

Realizing the importance of systematic examination of the locality, I had, during my first brief stay at Khotan, on October 15 paid a rapid preliminary visit to Yōtkan; at the same time I arranged for the collection of such antiques from the place as happened to be for sale among the villagers or in the hands of Khotan traders. The proceeds of this search awaited me at Khotan on my return from the mountains; and after giving to my men and animals a few days of much-needed rest I hastened to proceed to Yōtkan for a thorough survey of the site. I reached it on November 25 from the south, after a brief visit to the jade-pits at the debouchure of the Yurung-kāsh Valley, and devoted the next four days to a careful study of the antiquarian aspects of the site and its immediate vicinity.

The name Yōtkan is borne by a group of detached hamlets, of which the northern one, called Khalche, is situated, as the map of the Khotan oasis and the large scale one of Plate XXIII show, nearly five miles from the western gate of the Yangi-shahr or Chinese town of Khotan, and approximately west by north of it. Through the centre of the area formed by the village lands of Yōtkan there passes a ravine, deeply cut into the loess soil and known as the *Yōtkan-Yār*. Where the course of this ravine approaches the houses of Khalche it is adjoined on the south by the site which has furnished whatever relics have so far been recovered of the old Khotan capital.

Position of
Yōtkan.

The remarkable appearance presented by this site, and the no less curious nature of the operations to which finds of antiques are there due, were bound to attract from the first my special interest. A preliminary survey showed the site to consist of a large depressed area sunk from 20 to 30 feet below the level of the surrounding ground, and forming, as seen in the large scale map (Pl. XXIII), an irregular oblong with sides each about half a mile in length. Except where the *Yōtkan-Yār* enters and leaves it, this depression proved to be bordered everywhere by steep banks cut into what at first seemed natural loess, but which on closer examination showed, besides pure soil, layers full of pottery débris, ashes, decayed wood, and other decomposed matter. Along considerable portions of the enclosing banks there were plentiful signs of recent diggings and 'washings'. It was soon made clear to me by the villagers' statements that it was solely the working of these banks, or more exactly of the deeply embedded layers just mentioned, which produced the annual yield of antiques from Yōtkan; while within the depression itself, now mostly occupied by rice-fields and marshy ground, finds were wholly unknown.

The first careful inspection of the whole site sufficed to convince me that this great depression or basin was indeed, as the villagers plainly told me, the result of long-continued excavations, such as were still proceeding each summer. Neither the extent nor the shape of the depressed area could possibly be accounted for by the erosive action of flood-water carried in the *Yōtkan-Yār*, as had been somewhat vaguely assumed by some earlier visitors to the site when they spoke here of 'frightful ravages in the soil'. But as soon as I had realized that this strange-looking site corresponded in its present features to the huge open-air pit of some mine or quarry, and had like it been created by systematic diggings, two fresh questions at once confronted me. What was the object for which such extensive and necessarily laborious excavations had been carried on, and when and how had they originally been started?

Excavated
area of
Yōtkan.

To the first question the evidence of the work which on my visit in October I found actually proceeding supplied a conclusive answer: it was for gold in the first place and next for chance finds of small objects of value, such as pieces of worked jade, gems, ornaments, &c., that the banks enclosing the site were annually being dug into and the soil from their débris-filled layers 'washed' by a varying number of diggers. To obtain a reliable answer to the