

small cellas opens on a narrow wooden gallery in front. From this another wooden gallery ascends to the fourth story containing only three small shrines all originally decorated in the same style, but poorly preserved. From one of them very steep rock-cut stairs lead up to the topmost shrine, which has been completely renovated with an image in Tibetan style and wall-paintings showing scenes from the apocryphal T'ang-sên's life. Another staircase leads to a cella 16½ feet square evidently added later, containing a miniature Stūpa quite in the style of a Chinese Pagoda, and on the walls a diaper of low relievo plaques recognizable as new by their inferior types. Near the foot of the main group of caves just described, both to the south and north, a few caves are to be seen irregularly disposed at different levels. In the largest of these, to the north of the entrance leading to the main group of the cave-shrines, a colossal Buddha figure is seated on a stone base roughly carved with relief figures of demons crouching as supporters. Other smaller caves may have been intended from the first as monastic quarters.

Minor cellas.

Such inquiries as I was able to make through the ineffective channel of my hapless Ssü-yeh, here as elsewhere wholly indifferent to 'old things', failed to reveal the survival of any non-Tibetan manuscripts or prints among the Buddhist texts owned by the monastery. But it is possible that a search made with adequate leisure and help might yet produce a different result. For judging from the sculptural remains in the caves I feel strongly inclined to believe that the site was already occupied in Hsi-hsia times, and though the extant sacred structures, apart from the caves, cannot be older than the Ming epoch, yet the monastic establishment that accounts for them may well have enjoyed continuous existence from a much earlier period. In any case it is clear that the sanctity of the site is derived from its cave-shrines, and for the construction of these the striking natural feature presented by that imposing wall of sandstone offers a sufficient explanation.

Early occupation of sacred site.

It only remains for me to mention that on my departure from the site, the heads of the monastic community, in return for the offering in silver made by me as a pilgrim, presented me with the fine carved wooden panel, 010, reproduced in Pl. LXVIII, which apparently had been removed some time before from the half-ruined hall of the upper temple that was undergoing reconstruction, and with a Tibetan painting on canvas, 011, representing a Buddha enthroned among Bodhisattvas and demonic divinities. Judging from its worn surface the painting appears to be of some age. The decorated panel, which retains traces of former colouring, probably dates from Ming times and is certainly a fine specimen of Chinese ornamental wood-carving.

Carved panel and Tibetan painting.

On the evening of July 8th I was rejoined by Lāl Singh, who had determined the point where the Kan-chou river debouches from the mountains, and after passing south across the wide alluvial plain occupied by the most fertile portion of the Kan-chou oasis had skirted the foot of the hills towards Nan-kou-ch'êng. Sorry as I was to bid farewell to these attractive surroundings, I moved on with him on July 9th south-eastwards to the small town of Hung-shui, so that time might not be lost there over the arrangements for the hiring of the animals that we should need in the mountains. The way there, passable for carts, led all along through village lands which, if less fertile than the ground near Nan-kou-ch'êng, were yet equally independent of irrigation. The slopes of the foothills overlooking them were everywhere clothed with rich vegetation and higher up with thick forest.

March to Hung-shui.

Our pleasant quarters in a spacious garden-girt temple outside Hung-shui (Fig. 263) and the glorious view of the verdant mountains afforded but scant compensation for the difficulties and consequent delay that we experienced here in securing the promised transport. The military commandant of the place, which like all the more important points on the direct route from Kan-chou to Hsi-ning is guarded by a small garrison, seemed anxious enough to comply with the orders which General Ch'ai, my old friend, had issued beforehand from Kan-chou. But the owners

Delays about transport.