

CHAPTER XI

THE LOU-LAN SITE

SECTION I.—EXCAVATION OF RUINED DWELLING, L.A. I.

IN the early morning of December 18 my first task was to dispatch my transport according to a previously settled plan. The main convoy of camels was sent off, under Tokhta Ākhūn's guidance, to a salt-spring at the foot of the Kuruk-tāgh north-westwards which he had discovered the year before, when accompanying Professor Huntington on his plucky expedition to Āltmish-bulak, across the salt-encrusted old lake-bed, and which he appropriately called *Yangi-bulak*, 'the New Spring'. There the camels were to get a rest and much-needed grazing while we were at our excavation labours. Five camels were to return to our half-way depot at Camp 121 and to fetch the supplies left there and such fresh ice as had been brought up by the auxiliary donkey column. Rai Rām Singh, provided with some camels, was to make a short surveying reconnaissance to the north-west and to ascertain the exact positions of the ruins which Dr. Hedin's popular narrative mentioned in that direction, but which the small-scale sketch-map attached to it did not show.

Disposal of transport.

Left to the undisturbed solitude of the site, I set out for a rapid survey of its ruins. Looking round from the high base of the Stūpa below which my tent had been pitched, I had before me vistas which seemed strangely familiar and at the same time strikingly novel (Figs. 92, 93). To the south and south-west there rose in small clusters ruins of timber and plaster-built houses. These, with their bleached and splintered posts and the steep, débris-strewn slopes of the wind-eroded terraces on which they stood, curiously recalled well-remembered ruins at the Niya Site, though here the winds had generally left far less cover of protecting sand.

First survey of ruins.

But I was far more impressed by the difference in the setting. Around the scattered ruins of the Niya Site and their silent scenes of destruction the eye had found relief in the soft-lined expanse of swelling dunes and sand-cones which recalled the open sea. Here there was nothing for the eye to rest on but an endless succession of sharply-cut Yārdangs of hard clay and deep-scoured trenches, all running in the same direction, just as that relentless north-east wind had sculptured them. It was, too, strangely like a picture of the sea, but of one frozen hard and buckled into innumerable pressure ridges. The view from the Stūpa ranged freely over many miles of this dismal ground. But, apart from the ruins near, my powerful glasses showed no structural remains excepting a few scattered mounds, manifestly brick-built and badly decayed, in the distance to the north and north-west. It seemed strange that any structures at all, built of mere timber and wattle, should have survived the effects of such frightful erosion. But I did not stop at the time to think about the special reason which had saved them in the vicinity of the Stūpa.

Wind-eroded landscape.

Just as the ruins themselves, so the work to which I settled down at them combined both familiar and novel aspects. I knew beforehand that remains to be brought to light here dated approximately from the same period as those of the Niya Site, i.e. from about the third century A.D. The clearing the ruined structures of the sand and the hoped-for refuse accumulated within them, the careful search of the débris strewn the eroded slopes below, and so forth, were tasks to which not only myself but Naik Rām Singh and my faithful factotum Ibrāhīm Beg were fully

Dr. Hedin's exploration of site.