

far-off Sogdiana, the region of the present Samarkand and Bukhara.

The interpretation of the Chinese records recovered was accomplished by my lamented great Sinologue friend, M. Chavannes, in a masterly publication issued at the Oxford University Press and including all Chinese documents from my second collection. Their contents, like those previously found by Dr. Hedin, conclusively prove that the site was that of a station designated as *Lou-lan* from the ancient name of the whole territory. This formed the western bridge-head, as it were, on the earliest route which the Chinese had opened towards the close of the second century B.C. into the Tarim basin.

The great majority of the dated documents belong to the years between A.D. 263 and 270, and thus coincide with the reign of the Emperor Wu-ti of the Chin dynasty, who, after the downfall of the Later Han, reasserted Chinese supremacy in the 'Western Countries'. The latest document is of the year A.D. 330. Its date is expressed in a regnal period that in China had come to a close fully fourteen years before. It is thus evident that the little station must have been completely cut off from intercourse with the central authorities of the empire. The final abandonment of the site, and of the desert route for which it had served as a terminal station, was by that time obviously very near.

Small as the station was and limited the local resources of the whole tract, yet there is enough evidence in the Chinese documents (Fig. 47) to show the importance of the traffic it saw as long as the route remained open. There are fragments of reports emanating from or directly addressed to the 'Commander-in-Chief of the Western Regions'; and of