

the rest with the same fate. The eroded clay terrace, a regular Yārdang of which the ruin occupies the northern end, extends for about 50 yards with a bearing from NNW. to SSE., and owes its preservation to the masonry of the raised graves which occupy its top. Exactly the same depth of erosion was observed at a series of Muhammadan tombs occupying small detached Yārdangs about 2 miles to the SE. (Fig. 477 a). If we assume that the earlier occupation of this area in Muhammadan times ceased towards the close of the fourteenth century, the rate of erosion here might be estimated at over $1\frac{1}{2}$ feet per century, which somewhat exceeds even that observed at the Loulan site.¹¹

But it will be well to bear in mind that the effect of erosion is likely to have varied in different portions of the tract according to the length of time during which it was left without water and hence without protecting vegetation. This will help to explain observations made while visiting other and probably later remains in the neighbourhood of Kalāt-i-gird. Proceeding to the south of Rāmrūd in order to visit certain ruins situated a little more than a mile to the west of Kalāt-i-gird, I passed through a belt of old Yārdangs lightly coated with *shōr* (Fig. 501) and thus curiously recalling the 'White Dragon Mounds' of the Lop Desert, though on a much smaller scale. They were from 8 to 10 feet in height and showed an approximate bearing from N. 325° W. to S. 175° E. in conformity with the 'Bād-i-sad-ō-bīst-rōz'. Their northern end or head was always steep, while the other end sloped down gently like a tail, the simile applied by the observant Chinese to those dreaded 'Dragon Mounds'.¹² The explanation of the peculiar white surface of these particular terraces was offered by an unmistakable flood-bed more than 100 yards wide, with abundant scrub near its banks, which was crossed a short distance beyond.

The remains above referred to, which the map marks as *Gumbaz-i-shāhī* and to which my guides gave the name of *Kalāt-i-tāghaz*, comprise some eight or nine domed tombs scattered about an extensive Muhammadan graveyard. The ground showed here practically no trace of wind-erosion and the domed structures, though manifestly of some age, were in comparatively good preservation. They would appear from this to belong to a later period of occupation, just like the large mansions at Machī. That the ground near by must have been already desert when they were built is proved by their bricks. These, $10'' \times 6'' \times 2''$ in size, were invariably found full of small twigs of tamarisk and similar scrub, such as still grows in plenty near the flood-bed. Ruins of tombs and a small farm traced at a distance of about 3 miles to the SE. of Kalāt-i-gird showed bricks of the same size, and in view of the scanty erosion, nowhere more than 4 feet or so, might likewise be safely attributed to that later phase of settlement in the southern delta.

Belt of
wind-eroded
ground.

Remains of
late
structures.

SECTION II.—REMAINS OF PREHISTORIC SETTLEMENTS

Among the remains of human occupation in past ages which aridity and wind-erosion combined have preserved for us on the very surface of the now dry southern delta of the Helmand, those of a prehistoric civilization perhaps offer the chief interest. They are represented by the broken pottery, stone implements, and similar hard debris that are found in remarkable abundance, thickly covering the summit and slopes of the small wind-eroded terraces or Mesas. These rise in great numbers like islands above the now arid plain between the vicinity of Hauzdār in the north and that of Kalāt-i-gird in the south. Judging from the large-scale survey, they are also very numerous farther to the SE., across the Afghān boundary. The layers of such debris mark the sites of prehistoric settlements. It is due to the protection afforded by these layers that the soil beneath, all alluvial clay, has retained the original level, while around them the level has been lowered in

Mounds
covered
with
pottery
debris.

¹¹ Cf. e. g. *Serindia*, i. pp. 371, 389.

¹² See above, i. p. 310.