

Thus the need for military protection beyond the newly conquered territory along the northern foot of the Nan-shan very soon asserted itself. Nor did it find the Chinese unprepared. Immediately after the first conquest of that great natural 'corridor' they had started to establish military colonies along it and to construct a wall extending to the west the defensive border-line of the 'Great Wall' which Shih Huang-ti, the predecessor of the Han dynasty, had created for protection against Hun inroads.

There can be no doubt that this western extension of the earlier 'Great Wall' was primarily intended to protect the newly opened highway into Central Asia. But while the 'Great Wall' of Shih Huang-ti appears to have borne that purely defensive character which we are accustomed to associate with the familiar 'Chinese Wall' of late mediaeval construction, the Emperor Wu-ti's wall was meant to serve as the instrument of a 'forward policy' conceived on a big scale. The analogy it thus offers to the earlier *Limes* systems on the borders of the Roman Empire is most striking. In a later chapter I shall describe the very interesting remains of this ancient Chinese *Limes* which I was able to trace and explore over a total distance of not far from 400 miles (Figs. 70-4).

Events moved rapidly enough. As so often in history, the aims of peaceful penetration in the interest of trade and civilized intercourse called before long for support by political influence and military action. It was the not unusual case of the flag having to protect the trade. From the outset the Chinese policy of Central-Asian expansion appears to have fixed its hopes for profitable trade far more upon the large and fertile territories in what is now Russian Turkistan