triangles with some point fixed on the K'un-lun range by his triangulation of the preceding year. I was aware of the hardships which the devoted surveyor would have to face partly from lack of water (as the few salt springs east of Singer do not freeze until well into December) and partly from the inclement atmospheric conditions of the Lop Desert. The gales and subsequent dust-haze that prevail there might oblige him to wait for weeks for a chance of sighting the mountains far away to the south of the dried-up sea-bed. The detailed instructions and arrange-

Arrange-
ments for
Kuruk-
tāgh
surveys.