

date, told of settlements that had been abandoned before its advance.

The ruined sites explored by me have more than justified the hopes which led me to Khotan and into its desert. Scattered over an area which in a straight line extends for more than three hundred miles from west and east, and dating back to very different periods, these ruins throughout reveal to us a uniform and well-defined civilisation. It is easy to recognise now that this bygone culture rested mainly on Indian foundations. But there has also come to light unmistakable evidence of other powerful influences, both from the West and from China, which helped to shape its growth and to invest it with an individual character and fascination of its own.

The origin and history of the culture that once flourished in Buddhist Khotan, are faithfully reflected in the remarkable series of sculptures and paintings which the ancient shrines and dwelling places, after long centuries of burial beneath the dunes, have yielded up. Exact archæological evidence enables us to determine the various periods at which these settlements were invaded by the desert sand. Though these periods range from the third to the close of the eighth century of our era, yet the preponderance of Indian art influences is attested by the latest as well as by the earliest of these finds. The rich statuary of the Rawak Stupa Court, and the decorative wood carvings of the ancient site beyond Niya, reproduce with astonishing fidelity the style and motives of that fascinating 'Græco-Buddhist' art which, fostered by Hellenistic-Roman influences grew up and flourished in Gandhara (the present Peshawar Valley) and other neighbouring tracts in the extreme North-West of India, during the centuries immediately preceding and following the commencement of our era. Yet when we turn from those remains to the frescoes on the walls of the small Buddhist shrines at Dandan-Uiliq, dating some five hundred years later, we recognise with equal distinctness the leading features of ancient Indian pictorial art as preserved for us in the Ajanta Cave paintings.

The records of the Chinese Annals plainly showed us that for