

Notices

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NOTICES

HORYUJI MURALS DESTROYED

BY DIETRICH SECKEL

I

One of the most disastrous cultural losses of our time occurred on January 26th of this year, when a fire broke out in the celebrated Golden Hall (Kondô) of Hôryûji near Nara, the oldest extant Buddhist temple of Japan and the oldest extant wooden structure in the world. Though, fortunately, the building itself suffered only minor damage, the world-famous murals, representing Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, were more or less destroyed or reduced to their barest outlines. As everyone who has even the slightest knowledge of Far Eastern cultural history will admit, this catastrophe is of a similar import to the world of Oriental art as, e. g., the destruction of the Sistine chapel frescoes would be to the art of Europe. They were the only existing specimens of monumental painting produced in the initial phase of Buddhist culture in Japan. At the same time, due to their presumably very exact imitation of Chinese models, they represented the classical period of China's Buddhist wall-painting which is practically lost to us except for the pictures discovered at Tun-huang and some other works of minor importance, all of which, however, are either of a later date or of a rather provincial character. Thus, the loss of the artistically outstanding and historically unique Hôryûji paintings means that one of the most important phases of Far Eastern art has virtually been obliterated and can be studied only with the aid of reproductions.

The story of their destruction, as told by Japanese papers, runs as follows: when, in the early morning hours of January 26th, the eighty-three year old Chief Priest Saeki passed the Kondô on his way back from another chapel, where he had performed matutinal rites, he did not notice anything extraordinary; but shortly thereafter, when he was taking his breakfast, he was alarmed by dense smoke enveloping the Kondô. Japanese papers report that the venerable priest tried to plunge into the burning structure and that only in the last moment could he be prevented from doing so by his fellow priests. The strong feeling of responsibility and of mystic identity between the man and what had been entrusted to him, which formed the very core of his life, was impressively manifested by this episode. The fire could be extinguished in a comparatively short time without spreading to other buildings, but the pillars and beams of the interior were charred and the paintings badly hurt, mainly by water.

The fire originated, as has been established almost beyond doubt, in a defective electric cushion (*zabuton*) used by one of the painters who were engaged, even

during the coldest winter months, in copying the murals. Obviously the artist had forgotten to switch off the cushion when leaving the hall on the previous evening and although it was equipped with an automatic switch overheating must have occurred. Main switches were installed at three different places in and near the building, but none of them seems to have been turned by the men in charge of the temple during the period of the copying work which had necessitated the installation of electric devices. It is a pity to report – and the Japanese seem to feel a good deal of shame about it – that evidently sheer carelessness on the part of the responsible men¹ (unfortunately not without parallel in Japan) has caused the loss of what Otto Küm-mel called “the most sublime work of monumental painting of all East Asia.”

II

Paradoxically, the catastrophe happened after these works had survived not only the long lapse of 1200 years and numberless earthquakes, typhoons, and thunderstorms but even the turmoil of the latest war. It is not generally known that the United States War Department was wise and generous enough, on the strong advice of a group of experts led by Prof. Langdon Warner of Harvard, to spare the oldest centres of Japanese civilization, Kyôto and Nara with their surroundings and their innumerable temples and other irreplaceable monuments of art. And ironically the destruction of the paintings was directly connected with the carefully planned attempt to preserve their beauty in its present state by making facsimile copies in the original size. A group of reputed painters had been busy for a number of years. As early as 1942 or 1943 I had the opportunity to watch them at work and to inspect the specially constructed neon lamps, which filled the old, dark temple hall with a flood of cool daylight, in which the colours of the paintings revealed themselves in an almost unnatural but fascinating splendour. The composition as a whole as well as the minutest details of the pictures were fully visible, probably more exactly and more strikingly than they can ever have presented themselves to their creator who had to work in the dim light of the shadowy temple hall. Most of the copyists used the traditional painting technique but one of them experimented with oil colours; all of them, however, aimed with the greatest devotion at the highest possible exactitude. Fortunately about one third of the copies seem to have been completed and saved, though a great deal of work remained to be done which has now become impossible; and there exist several photographs in the original size though modern colour photographs have never been taken. But can even the best

