

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE ANCIENT CEMETERIES OF ASTĀNA

#### SECTION I.—SEVENTH-CENTURY TOMBS IN GROUP I

Position of  
ancient  
burial-  
grounds.

ON January 18th I moved my camp from Murtuk back to our base at Kara-khōja, leaving Naik Shamsuddīn behind to complete the work connected with the removal of frescoes. On the following morning we started exploration at the cemeteries of ancient Kao-ch'ang. I had purposely left this work for the latter part of my stay in the Turfān district, as there was reason to think that this kind of archaeological exploration, when carried out in the close vicinity of a populous oasis containing many Chinese, might very conveniently be utilized at Urumchi as a pretext for reviving obstructive tactics against my operations in general. Earlier reconnaissances had shown me that the tombs around Kosh-gumbaz already noticed, and most of those to be found in small groups on the gravel glacis about a mile to the north-east of the walled enclosure known as 'Bēdaulat's town' (Fig. 321), had been recently opened and searched. But apart from these there was a large area covered with ancient cemeteries on the Sai north of the village of Astāna and about two and a half miles from the north-western corner of Idikut-shahri. Here, too, many of the tombs had during the last five years or so been excavated and searched for antiques, both by Mr. Tachibana and local purveyors of antiques, among whom Muḥammad 'Jīsa', the victim of Aḥmad Mullah's *émeute*, was said to have been the most active. But the very persistence of these operations and the great extent of the burial-grounds seemed to justify the hope that opportunity might still be found here for fruitful work on systematic lines.

Distribu-  
tion of  
Astāna  
cemeteries.

As appears from the sketch-plan (Pl. 31), this area stretches for nearly a mile and a half from east to west with a maximum width of about three-quarters of a mile. It lies almost entirely to the north of the canal that carries water from the Kara-khōja stream to the westernmost portion of Astāna cultivation, and passes within 300–400 yards of the village quarters clustering round the conspicuous ruined pile of Taizan. The easternmost extension of this area approaches within three-quarters of a mile of the northern extremity of Kara-khōja. To the west a shallow overflow bed, coming from Sengim-aghiz and bordered by a belt of sandy ground covered with thin scrub, forms the limit beyond which only a few scattered grave-mounds are traceable. The distribution of burial-places over this large expanse is, as the plan shows, very irregular. The rectangular enclosures, each containing a series of tombs more or less aligned, lie closest together in the south-eastern portion. Farther to the north the little mounds marking the position of individual tombs, whether detached or in small groups, are widely scattered without any discernible order.

Enclosures  
formed by  
gravel  
mounds.

A first survey of this area sufficed to show me that the surface indications presented by these cemeteries closely resembled those I had observed in the spring of 1907 at the burial-grounds near the south-western edge of the Tun-huang oasis and on the gravel Sai that I crossed before reaching Nan-hu.<sup>1</sup> Here, too, there were rectangular court-like enclosures marked by low gravel mounds, rising only a few feet above the flat ground. These enclosures invariably showed an entrance on

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Serindia*, ii. pp. 609 sqq., 619.