

taking five camels laden with flour from Charklik to his far-off encampment on a high plateau of the Chimen-tagh. He was a delightful barbarian figure buried in enormous sheepskins and carrying a heavy straight sword with a brass hilt studded with corals and green jade. He talked no language any of us could understand, would on no account face the camera, and looked altogether of another age. My trouble over all this rotten old plaster seemed to amaze him a great deal. I for my part felt very much as a classical archaeologist might who, while uncovering the remains of a Roman villa somewhere near Hadrian's wall, suddenly saw himself watched by a clansman from across the border in full panoply of the Middle Ages.

Some assurance came to me eighteen months later at Khotan when I had to open the cases brought away from Miran on camels, some weighing nearly two hundred pounds, and to repack their contents into lighter loads for ponies and yaks. Apart from slight cracks here and there, which were easily accounted for by the panels taken from slightly curving wall segments having necessarily been packed flat, no damage had occurred so far. By applying then a net-work of narrow bandages heavily steeped in carpenter's glue to the back of the plaster, I provided a very useful stiff backing, and thus an additional safeguard, for which at Miran there had been neither materials nor shelter available. But the time for true relief arrived only when, just three years after that trying exploit at Miran, the cases came to be opened at the British Museum. Then all doubts about the success of the hazardous experiment were lifted from my mind. How delighted my eyes were to behold these fine art relics, probably the most fragile ever transported over such a distance and over such ground, brought to safety practically in the same condition as when I had the good fortune to see them rise from their grave of long centuries in that dismal wind-swept desert of gravel!