

INTRODUCTION

THE object of this publication is to provide a full record of the explorations, archaeological in the first place but to a large extent also geographical, which my second Central-Asian expedition, undertaken under the orders of the Government of India, enabled me to carry out during 1906-8 in widely distant regions of innermost Asia. The plan of these explorations was directly based upon the results which had rewarded my first journey in Chinese Turkestan in the year 1900-1, and their start fitly coincided with the completion of *Ancient Khotan*, my Detailed Report on that pioneer expedition.

The new explorations were destined from the outset to cover a far wider area, extending from the Hindukush valleys and the uppermost Oxus right across the whole length of the Tārīm Basin to the province of Kan-su on the western marches of China proper. But the aims prompting my renewed efforts were the same, and since the results gained in the form of archaeological discoveries, new surveys, and observations of all kinds have so abundantly justified them as to claim these bulky volumes for their record, the briefest reference to the general objects of my enterprise may suffice here.

There was in the first place the fascinating hope of recovering from ruins long ago abandoned to the desert more relics of that ancient civilization which the joint influences of Buddhist India, China, and the Hellenized Near East had fostered in the scattered oases of those remote Central-Asian passage lands. Only by local investigations could there be cleared up in detail the historical topography of the ancient routes which had witnessed that interchange of civilizations between India, Western Asia, and the Far East, maintained as it was during centuries in the face of very serious physical obstacles through trade, religious missions, and the Chinese empire's intermittent efforts at political and military expansion into Central Asia. Last but not least, I was anxious to use whatever opportunity might offer for the exploration of previously unsurveyed ground in deserts and mountains. It was bound to help towards the elucidation of important geographical factors directly affecting the desert sites which have preserved those relics of antiquity, and closely bearing also upon the physical conditions and economic history of Central Asia in general.

It appears to me a favour of Fate that I was able to carry through my programme in its entirety and with abundant results of the value of which to research the student of these volumes may safely be left to form his own judgement. As regards the efforts and hardships its execution implied, it will suffice to refer him to the story as told in *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, the Personal Narrative of my journey.¹ But special mention seems due here of the extent of my explorations, as indicated by the length of time spent over constant travel and field-work, more than two years and a half, and by the aggregate of the marching distances covered on foot or on horseback, close on ten thousand miles; for in this extent is to be found the reason for the title I have chosen for the present publication.

¹ *Ruins of Desert Cathay, Personal Narrative of explorations in Central Asia and westernmost China.* By M. Aurel Stein. In two volumes, with numerous illustrations, colour

plates, panoramas, and maps from original surveys. Macmillan & Co., Ltd., London, 1912.

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