

CHAPTER XV

THE DEPRESSION OF TURFAN

ON February 23, 1906, after nearly nine months in the basin of Lop, I crossed the Desert Mountains (Chol Tagh) and entered the basin of Turfan. Though the physical features of the two basins are almost identical, and though the same race inhabits both, I felt at once a subtle difference in both scenery and people. In the Lop basin all had been vast, hazy, and uninspiring. Though the mountain range to the south affords some of the most magnificent scenery in the world, one may live near it for months and scarcely see it by reason of the haze. The country had yielded me some of its choicest secrets, but I felt no affection for it, no longing to return. Turfan is scarcely more attractive in outward appearance, but it is small enough to be comprehended at a glance. It possesses the qualities of the life-sized representation, as opposed to the colossal. The basin floor extends scarcely one hundred miles east and west by fifty north and south; the area is only about two per cent of that of its gigantic neighbor. From the west shore of the evanescent terminal salt lake of Böjanti, in the bottom of the basin three hundred feet below sea-level, one can see at a glance all the features which, in the Lop basin, can become familiar only after months of travel: the ring of encircling mountains; the concentric zones; the dwindling, withering rivers, flowing from terraced valleys out upon the plain toward the inconstant lake which most of them strive in vain