

crosswise in alternate layers. Intermixed with them was a slight sprinkling of coarse sand and gravel; but whether this was done on purpose, or merely a result of the layers having caught and retained the sand and small pebbles driven against them by exceptional gales, it was difficult to determine. Toghrak sticks driven vertically through the fascines were certainly intended to secure them when first stacked.

No strengthening of this sort was any longer needed; for through the action of the salts once contained in them and in the soil the reeds had acquired a quasi-petrified appearance and considerable consistency, though each reed, when detached, still showed flexible fibres. The regularity with which these strange stacks of antique Kumush were laid out near the watch-towers, usually at sixteen or seventeen yards' distance from each other, made me think at first of their having served for some defensive purpose, like a zariba. With such a supposition it would have been possible to reconcile, perhaps, the evident fact that some of them had been burned, their position being marked by plentiful calcined fragments (Fig. 174, 14). But when I found subsequently that exactly similar structures were irregularly disposed over narrow ridges, where the ground near the towers was much cut up by ravines or otherwise restricted, this idea had to be abandoned.

The true explanation presented itself when I noticed similar though not so accurately measured bundles of Toghrak branches heaped up in the same fashion near the south-west extension of the *Limes*, where such timber abounded and had been largely used in the wall construction. I then remembered that the dimensions of the neatly laid bundles, whether of reeds or branches, corresponded exactly to those of the fascines used in building the wall, and it dawned upon me that these queer mounds were nothing but stacks of the identical fascines kept ready at the posts for any urgent repairs in the wall. Thus breaches made in it could be quickly closed without having to collect and carry the required materials over a considerable distance. They at once reminded me then of the stacks of wooden sleepers seen neatly piled up at a