

# dig<sup>TM</sup>

INTO HISTORY



From Cricket Media

The First Trousers

Pg 50

A Recipe  
for Silk

Pg 22

When  
Camels Met  
Humans

Pg 5

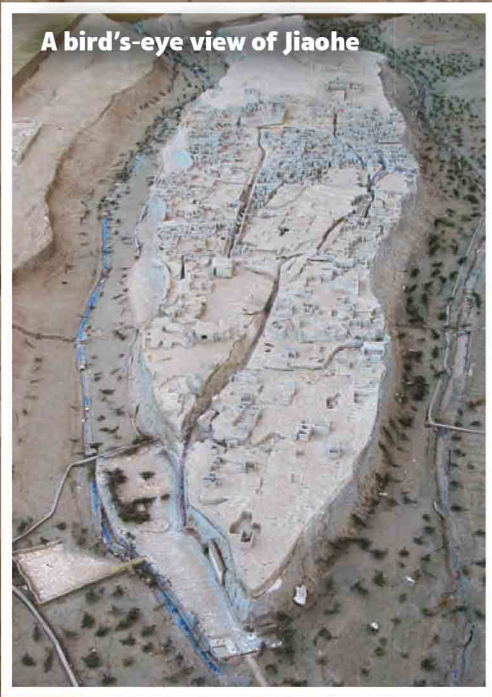
# Year One

## Along the Silk Road



**T**ravel six miles west of Turfan, just beyond the Taklamakan Desert on the northern branch of the Silk Road, and you will find the ruins of Jiaohe (seen here). This ancient city dates back to at least the second century B.C.E. It was built on top of a rock plateau that is bordered by two rivers. The plateau itself is 98 feet high and about 5,577 feet long. We know from Chinese history books that, in the Year One, Jiaohe was the capital city of the Nearer Cheshi Kingdom, one of 36 Kingdoms of the Western Regions.

A bird's-eye view of Jiaohe



A Look at

# Jiaohe

by Patrick Wertmann



## What a Spot!

Because of Jiaohe's strategic location on the Silk Road network, the Han Chinese and the nomadic Xiongnu fought many battles to control the city and the surrounding kingdom. The Xiongnu ruled large parts of the Eurasian steppes between the third century B.C.E. and the first century C.E. To govern the Western Regions, they established a military base in the Cheshi Kingdom. The Han Chinese had to cross this area to reach the lands renowned for their horses. They coveted the powerful so-called "Heavenly Horses" of Ferghana, which were said to sweat blood (a phenomenon now believed to have been caused by parasites). These animals were known for their size and strength, and the Han much preferred them to their horses, which could not run as far or as fast.

The struggle for supremacy over the Cheshi Kingdom was an ongoing story in the history of the Han and the Xiongnu. When the Han first attacked in 108 B.C.E., the kingdom was controlled by the Xiongnu. This war lasted more than 40 years. The Han emerged as victors and ruled for the next 70 years. So, in the Year One, what is known as the Nearer Cheshi Kingdom with its capital at Jiaohe, was under Chinese control.

## Finds at Abu Erteila

**T**he temple site at Abu Erteila in eastern Sudan has been excavated by an American-Italian-Russian mission since 2009. Pottery and carbon-14 dating of finds confirm that it dates to Meroitic times (350 B.C.E. to 350 C.E.) and houses Christian burials dating to the 11th-12th centuries. On the west is an extensive storage and food-preparation area. To the south are rooms made from recycled temple elements, and the east-west walls are oriented to the rising sun god, Amun. Reliefs and paintings in this previously unknown temple depict three Meroitic deities: the fertility god Hapy, the mother goddess Isis, and the python god Apedemek.

Among the finds we have made are a dramatic cobra-lined lintel for a window or door, two hieroglyphic-inscribed column drums, a sandstone wall block, a column base, a cornice stone, numerous column fragments, and a "butterfly joint" block. We have also uncovered scores of mud and fired bricks and white

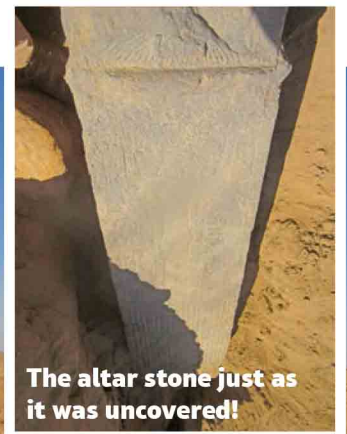
plaster fragments. None, however, were in their original locations. The site had been burned, probably when the area was destroyed by the Axumites around 340 C.E.

