

like above the eroded ground bore the remains of a house, constructed partly of the familiar timber and plaster walls and partly of mere rush walls once covered with clay. The walls nowhere stood more than two feet above the original mud floor, and the rooms traceable were all small.

Yet even ruins of such a modest description had before yielded interesting finds, and chance willed it that the experience should repeat itself here. The few labourers with me had scarcely begun to clear the corner of a small room only eight feet square, as a kind of experimental scraping, when there emerged several well-preserved wooden tablets inscribed in that ancient Indian Kharoshthi script, and of the curious type with which my former excavations had rendered me familiar. I greeted these remains of ancient correspondence yielded up by so humble an abode with real joy. They held out cheering promise at the outset, and also furnished the conclusive proof I was looking out for that this area, fully four miles south of the first ruins reached in 1901, held remains belonging to the same period.

The need of marching my caravan that day as close as possible to the large group of ruins reported by Ibrahim forced me to tear myself away from this encouraging find-place. Nor could I do more than rapidly survey a group of ancient houses upon which we came three-quarters of a mile ahead. They had remained hidden by a line of high tamarisk-covered cones from the more easterly route previously followed. It was strange to see old, but still amply-leaved Toghraks growing here and there near these ruins. Most of their companions were dead, and raised their gaunt trunks and branches in varied states of decay. There could be little doubt that this jungle, now approaching extinction, had grown up long after the dunes had overrun the deserted ancient settlement. But as I looked upon these patriarchs, still flourishing at their crowns, however splintered and fissured their trunks, I felt respect for them too. What struggles against constant aridity and the extremes of the desert climate these last outposts of the riverine jungle must have passed through!