

tapering shape and the rich globular mouldings of its base are derived from the Indo-Persian model in the Gandhāra reliefs is quite clear. But it is equally obvious that it represents a distinctly later development of this model than our Mīrān stucco pilasters. The same observation applies with equal strength to the two fine wooden columns of Indo-Persian style which were brought to light by my renewed excavations in one of the halls belonging to the main quarters of the Endere fort (E. III. iv), and which are shown in Fig. 70.<sup>20</sup> In these we find the addition of fillets up the shaft, marking later elaboration, but we can recognize even more clearly the essential continuity of the Indo-Persian type both in the base and in the bell-shaped capital.

Evidence of  
Endere  
columns.

The archaeological evidence furnished by these Endere columns carved in wood has its special value for the dating of the Mīrān shrine, because we know for certain that the structure containing them must have been built between A.D. 645 and 719, and probably nearer to the former date.<sup>21</sup> If we make due allowance for the time which is likely to have passed before the Indo-Persian column at Mīrān, still seen with all the essential features of its Gandhāra prototype, could develop into this later form of Endere and Khādalik, the conclusion seems justified that the construction of the Mīrān Vihāra M. II cannot safely be put later than the fifth century A.D.

Evidence of  
sculptured  
remains.

With the downward chronological limit thus inferred the evidence of the sculptured remains may well be reconciled; for their type shows no essential difference in style or technique from that so abundantly represented in the reliefs of the Rawak Stūpa, which may be dated with considerable probability from a period between the fourth and seventh century A.D.<sup>22</sup> But it must be borne in mind that, on the one hand, the sculptured relics of M. II are unfortunately very scanty, and that, on the other, conservative adherence to the models derived from Graeco-Buddhist art appears to have remained a strongly marked characteristic of Buddhist sculpture in Eastern Turkestan throughout its existence. Hence, no argument based upon style of sculpture could claim much independent weight in determining the date of the construction of the shrine.

Abandon-  
ment of  
shrine.

It is obvious that this must be kept quite distinct from the question of the time when the shrine was deserted and allowed to fall into ruin. The only piece of positive evidence available is the fragment of a palm-leaf Pōthī in Sanskrit, already mentioned. As it must have been written within the fourth or fifth century A.D., it supplies a safe upper chronological limit. As regards the lower, I feel inclined to attach some importance to the total absence of any relics in Tibetan writing, and to draw from it the inference that the abandonment took place at some period before the Tibetan occupation about the middle of the eighth century. It is true the evidence in this case is of a purely negative kind. But it seems to me to gather some additional weight from the fact that at the ruined temples of Khādalik and Endere, where the Brāhmī manuscript remains were of distinctly later type than the M. II Pōthī leaf, there were found with them plentiful Tibetan leaves and fragments which proved that Buddhist worship had continued in these shrines under Tibetan domination. Thus the clearing of this Mīrān ruin fully confirmed me in the belief that the site had a far older history, and in a way it prepared me for the much more striking proofs of this which my subsequent excavations revealed.

#### SECTION II.—THE STŪPA CELLA M. III AND ITS WALL-PAINTINGS

Ruined  
mound M.  
III.

On January 31, while the 're-burying' of the quarters, etc., dug up in the Tibetan fort still kept most of the labourers busy, I started work at the group of small ruined mounds rising above the bare gravel Sai about a mile to the west-north-west of the fort (Fig. 111). When, on my first approach to the site, I had cursorily inspected a cluster of five of them found just east of the raised

<sup>20</sup> Cf. above, p. 279.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. above, pp. 276 sqq.

<sup>22</sup> See above, p. 130.