

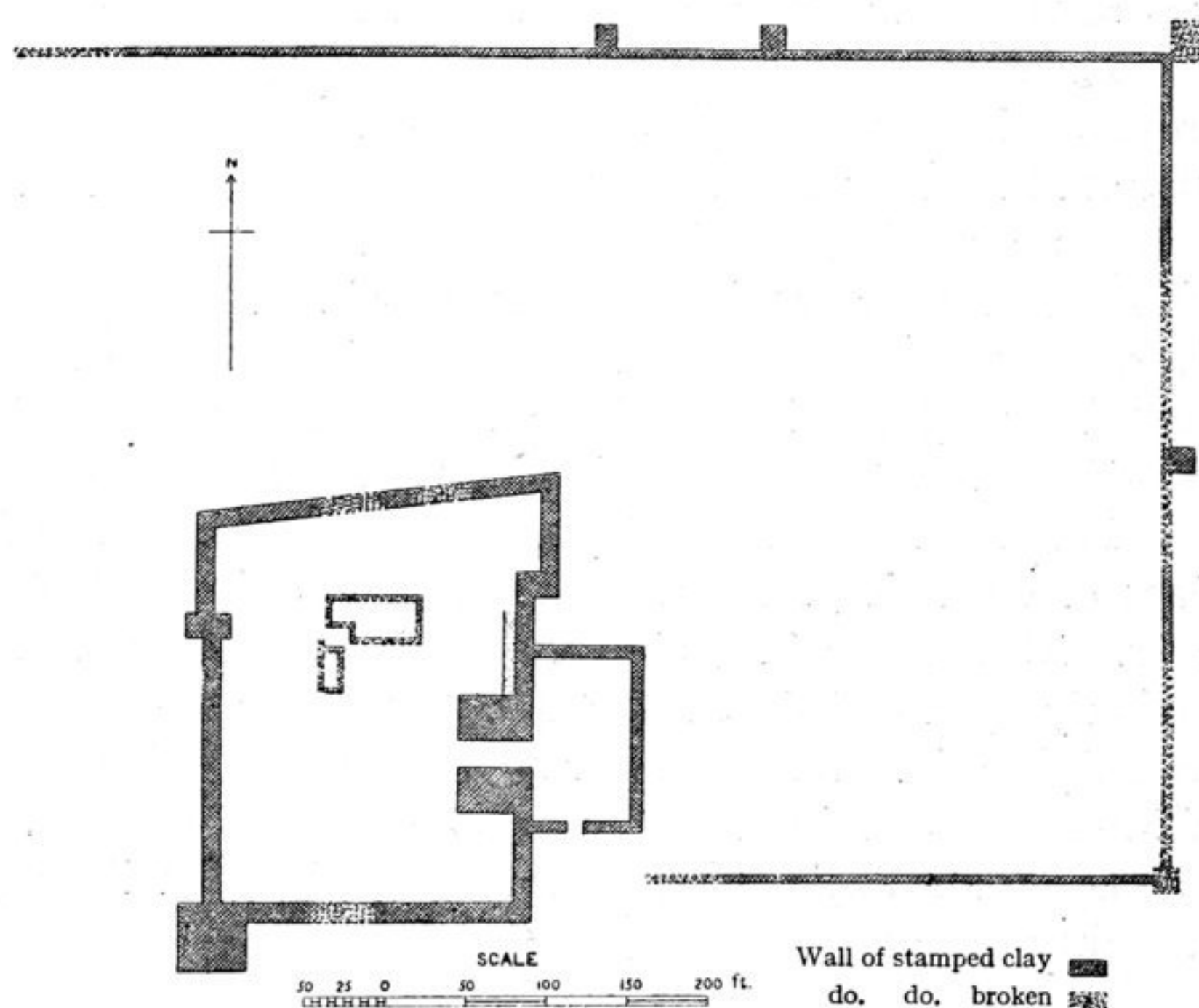
of the eastern wall on the outside. The walls of the fort had suffered but little except on the north and south faces. There they showed breaches which did not appear to be due to wind-erosion. A much larger outer enclosure adjoined this fort on the north and east; its walls, also of stamped clay, but only 5 or 6 feet thick, could be traced for about 700 and 500 feet, respectively. These walls were badly decayed, but towers of varying sizes intended to strengthen them survived in several places. The position of the end of the northern wall towards the river could not be determined, and the western wall had disappeared completely, having probably been carried away by a flood of the river.

Within the inner fort, walls of two small structures survived to a height of a few feet, the masonry showing courses of vertically set bricks. Excavation brought to light only remains of the roofing; nor did the refuse found in the south-west and south-east angles of the enclosure yield any datable objects. The clearing of two shallow depressions, probably marking the position of wells, one in the inner, the other in the outer fort, could not be attempted. So for chronological indications I had to fall back on what could be gathered from the remains of pottery; these were very plentiful, especially within the outer circumvallation. Among the potsherds fragments of hard grey ware, with or without 'string' or 'mat' marks, prevailed, distinctly suggestive of antiquity. Pieces of plain whitish-grey glazed ware were few. Most significant, perhaps, was the total absence, so far as I could observe, of porcelain and of such glazed ware as I had found at the sites of the Sung period that I had previously examined.

The irregularity in the plan of the inner fort speaks against its attribution to Han times, at least in its present shape, while the absence of such pottery as is common at Kharakhoto or Ch'iao-tzū makes it difficult to believe that the stronghold could have seen prolonged occupation either during the period of Sung or that of Hsi-hsia domination. I was therefore led to conjecture that the construction of the Taralingin-dürüljin defences might originally date, perhaps, from the troubled epoch which prevailed between the close of Han times and the advent of the T'ang dynasty, and again after the Tibetan conquest of the Kan-su marches (c. A. D. 750), when inroads of Turkish and other nomad tribes from the north must often have threatened the security of the Chinese settlements along the Kan-chou river and the foot of the Nan-shan. But some of the repairs may well be due to later temporary occupation.

A ride of two miles diagonally across the widening bed of the river brought us back again to the Etsin-gol route on the left bank. There in a small Mongol encampment, the first met with, 'Mālum', our itinerant Lāma, discovered a relative in the owner of one of the few felt tents. This unexpected meeting was not without its interest. Mālum had drifted years before to the Tun-

SKETCH PLAN OF
RUINED FORT
T. XLVIII. d
ON ETSIN - GOL



Origin of
river
defences.

First
Mongol
camp met.