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978-1-108-06973-1 - Sand-Buried Ruins of Khotan: Personal Narrative of a Journey
of Archaeological and Geographical Exploration in Chinese Turkestan

M. Aurel Stein

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Sand-Buried Ruins of Khotan

Between 1900 and 1901, the Hungarian-born archaeologist Marc Aurel Stein (1862–1943) made the first of several significant trips through Central Asia. In 1903, he published this account of his journey from Calcutta to London via the deserts of Chinese Turkestan. The text is richly illustrated with photographs of locations on the route followed by Stein's party, as well as of the people they encountered and many of the artefacts they excavated in the vicinity of the ancient oasis town of Khotan. Stein intended his book to be accessible to non-specialists, and his descriptions of the many important archaeological discoveries, such as Sanskrit texts of Buddhist scriptures, are interspersed with compelling human details and anecdotes about traversing the challenging terrain of eastern Central Asia. The work of an indefatigable explorer, this book sheds light on the spread of Graeco-Buddhist culture along the Silk Route.

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Seated Buddha,
between torsos of
colossal statues.
Rawak Stupa

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SAND - BURIED RUINS OF KHOTAN

PERSONAL NARRATIVE OF A
JOURNEY OF ARCHÆOLOGICAL &
GEOGRAPHICAL EXPLORATION
IN CHINESE TURKESTAN

BY

M. AUREL STEIN



WITH A MAP FROM ORIGINAL SURVEYS AND
NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS

T. FISHER UNWIN
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TO THE MEMORY
OF
MY BROTHER

WHOSE LOVING CARE EVER FOLLOWED ME THROUGH LIFE.

THIS ACCOUNT OF MY JOURNEY,

FIRST RECORDED FOR HIM,

IS INSCRIBED

IN UNCEASING AFFECTION AND SORROW.

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INTRODUCTION



THE journey described in these pages was carried out in the year 1900–01, under the auspices of the Government of India. Its main object was the systematic exploration of ancient remains about Khotan and in the adjoining parts of the great desert of Chinese Turkestan. The fresh materials thus brought to light for the study of the early history and culture of those regions were so extensive that my full scientific report must, by reason of its bulk and cost, necessarily remain beyond the reach of the general public. I have therefore gladly availed myself of the permission accorded to me to publish independently the present narrative, which is intended to record for a wider class of readers my personal experiences and observations, as well as the main facts concerning my antiquarian discoveries.

I have spared no trouble to render my account of the latter accurate in its details and yet thoroughly intelligible to the non-Orientalist. It has been my hope to attract his interest to a fascinating chapter of ancient history which witnessed interchange between the civilisations of India, China, and the Classical West in that distant part of Central Asia, and which seemed almost completely lost to us. If this hope is fulfilled, and if at the same time these pages convey adequate impressions of the strange scenes and conditions amidst which I passed that year of trying but happy toil, I shall feel repaid for the additional labour involved in the preparation of this narrative.

The circumstances which induced me to form the project of

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these explorations, and the arrangements by which I was enabled to carry it into execution, have already been explained in my “Preliminary Report on a Journey of Archaeological and Topographical Exploration in Chinese Turkestan,” published in 1901 under the authority of the Secretary of State for India. Hence a succinct notice of them may suffice here. The idea of archaeological work about Khotan first suggested itself to me in the spring of 1897, in consequence of some remarkable antiquarian acquisitions from that region. Among the papers left by the distinguished but ill-fated French traveller, M. Dutreuil de Rhins, were fragments of ancient birch-bark leaves, which had been acquired in the vicinity of Khotan. On expert examination they proved to contain a Buddhist text in an early Indian script and language, and were soon recognised as the oldest Indian manuscript then known, going back to the first centuries of our era.

About the same time the “British collection of Central-Asian antiquities” formed at Calcutta through the efforts of Dr. A. F. Rudolf Hoernle, C.I.E., received from the same region notable additions, consisting of fragments of paper manuscripts, pieces of ancient pottery, and similar relics. They had been sold to representatives of the Indian Government in Kashgar, Kashmir and Ladak as finds made by native “treasure-seekers” at ancient sites about Khotan. Similar purchases had reached public collections at St. Petersburg through the Russian Consul-General at Kashgar and others. A curious feature of all these acquisitions made from a distance was that, besides unmistakably genuine documents in Indian and Chinese writing, they included a large proportion of texts displaying a strange variety of entirely “unknown scripts,” which could not fail to arouse suspicion. While the materials thus accumulated, no reliable information was ever forthcoming as to the exact origin of the finds or the true character of the ruined sites which were supposed to have furnished them. No part of Chinese Turkestan had then been explored from an archaeological point of view, and it struck me that, however much attention these and other future discoveries might receive from competent Orientalists in

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PLAN OF EXPLORATIONS

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Europe, their full historical and antiquarian value could never be realised without systematic researches on the spot.

