

familiar layers of tamarisk branches inserted at regular intervals between the courses.

The tower rose in an easily defended position flanked by steeply eroded small Nullahs, and on the very brink of a deep-cut dry river bed, with its bottom showing streaks of salt efflorescence some eighty feet below the level of the Sai. Adjoining the tower on the west side I could trace the foundations of some small and badly decayed structure, probably the watchmen's quarters as I thought. The small fragments of iron implements, with a few pieces of carved wood and some stout woollen fabric, which I quickly picked up on the slope, confirmed this conjecture. For more there was no time as darkness was beginning to descend. With the deep shadows in the Wadi below, the desolation about this first relic of human agency in the desert was intense.

Yet my heart was buoyed up by cheering thoughts of fresh archaeological work as I hastened after my caravan along the track now luckily well marked in the gravel. After about three miles it brought me to a sharply scarped little valley with plenty of reeds and scrub by the side of a narrow streamlet hard frozen. A fire quickly lit by the men showed the place where the guide had halted. There was no need to search for springs among the flourishing reed-beds; for us men there was abundance of good ice, and for the animals slightly brackish water wherever holes were cut through the thin ice of the marsh. Salt-encrusted dead Toghrak trunks lay by the side of the stream, and living trees were said to exist farther north. So the name of the halting-place, Toghrak-bulak, was no fiction. But we had no inkling either that night or in the light of the morning that this was the bed of a live river which before two months had passed would become almost unfordable.

It broke with a dull dust haze raised by the cutting wind which had blown all night, this time, for a change, from the north-west. But my eagerness to get at more ruins made me press for an early start. We had followed the track leading eastwards across an absolutely barren gravel plateau for barely three miles, when I noticed a ruin rising on what looked like a low ridge to the south-