1. As usual in Japan, even some leading officials in the central government's Ministry of Education had to take the consequences. Thus, the director of the Social Education Bureau had his salary cut by 10 per cent for three months and Dr. Ôoka Minoru, one of the best experts in the history of Japanese architecture and for many years connected with the Ministry's Bureau for the Preservation of National Treasures, was discharged.

reproductions compensate for the loss of originals of such outstanding significance and value?

The copying had been necessitated by the increasing deterioration of the murals which were not painted, as may be inferred from their being frequently called frescoes, on the wet plaster ground but in tempera technique on the dry surface of the walls so that in many places the colour substance had gradually peeled off in small particles. Many years ago, when the situation became more and more alarming, a commission of experts had been set up who discussed ways and means of saving the treasures from complete decay but as the problem proved to be extremely complicated they were unable to reach an agreement or to carry out a definite plan. The most recent proposal I have heard of was to cut out the plaster walls from between the pillars, to transport them to a nearby museum building, to harden the body of the walls by injections and to fix all loose colour particles onto the surface. Then, the consolidated walls were to be enclosed in vacuum cases with glass panes in order to protect them once for all from insects, dust, moisture, and the extremes of heat and cold, and finally they were to be moved back to the Kondô and reinstalled in their original places on springs to soften the destructive force of earthquake tremors.

I do not know why this clever and reasonable plan has not been executed, but probably the men in charge of the temple hesitated to run the risk of removing the paintings before they were completely and carefully copied. Earlier it had been suggested that the murals be taken to a museum and replaced by copies in the temple but this idea had to be dropped due to the vigorous opposition of the clergy who naturally would not allow the pictures to leave the temple because, together with the holy images on the dais, they formed what may be called the sacred body or mystic core of the sanctuary. The wishes and proposals of the scientists who feel responsible for the careful preservation of cultural treasures are often at variance with the feelings of devout believers and what they deem indispensable for the performance of the cult. Which of the two opinions should be given precedence in the case of a sanctuary is a question of extreme delicacy. And though nobody will seriously blame the men who hesitated to take definite steps and contented themselves with carrying out the extensive copying program, it was perhaps not entirely unjustified when Abbot Saeki, from his point of view, spoke with bitterness of "the mischievous curiosity of the scholars" which had nothing to do with "true science."

III

For those interested I shall give a short survey, based on recent information, of what has happened to each one of the twelve murals in the next issue of the *Asiatische Studien*, together with a report on new Japanese researches concerning the subjects of some of the pictures and several other Hôryûji problems.

Generally speaking, it seems that all of the pictures have been stripped of the last remains of their colour surfaces and that nothing but the barest outlines (*Shita-e* or basic designs) have survived, in some cases very faintly or even beyond identification. As photographs carried by Japanese papers show, the interior of the Kondô with its pale, cracked murals and its pillars charred to the depth of about an inch, must present a ghastly appearance, deeply depressing to all those who ever had the privilege of visiting the sanctuary and of appreciating its unique treasures.

It is some comfort however, to learn that no other of these works of earliest Japanese art has suffered any damage and that even the building itself, in most of its important parts, has survived the catastrophe. Some years ago it had been taken apart for repair and reconstruction purposes – a practice generally employed in Japan – and therefore all structural elements of the Kondô above the ground floor (which could not be taken down because of the fragility of the murals), including the coffered ceiling and the baldachins suspended from it, have been saved and can easily be reinstalled as soon as the traces of the fire have been removed. But the complicated and costly process of replacing worn-out structural parts and of reassembling all the countless pieces of a Far Eastern building will probably take another couple of years. Simultaneously, the five-storied pagoda has also been dismantled, so that at present neither of the two famous main structures of Hôryûji is standing erect. Only their ground floors have been left untouched and are protected by rather fragile-looking temporary roofs supported by high wooden and bamboo poles tied together with the traditional ropes.

