

would offer a very convenient halting-place for caravans following the protected border line. My description of this locality further on will show that I found here traces of what seems to have been a large entrenched camp, probably dating back to the time when the route and the line of wall guarding it up to this point were first established.¹⁷ It is certain that there is no place on the route between the Jade Gate (T. XIV) and Bēsh-toghruk which would offer similar advantages for a half-way halting-place.

The 'Chü-lu granary', which is likely to have been one of the early 'resting stations' established soon after the Lou-lan route was first opened, may with some probability be located at Bēsh-toghruk. There is no other site likely to have offered such advantages as this place, which nowadays, too, has more grazing than any other west of the Limes. Being just beyond a difficult stage of the route, Bēsh-toghruk would be particularly suited for an advanced base of supply. But I could trace no remains to give archaeological support to the identification, and considering the character of the ground, with subsoil water near the surface and a good deal of *shōr* in the soil, no structures of mud bricks or mere clay would have had much chance of leaving visible traces here after many centuries of abandonment. No one who, like myself, has seen the wretched mud hovels which serve as Chinese 'inns' and guards' quarters on the desert route from An-hsi to Hāmi, the modern pendant of the Lou-lan route, could feel any doubt about their complete disappearance in the course of a thousand years or even less after they were abandoned. And yet they somehow suffice for a traffic which at times may not be much less than that seen by the Lou-lan route in its heyday.

The Chü-lu granary.

As regards the position of *Sha-hsi* well, we are furnished with a very helpful indication by the statement that the route there turned to the north-west. This, read in the light which my explorations of 1914 have thrown upon the line followed by the ancient Lou-lan route, takes us clearly somewhere near the point where it turns the last south-western offshoot of the low Kuruk-tāgh range, overlooking the Bēsh-toghruk valley from the north. This point approximately corresponds to 91° 32' long. 40° 23' lat. in Map No. 67. From there the line of the ancient route, as I have traced it, makes a sharp turn to the north-west and follows this bearing, along the shore of the dried-up Lop sea, till it reaches the point where its salt-encrusted bed and the 'White Dragon Mounds' flanking it are traversed.¹⁸ It was within about twelve miles to the north-east from this point that, when tracking in 1914 the line of the ancient route in the opposite direction, I came upon the first living vegetation at the foot of the clay cliffs lining the eastern inlet of the ancient sea-bed, north-west of Kum-kuduk.¹⁹ Three miles or so further on we succeeded in digging a well on a strip of ground where the soil became sandy. Though the water proved too salt even for the camels, its presence suggests that in early times, when desiccation had not yet proceeded so far, a 'resting station' with drinkable water, corresponding to the 'Sha-hsi well' of the *Wei lio*, might have existed somewhere near this place at the western end of the Bēsh-toghruk valley.²⁰

Position of Sha-hsi well.

¹⁷ Cf. below, chap. xvii. sec. i. The usual place where travellers halt at present is Toghrak-bulak, my Camp 154, on the bank of the Su-lo Ho, about three miles to the north-west. But here the grazing is very scanty, and, owing to the barren gravel soil of the adjoining plateaus, there could not have been enough of it in the days when much traffic passed along the route.

¹⁸ Cf. *Third Journey of Exploration*, *Geogr. Journal*, xlviii. p. 129. The provisional sketch-map attached to that paper will help to illustrate the change of direction which the ancient route line makes from the above point north-west of Kum-kuduk.

The indication in Map No. 67. A. 2; B. 3 of a continuous chain of low hills running north-west from that point has proved erroneous. In reality the heights, sighted in 1907 from great distances, were found on closer survey to belong to the western ends of separate parallel ranges of the Kuruk-tāgh, where they drop down towards the eastern shore of the great dried-up sea basin.

¹⁹ For a view of this ground by the ancient shore line, see Fig. 13 of my paper, *loc. cit.*

²⁰ Is it possible that a characteristic feature of the ground here suggested the designation *Sha-hsi* 沙西 for this station? It may literally be interpreted to mean 'the west [end] of the