

in the Chinese records brought to light by my excavations I knew already from some which Chiang Ssü-yeh had been able to decipher on the spot. But it needed M. Chavannes' translations, as embodied in his *Documents*, to show me how frequent these references to fire-signals are in the records recovered from the different stations.²

The subject is one which will best be discussed below in the review of the general antiquarian information furnished by the documents from the Limes. Here it will suffice to point out two minor observations which support this interpretation. No doubt, such signals would ordinarily be lit on the top of the towers, whence fires, even if small, could be quickly sighted by the men on guard at neighbouring stations. The reddish burnt appearance of the clay on the top of several watch-towers where it still remained and was accessible bore direct testimony to this practice. But there might be circumstances, as on occasion of a particularly big fire needed to penetrate a murky night or to light up the foreground in expectation of an immediate attack, when it would be necessary to set a whole stack on fire. The fact that the remains of burnt stacks were usually found, as shown by Plate 39 in the case of T. XII. a, at points such as the south-east corner of the group, where the risk of igniting others was less, thus receives its proper explanation. The greatly varying height of the stacks, from 7 feet down to 1 foot only, at the same watch-station can best be accounted for by the successive use made of the stored materials for signal-fires kindled in the usual way on the tower itself.

After proceeding for about three-quarters of a mile to the south-east along the narrow plateau on which the watch-station T. XII. a and the adjoining segment of the wall are built, the tower T. XII (Fig. 181) is reached. It occupies the southern end of that gravel ridge where it drops down into the wide marshy depression which I have already had occasion to mention in connexion with my return to the Limes from Nan-hu.³ The bogs and small lakes found in the Nullahs on either side of T. XII. a fill northward offshoots of the same depression. The latter is traversed by the caravan track to Lop close to the south of T. XII over ground slightly higher than the rest, and it is this topographical fact which explains why we find here the ruin of a watch-tower well removed from the line of the Limes wall. It is clear that the ancient route to Lou-lan must also have crossed the depression at this point, the ground further south being quite impassable owing to the large salt morass. A reference to Plate 33 or Map No. 74. D. 3 shows that a post maintained at T. XII was excellently placed for guarding the ancient route and watching the traffic passing along it. But we see also that it could not be intended to strengthen the defensive line of the Limes itself, as it is well behind it and near a segment of it which was adequately protected by the natural obstacles of impassable marshes.

I am therefore strongly inclined to believe that the purpose of T. XII was to serve as a road-side post for what I may call the police control of the border as distinct from its military defence. Guards placed here could make sure that westward-bound travellers, traders, etc., had been duly authorized to proceed *extra muros* by those in charge of the 'Jade Gate', the main frontier station, located at T. XIV. From all that Chinese and foreign records show us of the administration of the *kuan*, or 'barrier', on the empire's western border during successive periods, we can feel quite sure that this function of the police cordon maintained there was always taken as seriously as it used to be until quite recent years at the *Chia-yü kuan* of Su-chou, the modern representative of the ancient *Yü-mên kuan*.⁴ In the same way a preliminary watch could be kept here upon travellers, etc.,

² Cf. below, pp. 752 sqq. Here I may conveniently note the curious fact that we have a record of the collection of such fascines in one of the slips found at T. XII. a. ii, *Doc.*, No. 609. It mentions the respectable total of 42,390 faggots. M. Chavannes has correctly recognized that these must have

been intended to be used either for kindling signal-fires or for repairing the wall.

³ See above, p. 629.

⁴ For *Chia-yü kuan*, the modern equivalent of *Yü-mên*, see *Desert Cathay*, ii. pp. 274 sqq.; below, chap. xxvii. sec. ii.

Fascines for lighting signal-fires.

Position of watch-tower T. XII.

Watch-post for police control of road.