

classical models greatly influenced the work of local lapidaries and die-sinkers. The remarkable diversity of the cultural influences which met and mingled at Khotan during the third century A.D. is forcibly brought home to us by these records from a remote Central-Asian settlement, inscribed on wooden tablets in an Indian language and writing and issued by officials with strangely un-Indian titles, whose seals carry us to the classical world far away in the West.

The imitation of early Persian art of which, five centuries later, we find unmistakable traces in some of the paintings of sacred Buddhist subjects recovered from the ruins of Dandan-Uiliq, is a curious parallel, and from a historical point of view almost equally instructive.

The dwelling places, shrines, etc., of those ancient settlements had, no doubt, before the desert sand finally buried them, been cleared by the last inhabitants and others of everything that possessed intrinsic value. But much of what they left behind, though it could never tempt the treasure-seekers of succeeding ages, has acquired for us exceptional value. The remains of ancient furniture such as the wooden chair reproduced on p. 376; the shreds of silks and other woven fabrics; the tatters of antique rugs; the fragments of glass, metal and pottery ware; the broken pieces of domestic and agricultural implements, and the manifold other relics, however humble, which had safely rested in the sand-buried dwellings and their deposits of rubbish—these all help to bring vividly before our eyes details of ancient civilisation that without the preserving force of the desert would have been lost for ever.

But however interesting and instructive such details may be, they would, by themselves, not permit us with any degree of critical assurance to reconstruct the life and social organisation which once flourished at these settlements, or to trace the historical changes which they have witnessed. The hope of ever elucidating such questions was dependent on the discovery of written records, and it is fortunate indeed that, at the very sites which proved richest in those relics of material culture, the finds of ancient manuscripts