

richly decorated with painting (see Fig. 160). By the sides of the principal image are grouped statues, up to ten in number, representing saintly disciples, Bodhisattvas, and at the extreme corners Guardian-kings of the Regions. But often only the lotus bases have survived to mark their positions. Invariably a passage was left between the platform and the cella walls for the worshippers to perform the circumambulation prescribed by Buddhist worship after its ancient Indian model. In the smaller cellas, which ordinarily are exactly square in shape, the images similarly grouped are placed on a platform within a broad niche or alcove (see Fig. 200). In a few cases the centre of the cella had been left unexcavated and the square block of rock used as a backing for stucco images. In one of these shrines the back wall of the cella is occupied by a colossal representation of Buddha lying in death or rather Nirvana, a scene quite rare at Ch'ien-fo-tung, and evidently not a theme cherished by these Chinese artists.

The ceiling of the cellas is usually raised very high in the shape of a truncated cone, with a coffer-like device in the centre over a succession of receding steps, some real and some cleverly painted in succession (see Fig. 160). The dimensions of the truly colossal seated Buddha statues, attaining a height of over eighty feet in two temples, necessitated here a special architectural disposition, the great height of the cella being lit through a succession of antechapels on three or four stories which can be reached over narrow, breakneck flights of stairs carved out from the soft rock.

The sculptures of the cellas have suffered even more than the pictorial decoration both from iconoclastic zeal and from the hands of pious restorers. The fact of their being modelled throughout in stucco of friable mud accounts for the risks to which this statuary must have been exposed at all times. An examination of the many completely broken old images showed that there was no essential difference between their make and the methods of modelling which I saw used by a couple of Tun-huang 'hua-chiang,' or sculptors, who came during my stay to execute some repairs. Just as I had noticed in the ruined