

to remove the exposed loess surface and to lay bare again the upper layer of relievos. It was this action of the winds which had done here, as it were, the preliminary spade-work and thus led to the discovery of the ruin in the midst of these vast 'Tati' areas where the pottery and other débris exposed on the surface come down to much later periods. I could trace the abrading effect of the winds also in a minor observation. Practically all relievo pieces still retaining evidence of gilding were found in the débris layer resting on the floor, whereas among the very numerous fragments from the upper stratum vestiges of gilding were very rarely met with and only in specially protected folds and groves. The explanation was not far to seek when we noticed how easily the light breeze blowing at the time would carry off the thin flakes of leaf-gold from gilt fragments if these were left too long exposed on the surface. No doubt, the combined effects of fire and moisture had greatly reduced the cohesion between the stucco surface and the gilding.⁶

In addition, the ruined shrine must have been long exposed to those repeated burrowings which threaten all remains close to inhabited ground in this region. Hence I could scarcely expect to come upon such datable archaeological evidence as only ruins abandoned once for all to the desert can preserve. Yet a careful search of the débris layers revealed indications of distinct chronological interest. From the style of the relievos, to be discussed presently, I had drawn the conclusion that this shrine must have been approximately contemporary with the Rawak Stūpa. This received confirmation from the fact that the only coin discovered in the ruin was a 'cash' piece of the uninscribed type which was current both under the Former and Later Han dynasties. It was found close to the floor of the west passage, A.T. v, near the foot of the outer wall where it may have been originally deposited as a votive offering below the base of some image.⁷ The negative evidence which the absence within the ruin of any later coins furnishes, has some claim to attention; for it contrasts strikingly with the abundance of coins belonging to the T'ang, Sung, and early Muhammadan issues which the surrounding 'Tati' area yielded, and which conclusively proves that the ground itself continued to be occupied down to much later periods.

Chrono-
logical
indications.

Assuming this dating of the Ak-terek shrine to be true, the finds there of grotesque figurines in true terra-cotta of the type representing monkeys, familiar from the Yōtkan culture-strata, assume additional interest; for they furnish the first definite evidence as to the period when this branch of old Khotan art flourished. Already among the small relics which Rōze's men had collected at this site, and brought to me as specimens, there were a number of terra-cotta figurines of the type referred to, representing monkeys (A.T. 043, 046), and also camels (A.T. 038, 044, 056). They were said to have been picked up on eroded ground close to the reported 'Būt-khāna'. This origin was fully confirmed when, in the west passage of the temple, there came to light from the lower débris layer the portions of two relatively large monkey figurines, A.T. v. 1, 2, and another fragment, A.T. iv. 00164, in the east passage. The finds, in the same layer, of pottery decorated with saw-tooth and festoon ornaments, A.T. ii. 2, iv. 1-3, acquire interest for the same reason. Other pieces of decorated pottery, A.T. 001-0015, including a lamp handle with anthemion design, were picked up on eroded ground close to the shrine and may, partly at least, be assumed to belong to the same period. But, of course, in the case of small objects found on the surface of 'Tatis' where wind erosion may have

Finds of
terra-cotta
figurines.

⁶ I much regret that I did not pay sufficient attention to this fact in the packing of the Ak-terek finds. The cotton wool which I used for their first wrapping, proved, when it came to unpacking the relievo fragments in London, only too frequently to have stripped them completely of their gilding by catching the thin flakes of the leaf-gold. Hence no adequate idea of the number of gilt pieces found can be

deduced from the corresponding entries in the Descriptive List below. In extenuation of the mishap I may mention that it would have been quite impossible for me to improvise on the spot that supply of tissue paper which alone could have obviated it.

⁷ Cf. for similar finds of coins used as offerings at the Rawak Vihāra, *Ancient Khotan*, i. pp. 500 sq.