

Chinese
MS. rolls
retained
by Wang
Tao-shih.

On the day following my return to the site I received welcome proof that there was good foundation for the hint given me by Wang Tao-shih at Tun-huang that his store of ancient manuscripts was not yet completely exhausted. Having spent a day revisiting most of the larger cave-temples with their wealth of fine wall-paintings and stucco sculptures, I paid my promised visit to the priest; in the rock-cut shrine which formerly served as his quarters and now had become his store-room, he now produced two big boxes crammed with well-preserved manuscript rolls. By the careful appearance of their writing and the superior quality of the paper it was easy to recognize that the specimens I was able rapidly to examine belonged to that great stock of canonical texts, mostly Buddhist and dating from T'ang times, with which Wang Tao-shih, under the influence of quasi-religious scruples, had in 1907 been least willing to part.¹⁸

Character
of texts
kept back
by priest.

There could be little doubt that all these fine *chings* had passed through Professor Pelliot's hands when, a year after my own visit, he had subjected whatever was then left of the great hoard to his expert, if necessarily hurried, examination. It was practically certain that his 'selections', amounting roughly to about one-third of the manuscript bundles then examined, included all remains of non-Chinese texts that he could trace and those among the Chinese texts of which the special interest was at once apparent. I could not therefore reasonably hope for any finds of outstanding importance among the materials which Wang Tao-shih had taken care to keep back as a 'nest-egg'. All the same it appeared highly desirable to safeguard whatever Chinese manuscripts were still in the priest's precarious keeping from risks of further loss and dispersal, and to make them accessible for future critical study in the West.

Negotia-
tions for
purchase.

Negotiations for this purpose necessarily proved protracted and troublesome. The experience gained through the transactions which attended and followed my first visit had, indeed, freed the Tao-shih from those religious scruples and the more worldly apprehensions which made him on that occasion so difficult to deal with. But on the other hand his shrewd sense of business had been awakened by the payments received from subsequent visitors to a keener comprehension of the money value of what he retained. He consequently held out at first for a price per roll which, being about four times as much as that paid on the occasion of Chiang Ssü-yeh's big haul of October, 1907,¹⁹ seemed distinctly too high. No doubt Wang's estimate was greatly influenced by the fact that the rolls he was now prepared to part with were almost all large ones and particularly well preserved.

Purchase
of reserve
store of
rolls.

It would have needed Chiang Ssü-yeh's quick grasp and unfailingly tactful handling to bring home to the ignorant priest that these were not the criteria of the philological value of the texts. But though practical help in such matters was not to be obtained from my old secretary's inert successor, I managed in the end to arrive at a mutually satisfactory arrangement. For a total donation of five hundred Taels of silver he agreed to transfer to my possession the 570 Chinese manuscript rolls of which his reserve store was found to consist. Their total bulk is sufficiently indicated by the fact that their transport required five cases, each as large as a pony could conveniently carry.

In 1920 these rolls, together with the other manuscript materials recovered in the course of my third journey, reached a safe place of temporary deposit at the British Museum under the care of Dr. L. Giles. A first rapid inspection which this valued Sinologue collaborator was kind enough to make has confirmed my belief that most of the rolls would prove to contain texts of the Chinese Buddhist canon. But their detailed examination must wait until Dr. Giles has completed the cataloguing of the thousands of Chinese manuscripts brought away in 1907 from the same hoard, a lengthy task on which he has been engaged for a number of years. From the information kindly

¹⁸ Cf. *Serindia*, ii. pp. 812, 823.

¹⁹ See *ibid.*, ii. p. 825; *Desert Cathay*, ii. p. 339.