

through it and smaller tumuli close by we ascertained that these were the only materials used, and that the little mounds rested on the undisturbed gravel surface.

There could be no doubt that gate and tumuli were contemporary; but there was no clue to their origin and purpose. The people who built them were manifestly not Chinese nor of an advanced civilization. Was it possible to connect these modest cult relics with one or other of the small hill tribes, such as the Jô Ch'iang and the Little Yüeh-chih, to whom the Chinese Annals from Han times onwards make brief reference as dwelling along the slopes of the Altin-tagh west of Tun-huang, and whose grazing-grounds in those barren mountains and plateaus are now occupied by Mongol nomads?

I must refrain from touching here upon other points of historical and geographical interest which the observations gathered during this busy halt suggested in plenty. Nor can I discuss now the topographically important question, whether the ancient frontier station west of Tun-huang, which the Han Annals repeatedly mention under the name of 'Yang-kuan,' 'The Yang Barrier,' was really located at Nan-hu. The claim to this proud identification was put forward in a modern stone inscription, which some learned Tun-huang Mandarin of antiquarian tastes had set up in a small shrine between the south face of the ruined town and the lake. I think there is a good deal of topographical evidence to support it.

Whatever Nan-hu's ancient fame may have been, all of us were bound to appreciate the physical comforts which our stay in the little oasis offered. The days were unusually calm, and with the minimum thermometer rising for the first time above freezing-point, there was a spring-like feeling of warmth in the air, though as yet I looked vainly for a budding leaf or flower. Our hard-trying animals, too, felt refreshed, all but my enterprising little terrier who, while I was visiting a picturesque ruined temple above the gorge of the Nan-hu stream, picked up acquaintance with some half-wild shepherd dogs down below and absconded. After some hours of fruitless search he was recovered badly mauled. Having then to be