

FRAGMENT OF PAINTING FROM KARA-KHŌJA

THE site from which this and other examples of wall-painting were gathered is known as Dākiānūs-shahri or Idikut-shahri, and is close to Kara-khōja in the Turfān basin, north of the Kuruk-tāgh and the Lop desert, and about 250 miles due north of Mīrān. The operations of eminent archaeologist—Professors Grünwedel, von Lecoq, and others—while commendable in saving much of the painted work from the ruthless destruction resulting from the very active attentions of treasure-seeking villagers, left little but disconnected fragments, a few of which were recovered by Sir Aurel Stein. The probable date of this piece is about the ninth century A.D., and therefore about 500–600 years later than those of Mīrān (plates I to III). Fragments of manuscripts found included Uigur, Chinese, and Sogdian, indicative of the various influences present.

Kao. I. ii. 077

This very beautiful fragment shows the upper half of a standing Bodhisattva, probably Avalokiteśvara, holding a floral branch, daintily supported by both hands. One recognizes here in the round-cheeked Mongolian face the same type as that of Mi. xiii. 10, above. With this type the artist treats the features of the face with peculiar restraint, with a seeming reluctance to admitting them within the contours of that expansive area. The eyes are mere narrow, oblique slits, with a small dot for iris and pupil; the nose, long but pinched; the mouth, pursed and inadequate; the eyebrow, a thin oblique straight line. Discoloration from moisture and mud has spoilt the pale pink complexion. Although a great deal of the mud which covered the painting was carefully removed during the process of mounting, further clearing would have done more harm than good. The hands retain most of their original tint. The ears are large with elongated lobes, deeply slit and heavily jewelled. As in many of these paintings, the black hair is effectively used to emphasize the line of the shoulder; and the manner in which it surrounds the outer line of the ear is similar to the treatment in the Hāritī in plate VI. The effeminate character of this, and the long rippling lock in front of the ear, suggest a possible transitional stage of the transformation of the Buddhist Avalokiteśvara into the Chinese goddess Kuan Yin.

Unfortunately the head-dress is missing but the white taenia is tied in a large bow above the ear, one end floating upwards and another falling downwards