

ridge extends from SSE. to NNW., and its northern portion (Fig. 486), about 160 yards in length, rises to a height of about 60 feet near where a fosse-like little Nullah cuts it off from the rest. The direction of the ridge shows that, like that of Shahrīstān, it is an outlier of the Dasht plateau to the south. On the steep southern side of this Nullah a small cave, about 10 feet square, has been cut into the clay with a niche at its back. Drift-sand fills the interior to about 3 feet from the roof. To the east there adjoins a smaller excavation of irregular shape. On the top of the ridge nearest to the Nullah lie the remains of a walled enclosure about 72 feet square, as seen in the sketch-plan, Pl. 57. Its walls, about 4 feet thick, are badly decayed and on the east barely traceable. Beyond this little fort there rises, at a distance of only 10 yards or so, the ruin of a smaller walled enclosure with an outer wall about 32 feet square. This is separated from a circular tower within by a passage about $8\frac{1}{2}$ feet wide. The inner wall rises to a height of about 9 feet above the debris-filled passage and shows loopholes, apparently in two rows. Remains of two small structures survive at short distances to the east and north of this tower.

Conspicuous
ruined
structure.

At the northern end of the ridge, where its top falls off in height and narrows to little more than 20 yards, rises a ruin of quite imposing appearance (i, Fig. 488). It consists, as the detail plan in Pl. 57 shows, of a hall measuring about 35 feet by 27 within, approached through an anteroom about 17 feet wide. The walls, about 5 feet thick and built of sun-dried bricks $16'' \times 11'' \times 4''$ on the average (a size found also at Shahrīstān and Kōh-i-Khwāja), still rise in places to a height of about 20 feet. Remains of vaulting or arches which once carried a dome were traceable on the western wall of the hall. They showed masonry of the same type as at Ghāgha-shahr, with the long side of the bricks laid on edge parallel to the curve of the voussoir. In the middle, the greater part of the north and south walls has disappeared, probably owing to the erosive action of the prevailing wind, the *bād-i-sad-ō-bīst rōz* of Sīstān.⁵ This makes it impossible to determine the main entrance of hall and anteroom. But on the right of the southern wall of the hall there is a high vaulted passage about 5 feet wide opening from the anteroom into the former.

Likely place
of Zoroas-
trian wor-
ship.

This conspicuous structure presents distinct interest. Taking into account its plan and the limited ground available on either side, it is clear that it could not have been intended either for defence or for use as a residence. Hence importance must be attached to the name *Ātish-kadah* or *Ātish-gāh*, 'place of fire', which authentic local tradition assigns to this ruin. The survival of such a genuine tradition can easily be accounted for if we recall how Zoroastrian creed and worship lingered on in Sīstān right through the Middle Ages, just as they have to the present day at Kirmān and Yazd. The two oldest MSS. of the Vendidad are shown by their colophons to be descended from a MS. copied in Sīstān in A. D. 1205 by a Zoroastrian priest who had come there from India to obtain religious information for the Pārsīs.⁶ Even as late as A. D. 1511 a letter brought to India by Pārsī traders gives the figure of 2,700 souls as that of the Zoroastrian community living in Sīstān, then apparently the largest in the whole of Irān.⁷

Antiquity
proved by
pottery.

That the abandonment of the site, however, must date back to a far older period than that which saw Zoroastrian religion and cult slowly die out in Sīstān, is clearly proved not only by the far-advanced decay of the structure just described but also by the types of the abundant potsherds found at the site. The great mass of the fragments belong to the well-made 'ribbed' type which prevails at Ghāgha-shahr and is illustrated in Pl. CXV. A rich red colour-wash on the surface characterizes most of these ribbed pieces, as well as the fragments of decorated ware found there, of which some specimens are described in the List below and reproduced in Pl. CXV. It deserves to be noted that I failed to find a single piece of glazed ware. As an indication of the value which the evidence of pottery debris may claim in Sīstān, I may refer to the ruin of a small walled enclosure,

⁵ Cf. below, ii. pp. 949 sq.

⁶ Cf. West, in *Grundriss d. iran. Philologie*, ii. pp. 82, 129.

⁷ See *ibid.*, ii. p. 125.