

Naginis, half-human half-snake, represented as disporting themselves in the water.

No photographs could convey an impression of the charm which these compositions, and those to be described presently in the larger temples, derive from their rich and harmoniously blended colouring. In the design and grouping of the figures, in their drapery and general iconography, most of what is presented to us by these panels is a direct inheritance from Graeco-Buddhist art as developed in Central Asia. But when we come to examine the technique, even of these hieratic representations where regard for the traditional models was strongest, the difference in treatment is striking. Everywhere the free sweep of the brush so characteristic of Chinese pictorial art endeavours to assert itself over the delicate outline drawing which the same figures display in the frescoes and panels of ancient Khotan. With this change goes naturally a far greater attention to colour effect. The deep purples, browns, and blues which prevail, are set off very strikingly by the usual ground colour, a pale greenish blue most restful to the eye and probably first suggested by the lotus tanks amidst which these scenes of Buddhist paradise are so often placed.

Chinese style, which after all could only modify but not radically change the treatment of these hieratic scenes fixed by convention going back to Indian ground, found free scope in the smaller side panels and dados decorated with quasi-secular scenes of monastic life, husbandry, and travel. It is true that these little scenes, usually accompanied by cartouches filled in with Chinese inscriptions, or more often left blank, are in all probability meant to illustrate 'Jatakas,' or stories from Buddha's former births. But whether from the absence of Graeco-Buddhist models to guide, or on account of some other reason, the whole treatment here seems frankly Chinese. The result is work less effective from a decorative point of view, in fact often a little prosaic and confused, but full of quaint life and vivid movement.

The frescoes of some larger shrines show in places big panels of this type side by side with the conventional