

SECTION V.—THE RUINED STÜPAS OF L.A.

Of structures within the walled station there remains to be described only the ruined Stüpa L.A. x near its north-east corner (Fig. 96). It stands on the top of an isolated clay terrace round which wind-erosion has lowered the ground level to a depth of about eighteen feet in places, and this position, added to its surviving height of about thirty-three feet, makes the ruin the most conspicuous feature of the whole site (see Figs. 94, 95). That it was a Stüpa and not a watch-tower, as supposed by its first discoverer, could clearly be recognized at a glance by any one familiar with such ruins.¹ But the exact measurement of the building, implying a reconstruction of its original features, was no easy task, owing to the havoc caused by erosion and even more by the hand of man, the latter including earlier burrowings of treasure-seekers and the digging operations of Dr. Hedin's labourers.² However, a careful examination of the ruin, especially on the south-west, where the damage done had been less thorough, allowed me in the end to determine the essential dimensions and architectural details (see Plate 26).

Position of
Stüpa
within
station.

The Stüpa possessed all the main features I had observed in the Stüpas examined during my first expedition. As the origin and character of these features have already been fully discussed in *Ancient Khotan*, no detailed explanations regarding them are here needed.³ The L.A. Stüpa, too, shows the orthodox arrangement of a square base rising in three stories and surmounted by a cylindrical dome resting on a drum. The lowest of these stories is only one foot high and rests on a foundation of tamarisk fascines, as seen in Fig. 96 below the man on the left. At the foot of this story a course of bricks, lying on the natural ground and forming a kind of plinth, could be traced for about six feet near the south-west corner. The second story, set back four feet, shows a height of three feet. Above this rises the third story to a height of twelve feet six inches. It seemed to have been approached by a double flight of steps about a foot broad, cut into its south face. But the exact arrangement of these stairs, and of those which apparently gave access to the top of the second story, as traced at the south-west corner, could not be made out with full certainty. The top of the third story is marked in Fig. 96 by the man on the right. The dimensions of the successive stories are about fifty-one, forty-four, and thirty-three feet square respectively.

Structural
features of
Stüpa.

Above the third story of the base proper rose an octagonal drum, seven feet high, with a circular plinth one and a half feet high on its top. On this again rested the cylindrical dome, badly broken and standing only to about seven feet in height even on the best-preserved south-west side. Its diameter appears to have measured about twenty-one feet. Two thick strata of tamarisk bundles were embedded in the masonry of the octagonal drum, and can be made out in Fig. 96. The burrowings effected in the dome and drum by Dr. Hedin's men and earlier treasure-seekers have laid bare portions of the massive timber framework, consisting both of beams and stanchions, which had been inserted into the drum and dome to reinforce the masonry. Curved beams were exposed, owing to the disappearance of the original plaster covering, where the dome springs from the circular plinth. The stories of the base appear to have been built separately, one outside the other, as concentric squares, after a method observed also elsewhere among Turkestän Stüpas.⁴ Thus at the north-east corner, where wind-erosion had exposed the inner masonry, the plastered

Drum and
dome of
Stüpa.

¹ Cf. Hedin, *Central Asia*, ii. pp. 637 sqq., Pl. 64, 69, where the excellent photographs suffice to discount whatever doubts a long and inconclusive discussion of details, having no bearing on the archaeological facts, might otherwise raise as to the character of the ruin.

² Cf. regarding these operations, which included the

sinking of a well in the centre and the pulling down of a portion of the drum on the east, Hedin, *Central Asia and Tibet*, ii. pp. 118 sq.; also *Central Asia*, ii. p. 638.

³ Cf. *Ancient Khotan*, i. pp. 81 sqq., 339 sq., etc.

⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 339, for evidence of similar construction at the Niya Site Stüpa.