

and within or close to the present Nan-hu oasis. In Chapter XCVI of the *Ch'ien Han shu* we are told: 'After leaving the Yang barrier the first people which one meets on advancing are the Jo Ch'iang. . . . This people is 1,800 li from the Yang barrier and 6,300 li from Ch'ang-an; they live retired to the south-west and are not on the high road [from Tun-huang to Shan-shan or Lop].'<sup>10</sup> As we are subsequently told that the mountain territory of the Jo Ch'iang borders upon Shan-shan and Ch'ü-mo, i. e. Lop and Charchan, it is certain that this nomadic people occupied the high grazing grounds south of the Āltin-tāgh, especially the wide valleys of the Chimen-tāgh now held by Mongols. It is equally beyond doubt that the most direct and easiest line of access to them from the side of Tun-huang is the present *tāgh-yol*, or 'mountain route', leading from Tun-huang along the high northern slopes of the Āltin-tāgh and actually passing through Nan-hu.<sup>11</sup> On this route the only ground which could ever in historical times have possessed cultivation and local resources to any appreciable extent is the present oasis of Nan-hu,<sup>12</sup> and this fact fully accounts for the location there of the Yang barrier, which we may now, in view of all this concordant evidence, accept as definitely established.

Geographical reasons for two 'barriers'.

The existence side by side of two frontier stations, the 'Jade Gate' and the 'Yang barrier', on the ancient routes leading to the Western Regions from Tun-huang has been the subject of a good deal of learned speculation.<sup>13</sup> But in this case, as in that of other similar questions, it is possible to arrive at a clear solution only if due attention is paid to essential geographical facts, as established by adequate surveys, and if these are supplemented by archaeological investigation on the spot. The establishment of *two* main frontier stations, the 'Jade Gate' to the north-west and the *Yang kuan* to the south-west, became necessary, as soon as Chinese administrative control was extended beyond Tun-huang towards the close of the second century B. C., on account of the plain geographical fact that *two* divergent routes of importance leading to the Western Regions required to be watched and guarded. One of them, and this the more important, was the ancient Lou-lan route, which passed along the westernmost portion of the Han Limes, and which has been fully discussed in previous chapters. This, as we shall see, was effectively barred by the military station of the 'Jade Gate' and the smaller watch-posts along the Limes controlled from it. The other route, corresponding to the present *tāgh-yol* of the Lopliks, passed south-west to the slopes of the Āltin-tāgh. For the frontier-station of the 'Yang barrier', which was intended to guard it, Nan-hu offered a position recommended by every geographical consideration.

Strategic importance of Nan-hu.

The Chinese commanders who directed the Emperor Wu-ti's policy of Central-Asian expansion with so keen an eye for topography, as the alignment of their Limes proves, could not possibly overlook the strategic advantages of a firm hold upon Nan-hu. The route leading along the high barren slopes of the Āltin-tāgh, though practicable all the year, offers difficulties, through the scarcity of water and grazing, almost as great as the route by the Lop desert. In support of this statement I may refer to the description of Mr. Littledale, who was the first European to follow it in modern times, and to the short but graphic account left by the Chinese embassy to Khotan which about A. D. 938-39 passed from Tun-huang through these desert mountains towards Lop or Charchan.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> I follow the translation given by M. Chavannes, *T'oung-pao*, 1905, pp. 526 sq., note 8; cf. also Wylie, *J. Anthropol. Inst.*, x. p. 23.

<sup>11</sup> Regarding this 'mountain route', the ancient 'southern route' of Han times, also described in the *Wei lio*, cf. above, pp. 320, 418. Its line from Tun-huang towards Mīrān and Lop is shown in Maps Nos. 79, 75, 71, 68, 64, 61.

<sup>12</sup> At Somoto, the next stage on the *tāgh-yol* beyond Nan-hu (Map No. 75. D. 1), there is only a tiny plot of cultivation,

maintaining one or two Chinese families, and not enough water for more. Its occupation is solely accounted for by the passage of traders bringing wool from the Mongol camps about Anambar-ula, etc.

<sup>13</sup> Among recent discussions it may suffice to refer, e. g., to Herrmann, *Seidenstrassen*, pp. 107 sqq.; for earlier conjectures, see e. g. Richthofen, *China*, i. pp. 460, 495 sq., notes.

<sup>14</sup> For Mr. Littledale's experiences cf. *Geogr. Journal*, 1894, iii. pp. 455 sqq. The passage of the Chinese embassy