

would have involved the shifting of huge masses of sand and a far greater expenditure of time than any likely results would have justified. The abundant moisture permeating the lower sand strata was bound to have affected any other structures at this site quite as much as those already laid bare. The condition to which this moisture must have reduced any smaller relics of perishable substance was illustrated by the small fragment of a wood-carving, Ta. i. 008, almost wholly rotten, showing a seated Buddha. The other small finds made included decorated terra-cotta pieces, Ta. 004-5; i. 003, very closely resembling those from the Yōtkañ débris strata. Among other pottery remains some fragments of a vase with green glaze, Ta. 003; i. 001-2, may be specially mentioned.

Other remains from ruin.

In view of the interest attaching to the relics brought to light here of Khotanese pictorial art, and also in view of the position of the site far away from the present limits of the oasis, any indications as to the date of the latter would be specially welcome. The safest evidence at present available is that of the coins. The two found at the ruin itself are the *Wu-chu* piece already mentioned and an uninscribed copper coin from the foot of the wall ii. In addition eight poorly preserved Chinese coins were picked up on a small and completely eroded 'Tati' area to the south of the site. They are either much worn *Wu-chu* pieces or else uninscribed.¹⁵ The collective evidence of the coins thus points to the site having been abandoned before T'ang times. In the present state of our knowledge no closer date limits can be safely deduced either from the style of the paintings or from the palaeographic character of the two inscriptions in cursive Central-Asian Brāhmī found by their side. But if my tentative reading of three characters on a small fragment of coloured wall-plaster which was found in loose sand at the first trial excavation, Ta. 01, as written in Kharoṣṭhī should prove right, we should have to push back the upper date limit for the occupation of the site to about the fifth century A.D.¹⁶ In respect of the position of the site it should be noted that it lies almost exactly in the same latitude as the northernmost of the Kīne-tokmak ruins, about 13 miles away to the east on the other side of the Yurung-kāsh. For these the probability of abandonment before the T'ang period has been shown above,¹⁷ and this lower date limit is certain in the case of the Rawak Vihāra, which lies only 3 miles or less further south.¹⁸ In any case we have thus archaeological proof that the area of the main Khotan oasis on either side of the Yurung-kāsh River must have extended much further north than it does at present.

Chronological evidence of site.

Abandonment before T'ang period.

On April 11 I moved down by the river and by a long march reached the oasis of Islāmābād (Map No. 27. B. 2), the northernmost outlying settlement of the Khotan district. Even here there was striking evidence of the rapid expansion which Khotan cultivation had been undergoing for some time past; for owing to the construction of a large new canal about 1896 the seven to eight holdings formerly cultivated by settlers from Tawakkēl on the opposite bank of the river had grown into a large colony consisting of about 400 households and capable of supporting many more. A day's halt at Islāmābād was needed for drying and packing the fresco pieces brought away from Mayaklik, and also enabled me to secure welcome information about the ruins at the desert hill of Mazār-tāgh for which I was bound. What I had heard about them in 1900-1 and also on my subsequent visits to Khotan had sounded extremely vague.¹⁹

Oasis of Islāmābād.

But now ten narrow slips of wood, inscribed in Tibetan like those found in the Mīrān fort, were brought to me by Tawakkēl men who the year before had prospected for 'treasure' at a ruin on the hill-top. Thirteen more were put into my hands by Kāsim Ākhūn of Islāmābād, the son of my old guide Aḥmad Merghen,²⁰ who had died a few months earlier. The old hunter had secured them from

Finds obtained at Islāmābād.

¹⁵ See Appendix B.

¹⁶ The frescoed fragment showed unusual hardness at the time of discovery. Its original provenance could not be traced.

¹⁷ See above, p. 131.

¹⁸ Cf. *Ancient Khotan*, i. p. 451.

¹⁹ My doubts about the provenance of the coin batch said to have come from Mazār-tāgh and detailed in *Ancient Khotan*, i. p. 579, were fully justified.

²⁰ Cf. *Ancient Khotan*, i. pp. 237 sq.