

fine dust carried up by the wind from the deserts that has clothed their slopes with their thick layers of fertile loess.

But the openness of the great valley before us and the gentle slopes of the range bordering it on the south suggested thoughts in historical retrospect also. It was clear that Nature had created here a true highway, passable with ease for a great portion of the year, between the Tibetan marches of China and the oases along the northern foot of the Nan-shan. For cart traffic, such as the Chinese have always shown a civilized preference for, it has not been open in the past. But there can be little doubt that whenever Tibetan invasion reached Kan-su this direct and easy route from the Huang-ho and Hsi-ning must have played an important part in the campaigns that severed from China its Central-Asian dominions.

Where the narrow nullah descending from the pass debouches into the open Pāmīr-like valley, lies the large but half-deserted fort of O-po (Fig. 278), at an elevation of about 11,500 feet. A small detachment placed in it is intended to guard the route from Hsi-ning against nomadic Tanguts and others who visit the high valleys around. The place looked doubly desolate under a rainy sky, and there would have been no reason for us to make a day's halt outside its ruinous walls had not the passive obstruction attempted by the majority of our Chinese pony-men, who refused to move away from the *ta-lu*, obliged me to secure the assistance of the commander of the fort. Fortunately he proved an intelligent native of Hu-nan, capable of making out my poor Chinese talk in the Hunanese variety of the Mandarin, which I had acquired from converse with Chiang Ssü-yeh, my devoted companion on my former journey. Convinced in the end that the route I proposed to follow up the western head-waters of the Kan-chou river and then down the Ta-t'ung river was not likely to expose us to attacks from dreaded 'Hei-fan-tzū' or Tibetan robbers, and himself to troubles in consequence, he managed to bring the recalcitrants to reason. A substantial advance of silver which I made on account of hire also helped in the process, and an intelligent petty officer was attached to my party to assure some measure of control farther on.

Highway  
from  
Tibetan  
marches.

Halt at  
O-po.

#### OBJECTS OBTAINED AT MA-TI-SSŪ SHRINES

**Ma-ti-ssü. 01-9.** Nine clay stucco relief plaques, oblong, showing seated Buddha or Bodhisattva. Originally painted dark red, but blackened by smoke. Surface worn and detail mostly unintelligible.

01 and 02 show a Bodhisattva in jewelled necklace, Dhōtī, and stole, sitting cross-legged on double lotus, with lotus-petal halo behind. No separate halo for head. Field of halo divided by horizontal band and filled with scroll work; three discs above, one behind head and one on each side. The latter pair, perhaps Sun and Moon fig., and halo background originally gilded, with horizontal band in green and perhaps other colours. Border red. R. hand on knee in Bhūmisparśa-mudrā; L. in lap, apparently holding stem Vajra or ambrosia vase. 01 has Chinese chars. below Padmāsana. 6" × 4½".

03. Slightly smaller plaque showing similar fig.; detail somewhat clearer. 5" × (gr. width) 4¼".

04-8 are in Gandhāra style and show Buddha seated cross-legged on single Padmāsana supported by kneeling elephants under pillared and straight lintelled shrine. Latter apparently same in all, but best preserved in 04, which shows lotus-petal base and capital of pillar on each side, double rectang. abacus above, and relief of two deer facing each other across flaming jewel (?) on top of

straight crenelated roof at angles of which are birds. This relief prob. symbolizes the First Sermon in Deer Park at Benares.

Buddha has hands in meditation in 06-8, but in 04 they are in Dharmacakra-mudrā, and in 05 R. hand is in Bhūmisparśa-mudrā and L. in lap. Remains of black and red paint over all. 04, 6¾" × 4¼". 09 is fr. of smaller plaque of seated Buddha, with Padmāsana and lotus-petal halo as in 01-3. Hands in Dharmacakra-mudrā; surface much worn. Traces of Chin. chars. written below. 4¾" × 3¾". Pl. LXVII.

**Ma-ti-ssü. 010.** Carved wooden panel. Three boards of unequal width, 1" thick, are butted together and held by two battens at back about 1½" thick and 2½" wide, fastened by sliding into shallow dovetail groove, the edges of battens being cut to fit dovetail. To the board thus formed are applied a carved border of bold 'torus' section, an inner flat border, and in a row along middle board of panel four bosses carved with Chinese symbols.

Torus is mitred at corners and has slightly projecting continuous flat members on each side, by which it is fastened to board by wrought-iron nails. Flat inner border fastened by means of wooden dowel-pins. Bosses have chamfered border and are fastened to board by