

This association of a Mongol prince bearing a Muhammadan name with works of Buddhist piety has an historical interest of its own.

Inscription  
of A. D. 1348.

The partly broken slab bearing the inscription of A. D. 1348 has in its centre a relievo representation of a Dhyāni-bodhisattva, identified by M. Chavannes with Avalokiteśvara.<sup>9</sup> Above it and on both sides the sacred formula *Om maṇi padme hūṃ* is engraved in six different scripts: Devanāgarī, Tibetan, Uigur-Turkī, Mongol, Hsi-hsia or Tangutan, Chinese. The inscription below contains a record of the erection of the stēlē and a list naming the personages who 'have presided at the meritorious work', after Sulaimān, king of Hsi-ning, mainly members of the royal house and notables, most of them probably connected with Tun-huang. The stēlē may have an archaeological value because at its head in big characters it bears the name of the 'Cave of unequalled height' 莫高窟. This is taken by M. Chavannes as an indication that it was set up at this cave.<sup>9a</sup> Considering that the shrine Ch. XI, in which the slab is now found, almost immediately adjoins the cave which contains the image of the colossal seated Buddha, and that this certainly is the highest now to be seen at Ch'ien-fo-tung, the conclusion suggests itself that this great excavation is meant by the 'Cave of unequalled height', and that the stone was originally placed there. The fact of its lying loose and partially broken, whereas the other inscribed slab of A. D. 1351 is intact and still upright in what seems to be its original stone socket, might be taken to support this. We have already seen that the inscribed stone of A. D. 698, now at Ch. III, indicates the 'Cave of unequalled height' as the one which, according to the tradition of that period, marked the first shrine constructed at the site by Lo-tsun.

The 'Cave  
of un-  
equalled  
height'.

Inscription  
of A. D. 1351  
on temple  
reconstruc-  
tion.

The stēlē dated in the year A. D. 1351 supplements the former inscription in a very useful fashion and also furnishes information of direct archaeological interest for the site.<sup>10</sup> It declares itself in its heading as 'a notice on the reconstruction of the *Huang-ch'ing* 皇慶 temple.' After an exordium which records the composition of the inscription by one Liu Ch'i, 'director of literary studies in the Sha-chou district', we are informed: 'The *Huang-ch'ing* temple of Sha-chou had already passed through a great number of years and months since the T'ang and Sung [dynasties] to the present day; the wars had pillaged it and conflagrations had reduced it to ashes. . . . Su-lai-man, king of Hsi-ning, who greatly honoured the Buddhist religion, gave gold, pieces of silk, colours, rice, food-stuffs, and timber for construction, and ordered artisans to rebuild it. He charged the monk Shou-lang to direct this affair; besides Shou-lang kept a register to inscribe in it the list [of donors], in order to help towards the completion of the work. The statues of Buddhas, the mural paintings, and the roofings found themselves entirely renewed in their full glory.' Sulaimān having died in the meantime, the list of donors which follows names his successor Ya-han-sha, who in the inscription of A. D. 1348 figures as heir-presumptive, along with members of the family as well as numerous officials and others of Tun-huang.

Evidence of  
successive  
restorations  
of shrines.

The story here recorded of the ravages which the *Huang-ch'ing* temple had suffered in the centuries preceding the Mongol period, of the extensive repairs then effected, and of the method by which their cost was provided, affords a typical illustration of the manifold successive restorations which most, if not all, of the older and more important cave-temples are likely to have undergone. With the latest instance of such restoring activity I had special occasion to become familiar, as the following pages will show, and the varying stages of decay observed elsewhere in antechapels and other adjoining structures suggested that restoration has never quite ceased. In the case of the shrine Ch. XI, where the last two inscriptions are now found, modern restoration is attested by

<sup>9</sup> See Chavannes, *Dix inscriptions*, pp. 96 sqq. and plate.

<sup>9a</sup> But see, for another interpretation of the term *Mo-kao-ku*, the remarks of M. Pelliot, *B.É.F.E.O.*, viii. p. 521, who

takes it for a designation of the whole site. Thus Dr. Giles in his *Tun-huang lu*, *J.R.A.S.*, 1914, p. 707.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Chavannes, *Dix inscriptions*, pp. 99 sqq.