

645 and 664 A.D. A fitting tribute this to the memory of the pious traveller; for I felt quite sure at the time that my patron saint on his return journey must have passed within a few yards of the débris-covered hillock.

But what was the reason for this strange survival of worship at a site which must then for long centuries have been in ruins? The explanation was not far to seek. A number of considerations, as already stated, had gradually led me to the conclusion that the fort and the débris-strewn mound of T. XIV. marked the position of the 'Jade Gate' during the first two centuries A.D. When the danger of raids disappeared with the migration of the Huns westwards, and later on Chinese control over the Tarim Basin was lost for centuries, the whole line of the *Limes* west of Tun-huang was abandoned to the wilderness. But occasional caravans, as we know from Fa-hsien's travels, still continued to use the desert route, and, no doubt, wandering herdsmen and hunters still visited the grazing along the lakes and marshes of the terminal course of the Su-lo Ho.

So local worship had a chance of proving once more its tenacity. It clung to the site where those leaving the 'Jade Gate' of the 'Great Wall' for the difficult desert journey had of old been accustomed to put up ex-votos at the border shrine and pray for a safe return, just as Chinese travellers still do at Chia-yü-kuan, the modern equivalent of the 'Jade Gate.' What more conclusive proof of that tradition having survived to the present day could I have wished for than that presented by a small modern shrine which lay in ruins only a little over a hundred yards to the west of the hillock explored? The coarsely made clay images were all broken, perhaps the act of some truculent Tungans, and the roof and all woodwork had disappeared. But there was evidence of herdsmen still offering prayers at the ruin, and my own labourers from superstitious fear could not be induced to dig even near it. I was not altogether sorry for this, since the chance of finding anything of interest under the modern ruin seemed remote, and because this continued veneration was in itself an interesting archaeological asset.