

CHAPTER XIX

THE JADE GATE BARRIER

SECTION I.—THE RUINED SITE T. XIV

THE wide depression to which our survey of the Limes east of T. XIII has brought us forms a well-marked division on the line followed by the wall and by the once important route to the west that it was mainly intended to safeguard. Filled along its deepest portion by a series of lakelets or salt bogs, and bordered on either side by steep banks up to 50 feet in height leading up to flat gravel plateaus, it distinctly recalls the broad terminal bed of a river. The resemblance is not accidental. Looking at the Map (Nos. 74, 78) we can easily recognize that this depression, which from the commanding height of the walls of the fort T. XIV could be seen running far away to the south-east, represents the main terminal course once followed by the Nan-hu drainage towards its junction with the Su-lo Ho. Descending underneath the surface of the ground, this drainage still continues to feed the springs which give rise to the existing lakelets. Long before the historical period, no doubt, the ancient bed had assumed more or less its present aspect. But as the last traceable remains of the Limes wall end, on the west about 10 feet and on the east also about as much, above the present edge of the adjoining marshes, the possibility of the latter having shrunk since Han times must be kept in view.

Depression
near station
T. XIV.

However this may be, we can be quite sure that the change, if any, has not materially affected the immediate surroundings of the ancient fort T. XIV and the topographical reasons which account for its being placed here. As can be seen from the photographs in Figs. 179 and 183,¹ the fort and a mound adjoining it northward, which will be discussed presently as the site of important finds, occupy the top of a neck of raised ground which stretches isthmus-like across the depression and offers a convenient passage for traffic between the deep reed-fringed marsh to the north-west and the salt bog to the south-east.² The route to and from Lop had necessarily to follow the passage, which was completely commanded and guarded by the fortified post T. XIV established at this point. The position itself was rendered a naturally strong one by the nearness of the marshes to the north-west and south-east.^{2a}

Position of
fort T. XIV.

Its tactical advantages were further increased by the fact that the two knolls occupied by the ruined fort and the neighbouring mound, both resembling Mesa terraces in origin and character,

Distant
view from
ruined fort.

¹ The background on the left of Fig. 179 shows the low-lying marshy portion of the depression to the north of T. XIV.

² The map in Pl. 33 shows the position of T. XIV and the features of the depression more correctly than Map No. 74. D. 3. This records here mainly the survey made on our first visit in March, 1907, without the detailed features subsequently observed during my stay at T. XIV. The symbol marking the ruined fort requires to be shifted about half a mile to north-east and just within the line of the secondary

wall indicated eastwards.

Pl. 33 had to be prepared before I could utilize the supplementary observations made in 1914. Nor is its scale large enough to permit adequate indication of all details.

^{2a} I may note here that T. XIV proved to be known to the few Tun-huang people who visit the neighbouring ground for grazing ponies or for fuel by the appropriate designation of *Hsiao-fang-p'an* 小防盤 'the small protected camp'. The large ruined magazine T. XVIII is called by them *Ta-fang-p'an*.