

the westernmost portion of the Nan-shan range has cut its way here through the foothills overlain by huge ridges of drift-sand, but now loses itself a short distance below the caves. On the cliffs above the broad waste of rubble and sand on which the streamlet debouches, there were first seen a multitude of dark cavities, mostly small, like troglodyte dwellings of anchorites retired to a distant Thebais. From the small size of most of these recesses and the absence of wall paintings in almost all of them, it seemed safe to conclude that they had served largely as quarters for Buddhist monks.

Farther up there were to be seen hundreds of grottoes, large and small, honeycombing in irregular tiers the sombre rock faces (Fig. 79), from the foot of the cliff to the top of the precipice, and extending in close array for over half a mile. This bewildering multitude of grottoes all showed paintings on their walls or on as much as was visible of them from outside. Among them two shrines containing colossal Buddha statues could at once be recognized; for in order to secure adequate space for the giant stucco images of the Buddhas, close on ninety feet high, a number of halls had been excavated one above the other, each providing light and access for a portion of the colossus.

In front of most of the shrines there had been originally antechapels or porches of oblong shape carved out of the rock. Owing to the fall of the outer wall the tempera paintings with which the inside wall surfaces had always been decorated were now often fully exposed to view (Fig. 80). In many cases the rock-carved antechapels, whether originally or on restoration, had been replaced by wooden verandahs, generally much decayed. The galleries and