

of ancient cultivation in that direction. We found the dwellings VIII-X situated on comparatively open ground, showing practically no erosion and covered with a good deal of living scrub, such as the presence of subsoil moisture at no great depth could alone account for. We could still make out quite clearly on this ground the rectangular outlines of large perfectly levelled fields, and the small irrigation cuts that brought water to them. It did not need the discovery of two neatly cut octagonal stone rollers, such as are still used nowadays by Chinese agriculturists in the southern oases for rolling their fields, to convince me that cultivation had been practised here by a people thoroughly wedded to traditional Chinese methods. I should have found it difficult to believe that these fields and farms had been abandoned to the desert as many centuries ago as the ruins on eroded ground near by and as the ruins of Khara-khoto, had not the conclusion been forced on me by the discovery in all of them of potsherds of identical type, and also of a number of coins close to the dwellings IX and X. Among these eight coins, four are Sung pieces, while two bear the legend *Wu-chu*, and one shows the T'ang Nien-hao *K'ai-yüan*.³

Here as elsewhere among these ruins very little sand had accumulated within the broken walls where tamarisk-cones did not completely cover them. The total absence of remains of household furniture, roofing timber and the like, suggested that the ruins had been exploited for a long time after the settlement had been wholly or partly abandoned. The same conditions were observed at the large dwelling XIV (Fig. 254; Pl. 22), which, with its numerous rooms arranged round three sides of a walled court and a large outer enclosure, looked quite imposing. Part of the latter was buried under the slopes of a big tamarisk-cone close by, which by its very height, close on 30 feet, sufficed to indicate that the dwelling had been abandoned at an early period. For refuse heaps which might have furnished datable remains we searched in vain; nor could our Mongols show us the temple or *miao* of which some of them had apparently heard in connexion with this ruin.

Turning to the south-west from this ruin, we crossed a succession of high tamarisk-covered ridges separated by stretches of gravelly soil, where potsherds of the same type as those found at Khara-khoto were plentiful. Some three miles from ruin XIV we again came upon more open ground; but the lateness of the hour prevented me from visiting five more dwellings, XV-XIX, which Afrāz-gul had found stretching along a line to the south-west. According to his detailed description these were badly decayed, and debris of old pottery was to be found all around them. In two places he had crossed small canals running eastwards, and elsewhere he had found stones for rolling, as previously described, and also stones of hand-mills. With the exception of two unidentified pieces, all the seven coins found in this southernmost portion of the once occupied area belonged to Sung issues. The more westerly line of march that I myself had to follow in order to return to Khara-khoto brought us to a well-preserved canal which could be followed with ease for more than half a mile across a bare flat of clay. It was 10 feet wide between the top of the banks, which rose to 5 feet above the level of the plain, and was 3 feet deep in the middle. It ran from WSW. to ENE., but turned off to the west where we left it, thus clearly suggesting that it came from the river-bed which passed south-east of Khara-khoto.

³ The fact that the eighth coin showed the Nien-hao *Chia-ch'ing* of A.D. 1796-1821 might have puzzled me greatly, had I not subsequently learned by chance at Kao-t'ai that cultivators of that oasis, which, though fertile enough, offers no chance of expansion to meet the pressure of increasing population, had formed a plan for bringing this abandoned land east of Khara-khoto (known to them as *Hei-ch'êng*, the 'Black Town') once more under irrigation. They had carefully examined the ground and believed that, given an

adequate number of settlers to take up the venture, a canal bringing water again from the Ümne-gol could be made. It is likely enough that the modern coin was left there by one of these prospectors, or else by other visitors whom the tradition of this old colony had brought to the site.

Our Mongols also, as it proved, knew of these remains, but were quite definite in the assertion that no attempt at reclamation had been made since their Torgut forefathers took to grazing on the Etsin-gol, centuries ago.

Large dwelling
K.E. XIV.

Ground crossed on
return to
Khara-
khoto.