

possess a distinct historical interest, *e.g.* one directing the issue of provisions to the escort of an imperial envoy to So-ch'ê, or Yarkand, counting eighty-seven men. In another again there is a reference to an ambassador sent to the imperial court by a chief of the great tribe of the Wu-sun, who played an important part in the early history of Central Asia and then dwelt in the mountains of the present Farghana. But of such records I shall have occasion to give some account later, when dealing with the results of M. Chavannes' decipherment.

A very curious find, but for the topographical facts explaining the peculiar character of this site, might have puzzled me at the time. It was a considerable number of large paper fragments inscribed with elegantly penned Chinese characters. They turned up from the floor of what I soon recognized to have been a small cella, about ten feet square, on the western side of the hillock. That the texts they contained belonged to Chinese translations of Buddhist canonical works I could with Chiang's help make sure of at once, as well as of the reference made in another fragment to the dedication of some Buddhist images. So, taking into account the evidence furnished by the use of paper and the style of the writing, I concluded that these were relics from some modest shrine which had somehow survived at this otherwise long-abandoned site down to T'ang times. Other relics of it were ex-votos in the shape of small miniature flags made up of silk rags such as I had found at ancient sites excavated on my first journey.

Next morning this conjecture received striking confirmation by the discovery of a small wooden bowl embedded below the reed flooring and containing some eighty copper coins. Excepting two which were older, all were issues of the regnal period 713-742 A.D., and showed scarcely any wear resulting from circulation. So the attribution of the Buddhist text fragments to the eighth century, when the route to Lop-nor had last been an important line of communication, became practically certain. One of the fragments has since been proved by M. Chavannes to belong to a Buddhist canonical text, which Hsüan-tsang himself is known to have translated between