

distinctly strange and puzzling. Thus the mysterious origin which the popular legend heard by Hsüan-tsang ascribed to them becomes easily intelligible.

It is still more evident that the manner in which the pigeons kept at the shrine are propitiated with food-offerings by all modern wayfarers marks a survival of the pious practice of Buddhist times which was accounted for by that legend. As Hsüan-tsang's rats, so now the holy pigeons which have taken their place are supposed to recall a great victory. There is nothing surprising in this substitution of pigeons, visible in body yet of supposed miraculous descent, for the wonderful rats of the Buddhist story which pious superstition, even in Hsüan-tsang's days, apparently did not pretend to see any longer<sup>14</sup>. For to Muhammadan popular lore the pigeon is a sacred bird *par excellence*, and the custom of feeding pigeons at Mosques and Ziārats is widely spread throughout Islām<sup>15</sup>. Nor is there anything very remarkable in the great victory of a Khotan king over an invading host of barbarians having been converted by the Muhammadanized legend into a sanguinary contest between the infidels of Khotan and those pious emissaries of Islām whom local tradition believes to have first carried, sword in hand, the Faith into Buddhist Khotan.

Pigeons substituted for sacred rats.

We shall have occasion to recur hereafter to numerous legends, almost all localized at particular Ziārats of Khotan, which relate incidents connected with the first conversion of Eastern Turkestan, and which in many instances can be proved to have been grafted on sites already held sacred as places of worship and pilgrimage in Buddhist times. M. Grenard has collected a considerable number of these legends, and subjected them to a critical analysis which, from the point of view of the study of folklore and history of religion, is very instructive<sup>16</sup>. It is true that Imām Shākir Pādshāh, who is supposed to have suffered a martyr's death among the sands of Kum-rabāt-Pādshāhim, does not figure in the orthodox though apocryphal list of the twelve Imāms whom popular belief credits with having first planted the Faith in Khotan. But he shares this fate with many another alleged saintly 'Shahīd' of Khotan, to whom local tradition nevertheless clings with pious attachment. The details told of his last struggle are neither scantier than, nor very different from, those related in the Tadhkirahs of the recognized warrior saints of Khotanese legend.

Muhammadan local worship at Khotan.

How popular all over ancient Khotan the legend of the sacred rats must have been is strikingly illustrated by the fact that among the painted panels, originally deposited, no doubt, as votive offerings, which came to light in the course of my excavations among the ruined temples of the Dandān-Uiliq site, there is one that represents a rat-headed figure crowned with a diadem, and clearly marked as an object of worship by the attitude of an attendant figure. For a detailed description of this panel, D. iv. 5, reproduced in Plate LXIII, I must refer to the chapter which deals with the discoveries of that site; but I may point out here that the identity of this figure with the rat-chief mentioned in Hsüan-tsang's story can scarcely be doubted. The fact that the pictorial representations discovered at that site apparently comprise every one of the local legends recorded by Hsüan-tsang, seems to me a clear indication that the story of the holy rats, like that of the introduction of silkworms or of the minister's self-sacrifice to the river-goddess, must have been among the most cherished folk-tales of ancient Khotan<sup>17</sup>.

Painted panel representing chief of sacred rats.

<sup>14</sup> Julien's translation relating to the popular story says: 'Dans ce désert, il y avait des rats, &c.'; *Mémoires*, ii. p. 232. This seems to me preferable to Beal's version, which is in the present tense.

<sup>15</sup> e. g., at the popular shrine of Sheikh Junāyat in

Peshāwar it is customary for all those who come to invoke the saint's help to offer corn to the swarms of pigeons which abide near his tomb.

<sup>16</sup> See Grenard, *Mission Dutreuil de Rhins*, iii. pp. 3-46; also ii. pp. 240 sqq. <sup>17</sup> See below, chap. ix. sec. v.