

occupation stretching so far south was of considerable interest. It suggested that more ruins, perhaps, might be hidden in this maze of high tamarisk-covered sand-cones; but to search for them on such ground would cost time, and that I could not afford. In any case it was inspiring to find myself once more among the shrivelled trunks of poplars and fruit-trees which had flourished when Rome was still ruled by its Emperors.

After regaining the route we again passed for over a mile through a belt of big living Tograks. Most of them, by the size of their trunks and their much-fissured bark, seemed of great age, and plenty of dead trees were lying in the thickets between them. Here and there I caught sight of a narrow and tortuous channel emerging from the sand, just such as might have been cut by the last summer flood which the dying river succeeded in pushing out to this border area of dead and living forest. But that may have been centuries ago; for such large specimens of the wild poplar strike their roots to so great a depth as to be quite independent of occasional surface watering. We had left this living forest with its brilliant autumn colours behind us and wound our way for a mile north-westwards amidst closely set tamarisk-cones rising to thirty feet or more, when I found myself once more at the little opening where rows of completely bleached trunks of poplars and mulberry-trees, still upright, mark an ancient orchard or farm-yard already noticed in 1901. The sand seemed now somewhat less heavy, and for about sixty yards I could trace the line of ancient trees planted at regular intervals. The level on which they stood rose about ten feet above the eroded ground near by.

Belt of
living
Tograks.

From here the route taken by Sāduk, the shepherd guide from the Mazār, who had offered to show me some ruins not previously examined, and who was marching ahead with the water-carrying camels, seemed to strike slightly more westwards than the one I followed in 1901. After less than half a mile it brought us, to my surprise, to a small open plain, about three hundred yards long from south-east to north-west, where, by the side of bare eroded ground strewn with potsherds and similar hard débris, substantial rush-built fences and lines of dead poplars rising from the low sand caught the eye. Near the centre of this area a small plateau rising island-like above the eroded ground bore the remains of a dwelling, constructed partly of timber and plaster walls and partly of mere rush walls covered with clay. In the course of my subsequent survey it received the number N. XLI (see plan, Plate 18, and the general plan of the site, Plate 7), and is shown also, along with the adjoining ground, by the panoramic view (Fig. 75). Nowhere did the walls stand more than two feet above the mud floor, and all the rooms were small.

Newly
sighted re-
mains.

Ruins of even such modest dimension had, as I remembered well before, yielded interesting finds at this site, and chance offered here again an encouraging experience of this. I had scarcely put the few men with me to work at clearing a small room, only eight feet square at the north-east corner of the house (marked *a* in plan, Plate 18), as a kind of experimental scraping, when there emerged in succession three excellently preserved wooden tablets inscribed in early Prākṛit language and in Kharoṣṭhī script, showing the same types of wooden stationery with which my former excavations at this site had rendered me so familiar. One (now marked N. XLI. 1) was a complete double rectangular tablet, retaining its wooden cover or envelope; another, N. XLI. 3, the under-tablet of a similar document; and the third a 'Takhtī'-shaped label with a string-hole in its diamond handle. There were found also the handle and top of the bowl of a bronze spoon, and what looked like a chisel in bronze. There was nothing novel about these remains of ancient correspondence. And yet I had good reason to greet them with joy; for they held out a cheering promise at the outset, and also furnished the conclusive proof I was looking for, that this area, fully four miles to the south of the first ruins explored in 1901, held remains belonging to the same early period.

Trial ex-
cavation at
ruin N. XLI.

As I was anxious to bring my big convoy of men and supplies that day as near as possible to

Fresh group