

Looking at his work in the dado, I felt no need to ask myself what these gay figures carrying and enlivening the festoon decoration meant. It was enough for Western eyes to perceive, and to be gladdened by, the beauty and joy of life pervading almost all of them.

It was scarcely surprising that while my eyes rested on the dado, I felt often tempted to believe myself rather among the ruins of a villa in Syria or some other North-Eastern province of the late Roman empire than among those of a Buddhist sanctuary on the very confines of the true land of the Seres. When I looked at the frieze, the impression was very different. The numerous points of resemblance in technique, etc., not to mention the identity of the Indian prince's figure, left no doubt that the same hand had been at work here. Yet, though many features, such as the drapery and quadriga, could manifestly be derived direct from late classical art, there was plenty to justify the impression that the painter was here following models which had already been adapted to, and fixed by, the far stiffer moulds of a distinctly Indian tradition.

Though much must necessarily remain obscure or purely conjectural at present, the identification of the Buddhist legend represented in the frieze goes far to explain that impression. In the frieze, it is clear, the painter, wherever his original home may have been, was obliged by the sacred character of the subject to cling closely to the conventional representation which Graeco-Buddhist art, as established in the extreme North-west of India, had probably centuries before adopted for that favourite legend. On the other hand, as regards the dado we are tempted to assume that the purely decorative and frankly secular character of the composition left him free to yield to artistic influences from the West which were more direct and more recent. If I had been asked on the spot to express my explanation quite briefly, I should not have hesitated to offer the conjectural answer that the Graeco-Buddhist style of India gave its impress to the frieze, and that the contemporary art of the Hellenized Near East, as transmitted through Īrān, was reflected in the dado.

#### SECTION VIII.—KHAROṢṬHĪ INSCRIPTIONS OF M. v AND THE REMAINING RUINS OF MĪRĀN

The explanation suggested merely by differences which the artistic treatment of the frieze and dado displayed has since received striking and wholly unexpected support from the interpretation of one of the two short inscriptions in Kharoṣṭhī, already mentioned, which appeared on the well-preserved southern portion of the frieze. I had taken careful tracings of them and assured myself from a few words readily deciphered on the spot that their language was the same Prākṛit in which the documents of Niya, Endere, and Lou-lan are written.

There were points attracting my special attention to the inscription which was written in clear black ink over the right thigh of the elephant (Fig. 144). It consisted of three short and slightly curving lines. Though the neatly painted characters were only from a third to about half an inch high, the white background of the elephant's skin made them very legible. It was thus easy for me to see that their writing, being rather wayward both in direction and spacing, distinctly differed from the straight regular ductus of the inscription found written in larger characters above the palace gate, evidently by a practised clerical hand. This inscription, quasi-lapidary in appearance, might be assumed to designate the figure of the prince seen riding immediately below it. The writing on the elephant's hind leg seemed too long for a record naming the scene or actor represented. On the other hand, it did not look like a mere *sgraffito* of some passing visitor, especially as the place for it had evidently been selected with care. Thus a combination of rather slender arguments led me at the time to form a vague conjecture that this little inscription might possibly prove to contain some brief record, conspicuously placed on purpose, about the painter himself.

Treatment  
of legend in  
frieze.

Convention  
of Graeco-  
Buddhist  
art.

Inscription  
on ele-  
phant's leg.