

on the Upper Oxus well up to the middle of the eighth century. Embassies from Tabaristān to the imperial court are recorded as late as the years 744, 746, and 754 A.D., about which time the Chinese lost Western Turkestan to the Arabs. The exact description which the Annals give of the geographical position of Tabaristān, their distinct reference to the title Ispahbud (rendered quite correctly by 'hereditary commander-in-chief of the east for Persia'), and their mention of Tabaristān's struggle against the Arabs, are all clear indications of the closeness of these political relations. It is evident that by the latter a connexion of commerce must also have been encouraged, for which the Oxus valley and Khotan was the natural and most direct route. There is little hope of our ever obtaining light as to the incidents and conditions which brought the writer or the recipient of this Judaeo-Persian epistle to Khotan. But even without such information this fragmentary paper may claim to be considered one of the most interesting relics from Dandān-Uiliq; for it is a direct witness to those relations with distant Īrān which so much in the Buddhist art of the site presupposes, and at the same time, strangely enough, it is the earliest document in modern Persian which has come to light as yet.

The second relic from Dandān-Uiliq, which reached me at Rawak, the small piece of stucco inscribed with Chinese characters and apparently cut out from a plaster-covered wall, does not call for so full a notice. Owing to the extremely friable condition of the stucco it broke into several pieces before it reached London, but the few characters that were legible when it was first brought to me have escaped further injury. According to Dr. S. W. Bushell, who was kind enough to examine the inscription, 'it has every appearance from the handwriting of being a genuine relic of the T'ang dynasty'. The writing was arranged in three columns, each about 5 inches high and originally holding about eight characters, but owing to the painted surface having peeled off over the greater part Dr. Bushell 'could only decipher the first three characters and the upper two of the second column; these are *Fo ti-tzu* 佛弟子 "The Disciple of Buddha", and *Kuan-shih* 觀世, sufficient to indicate a memorial of the dedication of an image of Avalokiteśvara (Kuan-shih-yin). The occasion would have been given lower down, as *wei* 爲 "on account of", occurs there where all else is gone.'

Chinese
inscription
on stucco.

SECTION III.—KERIYA, NIYA, AND IMĀM JA'FAR SĀDIQ

The examination of the scanty remains at Rawak had completed the task for which I had set out just a month previously from Khotan. So on the morning of January 6 I dismissed Ahmad Merghen with the last batch of the Tawakkēl labourers, and set out with a much reduced caravan for the Keriya river. About two miles to the south-east of my Rawak camp we passed a strip of ground about half a mile broad, where broken pottery, fragments of glass, and the usual 'Tati' débris cropped up on the bare patches of loess between the dunes. Turdi called the place *Tört-Uiliq* 'the four Houses', but had never come across any structural remains on it. Beyond, all traces of ancient habitation ceased, and soon I passed also the last of the shrivelled dead trees, here a clump of wild poplars (Toghraks), with the sight of which I had become so familiar during these weeks. I had originally intended to steer due east, in order to strike the nearest point of the river, but the rising height of the dunes and the impossibility of getting at water obliged me after the first day to seek the route south-eastwards which the camels had previously followed. Even thus the two remaining marches led over truly forbidding ground. The individual sand-dunes were all between 30 and 50 ft. high, while the successive great ridges of sand or 'Dawāns', of which some seven had to be crossed,

March to
Keriya
river.