

CHAPTER XIII

THE ANCIENT BUDDHIST SHRINES OF MĪRĀN

SECTION I.—SCULPTURED REMAINS OF RUIN M. II

MUCH pleased as I was with the abundance of the materials illustrating the later occupation of the site which I found in the ruined fort, I felt glad when the excavations had sufficiently advanced for me to move a part of my band of diggers to the temple ruin M. II, first examined on December 8. The experimental clearing then effected had disclosed some sculptured fragments of manifestly old appearance, and had thus raised a hope of discovering remains which might help to trace the history of the site further back.

The ruin was situated about a mile and a half to the north-east of the fort, and a few hundred yards beyond the line dividing the bare gravel Sai from the area of thickening tamarisk-cones on the north. Near the ruin M. II the ground was still fairly open, and had a clayey surface covered with a layer of fine sand and undergoing wind-erosion. Fragments of pottery, hand-made but of fine well-levigated clay, could be picked up around in plenty. The corrading effects of the wind were strongly marked in the appearance of the conspicuous main structure of the ruin. It presented itself as a solid mound built of sun-dried bricks, oblong in shape but showing no readily recognizable surface features. Two stories, however, could at once be distinguished, and of these the lower one on subsequent clearing proved, as the plan in Plate 31 shows, to measure about 46 feet on its longer sides and a little over 36 feet on the shorter. Its height was about nine feet above what could be determined as the original level of the ground. On the top of this solid platform or base there rose a second story, also oblong in shape but far more decayed, as seen in Fig. 120. Its ground-plan, which could only be made out approximately, measured about $17\frac{1}{2}$ by 15 feet. In its badly broken state, which, as the photograph shows, was partly due to the burrowing of treasure-seekers, it was still over 11 feet in height. The corners of the whole structure were roughly orientated towards the cardinal points.

The destruction caused by the erosive force of the wind had left no trace of the plaster covering and decoration anywhere on the upper story, and had also bared the north-west and south-west faces of the base. But along the foot of the north-east and a part of the south-east faces, remains of relievo decoration in plaster emerged above the mass of débris accumulated there. As this was being removed, it was seen that those faces had been uniformly adorned with rows of niches between projecting surfaces of the wall, all heavily coated with plaster. The depth of the niches was about eight inches. The width varied slightly, the average being about two feet. The projections separating the niches were about as broad, and both were raised on a plinth about one foot four inches wide and less than one foot in height. The stucco facing of the base had nowhere survived to a height of more than four feet. But this was sufficient to show clearly the architectural design and the style of the relievo decoration.

The niches had once contained stucco statues in relievo, probably a little under life size. Of these one in the centre of the north-east face, as seen in Fig. 120, still showed the legs of a draped

Condition of ruin.

Decorated niches.

Relievo images in stucco.