

the mountains over relatively easy passes to the valley of the Ta-tung River, a tributary of the Huang Ho. It constitutes the only line of communication across the Nan-shan ranges west of Liang-chou which could ever have been of any practical utility to the Chinese holding Kan-su. Finally it may be noted that, whereas both Su-chou and Liang-chou must always have been particularly exposed to trouble from nomad aggression owing to their accessibility by routes from the barbarian north,² Kan-chou is protected from any direct attack on that side by the rugged hill range previously mentioned and the extreme barrenness of the desert plains which extend beyond it.

Chang-yih
of Han
times.

Idols men-
tioned by
Marco Polo.

Ruined site
of *Hei-*
shui-kuo.

There are no ancient remains above ground which would enable us to determine whether the present city occupies more or less the site where the *Chang-yih* 張掖 of Han times, corresponding to the later Kan-chou, was established. What indications on this point may be contained in Chinese historical records I am not in a position to ascertain. There seems, however, good reason for the belief that the city has not materially changed its position since mediaeval times. Marco Polo, who with his uncle Maffeo 'dwelt a whole year in this city when on a mission', describes *Campichu* as 'the capital and place of government of the whole province of Tangut'.³ He particularly mentions the 'many minsters and abbeys' of the Idolaters. 'In these they have an enormous number of idols, both small and great, certain of the latter being a good ten paces in stature; some of them being of wood, others of clay, and others yet of stone. They are all highly polished, and then covered with gold. The great idols of which I speak lie at length.' Sir Henry Yule has already called attention to the fact that the colossal figures representing Buddha in Nirvāṇa, to which Marco Polo obviously refers, are also mentioned in the descriptions of Kan-chou given by Shāh Rukh's embassy and Hājī Muḥammad, the Persian trader, interviewed by Ramusio about 1550.⁴ There can be little doubt that the colossal images meant in all three accounts are those still to be seen, of course with inevitable restorations, etc., in the great Buddhist temple of Kan-chou known as the Ta-fo-ssü.⁵

My return journey to Su-chou, as far as it lay along the high road, touched only at one point a site of some antiquarian interest. At a direct distance of about six miles to the north-west of the western main gate of Kan-chou, and just beyond the village lands of Yai-tzū, the road passes into a wide belt of waste ground, supporting but scanty scrub and partially covered with low dunes.⁶ For more than three miles from north to south and for about two miles across there extends here an area showing effects of wind-erosion and covered with small débris of pottery, hard bricks, and the like, just in the manner of a Turkestan 'Tati'. The site is known by the name of *Hei-shui-kuo*, and had already been mentioned to me at An-hsi by my antiquarian friend Mr. Li⁷ as a place from which antiques of different sorts are sometimes brought to collectors at Kan-chou. Along the eastern edge of the area the dunes lie heaped up to 25-30 feet in height, covering completely any remains that may survive on the ground. But beyond this belt of high drift-sand small erosion terraces from

² A reference, e.g., to the Russian Asiatic Trans-frontier Map xxii will help to make this point quite clear.

³ Cf. Yule, *Marco Polo*, i. pp. 219 sq., where in note 1 the form of the name *Campiciu*, etc., in Marco's text has been fully accounted for.

⁴ Cf. Yule-Cordier, *Cathay*, i. pp. 277, 294.

⁵ The identification was first proposed by Palladius, *Journal N. China Br. R.A.S.*, 1875, x. p. 10; see Prof. Cordier's note, *Marco Polo*, i. p. 221. For the first European description of the Ta-fo-ssü temple I can trace, see Lóczy, *Kina*, p. 492.

According to a statement recorded by Palladius, the temple

was built in 1103 by a Tangut Queen, who placed there the three idols 'which have since been found in the ground on this very spot'. The very cursory inspection I was able to make of the Ta-fo-ssü, as the shrine is locally known, suggested that these colossal stucco images, as well as the big structure which shelters them, must have undergone frequent and considerable renovations down to quite recent times, as was to be expected in view of the materials used and climatic and other local conditions.

⁶ See Maps Nos. 93. c. 4; 94. c. 1.

⁷ Cf. *Desert Cathay*, ii. p. 241.