

CHAPTER XXIX

KARA-SHAHR AND ITS RUINED SITES

SECTION I.—HISTORICAL TOPOGRAPHY OF KARA-SHAHR

ON December 1 I left Turfān town for Kara-shahr. I was anxious to save time for eventual excavations in that north-east corner of the Tārīm Basin before setting out to the south-west across the Taklamakān, and for this reason was obliged to follow the high road. This first skirts the western portion of the Turfān basin to the oasis of Toksun (Map No. 54. c. 2), and thence ascends southward through the difficult gorge of Su-bāshi to the barren hill ranges and plateaus which link the western Kuruk-tāgh to the T'ien-shan chain south of Urumchi. These the route crosses in a westerly direction over ground where both water and grazing are extremely scanty; after some 140 miles from Turfān it reaches at Ushak-tal the first cultivation within the wide Kara-shahr basin. Apart from a small ruined fort known as Oi-tam in the scrubby salt-encrusted steppe north-west of Toksun (Map No. 54. c. 1), which with its very massive walls of stamped clay looked to me decidedly ancient, the route offered no opportunity for archaeological observations. Yet there can be no doubt that it must have been always the main line of communication from Turfān to Kara-shahr and the northern oases of the Tārīm Basin. Along its eastern portion leads also what must in historical times have always been the easiest, if not the most direct, route connecting Turfān with the Lop region.¹

Route from
Turfān to
Kara-shahr.

If there are no old remains that can now be traced above the ground along the route just described, we find at least a fairly detailed account of it in the T'ang Annals.² M. Chavannes has already rightly recognized that the notice translated by him relates to the present route line, and only minor identifications remain to be added here. Starting from Hsi-chou 西州 or Yār-khoto, the itinerary takes us south-west to the town of T'ien-shan 天山, 120 li distant. In this we can safely recognize the present Toksun. 'Thence going south-west and passing through a mountainous gorge and the stony desert of Lei-shih 石雷石', which obviously corresponds to the narrow defile ascended above Su-bāshi, 'one arrives after 220 li in the stony desert of Yin-shan 銀山, or "the Silver Mountain".' The modern Chinese author of the *Hsi yü shui tao chi*, quoted by M. Chavannes, has correctly recognized that the reference here is to the hilly desert near the present station of Kumush, the name of which means silver in Turkī.³ The distance indicated agrees well with the

Route de-
scribed in
T'ang
Annals.

¹ I mean the route which leaves the Turfān-Kara-shahr high road at the desolate station of Ūjme-dong, Map No. 54. B. 3, and striking due south leads via Shōr-bulak and P'o-ch'êng-tzū to the tiny oasis of Singer. From this important route junction of the western Kuruk-tāgh (Map No. 55. D. 2) Lou-lan could be reached in ancient times as easily as the northernmost Lop tract is now at Tikenlik.

The route here referred to will be found duly marked in Roborovsky's Map II from Col. Kozloff's survey. With most other routes of the Western Kuruk-tāgh it was surveyed

in the course of my third expedition. It was made practicable for cart traffic after the Chinese reconquest of Turkestan in 1877, and postal stations, now completely abandoned, were established along it. The more direct routes from Singer to Turfān and Lukchun are made difficult, and during the warm portion of the year practically impossible, through want of water.

² Cf. Chavannes, *Turcs occid.*, p. 6.

³ Silver has been mined in the western Kuruk-tāgh also in recent times, but only in modest quantities.