

at least I was resolved to spare no precaution and trouble to make their transit as secure as conditions would permit, and thus to save my archaeological conscience. The question as to how best to attempt the seemingly impossible task had been revolved in my mind all through these busy days; and when by the evening of February 2nd all the frescoes capable of preservation lay safely spread out on their wooden boards, carefully protected against wind, driving sand, and other agents of mischief, I had my plan of packing ready.

The problem was how to combine the rigidity and compression which alone could keep the friable plaster from breaking up into dust and straw, with an elasticity which would counteract the innumerable buffetings and tumbles the packages were bound to undergo from camels, yaks, ponies, and loading men on their journey of months. It would have been worse than useless to think of materials such as European dealers might employ for delicate antiques. But I remembered how helpful the bundles of reeds, brought for camel fodder, had been for packing fragile wood-carvings at the sites of Niya and Lop-nor, and decided to make the most of the Kumush beds within reach by the dying Miran stream. Plentiful loads of their produce had been brought up over-night, and old Mullah sent to Abdal had managed to collect a supply of sheep's wool to replace my reserve of cotton wool already giving out.

The details of my method of packing were not evolved until repeated experiments which cost labour and much pain to one's chapped hands. But in the end I arrived at a *modus operandi* which left, at least, some hope that I might not have laboured in vain. I had reeds, dry but still fairly supple, cut down in regular fascines to a uniform length, somewhat greater than the longitudinal dimension of my fresco panels. Above a fairly thick layer of these I spread crosswise a substratum of shorter reeds cut to correspond to the width of the frescoes. Then came a thick bedding of the soft feathery tips of reeds containing their flowering parts, admirably suited to hold and protect the exposed rough plaster surface on the back of the fresco panel. The