Khukh Ordung, A Uighur Palace Complex of the Seventh Century

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Introduction[1]

Inhabitants of the Mongolian plateau have been staunchly nomadic. Cities rarely existed before the Russian hegemony, and at that point they first attached themselves to pre-existing Buddhist monasteries. The exception to this general pattern was the Uighurs, who had an empire in the eighth and early ninth centuries. They built several cities, extended and maintained a flourishing trade network, established sufficient agriculture and developed urban manufacturing. Although historians have pointed out these significant distinctions, few have fully considered the thoroughly revolutionary impact of this Turkish group on steppe culture. One result in the Orkhon Valley was the foundation for Karakorum, the only permanent seat of the imperial Mongols in the thirteenth century. That city occupied the same site and, in the early seventeenth century, served as building material for the major religious centre of Erdene Zuu accompanying the re-introduction of Buddhism. Therefore, the Uighurs affected the physical heartland of their empire for a millennium and the habits of the people to this day.

If urbanisation uniquely distinguishes the Uighurs, little is known about their sites, architectural style and construction techniques because only one place has been located and studied, the capital of Karabalgasum. However, new material emerges from the discovery of a complex built before the height of the empire. The place was constructed about 650 AD and exhibits the main features of the later capital. This discovery indicates that the Uighurs were a commanding force a full century before the standard dating of their empire.[2]

Historical Framework

The Uighurs were one of several groups in the large Eastern Turk confederation that spread from north China to the Siberian forest belt. As both political and military developments

[1] My sincere appreciation needs to be expressed to the Mongolian colleagues who accompanied me on several trips in the extreme heat of summer and snowstorms of winter to locate and measure some of the Orkhon Valley sites. They are my friend and translator, Munkhjargal Purev; Mr Davaadorj, the former curator of the Erdene Zuu Museum, who acted as guide and informant although he attributed almost all sites to Ogedai Khan in the Mongol period around 1235 AD; and Mr Damdensuren, the local hospitality host. In London, further work on the material was facilitated greatly by the drawings and discussions with the architect, Chi-Son Lei. For all the assistance, however, the notes and interpretation of the material remain solely my responsibility.

[2] This point was similarly endorsed by Hamilton, *Les Oighours a l'époque des Cinq Dynasties* (Pairs, 1955), p. 39, as cited by Peter Alford Andrews, *Felt Tents and Pavilions: the nomadic tradition and its interaction with princely tentage* (London, 1999), p. 141.

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weakened the empire, the groups in the area north of the Gobi became more independent. Another development was the rise of the Tang Dynasty in north China (618 to 907 AD). Much of the regime's success was based on a form of warfare different from the Sui and other previous regional Chinese dynasties, in which light cavalry replaced the heavy cavalry and precise formations of foot soldiers.[3] A good deal of this change came in response to the prowess of the Turkish military, which relied solely on lightening quick cavalry, utilised small but powerful weapons and deployed strategies that could cover hundreds of kilometres in both attack and retreat. With this supremacy, the Eastern Turks had controlled vast areas but were becoming challenged as the Tang began to use the same tactics.

Eventually, a natural disaster in the form of a devastatingly bitter winter in 626–27 AD caused much destruction of livestock and subsequent famine, which pushed the Eastern Turk Dynasty towards collapse. The Chinese were too cautious, however, to take advantage of the dynasty's weakness at that point but awaited their moment and, instead, a threat to the Eastern Turks came from groups within the central Mongolian plateau. The Xueyamuto led a coalition of Uighurs, Bayego and others who established a capital in the foothills of the Oitken Mountains.[4] In the spring of 627 AD, they defeated successive attempts by the Eastern Turks to regain control. The final defeat was the decisive Battle of Malieshan, in which 5,000 Uighurs routed 100,000 Eastern Turks and pursued the remnants all the way to the Tienshan Mountains.[5] Both forces used the same tactics, but it seems that the Uighur horses had been less affected by heavy snowfalls. As a result, the Eastern Turks were relegated to their centre of power south of the Gobi in the Ordos region and, without the support of the groups in the Mongolian plateau, the Eastern Turks succumbed to the rising power of the Tang not long after. The last khagan was routed at a confrontation at Tieshan (Iron Mountain) in 630 AD.[6]

Despite victory, the Chinese, who had long experience of nomadic power, did not attempt to incorporate the steppe except to make loose arrangements with the border people. This approach put the steppe peoples, including those in the Mongolian plateau, on a very extended lead. Already, in 629 AD, the Tang government had made an alliance with the Xueyamuto, recognising the khagan with a Chinese title as the leader of the northern steppe.[7] As proof of respect, the Tang expressed the alliance in terms of specific products in yearly exchanges of steppe horses for Chinese silk. The trade was greatly in the nomads' favour, not only because of the intrinsic value of silk[8] but also because threads and bolts of silk were the common exchange medium across Central Asia. In this way, the nomads gained necessary leverage for further commerce, which the Uighurs later developed to a massive level.[9]

[3] David A. Graff, "Strategy and Contingency in the Tang Defeat of the Eastern Turks, 629–630", *Warfare in Inner Asian History: 500–1800*, ed. Nicola Di Cosmo (Leiden, 2002), pp. 33–72; pp. 58, 60–61.

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 45–46. The range is known today as the Hangai Mountains. In modern Mongolian, *oitgen* means 'thick' in a general sense. The Mongolian term *hangai* is a poetic one meaning 'with many trees' or 'full of forests', a concept that probably reflects the ancient Turkish place name.

[5] Graff, "Strategy and Contingency", p. 46.

[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 51–54. Also Denis Sinor, "The establishment and dissolution of the Turk empire", *The Cambridge History of Inner Asia*, ed. Denis Sinor (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 285–316; p. 308.

[7] Graff, "Strategy and Contingency", pp. 49–50.

[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 56–57.

[9] Colin Mackerras, "The Uighurs", *The Cambridge History of Inner Asia*, ed. Denis Sinor (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 317–342; p. 338. See also his *The Uighur Empire According to the T'ang Dynastic Histories: a Study in Sino-Uighur*

It was not long before the main tribe of the Uighurs, the Yaghlakar; began to wield substantial power in the plain. About twenty years after the forging of the Tang alliance, by 647 AD, the Yaghlakar nobility had the confidence to assume various titles formerly used by the Eastern Turks and to establish their government along the same lines.[10] Slowly but carefully, the clan consolidated power until the sources finally note a critical event. In 742 AD, with the aid of a coalition of Karluk and Basmil, the Uighurs defeated the last khagan of the Second Eastern Turk state. With this success, they expanded their territory westward to Beshbaliq, near present-day Urumchi, and then in the next century to the Ferghana Valley. Two years later in 744 AD, they turned on the Basmil and formally took the grand title not just of khagan but of *Kutlugh bilgai kol khagan*, which announced the emergence of the Uighur Empire.[11] Shortly thereafter, they similarly subjugated the Karluk. For the next century, the Uighurs transformed Mongolia until they fell to another nomadic tribe, the Kirghiz, in 840 AD.[12] Then they dispersed into several groups but later formed the Second Uighur Empire with its capital at Qotcho.

During their hegemony, the Uighurs underwent substantial social and technological changes due to a broad cosmopolitan outlook. This was encouraged by a number of foreign groups that were active in the state. Nevertheless, the Uighurs were never under Chinese influence. Not only did their religions proclaim this independence but so did their choice of advisers and trade partners. The only significant Chinese component consisted of some imperial princesses as wives. On the other hand, the women were of diplomatic importance, allowing the Uighurs to be well aware of the changing political forces in the area. In particular, with China more stable than before, trade was burgeoning. This activity had attracted many Sogdians from Samarkand, Panjikent, Bukhara and the Ferghana Valley. The Sogdians had already been an important factor in the First Eastern Turk Empire; they had been organised into a separate 'tribe', which had even rendered an elite soldiery to the khagan.[13] The Uighurs encouraged Sogdian migration since it was extremely important to the economy, enhancing trade through a vast Sogdian network of contacts. Further, the group excelled in financial matters. When Sogdian-Uighurs were allowed to settle in China, they began to develop a lucrative money market. They stayed there after the Kirghiz invasion and were powerful enough to influence Chinese financial policy. The Tang tried to eliminate this threat in 843 AD, three years after the Uighur downfall, by forbidding their religion, Manichaeism. Manichaean temples seem to have been used as exchanges for the merchants as well as centres of worship and ritual.[14] Nevertheless, the Sogdians did not go away. Much

Relations: 744–840, Asia Publications Series no. 2 (Canberra, 1972), and his "Relations Between the Uyghur State and China's Tang Dynasty, 744–840", *Silk Road Studies* IV (Macquarie University, NSW, Australia, 2000), pp. 195–208.

[10] Mackerras, "The Uighurs", p. 323.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 317.

