

Nevertheless in this tantalizing *embarras des richesses* I was able to catch a few encouraging glimpses. It was thus that, in a series of monastic records apparently issued under the seal of the abbot of the chief establishment, I lighted upon the old name of the Ch'ien-fo-tung site, which here figured as San-chieh-ssü, the 'Temples of the Three Regions.' Subsequently I found out that even now three divisions are distinguished among the cave-temples, though the old designation of the site seems quite forgotten. Then again I found complete rolls stamped with the die of the 'Temples of the Three Regions,' and thus clearly marked as having formed part of a general monastic library.

Greatly delighted was I when I found that an excellently preserved roll with a well-designed block-printed picture as frontispiece, had its text printed throughout, showing a date of production corresponding to 860 A.D. (Fig. 191, 6). Here was conclusive evidence that the art of printing books from wooden blocks was practised long before the conventionally assumed time of its invention, during the Sung period, and that already in the ninth century the technical level had been raised practically as high as the process permitted. Then again there were spirited drawings and woodcuts to be found in the midst of the Chinese text rolls, needing no specialist experience to recognize their artistic merit.

Five days of strenuous work resulted in the extraction and rapid search of all 'miscellaneous' bundles likely to contain manuscripts of special interest, paintings, and other relics which I was eager to rescue first of all. Fortunately when the Tao-shih had last stuffed back his treasures into their 'black hole,' these had been put mostly on the top or in other more or less accessible places, being, of course, less convenient building material than the tight uniform packets of Chinese and Tibetan rolls (Fig. 194). But my task was not ended while there still rose against the walls of the chamber that solid rampart of manuscript bundles. They would have to be cleared out, too, and rapidly looked through. It was bound to prove a troublesome undertaking in more than one sense, though discreet treatment and judiciously administered doses of silver had so far