

in understanding the condition to which its débris has been reduced, and the peculiar character of the objects which alone can still be recovered from it. In a soil kept constantly moist through percolation from the irrigated top layer none but objects of exceptionally hard substance, such as terra-cotta, stone, metal, or bone, could escape decomposition in the course of centuries, and to this material the antiquarian relics of the site are in fact entirely confined. That these objects are mostly of very small size or fragmentary is also readily explained. They belong to the rubbish gradually accumulated at a site which probably for a period of more than a thousand years preceding the Muhammadan conquest had never ceased to be occupied by houses, and which even when the end came is not likely to have at once been abandoned completely. Objects of larger size and any practical utility were thus sure to be removed from the débris and to be utilized elsewhere.

It would have been undoubtedly a matter of considerable antiquarian interest to trace the exact distribution of the still recognizable remains through the layers of different depth. But a systematic search for such relics would have cost time, even if the convenient and effective method of excavation customary with the local diggers could have been followed. Their *modus operandi* consists of cutting away vertically the banks exposed at the edge of the excavated area with the help of little watercourses conducted over them. The soil carried off is subsequently washed in rough sieves, when, besides the tiny flakes of gold which attract the diggers, coins, gems, fragments of decorated pottery, and similar small objects can be readily recognized and extracted. The season of abundant water supply from the river, when alone such washing operations can be carried on, lasts only from July to September, and had long passed at the time of my visit. Hence my efforts at the site had to be restricted to the acquisition of as much of the last season's output of antiques as had not yet left the hands of the villagers.

In addition, I purchased through Munshī Badruddīn, the Ak-sakāl or headman of the Afghān traders at Khotan, and some other agents, whatever antiques were traceable in the Bāzārs of Khotan. It is certain that the latter receive by far the greater part of their supply in antiques such as ancient coins, cut stones, ornamented pottery, directly from the diggings of Yōtkan, and relatively little from those professional 'treasure-seekers' who annually in the winter months visit the old sites in the desert around the oasis, or else from chance finds elsewhere. For this reason it has appeared to me advisable to include in the list of antiques given at the end of the next Section those purchased by me at Khotan. But full certainty can never be obtained about the find-place of any objects which have once found their way into a Turkestan Bāzār, and consequently it would not be safe to base far-reaching arguments on any individual article procured through such channels. The distinctive marking of all batches of antiques purchased by me either at Yōtkan or in Khotan town will render this exercise of critical caution easy. It is scarcely necessary to point out that, even in the case of antiques bought at Yōtkan or avowedly brought to me from that site (marked with *Y.* in the list), the evidence as to their origin cannot have the same value as that of finds yielded by systematic exploration under my own eyes.

In respect of no other class of antiques would such full authentication be so important as in that of coin finds, for in the present state of our knowledge we must depend entirely on them for exact chronological evidence as regards the period during which the site of Yōtkan was occupied by the Khotan capital and its débris-layers deposited. Unable to secure this evidence by actual excavation, I took care to make my purchases of old coins from the site as far as possible at Yōtkan itself. The quantities of such coins annually washed out of the ancient strata seem to be considerable, and I had no difficulty in obtaining on my several

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Coin finds
at Yōtkan.