

There were a hundred camels and thirty men in this caravan. They came from Ku-ch'eng-tze. Some were sitting in basket-litters and peeped out from behind the curtains. The last string had both the big heavy camel-bells with clappers and little sleigh-bells.

We had yet another belt of high sand to traverse before we reached Shubunbuluk, where we were to pitch camp. Near this spring there was a little mere with a surface area of about twenty square meters and one decimeter in depth. Beside this mere sat a herd who sold us a sheep and a goat.

On September 23rd we rode on over dune sand and among tamarisks on the long journey to the west. The country preserved the same character almost throughout the day. We camped at the well Sujin-dzagh. Here, too, a caravan from Ku-ch'eng-tze passed by. The autumn caravan traffic seemed to be in full swing.

On the following day the ground was now hard and even, now covered with small bound dunes. Finally we traversed a belt of rather troublesome drift-sand, where one sat rocking and balancing on one's camel as he struggled up a steep slope or sank and glided down the other side of the dune.

Once more we were on level ground. A few poplars grew here and there. On a little hill to the left an obo had been erected.

We pitched camp near a well on level ground.

BORO-TSONCH

Just to the west of the camp was an isolated plateau that rose about thirty-five meters above the plain, and thither some of us directed our steps in the morning to see the tower that crowned the plateau. According to HUANG this ruin dated from the time of the Han dynasty. There were quantities of potsherds and the remains of a fire-place. This was Boro-tsonch (The Grey Tower) — one of the few names on our route that is to be found on STIELER's map, where it is spelled Borosontschi.

The route now took us west-north-west, between partly yellowed and sparsely growing trees. We camped at the well Sukhain-khuduk, whose water tasted nauseous, smelling of sulphuretted hydrogen.

On the 26th the day's march led us over a couple of very low ridges. The country was almost sterile, and we passed only a couple of narrow belts of tamarisk on our way.

At the camping place for the day we divided up into groups. We had reached the place early and knew that we had not far to go to Khara-khoto, the ruined town from the thirteenth century that was discovered in 1909 by KOZLOV. Everybody was curious to see it and in different groups all the gentlemen of the staff set out either on foot or camelback on the road leading to the ruin.