

about 70 square feet in that of iii. In addition to the pits i-vii, which were cleared on February 15th immediately after my arrival at L.C., a fresh careful search on the return march two days later revealed three more grave-pits, viii-x. Besides these a few shallow excavations were then traced towards the north-east extremity of the Mesa top. They contained nothing but drift-sand and had apparently never been used.

Protection  
secured  
from wind-  
erosion.

The only covering of those grave-pits which retained their sepulchral contents, just as they had been thrown in on re-burial, consisted of layers of reed-straw, from 1 to 1½ feet in thickness. This material, apparently so frail, had perfectly sufficed to keep off wind-erosion, a fact that I had frequently observed in connexion with ancient remains on desert ground in the Tārīm and Su-lo-ho basins.<sup>5</sup> The rows of tamarisk sticks which, placed at irregular intervals, roughly lined the edges of the pits and rose a few inches above them, may have been partly intended to secure these layers of reeds. That no superstructures had ever existed over these places of re-burial may be concluded with certainty from the uniform flatness of the Mesa top, as Fig. 158 shows it. This clearly proves that erosion cannot have been at work here to any great extent since the re-burials took place, and in a place so completely safe from moisture of any sort wind-erosion alone could have attacked and destroyed structural remains.

Custom of  
collecting  
burial  
remains.

The character of the mixed remains in the pits of L.C. left no doubt about their having been gathered from earlier graves, threatened with destruction or already exposed. It appears equally certain that this had been done in obedience to a pious custom that is still widely prevalent among the Chinese. Not having access to evidence in Chinese texts I may content myself with supporting this explanation by a reference to the kind of charnel-houses I know to have been erected for the identical purpose at the Chinese cemeteries of Kāshgar, Yārkan, and Khotan after the reconquest of the New Dominion. As regards the customs observed in the original burials, conclusive archaeological evidence has fortunately become available through my subsequent explorations in the Lou-lan area and in closely adjoining tracts.

Evidence of  
burials at  
L.H. and  
Ying-p'an.

At the ancient burial-places of L.H., which must be contemporary with the occupation of Lou-lan, I found coffins containing bodies wrapped up tightly with rags of worn clothing, precisely after the fashion suggested by the finds of L.C.<sup>6</sup> There, too, objects of personal use, articles serving for sepulchral offerings, &c., exactly corresponding in character to those recovered from the grave-pits of L.C., were found deposited by the side of the dead. Equally instructive was it to note there that the coffins, in groups of three or more, had been placed on raised ground safe from moisture, and the shallow pits containing them roofed over after the fashion which must have been common in ordinary houses of the local type.<sup>7</sup> Where these habitations of the dead had been reached by erosion, the coffins and their contents showed exactly the same stage of decay that had overtaken the remains found at L.C. before they were collected and deposited in the common pits. At the Ying-p'an site on the uppermost course of the Kuruk-daryā, I explored in March, 1915, some Chinese graves which may be ascribed approximately to the same period as those of Lou-lan.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Cf. e. g. *Serindia*, i. p. 381; ii. pp. 570, 605 sq., 677 sq., 687, 717, 736, &c.

<sup>6</sup> See below, pp. 275 sqq.

<sup>7</sup> It may be of interest to point out here that the method of placing the coffins in roofed huts, partially or wholly sunk into the ground, which the graves of L.H. illustrate, closely agrees with the indications furnished by Chinese texts as to the earliest forms of burial.

Thus De Groot, *The Religious System of China*, ii. p. 374, tells us how the oldest type of Chinese grave arose from the primitive custom of leaving the corpse alone in the simple hut

of wood and clay previously occupied by the living. According to ancient descriptions quoted, this earliest method of burial was still reflected by the graves of the Han period:

'But further, even at the present day the graves in the northern and central provinces of the Empire resemble the huts of the living in ancient times, being round heaps of clay . . .; the coffin inside is in many cases not sunk deep beneath the level of the soil around, and people hardly ever neglect to cover it with reeds, rushes, or mats before piling the earth over it.'

<sup>8</sup> See below, Chap. XXI. sec. i.