

Character of
sculptural
remains.

had necessarily exposed them far more than the mural paintings to all the vicissitudes of wilful damage and successive restorations. Yet continuity of traditional arrangement was attested here, too, by the way in which the statuary of the shrines, however much restored, seemed often to correspond in grouping and character to the indications traceable by the original image bases and the haloes shown in relief or painted on the backing walls. Reference to Figs. 207, 208, 211, 212 will help to illustrate this. The usual arrangement, no doubt, was originally a seated figure of Buddha in the centre with groups which varied in numbers but were symmetrically ranged on either side, composed of saintly disciples, Bodhisattvas, and divine attendants. Representations of Dvārapālas, the 'Guardian Kings of the Quarters', were easily recognizable in the richly dressed figures in armour that usually flanked these groups. Even where these familiar figures had completely perished, remnants of their demon cognizances were to be found at the bases. For the correct identification of other figures, broken or restored, familiarity with the mediaeval or modern Buddhist iconography of China would have been probably more useful than any local guide—if such had been procurable.

Remains of
old stucco
images and
their art.

At the outset it was reassuring to note the total absence of those Tantric monstrosities which have found their way into the Mahāyāna Buddhism of the Far East through the spreading influence of the cult as developed in Tibet and the mountain border-lands of Northern India. Closer inspection soon convinced me that, in spite of all the destruction which the stucco images had suffered in the course of successive vandal inroads like that of the Tungans, these cave-temples still retained plentiful remains to attest the prolonged continuance here of the sculptural traditions which Graeco-Buddhist art had developed and Central-Asian Buddhism transmitted to the Far East. The heads, arms, and often the upper portions of the statues in general were due to modern and sadly inadequate attempts at restoration. But their glaring defects and the clumsy ugliness prevailing where the stucco images had been altogether remade, as e. g. seen in Figs. 200, 227, 228, helped by contrast to bring out more clearly the good modelling of what survived elsewhere of the lower portions of statues, as well as the graceful arrangement of the drapery and the exquisite colouring of the whole. Comparison of the partially old sculptural work seen in Figs. 207, 208, 212 is instructive in this respect. It was fortunate that the large, elaborately adorned haloes and vesicas worked in relief at the back of the seated Buddha statues, and usually edged with flame scrolls (Figs. 207, 211, 212), had in many cases escaped serious damage and the risk of repair. The beautiful specimen, seen in Fig. 201 behind a broken over life-size image of Buddha, even when viewed without the harmoniously blended colours of the rich tracery and scrolls, helps us to imagine what the polychrome splendour of the original statuary in these shrines may have been like.

Colossal
Buddha
statues.

In the profusion of gilding once used for the sculptural work, of which plentiful traces survived on broken statues and reliefs, I could recognize an early feature well attested from Gandhāra to Khotan and beyond. It was the same with the remarkable effort bestowed on colossal figures of Buddha, of which two, one standing, one seated, reached to a height of close on 90 feet. These naturally recalled to my mind the huge rock-carved 'Būts' of Bāmiān and made me wonder at the time whether the 'Halls of the Thousand Buddhas' did not owe their creation, indirectly and in the last resort, to the example set at that famous site on the ancient high road from Gandhāra and Kābul to Baktra. There were the cave-shrines of Kuchā and Turfān, far more modest in size, no doubt, but similar in character, to serve as likely links. Undismayed by the great expense implied, pious restorers seemed to have directed their zealous attention towards these colossal images down to quite recent times. The caves in which they rise through a succession of stories had big modern antechapels, with their fronts built of gaily painted timber and elaborately decorated.