

## Darkhan Belle

By Nicholas Roerich

Yun-Wang, the Prince of the Hoshun Earkhan Beile, is the official head of the autonomous government of Inner Mongolia. We received an invitation to visit him at his headquarters, which are within two hours' riding distance from our camp. We traversed many dry river-beds, passed the place of the future Mongolian capital. Bricks are being burnt there at present. It is especially touching to pass this way and to think that there will be built and founded the capital of a people with such a great past. You know, how near to my heart is every building, even the very possibility of up-building. First we travelled north-east, then turned to the north, where in a distance of 40—50 miles lies the border of Khalka.

Along the way our car scared several herds of excellent horses. One is astonished to see to what extent local grasses, without the addition of any grain, are sufficient to keep horses as well as other cattle, in good form. Rare *avles* (settlements), here and there, small groves and solitary trees of the elm-karagatch, the popular tree of Central Asia, break the hill-lines of the horizon. Here and there one finds the high sharp desert grasses and the usual low spiny shrubs of Mongolia. It is remarkable how not only local camels, but cattle as well, have become accustomed to the spiny fodder.

Between low-lying hills appeared the headquarters of the Prince,—a square of white walls, crowned with dark teeth—like

a fortress. Within the wall can be seen the roofs of houses in Chinese style. Upon the gates are painted colourful Guardians of the entrance. Nearby, in a similar square of walls, stands the *yamin*—the secretariat of the *hoshun*. Apparently rain has just passed over this place and everything is covered with water. We approach the *yamin* first in order to hand in our cards. We are asked to enter. A large crowd of friendly smiling officers and soldiers surround us. The pointed straw helmets of the soldiers, crowned with a red spray, involuntarily suggests that a similar shape of helmet could be easily adopted for modern steel helmets, preserving thus the age-old traditions.

One must sit down in the friendly *yamin* and wait to be announced to the Prince. We exchange questions about the road, good health and other benevolent subjects. In a corner stand old Russian rifles. Manuscripts as well as Mongolian books can be seen on the shelves along the walls. An officer wearing a hat adorned with a coloured ball above the spray, to signify his higher rank, enters and asks us to follow him. We pass a brightly painted gate along a paved road and enter the palace. In a clean building of Chinese style we find the Prince seated, and we are invited to sit down in the same manner. Along the walls besides the sacred images are hanging portraits of the officers and leaders of Inner Mongolia. A large portrait of the Tashi-Lama also occupies one of the central places. The Prince himself is sixty-six years of age. His friendly experienced wise face reminds us of the images of the benevolent rulers of old. Through George and Chamba (the more interpreters, the better) a friendly talk begins, which runs from local matters

to religious themes. The Prince is a very spiritual person and a friend of the Tashi-Lama. On mentioning Shambala, his face takes a befitting solemn expression. It is mentioned that a Nation can prosper only with firm spiritual and administrative principles. The Prince speaks of the desire of the Mongolian people for a peaceful development. It is especially joyful to see the representative of his people emphasizing with all his heart a desire for peaceful upbuilding.

We exchange presents. On our part a gold enamelled watch of French workmanship, on the part of the Prince—two Tibetan carpets. The Prince intends to visit us as soon his car will be able to run on the badly flooded roads. He invites us to participate in the annual festival in the Batukhalka monastery, where the sacred dances, "Tsam" of Lamas, take place. On leaving we also visited his private chapel, situated in the same compound. The temple is kept in full cleanness and one sees the desire to make everything as good as possible. In the temple there are besides several Burkhans, a statue of Chenrezi and the White Tara, and on the walls is a large fresco of the battle of Shambala. Offering lamps burn callingly and everything shows that the temple is close to the heart of the owner. When departing, we took into our car a soldier with a red spray on his helmet to show us the road to the ruins of an ancient city, situated within the Prince's domain.

Neither excavations, nor any scientific description of the place have been made, but it deserves a serious research. The city is destroyed—razed to the ground. One remembers the

texts of old chronicles, in which they speak about cities, condemned by the conquerors to looting and devastation. The typical details of the ruins and bases of columns and numberless chips of broken vessels and fragments of ceramic architectural ornaments at once indicate the different periods of the city.

The latest period, according to the ceramics, belongs to the Manchu dynasty. Then there are obvious signs of the Ming dynasty, for instance a huge turtle of white marble, which probably serves as base for a stela. But still more interesting are the remains of the Mongolo-Nestorian times of the 12th and 13th century and perhaps even earlier. One sees *sarkophagi* with Nestorian crosses, which according to their ornaments on white stone, could be found either in the Bysantium, or San Marco, or Verona. On these monuments one can discern inscriptions, somewhere in Uigur glyphs, and elsewhere in old Chinese. On a latter George at once deciphered a very characteristic name, which in Chinese pronunciation means Elijah. This name is often repeated in Chinese Nestorian records. Nearby one may also see on huge heaps of ruins, nicely carved capitals, which remind of the lost snow-white temple. Not in vain is this place called in Mongolian "Many Temples."

George suggests to measure the ruins and to make a map of the city and to copy inscriptions for deciphering. One feels that such research may disclose many interesting discoveries. Who knows, perhaps, this city belonged to the well-known Mongolian Prince George, a Nestorian, who according to chronicles fell in a battle in the end of the XIII th century.

This period deserves serious study as it can give important pages of the Central Asian history. Let us hope the future finds will take a place of honour in the Mongolian Museum of the new capital. Besides governmental buildings there should be built immediately schools and a museum to preserve the best specimens of National creativeness.

At a time when we rejoiced at studying the ancient city, dark clouds gathered around and one could see here and there torrential rains. But the clouds did not touch us and on our return trip, the road, which had turned into lakes, proved the result of heavy rains, so welcomed by the Mongols for their grass. The hillside became more green. The herds of fat wet horses were shining and the up-to-then dry river-beds suddenly changed into swift torrents. We remembered the flood that took place unexpectedly during our previous expedition, at Sharagolchi. In Asia everything is unusual and sudden.

The ruins of the city once more confirmed how many rich surprises may be hidden in the Asian vastnesses. Sliding and slipping along the hillside, we reached our camp near the rock Timur. The very name suggests concealed ores—iron, coal, gold are mentioned, and in the south even oil is known. Many lakes give salt, which is the resource of much revenue. It was a joyful journey. We met a remarkable person and visited impressive ruins and saw useful grasses and other riches of Nature. It one is to add to these riches a constructive goodwill, then how much beautiful and instructive can be written again into the history of Mongolia. May this good hour come! Blessed is every up-building!