

Kharoshthi records on wood, whether letters, accounts, drafts, or memos, turned up in almost every one of these dwellings, besides architectural wood-carvings, household objects, and wooden implements illustrative of everyday life and domestic industries, such as weaving instruments and boot-lasts (Fig. 86). Though nothing of intrinsic value had been left behind by the last dwellers of this modest Pompeii, there was sufficient evidence of the ease in which they had lived, in the number of individual rooms provided with fireplaces and comfortable sitting platforms (Fig. 89). Remains of fenced gardens and of avenues of poplars or fruit trees could be traced almost invariably near the houses. In some cases where dunes had afforded protection, the gaunt, bleached trunks in these orchards, chiefly mulberry trees, still stood upright as high as ten to twelve feet (Fig. 83). Elsewhere they lay prostrate, or only the stumps survived, as in the case of the big poplars which had once lined an oblong tank near the southernmost of these dwellings, and the positions of which I could still accurately trace at the foot of a big tamarisk cone.

With so much of these ancient homesteads in almost perfect preservation it was soon easy to feel quite at home in them. No great efforts of imagination were needed to restore their original appearance, and consequently there was no sensation of awe to impress one. Being constantly reminded of identical features in modern Turkestan houses, I often caught myself wanting in antiquarian reverence for these relics of a past buried for nearly seventeen centuries.

But what at first fascinated me most was the absolute barrenness and the wide vistas of the desert around me. The ruins at the northern end of the site stretch beyond the zone of living tamarisk scrub. Like the open sea the expanse of yellow dunes lay before me, with nothing to break their wavy monotony but the bleached trunks of trees or the rows of splintered posts marking houses which rose here and there above the sand crests (Fig. 87). The feeling of being in an open sea was ever present, and more than once those remains seen from a distance curiously suggested the picture of a wreck reduced to the