[12] Michael R. Drompp, "The Uighur-Chinese Conflict of 840–848", *Warfare in Inner Asian History, 500–1800* (Leiden, 2002), pp. 73–104; p. 75.

[13] Edwin G. Pulleybank, "A Sogdian Colony in Inner Mongolia", *T'oaung Pao* 41 (1952), pp. 317–356; p. 349. In 630 AD, the Sogdians in control of the Hami district submitted to the Tang; *ibid.*, 351. There was also a colony in Lop Nor; Paul Pelliot, *Journal Asiatiqu* VII (1916), pp. 111–123.

[14] Samuel N. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: a Historical Survey* (Manchester, 1985), p. 238, as cited in Richard C. Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road: Overland Trade and Cultural Exchanges from Antiquity to the Fifteenth Century* (London, 1999), p. 82.

later under the Mongols this merchant group, by then no longer Manichean but Muslim, were the tax gatherers and customs co-ordinators for the Yuan Dynasty.

Not only were trade and finance significant contributions that the Sogdians brought to the Uighur state but one of their main religions, Manichaeism, was also important. The Uighurs adopted it as the official faith in 763 AD, the first of the very few states to do so. The seat of the eastern diocese was probably located at Qotcho.[15] The first part of the name, *chot*, means 'town'; and it was one of a string of cities along the trade route north of the Tarim Basin. From it, a spur led north over the Tienshan Mountains to Beshbaliq to serve the steppe. The religious conversion that followed this route was particularly impressive since the emphasis on a strict hierarchy of society and vegetarianism clashed completely with the steppe traditions of egalitarianism and meat products. Remnants of the religion can still be detected in Mongolia today, the name of Ahura Mazda being known to children as the ultimate power in the universe. In the eighth century, an emphasis on agriculture was probably a factor that led the Uighurs to leave their narrow valleys and concentrate their power on the wide Orkhon Valley. The well-watered and fertile region allowed them to grow grains and provided the space to construct cities.

Meanwhile, in the Sogdian heartland from the sixth through to the eighth centuries, major innovations in architectural engineering were taking place. Even rich merchants took the opportunity to develop larger and better buildings, first of two-floors and later three storeys. Panjikent is especially noted for this development.[16] Expertise in advanced styles, techniques and materials was another feature that the Sogdians could well have brought to steppe architecture.

Sogdians also served as administrators and translators.[17] Monuments to these skills and successes were erected in stone, and many inscriptions in Sogdian, Runic and Chinese are still scattered around the Orkhon Valley. The Sogidans' prestige and influence are exemplified by the fact that a Sogdian prime minister controlled the last khagan. Retaining only some important city-states from their previous empire, the Sogdian *diaspora* had become acculturated to steppe life and loyally served its rulers. The groups' presence testifies in many ways to the remarkably cosmopolitan content of the Uighur Empire.

Agriculture encouraged urbanisation, but trade did so even more. A market was essential for trade, which at first probably centred on the ruler's seat for the sake of protection and control. The trade brought in by the Sogdians was stimulated by royal support in the form of concessions and security escorts. Presumably, the court became a direct beneficiary; and it may have needed a central storage or treasury in a secure building. Economic advance from trade, accompanied by the Chinese subsidies, led to heightened political activity and religious ritual. The ceremonial for both occurred in a specific area in the mountain range dividing the steppe. There, the Uighurs founded at least one open-air compound, which

[15] Samuel Lieu, "From Iran to South China: The Eastern Progression of Manichaeism", Worlds of the Silk Roads: Ancient and Modern, *Silk Roads Studies* II (Macquarie University, NSW, Australia, 1998), pp. 1–22; p. 9. See also his *Manicheaism in Central Asia and China* (Leiden, 1998).

[16] Boris I. Marshak, "Sogdiana", Part I, *History of Civilizations of Central Asia* III (UNESCO Publishing, 1996), pp. 233–258; pp. 239–242. Panjikent was a minor state, but has been excavated over many seasons by Marshak. Similar material from other cities is unavailable.

[17] Guanuda Zhang, "The Role of the Sogdians as Translators of Buddhist Texts", *Silk Road Studies* VII (Macquarie University, NSW, Australia, 2002), pp. 75–78.

served as a palace. From it, rulers and administrators ran the empire and ultimately created cities.

From this core, the impetus to greater urbanisation was specifically a political one. A serious rebellion against the Tang took place between 755 to 763 AD. It was led by a general of mixed Sogdian and Turkish blood named Roshan (or in Chinese, An Lu-shan, meaning 'bright light').[18] The Chinese were unable to quell it, but the Uighurs did, striking an important blow in 757 AD under Bogu Tengri (Turkish) or Mou-yu (Chinese) Khagan (747 to 759 AD). Notably in that year, the khagan founded Bay Baliq or Rich City. About the same time, he also ordered the construction of a new capital,[19] Ordu Baliq or Royal City, now known as Karabalgasum, in the Orkhon Valley. The location of the first is unknown, but it may be the town on the Selenge River in the original home of the Uighurs near Lake Baikal built by Chinese and Sogdian craftsmen.[20] The capital, however, has been well documented archaeologically[21] and described in historical texts. For example, chroniclers emphasised that it had markets and various trades[22] that included the production of tiles, other ceramics and elaborate decorative stone carving. The capital consisted of a palace complex surrounded by an extensive town and fields in all directions available for agriculture and pasture.

It is inconceivable that such a sophisticated centre as Ordu Baliq, which was favourably compared by contemporaries to the impressive Tang capital, could develop directly from the ranks of tents of a nomadic encampment. To explain this sudden transition, some historians have argued that the city followed Chinese forms[23] but the possibility of a Sogdian contribution to architectural and city planning ideas should not be overlooked. Until now, however, the precursors to the Uighur capital have remained unknown. Fortunately, significant information about the stages of urban development emerges from the discovery in the foothills west of the Orkhon Valley of a palace similar to Ordu Baliq but from the preceding century.

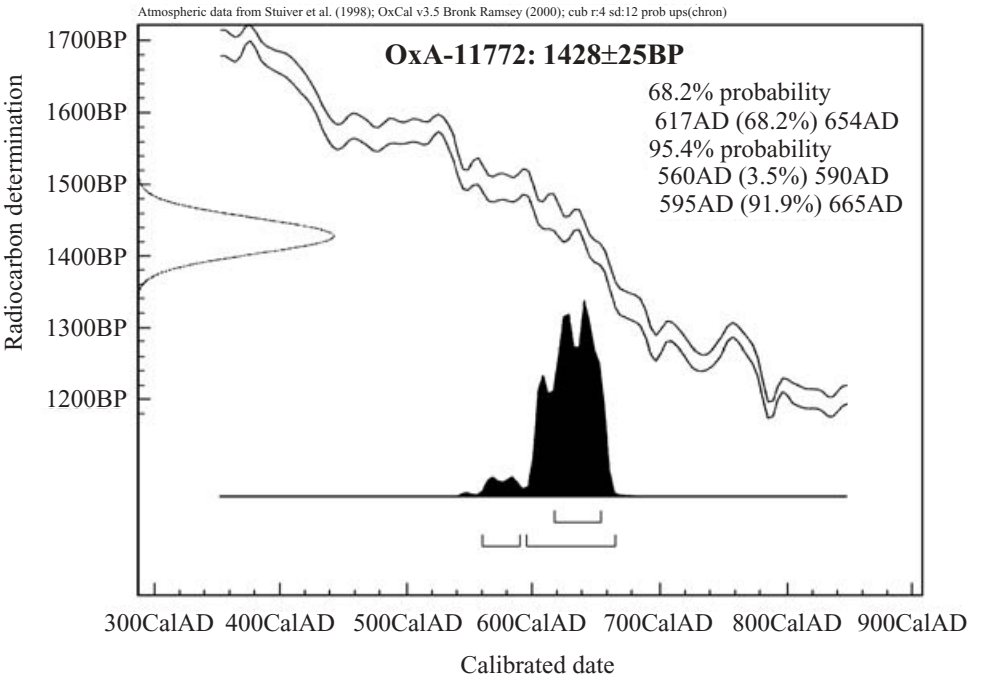
Besides the cultural importance of the new site, it also has a politico-historic importance. Since this complex was built about 650 AD, the date of Uighur hegemony should not be deemed to have started in 744 AD but from the time that the titles of the Eastern Turks were adopted in 647 AD as, not only did they announce at that date that they were the successors to the defunct First Eastern Turk Empire, but they also showed their new status and distinction by building a seat of government.

