

CHRONICLE OF CENTRAL ASIATIC EXPLORATION FOR 1931.

THE year 1931 has seen several large expeditions in the field in Central Asia.

The veteran explorer, Sir Aurel Stein, accompanied by his Surveyor Khān Sahib Mian Afraz Gul Khān, started in the summer of 1930 on his fourth great journey to Central Asia. This expedition, whose object it was to continue archaeological explorations in the Lop desert, and in a specified portion of the T'ien Shan Mountains, was largely financed by Harvard University and the British Museum. Unfortunately the sad realities of present conditions in innermost Asia, prevented this scientific enterprise from being carried out. After proceeding to Kāshgar from its base in Kashmir, the expedition was held back by prolonged negotiations with the Provincial Government at Urumchi. By the middle of November, Sir Aurel Stein secured permission to follow the caravan route skirting the southern edge of the Takla Makan desert. Permission was given to conduct scientific work and needful surveys along the route. On reaching the site of Domoko obstruction began to manifest itself. The Expedition was prevented by the local officials of the Keriya district from conducting excavations or making plans of ruined sites. On his arrival at the oasis of Charchan the explorer received the news that the Nanking Government had cancelled his passport and insisted on the Expedition's return to India. For his return journey to Kāshgar, Sir Aurel Stein chose the route leading past the Lop tract to the northern caravan route along the T'ien Shan mountains. Interesting observations were made during this trip. On his return to Kāshgar, Sir Aurel Stein resumed his negotiations with the local authorities, and after another considerable delay, the explorer was obliged to decide on his return to Kashmir. All objects of archaeological interest collected during the journey were deposited at the British Consulate-General at Kāshgar, awaiting the Chinese Government's decision as to their disposal.

On his return journey, Sir Aurel Stein had the good fortune to examine a large find of ancient manuscripts, discovered by local inhabitants in a ruined Buddhist stūpa above the Naupūr Village, some two miles west of Gilgit Cantonment. Sir Aurel Stein's examination has shown that the bulk of the manuscripts are written in the Central Asian Brahmi script on oblong birch bark leaves. Of special interest is one manuscript written on paper, and probably imported from Chinese Turkestan. Palaeographic indications suggest that some of the manuscripts may date back to the VIth century A.D. The

complete excavation of the site, and of three smaller stūpas immediately adjoining it, is awaited with great interest.

Another vast enterprise is that of the Citroën Expedition 'Centre-Asie', which represents an attempt to conquer by means of modern mechanical transport the continent of Asia. This expedition organized and financed by M. André Citroën, is commanded by M. Georges Haardt, assisted by M. L. Audouin-Dubreuil, and a numerous staff of scientists, mechanics, cinema-operators, and photographers. The scientific side of the enterprise is directed by the Rev. Teilhard de Chardin, paleontologist and discoverer of a Palæolithic culture in the Ordos; M. Joseph Hackin, Keeper of the Musée Guimet and well-known archaeologist; and M. André Reymond, biologist. Surveys will be conducted by Lt. Point, commanding the China group of the expedition, and Lt. Pecqueur. An artist is added to the staff in the person of the well-known Russian artist Alexander Iacovleff. In connection with the Expedition a pamphlet was issued entitled 'L'Expédition Citroën-Centre-Asie', which tells about the organization of the expedition and its programme. This pamphlet is accompanied by a booklet containing a popular historico-geographical account of innermost Asia / Chinese Turkestan, Mongolia and Tibet / by Professor P. Pelliot / *La Haute Asie*, par Paul Pelliot /.

