

river draining the Baghrash Lake has cut its way between the westernmost spurs of the Kuruk-tāgh and the foot of the high, rugged range north of Korla. The river, from the place where it emerges from under the ice sheet of the frozen lake, flows rapidly in its winding course towards the steadily narrowing defile, with a great volume of limpid green water. This river defile is passed by the road connecting Kara-shahr with the plains of the Tārīm Basin, and must have been from the earliest times a point of great military importance. Its entrance is marked by the unpretending mud fort of Bāsh-eghin (Map No. 49. B. 1), which Yāqūb Bēg erected when awaiting at Korla the attack of the reconquering Chinese army from the side of Hāmi and Turfān. The total length of the defile from this place down to the last cross spur near Shōr-tokai, where the great plain is first sighted, is about seven miles by road. Throughout, the river twists and bends between low rocky spurs projecting from either side. Where these spurs on the right bank are not too precipitous, the road keeps close to the river; it has been practicable for carts as far back as local tradition goes. At other points, where the river gorge becomes wholly impracticable, the road ascends and descends steep ridges. One of the narrowest and most picturesque points in the defile is near Kalka, a tiny patch of cultivation on the left bank, with a much-frequented place of pilgrimage known as Alpataka-mazār. Here a wooden gate across the road, with troglodyte quarters for a guard, marks a watch-station still in being.

Defile of
'Iron Gate'.

There can be no doubt that the defile here briefly described corresponds to the 'Defile of the Iron Gate' 鐵門關 (*t'ieh-mên kuan*), which an itinerary of the T'ang Annals mentions as situated 50 li to the west of Yen-ch'i.⁴ It must at all times have been a position favourable for defence and ambushes, and as such it figures in the account given by the *Chin shu* of a Chinese expedition which in A.D. 345 advanced from Yen-ch'i towards Wei-li, or the region below Korla.⁵ There we also find the name *Chê liu* 遮留 recorded as that of the valley. The name, by the significance of its meaning in Chinese, viz. 'the intercepting', is said to have saved the commander of the Chinese force from falling into an ambush there prepared for him by the ruler of Kuchā.

From the last spur overlooking the debouchure of the river the view ranged unbroken across the wide expanse of the Korla oasis and beyond to the unlimited horizon of the great desert plains veiled in the yellow haze of the evening. It was a satisfaction to feel that I had returned once more to the Tārīm Basin and to the north-eastern corner of my old field of work, the 'sand ocean'.

OBJECTS EXCAVATED AT KHŌRA SITE

Khora. 001. Large finial of turned wood. Plan, a circular drum below, and flattened sphere above; the two separated by chamfered moulding (which projects upwards, not down). On top of sphere, a small torus from which rises circular neck spreading out to head shaped like inverted bowl. Drum and sphere orn. with incised reelings. No dowel-hole or tenon. Wood hard but split. H. $9\frac{3}{4}$ ", diam. of base $5\frac{1}{8}$ ".

Khora. 002. Stucco relief fr. of seated Buddha. Hands in lap; head gone and most of vesica. Throne of five plain horizontal tiers; the two lower diminishing in size, the three upper increasing so that each projects over the

last. The whole apparently painted red over white slip, of which plentiful traces remain. Soft buff clay. $3\frac{1}{4}$ " \times $3\frac{1}{4}$ ".

Khora. 003. Finial of turned wood, with tenon projecting from lower unsmoothed end. Plan, a circular base with diminishing top, supporting flattened ball, from which rises circular neck spreading out to flat disc-shaped head. Ball separated from base and neck by plain ring-mouldings. Whole retains plentiful traces of colour over white slip, black on head and ball, green on neck and upper part of base, red on base itself and ring-mouldings. H. $3\frac{5}{8}$ ", diam. of base 2".

Khora. 004. Tapering wooden staff with knob at top;

is marked in one of the Chinese stone-engraved maps of A.D. 1137 at Hsi-an-fu; see *B.É.F.E.O.*, iii. p. 214, Map A.

⁴ Cf. Chavannes, *Ancient Khotan*, pp. 543 sq.; for Wei-li, see below, p. 1231.

⁴ Cf. Chavannes, *Turcs occid.*, pp. 7, 304. The distance agrees closely enough with the fifteen miles or so from Bāsh-eghin to Baghdād-shahri, where the capital of Yen-ch'i in T'ang times may safely be located; see above, pp. 1182 sq. M. Chavannes points out that the 'Defile of the Iron Gate'