In connection with this repair work all movable images and other ritual objects, including the small painted panels with flying “angels” above the dais, had been stored away in the lecture hall (Kôdô). In recent years not as many statues, shrines etc. were placed on the dais as formerly; many of them, including the Tamamushi and the Tachibana Shrines, had been taken to the new concrete museum erected between the western main enclosure of the temple and the eastern Yumedono compound where they enjoy safety and can be inspected much more easily than before.

How the damaged murals will be treated seems to be still under discussion. Some suggest that they should be left where and as they are, while others advocate their removal to the museum and their replacement by entirely new pictures to be painted by a famous artist.

IV

The extensive repair program which the venerated Hôryûji is undergoing now will perhaps lead to certain important discoveries concerning its history which, as every student of Far Eastern art knows, has been a matter of hot dispute among Japanese scholars during the last fifty years. We have to refrain from relating the whole story

here but we may mention that the main point at issue is whether the extant Kondô of Hôryûji is the first and original sanctuary erected by Empress Suiko around 600 A. D. or whether it was built one century later on the site of an earlier temple hall which, according to the *Nihongi*, the official chronicle published in 720, was reduced to ashes in 670. A discovery of major importance for this question was made during the war by Prof. Ishida Mosaku of the Ueno Museum in Tokyo, a great authority on the archaeology of the Yamato district. To the South-East of the main enclosure (the Saiin) of Hôryûji he found traces of the earthen bases of a temple hall and a pagoda which beyond any doubt must have existed at the time or before the present Hôryûji was built. One argument in favor of this theory is the very interesting fact that the pagoda stood in front of the hall on the central axis running from South to North; in other words, that this temple followed the "Shitennôji Plan" – also called the "Kudara" or "Korean Plan" – which we find in the Shitennôji at Osaka, one of the first temples established by Prince Shôtoku. Hitherto it was believed that this type of plan had become obsolete when the Hôryûji was built with Kondô and Pagoda standing side by side on a transverse axis, but in the newly discovered temple which may justly be called Proto-Hôryûji it has been followed once more. The most important consequence for the history of Hôryûji is that the temple which was built near the end of the 6th century was probably this Proto-Hôryûji and that the present Hôryûji either did not yet exist at all at that early date or that it served some other purpose than later on.

Now we understand, furthermore, why in the Kondô, besides the principal image of Shakyamuni flanked by two Bodhisattvas (*Shaka Sanzon*, dated 623) a statue of Bhaishajyaguru (Yakushi), made in exactly the same style, has been preserved so that the sanctuary has, against all accepted rules, two main images (*honzon*). Probably this statue, dated 607, was the *honzon* of the Proto-Hôryûji which was dedicated, as we know, to Yakushi Buddha, and having survived the fire of 670, it found shelter in the present Kondô. This hall, in turn, may have existed since the foundation of the temple as a "Shaka-dô," a chapel devoted to Shakyamuni Buddha whose image of 623 has been its *honzon* since that time; or it may have been erected, about a century later, as a substitute for the destroyed main hall of the Proto-Hôryûji and dedicated, according to a changed iconographic "program," to Shakyamuni as its *honzon* so that the old Yakushi image had to content itself with a subordinate position. In the first case, the Hôryûji pagoda may have been added, around 710, to the already existing hall, closely following its style, so that a new complete temple compound was the result. In the latter case, it must have been erected together with the newly built Kondô at about the same time, and simultaneously the Kondô murals were painted and the clay images installed on the ground floor of the pagoda, their early T'ang style precluding an earlier date of origin. A strong argument against dating Kondô and Pagoda around 710 is their definite Asuka style. They must either

have been contemporary with the Proto-Hôryûji or were built, though in the period of early T'ang style (Hakuhô period, according to the Japanese scheme of art history), in reverent imitation of the original style of the temple erected at the end of the 6th century. Which of the two alternatives deserves our consent or whether there exists a third possibility is open to argument; there even exists some evidence for the assumption that the conflagration happened as early as 610. The details of this difficult problem and the great number of controversial points cannot be discussed here² but in any case it seems useful at least to draw the attention of Western students to an important discovery which, due to wartime conditions, has probably escaped their notice.

