

portion of the ancient Chinese *Limes*, the true end of the great 'Chinese Wall' once guarding the confines of the empire, was proved by my explorations to have been extended practically along the whole length of this last, or riverine, section of the Lop-Tun-huang route. These explorations and surveys, owing to the abundant archaeological results which they yielded, will claim a detailed account in this and subsequent chapters. Before, however, I proceed to this, it will be convenient first to review succinctly the data we possess for the historical topography of the whole route.

Route skirts  
ancient  
Chinese  
Limes.

## SECTION II.—CHINESE RECORDS OF THE LOP DESERT ROUTE

When dealing above in Chapter IX with the Chinese historical records concerning the Lop region, I have had occasion to examine in detail the main topographical data in the often-discussed story of the earliest expansion of Chinese trade and power into the Tārīm Basin.<sup>1</sup> I have shown there how great was the part played in it by the route, then newly opened, which led from the Chinese advanced base at Tun-huang westwards to the territory of Lou-lan adjoining Lop-nōr. I do not intend to recapitulate here the evidence proving that the traffic, commercial as well as military, which passed into the Tārīm Basin after the events following Chang Ch'ien's famous mission (*circa* 136-123 B. C.), must have followed mainly the route leading north of the dried-up Lop lake-bed to that now wholly waterless portion of the Lop territory marked by the Lou-lan sites. Nor can I describe here the difficult but successful explorations starting from these sites which, in the winter of 1914, enabled me to trace this route right through to the point where its line must have joined the present desert route from Lop to Tun-huang. The brief preliminary account of them given elsewhere will at present suffice for purposes of reference.<sup>2</sup> With the limitation thus implied as regards the earliest period, I propose briefly to review here whatever data we can glean from sources at present accessible that bear on the historical topography of the route described in the preceding section.

Earliest  
history of  
route.

When dealing above with the notices furnished by the Former Han Annals about Shan-shan, or Lou-lan, I have already had occasion to discuss in detail the important, if scanty, indications they supply as to the main route leading to it from Tun-huang. I have shown there that, with the object of gaining the most direct access to the great northern string of oases forming, then as now, the easiest military and trade road from east to west through the Tārīm Basin, the Chinese first laid their main route to the north-eastern portion of the then habitable Lop territory, and made the ground marked by the remains of the Lou-lan sites as it were their bridge-head beyond the ancient Lop lake-bed.<sup>3</sup> This route, after first skirting the north-eastern shores of this great salt-encrusted waste, crossed its northern extension where it is narrowest. The physical difficulties encountered were very serious. But they were more than compensated by the saving of a great *détour* south, and by the advantage of bringing the Chinese troops and traders to cultivated ground with all its facilities in the way of supplies, etc., far sooner than it could have been reached by the route leading along the southern shore of the ancient Lop sea. A reference to the general map will show that from Bēsh-toghrak the Lou-lan Site (L.A.) is close on 70 miles nearer than Mīrān.

Direct line  
leading  
through  
Lou-lan.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. above, pp. 335 sqq.

<sup>2</sup> See *Third Journey of Exploration*, *Geogr. Journal*, 1916, xlviii. pp. 124 sqq.

<sup>3</sup> For the position and character of the ruined *castrum* L.E. to the north-east of the Lou-lan Site, which I discovered in 1914 and which represents the earliest Chinese *point d'appui* on the Lou-lan side, cf. *Geogr. Journal*, xlviii. p. 124. In the rough provisional sketch-map attached to this paper the

position of this *castrum* is marked approximately below the D of the entry DESERT.

Reference may conveniently be made to this sketch-map also for the ancient route leading eastwards to Bēsh-toghrak. But, besides the much reduced scale, the fact should be kept in view that the sketch was compiled for provisional use only, and before the results of astronomical and triangulation observations could be computed.