

Age on the bare ground scoured by wind erosion. The route we followed was different from that of my first visit in 1906; but finds and observations alike fully confirmed the conclusions then arrived at.

It was long after nightfall on February 10 that, struggling across that unending succession of steep Yardang terraces so difficult to cross for the camels, we reached the ruined Chinese station of Lou-lan. From our base camp at the familiar Stupa ruin (Fig. 59) I pushed out reconnaissances into the unknown desert to the east and north-east, while our diggers were kept at work with good results on small outlying ruins and deeper deposits of refuse which had escaped attention during the stress of my previous visit. Among the finds made in the course of this renewed clearing were more documents on wood and paper in Chinese, Kharoshthi and the Iranian language known since my discoveries of 1906-7 as Early Sogdian.

Quite as interesting were the series of close observations I was able to make on ground immediately adjoining the ruined site as to the levels at which a temporary return of water, subsequent to the abandonment of the Chinese station, had from time to time arrested the process of denudation and wind erosion by allowing desert vegetation to grow again and thus afford protection to the clayey soil. These observations clearly showed that the process, striking as its effects everywhere are, had not been constant during the sixteen hundred years which have passed since the site was abandoned to the desert. The water, which accounted for the appearance here and there in depressions of scanty tamarisk scrub and reeds since dead again, could only have come from the 'Dry River'. In fact, on returning