

towers was in view, clearly showing where ran the line which was to be guarded. Through my glasses I could see quite distinctly that the nearest towers were all built on small isolated clay ridges, such as rose in numbers from the flat of the marshy basin. Thus the constructors of the line had duly appreciated and used the advantages here offered for a widened outlook.

But to me it was even more curious to notice the striking resemblance which these clay ridges and terraces, generally ranged in rows running north to south, bore to the eroded formations I had met in the dried-up basin east of Besh-toghrak. I could not have wished for a more exact reproduction of the aspect which that old terminal lake bed, and in all probability also the end of the ancient Lop-nor bed about Achchik-kuduk, might have borne at some earlier period. Another interesting illustration of physical conditions long past elsewhere was afforded by the rows of Toghraks which closely lined the lagoons and water-channels visible from afar within the wide marshy area. I thought of the lines of dead Toghraks I had crossed so often in the desert north of the present Lop-nor, and rejoiced at seeing the picture of the physical conditions I had conjectured as prevailing there before desiccation, now so faithfully materialized before my eyes.

My examination of the ruin delayed me while the caravan moved ahead, and as, according to our guide, a long march was before us I had reluctantly to renounce for the time all reconnaissances off the route. This now took us for miles through belts of fine jungle and scrub, filling a succession of big bays which the marshy basin sent south. The track we were following had since the previous day shown numerous cart ruts, old and new, a clear indication that Chinese from Tun-huang were in the habit of using it. The grazing, too, looked inviting. I had been wondering for some time at the utter solitude when at last, after some nine miles of march, I noticed a little group of my men gathered on a reed-covered hillock round two strange-looking figures. These proved to be Chinese herdsmen from Tun-huang, clad in queer, heavily padded rags, looking after some cattle and horses.