

Hsüan-tsang, and discovered to my delight that the Amban, as a scholar of wide reading, knew of the Hsi-yü-chi, the great pilgrim's genuine memoirs.

His apologies for our inadequate quarters were profuse, and evidently inspired by sympathy arising from similar experience. His own furniture and property had not yet arrived, and the reception hall of his Ya-mên looked terribly bare in spite of some elegant wood-carving on the walls and its much-faded gilding. As I looked round it struck me that the good people of Tun-huang could have but little attention to spare for their magistrate if they left him even for a short time without a brazier or a curtain to keep out the icy wind. It was a comfort to know that at least he could wear a succession of suits underneath his official robe to keep himself warm, whereas my own 'best clothes' strictly prevented similar protection and left me to feel the bitter cold.

The Buran was still raging when I rode back through the almost deserted streets and the great waste space which extended within the southern face of the town-wall. I hurried to get my half-frozen feet into big fur boots, and had just begun within my carefully-tucked-up tent to warm myself a little, when Wang Ta-lao-ye's return call was announced. There was nothing for it but to receive him in my inhospitable barn of a hall. However, etiquette having once been satisfied, I kept on my fur boots. Seated on a thick Khotan felt rug and with a charcoal fire kept going in the cauldron which served for my men's mess, I did not find the conditions quite so trying. From the mule trunks close at hand I brought forth specimens of ancient Chinese records excavated at Niya and Lop-nor, reproductions of earlier finds, and anything else that might be relished by the Amban's antiquarian eyes.

The effect was all I could wish for. Wang Ta-lao-ye thoroughly enjoyed the scholarly treat which my exhibits provided. With a kind of intuition, due no doubt to his interest in the subject matter, he generally managed to follow the archaeological queries and problems I ventured to submit to his judgment in my terrible Chinese jargon. I found him quite familiar with the geography of Eastern