2. The pros and cons are summarized and discussed by Alexander C. SOPER in Appendix I (pp. 297-305) of his admirable work on *The Evolution of Buddhist Architecture in Japan*, Princeton University Press, 1942 (antedating, however, the above-mentioned discovery).

LES ŒUVRES POSTHUMES DE PAUL PELLIOU

PAR ROBERT FAZY

On sait que le regretté Paul Pelliot a laissé un grand nombre de manuscrits achevés ou presque. Représentant la matière d'une dizaine de volumes, ils se classent comme suit :

- I. *Histoire secrète des Mongols*, texte et traduction fragmentaire.
- II. *Notes sur l'Histoire de la Horde d'Or – Quelques noms turcs d'hommes et de peuples finissant en ar* (sous presse).
- III. *Histoire du Tibet ancien d'après les Histoires des T'ang* (sous presse).
- IV. *Notes critiques d'histoire kalmouke*.
- V. *Un vocabulaire arabo-mongol du XIV^e siècle*.
- VI. *Notes mongoles*.
- VII. *Trois articles sur la géographie ancienne du Turkestan chinois*.
- VIII. *Mémoires sur les coutumes du Cambodge de Tcheou Ta-kouan*.
- IX. *L'inscription nestorienne de Si-ngan-fou*.
- X. *Les débuts de l'imprimerie en Chine*.
- XI. Traduction française des 136 premières pages de l'*Histoire des Mongols* de RA-CHÏD-AD-DÏN-FADL-ALLAH (éd. Blochet, 1911, tome II).

Cette collection, remise au Musée Guimet par Madame Pelliot, présente un intérêt scientifique considérable. Un comité, réuni sous la présidence d'honneur de M. René Dussaud¹, est composé de spécialistes chargés de la mise au point des divers manu-

1. Ancien secrétaire perpétuel de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres.

scrits, dont la publication intégrale est en cours sous les auspices de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres avec le concours du Cercle National de la Recherche Scientifique. Ce comité se compose notamment de MM. J. Deny, professeur de turc à l'Ecole des Langues Orientales, J. Bacot, président de la Société Asiatique, G. Coedès, ancien directeur de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient, P. Demiéville, professeur au Collège de France, R. Grousset, conservateur en chef du Musée Guimet, L. Hambis, chargé de cours libre de mongol à l'Ecole des Langues Orientales.

Le premier volume, *l'Histoire Secrète des Mongols*², vient de paraître par les soins de M. Louis Hambis. Il contient :

1. La restitution du texte mongol d'après les leçons de plusieurs manuscrits dont l'un, particulièrement important³, date de l'époque des Ming et appartenait à Paul Pelliot. Le texte est divisé en douze chapitres, numérotés de I-X – pages 5-98, paragraphes 1-246 – avec deux chapitres supplémentaires – pages 99-108 et 109-120; paragraphes 247-264; 265-282⁴.

2. La traduction des six premiers chapitres – p. 121-196⁵; paragraphes 1-185.

Le chapitre VI, le dernier traduit par Paul Pelliot, va jusqu'à l'automne de l'année 1203. Il s'arrête à la bataille de Tchetchœr-oundour⁶ qui se termina par la défaite complète et la fuite du Ong-Khan et la soumission des Kéréit.

