

changes are proved, as regards the earlier periods, by the situation of ruins on ground now abandoned to desert or marsh, and as regards more recent times by actual records or local tradition.

Effects of
wind-
erosion.

At the same time wind-erosion aided by the movement of drift-sand has been and is still at work, exactly as in the Lop basin, wherever alluvial land once inhabited has been for a long time deprived of protecting vegetation. The destructive effect of this wind-erosion upon structural remains situated on such ground can be seen in the southern portion of the deltaic area almost as clearly as at ancient sites in the Taklamakān. But, just as in the latter region, they also help the archaeologist by laying bare relics of early periods on the very surface, after the fashion illustrated by the 'Tati' sites of Chinese Turkestan. To make the parallel between the deltaic areas of the great Central-Asian basin and Sīstān still closer we find in the latter, too, that portion of the ancient lake bottom which in historic or prehistoric times has seen human occupation, surrounded and in places broken up by terraces of hard clay, mostly gravel-covered, 'witnesses' of an earlier lacustrine level. It is on these, just as along the terminal course of the Su-lo-ho, that we may expect structural remains to survive protected both from moisture and from wind-erosion.

Field for
archaeo-
logical
research.

These rapid notes will suffice to show how historical past and geographical features combine to make Sīstān a very promising field for antiquarian research. The exceptional opportunity which the prolonged stay and special facilities of the British Sīstān Mission of 1903-5 might have offered for a systematic archaeological survey of the whole area on both sides of the border could not be utilized in the absence of a qualified archaeologist. Nor was it open to me to attempt this within the limited time available for my work and in view of the fact that access to the Afghān portion of Sīstān, which contains the majority of sites abandoned to the desert, proved unobtainable.

Work of
Mr. G. P.
Tate.

Fortunately Mr. G. P. Tate, whom previous work had made familiar with the adjacent region of British Baluchistān and who was interested in the history of Khorāsān, was encouraged to use the opportunities offered by his topographical duties to visit most of the ruins within range of the Mission's operations. He diligently endeavoured to collect and record in his *Seistan* such information, usually scanty enough, as could be gathered about the more conspicuous ruins from local tradition and late Muhammadan records. This information, supplemented by general descriptions of the ruins, is helpful as regards the remains of later sites; but there, too, as well as in respect of points of historical topography, it often calls for more critical treatment. Allowing for such limitations, Mr. Tate's work, illustrated by a number of excellent photographs, represents a very praiseworthy effort to aid the study of Sīstān's past. The indications furnished by it were of distinct help in gaining a bird's-eye view, as it were, of the principal sites which called for examination. For this and the very valuable guidance derived from the accurate mapping done under his supervision I wish to express here my grateful appreciation.

Account
limited to
sites
surveyed.

A variety of considerations oblige me to restrict myself here to an account of the sites and remains actually surveyed. The fact that I was unable to visit the Afghān portion of the territory and the comparative shortness of my stay on the Persian side, together with present limitations of time, do not permit me to treat the important bearing that the physical geography of Sīstān has had upon its political and cultural history. Nor can I attempt to discuss questions of historical topography, since access to the necessary textual sources and time for their study are both lacking. For similar reasons I must leave it to others to derive from the comparison of architectural details or objects found elsewhere in Irān such assistance as may be possible towards the determination of the chronology of ruins and other remains in Sīstān. I am fully aware that substantial progress in the elucidation of the antiquities of this as of other parts of Irān must depend on systematic excavations. Destructive 'treasure-seeking' is not unknown among the ruins of Sīstān. Hence it is all the more desirable that the country which enjoys special treaty rights