

centuries preceding the introduction of Islam as the probable date when these shrines and the settlement to which they belonged had been deserted. And this conclusion received curious support on the first day by Chinese copper coins bearing the date of the Kai-yuen period (A.D. 713-741), which were picked up under my eyes from the débris-strewn ground near the buildings.

Old Turdi felt quite at home among these desolate surroundings, which he had visited so frequently since his boyhood. It was the fascinating vision of hidden treasure which had drawn him and his kinsfolk there again and again, however scanty the tangible reward had been of their trying wanderings. Yet the familiarity thus acquired with the silent relics of the past had developed in him an instinctive interest in all traces of the life that once reigned here. As he guided me among these ghostly wrecks of houses and answered the many questions I put to him about his own observations, I could see the shy man grow more and more animated. It was evident from his communications that the conditions of the dunes were changing very slowly at this site. Consequently Turdi had no difficulty in recognising the places where he and his companions had been at work during previous visits. Luckily their scanty resources had never allowed them to overcome the difficulty experienced in carrying to this distant site supplies sufficient for a prolonged stay or to bring working parties of more than a few men.

Hence the structures more deeply buried in the sand had escaped unopened. It was important to select these in the first place for my excavations, and I felt grateful for Turdi's excellent memory and topographical instinct which enabled him readily to indicate their positions. Guided by this first rapid survey, I chose for my camp a spot from which the main ruins to be explored were all within easy reach. There were practical considerations which compelled me to make my choice carefully. For in order to keep my men at work as long as possible every day, it was necessary to spare them tiring tramps through the drift sand. It was still more essential that we should keep to a spot at which fuel could be readily obtained in the ample quantities I foresaw would be needed