

we passed a narrow sheet of water nearly a mile long which now receives this drainage of Nan-hu, wasting itself in the desert. But we soon found that canals within living memory must have carried water much farther to the north. The first dwellings of another abandoned small settlement were met with at seven miles from Shui-i. Our guide called it Kuan-tsou, and stated that it had been abandoned some sixty years ago. I was able to test here the accuracy of local tradition. Around the first farm I visited there were a few patches of ground not covered by sand, and among the small débris scattered over them my men soon picked up modern-looking potsherds and porcelain fragments, also some coins belonging to the regnal epoch of Ch'ien-lung (1736-96 A.D.). The isolated farm-houses were filled with drift sand to a height of six or eight feet, and owing to the greater distance from Nan-hu still retained most of their timber.

The trees once growing along the canals and irrigation cuts had all been cut down since cultivation was abandoned. But the trunks still emerging in a double row along what must have been the main channel, showed that its water was brought from the south-east, *i.e.* the now dry river bed I had traced east of the Tati forming part of the old Nan-hu oasis. Amidst the low dunes which had overrun what were once the fields of this hamlet, tamarisk cones had formed here and there up to a height of twelve feet. Everything showed that a typical 'site' was here in preparation to illustrate to posterity the conditions of Tun-huang village life early in the nineteenth century. The dwelling where I halted to take a photograph (Fig. 166) was more solidly built than the rest, and thus likely to attract the attention of some future archaeologist, say of 4000 A.D. So I could not forgo the temptation of depositing in a well-sheltered corner a dated 'Khat,' in the shape of a newspaper, for his eventual guidance and edification.

For over two miles farther north ruins of detached holdings were met with at intervals, all belonging to the same period, as frequent coin-finds proved. The last was a substantial homestead, with a thick refuse layer covering the courtyard (Fig. 168). A big dune, fully twenty feet