

Roman *Limes* were originally integral portions of the great strategic road system of the Empire where it approached its frontiers. The word *limes* served as the technical term for Roman military roads pushed forward from a base of operation on a frontier, and this justifies our use of it for their older Chinese counterpart.

We know from the Han Annals that by 108 B.C. a continuous line of posts and small forts was established from the present town of Su-chou as far as the 'Jade Gate'. This was at that time still placed somewhere east of Tun-huang. But after success had crowned the second expedition sent into the Tarim basin by the Emperor Wu-ti in the years 102-101 B.C. we learn that "military posts were established from place to place from Tun-huang westwards to the Salt Marsh". These were meant to safeguard the passage of political missions and trade caravans and to assure their supplies *en route*. There can be no possible doubt that this Chinese historical notice, based on the contemporary record of the famous 'father of Chinese history' Ssü-ma-chien, relates to the line of wall and watch-stations explored by me.

We know that the Emperor Wu-ti's policy of commercial and military advance into Central Asia was pursued with relentless energy in spite of formidable physical difficulties. It seems therefore safe to assume the westward extension of the wall to have reached the terminal point mentioned at the close of the preceding chapter within a very few years of 101 B.C. All the same it was no small satisfaction to me when the clearing of the modest quarters at one of the several towers, which guarded that western head of the *Limes*, brought to light a large inscribed tablet bearing a