

being represented by the site of Mīrān, and I-hsün, with its Chinese military colony, by the present Charkhlik.

The territory was connected with Tun-huang and the westernmost part of the Chinese marches within the 'Great Wall' by two lines of communication, as at the present day. The longer, and probably less frequented, route led along the northernmost range of the Āltin-tāgh. The other passed along the desert depression beyond the westernmost point of the Tun-huang *Limes* (near the 'Jade Gate') by the present Tun-huang-Charkhlik track, and thus reached the easternmost extension of the ancient dry salt-encrusted lake-bed of Lop-nōr, near the wells now known as Kum-kuduk. From this point the route bifurcated, one branch leading, as now, south-westwards along the southern shore of the ancient 'Salt Marsh' to Yü-ni (Mīrān) and I-hsün (Charkhlik), and thence on towards Khotan.

Ancient routes between Tun-huang and Lou-lan.

The other branch turned in a direction approximately west-north-west, passed the north-eastern extension of the dry 'Salt Marsh', and after crossing a great stretch of ground wholly devoid of water reached the old terminal course of the Konche-daryā, now known as the Kuruk-daryā ('the Dry River'). There the ruins of the Lou-lan Site attest the existence of a settlement which must have derived importance from the passage through it of the most direct route between China and the northern oases of the Tārīm Basin. Documentary evidence found at these ruins proves that the site was occupied by a Chinese military colony in the third and fourth centuries A.D., and that the ancient name of *Lou-lan* was applied to it. From this point the northern branch of the Tun-huang-Lop route, corresponding to 'the route of the Centre' of the *Wei lio*, continued in a north-westerly direction along the Kuruk-daryā and further on by the bed of the Konche-daryā, which still carries water. There a line of ancient watch-towers, first noticed by Dr. Hedin in 1896,²⁸ still marks this ancient high road leading to the long string of oases on the north edge of the Tārīm Basin.

Ancient route past Lou-lan Site to Konche-daryā.

From a variety of considerations connected with the main trend of Chinese political and commercial expansion westwards,²⁹ it may be safely concluded that the preponderating portion of the traffic which served it or resulted from it proceeded by this 'route of the Centre' as the most direct line connecting the 'Western Regions' with China. For the interests concerned in this traffic, the ground along the Kuruk-daryā, including the old station of the Lou-lan Site, certainly represented the most important part of Lop. This, perhaps, helps to explain the survival of the earlier designation of *Lou-lan*. But putting aside this question of traffic, the economic and political centre of Lop is clearly shown by the *Ch'ien Han shu*, as well as all later Chinese records, to have lain south, in the present Charkhlik tract. If this was the case after 77 B.C. and right through the period during which the 'route of the Centre', via the Lou-lan Site, was the chief channel for trade and political and military missions, the same condition of things is even more likely to have prevailed earlier, before the development of relations between China and the West had forced upon Lou-lan or Lop the rôle of an important link in a great artery of traffic.

Predominant importance of 'Route of Centre'.

²⁸ Cf. Hedin, *Reisen in Z.-A.*, pp. 75 sq. The account given of the construction of these towers, with layers of reeds between the courses of sun-dried bricks, clearly proves their early origin and closely recalls that observed in the towers of the Tun-huang Limes. Yet their good preservation led Hedin to attribute to them an age of only some centuries. [I made a careful survey of this line of watch-towers in March, 1915, and its results have fully confirmed the early date above assumed for its construction; cf. *Geogr. Journal*, 1916, xlviii, p. 208].

²⁹ One of the most striking of these indications is furnished by the position of *Wu-lei*, where the 'Protector-General of the Western Regions' during the Former Han period had his seat; cf. Wylie, *J. Anthropol. Inst.*, xi, p. 95. *Wu-lei* lay certainly between Kuchā and Korla, either at Chādir (cf. Herrmann, *Seidenstrassen*, p. 38), Yangi-hisār, or Bugur, and as all three are small oases, the choice of this position for the chief representative of Chinese power in the Tārīm Basin is only explained by the importance attaching to the high road leading through them.