

a fully developed and, no doubt, scribe-ridden military organization had kept moving along this chain of border watch-stations for more than two hundred years, was it wonderful that I soon grew accustomed to picking up records of the time of Christ or before, almost on the surface? Of course the harvest could not be reaped until my working party was brought to each of the ruined posts in succession, and Chiang-ssü-yeh was at hand eager to read out and interpret these 'waste papers' as well as he could at first sight. Curious it was then to hear of records which told of apprehended attacks, movements of troops brought up for reinforcement, inspection visits of high officers, or more frequently of such routine details as issue of fresh rations, arms and clothing. Just as along the telegraph lines of our Indian border, isolated small posts try to make up for the total dearth of local interests by keeping a constant flow of news from the busy world far away trickling over the wires as 'service messages,' so here, I thought, much of this correspondence was perhaps only a reproduction of orders meant originally for some headquarters and subsequently passed on to the lonely watch-stations.

But truly important was the steadily growing assurance, gathered from the dates which my indefatigable secretary's scholarly help allowed me to read with certainty, that this frontier line dated back to the end of the second century B.C., when Chinese expansion into Central Asia first began under the Emperor Wu-ti. As subsequently the date records receded farther and farther in antiquity, until we got to documents of the T'ien-han period commencing in 100 B.C., it became quite certain that the wall and the watch-stations along it were identical with the line of guard-houses planted at intervals, from Chiu-ch'üan (or Su-chou) to the Jade Gate. These the Han Annals record as having been constructed about 110 B.C., when attacks made by the Hsiung-nu on the Chinese political and commercial missions westwards forced the Emperor to despatch expeditions leading to the subjugation of Lou-lan and the establishment of Chinese military power in the Tarim Basin.