

systematic excavation with the whole of my little band of diggers. A couple of days earlier it had been unexpectedly strengthened by the two lost Nan-hu labourers, who to Chiang's and my own great relief turned up by the route from the east, looking very woe-begone, but as sound as their nature and opium would allow. As far as Chiang could make out their tangled story, they had fallen asleep after a little 'smoke' of their beloved drug, mistaken the track when they woke up, and then aimlessly strayed in the desert until, after two days' wandering without water, they were guided to the caravan track by the smoke from the camp fire of the herdsmen we had met on our first approach to Khara-nor. At a later season—and even now without the sustaining effect of their opium—these hapless fellows would almost certainly have perished. So nothing worse befell them than that the herdsmen, who rightly suspected desertion, had forced them to rejoin us.

The hillock we had to clear measured some eighty yards from east to west and nearly as much across, and there was nothing on the gravel-strewn slopes to show where to search for rubbish and ancient remains. So parallel trenches had to be dug all along the slopes down to the natural hard clay in order to make sure that nothing at this important point should escape us. There was plenty of work here for the men, and it took them fully three days to complete it, though on the very first there arrived a most opportune reinforcement in the shape of twelve additional labourers whom Ts'ao Ta-lao-ye, Lin Ta-jên's petty officer, had managed to bring up from Tun-huang along with half a month's fresh supplies. What with all the digging effected by the men—whom small but prompt rewards for interesting finds kept up to the mark—the little hillock soon suggested a kopje girt with shelter trenches against modern gun-fire. The results were ample and offered strange surprises.

One of these was provided by the narrow tunnel on the north-west slope, in which we first discovered that batch of wooden records from Wang Mang's reign. For instead of forming a window to some subterraneous chamber, as I had at first suspected, it proved to be the