

On the evening of May 4th I arrived at a ridge tapering away as usual at its end into a line of isolated terraces. The fact that both the end of the ridge and the last outlying terrace were occupied by towers was bound to attract my attention. As the distance between them was only about two miles, the ruined tower to the east and within the line (T. VI. B) could not have been intended for a mere signalling-post. So the thought suggested itself of some controlling main station. The plentiful débris adjoining the tower seemed to indicate quarters somewhat larger than usual, and numerous refuse layers scattered over the gravel slopes near by furnished proof of prolonged occupation (Fig. 182).

The position, though not more than a hundred feet above the basin, seemed well chosen for a sort of *point d'appui* on this flank. It commanded a complete view of the southern and south-eastern shore of the lake basin, up to the foot of the hill chain covered with high dunes which was seen to come from the direction of Nan-hu and to bend round to the north-west. It was clear that, as any attack from the west and the Lop-nor route would have to keep between the shore of the marshy basin and the impassable high sands, the line of watch-posts thrown out almost to within sight of the latter and controlled from this station would effectively prevent the main *Limes* being outflanked by raiders.

That evening we made an experimental scraping of the gravel-strewn slope at a point where a few wooden posts protruded some twenty yards north of the tower, and soon brought to light about two-score inscribed Chinese tablets of the usual shape. Though many of them had their surface decayed through exposure, the find was encouraging. Next morning I sent Chiang back from camp to continue the search while I had to look after the sinking of a well. When I rejoined him an hour later I found him triumphantly guarding for me nearly a hundred fresh Chinese records on wood, almost all complete, and in spite of slight damage from moisture quite legible. It was a delightful surprise, and my satisfaction grew still further when I ascertained that the numerous dated pieces all