

dome emerging from much *débris* above what seemed a disproportionately large base.

At first the clearing of this revealed nothing more stirring than the broken remnant of a narrow terrace or passage which seemed once to have run round the sides of this supposed main base, about twenty-nine feet square. I left the few men with me to complete, under Tokhta Akhun's supervision, the removal of the *débris* outside, while I made a preliminary survey of the adjacent masonry mounds. But on returning I realized quickly that the brickwork then laid bare was not a base at all but the remains of a solid structure, square outside but circular within, which was once, no doubt, domed and meant to enclose the small Stupa in its centre (Fig. 142). Heavy masses of *débris* fallen from the vaulting and the upper portions of the walls had completely blocked up the circular passage four feet eight inches wide which was left around the Stupa base, this, too, circular and measuring nine feet in diameter. The *débris* lay to a height of six feet and more from the original floor; but its removal was facilitated by the broad cutting which treasure-seekers, probably at an early date, had made from the west right through the massive masonry of the cella and, as we soon found, into the base of the Stupa itself.

The clearing was still proceeding in the afternoon when from the north and east segments of the circular passage fragments of painted stucco cropped up rapidly. It was evident that the interior walls of the cella had once been adorned with frescoes. Yet, when the digging there had reached a level of about four feet above the floor and a delicately painted dado of beautiful winged angels began to show on the wall, I felt completely taken by surprise. How could I have expected by the desolate shores of Lop-nor, in the very heart of innermost Asia, to come upon such classical representations of Cherubim! And what had these graceful heads, recalling cherished scenes of Christian imagery, to do here on the walls of what beyond all doubt was a Buddhist sanctuary?

As in eager excitement I cleared head after head with my bare hands in order to prevent any chance of damage,