

The time was yet distant when Tibetan style and Lamaistic worship were appreciably to affect the decadent Buddhist art of China.¹⁶

Absence of
Tantric
monstrosi-
ties.

This very restricted nature of Tibetan influence in the art of Tun-huang is confirmed also by another observation. I mean the gratifying total absence in the paintings and frescoes of the Thousand Buddhas of those Tantric extravagances and monstrous obscenities which are so prevalent in the pictorial representations of the later Lamaistic art of Tibet and the regions it has influenced northward. A few of the 'Tibetan' paintings from Tun-huang show, indeed, the beginning of a tendency towards that violent movement, rhythmic torsion of the bodies, and preference for the demoniac, which are such striking characteristics of the later Tibetan style.¹⁷ But sober Chinese taste and decorum never took kindly to these fantastic aberrations. As M. Foucher very justly remarked in the notes referred to above, 'the Pantheon which the paintings of Tun-huang reveal to us was evidently composed for the benefit of donors reasonable in their tastes and under the direction of monks still heedful of decency'.

Motives
of votive
offerings.

The votive inscriptions of the pictures which M. Petrucci has discussed in his chapter on the donors adequately inform us about the motives from which they were offered.¹⁸ Among them pious wishes for the spiritual benefit of dead parents and relatives are quite as prominent as prayers for the health and prosperity of the donors and their families. Where we find besides these usual objects of supplication also prayers for peace and security of the territory, it is of interest to note that the donors are officials of rank and almost always connected with the families Chang and Ts'ao, which, as stated before, furnished Tun-huang with its local chiefs for centuries.¹⁹ M. Petrucci has duly drawn attention to the fact that, by the side of the ideas and wishes proper to true Buddhist doctrine or compatible with it, the inscriptions often also express hopes and notions which are peculiar to traditional Chinese thought or Taoist in character.²⁰ They clearly reflect the beginning of that syncretistic process which has produced the strange medley of popular worship and superstition prevailing in modern China.

Portable
Buddhist
pictures.

It can scarcely be subject to doubt that the practice of offering pictorial representations of Buddhist divinities and of scenes of Buddhist mythology at places of worship goes back to the very beginning of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India, if not earlier. But in India itself climatic and other adverse causes have not allowed any remains of such pictorial offerings to survive except in the form of wall-paintings at the Ajanṭā caves and a few less important sites. That references to portable pictures may be traceable in Indian Buddhist literature, or in records that Chinese pilgrims have left of Buddhist shrines in India, is probable. But I cannot spare time to search for such references nor even to ascertain whether, and where, they may have been treated. In Central Asia, on the other hand, the practice of presenting such pictures at places of Buddhist cult is so abundantly attested by archaeological finds from the region of Khotan to Turfān and beyond that no detailed references are necessary. It may suffice to mention that the painted panels brought to light by me in 1900 from image bases of Dandān-oilik shrines were probably the first Central-Asian finds of this kind the origin and character of which could be properly authenticated, and that Professors Grünwedel and Von Lecoq's excavations at Turfān sites have subsequently yielded remains of paintings on fabrics which in type and subjects closely resemble those recovered in such numbers from the 'Thousand Buddhas' of Tun-huang.²¹

¹⁶ Regarding this growing influence of Tibetan art, which appears to assert itself in China specially from the time of the early Mongol Emperors onwards, cf. *Kokka*, No. 311, p. 235.

¹⁷ Cf. Petrucci, *Annales du Musée Guimet*, xli. p. 137.

¹⁸ See below, Appendix E, II, *Les donateurs*.

¹⁹ Cf. M. Petrucci's abstracts, *loc. cit.*, of the inscriptions

of Ch. 00101, 00185. a, 00205; lvii. 004.

²⁰ See Appendix E, II (conclusion).

²¹ Cf. *Ancient Khotan*, i. pp. 250 sqq.; for the first Turfān discoveries of paintings on silk and linen made in 1902-3 by Professor A. Grünwedel, cf. his *Idikutschari*, pp. 67 sqq.