

described have been followed also *mutatis mutandis* in the case of the paintings on linen and paper. But while to the cheaper and less delicate material usually corresponds a lower grade of artistic merit, on the other hand the greater strength of the material has helped to reduce the labour involved in the safeguarding of these paintings.

The far-reaching artistic interest of these pictorial remains and their importance for the history of Buddhist worship and iconography in Central Asia and the Far East had already greatly impressed me when I first beheld them in their original place of deposit. But only as the progress of the work of preservation at the British Museum revealed more and more the wealth and variety of all these materials could I fully realize the many points of novel interest—and the problems, too—which they raised, and the extent and difficulties of the labours which their detailed study and interpretation would need. In view of the archaeological evidence furnished by the place and conditions of discovery and by the dates then read on some of the paintings, it was clear that these pictorial remains mostly belonged to the T'ang period and the century immediately following it. Equally certain it was that they represented almost exclusively divinities and sacred scenes of Mahāyāna Buddhism as then prevailing on the western confines of China. Features derived directly from Graeco-Buddhist art, marks of the change it had undergone on its passage through Central Asia or Tibet, and the powerful impress of the art of China itself were all plainly traceable, though to a varying extent, in the subjects and style of the different paintings.

Artistic interest of paintings.

This mixture of influences was bound to give a special interest to the mass of new materials, but also to increase the difficulty of their proper analysis. As far as their character as works of art was concerned, the preponderance of Chinese taste and style was unmistakable from the first. The collection obviously derives additional value from this fact; for scarcely any genuine specimens of Chinese painting of the T'ang period were previously known to have survived. But at the same time the student is thus deprived of the guidance which contemporary works of Chinese religious art might have afforded. On the iconographic side, too, it soon became clear that the varied imagery displayed by the paintings, though in the main based on Indian conceptions and forms, yet bore evidence also of considerable changes and developments undergone on its transition to China and after its adoption there. Apart from the help which comparison with the later Mahāyāna Buddhism of the Far East and especially of Japan might offer, the chief hope of guidance for the interpretation of this Pantheon lay manifestly in the Chinese inscriptions which many of the silk paintings display, whether in the form of cartouches or votive records. They were likely to furnish information not merely about donors and dates, but also about the divinities, sacred scenes, etc., represented. It was obvious that for this part of my collection a collaborator was needed who with special knowledge of Buddhist iconography would combine the qualifications of a Sinologue as well as familiarity with Far-Eastern art in general.

Mixture of art influences.

Interpretation of sacred subjects.

My eager wish to secure such a collaborator was strengthened by the advice received from my friend M. Foucher, who in the summer of 1910 was kind enough to examine our paintings as far as they had by that time been made available for study, and from his unrivalled knowledge of Buddhist iconography to furnish me with brief but most helpful notes on the general classification of the subjects treated and on kindred iconographic points. As regards the varied characteristics of the art exhibited by the paintings I was fortunate enough to receive very valuable assistance of the same kind from Mr. Laurence Binyon, whose expert study of Far-Eastern painting had from the first led him to take much appreciative interest in them.

It was through Mr. Binyon's friendly intercession that I was offered the chance of securing for this very important part of my collection an exceptionally qualified collaborator in the person of M. Raphael Petrucci. Already distinguished in more than one field of research, M. Petrucci

Collaboration of M. Petrucci.