

destruction, whether of the wanton vandal type or of the equally mischievous sort which modern exploitation, for the benefit of collectors or museums, has tended to develop elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> There was comfort, too, in the hope that their detailed study on the spot by qualified experts was not likely to be long delayed. It is a source of special gratification to me that this hope has been realized early. Within a year of my visit came Professor Pelliot's prolonged stay. It enabled that brilliant Sinologue not only to devote careful study to the manifold epigraphic materials in the form of dedicatory or explanatory inscriptions, cartouches, etc., inserted in the wall-paintings, which help to determine the subjects represented or along with the abundant sgraffiti to settle the date of the temples, but to secure also an adequate collection of photographs through qualified professional help.<sup>2a</sup> Some months after my second visit to the site, in 1914, I had the great satisfaction to learn that Professor Serge d'Oldenbourg, one of the leading authorities on Buddhist art and iconography, had made the Thousand Buddhas of Tun-huang the objective for a special expedition organized under the auspices of the Russian Academy of Sciences and comprising the requisite staff of artistic and technical assistants.

Subsequent  
detailed  
study of  
frescoes.

It is to be hoped that the publication of the materials brought back by MM. Pelliot and d'Oldenbourg will not suffer more delay than is implied by present conditions. This hope and a knowledge of the abundance of those materials furnish an additional reason for strictly limiting my present account to a description of the particular shrines which my photographs and plans may suffice to illustrate. Nor shall I attempt in their case to deal with general features the right explanation of which might presuppose close acquaintance with the rest of the local shrines or with other Chinese Buddhist sites also, such as Yün-kang or Lung-mên. In recording my observations and explanations as far as they go I shall for convenience's sake follow the order from north to south, in which the caves examined by me were numbered.<sup>3</sup>

Description  
limited to  
particular  
shrines.

The cave-temple, Ch. 1, which had sheltered the great hoard, and which for that reason may fitly take the first place, is in respect of its ground-plan (Plate 43) certainly the largest of the existing shrines, but by no means the most ornate in its mural decoration. It consists in its old portion of a cella 54 feet deep and 46 feet wide, approached by a porch having a width of about 14 feet. Fig. 200 shows the north side of both, together with the entrance which gives access to the formerly walled-up chapel. The antechapel, once probably rock-carved, was found completely decayed by Wang Tao-shih, who replaced it by a modern structure of timber and brickwork. His work, too, are the hideous stucco sculptures, over life-size, which now occupy the large image platform: a Buddha seated on a separate high base, flanked on each side by a monkish disciple, two Bodhisattvas, and a Lokapāla. Though the statues are quite modern, there is reason to believe that portions of the bases are old and the grouping of the figures that originally intended for these bases. Old, too, are the elaborately decorated halo and vesica in coloured stucco relievo

Cave-temple  
Ch. 1. Re-  
storations.

<sup>2</sup> Apart from any protection that continued worship and local superstition may offer, account must be taken also of the important fact that owing to the very unequal surface which the pebbles, etc., embedded in the conglomerate of the rock walls present, and to the exceptional hardness and cohesion of the plaster placed over it to serve as a substratum for the wall-paintings, all in tempera, removal of detached portions of the latter is practically impossible. 'Fresco-cutting' operations, such as can be carried out with success and relative ease at Turfān and other Turkestan sites, would yield at Ch'ien-fo-tung only small shattered fragments of brittle coloured plaster.

I had a visible demonstration of this difficulty—and of the

protection it luckily affords—on my second visit to the site. I found that in the noble wall-painting which adorns the western side of the porch leading into the cave-temple, Ch. VIII (Fig. 226), the head of one of the flying attendants by the side of the Buddha's car, intact in 1907, had been chiselled around by a subsequent visitor, undoubtedly for the purpose of removal. An examination of the broad cutting effected showed plainly why the attempt had failed.

<sup>2a</sup> [See now Pelliot, *Les grottes de Touen-houang*, I (1920), reproducing the first series of a large collection of fine photographs taken by the late M. Charles Nouette.]

<sup>3</sup> The position of these particular caves is duly marked in the site plan, Pl. 42.