

shows, there could in historical times have existed no other route practicable for a large party than the existing caravan track from Tun-huang to Mīrān or Abdal. This conclusion agrees both with Fa-hsien's description of the conditions experienced by travellers and with the length that he gives for the journey. His seventeen days of travel correspond exactly to the seventeen marches in which I covered the ground from Abdal to the Tun-huang oasis, with two days of halt added. In the same way, his estimate of about 1,500 li approaches the distance of about 380 miles that I reckoned for the aggregate of the marches as closely as could possibly be expected, seeing that an equation of 4 or 5 li to the mile is the average which can safely be deduced from the records of Chinese pilgrims to India wherever it is possible to check their estimates of distance between definitely known localities.

Sung Yün, the next Buddhist pilgrim, as far as we know, to visit the Lop tract (A.D. 519), reached it, as we have seen above, not from Tun-huang but across the Koko-nōr region and Tsaidam.²⁴ The interesting report of P'ei Chü on the Western Countries, compiled in A.D. 607 from information collected at Kan-chou, mentions, indeed, Shan-shan or Lop as the first territory on the southern of the three roads westwards.²⁵ But it does not appear to indicate the route by which this was reached. We can, however, feel quite sure that it was the desert route from Mīrān to Tun-huang which was followed in the winter of A.D. 645 by Hsüan-tsang, the greatest of the Chinese Buddhist pilgrims, on his return from India to China. It is to be regretted that his own record in the *Hsi-yü-chi* stops short with his arrival in the territory of Na-fu-po, 'which is the same as the old Lou-lan country', and, as we have seen above, identical with Lop.²⁶

P'ei Chü's record of southern route.

Hsüan-tsang evidently considered the ground covered by the remaining portion of his homeward journey as lying within the borders of the Chinese empire, which since he first set out in A.D. 630 for the 'Western Regions' had, under the emperor T'ai-tsung, vigorously commenced its fresh expansion westward, and therefore as outside the scope of his record. But from his *Life*, written by his disciples Hui-li and Yen-tsung, we know that Hsüan-tsang actually accomplished this final part of his travels by crossing the desert from Lop to Tun-huang or Sha-chou.²⁷ The letter from the Emperor T'ai-tsung which Hsüan-tsang received at Khotan in reply to his application for permission to return, and which is reproduced in the *Life*, distinctly states that the magistrates of Tun-huang had been instructed to conduct him 'through the desert of shifting sands'.

Hsüan-tsang's desert crossing.

That the route through the desert connecting Tun-huang with the Lop tract continued to be used during T'ang times is highly probable. But the itinerary of the *T'ang shu* from Tun-huang to Khotan, of which M. Chavannes kindly supplied me with a translation,²⁸ starts from the Yang barrier, and may therefore, in view of the explanations given further on,^{28a} be assumed to refer to the route leading to Mīrān along the Āltin-tāgh. I regret that I have not access to the information probably to be gleaned from the newly recovered Chinese geographical texts dealing with the Tun-huang region which are to be found among the manuscripts from the Thousand Buddhas' Caves in my collection, and similarly also in that of M. Pelliot.²⁹

Desert route to Tun-huang during T'ang times.

As has been pointed out above, the very existence of a Tibetan fortified post at the site of

²⁴ See above, p. 323.

²⁵ Cf. Richthofen, *China*, i. p. 530, note, giving extracts from Neumann, *Asiatische Studien*, 1837, pp. 187 sqq.

²⁶ See above, p. 321; Julien, *Mémoires*, ii. p. 247; Watters, *Yuan Chwang*, ii. p. 304.

²⁷ Cf. Julien, *Vie*, pp. 288, 290; Beal, *Life*, pp. 210, 212.

It would be interesting to ascertain whether the 'conveyances' for which Hsüan-tsang at Na-fu-po exchanged the horses and camels supplied so far by the King of Khotan, and

which he used for the journey to Tun-huang, were really carts, as the French translation seems to indicate.

²⁸ See Appendix A, II, (Extract from *T'ang shu*, chap. XLIII b).

^{28a} See below, chap. xvi. sec. iv.

²⁹ Cf. for one of these texts Dr. L. Giles's paper, *Tun-huang Lu: Notes on the district of Tun-huang*, *J.R.A.S.*, 1914, pp. 703 sqq.; Pelliot, *J. Asiat.*, 1916, janvier-février, pp. 111 sqq.