

that by the 'Salt Desert' was meant the great salt-encrusted lake bed we had been skirting for days, which seemed to extend interminably to the north and north-east. Of the difficulties of transport, too, I had had my experience; and when I thought of the trouble my preparations for this desert crossing had brought on the people of Charklik and Abdal, I could appreciate what another passage of the Han Annals records of the attitude which the people of Lou-lan adopted towards this traffic early in the first century B.C. "Now the extreme eastern border of the Kingdom of Lou-lan, where it approached nearest to China, was opposite the Pih-lung mound, where there was a scarcity of water and pasture; and it always fell to its share to provide guides, to carry water and forward provisions to meet the Chinese envoys; but being frequently exposed to the oppressive raids of the soldiery, they at last resolved that it was inconvenient to hold intercourse with China."

But such local grievances did not save the petty chiefship, placed on the most direct line from Tun-huang to the Tarim Basin, from becoming an important link in the chain of garrisons and politically controlled states by which Chinese power asserted itself in the 'Western Regions,' with varying energy and success, during the first century before and the first two centuries after Christ. Though the Annals of the later Han dynasty mention Shan-shan or Lou-lan repeatedly in connection with events that took place in the Tarim Basin between *circ.* 25 and 170 A.D., they have preserved no details about the routes which led thither from the extreme west of China proper.

But, fortunately, M. Chavannes' researches have made accessible to us brief yet interesting information on the subject in the Wei-liu, a fragmentary historical work on the immediately succeeding Wei dynasty, composed between 239 and 265 A.D. Yü Huan, its author, tells us that instead of the two routes previously known and referred to above, there were in his time three lines of communication leading from Tun-huang and the 'Jade Gate' to the Western Regions.

The southern one passed from Tun-huang first through