

the deep-cut river-bed, offers a natural position of defence. Within the crumbling walls, which are built of bricks of practically the same size as those of the Stupa (fifteen by twelve inches and about four inches thick) and have a thickness varying from three to five feet, there appeared no structural remains inviting excavation. Nor was there much hope of relics of interest, such as written records, surviving to any extent on ground bare of the protecting cover of drift sand, and particularly exposed by its slope to the effects of such downpours as this north-western rim of the great basin from time to time knows.

So, after completing a plane-table survey of the ruins under a burning sun, I rode on north-westwards where the road to Artush skirts on its left a long sandstone terrace rising with an almost vertical rock face above the flat riverine Dasht. There, carved into the rock at an elevation of about fifty feet above the top of the débris slope which has accumulated at the foot of the terrace, and about as much below the overhanging brink of the latter, gaped the three niches close in line which are known as Öch-merwan. The doorways, carefully carved from the rock within shallow recesses, showed slightly slanting jambs, and seemed to measure about eight feet in height and about six feet across. I could easily make out at the back of the shallow central niche the painted head of a seated Buddha with hair-knob and halo, which Mr. Macartney appears to have been the first to notice.

The two side niches seemed much deeper, and suggested a connecting passage behind, which would permit the orthodox circumambulation or 'Pradakshina' of the sacred image in the small central shrine. Square holes cut into the rock at irregular intervals below the niches had once served to support the scaffolding needed for access to this little cave temple. To clamber up to it with the help of a rope let down from above proved impossible, and there was no time to improvise a rope-ladder such as I understood had been used by the Cossacks, who first visited the caves. Since they had been examined subsequently also by the members of the German archaeological mission which spent some time