

eyebrows bore traces of black paint. The carving, though too rude for any safe dating, was manifestly old, the stone showing a great deal of weathering.

That the image, whatever it may have been intended to represent, had been an object of pre-Muhammadan cult seemed likely *a priori*. This was made still more probable by the discovery at its side of what manifestly was to be taken for a miniature representation of a Stūpa (Fig. 341 on right). The block of stone, 14 inches in height, showed on two faces what looked like a double base of approximately square shape and, above a receding moulding, a roughly rounded top, suggesting a rudimentary dome. The material of the stone seemed to me granite. The back of the stone was flat. At the time I took it for a rough carving meant to show a Stūpa as it were in relievo. But a subsequent observation, made seven years later and far away near the Pāmīrs, has suggested to me that the peculiar shape of this stone was natural and due to erosive action. At a much-frequented Mazār near Namadgut in Russian Wakhān, and facing the ancient fortress of Kala-i-Ka'ka on the Oxus, I found collected a series of exactly corresponding stone blocks, differing in sizes but all showing the same curious resemblance to miniature Stūpas. They were clearly of natural origin, but had obviously been placed at the shrine out of lingering respect for their shape. This, while Buddhism still prevailed along the uppermost Oxus, would certainly have made them objects of worship at *svayambhū* Stūpas.⁴

Stone taken
for minia-
ture Stūpa.

The most curious feature to me, however, at this strange 'Ziārat' of Chalkoide was the enclosure around filled with the usual votive offerings of orthodox Muhammadan shrines in these parts, horns of *Ovis Poli* or *Ovis Ammon* and wild goats, horse-skulls, rags fastened on staffs, etc. There could be no doubt that worship at this shrine was very much a thing of the present, in spite of the Uch-Turfān Mullahs' protest against it, of which Mangush Bēg told me. Until recent years the cult of this queer 'Ziārat', he declared, was general among the Kirghiz of the neighbouring grazing-grounds. Numbers of men used to come to it also from distant valleys, good Muhammadans as all these Kirghiz herdsmen have been for long generations. It was said that at the present day only the older men clung to the custom of praying at the shrine; but even thus nobody dares to enter the enclosure. Curiously enough the carved figure was stated by Mangush Bēg to represent a female, Kuwaghiz by name, the wife of that ancient hero Kaz-atā, whose image is supposed to be represented by the conspicuous rock pinnacle already referred to. A confused tradition, the details of which I could not unravel, connects the two images. The nexus, however obscure, suffices to show that the curious shrine here surviving must have owed its origin to that worship of a striking natural feature, i.e. a *svayambhū tīrtha*, to use the Sanskrit terminology, which is so well known from the folk-lore of India, ancient and modern, and for which Buddhist local cult has always been ready to find room.

Local wor-
ship of
image.

This interesting excursion from Shait-kāk and the next two days' marches to Kelpin served to acquaint me with the very arid conditions prevailing in these outer T'ien-shan ranges notwithstanding their relatively great height. In the absence of records or datable remains of any antiquity, it is impossible to trace here the changes which the climate may have undergone during the historical period, though Kirghiz tradition seems distinctly to point towards progress of 'desiccation' in recent times. But, even without any definite data on this point, the study of the present conditions in these hills, where springs are now extremely rare and all travel depends on an exact knowledge of the water-supply obtainable from natural cisterns (*kāk*) and varying in different seasons, was to me of historical interest; for they make it easier to realize conditions such as are likely to have prevailed in the now absolutely waterless desert ranges of the westernmost Pei-shan during the period when

Advance of
aridity in
mountains.

⁴ Regarding early and modern worship of 'svayambhū' images in India, cf. *Rājatar.*, transl. Stein, i. 113; ii. 136, etc.