

that one of these little tablets was fully and precisely dated in a year of the Emperor Wu-ti corresponding to A.D. 269. Of him it is distinctly recorded that he re-established Chinese authority in the 'Western Countries' and maintained it during his reign (A.D. 265-89). It is difficult to believe that the ruined site continued to be inhabited many years after Wu-ti's time. Great political and economic disturbances must have accompanied the withdrawal of Chinese authority from these parts, and with them one feels tempted to connect directly or indirectly the final abandonment of the site.

The clearing of some other ruined dwellings to the north did not yield many novel finds, apart from a few fine specimens of architectural wood carvings (Fig. 43). This in a way made it less hard for me to tear myself away from this fascinating dead settlement than it would have been otherwise. Sixteen days of incessant hard work, together with the hardships implied by bitterly cold nights and mornings, had worn out all the diggers and my own men too. I fully realized that other structures were likely to have remained hidden behind dunes, though the men whom I sent out on reconnaissances failed to report any—for obvious reasons of their own. But then I had to think of other old sites both to the east and west about which I had received information, and of the comparatively short time still remaining at my disposal for their exploration before the season of sandstorms would set in and put an end to excavations at distant sites in the desert.

So I resigned myself with a heavy heart to take my leave by February 13 of this scene of fruitful and stimulating labours. When marching back to the end of the Niya river