

fifteen miles of the river's final course and of the belt it fertilizes. It seems probable that we must recognize in this shrinkage a result of that general desiccation which large parts of Central Asia are, according to a much-discussed geological theory, believed to be slowly undergoing. But while this physical fact fully explains why the ancient site was never re-occupied, it does not prove that the original abandonment was directly and solely due to it. Were this shrinkage the only possible factor to be reckoned with, we should still be puzzled to find an explanation why the cultivation, when it could not be maintained any longer at the old site, was not shifted southwards and continued—possibly within reduced limits—near the present end of the river-course. We have seen that the fertile belt both above and below Imām Ja'far Sādiq, now occupied by luxuriant forest-growth, would permit of the creation of a terminal oasis, and that a new irrigation canal, taking off some 26 miles above the Mazār, had actually been started a few years before my visit<sup>15</sup>. Yet nowhere between Niya and the present termination of the river did I trace any ancient remains or hear of such having ever come to light.

Taking these various facts into account, it appears to me that no explanation which it is at present possible to advance for the abandonment of the ancient site can claim definite acceptance as a safe basis for historical or geographical conclusions. As in most historical changes, the causes may have been far more complex than the modern inquirer is apt to assume. As regards the physical aspects of the question, it will be well to await reliable data such as can be furnished only by a detailed topographical survey, combined with prolonged and exact observations as to the volume of water carried by the river at different seasons, the rate of evaporation, &c. Nor can we hope to secure any clear knowledge of the irrigating capacity which the river may still retain at the present day, until its conditions and those of other rivers in the Khotan region have been systematically studied by a competent irrigation engineer, preferably of Indian experience.

Impossibility of final conclusions.

## SECTION VIII.—LIST OF ANTIQUES EXCAVATED AT NIYA SITE

### DOCUMENTS ON WOOD ACQUIRED AT NIYA AND IMĀM JA'FAR SĀDIQ.

**Niya. 22. i. 1901. a. Rectang. under-tablet**, split at one end, and pierced by insects. *Obv.* 11 ll. Kharoṣṭhī, very fine writing, closely resembling N. iv. 143; quite legible. *Rev.* blank.  $8\frac{1}{2}'' \times 3''$ . Well preserved.

*Obv.* Faint traces of 5 ll. cursive Khar. *Rev.* blank.  $9\frac{1}{2}'' \times 1\frac{5}{8}''$ . Wood well-preserved, dark and broken. Documents from Niya.

**Niya. 22. i. 1901. b. Wedge cov.-tablet**; hole near point. *Obv.* Seal cav.  $1\frac{5}{8}''$  from sq. end; surface bleached. *Rev.* 3 ll., very coarse and cursive Khar.,  $9\frac{1}{4}'' \times 1\frac{7}{8}'' \times \frac{3}{8}''$ . Wood soft.

**Imām J. S. 25. i. 1901. a. Wedge under-tablet**; hole near point. *Obv.* 3 ll. Khar. cursive, but very black and fine. Initial formula. *Rev.* 1 l. from sq. end.  $9'' \times 1\frac{9}{16}''$ . Well preserved.

**Niya. 22. i. 1901. c. Rectang. under-tablet**; fragment.

**Imām J. S. 25. i. 1901. b. Wedge under-tablet**; hole near point. *Obv.* 4 ll. Khar., very coarse, cursive, and blotted; much faded. *Rev.* 1 l. from sq. end.  $9\frac{7}{8}'' \times 2''$ . Wood well-preserved.

### OBJECTS FOUND IN N. 1.

**N. 1. 001. a. Fragment of stone**, nearly black, smooth on two sides and one edge. Otherwise rough and broken.  $3\frac{1}{4}'' \times 1'' \times \frac{3}{8}''$ .

**N. 1. 001. b. Fragment of coarse pottery**, with roughly N. 1. incised decorative lines.  $2\frac{5}{8}'' \times 1\frac{3}{4}''$ .

<sup>15</sup> See above, p. 313.