

Fa-hsien's
mention of
convent.

We may in all probability recognize an earlier mention of this sanctuary in the passage of Fa-hsien which describes the gilt splendour of 'what is called the king's New monastery' and which I have already had occasion to quote in full⁵. This monastery was situated 7 to 8 li to the west of the city, a bearing and distance closely agreeing with those recorded by Hsüan-tsang for the So-mo-jê convent. Its building was supposed to have taken eighty years and extended over three reigns. The Stūpa, 250 cubits in height⁶, was 'covered above with gold and silver, and finished throughout with a combination of all the precious substances'. Of the Hall of Buddha, i. e. the Vihāra built behind the Stūpa, Fa-hsien extols 'the magnificence and beauty; the beams, pillars, venetianed doors, and windows being all overlaid with gold-leaf.' Besides this, 'the apartments for the monks are imposingly and elegantly decorated, beyond the power of words to express.' Fa-hsien's reference to the rich offerings which the monastery received from 'the kings in the six countries on the east of the Ts'ung range of mountains'⁷, makes it clear that this shrine must have enjoyed exceptional fame in his time. Even though he does not tell us the story of its origin and speaks of it under a different designation, it seems difficult to assume that he could have meant any other than the So-mo-jê convent still renowned in Hsüan-tsang's days for its splendour and miraculous manifestations.

Village of
Somiya.

Judging from what previous experience had taught me of the fate which has befallen all ancient structures within the oasis, I did not expect to trace remains of what, notwithstanding all its glittering splendour, could only have been a pile of sun-dried bricks or wood doomed to rapid decay. All the more delighted was I when on the morning of Nov. 28th, in the course of inquiries preliminary to a survey of the villages west of Yōtkan, I first heard the name of *Somiya* mentioned. The village was said to be close to Yōtkan and to the west of it. Its name at once suggested a direct phonetic derivative of the ancient local name which is intended by the Chinese transcription of So-mo-jê, and to philological presumption topographical evidence soon added its weight.

Leaving the excavated area of the ancient city at its north-west corner by the route marked in the map of Plate XXIII, I reached first the hamlet of Eskente, half a mile to the west. There I was told of a 'Döbe' or mound existing near the cemetery of *Somiya*. The latter place I found to be situated only three-fourths of a mile further west, and to consist of some thirty scattered dwellings. I proceeded at once to the local Mazār, the reputed resting-place of three saints, and found it surrounded by an old cemetery extending over a considerable area at a level far lower than the adjoining fields. On asking from the first old villager I met for the reported 'Döbe' I was promptly taken to a field close to the north-eastern corner of the cemetery. There a little low mound, rising scarcely five feet above the surrounding ground and some 33 feet in diameter, is respected by the villagers with a kind of superstitious fear, though it shares in no orthodox way the sacred character of the neighbouring Mazār and cemetery. I soon had the oldest men of the village summoned to the spot, and in what they agreed in telling me of the mound may, I think, be traced the last lingering recollection of the ancient shrine that has left its name to *Somiya*.

Tradition of
Somiya
mound.

Shāmi Sōpe, a withered old man of about ninety, had heard from his father and grandfather, who had both died at a great age, that the little mound had ever been respected by the folk of *Somiya* as a hallowed spot not to be touched by the ploughshare. Some unknown saint

⁵ See above, p. 194, note 7.

⁶ Rémusat, loc. cit., p. 14, translating the passage from the *Pien i tien*, gives the height as 'vingt-cinq tchang.'

⁷ In the 'six countries' east of Ts'ung-ling, i. e. the

Pāmirs, we possibly have an early reference to the traditional *Ālti-shahr* or hexapolis of Eastern Turkestan; comp. for the latter *Tārīkh-i-Rashīdī*, Introd. p. 51.