

the people buried here had also belonged to that autochthonous population of hunters and herdsmen whom the Chinese annals describe as living in this dreary Lou-lan region before the route leading through it was abandoned in the fourth century A.D.

The objects found in these graves strikingly illustrated how wide apart in civilization and modes of life these semi-nomadic people of Lou-lan were from the Chinese frequenting that ancient highroad. As a point of special interest I may mention that the twigs found invariably tied in small packets into the coarse woollen shrouds have proved to belong to the Ephedra plant, an alkaline product of which in recent years has passed into Western medical use as a powerful drug. How the Ephedra plant, of which the taste is exceedingly bitter, has become in the Zoroastrian cult of the Parsis a substitute for the sacred Haoma plant and the Indian Soma, the juice of which is praised in the earliest Aryan texts as a sweet intoxicating drink dear to gods and men, is rather a problem.

I had been eagerly looking out along the foot of the Kuruk-tagh for traces of Afrazgul, whom at the beginning of February I had dispatched from Turfan for a difficult supplementary task of exploration in the Lop desert. Considering the truly forbidding nature of the ground and the length of strain put on the four brave camels sent with him, I had reason to feel anxious about the safety of the little party, since he was overdue at our appointed rendezvous. So it was a great relief when, the day after my return to Dolan-achchik, he rejoined me with his three plucky Turki companions, including doughty Hassan Akhun, my old camel factotum.