

CHAPTER LXXXIX

MORE TAKLAMAKAN RUINS

THE ground we had passed through had its own fascination, and survey work on it offered considerable geographical interest. Yet I was glad when, after a day's much-needed rest, I could by February 19th, 1908, resume archaeological labour at the Kara-dong site, which the river by its latest change has again approached after long centuries.

On my first visit in March 1901, a succession of sandstorms prevented a complete examination of the site. The shifting of dunes had since laid bare a number of small ruined dwellings (Figs. 290, 291), then deeply buried beneath the sand, half-a-mile or so to the south of the large quadrangle previously explored (Fig. 289). The excavation of them, now effected with the help of my Shahyar men and a small contingent raised from among the shepherds, furnished definite evidence that a small agricultural settlement, and not merely a frontier guard-post, had existed here far away in the desert at some period during the early centuries of our era.

Since none of the shepherds and hunters we got hold of knew anything of old remains farther down, I decided to move up the river in order to meet as early as possible the party of my old 'treasure-seeking' guides from Khotan whom, by an arrangement effected with Mr. Macartney's kind help *via* Kashgar, I had ordered up before starting from Kuchar. By February 25th I had the satisfaction of seeing this concentration across a vast space of desert duly achieved; for on this day a dozen familiar Khotan 'Taklamakanchis,' under the direction of Roze, old Turdi's quondam acolyte, joined me near my old camping-ground at