

Organiza-
tion of mili-
tary border
on Danube.

What makes the comparison with this modern Limes on the Danube of direct interest to us here are certain essential facts about the origin of its settlements and its military organization. As the tracts comprised in the 'Grenze' had become very largely deserted during the long preceding period of Turkish aggression and misrule, population had to be provided for them by the settlement of military colonists. These were drawn partly from other countries in the Habsburg dominions and partly from Serbian refugees that had crossed the Danube. The settlers were from the first brought under a purely military administration of which the company was the local unit. The cultivators belonging to a company formed a village community that held its lands in common. To each company was allowed a certain number of the watch-posts, usually placed in palisaded enclosures or towers (*palanka*), which guarded the line of the border. The small detachments needed for this purpose were provided by the family groups within each company giving their quota of men in turn. In addition to this periodical guard-mounting at the border posts, the military colonists were liable to a *levée en masse* in case of war. The regiments into which the border troops were already organized in peace time for the purpose of such general service could be employed far away from their frontier, and have often played their part on the battle-grounds of Italy, the Low Countries, or Germany. Special concessions as to land-tenure, etc., were meant to compensate for the hardships of such liability to service, which was practically lifelong. The officers who commanded the smaller units and looked after their administrative affairs in peace time were largely drawn from the border population itself; but appointments, especially in the higher ranks, were open also to officers of the regular army.

Limitations
of documen-
tary infor-
mation.

It is on general lines such as these, but, needless to say, with all the modifications implied by the differences of period, ground, civilization, etc., that we may with some probability assume the military 'agricultural colonies' established on the westernmost Chinese Limes to have been originally organized.¹³ It is impossible to expect that, with such scattered and often incomplete materials as our documents from the watch-posts of the Tun-huang Limes are, we should be able with certainty to reconstitute all essential details. Still less can we hope to trace such changes as are likely, in the course of more than two centuries, to have come over the arrangements for guarding the line of the Limes. These cannot have remained unaffected by the greatly varying phases through which, as we have seen, China's policy towards Central Asia and the distant West passed during the long period (98 B.C.—A.D. 137) covered by our documents. In this respect, too, the details must, in the absence of a connected historical record, necessarily escape us. Yet, in spite of these limitations, we obtain from the documents many interesting glimpses of the organization once maintained on this desert border, and the general observations just set forth may help us to interpret them better.

Other
records of
imperial
orders.

Before proceeding to details of that organization it may conveniently be noted that the document No. 60, which reproduces an imperial edict directing the establishment of a military colony, is not the only record to prove the issue of imperial orders concerning this distant border. In No. 63, from the same watch-station T. VI. b, we have the record, not completely decipherable, of an imperial edict concerning the constitution of the Ling-hu, Yen-hu, and Kuang-ch'ang companies, all three of which can be proved to have garrisoned watch-posts on the extreme south-west flank of the Limes.¹⁴ Unfortunately, the details about the sections and the strength prescribed cannot be made out with certainty. The other documents which mention imperial edicts, and which also, curiously enough,

¹³ See above, pp. 725, 729. As a curious modern parallel may be mentioned the organization of the Tun-huang levies raised from local agricultural families which I found in force on my visit to the oasis in 1907; see *Desert Cathay*, ii.

pp. 17, 294. No doubt similar—and equally ineffective—arrangements could still be traced elsewhere on the borders of modern China.

¹⁴ See above, p. 648.