

these explorations, and the arrangements by which I was enabled to carry it into execution, have already been explained in my "Preliminary Report on a Journey of Archæological and Topographical Exploration in Chinese Turkestan," published in 1901 under the authority of the Secretary of State for India. Hence a succinct notice of them may suffice here. The idea of archæological work about Khotan first suggested itself to me in the spring of 1897, in consequence of some remarkable antiquarian acquisitions from that region. Among the papers left by the distinguished but ill-fated French traveller, M. Dutreuil de Rhins, were fragments of ancient birch-bark leaves, which had been acquired in the vicinity of Khotan. On expert examination they proved to contain a Buddhist text in an early Indian script and language, and were soon recognised as the oldest Indian manuscript then known, going back to the first centuries of our era.

About the same time the "British collection of Central-Asian antiquities" formed at Calcutta through the efforts of Dr. A. F. Rudolf Hoernle, C.I.E., received from the same region notable additions, consisting of fragments of paper manuscripts, pieces of ancient pottery, and similar relics. They had been sold to representatives of the Indian Government in Kashgar, Kashmir and Ladak as finds made by native "treasure-seekers" at ancient sites about Khotan. Similar purchases had reached public collections at St. Petersburg through the Russian Consul-General at Kashgar and others. A curious feature of all these acquisitions made from a distance was that, besides unmistakably genuine documents in Indian and Chinese writing, they included a large proportion of texts displaying a strange variety of entirely "unknown scripts," which could not fail to arouse suspicion. While the materials thus accumulated, no reliable information was ever forthcoming as to the exact origin of the finds or the true character of the ruined sites which were supposed to have furnished them. No part of Chinese Turkestan had then been explored from an archæological point of view, and it struck me that, however much attention these and other future discoveries might receive from competent Orientalists in