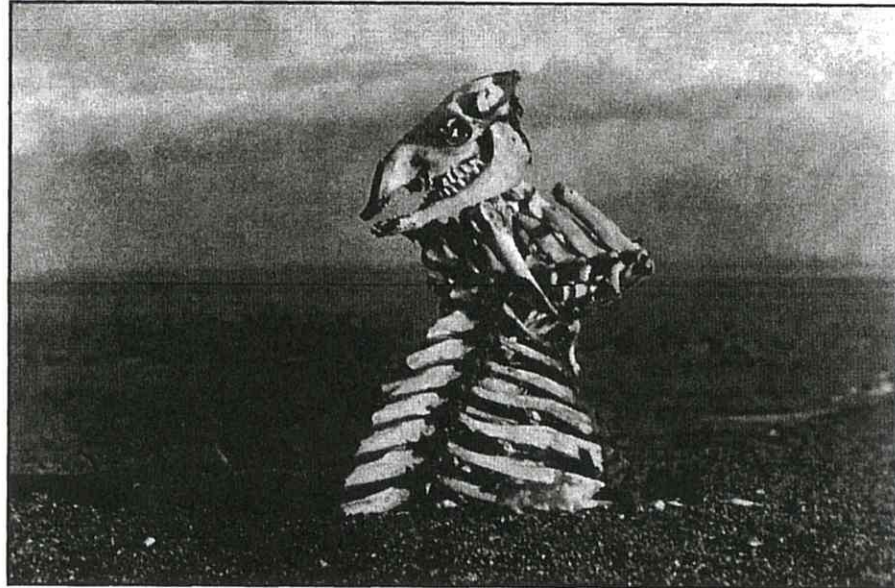


Source: An excerpt describing the Taklimakan Desert in *Encyclopedia*, a natural history of Asia written in the early 1300s by Chinese historian Ma Twan-lin.

Note: In ancient times, the Taklimakan Desert was sometimes referred to as the Gobi. Today, as then, the temperature in the desert reaches over 100° F and rainfall is minimal.

... you have to cross a plain of sand, extending for more than 100 leagues [about 300 miles]. You see nothing in any direction but the sky and the sands, without the slightest trace of road; and travelers find nothing to guide them but the bones of men and beasts and the droppings of camels. During the passage of this wilderness you hear sounds, sometimes of singing, sometimes of wailing; and it has often happened that travelers going aside to see what these sounds might be have strayed from their course and been entirely lost; for they were voices of spirits and goblins.

Source: The Hedin Foundation, National Museum of Ethnography, Stockholm, Sweden.



A horse-skeleton road marker in the Gobi Desert.

Document Analysis

1. Describe the climate of the Gobi Desert.
2. According to Ma Twan-lin, what guided Silk Road travelers through the Gobi Desert?
What caused many travelers to get lost there?
3. Why do you think road markers, such as the one in the photograph above, were set up in the Gobi Desert?