

reached the oasis and town of Keriya. The latter is a fairly large place and the headquarters of a district which extended at that time over nearly five degrees of longitude, needless to say almost all desert. Its jovial Chinese magistrate gave me a very kindly reception.

Keriya is not an old place, and the 'treasure-seeking' profession does not flourish there as in Khotan. But on the first day after my arrival an old and respectable villager came to tell me of ancient houses half-buried in sand which he had seen ten years earlier well beyond the famous pilgrimage place of Imam Ja'far Sadik in the desert north of Niya. Others, too, had heard stories of this 'old town' (*kōna-shahr*), to use the term which the people of the Tarim basin are accustomed to apply to every kind of ruin, even the smallest. So I set out for Niya on January 18 and, after a four days' journey along the line where the bare gravel glacia of the K'un-lun skirts the Taklamakan, reached the small oasis.

During the day's halt which regard for the due celebration of the Ramadan, the end of the Muhammadan month of fasting, obliged me to make there, I was greatly cheered by receiving unexpected proof of the great age of the ruined site I was bound for. Hassan Akhun, my sharp-witted young camelman, who was subsequently to share every one of my expeditions, had come across a villager possessing two inscribed tablets brought away from the site. When they were produced before me, I discovered to my joyful surprise that they contained writing in that ancient script of the extreme north-west of India known as Kharoshthi, and of a type which closely agreed with that prevailing during the first centuries of our era.

The man who brought me the tablets had picked them