from 1 to 2 feet in diameter. This upper chamber is only about 13 feet long, with a greatest width of 8 feet. Its height is not more than 4–5 feet, except where a narrow fissure leads through the rock upwards to a height of about 15 feet. The end of this fissure, which can be scaled with some trouble, was visible by the light of a candle. The upper story of the cave is shunned by the common people, who fear to ascend into its darkness, but no special sanctity attaches to it.

The walls of the cave show everywhere the natural conglomerate, with its well-rounded pebbles closely packed and varying in size up to one foot or more in diameter. A hard crust of black soot covers the wall surfaces throughout. The legend ascribes the black colour of the walls to the smoke with which the infidels are supposed to have here killed the saint. But in reality it is manifestly a result of the fires which the pilgrims who come to sit and pray in the cave are wont to light in winter to keep themselves warm. Beneath a thin layer of dust and ashes which I had cleared out, the bottom of the cave proved to consist of hard pebbles firmly embedded.

Find of Dutreuil de Rhins MS.

I examined the interior of the cave with particular care, as the report furnished to MM. Dutreuil de Rhins and Grenard represented it as the find-place of an ancient Kharoṣṭhī MS. of the Dhammapada on birch-bark, fragments of which were acquired by them in 1892 and published by M. Senart five years later[16]. The publication of this eminent savant makes it unnecessary to point out here in detail the importance of this find, since known as the Dutreuil de Rhins MS., from both the palaeographical and philological points of view. Whether written in India or outside it, these fragments certainly constitute the oldest MS. so far known of an Indian literary product. M. Grenard's account shows that the leaves were delivered to him and his companion on two successive visits to the locality by natives who professed to have found them with some other antiques (a bowl of well-finished pottery and a small figure carved in wood and enclosed in a casket) inside the grotto. Neither to M. Dutreuil de Rhins, who first visited the place and received some fragments, nor to M. Grenard, who about a month later secured what he believed to be the rest of the find, was the exact spot of discovery shown. The men who sold the precious leaves to the French travellers appear to have hindered them from a personal inspection of the cave by alleging religious objections. They certainly took care to hide the fact that a larger portion of the fragments had been sold by them to agents of the late M. Petrowsky, Russian Consul General at Kāshgar, through whose mediation it subsequently reached St. Petersburg.

Doubts as to find-spot.

Though the visit of the French explorers was still remembered by the Shaikhs, nothing was known to them or the villagers of the alleged discovery in the cave. On the other hand I found the guardians of the sacred spot ready enough, for a consideration, to show me the cave, including its mysterious recesses. The careful examination I was thus able to make of the whole interior did not reveal any spot where the objects described by M. Grenard could have lain effectively hidden for centuries. There were no traces of any recent opening visible anywhere in the rock walls, though the coating of old soot would have easily revealed such; nor could the thin layer of dust and ashes above the hard rock at the bottom have covered and preserved such bulky articles as a bowl and casket. These considerations make it distinctly improbable that the antiquarian relics now in Paris and St. Petersburg were actually discovered within the cave. They may have been found in the vicinity and the cave indicated as the

[16] Compare Grenard, *Mission D. de Rhins*, pp. 142 sqq.; Senart, *Les Fragments Dutreuil de Rhins*, *J. asiat.*, 1898, Sept.–Oct.; for earlier notices see *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des inscriptions*, IVe série, t. xxv. pp. 251 sqq.