

state of ruin. The houses in the southern group were mostly filled with drift-sand up to a height of six to eight feet, and some still retained a good deal of timber. Near one of the farms there visited (Fig. 164) I found some patches of ground that were not covered by sand, and among the small débris scattered over them modern-looking fragments of porcelain, bronze, etc. (Nan. K. 001-9) were soon picked up. Definite chronological evidence in support of the local tradition concerning the abandonment of this 'site' was supplied by finds of copper coins, including two pieces of Ch'ien-lung (A. D. 1736-96), besides one of K'ang-hsi (A. D. 1662-1723) and one of Hsien-p'ing (A. D. 998-1004). A tamarisk-cone, about twelve feet high, which rose amidst the low dunes close to this particular farm, evidently went back to a period of abandonment far earlier than the present, and suggested that the ruined homesteads had been built on ground which for centuries before had remained unoccupied. It is possible, and even probable, that this area had more than once passed through those vicissitudes of periodical occupation and abandonment of which I had observed evidence around Domoko.²

I was strangely reminded of my first visit to 'Old Domoko' in 1901 when I saw, rising above the light drift-sand, the trunks of the trees which once grew in orchards and along irrigation channels, and which had all been cut down since cultivation was abandoned. A clearly-marked main canal bed, traceable for a considerable distance by the double row of trunks along its banks, showed plainly that the water of this settlement must have been brought from the south-east, i. e. from the now dry river-bed passing east of the ruined town of Nan-hu and the adjoining 'Tati' area. Further on dunes grew less frequent, and on bare clay ground a small group of houses was passed almost clear of sand (Fig. 163). As in almost all these modern ruins, its bricks were of small size (12" x 6" x 2"), laid flat and on edge in the characteristic alternate courses. To the north-east, half a mile or so off, a small temple was sighted. Ruins of detached holdings were met with at rarer intervals until the last was reached after close on four miles' progress north-westwards through what were once the village lands of Kuan-tsou. It was a substantial homestead as seen in Fig. 162, with a thick layer of refuse covering the courtyard. A big dune, over twenty feet high, rose with its concave slope close by on the north and had covered outlying parts of the building. Two copper coins of Ch'ien-lung (A. D. 1736-96), found near the eroded foot of the walls, proved that the period of abandonment was the same here as in the other part of the settlement.

Everything showed that at Kuan-tsou a typical 'site' was in preparation to illustrate to posterity the conditions of Tun-huang village life early in the nineteenth century. All the farms that I had passed or sighted lay along a narrow belt stretching from south-south-east to north-north-west. It appeared to me highly probable that, like the final offshoots of the present Tun-huang oasis which stretch finger-like northward, it had received irrigation from a single canal, the one already noticed as coming from below Ku-tung-t'an and marked in the map (No. 78. A. 4). Here a case of recent progress of 'desiccation' seems to me clearly established; for the water-supply now obtainable from the springs that rise in the part of the dry river-bed lying north-east of the ruined town of Nan-hu only amounts to twenty cubic feet per second where I measured it near the hamlet destroyed by the flood of 1893,³ a volume which could not be conducted so far over ground of this character, where water is particularly exposed to absorption and evaporation. The distance intervening between that hamlet and the northernmost farm of Kuan-tsou is fully ten miles in a straight line. Nor can it be supposed that Kuan-tsou before its abandonment, say about 1840, had been in sole receipt of the whole water-supply available in the Nan-hu depression; for it is quite certain that the main oasis was cultivated at that time at least as much as at present, and so

Last ruins
of aban-
doned
settlement.

Desiccation
proved since
abandon-
ment.

² Cf. *Ancient Khotan*, i. pp. 458 sq.; also above, pp. 202, 207. The approximate date preserved by local tradition for

the final abandonment of 'Old Domoko' is about 1850.

³ See above, p. 614.