

We discovered the first traces of human habitations on the 28th March 1900, when crossing the Desert of Lop for the first time, at a distance of two days from Alt-misch-bulak. The circumstances in which we then were, as well as the advanced season of the year, rendered it impossible to make even a short stay in the desert, more especially as the supply of water which we had brought with us from the spring was barely sufficient to last us to the Kara-koschun. On the afternoon of the day named we came across numerous shards of broken earthenware vessels, one or two decimeters in diameter. Shortly afterwards we lighted upon the remains of two wooden houses, standing upon small platform-like elevations of the clay surface. Amongst these we picked up a number of wood-carvings, small sacrificial bowls or cups of clay, vast quantities of fragments of earthenware jugs and dishes, Chinese copper coins, a sort of copper pin, etc. etc. To the S. 58° E., at about an hour's distance by walking, was a cupola-crowned clay tower, much the worse for wear, and from it three other similar towers were visible to the S. 71° E., N. 59° E., and N. 88° E.

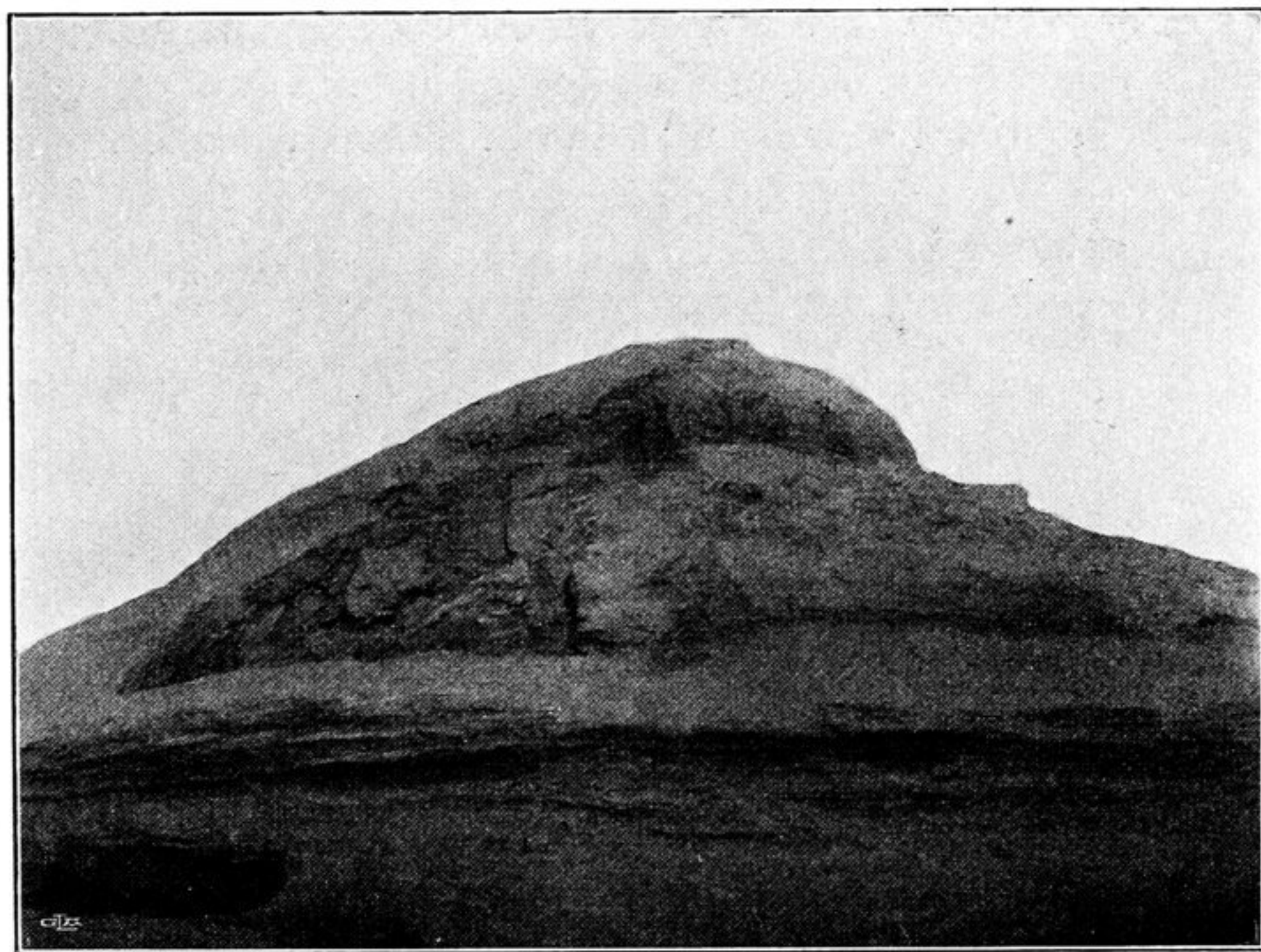


Fig. 278. ANOTHER VIEW OF THE SAME.

The more easterly house, which rested upon a platform  $2\frac{1}{2}$  m. high, was rectangular in shape, stretched from N. 33° E. to S. 33° W., and measured 6.60 m. in length, while the short wall was 5.60 m. Of the original structure nothing remained *in situ* except the four ground or foundation beams; all the rest had fallen, and the roof was blown over to the west side, where it formed an inextricable pile of ruins. From these it was not possible to deduce any conclusion as to the shape that the roof originally bore, that is to say whether it was flat, or pyramidal, or had the corners curved upwards like horns. Some of the posts (uprights) were turned or carved, the carvings representing human figures, or rather deities, and the motif of the lotus flower was also especially prominent. One post, which must have been one of the four corner-posts, was