

the inner fort. From the débris left undisturbed in the outer passages, and still more from the refuse layers covering the floor of a room on the top of the rampart not far off, I recovered a number of manuscript fragments and documents all written in Uigur script. They sufficed to prove that the site had continued to be occupied until towards the close of the Buddhist period. From many indications it seemed safe to conclude that the area of scrub-covered desert around, now showing incipient wind erosion, was then under cultivation.

From the height of the ruined fort I could clearly see southwards the glittering end of the salt-encrusted lake bed which receives whatever of Turfan drainage escapes evaporation. Above it rose the gravel glacié of the low Chöl-tagh range towards Singer. During my three days' stay at Chong-Hassar I sent Rai Lal Singh on reconnaissances to south and east to survey this end of the basin, while careful observations made at Chong-Hassar with the mercurial barometer showed its level to be depressed fully 360 feet below the sea. The salt-encrusted bed of the lake was boggy and impassable on horseback, whereas the ground north of it was covered with 'Shor' in hard cakes and lumps of salt, clear evidence that the extent of the lake had been shrinking within recent periods.

I myself examined the ruins known as Kichik-Hassar or the 'Little Castle,' two miles off to the north-east, and finding that the group of small Buddhist shrines and Stupas (Fig. 261) had never been touched by the archaeologist, took occasion to have them thoroughly cleared with the help of a band of labourers easily obtained from Besh-tam. Besides fragments of well-executed fresco work, we recovered remains of delicate paintings on linen, and a small but well-preserved statue of a Buddha in carved wood. Manuscript pieces and fragments of prints in Uigur, Chinese, and Tibetan proved that worship at these shrines continued at least as long as the occupation of Chong-Hassar. The fact that a route to Singer passes close by may account for the detached position of these shrines, which, as the photograph shows, are now being invaded by dunes.