

Taklamakan " as he was called in camp, just then turned up from Khotan. His arrival was greeted by me with joy; for instead of doubtful antiquarian spoil Turdi brought this time my long-expected mails, the postal accumulations of more than a month, and various much-needed stores.

It is impossible to refer here in detail to the ruins subsequently explored at this site. They were found scattered in small detached groups over a wide semicircular area, up to a distance of one mile and a half to the north of my second camp. Interesting as these excavations were, they yielded but a comparatively small harvest in written documents. The two dozen tablets brought to light comprised, however, an important find. In one of the houses belonging to the northernmost group I found the small tablet which furnished the unique specimen of Brahmi writing already referred to. In the same dwelling some fine specimens of architectural wood-carving (see p. 369) came to light in the shape of massive corbels, showing flower ornaments which are closely allied in style to those found in the Græco-Buddhist sculpture of ancient Gandhara. Less artistic but decidedly curious were the wooden boot-lasts we discovered in the same house; also a large cupboard had been left behind by its last inhabitants. A few hundred feet eastwards, close to some high sand dunes, the embankments of a small tank, 48 feet square, could be clearly made out. One of the poplars that once gave shade to its water still raised its gaunt, bleached trunk to a height of 12 feet, as seen in the photograph at the head of this chapter.

By the 13th of February I had completed the examination of every ruined structure that could be traced under the sand. From a high ridge rising about three miles beyond the northernmost ruins I searched the ground with field-glasses further towards the desert. But no indication of structural remains could be discovered over the great expanse where absolutely bare dunes alternated with equally denuded banks of loess. I was thus able to leave this fascinating site, which had yielded such precious antiquarian spoil, with a good conscience.