

is the abundance and relatively good preservation of the large mural paintings, of which many probably go back to T'ang times. Nothing but careful copies in colour by the hand of an artist fully conversant with Eastern painting and Buddhist iconography could do justice to all the wealth of spirited composition, graceful design of figure and ornament, and harmonious colour effects which these frescoes display, and then it would need his devotion for many laborious months. The task of their exhaustive study or of securing the materials for it was beyond my power and that of my camera. But there was at least the comfort to know that these fine remains of pictorial art were protected by continued worship and local superstition against wanton vandalism, and any attempt at 'museum exploitation.'

As already stated, the best-preserved and manifestly oldest frescoes were to be found within the large cellas, and just there the conditions of lighting were such as to render photographing particularly difficult. Only during certain hours of the morning could adequate light be obtained for particular portions of the painted wall surfaces. Even then work was often seriously interfered with or stopped by the dust-haze left behind by the violent gales which after some days' interval used to blow up the desert valley from the north or north-east. Thus it cost no small amount of time and effort to secure the dozens of photographic negatives by which, in combination with detailed notes, I endeavoured to bring away some record of the most characteristic schemes of mural decoration to be found in these grottoes.

I shall not attempt to describe now the frescoes in each of the temple caves with which I thus made myself familiar. Instead of this, I propose to explain the typical features in a few decorative schemes which were of special frequency or interest, and for the partial illustration of which the reproductions here available will suffice. In the smaller shrines, where the image groups occupy a large niche or alcove, both walls and ceiling show a general diaper decoration with rows of small stencilled Buddha figures, all alike in outline and pose, and varied only in the