

quaint conceits and skill in portraying vigorous action as one associates with Chinese performance and fantasy. Something of this freedom from restriction to canonical rules, observed in other examples, may perhaps indicate Tibetan influence. Cursive inscriptions in Uigur, written on several of the more formal compositions, suggest Turkish craftsmanship.

The task of detaching from their walls those paintings which were still in position was a delicate and laborious business; and the subsequent packing for the long journey by road over some of the most difficult country in Asia, in a manner that would ensure their delivery intact in New Delhi, was an equally exacting labour. The different qualities of plaster encountered required appropriate methods of procedure. Some of the plaster was hard and brittle; some sandy and gritty and inclined to break into small fragments. Other examples were just mud mixed with straw, hair, twigs, husks, pieces of rag, and in fact anything that would help to 'bind' it. In this class there were many different varieties with which I became intimately acquainted in the course of mounting and reassembling the fragments.

The paintings were cut from the walls in slabs about two feet square and two inches thick by means of a saw or other suitable tool after the painted surface had been protected and supported by a padded board. When the plaster was excessively brittle, it became necessary, in the case of masonry structures, either to remove the wall and so release the plaster surface, or to leave the painting undisturbed. (Sir Aurel Stein took this last alternative in the case of the fine *Mīrān V* picture which was later ruined by the clumsy efforts at removal by a Japanese 'archaeologist'.) The slabs thus cut out were packed in pairs, face to face, with wadding between; firmly bound together, and packed tightly in strong wooden cases. The cases were then conveyed by camel, yak, buffalo, bullock-cart, railway—by whatever mode of transport each part of the journey required—to their destination and into my hands.<sup>1</sup>

Notwithstanding the ruinous condition of most of the shrines, it is a matter of considerable and practical interest that the colours of nearly all of the paintings are as bright and fresh as when applied, a thousand or more years ago. Where the colours have deteriorated or have become obscured it is generally due to the action of smoke from camp-fires lighted by intruders who have found the caves or structures convenient halting-places; or to infiltration of water through broken roofs, sometimes bringing down streams of liquid mud; or to deliberate defacing

<sup>1</sup> For their subsequent treatment see my paper in *Indian Art and Letters*, vol. VIII, no. 1, 1934.