

the perfect state of the antechapel, substantially built of timber and elaborately decorated. Most of the fresco-work within its cella, however, seemed decidedly old, and there is no apparent reason to be urged against its identity with the Huang-ch'ing temple, the restoration of which the inscription of A.D. 1351 commemorated. At the same time, the fact that this antechapel now also contains the slab of A.D. 1348, which, as indicated above, may have come from the neighbouring cave-temple of the colossal seated Buddha, must warn us against accepting this *a priori* likely identification as conclusive.¹¹ Unfortunately, the structural additions in front have rendered the interior both here and at the last-named cave-temple so dark that photographic reproduction of the mural paintings without artificial light was impracticable, and even their close study difficult within the available time.

SECTION III.—WANG TAO-SHIH AND HIS RESTORED TEMPLE

The hurried preliminary visit I had paid, soon after my first arrival in March, to the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas sufficed to impress me with the abundance of interesting materials which their fully accessible remains offered for the study of Buddhist art. Yet there was even then in view for me another and more pressing task which was bound to engross my attention at the outset.

It was at Tun-huang and through Zahīd Beg, the intelligent Turkī trader of Urumchi who had established himself there at the head of a small colony of Muhammadan exiles from Hsin-chiang, that the first vague rumour had reached me of a great mass of ancient manuscripts which had been discovered by chance several years before hidden away in one of the cave-temples. There these treasures were said to have been locked up again by official order in charge of the Taoist priest who had come upon them. Zahīd Bēg's assertion that some of these manuscripts were not in Chinese writing had naturally made me still keener to ascertain exact details. The result of Chiang Ssū-yeh's cautious inquiries seemed to support the rumour, and in close council with him I had carefully considered the question how best to gain access to the find.

Rumour of discovery of manuscript hoard.

On my first visit to the site the Taoist priest was away, engaged apparently with his two acolytes on a begging tour in the oasis. Nor would it, perhaps, have been wise to attempt starting operations then at once. But fortunately the young 'Ho-shang' of Tangutan extraction already referred to, then the only dweller at the site, proved to be possessed of useful local knowledge, and it did not take Chiang Ssū-yeh long to extract from him some interesting details. The place of discovery of the manuscript hoard was a large shrine (Ch. 1 in plan, Plate 42) near the northern end of the main group of caves. Its gaily painted outer structures bore evidence of extensive recent restoration, the result of pious labours started and maintained by Wang, the *Tao-shih*, or Taoist priest, who had established himself here some seven years before. The entrance to the cave-temple had been formerly blocked by fallen rock débris and drift-sand, as was still partially the case at several of the caves situated at the foot of the cliff further south. While restorations were slowly being carried on in the temple cella and the place now occupied by its antechapel, the labourers engaged had noticed a crack in the frescoed wall of the passage connecting the two. An opening was thus discovered that led to a recess or small chamber excavated from the rock behind the stuccoed north wall of the passage (Plate 43; Fig. 200).

Story of Wang Tao-shih's discovery.

Manuscript rolls, written in Chinese characters but in a non-Chinese language, were said to have filled the recess completely. Their total quantity was supposed to be so great as to make up

¹¹ M. Chavannes, *Dix inscriptions*, p. 99, mentions that Hsi Sung, the author of the *Hsi yü shui tao chi*, speaks of the Huang-ch'ing temple inscription of A.D. 1351 as being found

'outside the cave of Mañjuśrī'. I regret that I did not ascertain on the spot whether this designation is applied at present to the shrine Ch. XI.