

had probably within historical times receded considerably to the north of the position occupied by the ruins.

A small stream known as Jahan-sai, which had once been used to irrigate the area, still passes within a few miles of the ruins. Near its banks the people of Abdal on the Tarim had established a small colony, where they could cultivate wheat without abandoning their life as fishermen on the river. They had no habitations there at the time, but in the narrow jungle belt by the river our camels and ponies could find such grazing as dry reeds, dead leaves of wild poplars and thorny scrub could offer. Thus we were spared for a time the usual anxieties about transport of water. But none of our party is ever likely to forget the misery we endured during those three weeks of incessant hard work from the icy gales which blew almost incessantly. There were days when all my assistants were on the sick list with the exception of my ever alert and bright Chinese secretary, Chiang Ssü-yeh.

My first view of the site was obtained from the top of a completely ruined mound showing solid masonry of sun-dried bricks. As a tunnel dug into it by 'treasure-seekers' showed, it undoubtedly marked the remains of a Buddhist Stupa or relic tower. Its top commanded an excellent view of other ruins which, rising over the wide level flat of gravel eastwards, looked like low islands on an inland sea. The old fort of which Tokhta Akhun, my hardy Loplik guide, had spoken as the principal ruin of the site, looked quite imposing from afar (Fig. 52). But when I had approached it and was eagerly clambering over the badly breached walls of its west face I was struck at once by their inferior construction as suggesting a comparatively late date.