

S. 60° E. The two outside villages in east and west are the largest, and lie 14 km. apart. This general position proves that they stood in part beside a tolerably straight road, and in part on the shore of a lake. It may quite safely be assumed, that this road was connected with the old road of which I discovered distinct traces in 1896 while travelling between Korla and Jing-pen. The traces in question consisted principally of *potajs* or watch-towers. Two of these, standing between the Kontsche-darja and the Kuruk-tagh, are reproduced in figs. 34 and 35. These two clay towers have, as will be seen, a very different shape from the large tower at Lâu-lan. They are truncated pyramids, while the latter is a truncated cone, at all events in its upper part. Moreover they are hollow inside and once contained a stairway to the summit. The materials of all the towers alike is however the same, namely clay, built round a frame-work of posts and branches of trees. One of these quadrilateral towers was surrounded by a similar quadrilateral wall (fig. 35). In any case all these ancient remains belong to one and the same vigilantly guarded road along

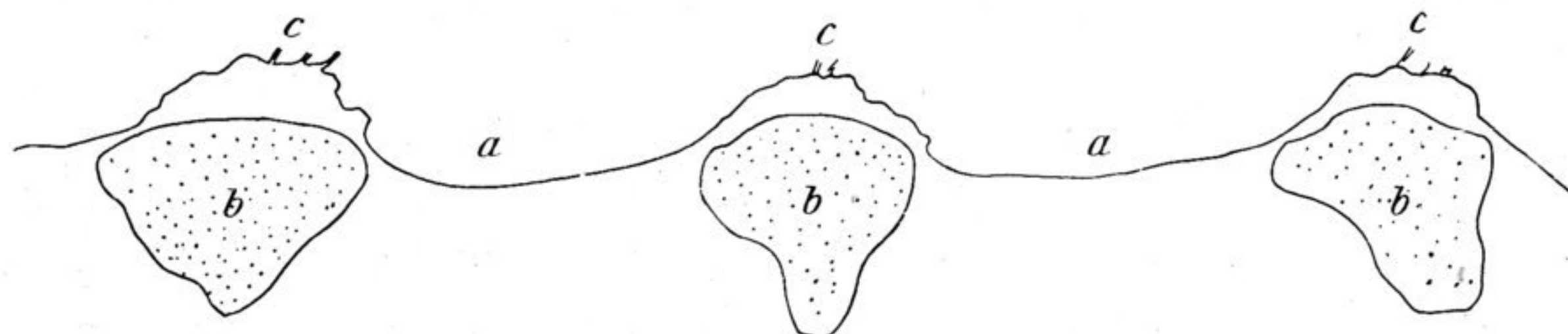


Fig. 296. a. = GULLIES STRETCHING NNE—SSW; b. = SAND ON THE LEE SIDE, OR SSW.  
c. = JARDANGS.

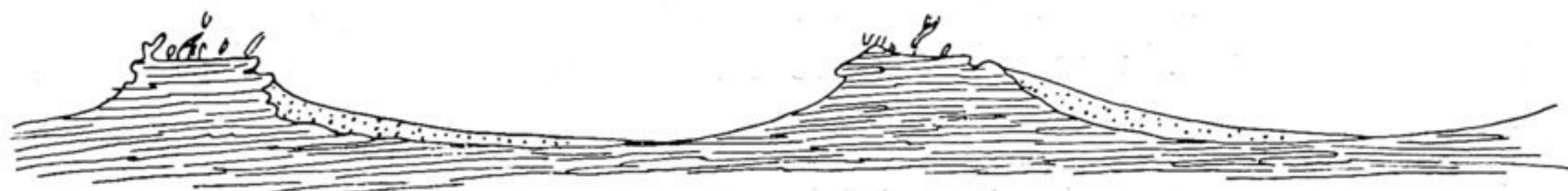


Fig. 297. VERTICAL SECTION OF THE SAME FROM NNE TO SSW.

the southern foot of the Kuruk-tagh. If you were to proceed successively from each of the groups of ruins I discovered to the next, and were to endeavour to follow the probable course of this ancient highway, you would in all probability find several other old ruins. As for Lâu-lan, it was simply and solely by pure chance that I was led to visit the four villages. Why then should there not be others like them on both the east and the west! Between Jing-pen and Lâu-lan I travelled indeed for the most part in the bed of the Kuruk-darja, and there may have been ancient villages on its banks which we did not see. It is the configuration of the country that makes it so difficult to discover the ruins. It is quite possible to go past the ruins of a house at a distance of only twenty meters or so, and yet never be aware of their existence. Kosloff does not speak of any ruins along the *astin-jol* to Tung-chuan; but this cannot of course be regarded as a proof that none exist. For, in the first place, the road between Lâu-lan and the existing Tung-chuan is entirely unknown; and in the second place the eastern half of the road may have had quite a different position in the desert from what it has now. Future exploration in this region will beyond doubt result in yet further discoveries.