

outside surface of the third base was visible behind the brickwork of the second. Whether the dome had contained a central shaft or chamber could no longer be ascertained, owing to extensive havoc wrought in this portion of the Stūpa. The sun-dried bricks used throughout were fairly hard, and showed the same dimensions as observed in L.A. II, viz. 18" × 12" × 4". Their slightly reddish appearance in places can be explained by a conflagration which may at one time have destroyed structures at the foot of the Stūpa, and by bonfires lit on its top after the shrine had fallen into ruin. The orientation of the sides of the base agreed with that of the walled enclosure and of the ruined dwellings within it. The terms 'south face', 'north-east corner', etc., applied above, are therefore not quite exact, and have been used merely for sake of convenient brevity.

Changes
undergone
by surface.

An observation made on the ground adjoining the Stūpa may find mention here, as it serves to illustrate the vicissitudes which the surface of the soil must have undergone since the occupation of the site ceased. On the north slope of the erosion terrace which the Stūpa occupies I found a thick layer of dead tamarisk brushwood which once had grown up here covering a piece of worked timber undoubtedly fallen from the ruin above. The position occupied by this dead tamarisk growth was six feet below the original level of the ground as marked by the already mentioned foundation of tamarisk fascines beneath the Stūpa base. It is obvious that wind-erosion must, after the abandonment of the site, have lowered the ground level to this depth before a temporary return of moisture permitted tamarisk scrub and the like to grow up again.

Varying
factors affect
surface
levels.

In full agreement herewith I found that wherever the tops of Yārdang ridges near the Stūpa bore dead tamarisks with the roots still embedded in the soil, their surface lay five to six feet below the original ground level as marked by the Stūpa foundations.⁵ I noticed the same difference of level also elsewhere, e.g. south of the enclosing wall of the station, where the Yārdang tops bearing dead tamarisks showed a level six feet lower than that on which the wall had been built. It clearly follows that the process of denudation and erosion, since the site was abandoned some time in the fourth century A.D., has not been a continuous one, and further that no safe conclusions can be drawn from the results of any measurement of levels over wind-eroded ground, such as that crossed by Dr. Hedin's line of levels south of the L.A. site, as far as the configuration of the ground during earlier periods is concerned. As the process of erosion is neither constant in its progress nor necessarily uniform over the whole area, only structural remains of an archaeologically datable character can furnish reliable indications as to the levels which the surface of the soil may have occupied at particular historical periods. It has appeared desirable to emphasize this limitation of our knowledge of earlier surface levels in view of a theory which, merely on the basis of a single line of measured levels, has assumed the ruined station L.A. to have stood on the actual shore of 'the ancient Lop-nōr'.⁶

Ruined
Stūpa L.A.
XI.

The nearest and most conspicuous of the structural remains traced outside the walled station was the large ruined mound built of sun-dried bricks, L.A. XI (Fig. 98), and situated about 400 yards east-south-east of the Stūpa. It occupies the top of a wind-eroded terrace; south of it the soil has been scooped out to a depth of some fifteen feet, as seen in Fig. 98. Close examination showed that the mound represents the remains of a Stūpa of which the cylindrical or dome portion has been completely destroyed, human agency probably aiding the erosive force of the winds. The base appears to have been orientated like that of the Stūpa within the station, but owing to the far-advanced decay of the outer masonry the sides could not be established with full precision. Judging from the north face, which has suffered less than the rest, the base may have formed a square of about 43-44 feet on the ground. No arrangement in stories could be made out. But

⁵ Such tamarisk growth on a Yārdang top is seen in Fig. 98 on the left of the foreground.

⁶ Cf. Hedin, *Central Asia*, ii. p. 635 and passim.