

stairs serving for access to the upper grottoes or for communication between them had almost all crumbled away. Hence many of these shrines high up on the rocks had become inaccessible. But the disappearance of porches and verandahs made it easy to see that the interior arrangements and decoration of these upper shrines did not differ in any essential way from those prevailing in the cave temples carved into the foot of the cliff.

Access to these offered no difficulty, even though the fine drift-sand which neglect through centuries had allowed to accumulate had covered the ground in front and also the original floor of the entrance, often to a considerable height. So I could quickly familiarize myself with the ground-plan and general structural arrangement of these shrines. They showed much uniformity throughout. From the oblong antechapel the cave-temple proper was entered through a high and rather wide passage, which alone admitted light and air to the interior. This consisted everywhere of a single rectangular cella, usually almost square, hewn out of the solid rock and provided with a high conical roof.

Within the cella I found generally a big rectangular platform decorated with painted stucco. Its centre was usually occupied by the colossal stucco image of a seated Buddha, with groups of Bodhisattvas, saintly disciples and divine attendants on either side (Fig. 81). These varied in numbers, but were always symmetrically arranged. It was only too easy to see how much of all this statuary in stucco had suffered in the course of centuries through the natural decay of its material, and even more from the hands of iconoclasts and pious restorers. But in spite of all this