

with several hundred thousands of men, was believed to have encamped his host near these rat-mounds. The king of Khotan, so the story went, with a force of only some few myriads, prepared to meet the enemy, but despairing of success turned his thoughts in prayer to the miraculous rats for help. 'That night the king of *Ch'ü-sa-ta-na* (Kustana, Khotan) in a dream saw a great rat' which promised him succour and victory for the morrow. The king thereupon set out with his forces before dawn and unexpectedly fell upon the enemy. When the Hiung-nu hastily prepared to resist the attack 'they found that the leather of their armour, and their horses' gear, and their bowstrings, and all the fastenings of their clothes, had been gnawed by the rats'. The terrified Hiung-nu were defeated with great slaughter, and their chief killed. 'The king of *Ch'ü-sa-ta-na* (Kustana, Khotan), in gratitude to the rats, built a temple and offered sacrifices; and ever since they have continued to receive homage and reverence, and they have offered to them rare and precious things. Hence, from the highest to the lowest of the people, they pay these rats constant reverence, and seek to propitiate them by sacrifices. On passing the mounds they descend from their chariots and pay their respects as they pass on, praying for success as they worship. Others offer clothes, and bows, and arrows; others scents, and flowers, and costly meats. Most of those who practise these religious rites obtain their wishes; but if they neglect them, then misfortune is sure to occur.'

Survival of
local legend.

Klaproth has already noticed the curious resemblance between this legend and the story which Herodotus tells us of the destruction of Sennacherib's Assyrian host on the frontier of Egypt, effected by field rats in the same way, and also foretold in a dream¹². But yet more interesting is the survival to the present day, and in the identical place, of the local worship which the legend told to Hsüan-tsang was intended to explain; for the locality which the pilgrim describes corresponds exactly to the position of the 'Kaptar-Mazār' relative to the ancient Khotan capital. The distance from the site of Yōtkan to the modern shrine is fully 24 miles by the map, which, taking into account the increase of actual road measurement due to small détours and the heavy going over sandy ground, adequately represents the one and a half marches implied by Hsüan-tsang's estimate of 150 to 160 li. The shrine still greets the traveller 'in the midst of the straight road across a great sandy desert', exactly as the pilgrim saw it.

Sandhills
near *Kaptar-*
Mazār.

Immediately to the east of it the road enters a tract where the dunes are plentifully interspersed with conical sandhills covered by tamarisk growth. These sandhills are typical features on those strips of the desert where the drift-sand is so plentiful as to form relatively high dunes, but where at the same time the ground water is still near enough to permit the tamarisk shrubs to send their roots down to it and thus to keep themselves alive on the top of the sand-cones which they bind together¹³. Only at this point of the whole route between Khotan and the west are these curious hillocks to be seen. I, therefore, do not hesitate to recognize in them Hsüan-tsang's 'succession of small hills formed by the burrowing of rats'. The explorer of the Taklamakān and the roving hunter or 'treasure-seeker' who visits wide areas of the desert have, indeed, occasion to become familiar in many places with these peculiar formations. But to the ordinary wayfarer who keeps to the main roads, and to the average stay-at-home inhabitant of the oasis they were bound to appear in old days, just as now,

¹² See *Mémoires relatifs à l'Asie* (1826), ii. 297 sqq., where an amusing parallel, capable of a less miraculous interpretation, is quoted from the official report of a Russian commandant about the destruction of certain military magazines at Okhotsk, in 1806.

¹³ For a diagram and a lucid explanation of the formation of such tamarisk-covered cones, see Hedin, *Reisen in Z.-A.*, p. 34. For illustrations showing hillocks of this kind see below, Figs. 38, 39, 44, 52; also Pl. VI; for other references to them, compare Index, s. v. *tamarisk*.