

may account for the want of 'office papers' from that period.<sup>3</sup> However this may be, the situation on the Tun-huang Limes must have undergone a marked change during the short weak reigns at the very beginning of the first century A.D. and during the usurpation of Wang Mang (A.D. 9-23) which succeeded them. We know from the Later Han Annals that in the years 6 B.C.-A.D. 5 there was a general break-up among 'the states of the Western regions', and that in A.D. 9 Wang Mang provoked a rupture between the Hsiung-nu and China.<sup>4</sup> In consequence of this we are told that 'the countries of the West conceived ill feeling and revolted; they broke off all relations with the Middle Kingdom and together they all submitted afresh to the Hsiung-nu'.

M. Chavannes has rightly drawn attention to the relative frequency of documents belonging to the time of Wang Mang, and the conclusion seems certainly justified that during those years the border line must have witnessed considerable military activity. It was plainly due to the necessity of defence against inroads from the revolted territories in the north and west. The purely defensive character of the border policy then prevailing is fully borne out by the retrenchment of the western extremity of the Limes which archaeological evidence, mentioned above,<sup>5</sup> leads us to assume for that very period. We have seen that the outlying watch-stations on the south-west flank are likely to have been abandoned about the time of Wang Mang.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, or very soon after, the line of wall stretching from T. xiv to T. iv must have ceased to be occupied as a continuous defensive system, though outlying posts at certain towers west of the Jade Gate were probably maintained somewhat longer.<sup>7</sup> In the later wall, which was built at right angles to the original Limes to connect the Jade Gate with the 'Yang barrier', this policy of passive defence has left its visible mark. The obvious intention was to reduce the extent of line which had to be permanently watched and garrisoned, and thus to concentrate the force that was available for defence. Exactly parallel cases of retrenchment are to be found in the history of the Roman Limes systems during periods when internal conditions imposed upon the Empire a purely defensive frontier policy.<sup>8</sup>

Troubles during Wang Mang's usurpation, A. D. 9-23.

Chinese power on the extreme north-west marches was even less able to assert itself during the first half-century or so which followed the accession of the Later Han dynasty in A.D. 25. The Limes as far west as the Jade Gate continued, indeed, to be guarded, as a fair number of documents with dates spread out between A.D. 35-77 prove.<sup>9</sup> But any attempt to re-establish order or imperial authority in the 'Western countries' was discountenanced from the capital, as a distinct record of the *Huo Han shu* tells us.<sup>10</sup> This policy of withdrawal and seclusion did not save the Chinese marches from being seriously disturbed by the Hsiung-nu, who during the Yung-p'ing period (A.D. 58-75) twice attacked Tun-huang and ravaged all the districts of *Ho-hsi* 河西, including also Su-chou, Kan-chou, and Liang-chou.<sup>11</sup>

Period of defensive frontier policy, A.D. 25-73.

<sup>3</sup> This explanation finds striking support in a passage which the Later Han Annals quote from a memorial on frontier policy addressed to the throne in A.D. 123. The memorialist points out therein that the policy pursued under the Emperors Suan (73-49 B.C.) and Yüan (48-33 B.C.) had 'secured subjects [beyond the administrative frontier] to take the place of a protective barrier; henceforth the gates of the passes were no longer closed; the winged (i. e. urgent) military orders no longer circulated'. Cf. Chavannes, *T'oung-pao*, 1907, p. 164, with an interesting note on the last words of the passage.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Chavannes, *T'oung-pao*, 1907, p. 155.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. above, pp. 694 sq. <sup>6</sup> See above, pp. 647 sq.

<sup>7</sup> See above, pp. 636, 674, 694.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. e.g. Kornemann, *Klio*, 1907, vii. pp. 73 sqq.; Cagnat, *L'armée romaine d'Afrique*, pp. 680 sqq.; Brünnow and v. Domszewski, *Die Provincia Arabia*, ii. *passim*.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Chavannes, *Documents*, p. iii. It is, perhaps, significant that none of these records were found at T. xiv itself, while quite a number was yielded by the closely adjoining station, T. xv. a (*Doc. Nos.* 483-86, 535). For the reasons which probably explain the growing importance acquired since Wang Mang's time by this subsidiary 'Gate' on the 'New Route of the North', cf. above, pp. 705 sqq. Placed on the most direct line of approach from the Hsiung-nu territories, it must have been specially exposed to attack.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Chavannes, *T'oung-pao*, 1907, p. 155.

<sup>11</sup> See Chavannes, *T'oung-pao*, 1906, p. 247; 1907, p. 156.