

rampart—could not claim any very high antiquity. Neither within nor without the enclosed area could I trace any sign of serious wind erosion, that inevitable impress left by time upon all old sites in this region. In spite of very scanty protection by sand, the rough posts and roof beams exposed in the ruins, invariably wild poplar trunks unhewn or but partially planed, showed little of that far-advanced bleaching and splintering which experience had taught me to recognize in timber of old sites as the infallible mark of long-continued exposure.

But all antiquarian yearnings apart, how little could a thousand years more or less matter, compared with the strange fascination of such a scene where human activity unrecorded had struggled with, and succumbed to, the desert? I entered the circumvallation from the south-east where a gate some eleven feet broad still kept its folds of rough timber ajar. As I passed between the many ruined dwellings scattered in irregular groups, the abundance of these silent witnesses of a life long departed seemed almost uncanny by contrast with the total absence of signs of human occupation outside. But could I succeed in securing from them definite evidence as to the origin and age of the settlement?

The uniform roughness of construction in these dwellings held out little promise, and their number was embarrassing at the start. Luckily I had brought with me an adequate posse of labourers, and as soon as the baggage had been unloaded on a patch of bare clay outside the west wall, I set them to work at two of the less coarsely built structures. The drift sand which filled them did not reach the low roofing made of rough trunks of the wild poplar, with brushwood and earth above. Yet it had sufficed to protect the walls, which here consisted of vertical bundles of reeds faced outside with a layer of mud. The timber framework supporting the whole showed none of the careful carpentry displayed by all ruins of the Niya site, but mere unhewn Toghrak posts with other trunks laid horizontally across the gable ends. The two or three rooms contained in these huts were absolutely bare of fittings. There was not even the comfort of a mud-built