

faced, that the physical conditions preclude all idea of agricultural occupation having been possible on this line during the Han period. Neither the marshy depressions which must have been, if anything, more extensive then than now, nor the absolutely bare gravel plateaus, well removed from all possibility of irrigation, could have furnished the fields needed for an 'agricultural colony.'

If the imperial edict really refers to the occupation of some part of the *Limes*, as we have now traced it west of Tun-huang, the only explanation would be that land for maintaining those troops might have been secured by an extension of the extant oasis and its produce allotted for the maintenance of the detachments by the wall. It is true that the records more than once refer to a 'delimitation' or clearing of 'celestial fields' as among the *corvée* duties imposed on the men of the stations. But in view of the local conditions it seems far safer to refer this expression to the clearing away of reed-beds and jungle, which must have seriously interfered with the safe watching of the border, than to the breaking up of desert soil for tillage, which had no chance without irrigation. I may mention here in passing that two more tablets from the same rubbish heap have proved to contain imperial decisions. The points on which they were issued cannot be made out with certainty; but the style of writing and expression used in conveying the Emperor's approval strictly accords with the formulas attested for the clerical etiquette of the period.

It is easy to understand that the records from the office of a small local commandant should yield more details about the soldiers he controlled, their condition of life and their duties, than about the policy and organization which kept them employed in guarding this route through the desert. It is of considerable interest that the records, where they name individual soldiers as recipients of articles of equipment, or otherwise, generally indicate with accuracy their origin, stating the canton, sub-prefecture, and province from which they had come. We are thus able to ascertain that the majority of these 'garrison soldiers,' to use their specific designation, were drawn from the distant provinces