

Hungarian Geological Survey and President of the Geographical Society of Hungary, who, as a member of Count Széchenyi's expedition and thus as a pioneer of modern geographical exploration in westernmost China, had visited these cave-temples as early as 1879. Though not himself a student of Eastern art and antiquities, he had been greatly struck by the importance and artistic interest of the remains. His glowing description of the fine fresco paintings and stucco sculptures that he had seen there, and the close connexion with early Indian art which he thought to have recognized in some of them, had aroused my deep interest and supplied the main cause for the extension of my expedition so far eastwards.

Prospects of fruitful work.

In my Personal Narrative I have endeavoured to describe the vivid impressions with which that first rapid visit paid on March 16 to the wonderful site of the 'Thousand Buddhas' had filled me.<sup>1</sup> They abundantly sufficed to show me how rich was the field which here opened for the study of Buddhist pictorial and sculptural art in China. Inadequately equipped as I felt myself to be for a task of this nature and magnitude, I realized the importance of securing whatever materials I could for a record of these artistic treasures, and the consequent need of a prolonged stay. My hope of thus aiding research in other directions also was greatly strengthened when that first visit yielded evidence, small in extent but unexpectedly definite, that there was a real foundation for the vague rumours I had first heard at Tun-huang through Zahīd Bēg, a Turkī trader from Urumchi settled there in exile, about the accidental discovery of a great deposit of ancient manuscripts hidden in one of the cave-temples.

Preparations for Limes exploration.

The fascinating prospects held out by my plans upon the 'Thousand Buddhas' made me feel doubly anxious to begin without delay the exploration of the ancient Chinese Limes. That this was a task which ought necessarily to come first at this season was quite clear from my Taklamakān experiences of the climatic conditions that were likely to prevail in the desert as soon as the winter had passed. It was essential that I should start back to the line of the ruined wall and watch-stations well provided in the matter of guides, diggers, and supplies in order to obviate needless delay in my proposed operations. In all these respects serious difficulties soon revealed themselves. Of the ruins I was anxious to trace and explore in the desert nothing was known to the scholarly magistrate of the *hsien*, Wang Ta-lao-yeh, a new arrival from another part of Kan-su, nor to his military confrère, Lin Ta-jên, the commander of the local militia, though both from the first showed friendly interest in my work and to the end proved very attentive and helpful.<sup>2</sup> Whether it might have been different with any of the other educated Chinese in the town, I am unable to state. But, in any case, the deep-rooted secretiveness of the local Chinese population effectively prevented any offer of guidance from them or from such Tungan herdsmen and hunters as occasionally visit the nearer of the riverine jungles.

Difficulties about labour and transport.

How great were the troubles about labour and transport which had to be faced and overcome during the next two months, I have related in some detail elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> Here it must suffice to mention that, what with the general scantiness of labour, due to depopulation; with the easy life and consequent indolence prevailing among the people of Tun-huang in general; with the weakness of the local administration, and—last but not least—the innate dread of the 'Gobi', or desert, shared by all Chinese, even the provision of the dozen or so of diggers we managed to secure in the end from Tun-huang, all hopeless opium-smoking wastrels, proved a very serious business for my official patrons. I had ample opportunity, then and after, to observe how different from the conditions familiar to me in Chinese Turkestan were the relations between nominal rulers

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Desert Cathay*, ii. pp. 20 sqq.

<sup>2</sup> Regarding these two sympathetic and well-meaning officers, typical representatives of the pre-revolution hierarchy

in these outlying parts of China, cf. *Desert Cathay*, ii. pp. 14 sq., 17 sq., 33 sqq., 69, 232 sqq.

<sup>3</sup> See *Desert Cathay*, ii. pp. 32 sqq.