

wastes by its side. My satisfaction was great when I found its top occupied by the ruins of a small and relatively well preserved fort (Fig. 297). This had clearly been built to guard the route leading by the river. Half-way up on the steep scarp overlooking the river a collection of staffs with votive rags marked the supposed resting-place of a saint, from which the hill takes its present name. The whole made up a striking picture of desert scenery, the death-like torpor of the red rocks and yellow sands being heightened by the heat and glare which brooded over all.

The little fort, looking down from its precipitous height like a true robbers' stronghold, had been burnt out long ago; yet its siege, or rather that of its rubbish heaps, kept us busy for three long and hot days. Tibetan records on wood and paper cropped up with miscellaneous relics when we cleared out the few still traceable halls and quarters inside. But their yield was trifling compared with that of the masses of refuse thrown down by the occupants in the course of long years on to the steep rock slopes below the east face (Fig. 298). The conditions had been exceptionally favourable for their preservation. Not a particle of moisture could rise from the river below to the height of this barren sandstone ridge which was clear of any trace of the humblest vegetation. An outlying and somewhat lower ridge kept off dunes and prevented erosion by driving sand.

It seemed like another Miran, with all the unspeakable dirt which these old Tibetans seem to have accumulated wherever they held posts, and with all its peculiar concomitant odours still fresh in my recollection. Buried in the thick refuse layers lay Tibetan tablets and papers by the hundreds, along with documents in Chinese and Brahmi script, and rarer pieces in Uigur and some unknown writing. The Tibetan records greatly predominated, pointing, as in the case of Miran, to the period of Tibetan invasions during the eighth and ninth centuries A.D. As far as yet examined by my learned collaborator, Dr. A. H. Francke, they seem to contain military reports, requisitions, and the like.

The dating has been fully confirmed by finds of coins and the Chinese documents. Among the latter some large