

Plates CLXVI-CLXVIII show, neatly rolled up, after the fashion of papyri, over small sticks of wood that sometimes had carved or inlaid end knobs. The length of the strips or sheets of which the rolls were made up varied from about 15 to 20 inches;<sup>2</sup> the rolls themselves when complete were found to extend to considerable lengths. All showed signs of having been much read and handled. Probably in consequence of this the protecting outer fold, with the silk tape which had served for tying up the roll, had got torn off very often.<sup>3</sup>

No attempt at cataloguing possible.

Where the covering folds of the rolls were intact it was easy for Chiang Ssü-yeh to read off the title of the Sūtra, the number of book and chapter, and anything else usually shown there. The information contained in those titles was of no guidance to me. The fact, however, that the headings of the rolls found in the first bundles were all different disposed of my apprehension that this great mass of manuscripts might be found to contain mainly an inane repetition of a few identical texts, after the fashion so widespread in modern Buddhism. At first I caused Chiang to prepare a rough list of titles; but as the Tao-shih gradually took more courage and brought out load after load of manuscript bundles for examination, all attempt even at the roughest cataloguing had to be abandoned.

Tibetan texts in roll form.

In this rapid examination of the first bundles Chiang failed to discover any colophons giving exact dates of the writing. The Tibetan texts, of which some also emerged from these bundles, could not be expected to help me in approximately determining the *terminus a quo* for the formation of the monastic library which was manifestly hidden away in the walled-up chapel. Those found then were also written in roll form (see specimens Ch. 05, 011, Plate CLXXIII; Ch. 06, 07, Plate CLXXIV), though with clearly marked sections, as convenience of reading required in the case of a writing that ran in horizontal lines. Neither the writing nor the probable contents, evidently portions of the canonical collections, could furnish chronological clues. But the paper, coarse and of a greyish tint, looked decidedly later than that of the Chinese Sūtra rolls. There was a presumption for connecting these Tibetan texts with the period of Tibetan predominance at Tun-huang, which lasted from about A.D. 759 to A.D. 850. Hence the conclusion suggested itself that the Chinese rolls, with their superior and manifestly older paper, would prove to belong to the preceding times of T'ang rule.

Discovery of texts in Cursive Gupta script.

But the first distinct assurance as regards the early origin of portions of the collection here deposited came when, on the reverse of a Chinese roll on old yellowish paper (now marked Ch. i. 0019, see App. F), incomplete but over 3 feet long, I lighted upon a text written in that Cursive Gupta script with which manuscript remains from Khotan sites and in the old language of Khotan had rendered me familiar. Soon there emerged three more fragmentary rolls of a similar kind (Ch. i. 0021. a, b, c; App. F), covered on one side or both with writing in the same script. The evidence seemed clear that at the time when the collection was formed a knowledge of Indian writing, and probably of Sanskrit, too, still prevailed in the Buddhism of this region. The appearance of Khotanese texts on the reverse of Chinese rolls distinctly pointed to a connexion existing at the time between the local religious establishments and the places where Buddhism had flourished in the Tārīm Basin. Nor had I long to wait before another bundle yielded a mass of Pōthī leaves, written in Cursive Gupta script and belonging, as Dr. Hoernle's analysis has since proved, to two

<sup>2</sup> For the indication furnished by these strips as to the size of sheets customary in early Chinese paper manufacture, see above, pp. 671 sq.

<sup>3</sup> In the specimen Ch. cv. 001 (Pl. CLXVII) this silk tape is visible, but placed within the roll instead of outside it, as the roll has been rolled up the reverse way in order to show

the colophon and seal at its end. The uniformly observed arrangement is for the text to begin at the right end of the roll and the latter accordingly to be drawn out to the right, the stick being placed against the left end of the paper roll.