

After a weary tramp of another three miles we passed the two large residences which were the southernmost of those explored in 1901. It was true comfort to see that the years since passed had dealt gently with the ruins. Scarcely a detail in the state of erosion or in the decay of their timber differed from the picture as recorded in my photographs and in my memory. Only a few inches of sand covered the large wood-carvings which I had found in the 'Ya-mên' along with the ancient chair, and which I had been obliged to leave behind. Rapidly I pushed on northward to where the brick structure of a small Stupa had formed my first landmark. The winds appeared to have cleared much of the treble base then hidden under drift sand; but there was no time for closer examination.

The long shadows of the evening made the high swelling dunes to the north-west look doubly imposing. Yet I managed to drag my straggling column onwards for close on two miles before falling darkness compelled us to halt. From my detailed map of the site I knew that we were now close to some ruins which I had sighted on the last day of my previous stay, and had then reluctantly been obliged to leave unexcavated as a reserve for another visit. While my tent was being pitched, I set out to find them, and soon set foot amidst their sand-buried timber (Fig. 91). The distance and other difficulties overcome made me feel like a pilgrim who has reached his sacred goal after long months of wandering. At the ruin I had struck, a large wooden bracket, decorated with carvings in Gandhara style, lay exposed on the surface. As I sat on it listening to the great silence around me, and thought of the life which seventeen hundred years ago had thronged this ground, now disputed only by the rival forces of drift sand and erosion, I enjoyed the happiest moments of rest I could wish for that evening.

Next morning I divided my party. Ram Singh, the Surveyor, was despatched north-eastward with three camels and an adequate supply of water to search for the ruins which Islam Akhun, a Niya villager, had offered to show at the distance of one march from the site as we knew it.