



BALAWASTE

BALAWASTE, a ruin site in the eastern part of the Khotan oasis, near the village of Domoko.

Fragments of manuscripts (given the signature DK = Domoko), pottery, and plaster were found at this site by Sir Marc Aurel Stein on his first and second expeditions in 1900 and 1906. On his third expedition in 1916, dealers in the local *bāzār* offered him pieces of a mural painting which, they said, had been removed by local treasure-hunters from the walls of a temple at Balawaste. The best pieces had been sold shortly before to Vice-Consul Colonel H. J. Harding. These and the pieces acquired by Stein passed into the possession of the New Delhi Museum. Other pieces were purchased by C. P. Skrine for the British Museum and by E. Trinkler for the Übersee-Museum at Bremen. The Metropolitan Museum in New York and the Academy for Oriental Culture at Tokyo also possess some fragments. It is uncertain whether all these pieces come from the same temple and whether the temple lay at the Balawaste site visited by Stein.

Approximately 94 pieces can be combined to form a sequence of life-size Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, divine beings, and *lokapālas* with their *parivāra* (retinue). A fragment now in Bremen depicting the *lokapāla* Vaiśravaṇa is particularly important because it bears the inscription of the donor Śūraputra in Khotanese. The main scene probably consisted of five groups each made up of a sitting Jina Buddha attended by two standing Bodhisattvas. The picture of Vairocana (now in Delhi) is renowned for the painting of the upper part of the body; his attendants (like those in the fragment at Bremen) are clad only in



loin-cloths. Also belonging to the series is a picture (parts now in London and Bremen) of a sitting four-armed deity, probably to be identified as the “silk god” seen by Stein on painted wooden tablets from Dandan Öilik. Possibly this god, being the tutelary deity of Khotan, was accompanied by the rulers of the five regions of the world. All the gods are sitting on lotus flowers in a pool, surrounded by smaller Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and divine beings. In view of the artistic style and the type of the clothing, the picture can be dated ca. 600 a.d. It is the most important surviving specimen of Khotanese art. The Tibetan art of the thirteenth century is in a related style. The picture also explains the lists of gods in certain Khotanese manuscripts as being descriptions of pictures in famous temples. Some sixty fragments with representations of the “Thousand Buddhas” come from the outer walls of the same or another temple; they too were said by the dealers to have been taken from the ruins at Balawaste.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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