

impressions which were found still intact on a number of tablets (Fig 44), furnished from the start striking evidence of the way in which the influence of the West, through products of classical art, asserted itself so far away as the Tarim basin. It was a delightful surprise when, on cleaning the first intact seal-impression that turned up, I recognized in it the figure of Pallas Athene, with aegis and thunderbolt, treated in an archaic fashion. Other clay sealings also showed Greek figures, such as a standing and a seated Eros, Heracles and another Athene. The engraved stones from which these impressions had been made very closely resemble in their style Hellenistic or Roman work of the first centuries of our era.

As if to symbolize this strange mixture of influences from the Far West and the Far East, a covering tablet found here has two seals impressed side by side. One by its Chinese lapidary characters is shown to be the seal of the Chinese political officer in charge of Shan-shan, the present Lop district in the East; while the other presents a portrait-head unmistakably cut after Western models.

Owing to the excellent preservation of many documents thus brought to light in the course of my first visit to this fascinating site, it proved comparatively easy almost from the start to clear up the essential antiquarian details relating to their character and use. But, as I soon recognized, the detailed decipherment of all these epigraphical finds in Kharoshthi was bound to prove a very difficult task. Owing to the very cursive character of the Kharoshthi script and the puzzling phonetic and other peculiarities of the early Indian dialect employed, this task has indeed taxed the scholarly zeal and acumen of that learned triumvirate of