

CHAPTER V

DISCOVERIES AT THE NIYA SITE

IN the desert due south of Dandan-oilik but far nearer to the still cultivated ground of the village tracts of Gulakhma and Domoko were other old sites awaiting exploration. They were all duly visited by me in the course of my first and second expeditions and proved to have been abandoned to the sands about the same period as Dandan-oilik or some centuries later. But none of them proved so ancient, so interesting and so important in every way as the extensive sand-buried settlement which I discovered in the desert well beyond the present termination of the Niya river. So I propose to take my readers there straight, just as good fortune guided me there in January 1901 directly after I had said farewell to Dandan-oilik and the scene of my first excavations.

Three days of tramping across the dunes to the east had brought me to the Keriya-darya, hard frozen at the time. It is the only river among those descending from the K'un-lun east of Khotan which, being fed by considerable glaciers, manages to penetrate far into the Taklamakan before it, too, dies away among high ridges of sand. Marching up its course for four more days, no longer on foot now, but thanks to a successfully arranged concentration on horseback, I