

possible to prove that the far earlier ruins at Miran, to which we shall presently turn, mark the site of Yü-ni, which the Chinese Annals mention as the 'old eastern town' of Shan-shan.

The absence of even the slightest scrap of Chinese writing among all these records is a significant indication of the total disappearance of Chinese influence and control in the Tarim basin from the last third of the eighth century onwards. But on the other hand, a crumpled-up little packet of papers in 'Runic' Turkish script supplies distinct proof that this distant corner, too, of the Tarim basin had seen something of those valiant Western Turk tribes who, whether as allies or as rivals of the Tibetans, had a main share in bringing down Chinese domination in Central Asia. The late Professor Thomsen, the famous decipherer of the Orkhon inscriptions in the earliest known Turkish tongue, has published these papers and shown that they date approximately from the same period and contain long lists of persons, apparently Turkish soldiers, to whom warrants or passports were issued.

There can be no doubt that the Tibetan stronghold was intended to guard the direct route from the southern oases of the Tarim basin to Tun-huang on the westernmost confines of China proper. This route passing south of Lop-nor had, like the one to the north of it, with which I shall deal later on, been used as a main line of communication into China from the times of the Han dynasty onwards. Hsüan-tsang, and centuries after him Marco Polo, had followed this track through the desert. So there was enough to invest this trying desert track with historical interest for me. But before I myself set out by it from Miran my work at this site was