

side which faces the entrance gate of the quadrangle could alone be completely cleared. The lowest section of the stairs leading to the top of the first base was fully 14 ft. broad, the one above 9 ft., and the one approaching the dome 6 ft. There can be little doubt that the stairs were in the first place intended to facilitate the circumambulation which was, perhaps, to be performed successively on each of the stories.

Stucco
coating
of base.

The portions of the lowest base story flanking this flight of steps proved, owing to the protection afforded by sand, to have retained a thick layer of fairly hard stucco bearing a coat of white paint. It may be safely assumed that this stucco coating once covered the whole of the Stūpa. Both the top and the foot of the lowest story were decorated with boldly moulded cornices in stucco about one foot high, as seen in Fig. 59. It was under the bottom cornice, in the receding corner formed to the south of the projection which bears the stairs of the lowest base story on the south-east face, that I discovered, sticking to the plaster at short intervals, four well-preserved *wu-chu* copper coins showing but little wear. Like numerous subsequent finds of such coins, they had manifestly been deposited as votive offerings, and furnished me with the first indication of the probable age of the structure.

Sculptural
decoration
of Vihāra
court.

Interesting as the Stūpa is by its architectural features and imposing dimensions, the great archaeological interest of the ruins does not centre so much in it as in the rich series of relief sculptures decorating the walls of the enclosing Vihāra. These were brought to light by the systematic excavations which I commenced as soon as the bands of additional labourers, quickly collected and dispatched by the Bēg of Yurung-kāsh, began to arrive at my camp on the morning of April 12. In order to avoid the risks of immediate damage to the friable stucco of the sculptures, and to get sufficient room for photographing them, it was necessary to open broad trenches at some little distances from the walls and then to proceed towards the latter, carefully clearing out the sand. The work commenced near the south corner; and it was in the course of this preliminary clearing that the small Stūpa base shown in the plan, and described below (sec. v), together with its interesting deposit of coins, was first reached. From this place the work of excavation was gradually extended along the south-west and south-east walls up to the furthest points which the high dunes rising over the rest of the south-west side and east corner permitted to be cleared within the time and with the means available³.

General
character
of reliefs.

As the work of clearing proceeded I soon realized that the main adornment of the walls, both towards the court and outside, consisted throughout of rows of relief statues in stucco over life-size. All the large reliefs represented Buddhas or Bodhisattvas; but from the varying poses, accessories, &c., still recognizable, a number of groups could be distinguished, arranged apparently with some regard to symmetrical disposition. Between the colossal statues at frequent intervals were smaller representations of attendant divinities or saints. In numerous instances the walls were further decorated with elaborate plaques in stucco, forming haloes above the heads of figures, or, in some cases, where sufficient space had been allowed, even with complete aureoles in relief around them. Here and there remains of small fresco paintings between the statues could also be traced, but generally the latter were too close together to permit of such decoration, at least on the extant lower portion of the walls. The whole of the relief work had been originally coloured, but the layers of paint had in most cases peeled off except where well-protected in drapery folds, &c. Thus the greatest portions of the stucco images presented themselves in the red ground colour of the clay in which they had been modelled.

³ For a photograph showing a portion of the south-east wall with the trenches in course of excavation, along both its sides, see *Ruins of Khotan*, p. 446. For others helping to

convey an impression of the great masses of sand overlying the Vihāra court and surrounding the ruins, see *ibid.*, p. 450, also here Fig. 60 and Pl. XIII.