

Another distinct advantage which T. xv. a offered as a subsidiary 'gate' station for the 'new route' lay in the immediate vicinity of springs with drinkable water in the marshy basin adjoining the plateau tongue on the south and the abundant grazing to be found there. I know from practical experience how important such considerations are at points where the last comfortable halt is to be made before the start on a long and trying journey through absolute desert, or the first rest to be allowed to men and animals after such a crossing. I may further point out, with reference to what the detailed map shows, that for travellers bound in the direction assumed for the 'new route' a move first to T. xiv, and thence along the extensive marshes to the west of it towards the first practicable river-crossing, or *vice versa*, would have implied a considerable detour.

Advantages
of position
of T. xv. a.

In view of these topographical reasons we are justified, I think, in attaching special significance also to such indications as the documents found at T. xv. a furnish. As has already been noted in the opening remarks of this section, the mere fact that so large a number of records was recovered at this point strongly favours belief in the importance of the station once established there. If our explanation is right, we ought to expect the great majority of the records to be contemporary with, or later than, the period A. D. 1-5, when the 'new route of the north' was first opened. This expectation is borne out by the fact that the refuse deposit of T. xv. a. iii, which, as we have seen, has its *terminus ad quem* in the last years of the Former Han dynasty extending to A. D. 9,¹³ has contributed thirty-six documents to M. Chavannes' publication (Nos. 446-81), whereas the total number of records yielded up by the refuse-heaps ii and i, which must be assigned to the periods A. D. 15-56 and A. D. 65-137 respectively, amounts to sixty-six (Nos. 482-547). To these may have to be added fourteen pieces from T. xv. a. iv and v, deposits which furnished no dated records but adjoin i and ii respectively.

Records
later than
A. D. 1-5
prevail.

Among individual documents there is quite a number with contents pointing to local business such as might appropriately be transacted by officers charged with the immediate supervision of traffic passing through the Limes. In T. xv. a. i. 16, *Doc.*, No. 541, we have a significant reference to some person 'preparing to pass north of the barrier'. In T. xv. a. v. 4, *Doc.*, No. 553, regulations about 'entry into and departure from', evidently, the Limes barrier, are quoted. In T. xv. a. iii. 22, *Doc.*, No. 479, the entry and passing out of a cart is mentioned. No. 461 might well be a kind of passport relating to a party of officials *en route*. T. xv. a. iii. 44, 24, *Doc.*, Nos. 454, 455, register each the dispatch of several letters to different addresses, including one 'at the residence of the governor of the command' and thus certainly at a considerable distance. It is the kind of record which might well be expected at a station forming the terminus of a route and of a postal line maintained along it.

Records of
traffic
through
barrier.

In the light of local knowledge the report furnished in T. xv. a. v. 9, *Doc.*, No. 552 (Plate XIV), seems to be of special interest. There we are told of the company of a *t'ing*^{13a} located so far away that 'by day one does not see the smoke signals; by night one does not see the fire signals; the native functionaries, the commandant and the officers of the post are warned not to burn fuel any further in order to avoid [needless expenses].' Knowing as I do the abundance of fuel in the shape of reeds, scrub, or wild poplars, which must have been available, in ancient times just as now, within easy reach of every watch-station on the Tun-huang Limes, it appears to me impossible that the watch-station to which this record refers could have been situated on the line of the Limes itself. Nor is there a single station on the latter of which it could possibly be asserted that it was too distant for its fire or smoke signals to be visible from one or more of the neighbouring watch-towers. On the other hand, the difficulty about fuel was bound to make

Want of
fuel along
'new route'.

¹³ Cf. above, p. 699; Chavannes, *Documents*, p. 100, regarding the date of No. 449.

^{13a} For the interpretation of the term *t'ing* 亭, see below, pp. 747 sq.