

All the previously suspected details of this elaborate and, for a time, remarkably successful fraud were thus confirmed by its main operator in the course of a long and cautiously conducted examination. It was a pleasure to me to know, and to be able to tell fellow-scholars in Europe: *habemus confitentem reum*—and that without any resort to Eastern methods of judicial inquiry. Yet possibly I had reason to feel even keener satisfaction at the fact that the positive results of my explorations were sufficient to dispose once for all of these fabrications so far as scholarly interests were concerned, even if Islam Akhun had never made his confession. In the light of the discoveries which had rewarded my excavations at Dandan-Uiliq and Endere, and of the general experience gained during my work in the desert, it had become as easy to distinguish between Islam Akhun's forgeries and genuine old manuscripts as it was to explode his egregious stories about the ancient sites which were supposed to have furnished his "finds." Not only in the colour and substance of the paper, but also in arrangement, state of preservation, and a variety of other points, all genuine manuscripts show features never to be found in Islam Akhun's productions. But apart from this, there is the plain fact that the forgers never managed to produce a text exhibiting consecutively the characters of any known script, while all ancient documents brought to light by my explorations invariably show a writing that is otherwise well known to us. There is, therefore, little fear that Islam Akhun's forgeries will cause deception hereafter.

This consideration, as well as the fact of the forgers' work having ceased some three years earlier, had decided me not to press for Islam Akhun's punishment on the score of this fraud. I knew besides that my kind-hearted friend Pan-Darin was not without reason popularly credited with a pious proneness for pardoning sinners. In fact, I had noticed during our interview how relieved the old Amban looked when I told him that I did not consider it a part of my business to demand Islam Akhun's punishment for antiquarian forgeries, of which Chinese criminal