

remaining panels show Sukhāvātī scenes closely resembling in all details those in the main group of our Western Paradise paintings.<sup>7</sup> Thus in one of the panels (Fig. 206) we see the lower portion of an elaborately arranged divine assembly, grouped around two platforms which are occupied by celestial dancers and musicians, while newly re-born souls in the form of babes disport themselves by their side. In the panel reproduced in Fig. 202 we find the foreground filled with a mass of small detached scenes, all painted in secular Chinese style and, no doubt, like the corresponding class of scenes in the side panels of our large Paradise pictures, representing incidents of some Jātaka story. The inscribed cartouches are obviously intended to interpret the story. The close agreement in style and arrangement between those pictures and the fresco panels makes it probable that the wall paintings as well as the sculptural remains in this cave go back to T'ang times.

The small shrine Ch. II. a, immediately adjoining Ch. II on the north and containing a cella less than 9 feet square, is remarkable for its wall-paintings, which are executed in true fresco and in a style strikingly different from that which I have observed elsewhere on the walls of Ch'ien-fo-tung cave-temples. The photographs reproduced in Figs. 203-5 will illustrate this difference better than any description, even though they cannot convey the delicacy of the outlines and still less the harmonious blending of soft tints. The chief frescoes occupy the south and north walls of the little cella, the entrance being from the east, and the west side occupied by an alcove containing a modern unfinished relievo group. The fresco panel on the south (Fig. 204) shows the figure of a Thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara, treated in the typical form of a Chinese 'Goddess of Mercy' and surmounted by a Dhyāni-buddha. At its feet are seen kneeling two haloed worshippers, both dressed in flowing gilt-edged robes. Above them stand two more haloed figures, perhaps meant to represent Bodhisattvas, in rich costumes and with very elaborate coiffures. The corners above them are filled on either side by an exquisitely drawn Apsaras or Gandharvī (Fig. 203), shown floating on cloud scrolls with her dark red and green scarves fluttering in graceful curves behind to indicate rapid movement. Nowhere else in the Ch'ien-fo-tung wall-paintings do we meet with such verve and freedom as these Apsaras figures and the corresponding ones on the south wall display.

True fresco  
in shrine  
Ch. II. a.

The fresco on the north wall (Fig. 205) is a close *pendant*. A similar Thousand-armed Kuan-yin figure, but here also carrying a flask, occupies the centre. Two haloed worshippers, the one on the right bearded, stand on either side in the middle, while two grotesque figures, resembling Vajrapāṇis with their muscular exaggeration and violent movement, appear in the bottom corners. The panels on either side of the entrance and alcove are filled with richly draped haloed figures in varying attitudes, of which Fig. 203 shows the one in the south-west corner. Within the alcove are painted two more Bodhisattvas, while the background behind the main image no longer remaining is decorated with graceful bamboo foliage painted in white on dark red. The coffered ceiling shows on similar dark-red ground a carefully executed diaper with white and black flowers and scrolls. It is possible to trace points of contact between the style observed in these fine frescoes and certain of our best silk paintings from the hoard. But I cannot attempt to follow up this relation or to seek for the phase of Chinese religious painting with which the style of these frescoes may seem specially connected. So much, however, is clear that the artist who adorned this small grotto must have stood, in skill and inherited training, far above the local school of painter-decorators to whom we owe most of the mural paintings I am able to deal with here.

Other fres-  
coes in cella  
Ch. II. a.

Proceeding south of Ch. I and passing the deep grotto Ch. III, which contains a colossal stucco image of Buddha entering Nirvāṇa behind a central rock mass (Plate 43), we come to the small shrine Ch. III. a, measuring 19 feet square without the alcove on the west which faces the entrance. The stucco images placed here (Fig. 207), comprising a seated Buddha with the right hand raised in the

Stucco  
sculptures,  
frescoes of  
Ch. III III. a.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. above, pp. 883 sqq.