

broad winding course. The depressions of the Yardangs lying exactly in the direction in which we were steering had, up to this point, made progress so easy that it caused us a downright feeling of dismay when we noticed how within a couple of miles from the dry river bed they gradually forsook us. The hope of turning to our advantage these strange scourings of the bitter north-easter for part at least of our new tramp had proved futile. A close succession of low dunes kept the ground covered with sand, and erosion had manifestly lost much of its power here. For about three miles we crossed numerous belts of dead trees, all Toghraks of small size, which must have died young; they marked courses which the river had followed only for short periods. Their lines seemed to run more or less parallel to the old river bed. Then followed bare eroded ground overrun by dunes only six to ten feet high, until dusk obliged us to halt by the side of a line of dead poplars still running west to east.

No doubt all this area was in the times of the Han occupation jungle-grazing, subject to inundations from the river. Hence the finds of small bronze objects, such as a fine arrow-head, were very scanty, once we had passed the main river course. A Han coin picked up close to that evening's camp was our last datable relic. But, of course, where erosion had free play it had laid bare also remains of far earlier periods. Thus we met on that first march rare patches of very coarse pottery, which was manifestly neolithic; and when nearing camp I picked up a fine celt or axe-head of jade four inches long, undoubtedly belonging to the later phase of the Stone Age. How near the latter approached our earliest historical epoch in this region is a question which it is quite impossible to answer at present.

Our march on December 30th, under a cloudy sky and with the wind for a change blowing from the west and north-west, was still easy. But certain significant observations suggested that we were passing into different ground. The characteristic direction of erosion from north-east to south-west was no longer observable on such bare banks and surfaces of clay as we met with. The dunes, at first quite low, grew slowly in height, while the flat, bare