

in books. The analogies do not depend on any cultural connections but on similar climatic conditions. Both at Lop-nor and in the desert parts of N. America the climate is so arid that objects which in other localities would have perished have been astonishingly well preserved.

The Ephedra plant has been in use in the Chinese pharmacy for a long time. It is not impossible that its medical quality was known as early as 2,000 years ago. I have asked Dr. D. HUMMEL, the surgeon of the expedition, who has experience of Ephedra both as a medical man and as a botanist, if the presence of Ephedra twigs in the coffins could account for the preservation of the mummies. He was not convinced that the Ephedra twigs would act as a preservative agent unless present in large amounts. In Grave 5 A there was a certain quantity; the photo Pl. VI c gives indeed the impression that the belly of the mummy was stuffed with Ephedra twigs. Such small amounts, however, as those placed in the bundles tied on the mantles can hardly have been of any importance as preservatives.

But Ephedra is an ever-green, and this feature, apart from the medicinal qualities of the plant, may have caused primitive peoples to regard it as possessing vitalizing powers, and therefore useful to the dead in this respect.

STEIN does not believe in the interpretation of this burial practice as a symbolic provision to prevent decay of the corpses; he only refers to the potential medicinal qualities of the plant. (Stein 1930—32).

An Ephedra is used nowadays by the Parsees of Bombay to produce their sacred beverage *Homa*. The Parsee priests say that the *Homa* never decays, and they keep it for a considerable time before they use it.

GERHARD BEXELL has kindly furnished me with the following important information about the use of the Ephedra plant among the Tibetans in Nan-shan south of Suchow.

Those of the Tibetans who cremate their dead take merely a few logs as a foundation for the funeral pyre, which consists mainly of Ephedra bushes. During the combustion the Ephedra plants develop a strong aroma which somewhat weakens the stench from the cremation.

The Ephedra plant is also used for the fabrication of incense in this region. The untreated twigs are sometimes used as incense by the poor, or in cases where proper incense is unobtainable.

These facts show the significance of the Ephedra twigs as a predecessor of incense-sticks, and also confirm the view that the use of incense as an offering has developed out of the pure necessity to milden the smell of the burning corpse or the burning sacrificial meat through adding some fragrant agent. In the course of time this detail has become dissociated from its origin, developed into the use of incense sticks and become in itself a sacrifice.

The occurrence in some coffins of grains of wheat and millet show that the people carried on agriculture to a certain extent. It is less likely that these handfuls