

Ridges Sands', *San-lung sha* 三隴沙.⁷ The reference in the *Wei lio* makes it clear that these designations were applied to the northernmost offshoots of a belt of high sand dunes which the caravan track coming from Tun-huang crosses, just as did the ancient Lou-lan route, a short distance to the north-east of Bēsh-toghrak (Map No. 35. B, c. 4). Now our surveys of 1914 have established the fact that the big south-eastern bay of the ancient sea extended continuously within the 'Bēsh-toghrak valley' as far as the vicinity of Yantak-kuduk (Map No. 35. A. 4). Thence a succession of *shōr*-covered areas or actual salt bogs extends in the same depression close to the west of the wells of Bēsh-toghrak (Map No. 35. A. 4; B. 3, 4). The accuracy of the statement in our passage as to the limits of the region with which we are concerned is thus vindicated by plain topographical facts.

It is not possible for us to test in the same conclusive fashion the statement made at the beginning of the passage: 'This region has an extent of a thousand *li*;' for we are not definitely told the direction to which this measurement applies. But it is certainly noteworthy that the recorded estimate agrees remarkably well with the distances measured along either of the two possible routes by which a traveller starting from the northernmost point of the 'Three Sands', east of Bēsh-toghrak, could attain the nearest habitable ground beyond the western extremity of the sea-bed. As long as the Lou-lan area received water from the Kuruk-daryā and was capable in places of human occupation, the western edge of the great salt waste which the Chinese knew by the name of *P'u-ch'ang* or *Yen-tsé*, 'the Marsh of Salt', might be reached at two different points, either by proceeding to Lou-lan by the 'route of the centre' or else by following the still practicable caravan track to Mīrān along the southern shores of the sea-bed.

Extent
of 'Salt
Marsh'
region.

Now the aggregate of my marches, as measured by cyclometer from L.J., the last outpost of Lou-lan, to the northernmost of the 'Three Sands' east of Bēsh-toghrak, along what I believe to have been the approximate line followed by the 'route of the centre', amounted to 199 miles.⁸ If the traveller were to start from the same point east of Bēsh-toghrak and to take the southern route still followed by caravans between Tun-huang and Mīrān, a total marching distance of practically identical length, as measured by us with the cyclometer in February, 1907, viz. 198 miles, would bring him to Camp 143 of our second journey. Near this we came upon the extreme south-western edge of the hard salt crust area of the ancient sea-bed. From there to the west towards Mīrān, desert vegetation in gradually increasing proportion is found along the track, and the region of bare salt, clay, or gravel is definitely left behind.⁹ Experience gathered on my explorations in the Tārīm basin and adjacent regions has abundantly proved that one mile there may ordinarily be reckoned as equivalent to 5 *li* in Chinese records of distances over level ground.¹⁰ Thus from whichever of the two routes the measurement of a thousand *li* might have been derived by Li Tao-yüan's authority, this estimate of distance would appear surprisingly correct.

Li Tao-
yüan's
distance
estimate.

For two reasons it seems to me more probable that the recorded estimate of extent was taken from the Lou-lan route. In the first place the whole of the topographical data mentioned in Li Tao-yüan's notice relates to the ground traversed on this route.¹¹ Secondly, we have in the conclud-

Li Tao-
yüan on
'N. limit
of lake'.

⁷ See *Serindia*, i. pp. 418, 425; ii. pp. 555 sq.

⁸ In this reckoning due allowance has been made for the detour implied by our having proceeded from Camp cvii first to the route on the southern side of the Bēsh-toghrak valley and having followed this as far as Yantak-kuduk (Map No. 35. A. 4) instead of moving direct to Bēsh-toghrak; see below, pp. 317 sq., 321 sq.

The distance of 230 miles indicated in *Serindia*, i. p. 425, note 38, referred to the marches from Camp c to Camp cxii,

farther to the east of Bēsh-toghrak, and made no allowance for the detour between Camps cvii and cx.

⁹ See Map No. 30. B, c. 2.

¹⁰ Cf. *Serindia*, ii. p. 735, with the references quoted in note 28 a.

¹¹ The reference to travellers *crossing* the area encrusted with hard salt is certainly significant. On the southern route it is only skirted.