

CHAPTER XV

ANTIQUARIAN PREPARATIONS AT KHOTAN

ON the 11th of November the short march to the village of Ujat, some eight miles lower down on the left bank of the Kara-kash, was made in an atmosphere so thick and grey that I had the sensation of a foggy autumn day somewhere near London. All view of the mountains, near as they were, was effaced as if with a brush, and from where my tent was pitched even the bluff spur just across the river at scarcely a mile's distance loomed only in faint lines through the dust-laden air. It was this spur, known as Kohmari, the last offshoot of the Ulughat range towards the plains, which made me place my camp at Ujat.

Topographical indications that need not be detailed here had convinced me that M. Grenard, the companion of M. Dutreuil de Rhins, was right in identifying Kohmari with the holy Mount Gosringa which Hiuen-Tsiang describes as a famous pilgrimage place of Buddhist Khotan. A Vihara, or monastery, raised on it marked the spot where Sakyamuni was believed to have preached a "digest of the Law" to the Devas. A cave in its side was venerated as the approach to "a great rock dwelling" where popular legend supposed an Arhat to reside "plunged in ecstasy and awaiting the coming of Maitreya Buddha." The Muhammadan Mazar, worshipped as the resting-place of the saintly "Maheb Khwoja," which