

The 'Three
Ridges'
Sands.

at the northern extremity of the *San-lung* ('Three Ridges') [desert of] sand.' With the knowledge of the ground which my explorations have furnished, I feel assured that by this must be meant that part of the route which lies immediately to the east of Bēsh-toghrak and has been described above as the end of its second section. A reference to Maps No. 74 and 70 will show that the route, where it passes through the old terminal basin of the Su-lo Ho, in some places skirts round, and in others actually crosses, the northernmost off-shoots of the high range of dunes which flanks the Bēsh-toghrak valley all along on the south. This range represents, as it were, only the foot-hills of successive ranges of drift-sand which extend upwards to the great gravel glacis of the high Anambar-ula portion of the Āltin-tāgh (Map No. 75. A-D. 1) and further west find their continuation in the area of high dunes spoken of by the Lopliks as *Kum-tāgh* (the 'Sand Mountains'), south of the dried-up Lop lake-bed.¹⁵

Sand ridges
E. of Bēsh-
toghrak.

Looking at the general map, we see quite clearly that the northern extremity of this great desert is formed by the low sand ridges which jut out like promontories into the above-mentioned basin and are crossed by the route. There we can quite safely locate 'the northern extremity of the [desert of] sand of the Three Ridges'. This identification is further supported by the change of bearing which the *Wei lió's* account implies, where it says that the route 'turns back (*revient*)' at this point. As we follow the route on the map, we see plainly that, after leaving the western end of the Limes, it runs almost straight to the north-west until it crosses the dune promontory nearest to Bēsh-toghrak, whence it strikes a south-westerly course in conformity with the general direction of the Bēsh-toghrak valley.

Origin of
local name
San-lung.

The agreement between the wording of the text and the topographical configuration is so close that I am tempted to connect the name of *San-lung*, 'the Three Ridges', with the fact of the route actually crossing three distinct offshoots or promontories of the high sand ridge on the south. The maps show these plainly stretching across the line of route between Camp 153 (Map No. 74. A. 3) and the head of the Bēsh-toghrak Valley (No. 70. D. 3, 4). This feature of the ground must have impressed itself all the more upon the Chinese wayfarers of old because it is only at this point that real dunes have to be traversed on the Lou-lan route. The dunes of the three offshoots referred to did not appear to me to rise anywhere above 40 feet or so, and would certainly be practicable for Chinese cart traffic such as I have seen elsewhere. Yet I know only too well from experience how troublesome an obstacle they are bound to present to weary men and beasts engaged upon such a desert journey. Nor can we feel surprise at these curved-backed ridges of sand attracting the attention of the old travellers and finding a record in the local nomenclature. The graphic designation of the 'White Dragon Mounds', used for the salt-encrusted Mesa belts which form so forbidding a feature towards the western end of the Lou-lan route,¹⁶ is sufficient to prove how observant of all peculiar topographical features were the eyes of the early Chinese wayfarers in these desolate wastes.

'Well of the
Protector-
General.'

With this point of the *Wei lió's* itinerary once determined, it is possible to fix upon probable locations also for the 'well of the Protector-General', which precedes it, and 'the *Chii-lu* granary', which follows it. In the former, I think, we can safely recognize the depression within the westernmost angle of the Limes wall, guarded by the watch-towers T. IV. a, b (Map No. 74. B. 3; also Plate 33), which, owing to plentiful grazing and to fresh water obtainable in springs and wells,

kindly pointed out to me, his translation, *T'oung-pao*, 1905, p. 529, of the name of this locality should read 'le puits du Protecteur général'.

¹⁵ Reference to the general map will best illustrate the configuration of this big belt of drift sand, which extends along the foot of the Āltin-tāgh between 91° and 94° long.

Dr. Hedin crossed it in February, 1901, from south to north along a line leading from Anambar (Khan-ambal of Map No. 75. B. 3) to a point in the dry terminal basin east of Bēsh-toghrak (his 'Toghrak-kuduk'); for a detailed account cf. Hedin, *Central Asia*, ii. pp. 86 sqq.

¹⁶ Cf. above, p. 341; *Geogr. Journal*, xlviii. p. 128.