Les chapitres non traduits – VII-X et les deux chapitres supplémentaires – vont jusqu'à la mort de Gengis-Khan⁷ et au règne d'Ogödaï – 1229 à 1241. Suivant le paragraphe final, *l'Histoire Secrète* aurait été achevée le 7^e mois de l'année 1240⁸.

D'après M. E. Haenisch⁹, plusieurs nouvelles reconstructions du texte de *l'Histoire secrète* ont été récemment publiées :

Hattori Schirō et Dug' ar Jab, Tokio, 1939 – le premier chapitre seulement;

Bügegeschik, Hailu, Mandchourie, 1941;

Altanwatschir, Kalgan, 1942;

S. A. Kozin, Leningrad, 1941¹⁰;

2. *Histoire Secrète des Mongols*, Restitution du Texte Mongol et Traduction Française des Chapitres I-VI, Paris, Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1949.

3. L. Hambis, *Histoire Secrète*, op. cit., Avertissement, p. III.

4. Cette division correspond à celle de la traduction de M. Haenisch – Erich Haenisch, *Die Geheime Geschichte der Mongolen*, Zweite verbesserte Auflage, Leipzig, Otto Harassowitz, 1948 – à la seule différence près que les deux « Chapitres supplémentaires » de Pelliot sont numérotés XI et XII.

5. Traduction Haenisch, pages 1-72.

6. Sans doute entre les sources de la Toula et celles du Kéroulen – Cf. René Grousset, *L'Empire des Steppes*, Paris, Payot, page 268.

7. En 1227. 8. E. Haenisch, *Geheime Geschichte*, parg. 282, p. 148.

9. E. Haenisch, *Geheime Geschichte*, Vorwort zur zweiten Auflage, p. XV.

10. Cette reconstruction, « Die wichtigste » – E. Haenisch, op. et loc. cit. – est accompagnée d'un glossaire et d'une traduction en russe.

enfin, une édition espagnole, publiée pendant la guerre « auf Grund von Nakas Arbeit besorgt von Scheratori Kurakichi, Tokyo (sic) 1942 ».

Il n'y a malheureusement pas grand espoir de voir la traduction des six derniers chapitres – de beaucoup les plus importants pour l'histoire de Gengis-Khan – sortir rapidement de presse. Paul Pelliot avait l'intention de donner un commentaire critique, justifiant les leçons adoptées dans sa restitution du texte. Ses notes n'ont pu être retrouvées. M. Louis Hambis a repris le travail, mais « il demandera beaucoup de temps et la traduction sera achevée dès que la critique textuelle aura été faite¹¹ ». Il faut donc remettre *sine die* la comparaison de la traduction française de MM. Pelliot et Hambis avec la version allemande de M. Haenisch¹².

11. L. Hambis, *Histoire Secrète*, op. cit., Avertissement, p. III.

12. Cf. R. Fazy, *Autour de Gengis-Khan*, *Bulletin de la Société Suisse des Amis de l'Extrême-Orient*, VIII, p. 3 et 17, note 66.

FRANCE-ASIE : HOMMAGE A GANDHI

Nous recevons, depuis quelque temps, *France-Asie*, revue de culture et de synthèse franco-asiatique, paraissant à Saïgon. Elle présente, à cette époque difficile, un intérêt si particulier que nous croyons devoir la signaler à l'attention de nos lecteurs.

France-Asie, largement « ouverte à toutes les tendances intellectuelles »¹, est aujourd'hui à sa quatrième année. Elle est née au milieu de la tension politique et sociale qui, pendant et après la guerre, s'est accrue en Asie coloniale et, en particulier, dans l'Indo-Chine française. Elle cherche, au moyen d'articles, de notes et de chroniques sur la vie culturelle, en Europe et plus spécialement en France d'une part, en Asie d'autre part, à apprendre à ses lecteurs orientaux et occidentaux à se mieux connaître. Il y a là un réel effort, non seulement vers une synthèse franco-asiatique, mais vers la compréhension entre élites d'Orient et d'Occident et, de là, vers l'entente des peuples.

