

As regards the ridiculous suspicions against us, it was decided by the Minister of Education that three members of his Ministry and three from the Ministry of Railways should put their learned heads together, and that same day examine the two wooden chests containing our archaeological collections, as well as the rest of our baggage. YEW and I went out visiting in the meantime, to show our contempt for these six »experts». We heard afterwards from CHEN and KUNG that the examination had been carried out with painful attention to the least detail. Every single parcel, even the smallest, had been opened, scrutinized, discussed and noted. For ourselves, who had definite scientific aims, and who were familiar with the history of the Lou-lan region, every least trifle we had excavated from the approximately 2,000 year old graves was of the greatest significance. Here the most apparently insignificant find might mean the answer to ethnological and historical questions of the utmost importance. But for dilettantes the whole collection must of course appear to be rags and rubbish, fitter for the scrap-heap than a place in a museum. They fumbled clumsily among shrouds from Lou-lan graves, they peered at the cracked wooden bowls, utensils, arrow-heads and bows; and they were nearly sick when they suddenly found themselves confronted with half a dozen crania, whose empty eye-sockets seemed to throw mysterious and reproachful looks at the meddling fellows who were now again disturbing their rest.

The examination took several hours. The »experts» were continually putting all kinds of wonderful questions.

»Where are the archaeological finds you made in Sinkiang, that the newspapers have been telling us so much about lately?»

»The objects you see here and that we have packed in these two chests represent all the archaeological material we found during the motor-expedition,» explained CHEN, who had himself been present when a large part of the finds had been made.

»This is no archaeological material, it's rubbish and trash. Where are the Buddha images and the archaeological treasures you discovered? Show us the Buddhas you found.»

»We didn't get as much as a glimpse of any Buddha images,» declared CHEN with icy calm. »The things we found are lying here in front of you.»

The »experts» looked at one another and at the skulls, and had a distinct feeling that they had lost face. They did not know what to think, and probably came to the conclusion that both we and the not over-intelligent Minister of Education had only meant to pull their legs. But they were not the men to criticize their superiors; so they went through the task they had been set with pedantic thoroughness, packed up the preposterous rarities again and stuffed the whole lot back into the chests, which they sealed — probably to prevent us from adding any »Buddha images» that we might have concealed elsewhere. They took their leave, undoubtedly pondering over the mysterious connection between on the one