The purpose of the Expedition is to cross Asia from Beyrouth to Peking on caterpillar cars, specially constructed for this purpose by the Citroën Automobile Works. From Peking, the Expedition plans to strike south to Hanoi and Saigon in French Indo-china, and from there to cross Siam, Burma, Northern India, Beluchistan, and rejoin the first route somewhere in Persia. From the outset the Expedition was divided into two groups: Groupe-Pamir, commanded by M. Haardt with a convoy of light caterpillars, and Groupe-Chine, commanded by Lt. Point with a convoy of seven cars. The second group was despatched from Marseilles to China with instructions to meet the first group in Chinese Turkestan. The first group started its motor journey from Beyrouth and after an uneventful journey across North Mesopotamia, Persia and Afghanistan reached Srinagar on the 24th of June, 1931. / During the Expedition's stay in Kabul, a brief reconnaissance was conducted in the famous Bamiyan Valley /. In Kashmir the Expedition made a prolonged stay in order to prepare the further route across the mighty mountain barriers to the North. This portion of the route presented most of the difficulties for mechanical transport. After a strenuous effort to bring some of the cars over the narrow Gilgit route, the expedition was forced to abandon its cars and proceed to Kashgar on caravan animals. Misgar, the terminus of the Indian Telegraph, was reached on the 1st September. Then across the Kilik Pass / 15,844 feet /, in the westernmost offshoots of the great Karakorum Range, the Expedition

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journeyed towards Tāsh-kurghān, and reached Kāshgar on the 19th September. Meanwhile the China group of the Expedition journeyed along the Peking-Hsinchiang trade route, and duly arrived at Urumchi, capital of Hsinchiang, where the authorities deprived it of the car with the wireless installation. From Kāshgar, the first group proceeded along the caravan route to Aksu, where it was met by four cars sent from Urumchi by Lt. Point. The last available news tells that the first group joined the second group at Urumchi on the 26th October.

During the past years several attempts were made to open up innermost Asia by motor transport. One of such Expeditions starting from China succeeded at the close of the Great War to cross the Gobi and to reach Urumchi.

The great scientific expedition to Central Asia, organized and directed by the eminent Swedish Explorer Dr. Sven Hedin, after four years of highly productive work is still in the field. A welcome and significant characteristic of this expedition is its close co-operation with Chinese scholars. A number of Chinese scientists took part in the expedition and contributed greatly to its success. Dr. Yūan discovered in the northern slopes of the T'ien Shan, east of Urumchi, rich deposits of dinosaur remains, and T. H. Ting conducted important explorations in the western section of Chinese Turkestan.

In a letter to the writer of the present note, dated September 8th, 1931, the great explorer writes:—

'My expedition, to which I soon will return, is working in eight different groups in Hsin-chiang, Khams, Gobi and Mongolia. My Swedish archaeologist, Dr. Folke Bergman, has found over 10,000 MSS. on wood from the early Han dynasty—at Etsin-gol. Dr. Erik Norin has discovered the Permo-carboniferous ice age and has definitely settled the question of desiccation in Central Asia. Dr. Nils Hoerner has discovered and surveyed the new Lop-nor. Nils Ambolt has determined with Invar pendulum the gravity of many places of Eastern Turkestan. Dr. W. Haude has sent up 353 pilot balloons to a maximum altitude of 21,000 metres. I have four very able Swedish geologists working in Central Asia and they will give a quite new idea of the structure and stratigraphy of the great continent.'

The important discovery of Han documents is the largest of its kind, and the material will be studied by Professor Bernhard Karlgren of Goeteborg in Sweden, and Professor Liu Fu of Peking. The collection will be preserved in Peking. Besides these Han documents, the expedition discovered several hundreds of funeral inscriptions of V-VII centuries, and numerous inscriptions of the Mongol epoch.

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Interesting discoveries are reported by Dr. Erich Schmidt, field director of the Persian Expedition of the University Museum and the Pennsylvania Museum of Art, on the site of Tepe Hissār, a few miles from Dāmghān, lying some 60 miles south-east of the Caspian Sea. The civilization discovered during the excavations may prove to be one of the connecting links between the Indus civilization and Mesopotamia.

G. DE ROKRICH.

We shall be glad to publish accounts of every exploration in Central Asia and adjacent regions, which will be brought to our notice.