

with that most prevalent in the ancient Chinese ammunition of Han times, with which I had become so familiar in the course of my explorations along the Tun-huang Limes.<sup>1</sup> The documentary evidence there secured, as well as the weight of the arrow-heads, makes it certain that they were intended for use with cross-bows. The fact that these finds were both made close together and on the same line makes it appear very probable that arrow-heads and coins were dropped by some convoy of Han times coming from the side of China and carrying stores for troops. The way in which the coins as well as the arrow-heads had been allowed to remain on the ground, without being picked up at the time or by subsequent wayfarers, might suggest that the convoy moving towards Lou-lan from which they fell had been travelling at night-time, and probably a little off the main track, but still in the right direction. If more sand than covered the ground than the winds have left now, small objects would continue to remain hidden from view, even though traffic may have continued to pass close by for several centuries.

The finds to which a fortunate chance had thus helped us at the very start were of great importance for my task. They gave welcome assurance that the direction I had decided to follow on the strength of previous antiquarian indications was indeed that of the ancient track by which Chinese political missions, troops, and traders had toiled for centuries through this lifeless wilderness. But they offered another advantage for which I had reason to feel grateful. By their very nature they helped greatly to raise the spirits of my men and filled them with superstitious confidence that spirits were safely guiding them. I myself could not help feeling a strange thrill when I showed Hassan Ākhūn and the rest of my Turkī myrmidons the well-defined line running from south-west to north-east, just as if some kindly spirit among those patient old Chinese wayfarers who had followed this desert route beset with hardships and perils had wished to assure us that the bearing I was steering on was the right one. With a few similar incidents to be presently recorded it made me feel at times as if I were living through experiences dimly remembered from some fascinating story of Jules Verne's which I had read as a small boy.

Beyond the spot where the coins were found the ground continued, for another mile and a half, to show the same salt-encrusted clayey surface with low Yārdangs. We then crossed a slight depression only about a quarter of a mile wide, with a hard crust of bare whitish salt, and reached ground where *shōr* gradually gave way to decomposed clay with an abundant admixture of gypsum<sup>1a</sup> flakes and here and there a thin layer of coarse sand. It provided easy going for the camels, and when, after seven and a half miles' march from Camp c, we reached the long narrow Mesa that had served as our guiding-point from L.J., the view obtained from it showed the same flat surface stretching for a considerable distance north-eastwards, and rows of Mesas adjoining it to the north. Our advance continued along the same bearing as we had followed from L.J. and brought us steadily nearer to an array of boldly sculptured Mesas of red clay on our left. To the south and south-east only a few isolated Mesas could be seen, rising above the level expanse of what, from a distance, looked like *shōr*, extending right away to the horizon and obviously marking what had been the western shore of the ancient sea.

For a distance of fully ten miles we thus skirted the southern border of an area covered with rows upon rows of Mesas. With their fantastically eroded shapes they suggested visions of ruined mansions, bastioned town walls, towers, or Stūpas, all red as if built of sandstone. Our north-easterly route, to which I was careful to adhere, were it only for the sake of the camels, kept us clear of the ground where these Mesas stood close together and rose to heights which I estimated at eighty feet or more. The few terraces, outliers as it were, which we actually passed by the side

Direction  
of route  
indicated  
by finds.

Approach  
to Mesa-  
covered  
area.

Mesas  
suggesting  
ruined  
structures.

<sup>1</sup> See Descriptive List above, p. 289; *Serindia*, ii. pp. 759, 767 (under \*T. 007); iv. Pl. LIII.

<sup>1a</sup> Throughout the ground surveyed near the Lop sea-bed

the entry 'mica' in Maps Nos. 29, 32 should be replaced by 'gypsum'.