

visit to Urumchi, the provincial headquarters on the other side of the T'ien-shan, chiefly for the purpose of seeing again my old Mandarin friend, scholarly P'an Ta-jên (Fig. 19), then holding high office as Financial Commissioner of the 'New Dominion' (Hsin-chiang). On all my three expeditions he had done his best whether near or far to help me in my labours. I owed it to him that a threatened resumption of obstructive tactics on the part of the provincial administration was averted. I feel all the more satisfaction at having had that chance of expressing my gratitude to this kind patron in person, because before my return in 1930 he had passed away, highly respected throughout the Province as a just administrator—and as one who died poor in spite of all his great charges.

In January 1915 work near Murtuk had progressed sufficiently to allow me to apply myself to a task which proved as fruitful as it was novel to me and in some ways unpleasant. Below the point where the gorge descending from Murtuk debouches on a gravel-covered waste, and above the large village of Astana adjoining Kara-khoja from the west, there extends a vast ancient burial-ground. It is marked by small conical mounds covered with stones, and by low lines of embanked gravel which form enclosures around scattered groups of such mounds. These mounds indicate the position of tomb chambers which are cut at a considerable depth into an underlying hard stratum of fine conglomerate or sandstone. A narrow rock-cut passage, originally filled in again, led down to a short tunnel-like passage giving access to each tomb and itself closed with a brick wall.

Most of these tombs appeared to have been plundered,