

terminal basin of the Su-lo-ho.⁴ Beyond it the height of the line of cliffs diminished. The plateau-like ground above them was cut up by narrow ravines which undoubtedly were due to erosive water action. Along this ground the shore curved but little, and no further indication of the old route could be traced on the stretches of hard salt crust adjoining. But quite close to the termination of the ancient track across the bay, one of the camelmén picked up below the cliffs a neatly made bronze tag, C. cv. 01 (Pl. XXIII), with rivets, which had evidently once been fastened to the end of a leather strap or cord. Here again was welcome evidence of the ancient traffic that had followed this route. It was curious to observe that for about half a mile from the same point eastward the foot of the eroded terraces was skirted by a well-marked bank of raised ground about twenty feet wide and at a level about three feet above the shore, along which it stretched in a fairly straight line. I could not arrive at any definite opinion about it, but may mention that for most of its length the previously noted track of wild camels kept with striking regularity close by its side.

First reeds
reached.

The men with the camels took to this 'road', which seemed so well trodden, with increased confidence, and their brave worn-out beasts had their reward when, after having covered fully twenty-two miles, we arrived at the extreme end of a narrow strip of sandy soil fringing the foot of the eroded plateau and supporting scattered tufts of reeds (Fig. 183). Very scanty as the grazing was, it was a great boon for the camels. A violent Burān coming from the south-west broke upon us as soon as camp was pitched, and made the night trying for us men. Yet my relief was great that we had carried our search for the ancient route safely past the formidable obstacles that the shores of the dried-up sea had presented.

Vegetation
and near
subsoil
water.

On the morning of March 5th a heavy haze hung over the great bay, and at first scarcely allowed us to make out the nearest peaks on the hill range above us. Not feeling certain where vegetation might be found again farther on, we made a late start for the sake of the camels. We noticed, to our relief, after a march of a couple of miles under the coastal cliffs, that the patches of reed-beds grew wider. Next a few tamarisks, some alive, some dead, appeared on isolated sand-cones to the south. After three miles of march we also came upon thorny scrub, and half a mile farther on the surface of the sandy soil showed signs of moisture. I had a well dug near a reed-covered little sand hillock; it yielded plentiful water at a depth of only four feet, but it was very salt, probably owing to a hard crust of *shōr* which was struck there. As it was from hunger far more than from thirst that the camels were suffering, and as there was still an ample reserve of ice for the men, we did not repeat the experiment elsewhere. I now regret this; for perfectly fresh water was subsequently struck by Lāl Singh within a day's march farther up this side of the valley, while at other points more to the east the water again proved brackish. In all probability the degree of salinity in the water of the Bēsh-toghrak valley depends largely upon the nature of the immediately adjacent soil.

Halt at foot
of plateau.

As we found farther on abundance of reeds near the foot of the coastal plateau as well as plenty of the thorny 'Kongurchak' scrub which could be used for fires—we had been running very short of fuel—we decided to halt there. It was clear that in order to reach our appointed rendezvous at Kum-kuduk, which from the mapping of my previous journey I could now locate with approximate certainty to the south-south-east, we should have to face once again the hard salt-crust surface across the eastern arm of the sea, and this at a point where its width was still considerable. It was necessary to let the camels have a rest and a feed before subjecting them to the fatigues entailed by this passage. Nor was some rest after the day's short march unwelcome to us men, who all felt the strain of the exertions and anxieties we had passed through. Our early

⁴ Cf. *Serindia*, ii. pp. 576, 589.