

'town of the Idikut or Uigur ruler'. I had already, seven years before, on my first passage through the Turfān district, paid a cursory visit to these extensive ruins, still so imposing in many places in spite of all the destruction that they had suffered. I had then been greatly impressed by the difficulty of doing justice to their archaeological interest owing to the disproportion between the large number and size of the ruined structures and the time and means available for their examination. That Professor Grünwedel experienced the same feeling is revealed by his account of the first systematic explorations at this site carried out by him in 1902-3.

Destruction already at that time was proceeding rapidly, through the agency of villagers digging for manure or antiques, and also of others who made a pastime of vandalism. To save remains that were as yet undisturbed from the ever-present danger of such operations meant a race in which the systematic excavator was necessarily handicapped. All the more credit is due to Professor Grünwedel and his assistants, and subsequently to Professor von Lecoq, who in 1904-5 preceded him at Turfān while in charge of the second German expedition, for the success that attended their devoted labours of salvage at this great site. Destruction had made unchecked progress ever since. It had, as already hinted above, been accelerated by the profit which, as the villagers soon realized, could be secured from the sale of antiques and manuscript remains to archaeological parties and others. The proximity of Urumchi made it a convenient market, and the Trans-Siberian Railway offered facilities even for direct trade with European centres.

A first rapid inspection of the site sufficed to show me how much the whole complex of ruins had suffered since my previous visit. A number of particular structures shown on Professor Grünwedel's sketch-plan, and which I well remembered, had altogether disappeared; others of large size, whose character was then still recognizable, had been reduced to shapeless mounds. The open areas completely cleared of ruins and brought under cultivation had considerably extended. There had been a corresponding increase of damage from damp to whatever remains might still survive in the structures surrounded by, or closely adjacent to, the heavily irrigated fields. I was thus reluctantly led to the conclusion that unless time and means were made available for the complete systematic clearing of large ruined mounds that marked important groups of shrines or monastic buildings, the chances of hitting upon structures not previously searched and hence likely to yield interesting finds would be very slight. For extensive excavations of this kind it would have been quite impossible at the time to secure the requisite large gangs of labourers; for all the village folk were then busy with harvesting, while early in the new year manuring, clearing of irrigation canals, and other preparations for spring sowing made an almost equal demand upon labour. I had here a practical demonstration of the radically different conditions of climate and cultivation that prevail in the Turfān depression and in the oases of the Tārīm basin. The amount of labour I could raise in the latter for excavation work during the winter months was in practice limited only by the number that I could manage to keep supplied with water at desert sites.

These considerations, together with the desire to reserve time for work at other Turfān sites, induced me to limit myself at Idikut-shahri to a few experimental diggings, such as could be carried through with the few men available. I hoped by them to obtain some knowledge of the condition in which the antiques excavated by villagers and offered for sale would probably as a rule be found. In connexion with these reconnaissances, I had the plane-table survey of the site, from which the sketch-plan, Pl. 24, is derived, carried out by Muḥammad Yāqūb and Afrāz-gul. The object in view was mainly to show with approximate correctness the shape and size of the circumvallated area of the ruined town and to make it possible to mark within it the position of the ruined structures at which some excavation was done. An endeavour was also made to indicate the situation of other structural remains still clearly recognizable as such; but as many among them had been reduced

Destructive
diggings.

Difficulties
of systema-
tic clearing.

Survey of
Idikut-
shahri site.