The practicable nature of the project was proved in the meantime by the memorable march which Dr. Hedin made in the winter of 1896 past two areas of sand-buried ruins in the desert north-east of Khotan. Though the distinguished explorer, during his necessarily short halt at each place, was unable to secure any exact evidence as to the character and date of the ruins, this discovery (of which the first account reached me in 1898) sufficed to demonstrate both the existence and the comparative accessibility of ancient sites likely to reward excavation.

It was only in the summer of 1898 that I found leisure to work out the detailed plan of my journey and to submit it with Dr. Hoernle's weighty recommendation to the Indian Government, whose sanction and assistance were indispensable for its execution. Generously supported first by Sir Mackworth Young, K.C.S.I., late Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab, and subsequently on my temporary transfer to Bengal by the late Sir John Woodburn, K.C.S.I., the lamented head of that administration and a zealous friend of Oriental learning, my proposals met with favourable consideration on the part of Lord Curzon's Government. In July, 1899, the scheme, in which Sir Charles Rivaz, K.C.S.I., then Member of the Viceregal Council and now Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab, had from the first shown kind personal interest, received the final sanction of the Government of India. A resolution in the Department of Revenue and Agriculture provided for my deputation on special duty to Chinese Turkestan, during a period of one year. At the same time a grant of Rs. 9,000 (£600), partly from Imperial resources and partly from contributions by the Local Governments of the Punjab and Bengal, was placed at my disposal to meet the estimated expenditure on the journey and explorations.

That, notwithstanding the great distances and physical obstacles to be overcome and in spite of all the uncertainties attending an enterprise in a new field, I succeeded in accomplishing the whole of my programme strictly within the sanctioned estimates of time

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and expense is a fact which from a practical and quasi-administrative point of view I feel proud to record. How much anxious thought, calculation and effort its attainment cost me, need scarcely be detailed here. Considering the nature and extent of the ground covered by my travels, and the difficulties of work in the desert, the relatively low expenditure involved in my explorations has since been noted with surprise by brother archæologists and others.

Long experience of marching and camping gained on Indian ground certainly helped in restricting the cost. But even thus the expenses of my expedition would certainly have been higher, had not the Survey of India Department liberally offered its assistance. Previous antiquarian tours in Kashmir, the Punjab, and on the Afghan Frontier had taught me the importance of exact topographical observation as an adjunct of my researches. The necessity of fixing accurately the position of ancient sites and generally elucidating the historical geography of the country was bound to bring surveying operations in Chinese Turkestan into the closest connection with my immediate task. But in addition I was anxious from the first to utilise whatever opportunities the journey might offer for geographical work of a more general character in regions which had hitherto remained without a proper survey or altogether unexplored.

Colonel St. George Gore, R.E., C.S.I., Surveyor-General of India, proved most willing to further this object. He kindly agreed to depute with me one of the native Sub-Surveyors of his Department, and to provide the necessary equipment of surveying instruments, together with a special grant of Rs. 2,000 (£133), in order to cover the additional expenses. Of the excellent services rendered by Babu Ram Singh, the Sub-Surveyor selected, my narrative gives ample evidence. With his help a continuous system of surveys, by plane-table, astronomical observations and triangulation, was carried on during the whole of my travels in Chinese Turkestan. The results of these surveys, which in the mountains I was able to supplement by photogrammetric survey work of my own, and the

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AID OF INDIAN GOVERNMENT

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direction and supervision of which throughout claimed much of my time and attention, are now embodied in maps published by the Trigonometrical Branch of the Survey of India. From these the small scale map was prepared which, with the kind permission of the Royal Geographical Society, has been reproduced for the present volume.

For the generous consideration and aid of the Indian Government that alone enabled me to undertake the scientific enterprise I had planned, I shall ever retain the feeling of deep and sincere gratitude. Through it, I had secured at last the long and eagerly sought chance to serve, in a new field and with a measure of freedom such as had never fallen to my share, those interests of Oriental research which had claimed me from the commencement of my student days, and which had brought me to India.

