

PLATE XI

PAINTED FRAGMENTS FROM KARA-KHŌJA

THE fragments here described were recovered from ruined shrines within the ancient walled town of Idikut-shahri, about one and a half miles from Kara-khōja in the Turfan basin.

Kao. II. 02

The ruin from which this example comes is described by Sir Aurel Stein as 'what apparently had been a vaulted cella or passage' built against the inside of the eastern wall of the town. It was choked with debris to the height of six or seven feet but 'at a height of about three feet from the floor, parts of a fine fresco composition were recovered'. Although he gives no description of the painting, this is the only piece from that shrine which came to me and it must be presumed to be the specimen referred to. As the reproduction shows, it was in an extremely bad state—shattered and abraded, but in many ways attractive. Reassembling and mounting it was a work of some difficulty and patience, and although the general scheme is clear the details and colouring need elucidation.

The scheme of the design is intended to show a region of mountains, where pine-trees flourish and forest fauna make their home. The mountains are represented by a series of imbricated lozenge shapes, with serrated upper edges, variously coloured, with pleasing effect. The lower central lozenge is pale green with serrations boldly outlined in dull red. That to the right is white with dull-red edges. To the left, dark red with darker red edges. The upper central lozenge is the same as the lower one. The colours repeat vertically—red over red, white over white, and green over green. This results in a regular sequence of change of colours horizontally and obliquely. In each lobe of the serrations is a small dark spot which was, originally, a patch of gold leaf.

Each lozenge forms the background to a group of three figures; an enthroned Bodhisattva, or the Buddha, with an adoring figure kneeling at each side. Two very incomplete Divinities are visible, one on each of the green lozenges. The upper one, whose head, neck, and right arm only remain, looks downwards towards a kneeling figure on his right, to whom he seems to extend his right hand. To the Buddha's left, a second figure sits in an attitude of devotion, gazing up at him. The flesh of the Buddha is pale, slightly shaded with grey. The hair is mauve-grey