Dating of the Site

A piece of wooden beam from the northern wall of the new site was dated by radiocarbon analysis. It provided a 91.9 percent probability range of dates from 595 to 665 AD. Although

[18] Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road*, p. 80.
[19] Mackerras, "The Uighurs", p. 337.
[20] Peter Alford Andrews, *Felt Tents and Pavilions: the nomadic tradition and its interaction with princely tentage* (London, 1999), p. 143, in reference to the location and craftsmen but not the name.
[21] V.V. Radloff, *Arbeiten der Orkhon Expeidition: Atlas der Alterthumer der Mongolei* (St Petersburg, 1892) in Russian. Karabalgasum Plan, Plate XXVII; No. 1, complete town; No. 2, palace, western part.
[22] Mackerras, "The Uighurs", p. 337.
[23] For example, *ibid.*, p. 340.

reliable, these dates can be narrowed substantially by using the 86.2 percent range from 617 to 654 AD. Notably neither extent reaches the conventional beginning of the Uighur Empire. However, the historical analysis explains that the group had made an impact on the region by 627 AD and assumed a regional throne in 647 AD. The last date excludes at least the lower portion of the smaller percentile. Therefore, the best possibility is that the building was constructed between 647 and 654 AD. This is a period of only eight years with a convenient working mid-point of 650 AD. Thus the site appears to have been a centre of Uighur power for over a century before the capital was moved to Ordu Baliq.



Radiocarbon Analysis
Radiocarbon Acceleration Unit
Research Laboratory for Archaeology and the History of Art
Oxford University, OxA-11772[24]

Description

Location

The early complex, now called Khukh Ordung or the Blue Palace, consists of two walled adjacent rectangles in a narrow valley in the eastern foothills of the Hangai Mountains approximately 47.01 degrees north and 101.55 degrees east, directly west and slightly south of Karakorum. It lies near the emergence from the southern mountains of the Tsagaan Sumiin Gol or White Temple River. Not far north of the site, the mountains reach

[24] The exact analysis will be published in an upcoming edition of the laboratory's journal, *Archaeometry*.

2,507 metres, so both ranges force the river to turn east just before the site. Then making its way between twin mountains, the river shifts to the northeast. The two mountains form wide gates to or from the site and are both sacred. One is the Tomor Khairkhan Uul (or Powerful Heavenly Mountain) on the northwest, and the other is Under Oboot Uul (or Mountain of the High Holy Cairn) on the southeast, both at 2,312 metres.[25] On the stretch of the river after the mountains, a small settlement or *geer* of felt tents with permanent stables, called Bag Nekdugeer (or First Post), exists at approximately 102.15 degrees north and 47.12 degrees east, halfway along the way to the town of Khotont. However, there are a number of other semi-permanent camps in the area as well. The river then feeds into the swamps northeast of Khotont, enlarged in the spring, to join the Orkhon River. The only way into the Orkhon Valley from the site is by this river or over high passes. Going south down the western side of the Orkhon Valley from Khotont along the main channel of the river, locally named the Young Orkhon, one reaches the base of the valley at Karakorum. There, that river in turn has emerged from the south out of another and very narrow valley. To the west of the Tsagaan Sumiin Gol Valley, the mountains become impenetrable, being closely packed onto one another and rising quickly to 2,700 metres. To the north after the range noted earlier, the mountains begin to lessen into high foothills with sharp soaring ridges and wider valleys. Currently, a road from Khotont leads through this area to western Mongolia.

The Tsagaan Sumiin Gol runs generally west to east at the beginning of the valley. The ruins lie several hundred metres to the north of the river. It is approximately five kilometres from the southern hills and two and a half kilometres from the northern edge of the valley. Beyond the site, not far to the west, first the southern hills close in; and then the northern range soon joins them, leaving a much narrower valley. The hills and mountains are covered in thick forest, mostly pine and larch; but the lowlands are fairly flat and rich in grasses. There are currently no marshy areas or scrub in the vicinity because of good drainage. The wooded hills would have served as protection from large hostile groups while the level narrow valley would have allowed a clear view of any approaching group.

Beyond these advantages, the site is also near a sacred hot spring, which currently has a keeper and has been converted into a small sanatorium, called Jarantain Rashan[26] (or the Waters of Sixty Cures). By jeep, the spring is about twenty to thirty minutes east of Khukh Ordung along the same valley. Two aspects of it could have been important to the ancient Uighurs. First, in winter water rather than ice is better for animals; and the heat of the river helps to expose some grass for fodder. However, the stream is too distant to have greatly benefited the encampment since the water would have frozen by the time it had been carried back. A second factor may have been more important for the inhabitants. At the source of the tributary, there is a small tussocky marsh with tiny pools, the water leaving crystal formations of various bright colours. Today this is believed to be of special medicinal importance, the water supposedly benefiting the eyes, kidneys, heart and other organs. Thus it may have

[25] *Tomor* means 'iron 'or 'metal' but as a descriptive term implies strength and power. The mountain was known at the beginning of the twentieth century as Tomor Godzor Uul or Strong Pinnacle Mountain. Traditionally at the new year or Tsagaan Sar, people go to a shrine there to pray and offer milk, cheese and money. On the other mountain, there is an *oboo* or large pile of stones laboriously carried to the top over the centuries for similar ceremonies throughout the year. Therefore, the two mountains are pilgrimage sites that give heavenly protection to the people of the upper valley of the Tsagaan Sumiin Gol.

[26] Pronounced "arshan".

been thought that both animals and humans gained well-being from the spring, even in winter. It would have been an auspicious arrival and departure point for travelling groups.

Structures

The Khukh Ordung complex consists of two rectangular sections, the western one containing more structures in a formal plan than the eastern one and the latter exhibits more open space than the first one. The western compound is surrounded by three walls and these create, an outer square, a transition zone and then an inner square. The transition zone has small side chambers, and the inner square has a low central platform. The second or eastern section of almost equal size is separated form the main one by a wide corridor. A causeway may exist, outlined by very slight raised kerbs, which comes from the east to the corridor at the middle of the extended north wall.

1. Walls and Entrance

The faint indication of a possible causeway stops at the outer wall. The wall now stands almost two metres high. The western half of approximately seventy-five metres forms one side of a large rectangle. Within this at a distance of approximately ten metres exists a main wall of slightly more than fifty metres along each side, creating another enclosure. The second wall is between eight and ten metres tall, depending upon the degree of erosion, with deposits reaching somewhat less than half the height. Even though complete chunks of the wall have worn away, down to the ground in some places, large sections remain, mostly in the northern wall. In these areas the top is about two and a half metres wide with a relatively even surface, making it easy to walk along. The four corners are rounded and separated from the outer wall by eight metres.

The entrance through the high second wall into the western square is mid-way along the eastern side. The portals are heavily eroded and now reach about eight metres, but they are higher than the connecting wall.



View from portal of northeast high wall. Main entrance to left with road up to inner wall.

The width of the entrance at those points is about fourteen metres, but erosion has filled the gap. Moreover, there is probably a raised threshold underneath because the gap, itself, is five metres high. Otherwise, it would not have accumulated proportionally more deposit than the walls have done. As a result, there is a small hill from the corridor into the compound. The gateway could have once held massive wooden doors of vertical beams like a stockade. It leads into an inner court through low walls, about half a metre high, that end at the inmost wall.



Jeep facing the inner compound, it is between the two entrance portals on the east side.

The second part of the whole complex is directly adjacent to the outer eastern wall of the large compound. A corridor exists between the high wall of the western section and the eastern compound. Both sections are connected through the corridor by low walls that extend eastward from the northeastern and southeastern corners of the high wall. These walls are continued to form the northern and southern boundaries of the second section. Therefore overall, the second wall of the chief compound, directing the lines of the eastern square, and the shared outer wall on either side of the main gates in the middle fold make both areas part of a single unit. Two more low walls inside the corridor also connect the two sections. These extra walls divide the corridor into three equal portions with the gate in the middle one.

2. Western Section

A. Intermediate Zone

The main section holds inside the second wall, a third wall, which provides an intermediate zone before the inner square. The wall is quite low, about half a metre high, and is parallel to the main wall at a distance of about six and a half metres. On opposite sides, those of the north and south, small side chambers reach from the third wall to the large one. The rooms vary in size, some barely big enough to turn around in while one is about eighteen metres in length. One corner of the square has a complicated set of radiating lines that is difficult to attribute to rooms, suggesting that they may have been later alterations. On the ground level, there are no openings in the low walls; so any access point would have been raised

at least half a metre. In contrast, the opposite sides have no chambers. In the western wall, there is an opening at ground level, wide enough for a person to pass into the zone from the inner square. The lack of any chambers along the eastern wall keeps the entrance to the compound completely clear. The zone has two entrances at ground level; no other area in the entire complex has even one.



View from south western high wall over southern chambers.

B. Inner Square

The third wall encloses the inner square with walls approximately thirty-eight metres long. The enclosure is flat and open except for a slightly raised platform. Without walls or objects in it, the amount of space is difficult to judge. However, some sense of scale is provided by a herd of twenty-seven horses with three foals that were in it. Even through they were spread out grazing, they took up a fraction of the expanse.



View of inner square.

