

limits of Central Asia or the Far East. On the other, the fact of my having been the first European scholar to see and partially examine it *in situ* has imposed upon me the obligation of recording in detail whatever observations I made concerning the conditions in which these relics had survived, and also whatever information may be useful to explain the character and extent of the collection I succeeded in bringing away. The same quasi-antiquarian reasons make it appear desirable for me to supplement this chapter by brief notes about the fortunes undergone by the contents of this remarkable hoard since my visit to it.

M. Pelliot's visit to Ch'ien-fo-tung.

It was a most happy circumstance, and one for which all students of ancient China have particular reason to feel grateful, that just within a year after my own first visit to the 'Caves of the Thousand Buddhas' the ancient remains at the site, including all those I had been obliged to leave behind in Wang Tao-shih's cave, came to be examined by a scholar so exceptionally qualified for their full elucidation, especially on the Sinologist side, as Professor Paul Pelliot. This distinguished French savant, entrusted with an archaeological mission in Eastern Turkestan and Western China, had first received information about the Ch'ien-fo-tung *trouvaille* from cultured Chinese officials of high rank whom he met during his stay at Urumchi in the autumn of 1907.¹ Having fixed his attention from the start upon the detailed exploration of this site, he reached Tun-huang at the beginning of February, 1908. There he put himself into touch with Wang Tao-shih after a preliminary visit to the caves, and on March 3 he secured access from him to the rock-cut chamber where the hoard continued to be kept.

Scrutiny of Chinese manuscript rolls by M. Pelliot.

The remarkably wide range and critical thoroughness of his attainments made it easy for Professor Pelliot to realize at once the great importance of the manuscript treasures still left there. This was particularly the case with regard to different classes of texts represented among the Chinese rolls which formed the great bulk. With an energy and persevering zeal fully equal to his great Sinologist knowledge he threw himself into the task of effecting a rapid scrutiny of all these masses of rolls. Crouching within the small chamber itself, he completed this for what he estimates at a total of about 15,000 separate texts, notwithstanding the additional difficulties created by the fragmentary state of so many among them. Complete unfolding and examination, he believes, would have taken at least six months, but, proceeding at a rate which amounted to about 1,000 rolls per diem for the first ten days or so, he succeeded in picking out any non-Chinese manuscript remains on detached leaves or rolls that turned up, and all those many Chinese texts which for philological, antiquarian, or other reasons appeared to offer special interest.

Wang Tao-shih's reassured attitude.

Wang Tao-shih appears to have observed towards M. Pelliot more or less the same attitude as in my case. There is little doubt, however, that he must have meanwhile gained a good deal more assurance through the experience of his previous transaction with me. It had provided welcome funds for his cherished pious building activity, and yet, owing to the strict discretion observed on our part, left him in undiminished control of the bulk of his precious bundles and in full enjoyment of his local reputation.² Whatever his motives and calculations may have been, he

¹ See *Bulletin du Comité de l'Asie française*, janvier 1910, p. 21. This number of the periodical, pp. 11-24, reproduces the *Conférence de M. Paul Pelliot*, delivered on December 10, 1909, at the Sorbonne, and furnishes in it a general account, the fullest at present accessible, of Professor Pelliot's expedition, illustrated by excellent photographs of M. Nouette.

Professor Pelliot's labours at Ch'ien-fo-tung form the subject of a very interesting preliminary report, prepared at the site under the date of March 28, 1908, and published in

M. Pelliot's article *Une bibliothèque médiévale retrouvée au Kansou*, *B.É.F.E.O.*, viii (1908), pp. 501-29. It is from this article that the information so far available about his operations at the Thousand Buddhas of Tun-huang is mainly derived.

² Considering what I knew of Wang Tao-shih's quaint diplomacy, and in view of the pious interests he obviously wished to serve, I could not feel surprised at his having kept M. Pelliot from forming a correct estimate both as to the length of time during which he had allowed me to search his