The twelve years since passed, mainly in the service of the Punjab University, had taught me fully to appreciate the importance of both time and money in regard to archaeological labours. Though placed tantalisingly near to the ground which by its ancient remains and historical associations has always had a special fascination for me, I had rarely been able to devote to antiquarian work more than brief intervals of hard-earned leisure.

The fact that my administrative duties had no direct connection with my scientific interests, might well have made me feel despondent about the chance of ever obtaining the means needed for systematic archaeological explorations, even on well-known ground and in easily accessible regions. For with, I fear, the majority of fellow-workers I had failed to profit by the example of the late Dr. Schliemann, who, before attempting to realise his grand projects at Troy and Mykene, had resolutely set himself to assure that safest base of success, personal independence and an ample reserve of funds.

The exceptional help which the Indian Government, inspired by Lord Curzon's generous interest in the history and antiquities of the East, had accorded to me, for a time removed the difficulties against which I had struggled, and brought the longed-for oppor-

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tunity within my reach. But remembering the circumstances under which it had been secured, I could not prevent anxious thoughts often crossing my mind in the course of my preparations and after. Would Fate permit the full execution of my plan within the available time, and would the results prove an adequate return for the liberal consideration and aid that the Government had extended to me?

I knew well that neither previous training and experience, nor careful preparation and personal zeal, could guarantee success. The wide extent of the region to be searched and the utter insufficiency of reliable information would alone have justified doubts as to how much those sand-buried sites would yield up during a limited season. But in addition there was the grave fact that prolonged work in the desert such as I contemplated would have to be carried through in the face of exceptional physical difficulties and even dangers. Nor was it possible to close my eyes to the very serious obstacles which suspicions of the local Chinese administration and quasi-political apprehensions, however unfounded, might raise to the realisation of my programme.

When I now look back upon these anxieties and doubts, and recognise in the light of the knowledge since gathered how much there was to support them, I feel doubly grateful to the kindly Destiny which saved my plans from being thwarted by any of those difficulties, and which allowed my labours to be rewarded by results richer than I had ventured to hope for. In respect of the efforts and means by which these results were secured, no remarks seem here needed; the reader of my present narrative, whatever his knowledge of Central Asia and its historical past may be, can safely be left to judge of them for himself. But in regard to the scientific value of the results similar reticence would scarcely be justified, however much personal feelings might make me incline towards it.

It is impossible to overlook the fact that archæological research in great fields like India and Central Asia, which lie beyond the stimulating influence of Biblical associations, has not as yet succeeded in gaining its due share of sympathy and interest from

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SCIENTIFIC RESULTS OF JOURNEY

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the wider public. In consequence the latter has so far had little opportunity of learning to appreciate the great historical problems which are involved in those researches. In the absence of such preparatory information the non-Orientalist could not be expected to form for himself a correct estimate of the importance of the discoveries resulting from my explorations without the guidance of expert opinion. I must therefore feel grateful that the generous attention paid to my labours by the most representative body of qualified fellow-scholars permits me to supply expert opinion in a clear and conclusive form.

The International Congress of Orientalists, assembled at Hamburg in September, 1902, before which I was privileged to give an account of my journey and excavations, adopted the following resolution, proposed by Professor Henri Cordier, the representative of the French Government, and Dr. A. A. Macdonell, Boden Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford, and recommended by the combined Indian, Central-Asian, and Far-Eastern Sections:—

“The XIIIth International Congress of Orientalists held at Hamburg beg to express their thanks to His Excellency the Viceroy and the Government of India for the great encouragement they have extended to Oriental learning and research by granting to Dr. M. A. Stein the necessary leisure and means for the prosecution of his recent explorations in Eastern Turkestan. They desire at the same time to express their appreciation of the highly important results which have rewarded the labours of the scholar selected by the Government of India, and which represent an ample return for the outlay incurred, owing to the practical nature of the operations conducted by him. They would also venture to express the hope that facilities will be given to him for completing the publication and elaboration of the results obtained, and that the Government will be pleased to sanction any necessary extension for this purpose of Dr. Stein’s present deputation. Finally, they venture to express the hope that, when circumstances permit, the interests of archæological research will be allowed to benefit by Dr. Stein’s special experience and previous knowledge, which are likely to facilitate considerably the further explorations which it is desirable should be entrusted to him in the interests of India.”

