

historical past. But opportunities for actual exploration were restricted for a variety of reasons; so my account of this journey may be brief.

Continued occupation coupled with intensive irrigation has allowed but few structural remains to survive within the smaller oases, while on the desert ground around or between them there was not enough drift-sand to aid in the preservation of antiques. Thus at the oasis of Bugur, five marches to the west of Korla, where I believe the ancient Lun-t'ai, mentioned in the Former Han Annals as the seat of the Chinese Protector General of the whole Tarim basin, to have been situated, no ancient ruins whatever could be traced. But in the clayey desert beyond it, towards Kucha, I found a series of massive watch-towers along the caravan route clearly proving that the ancient Chinese highroad must have followed this identical line.

At Kucha the highroad reaches an oasis which after Kashgar is the largest at the south foot of the T'ien-shan. Apart from the size of the cultivated area and its economic resources which the irrigation facilities derived from two considerable rivers assure, Kucha enjoys also the advantage of a geographical position particularly favourable for trade; for the highroad is joined here by routes leading north across the mountains to rich tracts of Dzungaria, while to the south Khotan can be directly reached by the route that crosses the Taklamakan desert along the bed of the Khotan river. All this accounts for the importance, political as well as cultural, that has attached to the territory throughout historical times. This importance is reflected by numerous and impressive remains of temples and cave-shrines which illustrate the flourishing conditions of Buddhist religious