

in the desert west of Tun-huang fully supported this opinion.

But whatever the origin and purpose of this peculiar constructive feature may be, I felt certain that the old fastness was the same which Hsüan-tsang had seen or heard of. The way in which he records the ancient legend then clinging to it leaves no doubt about its having become ruined long before his own time. The local tradition he had heard ascribed the stronghold to the Han times, the earliest period of Chinese influence in the Tarim Basin; and I felt not a little pleased to think that here, at the very first point where I had touched his Central-Asian route, archaeological evidence on the spot confirmed afresh the often-proved trustworthiness of my Chinese patron-saint. But how striking, too, was the evidence afforded by the ruins for the dryness of the climate which prevails in these mountains, and which alone could account for their survival in so exposed a position from so early a date!

When, after making a rapid plan of the ruins, we had safely descended and were continuing our march in the failing light, I felt more than ever impressed by the natural strength of the Kiz-kurghan position. The narrow track leading by the left bank of the river was completely commanded by rock walls; these towered so sheer above it that some contrivance of ropes would have enabled the defenders to gain direct access to the river water. Close investment of the fastness was impossible either from the river or the winding gloomy gorge of the Kiz-kurghan Jilga, forming a huge natural fosse with precipitous rock scarps on both sides hundreds of feet high.

Proceeding down the gradually widening defile of the Tash-kurghan river, I passed old terraced fields with traces of canals from the side valley of Kara Jilga, and was thus able to realize that Kiz-kurghan had once guarded not only the great route from the Pamirs but also the old western limits of Sarikol cultivation. At Pising, where we halted for the night near two mud-built huts and some felt tents permanently tenanted by Sarikolis, I found fields tilled quite recently. The complaint here as at Dafdar, a small settlement of Wakhan immigrants across the river, was