

measured only five or six yards in length. Beyond this the front of the enclosure as well as its other sides showed only as low ridges of gravel. They were made just perceptible by the relief they presented in the slanting rays of the setting sun.

While the 'gateways' showed fairly hard masonry of coarse but unusually large bricks, I vainly searched on the line of the enclosing 'walls' for any remains of brickwork or even of reed fascines. One of these strange quadrangles measured seventy-five by seventy yards, having its entrance, as usual, on the south. The enclosing ridges were invariably orientated, though but roughly. Within the enclosed areas there were always to be found several low tumuli, the largest facing the entrance from the north and the rest scattered without any apparent arrangement. Those in the ruin just mentioned measured from fifteen to seven yards in diameter, with a height not exceeding five feet. Of course, the idea that these were ancient places of burial soon occurred to me and to Chiang as well. But neither Chinese custom, nor what I knew of Buddhist and other religious practices in Central Asia, seemed to offer any clue. And if the tumuli should prove to contain graves I wondered how I should get Tun-huang people, particularly orthodox in their superstitious awe of graves, to help in the systematic opening. But the site was anyhow within easy reach of the oasis, and for the present I did not care to delay on its account.

We found a convenient camping-place on a broad grassy flat known as Tung-wei-chü by the left bank of the river, and after a night when the thermometer still showed a minimum of twelve degrees of frost, started for the march to Nan-hu. It proved close on thirty miles. For the first half of this distance the route led along the southern edge of a gravel-covered plateau where it falls off with precipitous cliffs to the deep-cut bed of the Tang Ho. It was like the counterscarp of a deep fosse with a glacis stretching away from its brink to the north. Absolutely barren outer hills, covered with dunes for the most part, rose from the right bank of the river and were fully in view throughout. A few half-ruined Pao-t'ais of