

about Khotan curiously recalled Indian origin. But I had already seen enough of the people of Tun-huang to realize how thorough a mixture of races may be looked for at these ancient cross-roads between China, Tibet, and the quasi-Aryan settlements of the Tarim Basin.

Our guide readily took us to the temple containing a big Chinese inscription on marble which records pious works executed here in the T'ang period, and subsequently to the two shrines where smaller epigraphic relics dating from the Sung and Yüan dynasties are preserved. Alas! I had to leave the examination of them entirely to Chiang-ssü-yeh, who, with true Chinese delight in things palaeographical, was soon absorbed in a study of the finely engraved rows of characters. But it was a comfort to know that with one or two exceptions they had already been published by M. Chavannes from impressions brought back by M. Bonin.

At Tun-huang I had first heard through Zahid Beg vague rumours about a great hidden deposit of ancient manuscripts which was said to have been discovered accidentally some years earlier in one of the grottoes. And the assertion that some of these manuscripts were not Chinese had naturally made me still keener to ascertain exact details. These treasures were said to have been locked up again in one of the shrines by official order. In secret council Chiang and myself had discussed long before how best to get access to the find, and how to break down if necessary any priestly obstruction. I had told my devoted secretary what Indian experience had taught me of the diplomacy most likely to succeed with local priests usually as ignorant as they were greedy, and his ready comprehension had assured me that the methods suggested might be tried with advantage on Chinese soil too. The absence of the Taoist priest in charge of the manuscripts made it impossible to start operations at once. But the young monk was able to put us on the right track. So I soon let him be taken aside by the Ssü-yeh for private confabulation. From a rapid inspection of the southernmost caves, perched high up near the top of the cliff, I had just returned to the grotto containing the latest of the