As far as the space and the limited means of illustration available in this personal narrative would permit, I have endeavoured to

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explain to my readers the significance of the mass of antiquarian materials brought to light by my excavations—whether in the form of objects of ancient art and industry ; or in those hundreds of old manuscripts and documents which the desert sand has preserved in such surprising freshness ; or finally in the many curious observations I was able to make on the spot about the conditions of every-day life, etc., once prevailing in those sand-buried settlements. But of the great historical questions which all these finds help to illuminate, it was impossible to show more than the bare outlines, and those only in glimpses. This cannot be the place for their systematic discussion. But I may at least indicate here the main directions in which those discoveries are likely to open new vistas into obscure periods of Central-Asian civilisation.

The early spread of Buddhist teaching and worship from India into Central Asia, China and the Far East is probably the most remarkable contribution made by India to the general development of mankind. Chinese records had told us that Buddhism reached the “Middle Kingdom” not directly from the land of its birth, but through Central-Asian territories lying northward. We also knew from the accounts left by the devoted Chinese pilgrims who, from the fourth century A.D. onwards, had made their way to the sacred Buddhist sites in India, that Sakyamuni’s creed still counted numerous followers in many of the barbarian “Western Kingdoms” they passed through. But these Chinese travellers, best represented by the saintly “Master of the Law,” Hiuen-Tsiang, our Indian Pausanias, had their eyes fixed on subjects of spiritual interest, on holy places and wonder-working shrines, on points of doctrine and monastic observance. Of the many things of this world about which their observations would have been of far greater interest for the historical student, they have rarely chosen to inform us even within the sacred bounds of India. Hence their brief notices of Central-Asian countries, visited merely en route, fail to supply definite indications of the extent to which Indian culture, language and art had spread with Buddhist propaganda across the Himalaya and the Hindukush.

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BUDDHISM IN CENTRAL ASIA

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That such influences had been at work there for long centuries, and sometimes penetrated even much further to the East, occasional references in the Chinese Annals and elsewhere had led us to suspect. But of those indigenous records and remains which might enable us to reconstruct that bygone phase of civilisation in its main aspects, all trace seemed to have vanished with the Muhammadan conquest (tenth–eleventh century).

Chance finds of ancient manuscripts, in Sanskrit and mostly Buddhistic, which commenced in 1890 with Captain (now Colonel) Bower's famous birch-bark leaves from Kucha, were the first tangible proof that precious materials of this kind might still be preserved under the arid soil of Chinese Turkestan. The importance of these literary relics was great, apart from their philological value ; for they plainly showed that, together with Buddhism, the study of the classical language of India also found a home in that distant land beyond the Himalaya. But on the cultural *entourage* in which this far transplanted Indian learning had flourished, such chance acquisitions, of uncertain origin and unaccompanied by archæological evidence, could throw little light.

For systematic excavations, which alone could supply this evidence, the region of Khotan appeared from the first a field of particular promise. In scattered notices of Chinese records there was much to suggest that this little kingdom, situated on the important route that led from China to the Oxus Valley and hence to India as well as to the West, had played a prominent part in developing the impulses received from India and transmitting them eastwards. The close connection with ancient Indian art seemed particularly marked in whatever of small antiques, such as pottery fragments, coins and seals, native agency had supplied from Khotan. And fortunately for our researches, archæology could here rely on the help of a very effective ally—the moving sand of the desert which preserves what it buries. Ever since human activity first created the oases of Khotan territory, their outskirts must have witnessed a continuous struggle with that most formidable of deserts, the Taklamakan ; while local traditions, attested from an early

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date, told of settlements that had been abandoned before its advance.

The ruined sites explored by me have more than justified the hopes which led me to Khotan and into its desert. Scattered over an area which in a straight line extends for more than three hundred miles from west and east, and dating back to very different periods, these ruins throughout reveal to us a uniform and well-defined civilisation. It is easy to recognise now that this bygone culture rested mainly on Indian foundations. But there has also come to light unmistakable evidence of other powerful influences, both from the West and from China, which helped to shape its growth and to invest it with an individual character and fascination of its own.

