

A shorter reconnaissance in the same direction was entrusted to Rai Ram Singh, whom I expected to make an exact survey of the positions occupied by the ruins which Hedin's popular narrative mentions west of the group we had reached, but which the small-scale route map attached to it could, of course, not show. I thought that the large number of men at my disposal would enable me to deal quickly with the ruins I had rapidly inspected in the morning. So Hassan Akhun was instructed to send back by December 23rd a batch of camels sufficient to shift our camp then to new ground near the western ruins.

Free of loads the camels and those with them seemed eager to get clear of our desolate camping-place, and shortly after 8 A.M. I was left with my labourers to the undisturbed peace and solitude of the site. As I looked round from the high base of the Stupa below which my tent stood, while the men for once were finishing their morning meal in broad daylight, the scene of our prospective labours struck me like a view strangely familiar and at the same time novel (Figs. 113, 114). The ruins of timber and plaster-built houses rising with their splintered and bleached posts, like the last remnants of wrecked boats, on terraces high above the eroded ground, bore an unmistakable likeness to the structures I remembered so well from the Niya site. But how different was their setting!

Instead of the soft-lined expanse of swelling dunes and sand-cones, the eye here caught nothing around but an endless succession of sharply cut Yardangs of hard clay, all running exactly the same way, as sculptured by that relentless north-east wind. They too, like the dunes, called up a picture of the sea, not, however, a sea in free movement, but one frozen hard and buckled into innumerable pressure ridges. The view ranged freely over many miles. But apart from the closely packed cluster of ruined dwellings to the south and south-west of the Stupa, my powerful prismatic glasses showed no trace of structural remains elsewhere excepting a few scattered mounds, manifestly brick-built, in the distance northward. It seemed hard to believe that any isolated house of the usual timber construction could have survived such frightful erosion.