

of unexplored ruins, N. xxxvi-xl.

the large group of unexplored ruins which Ibrāhīm had reported to the north-west of the site, I had soon to tear myself away from this encouraging spot. Nor could I spare time for more than a very rapid survey of the group of ancient houses (N. xxxvi-xl in site plan, Plate 7) upon which we came about three-quarters of a mile ahead amidst wild poplars, living and dead. A line of high tamarisk-covered sand-cones had effectively masked these ruins from the more easterly route followed in 1901. It was interesting to see old but still amply-leaved Toghraks growing near these ruins. Most of their companions were dead, and raised their gaunt trunks and branches in varied states of decay. There could be little doubt that this jungle, now approaching extinction, had grown up long after the dunes had begun to overrun the deserted ancient settlement. Yet even so I could not look without a feeling of respect upon these patriarchs still flourishing at their crowns, however withered and fissured their trunks. For how many centuries these last outposts of the riverine jungle had faced the constant aridity and climatic extremes of the desert!

Condition of previously explored ruins.

From there a weary tramp of over three miles across more open ground with broad dunes and rare tamarisk-cones brought us to the two large residences, N. III and N. IV, which were the southernmost of those explored in 1901. The years since passed had dealt gently with the ruins. Scarcely a detail in the state of erosion or the decay of their exposed timber differed from the picture which my photographs and my memory retained. Only a few inches of sand covered the big turned finials and other large pieces of wood-carving which I had found in N. III, the 'Ya-mên', as we called the ruin, along with the ancient chair, which I had been obliged to leave behind then. I was glad to see that the drift sand caught by the walls completely filled the rooms we had excavated, affording protection as before. But the dunes close by appeared to have been lowered a little. After another mile and a half northwards the brick structure of the small Stūpa was reached where my first camp at the site had stood. Here the winds appeared to have cleared parts of the treble base then hidden under drift sand; but no time was available for closer examination.

Arrival at ruins 'left over'.

Across the high swelling dunes to the north-west I managed to drag my straggling column onwards for close on two miles before nightfall compelled us to halt on a small patch of eroded ground. I knew that we were here close to some ruined houses which I had sighted on the last day of my previous stay, but had then reluctantly been obliged to leave behind unexcavated as a reserve for another visit.⁵ While my tent was being pitched, I set out to find them, and soon set foot amidst their sand-buried timber. At the ruin I struck (N. xxvi in plan, Plate 7), a large wooden double bracket, decorated with carvings in Gandhāra style, lay exposed on the surface. While I sat down on it for a short rest my thoughts were full of gratitude for the kindly Fate which had allowed me to return in time to this fascinating ground in spite of distance and many difficulties. But I little dreamt then how rich an archaeological haul was waiting for me at one of the nearest ruins.

SECTION II.—THE NORTH-WESTERN GROUP OF RUINS

Reconnaissance for ruins north-eastward.

On the morning of October 20 I divided my party. Surveyor Rām Singh who had rejoined me at Niya from work in the mountains, was dispatched north-eastward with three camels and an adequate supply of water to search for the ruins which Islām Ākhūn, a Niya villager, had offered to show at the distance of one march from the site as we knew it. Islām Ākhūn declared that he had visited the site in the winter of 1902 in company with a large party composed mainly of adventurous 'Kalandars', or mendicants, 'stranded' at Imām Ja'far Sādiq's shrine, in order to search for

⁵ See *Ancient Khotan*, i. p. 380, and ii. Pl. XXVII, for ruin N. XII.