

ship was aware of the exact position of this famous 'Jade Gate'.

Nor could I get any information about any ruins likely to mark the route leading to it in the course of the enquiries I had made at Charkhlik and Abdal. I knew, however, from a brief account which Monsieur C.-E. Bonin, of the French Diplomatic Service, had published of his unsuccessful attempt in 1899 to follow the desert route from Tun-huang to Charkhlik, that he had passed some ruined watch-towers and even remains of a wall running along them before he had to turn back from some marshes met west of the Khara-nor lake. M. Bonin's passing notice suggested the probable antiquity of those ruins, but in the absence of any map or route sketch it could not help to locate them.

Fortunately observant old Mulla of Abdal, the true modern pioneer of the route, had told me that I might come across the first 'Pao-t'ais', as he called them—the term usually applied to small towers serving as signposts on Chinese roads—on the first march after emerging from that maze of high clay terraces or Mesas. My hope was not disappointed. We were moving that evening of March 7 across a bare gravel plateau when a small mound, about a mile off the caravan track we were following, attracted my attention. On reaching it I found to my joy that it was a relatively well-preserved watch-tower, solidly built with bricks of hard sun-dried clay and some twenty-three feet high.

When I saw the familiar layers of tamarisk branches inserted at regular intervals between the courses, there could be no doubt about the great antiquity of this watch-tower. It rose in an easily defended position on the very