

road we had stumbled into was formerly used by Asiatic travellers. At the beginning of that day's march we noticed two or three unmistakable cairns of stones crowning conspicuous eminences, and in the little tamarisk oasis there were three stones evidently arranged to support a cooking-pot over a camp-fire, though there were no traces of either soot or ashes, so that a long time must have elapsed since the stones were last used for the purpose indicated. Higher up the cairns stood closer together, and when we reached a very faintly defined latitudinal valley, we perceived that the road bifurcated. To the west-south-west there were four conspicuous cairns crowning as many crags that jutted out towards the north, and similar cairns were visible to the north-west. The former road would seem to have run along the southern range of foothills of the Kuruk-tagh to the towns which anciently stood on the northern shore of Lop-nor; the latter to the neighbourhood of Turfan. Of the road itself there does not of course exist a trace; it is only the cairns of stones that betray its former existence. Some of them are much weathered, suggesting a great age. They consist generally of one or two large slabs of slate placed on edge, supported and surrounded by smaller stones (fig. 74).

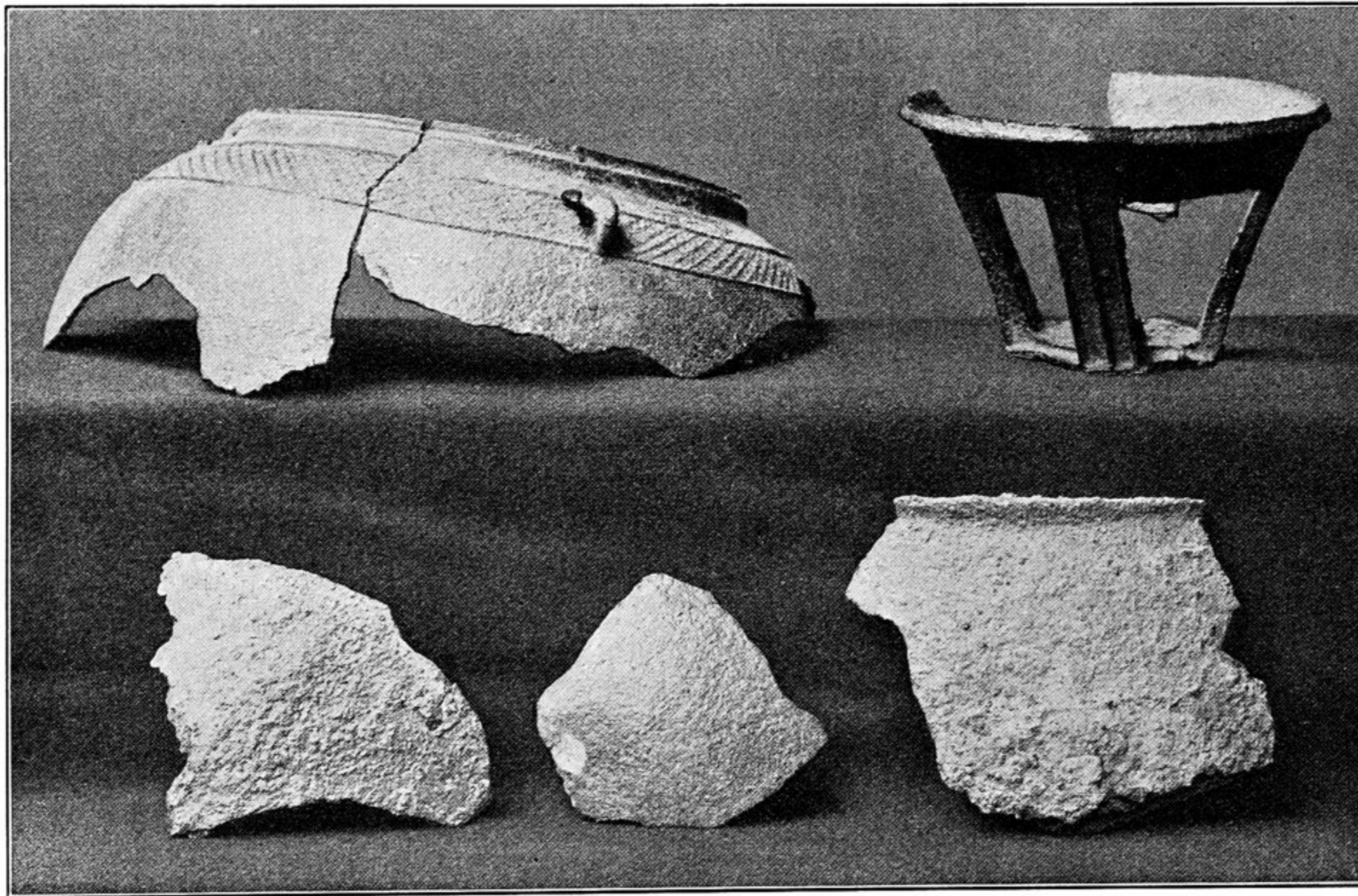


Fig. 73. FRAGMENTS OF IRON POT FOUND IN THE LOWER KURUK-TAGH.

Before us stretched from west-south-west to east-north-east a reddish mountain-range of no great altitude, its top approached by a very gentle slope. The pass, by which the old road crossed it, is so flat that it was only the shallow torrents which told us where it actually was situated, for the ascent and descent are hardly noticeable to the unassisted eye. To the north we now commanded an extensive