

ward. My visit to Ak-su was largely prompted by the wish to see again the scholarly Mandarin who had helped me so effectively as Tao-t'ai. So it was doubly gratifying to hear his praises sung by all the cultivators who had come here as hopelessly poor folk, and were now beginning to feel themselves veritable 'Bais' or men of substance.

Then I crossed eastwards the strip of absolutely sterile desert which separates the Kara-kash and Yurung-kash Rivers. At a most unpromising-looking spot near Mayalik I came upon the remains of a large Buddhist temple completely buried under high dunes. After a day's hard digging there emerged walls decorated with colossal fresco figures and inscribed stucco relievos of large size. Everything clearly indicated that this temple, like the great Rawak Stupa on the opposite bank of the Yurung-kash, belonged to the early centuries of our era. Unfortunately here, too, as at Rawak, subsoil moisture due to the vicinity of the river had caused all the woodwork to perish. It also had softened the clay of the walls and relievos to such an extent that the frescoes on the former collapsed one after the other soon after exposure. As continued excavation would have resulted in complete destruction, I had to be content with photographs and the removal of some smaller frescoes.

We then set out northward for Ak-su by the desert route which leads down the Khotan River bed, at that season practically dry. From Tawakkel onwards I had the benefit of having my caravan guided by Kasim Akhun, the experienced hunter, who with his father Merghen Ahmad had accompanied me seven years before on my expedition to Dandan-oilik. The hardy old man, alas! had passed away some months earlier. I had already heard vague reports about the existence of old remains on the curious desert hill of Mazar-tagh, which, as the last offshoot of a low and almost completely eroded range from the north-west, juts out to the left bank of the Khotan River.

On April 16th I reached the hill, which rises with its gaunt and barren cliffs of reddish sandstone some two hundred feet above the wide river bed and the sandy