

A.D. 263-270. This is exactly the time when we know the Emperor Wu-ti, the founder of the Western Chin dynasty, to have reasserted Chinese control over these distant confines of the empire after the period of internal disruption known as the 'Epoch of the Three Kingdoms' (A.D. 221-265). We may safely conclude from the prevalence of those dates that the route and the station guarding it had then experienced years of exceptional traffic and activity. But that the post remained in Chinese occupation for at least sixty years longer is proved by a slip from the first ruin I excavated, which records a payment to a certain barbarian in the year A.D. 330.

Curiously enough the very way in which this date is expressed conveys a clear indication of the final abandonment then being near. The year is stated as the sixteenth of the 'Nien-hao' or regnal title Chien-hsing, which commenced in A.D. 313. But as the reign of the last emperor of the Western Chin dynasty, which it designates, came to a close in A.D. 316, it is certain that the little station must then have been completely cut off from official intercourse with the central authorities of the empire. Else it could not have continued using the obsolete 'Nien-hao' for fully fourteen years longer.

That this condition of administrative isolation was not merely local, but must have also affected other Chinese garrisons surviving in the Tarim Basin, is made highly probable by another significant observation. The ruined site could not have been a mere outlying post; it must have lain on an important line of communication for the refuse of a few closely adjoining structures to furnish half-a-dozen fragmentary documents which directly emanate from, or are addressed to, the 'Commander-in-Chief of the Western Regions'—*i.e.* the chief representative of Chinese imperial power in the Tarim Basin. One of them conveys the 'Chang-shih's' order to a certain officer to set out for some specified localities still identifiable in Kan-su. Another names as the writer the 'Secretary in charge of official correspondence under the orders of the Commander-in-Chief.' Of particular interest is the sealed wooden lid which must once have closed a small box containing an