

climate makes the use of sun-dried bricks far more common, they are very rare indeed.¹⁶ Hence I am inclined to look upon this old brick-kiln of the Lou-lan Site as another significant indication of the strong influence which was exercised here by Chinese occupation.

Departure
from Lou-
lan Site.

With the completion of these surveys all that could be done, for the present, at this site was finished. Such reconnaissances as I had previously been able to make through Rai Rām Singh and the two Loplik hunters had failed to reveal within striking radius any other structural remains still awaiting excavation. This negative result had made it possible to arrange my programme of movements, and by the evening of December 28, when the ruins of L.B. I-v had, by a kind of re-burial, had their protecting covering of sand restored to them, I felt relief at the timely arrival of the camels ordered back from the salt spring on the north-west. Eleven days of constant toil, carried out under such trying conditions, had just sufficed for the completion of our tasks, but also wellnigh exhausted the endurance of the men. Recurring cases of illness among them showed how the constant exposure to icy blasts, with hard work by day, inadequate shelter at night, and necessarily scanty rations of water, was telling on them. The hoped-for supply from the spring having failed, our ice-store was running very low, and this fact alone was enough to force me reluctantly to abandon any hope of extending my explorations by a move along what I conjectured to have been the ancient Chinese route leading eastwards. It was time for us all to return to ground where water was to be found, and to leave to the future that plan of extended explorations which brought me back to this dead desert region in the winter of 1914.

SECTION VIII.—CHINESE DOCUMENTS FROM THE LOU-LAN SITE

In the preceding portions of this chapter I have endeavoured to record all the facts concerning the site yielded by my excavations and surveys on the spot, and by the subsequent examination of the antiques brought to light there. It still remains for me to review the data concerning the ancient settlement which can be gathered from the documents discovered there, and to elucidate the evidence that the Chinese historical records may furnish as to its character and origin.

Chinese
documents
elucidated
by M.
Chavannes.

From the first, the abundant finds of Chinese documents which rewarded the clearing of those ancient refuse-heaps near the ruined 'Ya-mên' of L.A., and the very place of their discovery, had encouraged me to hope that historically interesting data might be gleaned among them. This expectation has been justified by the information which M. Chavannes' painstaking and lucid interpretation of all but the most fragmentary and obscure of these records has rendered accessible also to those who are not Sinologists.¹ My gratitude for this very valuable help, and for the generosity with which M. Chavannes placed it at my disposal even before publication, must be all the greater because the archaic and often very cursive script, the poor preservation of numerous pieces, and the nature of the contents, too often fragmentary and bristling with intricate administrative details, have made the decipherment a task of exceptional difficulty. It is solely on the strength of M. Chavannes' exhaustive treatment of these documents that I can attempt here to focus, as it were, the glimpses which they reveal as to the historical character and the local conditions of the site.

Chinese
garrison
located at
L.A.

In the first place, the nature of the great bulk of the documents conclusively supports the view, derived from archaeological evidence, that the principal group of ruins, L.A., belongs to a small fortified station, garrisoned by Chinese troops and intended to guard the important ancient route

¹⁶ At none of the old sites of the Khotan region from Rawak to Endere did I see any traces of brick-kilns. Yet at all of them fuel must have been abundant in ancient times.

¹ See Chavannes, *Documents*, pp. 155-98, Nos. 721-939.