somptueux de Touen-houang étaient l'aboutissement d'un mouvement qui, partant des données gandhāriennes où le Buddha historique prédomine, pousse de plus en plus au premier plan les Buddhas et les Bodhisattvas mythiques du Mahāyāna. Nous avons donc pu non seulement retirer des *maṇḍalas* de Touen-houang leurs données intrinsèques, nous avons pu les faire rentrer dans une histoire qui recouvre les hautes périodes du bouddhisme septentrional, durant lesquelles se constituent les types iconographiques de son panthéon.

IV

ESSAY ON THE ART OF THE TUN-HUANG PAINTINGS

BY

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The paintings found at the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas are distinguished from the various other pictorial works (chiefly frescoes) which have been found in Eastern Turkestan, by the fact that among them are a certain number of examples of the central tradition of Chinese Buddhist painting. Khotan, Turfan, and other sites have yielded remains of pictorial art which are of fascinating interest and of extreme importance to the archaeologist and the student of religion. The style of art which these remains represent has its own merit and attractiveness; yet it is always of a provincial character.

But at Tun-huang we are within the borders of China; and the art of China during the T'ang period (to the latter part of which the great mass of the paintings discovered at the Caves may be referred) was at its grandest. Could the masterpieces of Wu Tao-tzŭ and his compeers be restored to us, we should probably rank this period with the greatest periods of creative art in the world's history. Unfortunately we have but meagre vestiges, and copies from renowned works, with which to eke out the glowing descriptions of Chinese historians of art. Hence the Tun-huang paintings are not only illuminating documents for the study of Mahāyāna Buddhism, but of yet greater—and indeed inestimable—value for the study of art, including as they do precious fragments of a period of great art, the productions of which have been almost entirely lost. It is true that only two or three of the paintings are fine enough in handling and workmanship to warrant our presuming them to be from the brush of a master. Most of them resemble, in quality, the kind of work produced in the workshop, say, of an artist like Botticelli—inferior in power but still redolent of the master's atmosphere and pervaded by reminiscence of his design, even when not actually painted from his cartoons. At any rate they suggest the greater work behind them in conception and design. We can get from these paintings an idea, probably not inadequate on the whole, of what Chinese Buddhist art was like in the ninth and tenth centuries.

Tun-huang is so remote, lying on the extreme western frontier of China, that it might have seemed reasonable to suppose the paintings found there to be the products of a local school. But on the other hand the position of the place on the great highway stretching across Asia from China to the Mediterranean, where it intersected the main route from Mongolia in the north to Tibet in the south, made it peculiarly accessible to influences both from east and west; and, in fact, the paintings found at the Caves, despite a monotony of subject-matter, exhibit a considerable variety of styles.

On the one hand we find purely Indian art represented by a group of small paintings which are probably Nepalese; on the other, a certain number of paintings which are entirely Chinese. Between these extremes there are pictures of an intermediate style which we may safely presume to be productions of the local schools of Turkestan, or in some cases a provincial Chinese school. Again, there are a few works which are Tibetan.

The Nepalese paintings are ten in number, and form a single series, each representing a Bodhisattva or divinity. The workmanship is rather coarse and clumsy; but they are of interest because, apart from the frescoes at Ajaṇṭā and a few other sites, there is almost nothing remaining of early Indian painting.