

## CHAPTER VIII

### EXPLORATIONS AT ANCIENT LOU-LAN

IT was at the small oasis of Charkhlik, as already related, that in the first days of December 1906 I had to make preparations for my long-planned expedition to the ruins in the utterly waterless desert north of Lop-nor which Dr. Hedin had first discovered on his memorable journey of 1900. After exploring whatever remains we might trace there, I proposed to take my caravan across Marco Polo's 'Desert of Lop' to Tun-huang by the ancient route which he followed and which had since fallen into oblivion for centuries. Everything pointed to the need of careful arrangements for transport and supplies if serious risks were to be avoided. Equally important it was to husband my time as carefully as possible; for work in waterless desert would be practicable only during the few months of winter when the cold would allow me to transport water in the form of ice.

The extremely limited resources of Charkhlik, a mere village as befits the headquarters of a district almost wholly desert, made these preparations an exacting task. Within three days I had to raise a contingent of fifty labourers for the proposed excavations, with food supplies to last all of us for five weeks, and to collect as many camels as I possibly could for the transport; for we should have to carry water,