During the 2015 season, we found the stone temple pavement and another column drum still in place. But, our most spectacular find was a five-foot-tall altar stone (inset below), whose inscription could still be read. It had been dedicated to Isis. We also found painted walls, and the images may be of Apedemek. Other finds included thousands of wheel-turned pottery sherds that ranged from large Meroitic coarse-ware storage vessels to painted and impressed fine fragments of cauldrons, bowls, jars, plates, and lids.

**Richard A. Lobban**, *Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at Rhode Island College, is author of the Historical Dictionary of Ancient and Medieval Nubia (Scarecrow Press).*



**Just look at the colors on this stone being excavated at Abu Erteila! They are still vibrant today!**



**The altar stone just as it was uncovered!**



## Who Were the Cheshi?

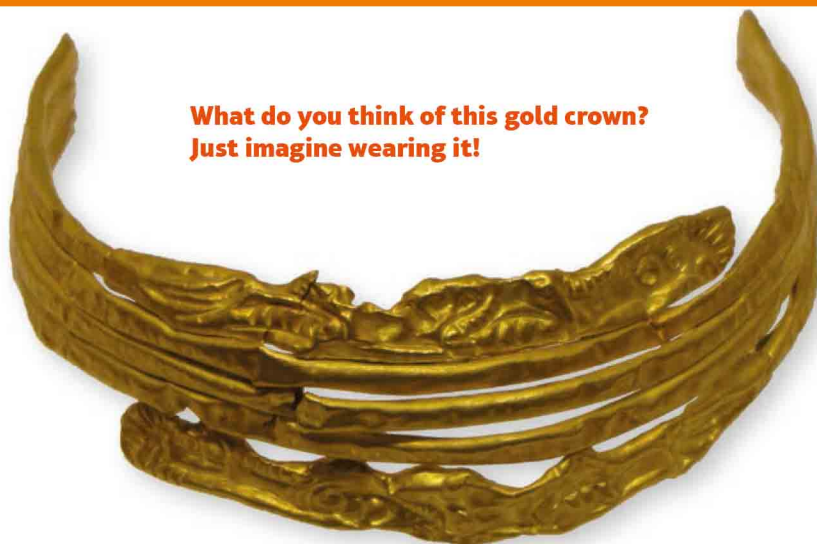
Scholars have tried to find answers to this question, but these people did not leave any written documents. As a result, we must rely on the historical sources available, and these were written by the Chinese. According to these sources, the Cheshi people

*lived in tents, followed the grasses and waters, and had considerable knowledge of agriculture. They owned cattle, horses, camels, sheep, and goats. They were proficient with bows and arrows.*

From this passage, we learn that the Cheshi were skilled hunters who traveled with their flocks, always on the lookout for ideal pastures. But they also knew about farming. Are you surprised that not all nomadic families roamed the plains? The evidence proves that some did live in settlements and followed an agricultural way of life.

**See the two humps on each of these gold Bactrian camel figures? Both were made during the time of the Han Empire.**

**What do you think of this gold crown? Just imagine wearing it!**



We also learn from Chinese sources that the king of Nearer Cheshi governed more than 1,500 households, with a total of more than 4,000 people, 2,000 of whom were able to bear arms. As archaeologists do at all excavations, those at Jiaohe documented their finds and drew maps showing residential districts in the east and west; a district to the north that was reserved for Buddhist monasteries; and the ruins of a large government office in the southern part of the city. Cemeteries with tombs yielding a great variety of precious objects were also found.

## A Closer Look at the Finds

Among the Jiaohe treasures is a pair of Han Empire ornamental gold plaques (below). Each is about an inch in length and in the shape of a two-humped,

Bactrian camel.

The camels were designed to appear to be looking at each other.

This find illustrates how important these animals were in desert areas such as Jiaohe.

Another object unearthed from a grave was a semicircular crown of five golden bands (above). Two of the bands are shaped to resemble fighting animals, presumably a deer and a feline. This motif reminds us of similar finds associated with the Scythians (see page 44), another group of nomads living further to the west. This discovery also proves that the people of Jiaohe were in contact with peoples beyond their borders, especially through trade. These interactions naturally resulted in the different cultures influencing each other.

The city of Jiaohe flourished for many centuries. It was governed by different rulers and experienced a heyday during the Tang dynasty (618–907 C.E.). The destruction of the city and its people came in the 13th century during an invasion by the Mongols under their leader Genghis Khan.

