

trodden this ancient desert track, and luckily one of the earliest known among them, worthy Fa-hsien, has left us a graphic account of it. He and four other monks, all bent on seeking spiritual guidance in distant India, started in 399 A.D. from Tun-huang in the suite of an envoy.

The learned prefect of that frontier district "had supplied them with the means of crossing the desert before them, in which there are many evil demons and hot winds. Travellers who encounter them all perish to a man. There is not a bird to be seen in the air above, nor an animal on the ground below. Though you look all round most earnestly to find where you can cross, you know not where to make your choice, the only mark and indication being the dry bones of the dead left upon the sand. After travelling for seventeen days, a distance of about 1500 Li, the pilgrims reached the kingdom of Shan-shan—a country rugged and hilly, with a thin and barren soil." As the settlement north of Lop-nor was by that time already abandoned, there can be no doubt that the pilgrims' route must have taken them towards Miran and Charklik. Their subsequent journey of fifteen days to Kara-shahr with its north-westerly bearing confirms this location.

Two and a half centuries later the route we were following had seen a Buddhist pilgrim of still greater fame, Hsüan-tsang, of pious memory, returning from India to China laden with Buddhist relics and sacred books after his many years' wanderings. Unfortunately, the great pilgrim's own *Memoirs of the Western Regions* stop short with his arrival in the territory of Lou-lan. He evidently considered the remaining portion of his homeward journey as lying within the borders of the Chinese empire, which just then had commenced its fresh expansion westward, and hence as outside the scope of his record. But we know from his biography, written by a disciple, that Hsüan-tsang actually accomplished this final part of his travels by crossing the desert from Lop-nor to Tun-huang.

Often had I thought of him during those hard days at Miran, and liked my ruined temples all the more as I remembered how in all probability their walls, then no doubt already sadly decayed, must have seen my Chinese