

facilitated my journey to Tun-huang and, subsequently, in the mountains beyond, even though, being confined to the actual line of route, it gave no indication either of the true terminal course of the Su-lo Ho or of the abundant remains of the ancient Chinese Limes to be found along its eastern section.

Revival of
traffic on
desert
route.

In 1899 M. C.-E. Bonin, of the French Diplomatic Service, made an attempt, to be referred to again presently, to follow the route through from Tun-huang. It did not succeed beyond the first few marches, but enabled him correctly to recognize the character and importance of the remains last mentioned. In the winter of 1905-6 Colonel Bruce, accompanied by Captain Layard and Surveyor Lāl Singh, followed the route right through from Abdal to Tun-huang, and made a record of his party's trying experiences on this desert crossing.²⁰ Finally, starting a couple of weeks after them, Professor E. Huntington proceeded by the same track as far as Kōshe-langza, and thence made that plucky and memorable march northward which carried him right across the great crumpled-up salt waste of the ancient Lop sea to the foot of the Kuruk-tāgh, and which was rewarded by plenty of important geographical observations.²¹ I have already had occasion elsewhere to record the steadily increasing use which, as I found in 1907, was being made of the old Lop-Tun-huang route for commercial traffic between Kan-su and Khotan,²² and I may add here that the experience of my journey in 1914 showed this revival of the old trade route still continuing.

SECTION IV.—FIRST REMAINS OF THE OLD CHINESE LIMES

Third
section
of route to
Tun-huang.

From this review of the historical notices of the old Lop desert route I may now return to an account of the journey which brought me over its third and remaining section to the oasis of Tun-huang and Sha-chou. My account may be brief; for subsequent archaeological explorations brought me back to this section for more than five weeks' work, and the record of them will also be the best place for discussing the topography of the ground. My first rapid passage did not allow adequate time to examine it in any detail. Most of the topographical features shown by Maps Nos. 74, 78 along this section of the route were, in fact, not mapped until that later occasion.¹

M. Bonin's
notice of
ruins.

The flat gravel expanse to which, on March 7, the first few miles of our march beyond the ancient terminal basin had brought us (Map No. 74. A. 3) revealed none of those interesting details of the ground, and progress over it for close on ten miles was both easy and strangely monotonous. But there were expectations of archaeological discovery to keep me fully alert from the start on this new section of the route. From the brief account which M. C.-E. Bonin had published of a journey made right across China,² I knew that, after reaching Tun-huang in the autumn of 1899, he had attempted to follow the route through the desert to Lop. Owing to the want of reliable guides, or the reluctance of his Chinese escort to proceed further, he had been obliged to turn back to Tun-huang and travel by the mountain route, apparently after having reached the first marshes west of the Khara-nōr. In the course of this unsuccessful attempt he had passed ruined watch-towers, which recalled to him the *P'ao-t'ais* seen along the imperial highway in Kan-su, and also correctly observed some remains of a wall running near them. The distinguished French traveller had shrewdly guessed the probable antiquity of these ruins and even their historical

²⁰ Cf. Bruce, *In the Footsteps of Marco Polo*, pp. 173 sqq.

²¹ See Huntington, *Pulse of Asia*, pp. 248 sqq.

²² Cf. *Desert Cathay*, i. pp. 345, 351; ii. p. 99. It may be noted here as a point of quasi-historical interest that caravans to and from Khotan, owned by Pathān traders from the Indian N.W. Frontier, are accustomed to follow the

desert route regularly each winter.

¹ The results of these surveys along the ancient Chinese Limes are shown in fuller detail by the Map in Pl. 33 on the scale of 3 miles to 1 inch.

² Cf. Bonin, *Voyage de Pékin au Turkestan Russe*, in *La Géographie*, 1901, p. 173.