The origin and history of the culture that once flourished in Buddhist Khotan, are faithfully reflected in the remarkable series of sculptures and paintings which the ancient shrines and dwelling places, after long centuries of burial beneath the dunes, have yielded up. Exact archaeological evidence enables us to determine the various periods at which these settlements were invaded by the desert sand. Though these periods range from the third to the close of the eighth century of our era, yet the preponderance of Indian art influences is attested by the latest as well as by the earliest of these finds. The rich statuary of the Rawak Stupa Court, and the decorative wood carvings of the ancient site beyond Niya, reproduce with astonishing fidelity the style and motives of that fascinating 'Græco-Buddhist' art which, fostered by Hellenistic-Roman influences grew up and flourished in Gandhara (the present Peshawar Valley) and other neighbouring tracts in the extreme North-West of India, during the centuries immediately preceding and following the commencement of our era. Yet when we turn from those remains to the frescoes on the walls of the small Buddhist shrines at Dandan-Uiliq, dating some five hundred years later, we recognise with equal distinctness the leading features of ancient Indian pictorial art as preserved for us in the Ajanta Cave paintings.

The records of the Chinese Annals plainly showed us that for

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ART OF ANCIENT KHOTAN

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considerable periods under both the Later Han and the Tang dynasties China had maintained effective political control over the kingdom of Khotan. My excavations have confirmed these records, and from the finds of Chinese documents on wood or paper, Chinese coins, articles of manufacture, etc., it has become abundantly clear that Chinese civilisation no less than political ascendancy asserted there a powerful influence. Seeing how close for centuries were the relations between Khotan and the great empire eastwards in matters of administration, trade and industrial intercourse, we cannot feel surprised to find a connection in art also attested by manifest traces. It is China which in this direction appears the main borrower; for besides such distinct historical evidence as the notice about a scion of the royal house of Khotan, whom the *Annals* name as the founder of a new pictorial school in China in the seventh century A.D., there is much to suggest that the Indian element which so conspicuously pervades the whole Buddhist art of the Far East had to a very large extent found its way thither through Khotan. Yet a careful analysis of the composition and drawing in more than one of the frescoes and painted panels of Dandan-Uiliq will show that Chinese taste also had its influence on the later art of Khotan.

For us still greater interest must attach to the convincing evidence disclosed as to the question how far into Central Asia the classical art of the West had penetrated during the first centuries of our era. We see its triumphant advance to Khotan, half-way between Western Europe and Peking, strikingly demonstrated by the remarkable series of classical seals, impressed on clay and yet preserved in wonderful freshness, which still adhere to a number of the many ancient documents on wood discovered at the sand-buried site beyond Niya. As explained in Chapter XXV., where I have discussed and illustrated some of these important finds, we cannot make sure in each case where the well-modelled figures of Greek deities, such as Pallas Athene and Eros, or the classically treated portrait heads that appear in these seals, were actually engraved. But it is certain that the seals themselves were currently used by officials and others resident within the kingdom of Khotan, and that

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INTRODUCTION

classical models greatly influenced the work of local lapidaries and die-sinkers. The remarkable diversity of the cultural influences which met and mingled at Khotan during the third century A.D. is forcibly brought home to us by these records from a remote Central-Asian settlement, inscribed on wooden tablets in an Indian language and writing and issued by officials with strangely un-Indian titles, whose seals carry us to the classical world far away in the West.

The imitation of early Persian art of which, five centuries later, we find unmistakable traces in some of the paintings of sacred Buddhist subjects recovered from the ruins of Dandan-Uiliq, is a curious parallel, and from a historical point of view almost equally instructive.

The dwelling places, shrines, etc., of those ancient settlements had, no doubt, before the desert sand finally buried them, been cleared by the last inhabitants and others of everything that possessed intrinsic value. But much of what they left behind, though it could never tempt the treasure-seekers of succeeding ages, has acquired for us exceptional value. The remains of ancient furniture such as the wooden chair reproduced on p. 376 ; the shreds of silks and other woven fabrics ; the tatters of antique rugs ; the fragments of glass, metal and pottery ware ; the broken pieces of domestic and agricultural implements, and the manifold other relics, however humble, which had safely rested in the sand-buried dwellings and their deposits of rubbish—these all help to bring vividly before our eyes details of ancient civilisation that without the preserving force of the desert would have been lost for ever.

