

it extensive waste lands alternate with strips of poor fields irrigated from canals of no great size, which take off from the Su-lo Ho between the villages of Hsiao-wan and Huang-ch'ü-k'ou.⁷ All the way ruins of walled villages and towns were far more conspicuous than the scattered farms and hamlets of the present occupation. Most of the former, like the walled enclosures to the north of Kua-chou-k'ou shown by the map (Lu-kung, Po-ch'i-pao), were said to have been destroyed during the great Tungan inroads. But some at least are likely to have been deserted much earlier. After passing a broad winding Nullah near the hamlet of T'ou-kung,⁸ which undoubtedly represents an old bed of the Su-lo Ho, the road led through the abandoned town known as *Kua-chou-ch'êng* 瓜州城 after the ancient name of the whole oasis or district. Its walls of stamped clay form a rectangle of about one-half by one-third of a mile, enclosing but scanty remains of houses, among them those of a Ya-mên said to have accommodated the military command now transferred to Tun-huang. Outside the north gate I found a tumbled-down temple still the scene of a local festival. The town was said to have been destroyed by the Tungans, and the waste appearance of the interior pointed to its having been half-abandoned even before. But that it marks a site of some former importance, and possibly that of the ancient chief town of Kua-chou, becomes probable from its central position within the oasis and from certain archaeological indications to be discussed further on.

After leaving the area of spasmodic cultivation to the north-west of Kua-chou-ch'êng, the road crosses for close on four miles an open scrub-covered plain, with bare gravel patches in places and no trace of former cultivation. Beyond this, at the eastern end of a compact stretch of tilled land, about two miles wide where broadest, and forming what is now the main oasis, the present 'town' of An-hsi is reached. In spite of its high-sounding name *An-hsi* 安西, 'the [seat of the] Western Protectorate', the same which once in the great T'ang times had been borne by the headquarters of the Chinese administration controlling the whole of Turkestan,⁹ everything about the place, officially ranking in 1907 as a *Chou* or 'Independent Prefectural City', presents an air of neglect and stagnation. Scarcely more than a straggling street within a big and desolate-looking enclosure of crumbling walls, An-hsi shows plainly that it owes its importance, such as it is, solely to being the last halting-place with local supplies on the highway leading from Kan-su to Hāmi and Chinese Turkestan. After leaving the western gate of An-hsi and crossing the Su-lo Ho a couple of miles beyond, the traveller bound for Central Asia by that great caravan route enters the gravel and stone desert of the Pei-shan and does not reach arable ground again until after eleven weary marches.

The six days' stay, which a variety of practical tasks, including preparations for the move into the mountains south and arrangements for the safe storage of my collection of antiques, obliged me to make at An-hsi,¹⁰ amply sufficed to show me how limited were the resources of the place and the district. The scattered hamlets constituting the main oasis in the wide scrub-covered plain were, no doubt, but slowly recovering from the terrible ravages caused by the Tungan inroads. Scarcity of population was the obvious explanation why a good deal of land capable of irrigation from still existing canals and showing clear traces of former cultivation was being left untilled to be overrun by the low scrub of the desert. Yet allowing for these human causes, it was still easy to realize from the physical aspect of the ground that the old oasis of Kua-chou could never have equalled that of Tun-huang in extent or fertility. Apart from the fact that the area between the foot-hills and the

The 'town' of An-hsi.

Limited extent and resources of oasis.

⁷ See Map No. 83. A. 2.

⁸ *T'ou-kung* means literally 'the first settlement'. Such numerical designations of village areas are common everywhere on the westernmost Marches of Kan-su; cf. e.g. *San-kung*, *Lu-kung*, *Pa-kung* in the An-hsi tract (Map No. 81. C. 2, 3; D. 3). Has the prevalence of this numerical nomenclature perhaps something to do with the need of repeated re-settle-

ment after devastating inroads which were likely to obliterate older local names?

⁹ Established at Kuchā since A.D. 658 and previously at Turfān; cf. Chavannes, *Turcs occid.*, p. 118, but see also Chavannes, *Notes additionnelles*, *T'oung-pao*, 1904, p. 19.

¹⁰ Cf. *Desert Cathay*, ii. pp. 236 sqq.