C. Central Rectangle

Opposite the main gate, there is a rectangular platform. It rises above the ground about three-quarters of a metre with well-worn sides especially at the ends. It is about eighteen metres long and eleven and a half metres wide. It is approximately ten metres from the north and south walls, slightly more from the back wall and fifteen metres from the front one. The surface is flat; but at the southern end there is a circle, rising for another half metre. It is somewhat elliptical but is basically round with a diameter of about three and a half metres. It is approximately two-thirds of the distance from the front wall and again almost two-thirds of the distance from the north wall, suggesting that it could have played a pivotal role in the layout of the measurements of the complex.

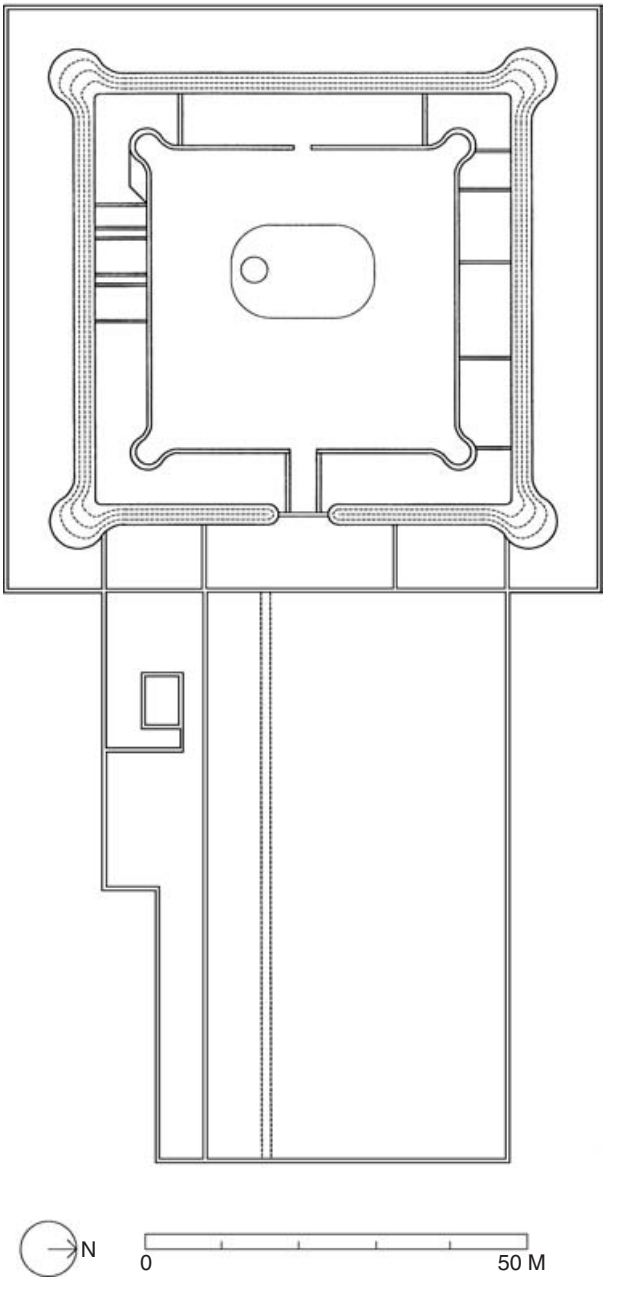
3. Eastern Section

The eastern section is not square but has more length than width and lacks a straight stretch along the southern wall. The gravelly flood plain below it may have altered the original plan. The main walls are seventy-five metres long, which matches the side of the outer square of the main section, and fifty metres wide at the western end and thirty-three and a half metres wide at the eastern one. It, therefore, covers a total space of slightly less than 375 square metres. Like a folding case easy to transport, the west wall matches the confronting east wall of the second square of the main section. In general, the outer walls of the eastern section are low. However on the southern side by the river, the land drops away, creating a much higher wall from the outside. It is wide enough to walk along, probably protecting the building from possible floods. Adjacent to that wall inside is a honeycomb of small rooms and intersecting walls with deep floors (not shown on the plan). A conspicuous square could have been a water tank. There is no specific corridor that connects any of the rooms, nor are there any entranceways. The rooms are closed off by a low wall about three-quarters of a metre high that runs east to west, ending at the outer walls. Parallel to this wall towards the north is a shallow ditch nearly half a metre deep. The remaining portion covers two-thirds of the compound and is flat with no other structures.

Construction

The complex exhibits construction methods and materials used for brick buildings as well as tent camps. Although the builders combined these features, the dominating influence on the layout was the camp. Much of that structure was not built up, so the physical remains consist mostly of brick walls and roof tiles.

Sandy-white sun-dried mud brick was the building material for the walls. Only in the high intermediate wall is it still in brick form. This high wall received considerable attention and was made from brick throughout. The blocks received tensile strength from wooden beams that penetrate through the wall. The beams form horizontal rows that presumably start at the ground. Now only eight rows are visible above the deposit, so there are probably fifteen in all. Within each row, the beams are separated by intervals of about ten centimetres. The rows progress upward at intervals of eighty to ninety centimetres. Many beams have completely



Khukh Ordung
By Chi-Son Lei after site sketch by Judy Kolbas.

disappeared, leaving holes through the entire wall. The wood is pale red and extremely light, perhaps spruce. The reinforcing beams of wood may not have been necessary for support since the walls are thick.



The high north wall consisting of layers of mud black between rows of wooden beams (mostly rotted away) seen as square holes.

Their purpose may have been, rather, to absorb shocks from earth tremors since the region is highly prone to these. The close layering of the beams was not derived from Chinese or Sogdian methods, however. Instead, it may have followed the regional technique for externally reinforcing the intersecting bender tent of aplings. For example, in a mural painting of Temple 9 at Bezalik, a tent appears encased by nine ribs, starting from the ground.[27] Since the intersecting bender type was probably well-known and was part of the development of the trellis tent, the same method of stabilisation presented itself to this new construction. However, in the later capital, this feature does not appear.

Roof tiles found at the site are of kiln-fired clay. There is quite a variety; one piece is ribbed, and two others have a depressed level that could have allowed them to connect into a roof strut. All of the recovered pieces are curved to varying degrees and are approximately one centimetre thick. The colour of the clay varies as well as the consistency. Basically, it is pale greyish pink. Most pieces are glazed inside and out with a grey-black or grey-brown coating. In some tiles, the texture is coarse, almost pebbly, while others are fine and tight. The bottom of several unglazed pieces shows part of the manufacturing technique; after the clay was pressed into the mould, it was covered with a fine burlap sacking material and then fired, the undersides being completely covered with clear imprints of woven fabric. All examples exhibit a consistent density of taut thin threads, one even showing a fold in the fabric. Presumably, the tiles were manufactured at the site. The Uighurs continued to use this type of material in their next capital at Ordu Baliq and much later at Qotcho. It was reported after 1220 AD that they had "clay roofed houses and glazed windows".[28] Shards of pottery, pieces of metal or fragments of fabric were not discovered; however, no excavation beyond the surface was undertaken. Our current knowledge suggests that

[27] Andrews, *Felt Tents and Pavilions*, pp. 161–169. At first, he believes the bender type to have come from northern India with the Buddhist ascetics but ends with current examples from the Nanay Tungus, so the type of structure need not have been imported.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 160.

the site was evacuated in an orderly manner with moveable objects carefully packed and transported.

Camp procedures influenced the construction of the rest of the site. The shape followed the rectangular layout of a camp with surrounding walls and the position of the work areas as well as the orientation. The low thresholds copied the floor plan of an individual tent. Finally, the flat assembly area of the main square and the larger section of the adjacent square were probably prepared, following the procedure used today of clearing and levelling the ground before erecting a *geer*.

Interpretation

To interpret the function of the complex requires an understanding of some of the main features of the culture. From that, it is immediately evident that the site is an innovative enhancement of the core of social cohesion, the royal camp.[29] The court would have been installed at the permanent site of Khukh Ordung for at least part of the year. Central to this camp was the khagan's pavilion, which was not only a gathering place for all Uighurs to partake in political and religious ceremonies but was also a location to receive foreigners and awe allied tribesmen. It was not just a shy copy of other capitals, a modest rendition of a Chinese or Sogdian city, but rather a display of Uighur superiority.[30] The khagan and his clan excelled because of new technology and good management of skilled people. As a result, this complex was intended as an exhibition hall to glorify Uighur power.

