

wall of the rotunda, together with the dome it had carried, must have collapsed inwardly. Besides bricks approximating in size to those used in M. III-V, there were found larger ones of oblong shape, up to 2 feet in length, and flat slabs of sun-dried clay of remarkable hardness, some of the latter showing raised margins. It occurred to me at the time that these large-sized bricks and slabs may have had their special use in the vaulting of the dome if the latter was constructed on the principle of corbelled horizontal courses. But a span of 19 or 20 feet, such as the ground-plan of the rotunda would lead us to assume, exceeds the maximum measurement attained by this early method of vaulting, as known to me from extant examples in India.²² It only remains to add that the fragments of human bones, M. xv. 01-12, which were found near the east foot of the ruined mound, probably had their origin in some sepulchral deposits, such as were repeatedly found by me at the shrines of the 'Ming-oi' site near Shōrchuk.²³

The fragments of stucco sculpture above detailed and more fully described in the List below were the only relics of direct archaeological interest that the complete clearing of the ruined shrine yielded. Considering the very conservative character of Buddhist sculptural art as practised in the Tārīm basin, no conclusive chronological argument can be drawn from them. There is nothing in their style *a priori* to preclude the conjectural attribution of the shrine to the same period as that which a variety of indications have led me to assume for the ruined Vihāra of M. II explored in 1907, viz. the fifth century.²⁴ A somewhat later date may however also be considered as possible.

Dating of
shrine
M. xv.

Judging from the evidence afforded by the ruined shrine M. XIV and its Tibetan records, as well as on general topographical grounds, I am inclined to believe that the area lying north of the bare gravel Sai on which stand the ruins explored in 1907 continued to be occupied longer than the latter. The abundance of tamarisk growth both on cones and on flat ground shows that this area is still reached by subsoil water, and this again explains the almost complete absence of wind-erosion to which otherwise the soft loess soil would readily lend itself. It appears probable that other vestiges of antiquity lie hidden amidst this confusing scrubby waste. But the Lopliks were unable—or unwilling—to show any more, in spite of generous rewards offered, and the manifold and urgent tasks that kept all of us fully occupied during our stay at Mīrān prevented a close and thorough search.

Prolonged
occupation
of northern
area.

Simultaneously with the archaeological labours described, I had to push on preparations for the explorations which I intended our several parties to carry out in the waterless desert north and north-east of the present terminal marshes of the Tārīm. The scanty resources and evasive cunning of the Mīrān Lopliks rendered it difficult enough to make up the deficiencies of supplies and transport with which I had been obliged to leave Charkhlik. Everything connected with the proposed explorations depended on the strength of my transport column. Yet two weakly camels were all I had been able to add to it at Mīrān, while the ten hired animals brought from Keriya were manifestly unfit for prolonged work in the desert, and their owners, frightened by the prospect, were constantly clamouring for discharge and threatening to desert.

Prepara-
tions for
desert
explora-
tions.

But apart from these cares I had another source of serious anxiety during these days. Within a week of my arrival at Mīrān I received a letter from Sir George Macartney bringing grave news. From the head-quarters of the provincial Government at Urumchi an edict had issued ordering all district authorities to prevent us from carrying out any surveying work, and in case of any attempt to continue our explorations to arrest and send us under escort to Kāshgar 'for punishment under treaty'. There is no need to discuss the probable motives of this intended obstruction, or how far the alleged regulations by the General Staff of the Chinese Republic quoted in explanation

Threatened
official
obstruction.

²² Cf. my 'Report on an archaeological tour with Buner Field Force', *Indian Antiquary*, 1899, p. 36.

²³ See *Serindia*, iii. p. 1186.

²⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, i. pp. 491 sq.