

inscriptions, engraved about the middle of the fourteenth century, when Chiang joined me full of joy at the success of his investigation.

It was in a large shrine farther north, bearing on its walls evidence of recent restoration, that the deposit of manuscripts had been discovered. The entrance to the cave-temple had been formerly blocked by fallen rock-débris and drift sand. After this had been cleared out, and while restorations were slowly proceeding in the temple cella and its antechapel, the workmen engaged had noticed a crack in the frescoed wall of the passage between them. Attracted by this they discovered an opening leading to a recess or small chamber hollowed out from the rock behind the stuccoed wall to the right.

It proved to be completely filled with manuscript rolls which were said to be written in Chinese characters, but in a non-Chinese language. The total quantity was supposed to make up some cart-loads. News of the discovery ultimately reached provincial headquarters, and after specimens had been sent to far-away Lan-chou, orders were supposed to have come from the Viceroy to restore the whole of the find to its original place of deposit. So now behind the carefully locked door with which the recess had been furnished, these strange undeciphered manuscripts were said to be kept. The shrine, though full of Buddhist frescoes and sculptures, was in charge of a Taoist priest, the small fraternity of Ho-shangs or Buddhist monks, to which our guide belonged, peacefully sharing with him the guardianship of the site.

The priest was away in the oasis, apparently on a begging tour with his acolytes. Chiang had thus no chance to pursue his preliminary enquiries further. But, fortunately, the young Ho-shang's spiritual guide, a Sramana of Tibetan extraction, had borrowed one of the manuscripts for the sake of giving additional lustre to his small private chapel, and our cicerone was persuaded by the Ssü-yeh to bring us this specimen. It was a beautifully preserved roll of paper, about a foot high and perhaps fifteen yards long, which I unfolded with Chiang in front of the original hiding-place. The writing was, indeed, Chinese; but my