

islands. A flock of white gulls sat chattering in the lee of a *yardang* at the north-eastern point of the island. CHIA KUEI collected soft sappy stems from the fresh spring shoots of the reeds. They tasted excellent — a sort of desert asparagus.

The spirits of the air were in a noisy mood on May 4th also. We could see nothing for flying sand and dust. Sky, earth and water formed one uniform grey fog. The lake, whose water had been crystal-clear a few days earlier, was now as turbid as pease-soup from the eating away of the shore by the waves and the swirling up of mud from the bottom. A sheep was slaughtered, and our faithful dog Tagil had a good feed of »innards». Our three boatmen ate up their share at once, and had therefore to live exclusively on bread for the next three days. They found on the island fragments of pottery, and some pieces of the mechanism of an old Chinese crossbow.

The storm had raged for a good fifty hours, and the morning of May 5th was also unpleasant. The sky was overcast and lowering. However, we packed, climbed aboard, and steered out across a broad lake to the north-east. The water was shallow, and the paddles touched bottom everywhere.

A RUINED HOUSE

Sheets of water of no great extent lay both to the north and north-east of us. We kept a north-easterly course, but got into a blind alley; so we sent SADIQ and HAYIT to reconnoitre to the east. They saw a big lake to the south-west; northwards nothing but *yardangs*. We steered into a little canal, in places only 5 or 6 m wide, which ran between solid clay banks and islands of thick reeds. At 12.30 we came out on a fairly broad sheet of water, and hoped that this was the main arm of the delta. We followed its left bank, and presently caught sight of some grey tree-trunks some way off inland. Two of them formed an X. We must find out whether this mark — symbolizing the unknown — was a freak of nature or the work of man.

We landed, therefore, at one o'clock, walked about two hundred meters north-west, and found the remains of a house. It dated, obviously, from the Lou-lan era — i. e. it was at least 1,600 years old. On the way we passed quantities of red and black fragments of clay pots and bowls.

Eighteen vertical posts were still standing upright, and the walls were made of reeds and tamarisk boughs plaited together, in which the vertical work predominated. The material and the method of building were thus the same as at Lou-lan. The house was about 7 × 12.5 m, and had four rooms. It ran from north-east to south-west, standing on a hillock about 2 m above the surrounding country. Round about it lay a number of smallish beams and pieces of plain wood. There were doorways between the rooms. In one case the two door-posts had come loose and were leaning over, forming the cross we had seen.