

Results of
reconnais-
sances.

On the evening of the third day of our stay Afrāz-gul returned to our base camp at L.A. from his extensive reconnaissance to the east and north-east. His account of important remains in the latter direction was very encouraging. It held out the hope that these would furnish the clue to the line of the ancient Chinese high road from Tun-huang, which I was anxious to follow through from the Lou-lan side. His report and maps also satisfied me incidentally that some reliance could be placed on the information brought back by the small parties which had been sent out to search the area around L.A. These stated that only at two points had they come upon remains other than mere relics of the 'Tati' type or ruins already explored by me, and these two proved to be identical with the only places within half a dozen miles of the Lou-lan station where Afrāz-gul had been able to trace remains calling for excavation. The ancient burial-ground reported to the north-east was left to be explored later, when I should move to the ruins farther away in the same direction. But the ruined dwelling traced to the east-south-east was duly visited on February 14th, while supplementary work was still in progress at L.A.

Visit to
ruin L.D.

This dwelling, L.D., was found to be situated about two and a half miles from the station L.A. As we proceeded towards it, the sculpturing effect of wind-erosion on the ground became less marked, and the height of the Yārdang terraces decreased to 6 to 8 feet. Close to the ruin, dead reed-beds were found on the top of some of the Yārdangs; they could also be seen on a low sandy ridge near the bank of an ancient channel farther south, to which I shall presently refer. Close to the ruin I noticed a few old tamarisk trunks still alive at their top, and received the general impression that subsoil moisture may have allowed vegetation to survive here longer than in the belt farther north.

Clearing of
dwelling
L.D.

The ruin proved to be that of a large dwelling, evidently a farm built of Toghrak timber, with wattle walls of vertical tamarisk branches. The woodwork was all badly decayed through rotting; but the tamarisk wattle of the walls survived to a height of a foot or a little more and permitted me to make out quite clearly the disposition of the rooms, as shown in the plan (Pl. 11). The depth of erosion around was only about 5 to 6 feet. The tamarisk brushwood of the walls had sufficed to retain a low layer of drift-sand within the rooms. But the objects brought to light by clearing them were few. The most important of them were the wedge-shaped wooden cover-tablet, L.D. 07, and the fragment of another, L.D. 04; though bleached and perished by exposure they yet clearly showed by their shape that they had belonged to Kharoṣṭhī documents of the same type as found in numbers at the Niya and L.A. sites. Their evidence leaves no doubt that the occupation of the dwelling was contemporary with that of the Lou-lan station.

Objects
recovered
at L.D.

Apart from some wooden implements, L.D. 02 (Pl. XXVI); a horn spoon, L.D. 06 (Pl. XXI); the fragment of an iron cooking-pot, L.D. 05, the finds chiefly comprised numerous small fragments of bronze ornaments and the like, as well as beads of glass and stone. Most of these small objects were picked up on the eroded slopes around the ruin. The small fragment of a bronze mirror, L.D. 09, may be mentioned as showing Chinese characters in the ornamentation of its back. Embedded in the ground just outside the northernmost room was found a large pottery vessel, about 3 ft. in height and 2½ ft. in diameter at its widest; the portion of its shoulder and rim, L.D. 08 (Pl. XXIX), shows the thickness and hardness of its material. A find of distinct interest had been made by Afrāz-gul on his preceding visit, in close vicinity to the ruin; this was a well-preserved Chinese bronze coin of peculiar type (Pl. CXIX), showing different seal characters at either end and attributed to Yüan Yen (12-8 B.C.). The chronological indication furnished by the effaced remains of Kharoṣṭhī documents is fully confirmed by the fact that the twenty coins picked up near L.D. were all of the *Wu-chu* type, about half of them being small clipped pieces.¹⁸

¹⁸ See below, Appendix B.