

it and close to the floor we found two small wooden tablets of oblong shape, inscribed on one side with cursive Brahmi characters. The socket which appeared on the back of one of them was proved by subsequent discoveries elsewhere to have once held a clay seal.

The fact that only Han coins were found here, as well as other indications, make it appear probable that Rawak was deserted a considerable time before Dandan-Uiliq. But until the peculiar physical conditions of the various parts of the Taklamakan, and particularly those concerning the movement of the sand-dunes, have been systematically studied for a prolonged period, it would be hazardous to draw conclusions as to the rate of progress in the general advance of the desert southwards. And even when such observations are available—and I for one shall respect the devotion of those who may thereafter charge themselves with their collection on this forbidding ground—it is very doubtful whether their results could be relied upon to give a true view of the conditions prevailing at earlier periods.

The examination of the scanty remains at Rawak completed the task for which I had set out just a month previously from Khotan. So on the morning of the 6th of January I began the march to the Keriya River after paying off Merghen Ahmad with the last batch of the Tawakkel labourers. They parted from me in good spirits, well satisfied with the reward their work had earned them, and evidently none the worse for their long camping in the desert. Islam Beg, too, who had managed these people so well, now left me for Khotan, glad to regain once more the comforts of a warm homestead. He was to carry to the Khotan Amban my news and thanks for his help which had rendered the exploration of Dandan-Uiliq possible; also my mail bag was entrusted to him to commence its long journey westwards.

It was with mixed feelings that I said farewell to the silent sand-dunes amidst which I had worked for the last three weeks. They had yielded up enough to answer most of the questions