

of the Tang dynasty that, during the second half of the eighth century, Tibetan invasion seriously threatened, and towards its close actually destroyed, the authority of the Imperial Government in Eastern Turkestan. These records, of which Professor Chavannes has kindly communicated to me a series of very interesting extracts, indicate plainly that, though the Tibetan advance had already (about 766 A.D.) led to the isolation of those outlying provinces, the local Chinese administrators succeeded for a time in maintaining their authority, at least over part of their territories. In 781 A.D. they managed to transmit pathetic appeals for help to the Imperial court, from which, however, there came no succour, only grants of laudatory titles and liberal acknowledgments of official merits. In 784 A.D. their position appeared so desperate that the Central Government considered the advisability of their recall. Finally, from 791 A.D. onwards, the Tibetans possessed themselves of Turfan and the adjoining region, and nothing more was heard of Eastern Turkestan or the "Four Garrisons," as the Chinese then styled the territories controlled from Kucha, Khotan, Karashahr, and Kashgar.

It is a fortunate circumstance that a Chinese inscription scratched into the cella wall close to the image in the north-west corner (visible to the right in the photograph, p. 415) renders it certain that we must read the evidence of the Tibetan finds in the light of the Chinese records just summarised. From the photographs taken by me of this curious graffito, Professor Chavannes has been able to make out a considerable part of its contents, probably as much as the loosely scratched characters will ever permit to be read. It mentions the return of Tsin-kia-hing, a dignitary of the Chinese administration charged with official sacrifices, to his own district, apparently after the receipt of a report concerning the death of certain military officers with whom he was associated. Twice the 'Ta-fan' or Tibetans are mentioned, and a reference is also made to the "Four Garrisons." The date when this record was incised is given as the seventh year of a period which, owing to the defective preservation of the first character, may be read as Kai-yuen or Cheng-yuen, the year meant corresponding either to A.D. 719 or 791.