But however interesting and instructive such details may be, they would, by themselves, not permit us with any degree of critical assurance to reconstruct the life and social organisation which once flourished at these settlements, or to trace the historical changes which they have witnessed. The hope of ever elucidating such questions was dependent on the discovery of written records, and it is fortunate indeed that, at the very sites which proved richest in those relics of material culture, the finds of ancient manuscripts

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DISCOVERIES OF ANCIENT RECORDS

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and documents were also unexpectedly ample and varied. The Sanskrit manuscripts excavated at Dandan-Uiliq acquaint us with that class of canonical Buddhist literature which we may assume to have been most cherished in the monastic establishments of ancient Khotan. The series of Chinese documents discovered in ruins of the same site is of particular historical interest. The exact dates recorded in them (781–790 A.D.), in combination with other evidence, clearly indicate the close of the eighth century as the time when the settlement was deserted, while their contents throw curious side-lights on the economical and political conditions of the territory immediately before Chinese suzerain power finally abandoned these regions to Tibetan invasion. Sanskrit manuscripts and records in Chinese mark foreign imports in the culture of Khotan. All the more interest attaches to the numerous documents and fragmentary texts from the same site which show an otherwise unknown language, manifestly non-Sanskritic yet written in Indian Brahmi characters; for it appears very probable that in them we have records of the tongue actually spoken at that period by the indigenous population of Khotan.

We see Sanskrit, Chinese and the same non-Sanskritic language similarly represented among the literary finds from the ruined temple of Endere, in the extreme east of the territory explored. But here in addition there appears Tibetan, as if to remind us of the prominent part which Tibet too has played in the history of Central Asia. A curious Chinese graffito found on the wall of the Endere temple clearly refers to the Tibetans, and gives a date which, since its recent examination by Sinologists, can be safely read as 719 A.D. It is probable that these finds of Tibetan manuscripts are directly connected with that extension of Tibetan power into Eastern Turkestan which the Chinese Annals record for that very period.

But much older and of far greater importance than any of these finds are the hundreds of Kharoshthi documents on wood and leather brought to light from the ruined houses and the rubbish heaps of the ancient settlement discovered beyond the point where

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the Niya River now loses itself in the desert. Their peculiar writing material (so much older than the paper of my other literary finds), their early Indian script and language, and the surprisingly perfect state of preservation of many among them would alone have sufficed to invest these documents with special interest. But their exceptional historical value is derived from the fact that they prove to contain records written as early as the third century of our era, and dealing with a wide range of matters of administration and private life.

In Chapter XXVI. I have endeavoured to indicate the varied nature and abounding interest of the information which this mass of official reports and orders, letters, accounts, and miscellaneous “papers” (to use an anachronism) is bound to reveal to us. The results already obtained have opened new and far-reaching vistas. It is no small discovery to find the old local tradition of a colonisation of Khotan from the extreme North-West of India confirmed by the use, in ordinary practical intercourse, of an Indian language and a script peculiar to the very region from which those Indian immigrants were believed to have come.

The thought of the grave risks with which nature and, still more, human activity threaten all these relics of antiquity, was ever present to my mind, and formed an urgent incentive to unwearied exertion, however trying the conditions of work might be. On the one hand I had ample occasion in the desert to observe the destructive effect of erosion by wind and sand on whatever of ancient remains is left exposed to its slow but unrelenting power. On the other I could not fail to be impressed by the warnings of impending destruction through the hand of man: there were the evident traces of the mischief done by Khotan “treasure-seekers” at the more accessible sites, and also, alas! a vivid remembrance of the irretrievable loss which the study of Indian art and antiquities has suffered through “irresponsible digging” carried on until recent years by, and for, amateur collectors among the ruined Buddhist shrines of the North-West Frontier of India.

Though the climate of the Turkestan desert is not inferior in

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RISKS TO KHOTAN ANTIQUITIES

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conserving capacity to that of Egypt, yet neither Khotan nor any other territory bordering on that desert could ever compare with the land of the Pharaohs in wealth of antiquarian remains awaiting exploration. "Ancient cities," complete with palaces, streets, markets, etc., such as are pictured by Turkestan folklore, and also by indiscriminating European imagination, as lying submerged under the sand-dunes through a kind of Sodom and Gomorrah catastrophe, are certainly not to be looked for. The sites where settlements abandoned in early times could be located, with ruins still capable of excavation, were few in number, and even those among them which, being further removed from the present inhabited area, had so far escaped the ravages of the "treasure-seekers," could not be expected to remain safe much longer. The time seems still distant when Khotan will see its annual stream of tourists. Yet the extensive industry of forged "old books" which had grown up in Khotan during recent years, and which I was able to trace and expose in detail (see Chapter XXXI.), sufficiently shows how dangerous a factor "collecting" has already become even in Chinese Turkestan.

