

CHAPTER XX

HISTORY AND RECORDS OF THE TUN-HUANG LIMES

SECTION I.—THE EXTENSION OF THE 'GREAT WALL' BEYOND TUN-HUANG

Historical
importance
of Limes
records.

OUR survey of the remains of the Tun-huang Limes, as detailed in Chapters XV–XIX, has abundantly demonstrated how much help for the explanation of archaeological and topographical details is furnished by the early Chinese records which were brought to light there in the course of my explorations, and which M. Chavannes' critical acumen and unsurpassed powers of work have rendered accessible to research. They are the oldest extant Chinese manuscripts at present known, and their historical importance is considerable. The value of the results which their thorough treatment in M. Chavannes' *Documents chinois* has yielded for Chinese antiquarian, palaeographical, chronological, and kindred studies needs no exposition here. It has been set forth very clearly by M. Chavannes himself in his *Introduction*,¹ and has, since the publication of that volume, been fully recognized also by all competent Sinologists. Not less do they recognize the exceptional difficulties which had to be overcome in the decipherment and elucidation of those records.

Information
on history
of border-
line.

As far as the interpretation of individual archaeological finds and the determination of questions affecting the ancient topography of the Limes were concerned, I have already endeavoured to make proper use of the evidence which M. Chavannes' translation and analysis of the documents have furnished. But there still remains the task of reviewing any general information bearing on the history and conditions of China's westernmost border wall that can be gathered from the original records, as well as from the notices in the Han Annals and other texts which M. Chavannes has collected in his *Introduction*. By examining this information in the light of the facts which actual exploration on the ground has revealed, we may hope to realize better the organization which created and maintained this portion of the ancient 'Great Wall' on the desert marches of Kan-su, and to restore a picture of the life once led there. To these preliminary remarks it may be well to add that, while I am myself indebted to M. Chavannes' invaluable publication for whatever use I can make here of the original records and texts, the archaeological facts gathered by me from actual observation were only partially accessible to M. Chavannes at the time when his volume was written. This will help to explain the instances where, in the application of the data furnished by the documents from the Tun-huang Limes, I have been led to conclusions which to some extent differ from the inferences drawn by M. Chavannes.

First
creation of
'Great
Wall'.

The notices reproduced in M. Chavannes' *Introduction* from the Former Han Annals and other Chinese historical sources² show clearly the relation between the Limes with which we are here concerned and the older system of border defence which was intended to protect China further east from barbarian incursions. In 214 B.C. the Emperor Shih Huang-ti, of the Ch'in dynasty, linked up the defensive lines by which the feudal kingdoms of the North had endeavoured to

¹ Cf. Chavannes, *Documents*, pp. vii sqq.

² Cf. Chavannes, *ibid.*, p. v.