

have been aquatic plants; the gill-slits as well as the scales near the tail are especially distinct. It may be pretty safely assumed, that the inhabitants of this place would never have thought of using fish as an essential motive in their decorative work had not fish played a prominent part in their means of sustenance, and been found in the immediate neighbourhood. In this respect these artificially carved fish may almost be regarded as a sort of »representative fossil», which, even though we had discovered no fish-bones, mollusc-shells, or other proofs of the existence of a lake, would speak eloquently for the presence of collections of fresh water in the vicinity. But the discovery of fish-bones and of representations of fish puts it beyond all doubt, that the inhabitants of this locality lived in great part upon fish and used fish as food, just as the modern Lopliks do, but the modern Tibetans do not. The only difference was no doubt this, that whereas fish form the principal food of the Lopliks, agriculture and the keeping of live-stock were in Lôu-lan more important than fishing. But in spite of our most diligent search we never found any remains of canoes or other boats; but then any that may have been left by the lake-side would be exposed to more rapid destruction than the more resistant and solid houses.

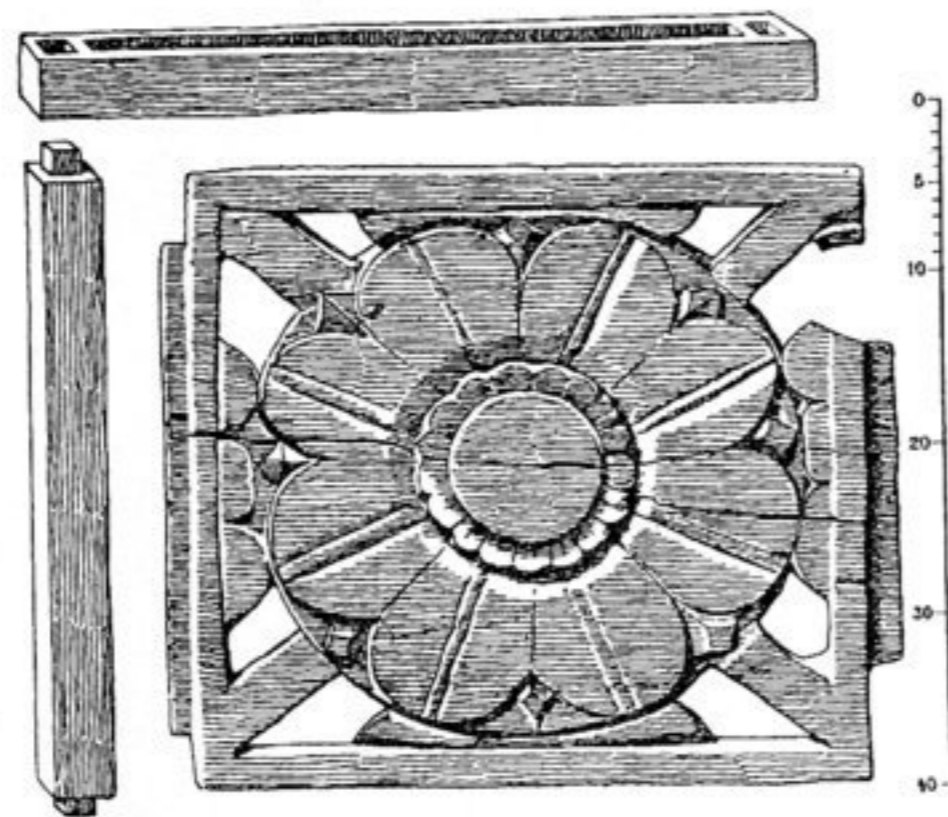


Fig. 295.

A large plank, 22 cm. in breadth, was carved from end to end with figures of men, each, like the seated figures at the village where we encamped, under an arch, and with distinct traces of an aureole or glory round each head*. Of this plank, which was unique of its kind, I brought away a specimen. Fragments of two smaller pieces of plank show a man sitting, the knees, crossed feet, and left hand being well preserved; the clothing is a good deal folded.

Upon comparing together the wood-carvings which we excavated it is speedily apparent that they fall into two different classes in respect of size. One class embraces strong planks 2½ m. long, the other thinner pieces 41 to 55 cm. long. The former class were affixed partly in a horizontal position, as cornices or panels, partly in a vertical position, for instance the planks with the human figures. These were however inclosed in square frames (see fig. 295), each frame containing a separate design, such as a large lotus flower with four or eight leaves, or an open-work pattern.

All the timber that lay on the outside of the heap of ruins was injured by the winds and the weather; the only portions that are in a good state of preservation are those that were covered with sand and dust (see by way of example the very fine detail shown on fig. 294).

Beyond the carvings we found nothing here except a red cord, which may have been used to hold together the beads of a rosary; a number of small primitive earthenware cups; a small slab similar to those which in Chinese and Tibetan temples are wont to be placed in front of the idols to arrange the sacrificial bowls

* Illustrations of all these wood-carvings will be found in Prof. A. Conrady's archæological part of this work.