In the face of such difficulties as work in the Taklamakan presents I could never have made my explorations sufficiently extensive and thorough without the active co-operation of the Chinese administrators of the districts from which I had to draw guides, labour, supplies—in fact, whatever was needed during my winter campaign in the desert. I had the good fortune to find in the Ambans Pan-Darin and Huang-Daloi, then in charge of Khotan and Keriya, reliable friends, thoroughly interested in my work and ever ready to help me with all that was in their power. I look back to the invariable kindness and attention I received from these amiable Mandarins with all the more gratitude as it was shown at a time when, as they well knew, the conflict with the European powers was convulsing their empire. They were fully aware, too, that the services rendered to my scholarly enterprise could earn them neither material advantages nor honours.

The true historical sense innate in educated Chinese and the

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legendary knowledge I found to prevail among them of Hiuen-Tsiang, the great Buddhist pilgrim, whom I claimed as my guide and patron saint, certainly helped me in explaining the objects of my explorations to my Chinese friends and enlisting their personal interest. But I cannot doubt that the sympathetic attitude adopted from the first by the provincial administration towards my work was directly due to the efforts made on my behalf by Mr. G. Macartney, C.I.E., the representative of the Indian Government at Kashgar, whose personal influence among all Chinese dignitaries of the province is as great as it is well deserved. My narrative shows the manifold benefits I derived from the unfailing care of this kind and accomplished friend, who from afar never ceased to follow my explorations with watchful interest. For the important help he thus rendered towards their success, and for all his personal kindness, I am anxious to record here the expression of my sincere gratitude.

The *résumé* given above of the aims and results of my archaeological work will, I hope, help to account for the character of my present narrative and the labour involved in its preparation. The interests of science obliged me to concentrate my efforts on a series of well-defined tasks and to avoid whatever might interfere with their carefully prepared execution. Mine was not a journey leaving much range for those chance incidents which may at times lead to exciting personal experiences, but are far more likely to cause loss in substantial results through waste of time, energy and means. I can only hope that my book may reach readers ready to find compensation in the thought that long-continued study of the ancient East and familiarity with modern India and its northern borderlands permit me to offer them guidance in regard to much that is of general human interest both in the present conditions and the historical past of the regions traversed.

The critical standards to which I am pledged by my work as a scholar would not allow me to compile a narrative by the mere reproduction of those diary leaves which were intended to convey the first records of my personal experiences and impressions to

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PREPARATION OF PERSONAL NARRATIVE xxiii

dear eyes since closed for ever by Death. Though my account was intended for a wider public than that of Orientalist or antiquarian scholars, yet I felt it incumbent to take every care that it should neither contain statements which further scrutiny might require to be modified in my scientific Report, nor pass over unnoticed any essential facts connected with my archæological discoveries.

The preparation of my narrative on these lines has implied far more labour than may, perhaps, appear on the surface. It would, in fact, have been impossible to accomplish it with the scanty leisure left from official duties as Inspector of Schools in the Punjab, to which I had to return on the conclusion of my explorations, in the autumn of 1901. Fortunately, however, the Government of India, on the proposal of the Punjab Government and with the concurrence of the Secretary of State for India, granted to me in the following year a period of deputation to England in order that I might be enabled to elaborate the results of my journey with the help of the original finds temporarily deposited in the British Museum.

For the generous consideration thus shown to me I feel it my duty to record here my deep sense of gratitude to His Excellency the Viceroy and the Indian Government. Just as my explorations were rendered possible only through their powerful aid, so, too, I owe to their liberality the temporary freedom for scholarly labour which has permitted me to complete the present narrative. I feel confident that its contents will be found in more than one respect a necessary complement to my Detailed scientific Report which is still under preparation. On the other hand, I must refer my readers to the latter publication for many illustrations of antiquities, ruins, scenery, etc., which to my regret it was found impossible, on account of technical difficulties and other reasons, to provide here.

