

SECTION VI.—THE 'NEW ROUTE OF THE NORTH'

It still remains for us to consider how we are to account for the great extent of the refuse deposits and the abundance of records among them at a point like T. xv. a, where practically no structural remains, even of the modest type usual at ordinary watch-towers of the Limes, could be traced. The question must force itself upon our attention when we bear in mind that the number of records recovered at this place, and included in M. Chavannes' publication, 117 altogether, is considerably larger than the number of those from T. xiv, the site of the Jade Gate, 80 in all, and second only to the aggregate of documents from T. vi. b, which amounts to 228. At the last-named point it was possible to account for the abundance of these ancient 'waste papers' by the fact that the office from which they had been thrown out belonged to the headquarters of an outlying section of the Limes, important as protecting its flank and guarding a practicable route from the west. Considering how close T. xv. a is to T. xiv, the site now identified as the main station of 'the Yü-mên barrier', the question confronting us here appears distinctly more difficult to answer. Fortunately we can have recourse here to an interesting historical notice, bearing on the ancient topography of this region, but not as yet discussed in these pages. If it is correctly interpreted in the light of the local knowledge that we possess now, I think that it may help us towards a satisfactory solution.

Abundance
of records
at T. xv. a.

The notice I refer to is to be found in the passage of the *Wei lió* (composed between A.D. 239–265) which deals with the several routes leading from Tun-huang to the Western Countries, and which I have already discussed several times.¹ As we have seen, the *Wei lió* distinctly tells us that of 'the roads which, starting from Tun-huang and Yü-mên kuan, pass into the Western Countries there were two before, but now there are three'. Two of these roads, which are described as the routes of the south and the centre, have been definitely proved to be identical with the routes leading along the Ältin-tāgh slopes to Mīrān and through the desert to Lou-lan respectively, and need not detain us here. The route with which we are now concerned is the one which the *Wei lió* calls elsewhere 'the new route of the north',² and the initial portion of which is thus described:

Wei lió's
notice of
routes from
Tun-huang.

'The new route [of the north] is the one which, starting from Yü-mên kuan, sets out on the north-west, passes through Hêng-k'êng, avoids the San-lung [desert of] sand as well as the Lung-tui, leads north of Wu-ch'uan and arrives, in the territory of Chü-shih, at Kao-ch'ang (Kara-khōja, Turfān), which is the residence of the Wu-chi-hsiao-wei; then it turns westwards and rejoins the central route at Ch'iu-tzū (Kuchā).' The route meant here is, as M. Chavannes has already pointed out, obviously identical with the one mentioned in the following passage of the chapter of the Former Han Annals that deals with the Western Regions:³ 'During the period *Yüan-shih* (A.D. 1–5) there was made from the kingdom of the Posterior King of Chü-shih a new route which, passing north of Wu-ch'uan, penetrated as far as the Yü-mên barrier; the journey was thereby reduced. The Wu-chi-hsiao-wei Hsü P'u-yü had opened [this route] in order to shorten the length of the road by one-half and to avoid the dangers of the Po-lung-tui ("White Dragon Mounds").'

'New route
of the
north'.

We see in this earlier text the starting-point as well as the end of the 'new route' quite clearly indicated. The latter is the 'Jade Gate barrier', which we have located on the westernmost portion of the Limes with its headquarters at T. xiv. The former is the region about Guchen (Ku-ch'êng-tzū) and Jimasa, at the northern foot of the T'ien-shan portion overlooking the Turfān

'New route'
of Former
Han Annals.

¹ Cf. Chavannes, *Les pays d'occident d'après le Wei lió*, *T'oung-pao*, 1905, pp. 528 sqq.; above, pp. 417 sqq., 555.

² See Chavannes, *T'oung-pao*, 1905, p. 556; above, p. 418.

³ I follow M. Chavannes' rendering, *T'oung-pao*, p. 533,

note 1; see also Wylie, *J. Anthropol. Inst.*, xi. p. 109. M. Chavannes gives A.D. 2 as the exact date when the new route was opened. I am unable to trace this specific date in the translated passages accessible to me.