

A well-preserved tower, T. IX.

From this point onwards, the line of the wall could be traced with ease to the end of that day's march, as it ran practically without a break closely along the route. First, an almost straight stretch of *agger*, with rough branches of Toghrak now mingling with the reeds of the fascines exposed on the surface, brought us after two miles to the massive tower, T. IX (Fig. 173), already sighted from where I had first struck the wall at T. III. It proved to be remarkably well preserved and quite an impressive structure, as it rose to a height of over 25 feet on a commanding knoll above the edge of the gravel plateau which here overlooks a wide depression both eastward and northward. The masonry, very solid and regular, had a base  $22\frac{1}{2}$  feet square. The bricks, 14 by 7 inches and 5 inches in thickness, were here set in alternate courses with the longer and shorter sides facing outwards, thin layers of reeds being inserted after every five courses for the sake of additional strength. Though only sun-dried and containing very little or no straw, they were unusually hard; this, I thought, might perhaps be due to the cementing effect of salts contained in the soil or in the water with which they had been made. On the top, big Toghrak beams were visible, as they had been exposed by erosion from the masonry once embedding them. Yet at the foot of the tower erosion had succeeded in lowering the ground level scarcely one foot below the bottom course of brickwork—a clear proof of the protection here afforded to the soil by its surface cover of gravel. But no trace of any adjoining structure or other signs of occupation could be found. The line of the wall passed in a small semi-lune to the north of the tower and at about seventeen feet distance.

Features of watch-tower T. X.

Immediately to the east of T. IX the ground falls off with a steep slope to a wide scrub-covered depression, as seen in Plate 33. Though most of the soil here was composed of coarse sand, and in parts overgrown with reeds and tamarisks, the gravel-covered *agger*, marking the line of the wall and still in places eight or nine feet high, could be followed without difficulty for over three miles to the tower T. X (Fig. 174). This occupied the northern end of an isolated clay ridge, which rises with very steep slopes to about a hundred feet above the steadily widening depression. Its construction varied considerably from that of the other towers visited on that first day along the old Limes wall, and thus helped to impress me at once with the fact that those who had established that line through the desert knew well how to adapt their methods to local resources. Instead of courses of brickwork there were here regular layers of stamped clay, each receding somewhat from the edge of the lower one; the whole thus presented the appearance of a truncated pyramid. The layers, each one foot ten inches in thickness, were hardened and bound together into concrete-like consistency by the salt contained in the gravelly soil with which they were built. The same agent had caused the intervening strata, about two inches thick, of tamarisk brushwood and sticks to become almost petrified. The structure with its salt impregnation curiously shimmered in the dusk, as the other towers might have shimmered in the old times when they still carried the thick coats of whitewash of which we subsequently found plentiful traces. About twenty-five feet square at the base, the tower rose to close on thirty feet, though, as Fig. 174 shows, the south and part of the east face had fallen.

Wall line traced to lake shore.

The very mode of construction here used implied that water was near at the time. Nor did it prove distant now. Within about half a mile the track crossed a salt-encrusted, marshy bed into which a small brook of very salt water made its way from the south-west. Beyond extended an area of luxuriant reed beds and Toghrak groves, and there I found my camp pitched close to a small lake. Though salt in its lower portion, it held quite drinkable water along its southern margin where it was fed by springs.<sup>10</sup> Next morning I returned to the wall and found that it ran in a practically straight line from T. X to the lake-bed, which it struck almost at right angles near the middle of the south shore. The remains of fascines, half-petrified with salt, could be traced without

<sup>10</sup> The salinity there measured on March 18, 1914, varied from 0.46 to 0.20.