

depression, a relatively fertile tract which under the name of 'Posterior Chü-shih' is often mentioned in the Former Han Annals. As the protectorate of Pei-t'ing, the later Bēsh-balik, it figures largely also in the Chinese records of the T'ang period.⁴ That we are so far unable to identify the intermediate locality of *Wu-ch'uan* 五船 (literally meaning 'the five boats') and that of *Hêng-k'êng* 橫坑, which the *Wei lio* mentions in addition, is not to be wondered at, since that portion of the easternmost Kuruk-tāgh which lies west of the route from Tun-huang to Hāmi, and which 'the new route of the north' must have crossed, has up to the present remained practically unexplored.

Direct route
from Tun-
huang to
Hāmi.

But if we look at a map, such as sheet No. XXI of the Russian Trans-frontier Map on the scale of 40 versts to 1 inch, which shows the whole area between Guchen and Tun-huang, whether surveyed or not,⁵ two facts emerge quite clearly. On the one hand, we see that if a direct route could be struck across the desert hill ranges and plateaus intervening between the easy pass by which the present road from Guchen to Hāmi crosses the T'ien-shan (north of the station of Ch'i-ku-ching) and the line of the Limes near T. xiv, it would reduce the distance to be travelled between the two points by about one-half, just as the notice in the Former Han Annals puts it, compared with the devious and difficult route leading past the salt wastes of the ancient Lop lake-bed to Lou-lan, thence to Turfān, and so on to Guchen.⁶ On the other hand, we cannot fail to realize that such a route would necessarily have to pass by the depression, sinking almost to sea-level, where the course of the river coming from the Hāmi oasis terminates in the Shona-nōr marshes.

Bifurcation
of route to
Guchen and
Turfān.

Once this depression was gained from the side of the Tun-huang Limes, it would be possible even now to reach in an almost straight line the low saddle in the eastern T'ien-shan which the present Chinese cart-road from Hāmi to Guchen crosses between the stations of Ch'i-ku-ching and Ta-shih-t'ou. From the same depression it would have been open for travellers of ancient times, instead of thus proceeding north-westwards to 'Posterior Chü-shih' or Guchen, to turn to the west and continue their journey to the Turfān depression, or 'Anterior Chü-shih', as the Former Han Annals call it, which comprises Kao-ch'ang also amongst its oases, a site marked by the ruins of the present Kara-khōja. Hence the statement of the *Wei lio* which makes the 'new route of the north' lead to Kao-ch'ang in the territory of Chü-shih is easily reconciled with the earlier account of the route preserved in the Former Han Annals.

⁴ Cf. Wylie, *J. Anthropol. Inst.*, x. pp. 22 sqq.; xi. pp. 106 sqq. For the identification of Pei-t'ing cf. Chavannes, *Turcs occid.*, p. 11. My visit to this territory in October, 1914, enabled me to verify the correctness of M. Chavannes' conclusions and to identify in detail the localities of the T'ang itinerary there discussed by him; see *Geogr. Journal*, 1916, xlviii. p. 201.

⁵ This sheet in its latest edition, as reproduced also in vol. iii (Map II) of the Report on Captain Roborovsky's expedition, Petrograd, 1899, shows the routes surveyed by that expedition between Hāmi and Turfān, in the northernmost portion of the Kuruk-tāgh locally known as Chöl-tāgh, 'the desert hills', as well as the line followed by Captain Roborovsky on the reconnaissance which he made from a point west of Khara-nōr into the desert hills north-westward, and which is referred to below, p. 707.

The other routes indicated by this Russian map in the wholly unexplored desert area west of the Hāmi-Tun-huang road are based solely on 'native information' which cannot be checked. There is strong reason to suspect that the strings of names shown for certain supposed wells along these route-lines refer in reality to halting-places close to, if not actually

on, the known road from Hāmi to Tun-huang. Such duplication or triplication of apocryphal routes derived from inadequately collated native itineraries is an experience well known to cartographers who are familiar with the early mapping of other parts of Asia, not necessarily deserts. The existence of the 'Toli lake' shown in that map is particularly dubious.

⁶ I may point out here that the direct tracks leading from Turfān to Guchen across the high, snowy portion of the T'ien-shan intervening are open only for a part of the year, and, as my crossing in 1914 of the least difficult of the passes, the Pa-no-p'a, showed, impracticable at all times for any but the lightest transport. Trade caravans and military convoys would at all times have to make a great detour either west (via Urumchi) or east (via Ulan-su) in order to get round the Bogdo-ula range by a route practicable for camels or carts.

This point has to be borne in mind when we compare the two routes referred to in the notice of the Former Han Annals. The 'new route of the north' coming from the Shona-nōr must have crossed the T'ien-shan by the easy and low saddle north of Ch'i-ku-ching over which the present Chinese cart-road from Hāmi to Guchen and Urumchi passes.