From the early days of the Uighurs' emergence, a significant development in new forms of tent was changing society. Earlier tent types had been constructed by bending saplings into shape and covering them with leather or branches. It was impossible to move unless the whole tent was lifted onto a cart,[31] so people were generally restricted to forests or scattered woods. This basic type of accommodation continued for a number of centuries even after new types emerged. However during the Turk Empire, the trellis tent had appeared,[32] made of several folding diagonal lattices fitted together. There were three great advantages to this tent. First, the pre-fabricated sections allowed the erection of small or large tents as needed. Secondly, each section collapsed into a narrow piece similar to a board that could be transported easily by camel. This flexibility gave the Turks a much greater ability to move their families and livestock faster and further than before.[33] In particular, they could move across the grasslands, the best pasture for horses and sheep. In short, the folding tent gave them the features of steppe nomads as known today. Finally, the new tent was much stronger than the bender type, which allowed a felt covering. Therefore, the thick and waterproof

[29] *Ibid.*, pp. 125–126. *Ordu* meant "the great headquarters tent" or royal tenthold.

[30] Although a number of historians assume northern tribes were under a continuing civilising influence from the Chinese, others like Wittfogel note that "cultural opposition counterbalanced" technological borrowing; *ibid.*, p. 223.

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 172.

[32] There is no specific indication that the trellis tent actually existed during the Eastern Turk Empire. However, at least the prototypes were being created; *ibid.*, p. 131. The earliest possible depictions of one comes from the Uighur period, first on a Uighur tombstone, *ibid.*, p. 174, and then in a pottery model dated seventh to eighth century from the Sogdian heartland; *ibid.*, pp. 176–177.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 173.

material completely enwrapped the tent, providing more warmth and protection from sun, cold, wind and rain. Presumably, the standard of living and health rose substantially.

There were practical and ritualistic procedures for making and breaking the new kind of camp, which explain much of the design and purpose of the Blue Palace. In particular, the complex follows the arrangement of an important and extensive camp. First, the surrounding walls enclose a spacious open area. Descriptions, either pictorial or written, are not available for this period; but, for the Khitan Dynasty (907 to 1125 AD), the walls formed a rectangle and were made from portable material like wood or cloth. They were open at the corners, or one wall was removed for special receptions.[34] Because of the gaps, the walls provided privacy more than protection from wind or attack. The Uighur structure considered here, in contrast to a standard moving camp, did ensure security since there is only one entrance; and the walls are massive and high. The original basic form of a camp was elaborated for a royal enclosure displaying the khagan's military power. Notably, it had two square sections. According to another contemporary report about the Khitans, "the Large Forbidden Enclosure was one hundred and ten paces long on each side; in it were ten felt tents and seven black military tents. Outside the Large and Small Forbidden Enclosures were ten thousand armoured Ch'i-tan soldiers equipped with lances, swords, banners, bows and arrows".[35] These reports from the Khitan period reflect the form of royal camp that the Uighurs had probably already developed.

After the camp layout was established at Khukh Ordung, the main enclosure was adapted to correspond to the most advanced mode of dwelling, the trellis tent. It did so by having only one entrance. The similarity to a tent continues with the orientation of that entrance, which had religious and social importance. Early in the seventh century, religious beliefs had undergone major development. The Turkish conception of the afterlife had changed from one of roaming spirits in a nether world to one of a permanent rest in the underworld. Tomb structures and burial grounds had appeared. Also, the coalition of shamanistic spirits had given way to a superior deity, the sun. A supreme god required a special person to mediate between it and the community of men. The change included a permanent seat for the khagan to perform and supervise the ritual. Part of this activity was to regularly render incantations and honours to the sun, but one of the main features was to face the sun as a sign of submission.[36] The religious reform persisted and was reflected later in Khitan times when, "after the recognition ceremony, the emperor emerged from his tent in the morning and, facing the sun, bowed four times". Also during the Khitan period, a contemporary reported, "all huts and houses as well as tents and cart-tents faced east".[37] This encouraged people to face the rising sun as a means of receiving its blessing every day. From at least the Turk confederation to the Mongols, about seven hundred years, the door was in the east.[38]

[34] *Ibid.*, pp. 240–241.

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 250. Andrews gives much further detail in the surrounding pages. For camp layout, see also Denis Twitchett and Klaus-Peter Tietze, "The Liao", *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 6, *Alien Regimes and Border States: 907–1368* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 43–153, p. 98.

[36] Andrews, *Felt Tents and Pavilions*, p. 124.

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 251.

[38] *Ibid.*, pp. 121, 145, 160. The Khitans, an early Mongol culture, started changing some of the pattern. The top rank continued to face east, but the second tier faced south and the third west; *ibid.*, pp. 250–251. It was the southern orientation that the imperial Mongols adopted, which they follow to this day.

This orientation meant that, socially, the seat of honour was at the back or west and that the ruler faced east when he received guests.

The orientation was crucial but a longer lasting concept was also taking hold. The new type of tent in its turn influenced cosmology. A steppe dweller to this day cannot shake the system off when he follows traditional astrology. The axis of the universe began at the central hearth, proceeded out through the roof smoke hole provided by the new tent and connected to the North Star. All the world revolved around this line, so the heavens had power over the events of each day. This axial concept applied most specifically to the ruler's tent, adding to the khagan's spiritual and political role.

The walls and enclosures of Khukh Ordung reveal another aspect of Uighur conceptions of the world. The entire universe was strictly ordered, and the number three held the key to it. As a result, the complex was modelled according to this number. As already mentioned, the interior space in both sections is divided into thirds, both east to west and north to south in the main one and north to south in the ancillary one. Two-thirds of two of these spaces is open while the remaining third holds special structures. In the main compound, the assembly area commands two-thirds of the space whereas the circle in the platform delineates the beginning of the khagan's area. In the long eastern section, the inside wall clearly divides the compartments towards the river to the south from the remaining two-thirds of clear ground to the north. A further indication of the importance of the number is that there are three walls surrounding the main section even though the outer and inner ones are low. The middle wall is the impressive one, probably signifying the khagan's world and realm. Finally, the corridor at the entrance is divided into three sections. Again, the middle part was the important one since it encompassed the gates to the khagan. Therefore, both sections and the intermediate corridor are divided by the rule-of-three. As the basic proportion, the number seems to have reflected the design of the universe; that is, the subterranean world, the surface one of men, which included the lower sky and weather, and the blue heaven above, a fundamental shamanic belief. In this scheme, the khagan was lord of the middle world. He had great responsibilities in it, which included keeping it balanced with the other two.

Another reflection of the camp at Khukh Ordung is the service area. For any camp, it was and still is usually to the side of the tent. The chambers on the north and south sides of the main section of the palace reflect that arrangement. However, many important functions also take place immediately in front of the tent, including piling useful items such as wood and sheered wool and drying cheese or meat. Similar functions probably took place in the smaller rectangle immediately in front of the main section to meet the needs of events taking place in the main one. The function of the second rectangle should not be obscured by the fact that it is more formal than that of a normal camp. Instead, the builders apparently sought a visual consistency to the two sections. Further, the ruler's wives and extended family members could have lived in this section rather than the other one, thereby leaving the main enclosure strictly for ceremonies and the khagan's official *geer*. If so, the eastern section too kept the preparation area on the side. That function is reinforced by the fact that the rooms are too small for animal enclosures or monk's cells. Further, the channel and especially the tank seem most likely to have held water for industrial purposes like arms manufacturing and fulling of felt or for domestic uses like cooking for feasts, suggesting it was an active work area rather than being limited to storage.

Inside the main western section, the various-sized rooms on the left and right sides were probably places to store valuable silver and gold utensils, robes of honour, furs and silk for ceremonies and especially the silk payment from the Chinese. On the other hand, no rooms exist on the back or front walls, leaving open space behind the inner walls perhaps for carts and baggage supplying food and carpets. The sources imply that every valuable item travelled with the ruler as he toured his realm. However, this complex indicates that a good deal of special equipment could have been left safely if entrusted to a guard.

The open area allowed the ranks of loyalists to pay homage, receive their instructions and partake in religious and political festivals. Within the space, the platform was the central focus of activity. Politically, it was most probably the location of the entertainment pavilion before the khagan's tent. The entertainment would have included presentations, especially dances, for the khagan by his subjects and visiting envoys.[39] It would also have been the serving area, initially for long drawn-out drinking sessions and then for the mass feast if imperial and current Mongol traditions observe the same pattern. Therefore, the khagan's tent would have been placed between it and the back wall. The small opening in that wall would have permitted the khagan and those attending him, such as his chief wife or prime minister, to retire without going through the ranks of courtiers. The raised circle on the south of the platform is extremely puzzling. It could have been a special location for the great urn that held the local intoxicating beverage or the gigantic stewing pot from which food was ladled out to participants in the feast. Other than these two food-related possibilities, there does not seem to be a reasonable explanation for it at this point. Later designs did not include this feature. However, the ceremony that probably took place at this circle was expanded at the next capital of Ordu Baliq. The place grew into a special reception-drinking area at the end of another platform. The improvement took the form of a solid round brick tower that rose high above the entire city and palace complex. The actual serving platform at Ordu Baliq, however, remained in the same location; that is, in front of the khagan, but farther away from him and more centred in the compound. This long platform, acting like a table, would always have been the place reserved for serving food and especially drink, if current Mongolian custom faithfully follows this tradition. It would not have been for receiving or distributing gifts; those would have been handed directly to or from the ruler.

