

rough, ever-roving customers. Whatever violence and cruel deceit they might be prepared for in the rôle of brigands and rebels, when occasion arose, these Tungans had at least the saving grace of blunt, fearless speech and pride in their local knowledge. When I questioned them with Chiang's help about old 'Pao-t'ais' in these parts, and offered a reward for showing me any, the elder of the men, who claimed main ownership of the flock, after some consultation with his brother, agreed to guide us to a point where we might both obtain a sight of some towers and find water for camping.

So led on by the Tungan we rode quickly ahead, until after another three miles or so he brought us to an isolated clay terrace some forty feet high on the edge of a wide marshy belt stretching away towards the river. I clambered up to the top, and looking south and south-east could count not less than ten towers extending in a line approximately east to west. The yellowish rays of the sinking sun lit them up clearly in spite of the distance. There could be no possible doubt about their marking the alignment of the old wall, and my delight at this success was great. The sturdy ruffian by my side had reason to be satisfied with the reward of silver I gave him on the spot without weighing. As he saw me gazing at the line of towers through my prismatic glasses he without hesitation jerked out the information that this marked 'the old Han road from An-shi to Lop-nor.'

It sounded like a strange confirmation of the surmise I had nursed in my own mind for some time past. But I had no means yet to decide whether the antiquarian hint thrown out from this rough mouthpiece was correct, and still less whether the Tungan's statement was derived from a shrewd guess or the echo of a distant tradition. He did not claim to have been much farther west along this 'old Han road.' But an elder brother of his, now trading about Hsi-ning-fu, had taken a strange 'Kuan' or official along it to Lop-nor some seventeen years before. Judging from the date indicated, I strongly suspect that this adventurous traveller was the ill-fated M. Martin. As we know from M. Grenard's account of the Dutreuil de Rhins expedition,