

'Dragon  
Town' re-  
presented in  
Mesa area.

The identification of this Mesa area with the 'Town of the Dragon' is proved both by the situation which the already-quoted passage indicates for it, relative to Shan-shan and the marshes receiving the 'waters of the Ho', and by the description of the 'Town of the Dragon' given in the text immediately following. In regard to the first I may point out that if 'the water accumulates in the north-east of Shan-shan and in the south-west of the Town of the Dragon', the latter must necessarily be situated to the north-east of Shan-shan, i.e. the Charkhlik-Mīrān tract. Now a glance at even the rough, small-scale sketch-map accompanying my above-quoted paper and illustrating my explorations of 1913-15 is enough to show that this is exactly the bearing from the Charkhlik-Mīrān tract to the Mesa belt stretching north-east of Lou-lan. It is along the shore of the ancient salt-encrusted lake-bed, stretching thence south-westwards to the vicinity of the Chainut-köl lagoons, that the terminations of the various old river-beds representing branches of the Kuruk-daryā could be traced by us, and on this ground must be placed the terminal marshes referred to by Li Tao-yüan.

Description  
of 'Dragon  
Town'.

The description given of the 'Town of the Dragon' in the immediately succeeding passage is equally convincing. 'The Town of the Dragon is the site of the town in which at one time resided Chiang Lai 姜賴. This was a great kingdom of the Hu. An overflow of the P'u-ch'ang lake covered up the capital of this kingdom. The foundations [of this town] are still preserved; they are very extensive. If at sunrise one starts from the western gate one arrives at sunset at the eastern gate. At the scarped foot of this town a canal had been made. On the line which has survived of it, the wind blowing has gradually produced the form of a dragon, which with its face turned westwards regards the lake. It is from this that the name of the Town of the Dragon is derived.'<sup>36</sup>

Origin of  
name  
'Dragon  
Town'.

We see here quite plainly that the name 'Town of the Dragon' was borne not by the remains of a real town, but by a striking natural formation, that great array of high Mesas already referred to, which in ancient times must have presented themselves to the imagination of wayfarers—just as they did to ours when we passed here in February, 1914, the first travellers for many centuries through this desolate wilderness of clay and salt—like the walls and mansions of some huge ruined city. The very extent of it given in the description, a long day's journey from one city gate to the other, which otherwise might seem like a fanciful exaggeration, fully confirms our identification. For it took us a long day's march on February 27, 1914, to pass through that portion of the Mesa belt which the ancient Chinese route, as then correctly traced by me, traverses.<sup>37</sup> I am unable to decide to which particular clay ridge, if any, the explanation given of the origin of the name 'Dragon Town' referred. But it is curious to note in it what looks like a correct comprehension of the conspicuous part played by wind-erosion on this ground.

Great salt  
waste de-  
scribed.

What follows in Li Tao-yüan's notice about the physical characteristics of the region adjoining the 'Town of the Dragon' confirms our belief in the accurate local knowledge possessed by the authority from which he borrowed his statements of Lou-lan topography. 'This region has an extent of a thousand li; it is entirely formed of salt, but of salt in a hard and solid state. The travellers who pass through it spread pieces of felt for all their domestic animals in order to make them sleep on these. If one digs beneath the soil, one finds blocks of salt, big as large cushions, which are piled up one above the other in regular fashion. [In this country there are] as it were mists which rise and clouds which float, and rarely does one make out the stars and the sun. Little is found there of living animals and plenty of demons and strange beings.'

shore of the great dried-up salt sea; see *Desert Cathay*, i. pp. 522 sqq. The identification with the 'Town of the Dragon', there proposed, has been proved by the explorations of my third journey to be erroneous. For another and larger area covered with such high clay terraces, marking an

ancient lake-bed of the Su-lo Ho, further east, see *ibid.*, pp. 533 sqq.

<sup>36</sup> See Chavannes, *T'oung-pao*, 1905, p. 571.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *Third Journey of Exploration*, G.J. xlviii, p. 127.