It remains for me to record my grateful acknowledgments for the manifold assistance which I have received while preparing this volume. To none do I feel more indebted than to my artist friend, Mr. Fred. H. Andrews, who ever since my return from Chinese

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Turkestan has furthered my labours with enthusiastic devotion. His wide knowledge of ancient Indian art, acquired in his late post as Principal of the School of Art and Curator of the Museum at Lahore, and his own high artistic abilities, have rendered his co-operation in the arrangement and description of my collection of antiquities of the utmost value. He has never wearied in giving me the full benefit of his expert advice in questions affecting the technical aspects of my finds, and he has spared no trouble to make the illustrations of this book as effective as their number and the available means of reproduction would permit.

Besides drawings and diagrams embodied in these pages I owe to his skill the design reproduced on the cover of this volume and the Black and White drawing for the Vignette which adorns the title-page. This represents a restored yet faithfully conceived enlargement of the figure of Pallas Athene as seen in several of the ancient seal impressions on clay excavated by me from the desert sand. I could scarcely have wished for my narrative to issue under a more felicitous emblem.

Dr. A. F. Rudolf Hoernle, the eminent Indologist, who from the first had shown the warmest interest in my explorations, was kind enough to place at my disposal valuable information in respect of the ancient manuscripts in Brahmi characters, the publication of which has been undertaken by him; he has further rendered me the great service of reading a revision of this book. I owe a similar debt of gratitude to my friend Mr. E. J. Rapson, of the British Museum, who not only charged himself with the care of my collection while I was absent in India, but has also allowed me to benefit at all times by the results of the most painstaking researches he has devoted to the decipherment of the ancient Kharoshthi documents. To Dr. Percy Gardner, Professor of Archæology in the University of Oxford, I am indebted for most competent guidance in respect of the objects of classical art contained in my collection, and for much kind encouragement besides.

For the interpretation of my important Chinese records I must

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF FRIENDLY HELP xxv

consider myself particularly fortunate in having enjoyed the assistance of such distinguished Sinologist experts as Dr. S. W. Bushell, C.M.G., and Professors É. Chavannes and Douglas. The complete translation and analysis of those documents with which Professor Chavannes, of the Collège de France, has favoured me for publication in my Detailed Report, has already proved of very great value for the study of Chinese influence in Turkestan. Dr. Bushell and Professor Douglas, of the British Museum, have never failed to help me with learned advice on questions concerning Chinese lore.

If I have left it to the last to mention my obligations to my friends Mr. J. S. Cotton, late editor of the "Academy," and Mr. P. S. Allen, of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, it is only because theirs was the help benefiting more directly the Western or modern aspect of the work now presented. The former did me the great favour of revising my manuscript with special regard to the requirements of the general reader, a task for which he was exceptionally qualified by his literary experience; while the other kind friend cheerfully charged himself with a revision of my proofs and greatly helped me by its thoroughness. To his kind offices and the generous mediation of Mr. Cuthbert Shields, I owed the peaceful retreat for scholarly work which the hospitality of the President and Fellows of Corpus Christi College assured to me during the summer of 1902. With those inspiring precincts, full of great memories from Erasmus to Ruskin, I shall always associate the recollection of the pleasantest part of my work in England.

* *

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The narrative here presented still leaves me far from the conclusion of the labours which the antiquities and observations brought back from Chinese Turkestan have entailed upon me. Yet even thus I cannot prevent my eyes from looking beyond towards other fields of archaeological exploration, no less closely linked with the sphere of Indian historical interests and equally

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likely to yield a rich harvest. On some my thoughts had been fixed long before I was able to visit India; but the years which have since passed by, though as full of scholarly labours as other duties would permit, have seemingly not brought me nearer to the longed-for chance of exploring them.

Life seems short where the range for research is so vast as in the case of ancient India and the regions through which it communicated with the classical West. But life must appear shorter still when the chosen tasks cannot be done in the study, when they call for the exertions of the scholar and explorer combined, such as are readily faced only while the optimism of comparative youth and physical vigour endures. To Fate—and to those who dispense it, I offer due thanks for having allowed me to work on Indian ground and at last, after years of toil, to attain for a time freedom and the means to serve science. Yet when I look back upon all the efforts that had to precede this opportunity, I am tempted to regret that I cannot share the Indian belief in those ‘future births’ which hold out promise of appropriate reward for ‘merits,’ spiritual and other. For on the strength of such a belief I might feel more hopeful of meeting yet with that reward for my work at Khotan which I should prize highest,—the chance of repeating it elsewhere.

M. AUREL STEIN.

BRITISH MUSEUM,
April 16, 1903.