

CHAPTER XL

ANCIENT TEMPLES OF MIRAN

THE abundance with which the ruined fort yielded up materials illustrating the conditions of the later occupation of the site, only increased my eagerness to get at remains which might help me to trace its earlier history. So I felt heartily glad when on January 29th the advanced state of the fort excavations allowed me to take a portion of my band of diggers across to the ruined temple a little over a mile away to the north-east, where experimental clearing in December had disclosed some sculptural relics of manifestly early type. It was a bitterly cold day. The minimum temperature was 37 degrees below freezing-point; and in the piercing north wind it seemed as if this would never rise at all. But all the discomforts from cold, wind, and the dust clouds attending work in the trenches were forgotten at times over the interesting results of the digging.

The ruin, which on my first visit I had recognized as that of a Buddhist shrine, presented itself before clearing as an oblong mound of masonry in sun-dried bricks, measuring about forty-six feet on its longer sides and a little over thirty-six feet on the shorter. The corners were roughly orientated towards the cardinal points. Two stories could be clearly distinguished, one about nine feet high above what proved to be the original ground level, and on the top of it another and far more decayed one, about fifteen by seventeen and a half feet in ground plan, and in its broken state still over eleven feet high. Destruction caused by wind erosion had completely removed the plaster covering and decoration from the upper story