There are a few other curiosities about the design that need more consideration. First and most perplexing is the lack of a direct way into Khukh Ordung. There are walls completely around it and of some height immediately before the grand gates. People had to walk in, climbing over these low impediments. In many cultures or situations, thresholds have substantial symbolism. Presumably, such was the practice with the Uighurs. One manifestation was probably reflected in later imperial Mongol customs: the death penalty was punishment for anyone stepping on the entrance floor beam of a khagan's *geer*. A less strict taboo is still honoured in Mongolia. If such behaviour did exist, then Uighur threshold rituals would be one more custom taken from the tent and applied to this building.

Another curious point is that, in both Khukh Ordung and Ordu Baliq, the grand avenue does not lead directly to the massive gates. Instead, the entourage probably circled around the complex, presumably on horseback, and then had to dismount at the outer north wall

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 249.

of Khukh Ordung. The corridor restricted people from a wide band to a narrow, compact group. This funnel secured the entrance and equally, it seems, inspired awe. A nomad used to the wide steppe and low tents would have been impressed by the tall walls and grand scale of the complex. However, being constrained between two walls, he would have felt a most unusual sensation, somewhat like fear, made up of both claustrophobia and the knowledge that there was no ready escape. Once he was inside, however, the space opened up with few layers of structures to manoeuvre through or impede a view of the ruler. Moreover, the interior would have amply compensated him for the blank outer austerity. The colourful tents and pavilions would have raised his spirits, providing a roller-coaster of emotions he would not soon forget. Indeed, both palaces turned inward; all activities were directed towards the khagan's person. The impact of his glory was an internal and privileged event, making the whole palace crucial to the Uighur sense of glory. As a result, there was probably a ceremony of approach that included the complete symbol. A representation of this ceremony seems to be the nine-fold circuit performed inside the courtyard of Ordu Baliq by the new Chinese wife of the khagan in 828 AD.[40] Therefore, it seems probable that groups coming to pay allegiance to the khagan performed at least one such sedate and stately lap of honour, going all the way around the entire complex.[41] In practical terms, this procession allowed the khagan and his entourage time to prepare inside for a reception.[42] Impressive processions were, perhaps, one of the main features of Khukh Ordung; the palace provided the centre in a special setting for grand activities. The atmosphere created at its entrance in the corridor was another way to display increased Uighur political and military might.

In spite of the importance of the palace, the khagan was probably not continuously in residence. At times, he may well have moved to different locales to perform seasonal rituals. For example, the Khitans had major ones in the seventh and eight months of the steppe calendar or in mid-autumn as the first snow was about to fall.[43]

The palace was the spiritual core of the empire because it held the ruler and because of its location. In this region of the Oitken Mountains existed the Uighurs' two most sacred sites, the Cave of the Ancestral Spirits and the Shrine of the Earth Mother. From that foundation, the Uighurs acknowledged the spiritual power they drew from this special place, which is best expressed in their own words. In the accession speech in 716 AD of Bilgai Khagan, there is no doubt that he placed great faith in sacred geography:

> If the Turk qaghan rules from the Otuken Mountains there will be no trouble in the realm. . . . . A land better than the Otuken Mountains does not exist at all! The place from which the tribes can be controlled is the Otukern Mountains. Having stayed in this place, I came to an amicable agreement with the Chinese people. They give us gold, silver and silk in abundance. The words of the Chinese people have always been sweet and the materials of the Chinese people have always been soft. Deceiving by means of sweet words and soft materials, the Chinese are said to cause the remote peoples to come close in this manner. After such a people have settled close

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 148.

[41] This process is still evident today in the region. Ingrained in Mongols is the circumambulation of a sacred or ancient site. For small *oboos*, three times is usually preferred, for large monasteries like Erdene Zuu, once is enough. The walk always proceeds clockwise, whatever the starting point, following the sun.

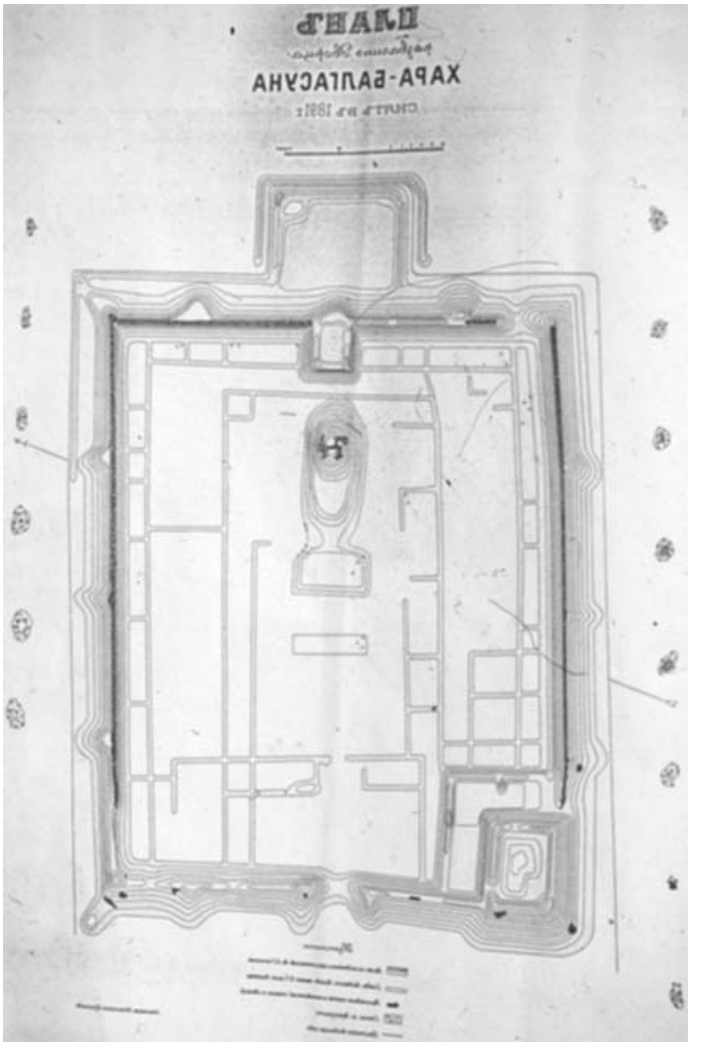
[42] An idea of the complicated protocol that attended such receptions is indicated by contemporary Tang procedures for receiving steppe envoys; *ibid.*, pp. 130–131.

[43] *Ibid.*, p. 265.

to them, they are said to plan their ill will there. . . . . If you intend to settle in the Choghay Mountains or on the Togultum Plain in the south, O Turk people, you will die! . . . . If you stay in the Otuken Mountains, you will live forever dominating the tribes![44]

Comparisons

The impact of Khukh Ordung is measured not only by the resounding words of a khagan but also by its influence on other Uighur structures. The closest comparison is Ordu Baliq



Ordu Baliq
By V. V. Radloff (Plate XXVII).

[44] *Ibid.*, pp. 129–130.

or Karabalgasum from the eighth century. There are also two other buildings that exhibit the same layout, one at Bezalik, northeast of Turfan, and another near Qotcho. Some parts of these Ordos sites have been dated to the seventh and eighth centuries, making them contemporaries of Khukh Ordung and Ordu Baliq.[45] The basic design of these four constructions is similar, but it received interesting modifications.

Ordu Baliq or Karabalgasum

The Uighur capital of Ordu Baliq or Karabalgasum was excavated in the early 1890s by a Russian team headed by V.V. Radloff. The work remains the most extensive and reliable on many sites within the Orkhon Valley.[46] The city had a grid plan with the palace on the edge of the eastern side.[47] The palace lay at the northern end of a long boulevard with most of the city to the west of the boulevard and no buildings beyond or in front of the palace. At its start, the boulevard has an open area on the east side, perhaps a preparation field for processions, and ends at the park surrounding the palace complex. The boulevard provides a straight line-of-sight that reaches the back of the palace, not the front gates. Therefore, a procession moving towards the palace would have seen above the ramparts the imposing high western tower. On the tower's broad surface would have been erected a gold canopied pavilion, which the clear sky would have allowed to glint with 'sun rabbits'[48] visible for many kilometres.[49] The procession, however, could not have entered the court at the western end. Instead, it would have emerged into a large square park surrounding the palace and probably wound through it around outer columns. There are eight detached gigantic columns on the north and south sides, which stretch the entire length of the ceremonial section. After that area, a procession would have entered, presumably from the north, a corridor running along the eastern wall of the main compound unit it reached the massive gates in the middle.

