

December 7, a misty and bitterly cold day, for my first winter campaign in the desert. Three dreary marches down the Yurung-kash river, winding between fairly high sand-dunes, brought us to the outlying small oasis of Tawakkel. Turdi, an experienced old 'treasure-seeker' whom Badruddin Khan, the Aksakal or headman of the Indian traders at Khotan and an ever helpful friend, used to employ on the search for antiques, was to be our guide to the ruined site some sixty miles off in a straight line to the north-east. To him and others at Khotan belonging to the luckless little fraternity of venturesome seekers for 'treasure' it was known by the name of Dandan-oilik, 'the place of houses with ivory'.

But I had engaged also two hardy Tawakkel hunters, Ahmad Merghen and Kasim Akhun, who had guided Dr. Hedin years before on his short visit to that site and then down the Keriya river, to help us on the desert journey. They were splendid men, inured to all hardships by their roving life. They proved very useful from the start when it came to collecting a party of thirty labourers for intended excavations. Owing to superstitious fears and in view of the expected rigours of the winter, the cultivators were naturally reluctant to venture so far into the desert. Notwithstanding the ample pay offered and stringent instructions issued by P'an Ta-jên (Fig. 19), the scholarly Amban of Khotan who befriended me then as on all my subsequent journeys, it needed the confidence inspired by the two hunters to overcome this reluctance.

Seven camels of mine and a dozen locally hired donkeys had to suffice for the transport of the baggage of our whole party and of food supplies for four weeks. The donkeys