

measurement showed, close on 500 cubic feet. Within the small room measuring about nine feet square there was left barely space for two people to stand on.

It was impossible to examine anything in this 'black hole'. But when the priest had brought out some bundles and allowed us to look rapidly through the contents in a room of the newly built porch, well screened from inquisitive eyes, the importance of the great mine here opened for research in many directions soon revealed itself. The thick rolls of well-made strong paper, about one foot high and sometimes up to twenty yards or more in length, which turned up first contained Chinese Buddhist texts. They were all in an excellent state, manifestly preserved more or less in the condition they were in when deposited.

Even before detailed examination of colophons had shown exact dates, reaching back in some cases to the beginning of the fifth century A.D., there were to be noted unmistakable signs of great age in the writing, paper, arrangement, etc. An extensive text in Indian Brahmi characters written on the reverse of a Chinese roll left no doubt about the bulk of the manuscripts dating from a period when Indian writing and a knowledge of Sanskrit still prevailed in Central-Asian Buddhism. I could not feel surprise at such relics of ancient cult and learning having escaped all effects of time while walled up in a rock-cut chamber in these terribly barren hills. They were hermetically shut off from what moisture, if any, the atmosphere of this desert valley ever contained.

Already the search of those first hours carried on in a state of joyful excitement showed how varied were the remains awaiting here excavation of a novel kind. As bundle