

perched one above the other without any order or arrangement in stories (Fig. 159). In front of many were open verandah-like porches carved out of the soft rock with walls and ceilings bearing faded frescoes. Rough stairs cut into the cliff and still rougher wooden galleries served as approaches to the higher caves. But many of these seemed on the point of crumbling away, and high up in the topmost rows there were manifestly shrines which had become quite inaccessible.

There was nothing to guide me in my first rapid sight-seeing. Some of the larger grottoes on the lowest floor had, indeed, elaborate wooden antechapels of unmistakably modern look to indicate restoration. But I soon found that even these shrines contained much that was manifestly old both in fresco work and statuary. As I passed rapidly from one cella to another my eyes could scarcely take in more than the general type of the frescoes and certain technical features of the stucco sculptures. The former, in composition and style, showed the closest affinity to the remains of Buddhist pictorial art transplanted from India to Eastern Turkestan, and already familiar from the ruined shrines I had excavated at Dandan-oilik and other old sites about Khotan. But in the representation of figures and faces the influence of Chinese taste made itself felt distinctly, and instead of the thin outlines and equally thin colouring there appeared often a perfect exuberance of strong, but well-harmonized colours. Where deep blues and greens preponderated there was something in the effect distinctly recalling Tibetan work.

I could not doubt for a moment that the best of these frescoes belonged to the times of the T'ang dynasty. In the rest, whether left in their original state or touched up by modern restorers, I could see that I had before me the work of painters who faithfully continued the artistic traditions of that period. The subjects and sizes of the mural paintings varied greatly in the different shrines, while the ground plan and arrangement of the latter showed much uniformity. From a kind of oblong antechapel, fully open to the light, but generally badly injured,