

reason of their legibility and interest has included in the first section of his publication,⁴ not less than 256 (*Doc.*, Nos. 9-264), or more than one-third of the whole number, were obtained from this site. The relatively good preservation of a large proportion of them, and the fact that they all belong to the same period, chronologically well defined and not far distant from the establishment of the Limes, necessarily add much to the historical value they possess as original and contemporary evidence for the organization of this ancient military border line and the life led in the desert along it. In the review of the information to be gleaned from the written records of the Limes as a whole,^{4a} the data supplied by the documentary finds of this station will be drawn upon more largely than those of any other individual site. Here, however, I must, in accordance with the plan followed elsewhere, restrict my remarks to those points which have a direct archaeological bearing on this particular locality and the section of the Limes belonging to it.

In the first place, the large number of dated records found at this station is worthy of mention. As a reference to *Doc.*, Nos. 37-58, 91-3, 158-60, 255, shows, their series covers the period 68-56 B.C. In addition to this, chronological evidence of great value is given by the numerous tablets forming parts of elaborate calendars, Nos. 9-24, 25-35, 36, in which the cyclical designations of particular days in each month are recorded. By a painstakingly exact and ingenious analysis M. Chavannes has established that these calendars were issued for the years corresponding to 63, 59, and 57 B.C. They were needed, no doubt, for the correct dating of official correspondence, accounts, etc., such as would issue from local head-quarters, and the fact that such calendar tablets were found at T. vi. b in so large a number, while the other stations on the Limes together yielded only three similar fragments in all, suggests that an office of some importance was placed here.

Records dated 68-56 B.C.

Chinese calendars of 63, 59, 57 B.C.

The same conclusion may be drawn from the finds at T. vi. b, comprising four documents, *Doc.*, Nos. 60, 63, 142, 206, which reproduce or quote imperial edicts concerning the border line and the troops intended to guard it. The first among these is of distinct historical interest, as it records the emperor's orders for the establishment of an agricultural military colony in the Tun-huang region and the methods to be followed in the construction of a 'rampart' for guarding the border. No date is given in this very important document, *Doc.*, No. 60. But the contents of the imperial edict by themselves prove that it must belong to the period when the Limes was first extended to this region. This fact, taken in conjunction with the chronological range, 68-56 B.C., of the dated records already referred to, seems to me to justify the inference that the establishment of the flanking line of watch-stations to which T. vi. b belonged, and which were meant to be controlled from it, goes back to the very time when the construction of the westernmost Limes beyond Tun-huang took place, about the last years of the second century B.C. To this assumption, in fact, we are led by the very purpose which, as has been shown above, obviously determined the throwing out of this flanking defence. As soon as the Limes wall was continued to its natural end at the terminal basin of the Su-lo Ho, it became necessary also to watch the eastern edge of the latter.

Imperial edicts concerning Limes.

It is more difficult to feel sure of the exact period when these outlying stations to the south-west of the termination of the Limes wall were abandoned. The latest of the documents with a precise date that have been found at them, T. v. 2, *Doc.*, No. 428, was, as already mentioned, written in 39 B.C. A somewhat later *terminus ad quem* is supplied by the small tablet T. vi. c. i. 3, *Doc.*, Nos. 4+265, which bears on its reverse a fragment of a well-known Chinese lexicographical work, the *Chi chiu chang*, composed between 48-33 B.C. The text was copied here, as M. Chavannes points out,⁵ evidently as a writing exercise. Some time must necessarily have elapsed before a work of this class could have attained such vogue as alone can explain its study at desolate posts

When was T. vi. b abandoned?

⁴ See Chavannes, *Documents*, pp. 10-151.

^{4a} Cf. below, chap. xx. sec. iv-vi.

⁵ Cf. Chavannes, *Documents*, pp. 9, 64.