

according to local information, during the great Muhammadan rebellion of the last century and Yakub Beg's subsequent regime, but probably also earlier, mainly in search of valuables deposited with the dead. But as our investigations proved, the solid wood of the ancient coffins must also have been prized as a very useful by-product; for fuel, whether from trees or cattle-dung, is very scarce in these Turfan oases. Drift-sand had completely closed up again the passage of approach to the tombs thus opened, and this, with the utter aridity of the climate, accounts for the wonderful preservation in which their contents were found by us. Only during recent years, since the revolution in China had relaxed Chinese feeling about the desecration of the dead, had the tombs attracted attention from local antique-hunters. Their operations had not proceeded far, but they gave useful assurance as to the absence of local prejudices. This allowed me, in fact, to secure a very useful guide in a certain Astana villager who, through protracted practice in this *macabre* line of business, had acquired uncanny familiarity with such abodes of the dead.

Willing labour could be obtained in plenty, and allowed very numerous tombs to be opened in rapid succession. The systematic search of each has conclusively demonstrated that the cemetery contains burials from the very beginning of the seventh to the second quarter of the eighth century A.D. This period comprises the last reigns of the local dynasty ruling Turfan territory before the Chinese reconquest in A.D. 640, as well as the century following which saw T'ang rule firmly established over Eastern Turkistan. Kao-chang, marked by the ruins near Kara-khoja and Astana, was then an important administrative centre and garrison.