

The difficulties to which I refer are accounted for largely by the extent of the archaeological operations carried out, the great variety of the finds and observations made, and not less by the scope and character which I felt obliged to give to my task of recording them. The extent of the field-work is sufficiently illustrated by the fact that, taking only the territory of ancient Khotan, the old sites and remains which I surveyed in detail or excavated are scattered over an area which in a direct line stretches for more than 300 miles from west to east. The wide range of the antiquarian remains is equally striking. Dating back to periods which may be estimated to extend over at least eleven centuries, they show remarkable diversity in nature and character. Among the sites surveyed there are represented the curious wind-eroded 'Tatis', typical of the great physical changes to which the soil of the tracts bordering on the desert is subject; 'culture-strata' left behind by thickly inhabited ancient settlements and deeply buried below the loess accumulations of centuries; and in the area now overrun by the moving sands of the Taklamakān, sites with structural ruins of all kinds and in all stages of preservation. The remains discovered of temples, fortified posts, Sarais, private dwellings, &c., with the relics of ancient art-work and industrial products found in them, have been so plentiful and multifarious as to enable us to study most aspects of the early civilization which once flourished there.

The very abundance and novelty of the archaeological materials brought to light necessarily made the task of correctly recording and interpreting them one of considerable difficulty. But what greatly added to the difficulty—as it undoubtedly did also to the fascination and scientific interest of the work—was the remarkable diversity of cultural influences thus revealed in the arts of ancient Khotan. That the Buddhism which we knew from Chinese records to have been early established in the country had been imported, directly or indirectly, from India was, of course, always certain. But there was little to prepare us for such overwhelming evidence as the wealth of Kharoṣṭhī documents on wood and leather discovered at the Niya Site has furnished of the large place which Indian language and culture must have occupied in the administration and daily life of this region during the early centuries of our era³. That Sanskrit Buddhist literature was studied in Khotan down to the end of the eighth century A. D. has been proved beyond all doubt by the texts in Brāhmī script which I excavated in the ruined shrines and monastic dwellings of Dandān-Uiliq and Endere. At the same time, the large series of ancient stucco sculptures, frescoes, painted tablets, and relief carvings in wood, from ruins the dates of which, as determined by exact chronological evidence, range from the third to the eighth century, has conclusively demonstrated that the Graeco-Buddhist art of the extreme north-west of India found a new home in Khotan and enjoyed a long-continued local development.

The territory of Khotan had, like the rest of the Tārīm basin, been under Chinese supremacy for considerable periods both under the Han and the T'ang dynasties. The interesting finds of Chinese records on wood and paper, Chinese sgraffiti, coins, articles of industrial art, &c., at the sites excavated by me have made it abundantly clear that Chinese political control was effective, and that the influence of Chinese civilization, too, must have strongly asserted itself. The fact that Khotan occupied an important position on the ancient trade route from China to the Oxus basin no doubt helped to increase this influence. To the same connecting link we must ascribe those early relations with the distant West which the remarkable series of classical seals found impressed in clay on a number of the ancient Kharoṣṭhī documents from the Niya Site attests in so striking a fashion⁴. The imitation of Persian art, of which we find unmistakable indications five centuries later in Buddhist paintings recovered from the shrines of Dandān-Uiliq,

³ See chap. xi, in particular pp. 363 sqq.

⁴ See below, pp. 354 sqq.