

SECTION XI.—THE ABANDONMENT OF LOU-LAN

No later
mention of
Lou-lan
colony.

I am unable to trace any Chinese record relating to the military colony established at Lou-lan of a date later than that to which Li Tao-yüan's notice may belong. We know that after the close of the Eastern Chin Dynasty (A. D. 317-420) and the division of the empire between North and South all attempts at asserting Chinese predominance in the Western Countries ceased for over two centuries. When, under the Sui dynasty (A. D. 589-618), interest in those distant regions revived, the imperial commissioner P'ei Chü, collecting information at what now is Kan-chou, wrote in A. D. 608 his 'Treatise with maps on the Western Countries'. But the account he gives of the three routes which were then open to these territories clearly shows that by that time the *Wei lió's* 'route of the Centre', passing north of the P'u-ch'ang lake and through Lou-lan, was no longer known.¹

Lou-lan
station
abandoned
in 4th
century.

This negative evidence of the records cannot tell us when the route actually became closed. But we may safely assume that this event was not far removed from the time when the Lou-lan Site was abandoned. And for the approximate determination of this we have fortunately definite archaeological evidence to guide us. That the abandonment of the Chinese station at Lou-lan took place some time during the fourth century A. D., and probably not long after its first third, is proved by the fact that among the numerous Chinese dated records found at the ruined station L.A. there are only three belonging to the fourth century, and of these none later than A. D. 330.² Against these we have not less than fifteen in my own collection dating from the years A. D. 263-70, with at least six more of the same years brought away by Dr. Hedin.³ Equally convincing is the evidence of the coins. In the course of my explorations of 1906 and of 1914 I recovered an aggregate of over five hundred copper coins from the whole Lou-lan area.⁴ Yet among this great array of coins there is not a single piece showing a type later than those issued during Han times and down to the Western Chin dynasty.

Cause of
abandon-
ment of
route.

Whereas the time of abandonment of the Lou-lan site and of the once important route passing through it may thus be considered as approximately fixed, we are not in a position at present to make a safe assertion as to the direct cause of this abandonment. In view of the chronological coincidence it would be tempting at first sight to seek this cause solely in the cessation of Chinese political control westwards, which took place in the course of the fourth century A. D., and the considerable reduction of trade intercourse with the Western Countries which is likely to have accompanied it. But this assumption would not by itself suffice to explain why, on the reassertion of Chinese authority in the Tārīm Basin before the middle of the seventh century, no attempt was made to reopen the Lou-lan route. It was certainly the shortest line of communication between Tun-huang and the great oases along the southern foot of the T'ien-shan, and, as Li Tao-yüan's commentary shows, a clear recollection of it had survived in China until only about a century earlier.

Abandon-
ment con-
nected with,
or followed
by, physical
change.

We are thus led to conclude that the abandonment of the Lou-lan route must have been connected with, or else followed in the interval by, that great physical change, disappearance of an

¹ Cf. Chavannes, *T'oung-pao*, 1905, p. 534, note 3; also Richthofen, *China*, i. pp. 529 sq. P'ei Chü's central route led through Turfān, Kara-shahr, Kuchā, and, no doubt, reached the first place, as the modern Chinese high road does, via Hāmi. His southern route followed the line Shan-shan, Yü-t'ien (Khotan), etc. The routes mentioned by P'ei Chü are the same which, as seen from the T'ang Annals, were in use after the reconquest of Eastern Turkestan as

long as Chinese control lasted.

² Cf. above, p. 408. To the two documents of A. D. 312 and 330 there must be added a third, of A. D. 310, in Dr. Hedin's collection; see Herr Himly's paper in Hedin, *Central Asia and Tibet*, ii. p. 144.

³ See Herr Himly's paper, *ibid.*

⁴ For a synopsis of the coins found at Lou-lan in 1906, see below, Appendix B.