

and ruled in these outlying parts of China proper. It seemed to me—and the statements made in confidence by my official friends confirmed this observation, which has a certain historical interest—that there survived, among the Tun-huang people in particular, a lingering consciousness of being, as it were, military colonists guarding an important outpost of the empire, and a strong sense of local individuality. They certainly needed handling with special care and discretion on the part of those put in authority over them, and the serious local outbreak, to which Wang Ta-lao-yeh became a victim soon after my departure from the district, strikingly demonstrated that even such qualities would not always suffice to avert trouble.

Of the fortified border line westwards, and of the opportunities for interesting archaeological work that its remains might offer, I had been able to form some idea on my journey to Tun-huang. But I had been obliged to turn away from it before reaching Yantak-kuduk, and thus there remained the question whether the line of wall really continued to the north of the oasis also, and what its direction might be beyond it. This problem, in conjunction with some vague information about a 'kōne-shahr' which Zahīd Bēg gave, decided me to start my explorations by striking due north towards the Su-lo Ho course. The first march, which took me on March 23 to the small village of Shih-tso, showed me plentiful marks of the destruction left behind by the Tungan raids, though some thirty-eight years were said to have passed since the last of them. The further we passed from the town, the more frequent became the sight of ruined homesteads and temples. Yet the land around them was once more under careful cultivation. Another significant feature was the number of large bastioned forts I sighted here and elsewhere within the oasis, defended by high and massive walls of clay, recent in appearance. The houses within were few and rarely tenanted.

These strongholds had all been built or repaired by the neighbouring villagers when Tungan raids threatened during the years of the great rebellion, or at the time of more recent Muhammadan risings in the Hsi-ning region. When the raids actually did reach the oasis in the sixties of the last century, these scattered places of refuge had fallen, one after the other, an easy prey to the onslaught of the fanatical rebels, who spared neither women nor children. Only that portion of the population escaped which sought safety in the town of Tun-huang, and there many were carried off by starvation during a long, if intermittent, siege. These little village-forts, known as *p'u-tzū* or *pao-tzū* 堡子, became a very familiar sight to me throughout the Kan-su oases that I visited.⁴ What prompted their construction or maintenance was solely the traditional Chinese policy of seeking safety behind high walls, however inadequate their defence might be in numbers or spirit. The appearance of these places of refuge strongly recalled to me the Pathān village forts, or 'Killas', so common in the turbulent tribal tracts beyond the Indian North-west Frontier. Yet what utterly misleading conclusions as to the character of the peaceful Kan-su settlers might be drawn from this apparent resemblance by a future archaeologist, who would see only the ruins of their ill-fated attempts at defence!

So far we had followed the cart road leading to Hāmi. On the following day we struck to the north-west and crossed successive stretches of fertile land, left deserted since Tungan days, between others where cultivation had been resumed. It was very instructive to see how new homesteads of modest dimensions had been established among the ruins of more substantial dwellings built before the Tungan inroads, and how young plantations of trees were growing up amongst the few old elms which had survived the period when this tract had remained without people and its timber had been at the mercy of wood-cutters from Tun-huang town. How often the oases of the Tārīm Basin, whether abandoned or still inhabited, may have seen a similar process! Then we approached the left bank of the Tang Ho and crossed a deep channel taking off from it, which evidently was an old canal of importance (Map No. 78. D. 3). Beyond it extended a wide steppe of reeds and scrub,

Start north
of Tun-
huang.

Village forts
recall Tun-
gan raids.

Reclama-
tion of
deserted
fields.

⁴ For photographs of such fortified villages, cf. *Desert Cathay*, ii. Figs. 218, 221, 230, 253.