

then went on to *Sukchau*, where they were lodged in the great *Yam-khaan* or Post-house, at the City Gate.' That the place here referred to under the Turki designation of *Karaul*, meaning 'watch-station', is identical with Chia-yü kuan was duly recognized by Sir Henry Yule and is subject to no doubt. The description clearly indicates that the 'chiusa' then maintained there was more or less of the same type as we see it at present.²⁰

Less than a century and a half later we receive an exactly corresponding account of this frontier station in the very interesting relation about Cathay which Gislen de Busbeq, Charles V's ambassador to the Porte (1555-62), took down from the mouth of a Turkish Dervish.²¹ This intelligent and observant 'Turkish vagabond' had travelled to distant Cathay, with a caravan to which he apparently attached himself, from the Persian frontier. 'After a fatiguing journey of many months they came to a defile which forms, as it were, the barrier gate of Cathay. For a great part of that empire consists of inland country, and here there was an inclosing chain of rugged and precipitous mountains, affording no passage except through a narrow strait in which a garrison was stationed on the king's part.'²² There the question is put to the merchants, "What they bring, whence they come, and how many of them are there?" The answer being given, the king's guards pass it by signal—by smoke if in daylight, by fire if by night—to the next watch-tower; they to the next, and so on, till in a few hours the message reaches the king at Cathay: a thing which would by any other communication require many days. The king sends back his orders in the same manner and with equal rapidity, saying whether all shall be admitted, or only a part, or the whole put off.'

Account of
Chia-yü
kuan re-
corded by
de Busbeq.

The whole account is one of distinct interest. It describes quite correctly the position of Chia-yü kuan and the system of controlling the admission of foreigners as worked there in Ming times. The reference to the use of fire-signals further proves that the chain of watch-towers along the line of the border wall which it presupposes must have then still been maintained in fair order. Incidentally we receive here the fullest description I can trace in Western sources of that early Chinese system of optical telegraphy which the documents discovered by me along the Tun-huang Limes so abundantly attest for Han times.²³ We can scarcely attach blame to our wanderer, remarkably matter of fact as he is in almost all his statements, for crediting this system with a higher degree of precision than it could ever have aimed at; for obviously foreign visitors were dependent in this respect upon such explanation of the messages transmitted, etc., as the Chinese in charge chose to give them.

Interest of
Turkish
Dervish's
account.

At any rate, if our next Western informant about Chia-yü kuan, Benedict Goës, had accepted this statement about the use of the fire-signal service, he would have had reason in his own case to complain of its having been worked with excessive slowness. From the closing portion of the pious traveller's story as preserved by Ricci²⁴ we learn that from 'Camul', i. e. Hāmi, 'they came in nine days to the celebrated northern wall of China, reaching it at the place called *Chiaicuon*, and there

Benedict
Goës'
passage
through
Chia-yü
kuan.

²⁰ As Sir Henry Yule rightly pointed out, there is a distinct resemblance between the way in which Shāh Rukh's embassy was received here and what the extracts preserved from the work of the Arab traveller Ibn Muhalhil (*circa* A.D. 941) record about the treatment which those 'desiring to enter China from the Turkish countries' received at the *Maqām-ul-Bāb* (House of the Gate) 'in a sandy region' and further on at the *Wādī-ul-Maqām* (Valley of the Station), etc.; cf. Yule-Cordier, *Cathay*, i. pp. 251 sq. The localities meant cannot be definitely identified; but the passage shows how deeply rooted in tradition was the system of con-

trolling admission of foreigners on this frontier.

²¹ See Yule-Cordier, *Cathay*, i. p. 297.

²² The text in *A. Gislenii Busbequii omnia quae extant*, Amstelodami, 1660, p. 327, runs as follows: 'Postquam multorum mensium labore ad angustias ac veluti claustra regni Cathaini perventum est (nam bona pars ditionis regis Cathay mediterranea est, asperis montibus praeruptisque saxis circumdata, nec potest intrari, nisi per certas fauces, quae regis illius praesidiis tenentur), ibi mercatores interrogantur,' etc.

²³ Cf. above, pp. 753 sqq.

²⁴ Cf. Yule-Cordier, *Cathay*, iv. p. 239.