

Ruined
tower,
T. xxv.

so clearly marked as to make their recent abandonment obvious, and with this the structure of the tower, T. xxv (Fig. 152, Plate 34), fully agreed. It was built on a clay ridge, rising about sixteen feet above the depression on the north, and proved both massive and remarkably well preserved. Measuring twenty-six feet square at the base, it rose to a height of about twenty feet. Its top bore a brick parapet and within this a roofless cella, open to the south, but provided with the peculiar masking wall which usually serves to screen the street entrances in modern Chinese temples or mansions. The cella walls, some ten feet high, still retained a good deal of plastering. It was impossible to examine this superstructure more closely, because the ladder-like stairs which once led up to it on the west side, as shown by the holes in the masonry left for beams, had disappeared.

Brickwork
of later date.

A variety of details proved that the tower could not be of an early date. The bricks were much smaller than those in the towers which had been examined along the ancient wall to the west, measuring only 12 by 6 inches, with a thickness of two inches. The characteristic thin layers of reeds between courses at regular intervals were not to be found here. But quite as significant was the observation that the cella walls and parapet had alternate courses of bricks set horizontally and vertically, i. e. on edge, a mode of construction that I never met on Chinese soil except in modern or mediaeval buildings. For traces of the ancient wall I searched in vain; but to the south a low earth rampart about 100 feet square adjoined the tower and evidently marked an enclosure. From what I saw later on of similar towers at different points outside the Tun-huang oasis, I conclude that T. xxv was a structure of somewhat recent origin, intended to serve as a place of observation and temporary refuge for a small outlying settlement.

Search for
Limes line.

In the absence of any more towers I felt puzzled as to the best way of continuing the search for the wall, but decided to march on further east, where in any case we could expect to strike the cart track leading north towards Hāmi, and thus secure guidance to Roborovsky's ruins. When, after a march of about four miles, the plane-table was fixed on one of the few isolated clay terraces rising above the scrubby plain, I scanned the horizon in vain for any tower or other guiding mark. But the Surveyor's keen eyes noticed animals grazing in the distance, and after a couple of miles' ride eastwards we came upon a large flock of sheep, cows, camels, and ponies guarded by two armed Tungans, their owners.

Guidance of
Tungan
nomads.

It proved a very fortunate encounter. The nomads looked rough, and their truculent ways could scarcely have roused confidence in solitary wayfarers; but they were well acquainted with the riverine grazing-grounds on the lower Su-lo Ho, and, in contrast with the secretive reticence of the settled Chinese, had the saving grace of pride in their local knowledge. When questioned about 'old P'ao-t'ais' and offered a reward, the elder of the Tungans agreed to guide us to a point where water for camping might be found and a sight of some towers obtained. He proved true to his promise. A ride of another three miles or so to the north-east under his guidance brought us to an isolated clay terrace some forty feet high, on the edge of a wide marshy belt stretching away to the river. He called the spot Ch'ing-shui-k'êng-tzū (see Map No. 81. A. 2). Once on the top, he pointed to the south and south-east, and there I could sight through my glasses no less than ten towers extending in a line approximately east to west. In spite of their ruined state and the distance, which subsequently proved to be from five to ten miles, they were lit up clearly on the horizon by the yellowish rays of the sinking sun. I could not feel any doubt that they marked the alignment of the old wall for which I was searching, and the sturdy ruffian by my side had reason to be satisfied with the reward in silver I there and then gave him.

Towers
marking
'old Han
road'.

I was still gazing at the line of towers through my prismatic glasses when, without any hesitation or questioning, he jerked out the information that they marked 'the old Han road from An-hsi to Lop-nōr'. It seemed like a strange confirmation of the conjecture to which M. Bonin had