At this point, the palace of Ordu Baliq begins to resemble the surface ruins of Khukh Ordung. The most striking similarities are the juxtaposition of two compounds, their orientation and the internal arrangement of structures. In particular, both palaces have the same type of corridor between the ceremonial compound and the second section as well as massive entrances facing approximately east.[50]

To enter the main section, the visitor has to mount a hill similar in height to the one at Khukh Ordung. The visitor of the eighth century would have probably dismounted at this point and proceeded on foot, his horse joining many others in the side park. Inside the main section, there is more elaboration than found at Khukh Ordung. However, first, the gates lead to an area with a small exit into the main square. This seems to be a preparation area in

[45] Chao Hua-shan, "New Evidence of Manichaeism in Asia: a Description of Some Manichaeian Temples in Turfan", *Monumenta Serica* 44 (1996), pp. 267–315; pp. 291–292. He has identified several grottoes as Manichaean with paintings underneath later Buddhist ones. For example, in the northern area of Bezalik, the caves are from the mid-seventh century. In Tuyok, all the temples are of this date. The layout of these caverns, however, is not similar to the above-ground buildings discussed here, which originally probably were not temples.

[46] The Orkhon River flows north to join the Selenge River that ultimately feeds into Lake Baikal.

[47] This provides a clue that at Khukh Ordung people may have lived beyond the western wall.

[48] The term 'sun rabbits' is a Mongolian expression for brilliant darting light.

[49] Andrews, *Felt Tents and Pavilions*, pp. 143–146. He interprets the sources to say "the castle roof" whereas the "Hundred-man Pavilion" was spread out atop a solid brick tower.

[50] The orientation at Karabalgasum is not east in cardinal terms but east-southeat, perhaps a practical alignment since the sun rises especially in that direction in winter.

which weapons were probably removed and last minute instructions given. On each side of this area, there are other additions, in particular a high square bulwark on the southeastern corner of the compound. Low walls separate another area of similar size on the northeastern corner, which may have stored visitors' weapons and extra cloaks. Therefore, this initial area has three divisions, similar to the corridor at Khukh Ordung. After the area, the structure forms a square as at Khukh Ordung, which is also divided into thirds. Moreover, chambers are on the left and right of the main square with raised thresholds. However, the rooms are more complex; and they are, notably, banked right up to the wall at even divisions while before them are long, open sections.

Besides the columns and internalised forecourt, Ordu Baliq has three more structural additions to the design of Khukh Ordung. First, the location for the khagan's tent behind the platform has been highly emphasized with a massive and elevated stage that has an enormous solid brick tower at its west end. Another addition is just behind it, a raised walled square that overlooks an outer double-walled square. That outer rectangle is one-third of the length of the wall and occupies the middle portion of it. Finally, there are two serving platforms, the western one higher than the forward one. The major one is in the centre of the compound. However, the forward one is about one-third the distance from the front, a reversed position of the proportion in Khukh Ordung.

The platforms are not the only adjustment to the fundamental measure of three. The number of walls observes it as well. The external rows of circular towers on the north and south sides could represent an outer wall, but they do not extend around the whole palace. Further, the inner wall is lost among the double rows of side chambers. Only something less permanent than brick might originally have screened the space. Therefore, in some aspects, new objectives seem to have modified old principles.

On the other hand, another striking similarity between Ordu Baliq and Khukh Ordung is the structure in front of the main compound. At both sites, the ceremonial centre is separated from the eastern section by a corridor large enough for two jeeps to pass each other. Equally, the wall of the eastern compound is directly opposite the massive gates and is unbroken obscuring the khagan's tower. Curiously, the eastern block at Ordu Baliq seems to be placed slightly north of the main one according to Radloff's drawing; so the southern and northern walls of both sections do not line up with each other as they do at Khukh Ordung. The walls in and around the eastern compound of Ordu Baliq are again low, having actually disappeared more than a century ago along the corridor except for the middle third. However, even that is almost impossible to find now. There were no buildings on any side of this section except the palace. Inside, the eastern section was split into three equal parts, the middle one remaining completely bare. On each side, the space is filled to capacity with one chamber after another, which suggests that the service function was substantially increased from that at Khukh Ordung.

The adjacent structure in both sites was related in either length or breadth to the ceremonial compound. The one at Ordu Baliq is actually shorter on the southern and northern walls than on the eastern and western ones. However, those match the eastern and western walls of the main portion of the ceremonial section in contrast to Khukh Ordung. In spite of the eastern block's important role at Ordu Baliq, only its position and the similar lengths of the northern and southern walls relate it to the main compound. Otherwise, there is no

apparent attachment by means of walls. On its own without the model of Khukh Ordung, this section has not been considered an integral part of the palace until this study.

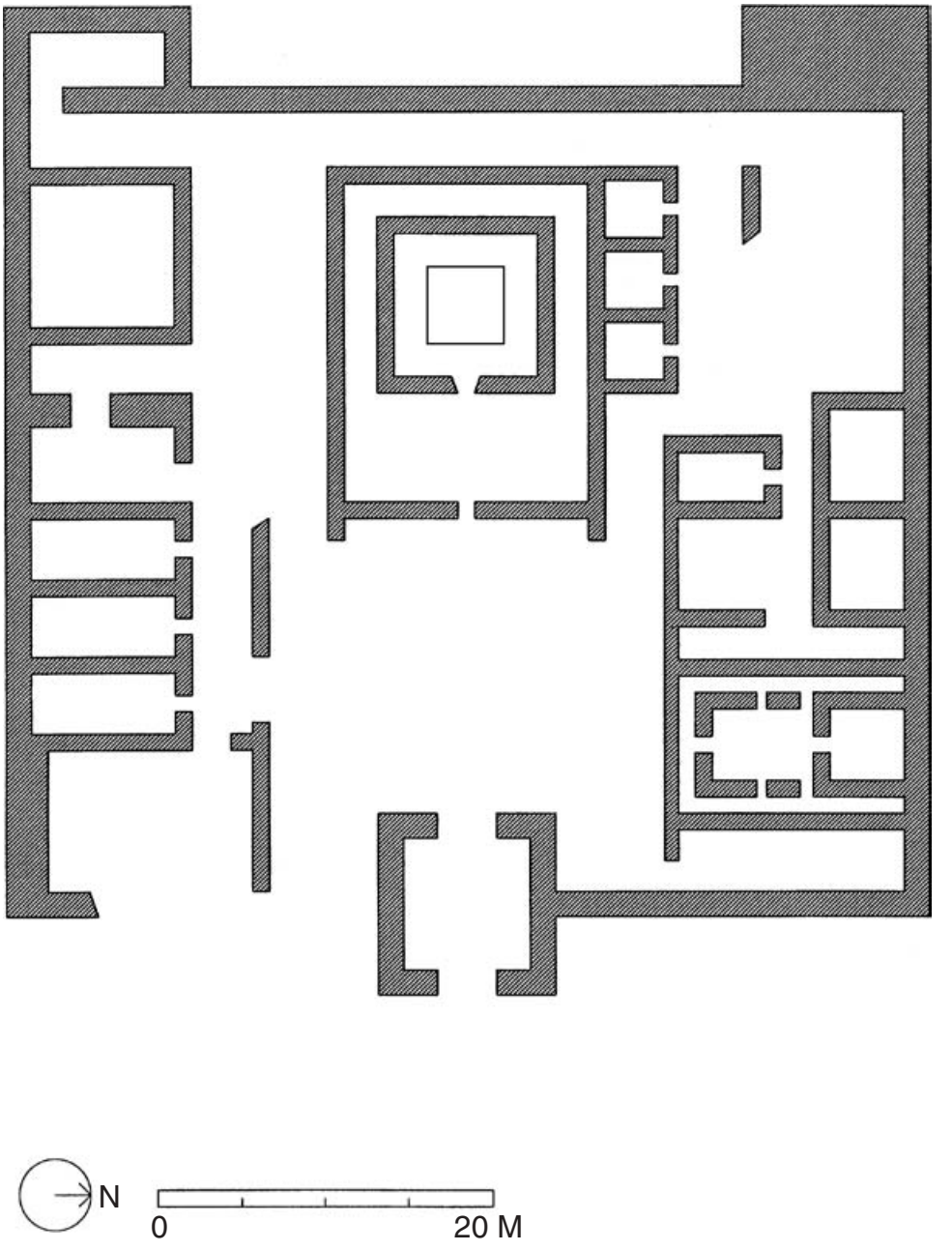
Tschyqqan Kol

An adaptation of the main palace at Karabalgasum is evident at Tschyqqan Kol near Qotcho. The Turkish name probably means 'Khan's Ear Lake', which adequately suggests the shape of the body of water. There are several buildings surrounding this lake and some on its island. Temple 7, excavated by Albert von le Coq,[51] has features similar to the Orkhon complexes. First of all, the building is square and has three walls, each with only one entrance. The large square portal is a reduced rendition of the interior area at Ordu Baliq. Secondly, the area just after the gate is open with no structures immediately beyond it. Then the compound is divided into thirds, having rooms on opposite sides but none at the back or front. Also similar to Khukh Ordung and Ordu Baliq, it has several chambers that have no floor-level entrances. Beyond the open area in the large compound of Tschyqqan Kol, another square copies the wall, entrance orientation and reception area of the encompassing structure. Within the second square, there is another wall with a single entrance in the same orientation as the previous two. Within the third compound is the final similarity, a rectangular platform, which occupies almost all the space. The focal point of the whole compound is this platform, which is about a third of the distance from the back wall. The plan provides a straight axis from the outside wall through the outer courts to the inner room. Once again, some of the significant features of the plan are based on the number three, in particular the group of walls around the platform and the division of space from side-to-side. Thus, the compound follows the same basic pattern of Khukh Ordung. The most crucial differences are the restriction of the view to the platform from the open courtyard, an area that would have provided the only place for assembly, and the lack of enough space for a tent behind the platform.

