

PLATES XII—XXXI
PAINTINGS FROM BEZEKLIK

BEZEKLIK, the largest of the Buddhist sites of Turfān, lies in a mountain gorge between Kara-khōja on the south and Murtuk on the north, and about twenty miles due east of Turfān town. The shrines are in a series of caves excavated in the rocky walls of the gorge, and, as usual with such cave shrines, entrance porches, and sometimes additional rooms, were constructed of timber and masonry. Most of such added structures have long since perished or are in ruins, but within, on the walls and vaults of the caves, a great amount of painted decoration remained. Reference has been made to the exhaustive study of the shrines by Professors Grünwedel and von Lecoq about forty years ago, when considerable portions of the paintings were removed to Berlin. When Stein visited them about two years later, he saw that the caves were suffering further denudation and destruction at the hands of ignorant local people. On his subsequent visit in 1914 he found evidence of increased destruction, and he writes: 'With the sad proofs of progressive damage before my eyes I could feel no doubt that, as local protection was out of the question, careful removal of as much of these mural paintings as circumstances would permit, and artistic or iconographic interest would warrant, offered the only means of assuring their security.' And so, giving careful instructions to his two very capable Indian assistants, Naik Shamsuddīn and Afrāz-gul Khān, he left them to remove and pack selected portions. The result of their skilful work may now be seen in the Central Asian Antiquities Museum in New Delhi, where I had the difficult, but congenial, task of reassembling and mounting them for, as I hope, permanent preservation and exhibition. It is from these reassembled sections that the following reproductions have been made. A general plan of the group of caves is given on plate c with the shrines numbered to correspond with the numbers attached to the paintings reproduced, and enlarged plans of individual shrines, showing positions originally occupied by the paintings, are given on plates A and B.