

CHAPTER XXI

SITES AROUND DOMOKO

WHILE Naik Ram Singh was directing the opening of trial trenches, and my ever alert Chinese Secretary carefully watching for any remains which the diggers might light upon incidentally, with note-book and brush ready to record their position, I managed to pay visits to some smaller ruined sites scattered among the sand-cones and tamarisk scrub of the neighbouring desert at distances varying from one to three miles. Apart from Tati areas strewn with potsherds, their only remains consisted of almost wholly eroded ruins of modest dwellings built of plaster and rush walls which were easily cleared and searched.

But at the southernmost of these little sites known to Mullah Khwaja as Darabzan-dong, I succeeded in tracing the position of a Buddhist temple on the top of what, owing to wind-erosion of the surrounding ground, presented itself as a small clay terrace or 'witness,' to use the geological term. Though the layer of sand and débris covering the top was nowhere over one foot thick, we here unearthed fragments of fresco wall decoration and stucco reliefs together with badly decayed pieces of a Brahmi manuscript. Insignificant in themselves, the finds sufficed to establish the important chronological fact that this site, too, though within less than a mile of the stream of Domoko, was abandoned about the same period as Khadalik and distant Dandan-oilik. The discovery had its own special interest, as it strengthened my doubts as to whether this simultaneous abandonment of settlements dependent on the same water-supply and yet widely