

colouring, the portions removed—or destroyed—must have comprised mainly the central portion of the frieze as it survived in 1907 and has been described and reproduced in *Serindia*. In what condition the pieces detached reached their destination, and whether they have now been made accessible for study, I have not so far been able to ascertain.

Painted  
dado of  
N. hemi-  
cycle, M. v.

There were, unfortunately, various indications that the removal of these spoils must have been attended with much damage, owing to haste and perfunctory methods of work: among others, the fact that no attempt had anywhere been made to cut away the hard brick wall behind, without which, as experience gained in 1907 had shown, no safe removal of the brittle painted plaster was possible. There had been no systematic clearing of the circular passage of the shrine, the sand and earth with which it had been filled in again by us still lying undisturbed all round the Stūpa base. My regret was accordingly to some extent diminished when the first rapid examination showed that the dado of the northern hemicycle had remained untouched under the protecting cover then provided. The removal of the fresco panels thus fortunately preserved was started under my personal direction on the 20th of February after a fresh series of photographs (Figs. 112–15) had been taken of this hemicycle, under difficulties quite as great as those previously experienced and described in *Serindia*.<sup>12</sup>

Removal of  
surviving  
wall-paint-  
ings.

This removal proved a very delicate task, which greatly taxed the trained skill of Naik Shamsuddīn, assisted as he was by Afrāz-gul and myself, and the icy blasts from the north-east to which we were almost constantly exposed made the work particularly trying. The methods used in detaching the brittle panels of painted plaster and in subsequently strengthening them at the back and packing them safely for distant transport were essentially the same as those successfully employed in dealing with the frescoes of the shrine M. III on my former visit to the site.<sup>13</sup> But the peculiar composition of the plaster, which, as previously recorded, consisted in M. v of a smooth but very thin and exceedingly brittle outer layer and an inner one much softer and lacking in cohesion, necessitated here a very troublesome preliminary procedure.

Method of  
operation.

Before the successive panels of the dado, each showing a portrait or garland-carrying *putto*, could be safely detached in their turn with the help of special appliances duly prepared beforehand in the workshops of the 1st Sappers and Miners, it was necessary first to have the wall behind systematically cut away by a sort of sapping. The unusual hardness of the bricks, the rotten condition of the mud in which they were set, and the extreme brittleness of the plaster layers, only about an inch thick altogether, all combined to render the operation a very slow and delicate one (Fig. 110). The subsequent application of a canvas backing to the panels, a very necessary precaution, had to be carried out on the spot and was much retarded by the bitter cold, which kept the glue from drying in spite of the improvised shelter of a felt tent (Fig. 108). Finally the making of stout cases out of freshly cut tree trunks and the safe packing of the heavy bundles of plaster between thick layers of reeds needed prolonged labour (Fig. 125).

Thus it took fully twelve days' work at high pressure before, on the eve of my departure from Mirān, the task of rescuing what was left of these fine remains of Buddhist pictorial art was finally completed. However much I must regret the loss caused by the circumstances which had prevented my undertaking that task immediately after my discovery of the frescoes, the experience now gained conclusively proved that I had then correctly gauged the technical difficulties involved and the time it would have taken to overcome them.

Previous  
record of  
Mirān ruins.

A description of the frescoed dado in the northern arc, as seen by me on its first discovery, has been recorded in *Serindia*, and the addition of such details as closer examination under less trying conditions may reveal must wait until the whole of the panels, which at present are still

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Serindia*, i. p. 532.

<sup>13</sup> For a description of them, see *Desert Cathay*, i. pp. 463 sqq.