

distinctly suggested an origin from prehistoric occupation. The ancient refuse mixed with the stones was being dug for manuring, and this might have accounted for the disappearance of other mounds.

Was it possibly this stone material, evidently brought from a distance, which had induced the Chinese of the T'ang times to designate the place—then occupied by a garrison, three marches south of Lop-nor, and by its position on the route to Charchan clearly corresponding to Charklik—as 'the Stone Town'? The T'ang Annals distinctly place there the capital of the Lou-lan or Shan-shan of the Han period, at least from 77 B.C. onwards. Chinese administration still retains a keen eye for matters of military geography. It was thus scarcely surprising to find that Charklik, as a point of strategic importance where a well-known route from Tsaidam and Tibet joins the roads to Khotan, Kara-shahr, and Tun-huang, had in recent years been held important enough for a small Chinese garrison. The neat little fort, with walls of stamped clay erected some ten years before, now stood empty, greatly to the relief of the people of Charklik, for whom the presence of a garrison of a hundred men had meant additional fiscal obligations. But the appearance on the scene some years after of a body of Tungan rebels, who had fled from Hsining to Tsaidam, and were thence troubling the Mongols grazing in the mountains south of Charklik, well illustrated the wisdom of Chinese precaution.

In spite of all the harassing work my three days at Charklik seemed cheerful. Perfectly calm weather had set in with bright sunlight, and for most of the time I could see the mountains south quite clearly. In addition to all that was needed in the way of men and supplies for the desert expedition to my immediate goals, I had gathered very welcome information from a trader about the route across the desert to Tun-huang, and had laid in accordingly stores of supplies, fodder, and even uncoined silver, in anticipation of my move to that new field. With my depot established at Abdal I should be independent of Charklik and free to strike eastwards whenever my tasks about Lop-nor would allow.