Sans prétentions scientifiques, *France-Asie* se distingue par son impartialité et sa tenue littéraire. Toute proportion gardée, son effort se rencontre à tel point avec le nôtre que notre sympathie lui est acquise a priori et que nous sommes heureux de pouvoir féliciter ici son directeur, M. René de Berval, du succès croissant de sa revue.

Nous signalons à nos lecteurs le numéro 32, de Novembre 1948 : *Hommage à Gandhi*. Il réunit des hommages de penseurs, hommes de lettres, érudits, hommes

1. Cf. n° 32, page 237, René de Berval : « Chez moi, on accueille toutes les tendances intellectuelles ».

politiques de France, des Indes, de l'Indo-Chine, de la Chine, du Japon et de la Corée et des témoignages venus de toutes les parties du monde. Un choix de pensées de Gandhi, des détails biographiques, un chapitre consacré aux six derniers mois du Mahâtmâ, et une bibliographie anglaise, française et vietnamienne, le terminent. L'ensemble forme un hommage émouvant à l'une des plus belles figures du siècle et apprend à mieux connaître et à mieux comprendre un homme qui, toujours sincère et mettant ses actes en harmonie avec sa parole, sut jusqu'à son dernier jour – et quoi qu'il pût lui en coûter – vivre d'accord avec son idéal. *Les Réd.*

BÜCHERBESPRECHUNGEN · COMPTES RENDUS

WOLFRAM EBERHARD, *Chinas Geschichte*. Band I der *Bibliotheca Sinica* (Chinesische Philosophie, Literatur, Kunst, Geschichte – Übersetzungen, Darstellungen, Essays, in Verbindung mit Fachgenossen herausgegeben von E. H. VON TSCHARNER). – 404 S., 8°. Bern, A. Francke Verlag, 1948.

China und sein Werden können nicht mehr von der Tagesordnung des 20. Jahrhunderts verschwinden. Um dem gewöhnlichen Sterblichen, aber auch dem « China-kenner » eine Orientierung in der drei Jahrtausende umfassenden, verwickelten Kontinuität zu ermöglichen, sind Abrisse, zusammenfassende Darstellungen, unerlässlich. Die meisten der größeren Geschichten Chinas sind veraltet; sei es, daß die Forschung viel neues Material beibrachte, sei es, daß die sie tragende Geschichtsbetrachtung hoffnungslos veraltet und ungenießbar geworden ist. (Etwa nach dem Schema: erst war der Staatsgedanke da, im luftleeren Raum; dann kamen die Fremden, alsdann die Hofintrigen und zu guter Letzt wohnte solchem Geschehen auch die chinesische Gesellschaft bei. Dieses Schema ist leicht als der Zerrspiegel wirklicher Vorgänge im 19. Jahrhundert zu erkennen.) Der Aufgabe, einem weiteren Leserkreis ein zusammenhängendes Bild Chinas zu vermitteln, unterzogen sich kürzlich die aufs Technische ausgerichtete *Short History of the Chinese People* von L. C. Goodrich (New York 1943), die soziologisch-geistesgeschichtlichen Problemen zugewandten Vorträge H. Wilhelms über *Gesellschaft und Staat in China* (Peking 1944) und die *Geschichte Chinas und seiner Kultur* des chinesischen Literaten Tsui Chi (aus dem Englischen übersetzt, Zürich 1946), der es verstanden hatte, geschickt der Nachfrage entgegenzukommen, die während des zweiten Weltkrieges aus dem Interesse für den Verbündeten des Westens entstanden war.

Nun wird die neue Reihe *Bibliotheca Sinica* glänzend von einem ähnlichen Versuch eröffnet. Ihr Herausgeber E. H. v. Tschärner hat eine glückliche Hand bewie-