

Tun-huang  
restored to  
T'ang  
dynasty.

On the whole it seems safe to assume that the great mass of the paintings, etc., recovered belongs to the two centuries immediately preceding the walling-up of the deposit.<sup>7</sup> We have seen above that about A.D. 850 Tun-huang was freed from Tibetan subjection, which had lasted for a century, and returned once more to T'ang allegiance.<sup>8</sup> This reassertion of imperial authority may reasonably be supposed to have rendered the position of this westernmost outpost of China proper more secure, at any rate until the end of the dynasty more than half a century later. Such a period of relative peace is likely to have benefited also the places of worship at the Thousand Buddhas and added to their artistic embellishment.

Tun-huang  
isolated from  
Empire.

We know that soon after the downfall of the T'ang Tun-huang and the territory of Kua-chou immediately adjoining it once more became isolated from China, and this time for centuries, by the growing power of the Uigurs and Hsi-hsia to the east and south-east.<sup>9</sup> But even before, during the interval just referred to, the political and trade relations with the regions under effective imperial sway could not have been close; for ever since the loss of the 'Western regions' to the Turks and Tibetans Tun-huang had become a mere outlying oasis of no special consequence to the Chinese Empire. This alone would have sufficed to remove any doubt as to the essentially local origin of the paintings which found their way to the Thousand Buddhas of Tun-huang as pious gifts during the ninth and tenth centuries. But fortunately the paintings themselves also furnish direct evidence on this point in the votive inscriptions recording those who offered them for the spiritual benefit of dead relatives, or to secure health, peace, prosperity, and similar boons.

Local pro-  
duction of  
paintings.

In a dozen or so of the inscriptions treated by M. Petrucci those who are named as the donors, along with members of their families, are described as officials. That their charges were local is made clear in some cases by the description which is given of them.<sup>10</sup> In half a dozen other cases the same may safely be concluded from the fact that the names borne by the donors prove them to belong to the Chang 張 and Ts'ao 曹 families, which we know from historical records to have given for centuries its chiefs to the semi-independent petty state formed out of Tun-huang and the adjoining territory.<sup>11</sup> Other inscriptions again show us the donors as people of modest position

<sup>7</sup> A parallel of some antiquarian value may be drawn, perhaps, from what a passage of Sung Yün's narrative, also otherwise interesting, tells us of the pilgrim's visit, about A.D. 519, to the Buddhist shrines of Han-mo, east of Khotan (cf. Chavannes, *Voyage de Song Yun*, p. 14; also *Ancient Khotan*, i. pp. 456 sq., for the position of Han-mo). Among the thousands of banners which he saw hung up in them he noted that more than one-half were of the period of the Wei dynasty (commencing from A.D. 386). A great number of the Chinese inscriptions on them recorded dates from A.D. 495-513, while only one of them dated back to the epoch of the Yao Ch'in (A.D. 384-417).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. above, pp. 799, 816 sq.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Chavannes, *Dix inscriptions*, pp. 12 sq., on the conditions in which the Chinese envoy to Khotan during A.D. 938-42 found these outlying territories, always exposed in the south to the aggressions of Tibetans also. Yet his report clearly brings out the essentially Chinese character of the local population; cf. Rémusat, *Ville de Khotan*, p. 77.

This isolation from the Empire is strikingly illustrated by what M. Petrucci (see Appendix E, II) has pointed out about the continued use of a *nien-hao* in a votive inscription of A.D. 910, six years after it had lapsed, and about the ignorance displayed in another inscription of A.D. 947 as to

the downfall of the dynasty half a year earlier.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. below, Appendix E, II, *Les donateurs*, for the inscriptions on the woodcuts Ch. 00205, 00185 (Pl. CIII), and on the painting 00102 (Pl. LX). The name *Kuei-i*, which in the first two occurs among the donors' titles, appears to have been given to the command of Tun-huang after the restoration of Chinese suzerainty in A.D. 850; cf. Chavannes, *Dix inscriptions*, p. 86, note 1.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. M. Petrucci's abstracts, below, Appendix E, II, *Les donateurs*, from the inscriptions of Ch. 00101, 00167 (Pl. LXI); 00185 (Pl. CIII); liv. 006 (Pl. LXIX); lvii. 004 (Pl. LXVI); lvii. 001 (Pl. LXVIII). For the position held by the Chang and Ts'ao families in the Tun-huang region, cf. Chavannes, *Dix inscriptions*, pp. 12 sq., 80; also below, Appendix A, V. c, and above, p. 817. A member of the Chang family appears already in the middle of the fourth century A.D. as the practically independent ruler of Liang-chou and the marches westwards; cf. Chavannes, *Ancient Khotan*, i. p. 543, note 4.

The Ts'ao Yüan-chung 曹元忠, whom the woodcut Ch. 00185. a of A.D. 947 mentions as its donor with a long string of titles, may have been identical with one of the chief officials of Tun-huang who in A.D. 938 met the Chinese envoy sent to Khotan; see Rémusat, *Ville de Khotan*, p. 77. Ch. lvii. 004 shows the close inter-relationship of the two