

his way to Seric regions like those agents of Maës, the Macedonian, that Hassan Akhun derived his strange jumble of versatile ingenuity and exuberant temper, fitful energy and classical impudence.

There was every reason to believe that the mound sighted belonged to the eastern or main group of Hedin's ruins. So I decided, without hesitation, to steer for it. The direction differed but little from that of the Yardangs, and thus favoured progress; but the distance proved nearly five miles, and though all the men moved on with alacrity, it took us two hours to cover them. On arrival I convinced myself that the large brick mound was that of a Stupa, undoubtedly the same near which Hedin had first camped on his return in 1901. Chinese coins of the Han type were picked up in numbers around, and finds of arrow-heads and other small objects in bronze became frequent.

Among the three mounds which now had come into view, the one to the south-east and largest was quickly recognized by Mullah as the place where Hedin's camp had stood. The ground separating us from it was frightfully eroded, and the succession of steep clay banks and sharply cut trenches between them, twenty and more feet deep, had to be negotiated at right angles. These last three miles were like an obstacle race, and most tiring. But just as darkness came on I had the satisfaction of reaching the foot of the ruined Stupa, which stands out in this weirdly desolate landscape as the landmark of the main group of ruins.

The abundance of ancient timber strewing the ground where structures had been completely eroded, allowed us to light a big signal fire on the top of a high clay 'witness,' and, guided by it, the convoy of our much-tried camels safely arrived nearly two hours later. I, likewise, had been fairly worn out by the exertions and anxieties of this week of hard desert marching. Yet as I sat warming myself with the men by the glowing bonfire, which threw ruins and Yardangs alike into fantastically bold relief, all that remained was elation at the goal successfully reached. In the letters which I wrote that night in my little tent until