

at the outset of his last campaign against the Tangut kingdom.<sup>6</sup> Subsequently Palladius indicated Chinese references of the Mongol period to the lake '*I-tsi-nay*', and noted information with regard to vestiges of an old town still to be seen in its vicinity, as well as to traces of an old route leading from I-tsi-nay to Kara-korum. Professor H. Cordier in his edition of Sir Henry Yule's great work recorded conformably with the above his conviction that 'Etzina must be looked for on the river *Hei-shui* called Etsina by the Mongols',<sup>7</sup> and when Colonel Kozlov's discovery of Khara-khoto had become known, he did not hesitate to identify this site with the city named by Marco Polo.<sup>8</sup>

Yet if our evidence were confined solely to the antiquarian finds yielded by Khara-khoto itself and the observations made there it might have been difficult, perhaps, to suppress all doubt as to the conclusive character of this identification. There was in the first place the fact that the great mass of textual remains at the site were Hsi-hsia, and thus presumably dated back to the period of Hsi-hsia or Tangut rule that had closed fully fifty years before Marco Polo's arrival at Kublai Khān's court. On the other hand, there was no definite proof that the town had survived the destruction attending the Mongol invasion which had put an end to that rule.<sup>8a</sup> In the second place, considering the physical conditions now prevailing along the whole lower course of the Etsin-gol, the modern visitor to the site might well have been induced to conclude from the total absence of traces of cultivation in the immediate vicinity of the ruined town that agriculture could never have been carried on near it. Yet Marco Polo's account distinctly tells us that 'the inhabitants live by their cultivation and cattle, for they have no trade'.

Our survey of the extensive area eastwards with its unmistakable remains of agricultural settlements completely removes such doubts as the character of the ground around the walls of Khara-khoto and the present absence of all cultivation in the Etsin-gol delta might otherwise have raised. Moreover all topographical indications combine to bear out the accuracy of Marco Polo's statements. The reckoning of a twelve days' ride from Campichu or Kan-chu to the 'city of Etzina' agrees remarkably well with the distance of 278 miles that our traverse reckoning checked by cyclometer showed for our direct journey from Khara-khoto to Kan-chou. If the journey were done, with far more convenience no doubt, by following the course of the Kan-chou river, this distance would be increased only by some sixteen miles and still remain easily practicable for mounted men in twelve days. A reference to our map and to those of Colonel Kozlov's surveys north of the terminal lakes of the Etsin-gol will show that Marco is perfectly correct in stating that 'Etzina' lies 'towards the north on the verge of the Sandy Desert'. That 'Etzina' belonged 'to the Province of Tangut' would be certain on geographical grounds even if there were not the Hsi-hsia texts of Khara-khoto to prove it. For the statement that 'the people are Idolaters', i. e. Buddhists, the remains of Khara-khoto furnish equally convincing evidence. The accuracy of the reference to their possession of 'plenty of camels and cattle' was brought home to us by the large herds of cattle kept by the present Mongol occupants of the delta, and by the numerous large droves of camels which we met there. About the local breed of falcons which Marco Polo mentions, I regret not to have made proper inquiries. Opportunity to use them for sport certainly abounds.

Marco Polo's account makes it clear that 'Etzina' owed its importance in his day, and probably earlier also, to the fact that it was the last place where caravans from Kan-chou or Su-chou bound northward into the heart of Mongolia could secure supplies for men and beasts. Reference to the Russian 100 verst to the inch map or to any other map of Mongolia reveals the fact that a route

Chrono-  
logical  
doubts.

Accuracy  
of Marco  
Polo's state-  
ments.

Importance  
of route  
along Etsin-  
gol.

<sup>6</sup> See Gaubil, *Histoire de Genchiscan* (Paris, 1739), p. 49.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Yule, *Marco Polo*, i. p. 225, where the notice of Palladius (*J. N. China Br. R. A. S.*, 1875, x. pp. 10 sq.) is quoted.

<sup>8</sup> See Cordier, *Marco Polo, Notes and Addenda*, p. 53 sqq.

<sup>8a</sup> [But see now above, p. 441, for dated documents of the Mongol period.]