

On my subsequent journey to Korla leading through the desert north-westward I was able to explore the remains of an ancient line of watch-stations extending for over a hundred miles along the foot of the Kuruk-tagh. In these watch-towers (Fig. 123), some of them remarkably massive, it was easy to recognize the same characteristic features of construction with which I had become so familiar in the course of my explorations along the ancient Chinese *Limes* of Kansu. The towers obviously dated back to the time, about 100 B.C., when the Emperor Wu-ti caused the route leading from Tun-huang towards Lou-lan to be protected by his wall and line of watch-stations.

From the great height of these towers and the distances between them, as well as from other indications, it could safely be inferred that they were primarily intended for the transmission of fire-signals. The importance of this ancient highroad must have been greatly reduced after the extension of Chinese control to the north of the T'ien-shan had opened the route *via* Hami and after the route *via* Lou-lan had been abandoned. But the finds of coins, torn Chinese documents on paper, and the like, made among refuse-heaps near the towers, showed that the line marked by these towers was still frequented in T'ang times.

The need of signalling arrangements must have specially made itself felt here in Han times; for it was mainly from this north-eastern corner of the Tarim basin which holds the oasis of Korla that those Hun raids must have proceeded which we know from the annals of both the Former and Later Han dynasties to have more than once threatened the Chinese hold upon Lou-lan and the security of the route leading through it. Korla marks the eastern end of the line