

some smaller mounds having been completely levelled in the course of these operations. No recent excavations were acknowledged, except in the case of one of the northernmost mounds, about 48 ft. in diameter and 12 ft. high, which was said to have been opened by Chīra cultivators some two months earlier. The exposed portions of the mounds showed everywhere thin layers of small pieces of Toghrak wood, bark, and thorny scrub, mixed up with the coarse sand and gravel of the surrounding ground. Nowhere could I find in the cuttings remains of walls or traces of any other regular construction. The pieces of wood were far too small to have served for building purposes. Much of it appeared charred, and on digging down to the ground in the second tumulus from the south I came on a layer of wood 6 in. thick which was practically reduced to the condition of charcoal. The ground below this layer consisted of a hard clayey soil which generally seems to underlie here the gravel and pebbles of the 'Sai.'

Human
remains
in mounds.

The villagers, perhaps by order of the Bēg, who probably was anxious to avoid possible inquiries by the Amban as to finds made, &c., denied all knowledge as to the contents or purpose of the mounds. But when I had picked up two human thigh bones, about 17 in. long, near the recently opened mound on the north, they seemed inclined to admit that human remains had been found also elsewhere. Subsequent inquiries at Gulakhma in fact showed that two skeletons at least had been found in the course of the latest diggings, but the bones had been gathered again and buried somewhere from superstitious fear. From the loose gravel of the same mound where the two above-mentioned bones lay, some ragged fabrics of cotton were picked up by me; of these the pieces illustrated in Pl. LXXVI (see also list below) are specimens. One of them is a coarse cotton stuff resembling in colour mummy cloth, the other of finer make shows buff colour with a small diaper pattern.

Character
of tumuli.

I was unable to form any definite opinion as to the original character of these tumuli. But much points to their having been raised as burial mounds, perhaps over partially burned bodies. That they had contained other deposits, too, possibly some of value, appears probable enough, as otherwise the villagers would scarcely have continued so long the laborious task of digging up every mound. But any finds of intrinsic value were stoutly denied by those directly concerned, including the Bēg, no doubt for the reason already indicated, while the gossips of Gulakhma could tell my men only the usual wild stories about ingots of silver, &c., which were supposed to have been found there. As to the age of the mounds, all that can be safely asserted is that the ground near by must at the time of their construction have already borne the character it has now, there being in particular no indication of fertile soil having been removed by deflation. The good preservation of the wood and scrub, which seemed to have been inserted for the sake of giving greater consistency to the mounds, did not suggest very high antiquity.

Farewell
visit to
Keriya.

On March 30 I sent on the main part of my camp under the Surveyor to reach Khotan by easy stages, while I myself, with the minimum of impedimenta, hurried back to Keriya to bid farewell personally to its kindly Amban. My rapid marches were made pleasant by noticing on all sides exuberant signs of spring, which had come over the land with surprising rapidity. On April 1 I exchanged long visits with Huang-Daloi, and assured him of my due sense of gratitude for his never-failing help, which alone had rendered the extent and success of the last months' explorations possible. I also impressed him with my appreciation of the excellent services which Ibrāhīm, our energetic Darōgha, had rendered, and secured for the latter a public commendation by the Amban and the promise of appropriate promotion.

Antiques
purchased
at Keriya.

I had previously asked my acquaintances among the Bēgs and Mullahs of Keriya to look out during my absence in the desert for any antiques that might happen to be brought into