

sitting platform or fireplace, such as poor cultivators' houses in the modern oases ordinarily display.

When next day we proceeded to clear one after the other of the small 'houses' built with walls of stamped clay or coarse sun-dried bricks, the experience was repeated. Nowhere did we come upon the remains of furniture or household implements, however humble. Fragments of broken pottery, elsewhere the commonest marks of earlier occupation, were strangely absent. Most curious feature of all, nowhere within or without the ruined dwellings and sheds did we strike any of those accumulations of refuse or dung which in this region invariably adjoin any group of habitations tenanted for some length of time, whether ancient or modern. It was clear that we could not hope here for datable archaeological evidence. But in the end closer observation of the general conditions prevailing helped to reveal something about the origin and abandonment of this curious site.

As already stated, I was struck from the first by the absence of marks of wind erosion. This fact was not merely a definite indication of relatively recent date for the ruins, but also gave significance to certain negative features. Though there were near the circumvallation considerable patches of ground clear of drift sand, I looked in vain on their flat expanse for any traces of that careful terracing and division for purposes of irrigation which ancient cultivated soil retains for long periods wherever surface erosion is absent. Nor could I find anywhere the remains of fruit trees or Tereks, such as are invariably planted along fields and roads in an oasis, though the trunks of dead Toghraks rose in plenty both within and without the enclosure. Characteristically enough the big Toghraks inside the wall were to be found mostly in open spaces left between the dwellings, having evidently grown up there before these were erected and having been spared for the sake of their shade when clearing and building began. The good preservation of the branches in these patriarchs of the desert jungle, as seen in the illustration (Fig. 102), suggested that their death did not date back to any very distant period.