

He was then to push due north into the desert as far as he could in a day without exhausting the camels. I myself with the rest of my column tramped on under Ibrahim's guidance over the high sands to the north-north-west, in quest of the ruined dwellings upon which my old guide had lighted in his wanderings two years previously. Progress was slow over the steep dunes closely packed amidst a maze of tamarisk-covered sand-cones, and it took fully an hour before I reached the nearest of these ruins. It proved that of a timber-built dwelling, half covered by a big dune, just beyond the line to which living tamarisk scrub extended.

Marching on over absolutely bare dunes for another two miles, I passed one after another of the ancient houses reported. They lay in a line along what must have been the extreme north-western extension of a canal once fed by the Niya River. The line proved to be situated only about two miles to the west and north-west of the northernmost ruin we had been able to trace in 1901. But the swelling ridges of sand intervening had then kept them from view. For my camp I selected a patch of open eroded ground near the northern end of the ruins, and lost no time in commencing my day's work at the farthest ruined structure we could trace.

It was a comparatively small dwelling covered only by three to four feet of sand, and just of the right type to offer an instructive lesson to Naik Ram Singh and the men (Fig. 84). It occupied a narrow tongue of what, owing to the depression produced around by wind erosion, looked like high ground, extending in continuation of the line of a small irrigation canal still marked by fallen rows of dead poplars. As soon as the floor was being reached in the western end room, Kharoshthi documents on wood began to crop out in numbers. After the first discovery of a 'Takhta' had been duly rewarded on the spot with some Chinese silver pieces, I had the satisfaction of seeing in each of the three living-rooms of the house specimen after specimen of this ancient record in Indian language and script emerge from where the last dweller, probably a petty official, about the middle of the third century A.D., had left behind his 'waste paper.'