Bezalik

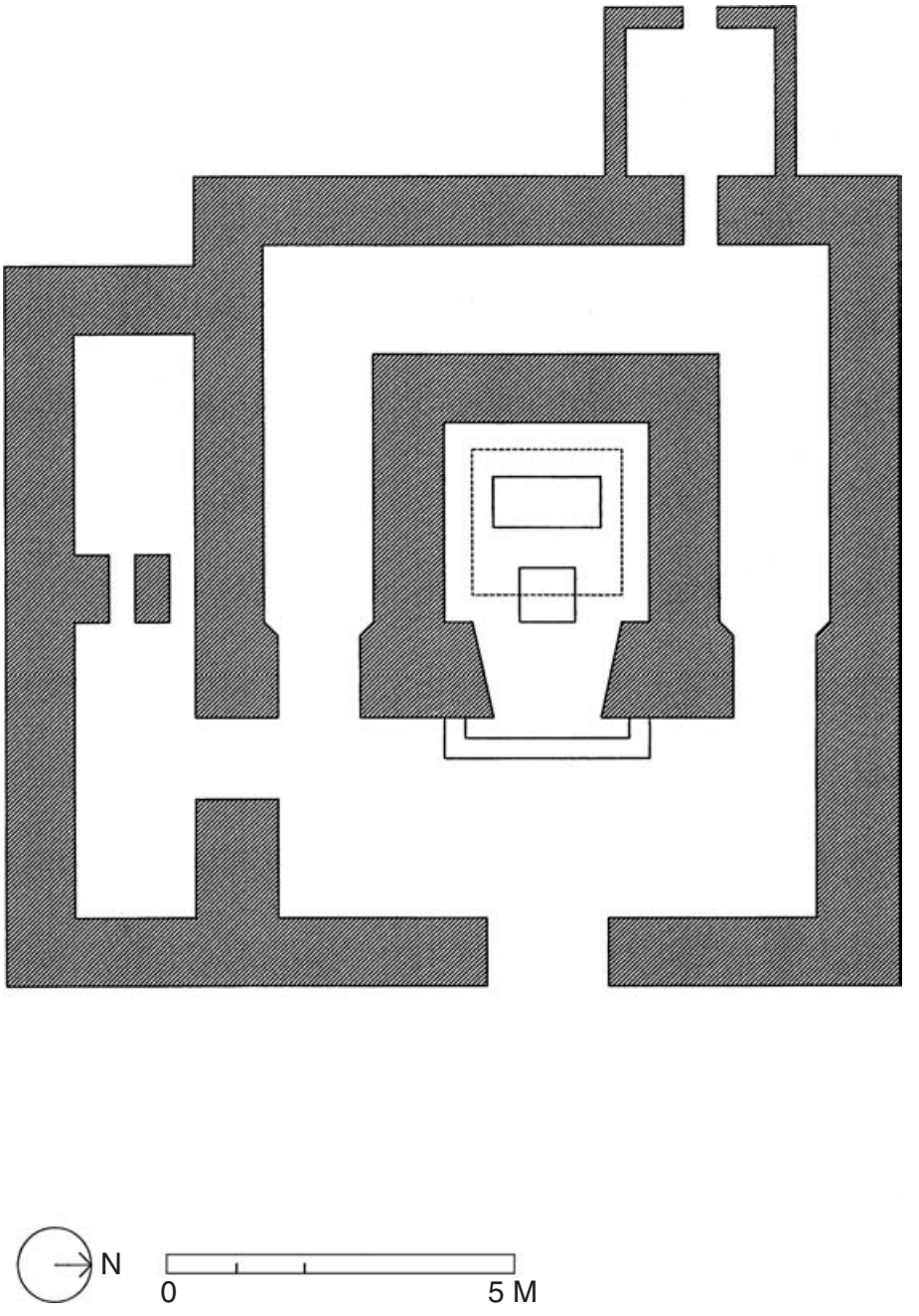
A structure simpler but similar was also discovered by von le Coq at Bezalik in Temple 9.[52] The layout is again very close to the ceremonial section of both Khukh Ordung and Ordu Baliq. First, the building is rectangular. Secondly, there is a single entrance in the east to every courtyard. Thirdly, there is a central platform at the core of the building. Finally, there are chambers on the side of the compound. The second wall is the important one, like Khukh Ordung, with large chunky portals leading to the middle court. A step before the portals provides a small assembly area level with the raised inner court. Inside the last court, there are two platforms, like Ordu Baliq; and the main one is oblong and closer to the far west end. The rectangular extension beyond the west wall behind the platform is similar to that of Ordu Baliq, but a small exit reflects the same opening at Khukh Ordung. Notably, the extension seems to be rudimentary as does the service area, which is limited to only one

[51] Albert von le Coq, *Chotscho: Koenglich Preussische Turfan-Expeditionen* (Berlin, 1913), p. 12. Le Coq has the entrance in the west, which is probably a printer's error.
[52] *Ibid.*, p. 14.



Tschyqqan Kol, Temple 7
By Chi-Son Lei after von le Coq.

side of the building on the south. The reduction continued with the lack of a third wall; but the small building still remains open to the sky in the centre, as indicated by the dotted square of the drawing. In this structure, the close walls dilute much of the visual impact



Bezalik, Temple 9
By Chi-Son Lei after von le Coq.

of space divided by the rule-of-three. Nevertheless, the platform seems to be the point of register both east to west and north to south, even if inaccurately so. This building provides a clearer view than the previous one of the platforms from the various courts, but once again there is no space for a royal tent behind the main platform.

The comparison of these three sites to Khukh Ordung indicates that all of them have similar orientation, walled courts with a single entrance and a rectangular ceremonial platform near the western end or in the centre. These factors imply that their planners shared the same concepts and cultural cohesion. The two located in Mongolia, namely Khukh Ordung and Ordu Baliq, are imperial in context while the two in China seem to have functioned for restricted royal ceremonies. The design and measurements of the Mongolian compounds are comprehensive, using a conceptual framework of the rule-of-three and clear, straight lines-of-sight to the royal figure. The minor structures, however, copied the royal design without fully employing its underlying principles. It seems, therefore, that the builders of the smaller sites were not 'architectsy' and did not understand the fundamental theory of the style. Instead, the builders could have gained much knowledge to reproduce the similarity from a ground-level inspection of the ceremonial areas of the original palaces.

Conclusion

The discovery of the Blue Palace provides a foundation for exploring one of the most unique contributions the Uighurs made to steppe history, the only historical attempt in Mongolia at urbanisation. Key to that revolution was a permanent residence for the ruler that emerged in response to the changing technology and social adaptation taking place in the seventh century. The modifications in warfare tactics and religious concepts were remarkable developments but not the only ones. The Uighurs also embraced advances in structural engineering, in particular a new type of dwelling. The trellis tent had a significant influence on their way of life, physically, religiously, economically and socially. It demanded special skills and material, so the elite were still the people most able to attain one. For example, felt manufacture required a substantial flock of sheep and manpower at the critical period in summer, which most herdsmen did not possess. Therefore, even the covering indicated status and power that was reinforced by silks and furs inside. Moreover, the colour of the felt was symbolic. The Uighurs dyed their felt blue,[53] a feature that the current name has unwittingly retained. A walled enclosure further heightened the prestige of such noble tents, creating an impressive gallery for their exhibition. Before the main tent, an open pavilion with guyed struts to support the central poles allowed everyone to see the ruler.[54] As a result, remarkably, this type of palace combines the storage asset of a permanent building with the superstructure of a movable tent within the layout of a standard camp.

While the collapsible lattice framework was an important advancement, the Uighurs explored even more ideas. As a result, the skill to build permanent brick walls and roofed holding chambers may well have come from the Sogdians. Nevertheless, the design and purpose of the palace arose directly from Uighur needs and experiences. Khukh Ordung expressed the Uighurs' rising pride in their supremacy and unique identity as well as thrusting a formidable challenge to the less-sophisticated tribes north of the Gobi.