

river bed now shown on the map was, in fact, not mapped until two months later.

Progress over the flat expanse of gravel was easy, but also strangely monotonous. For nearly ten miles the only features to be noticed were two or three shallow depressions covered with reed-beds which the route crossed. If my attention was kept fully alert on this march it was due now to expectations of an archaeological nature. From the brief account which M. C.-E. Bonin, of the French Diplomatic Service, had published of a journey made in 1899 right across China, I knew that he had attempted to follow the desert route from Tun-huang to Lop-nor. He had been obliged to turn back owing to the want of reliable guides, or the reluctance of his Chinese escort to proceed farther, apparently after having reached the first marshes west of the Khara-nor. In the course of this unsuccessful attempt he had passed ruined watch-towers, and even observed some remains of a wall running near them. But though the distinguished French traveller had expressed a shrewd guess as to the probable antiquity of these ruins, and even as to their historical importance as proof of an ancient route, his passing notice of them could not help me, in the absence of any map or route sketch, to locate them beforehand. Fortunately I had been able to enquire about them from Mullah of Abdal, the true pioneer of the route, and what that observant old fellow had told gave me hope that I might come across the first 'Pao-t'ais,' as he called them, on this very march leading to Toghrak-bulak.

My hope was not disappointed. It is true, the first tower-like mound which attracted attention when we had covered about thirteen miles of march, lay too far off to the north, and was noticed too late to turn back to it. But the second mound, approached after another couple of miles, proved to my joy an unmistakable and relatively well preserved watch-tower. It rose in a solid mass of brick-work, about fifteen feet square, to a height of some twenty-three feet. About its early age I felt no doubt when I examined its well-made bricks of fairly hard clay, some fourteen by seven inches and four inches thick, and found