

'Spectacles' of dead in Ast. i. 3.

the hands of plunderers. They lay with the heads pointing to the south, one of the bodies being small and probably that of a woman. The fabrics which clothed them, plain cotton and snuff-coloured silk, had rotted away into shreds. But the mask-like covers of silk placed over the faces had survived better and revealed, when removed, interesting details in connexion with the last toilette of the dead. In the case of the larger body, *a*, obviously male, which lay eastward of the other and nearer to the entrance, the face-cover contained in the middle a piece of figured silk showing a very fine design of distinctly 'Sasanian' style, Ast. i. 3a. 01 (Pl. LXXIX). Of the frill, in plain blue silk, i. 3. a. 02, only small fragments were recovered. Below this cover was a pair of 'spectacles', placed over the eyes, i. 3. a. 04, consisting of a thin plate of silver, formed into two lotus petal-shaped pieces which are joined end to end. The slightly embossed centre of each is punched with a number of small holes and the flattened edges drilled for sewing on to the silk with which the surfaces were covered. The exact object intended to be served by these 'spectacles', of which further examples were recovered on other bodies, still remains to be ascertained.

Byzantine gold coin in mouth of dead.

But the most curious and instructive discovery here made was the following. Mashik, our special cemetery assistant, whom long practice in searching the dead had relieved of all scruples, by breaking the jawbones of the skull recovered from the mouth cavity a thin gold coin which I was able at once to recognize as Byzantine (Pl. CXX). It has since been identified by Mr. R. B. Whitehead as an approximately contemporaneous imitation of a gold coin of the Emperor Justinian I (A. D. 527-65).³ This at once supplied a *terminus a quo* for this particular group of tombs. The chronological evidence was confirmed by finds in two more tombs of the same group, Ast. i. 5 and i. 6, of thin gold pieces (Pl. CXX), similarly showing the type of Justinian I's gold coinage but struck only on the obverse. Mashik claimed the distinction of having been the first to learn by experience to look for coins of gold or silver placed in the mouths of the dead, though his search was but rarely rewarded. That earlier pillagers had not made the same discovery was proved by the fact that in none of the tombs which we explored, and which Mashik stated that he had not himself touched, had the skulls suffered the rude operation by which he was wont to ascertain whether they contained a coin.

Custom of providing obolus for dead.

The fact that out of the four coins actually found by us in the mouths of Astāna corpses three are Byzantine gold pieces or imitations of such pieces (Ast. i. 3. 023; 5. 08; 6. 03) and one a Sasanian silver coin (Ast. v. 2. 02) might naturally predispose us to connect this practice with the ancient Greek custom of placing a coin between the lips of the dead as the fare due to Charon, the ferryman of Hades. But the reference with which M. Chavannes kindly supplied me in 1916 to a Buddhist story in the Chinese Tripiṭaka suggests that the custom was not unknown in the Far East also.⁴ It must further be borne in mind that as China had never had a gold or silver coinage, those who at Turfān wished to provide their dead with an adequate obolus for the journey to the world beyond would necessarily have to use a coin of Western origin for their pious purpose, if they wished it to be of precious metal. I must leave it to others, with more ample literary resources than I can command at present, to trace such other links as may exist between the practice here discovered and the burial customs of the East or West. It will be sufficient here to remark that all the three gold coins above mentioned were recovered from bodies in one and the same group of tombs, the approximate period of which, as we shall see presently, is determined by inscriptional records.

Finds on body Ast. i. 3. b.

The second smaller body, *b*, in all probability female, had evidently been laid out in much the same manner as the first. It was found near the back wall of the tomb on a piece of much-decayed matting. Here, too, the face had a cover made of an originally circular piece of polychrome figured

³ See Appendix B.

⁴ See Chavannes, *Cinq cents contes et apologues extraits du Tripiṭaka chinois*, i. p. 248.