

3. SÖGET-BULAQ.

A. Ruined fortress.

When travelling from Korla to Shindi, in October 1928, I took the road via Sai-cheke at Könche-darya through the narrow mountain valley Söget-bulaq. The reason why I chose this route was that my guide URAYIM (= IBRAHIM) from Shinega informed me that there was a "Kohna-shahr" in the Söget-bulaq valley. After having proceeded 9.5 km. northwards (measured in a straight line) from the southern foot of Quruq-tagh we also reached a ruined fortress on the western side of the valley, where it forms a marked bend and is wider than elsewhere.

The structure is situated on the top of a small but very steep hill, the walls of the fortress following the irregular shape of the hill, Fig. 39.¹ It measures roughly 50×30 m. The walls are built of slabs with mortar. As seen in Pl. XIXa parts of the masonry have fallen down. The walls do not exceed 4 m. in height. The interior makes more the impression of a platform than of an enclosure. There is only one gate, situated in the southern part on a narrow promontory. Here the walls are higher but also thinner. On the eastern side an inlet between two promontories has been closed by a low wall thus forming a lower bastion.

Only a couple of undecorated potsherds were picked up inside the fortress. Below the rampart we found the bronze pendant Pl. 15: 3, in the shape of a very stylized animal representation, a ram, the horns forming the suspension loops. There are pendants among the Ordos bronzes with similar conceptions of the animal.

These meagre finds do not furnish any definite chronological clue. Considering the general situation of the fortress, it is evident that it was constructed to control traffic from North to South or vice-versa, and it was most likely built to block this mountain road from invasions from the north. When traffic on the Silk Road, or more precisely The Road of the Centre, was flourishing it was certainly very necessary to protect this east-westerly route from flank attacks, and in this part especially from the north. The Silk Road here followed the line of watch-towers between Ying-p'an and Korla, a line that is easily reached from the Quruq-tagh mountains. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that the Söget-bulaq fortress was built at the time when the trade along the Silk Road was lively and when the Chinese still feared inroads from the Hsiung-nu.

The Söget-bulaq fortress may also have been constructed to protect one of the roads to the kingdom of Shan, a small state mentioned in the Former Han annals and located in western Quruq-tagh. This explanation, however, is less probable as this kingdom can hardly have been of much consequence. The name Mo-shan mentioned by LI TAO-YÜAN probably refers to the same territory.

¹ The contours on the plan are not measured and the intervals are thus very approximate; they do not reach the foot of the hill.