

then occupied by that famous frontier station, and this question is one which, on account of its historical interest and its bearing on the archaeology of the Limes, must claim special consideration here. That the 'barrier' known as the Jade Gate 玉門 had received its designation from the jade, *yü* 玉, which since the earliest times formed the most precious of the imports from Central Asia into China, has always been fully recognized by Chinese antiquarians and Western scholars alike.¹⁴ But critical inquiry as to the varying positions which it undoubtedly occupied at different periods has become possible with real profit only since my systematic exploration of the remains of the ancient Han Limes.

Ssü-ma
Ch'ien's
reference to
the Jade
Gate.

In the preceding chapter I have been able to show at length that the evidence of dated documents, combined with that of archaeological and topographical observations, proves the site of T. XIV on the Limes to mark the position where the headquarters station of the Yü-mên barrier was established in and after 96 B.C., if not for some years earlier.¹⁵ But M. Chavannes, while fully recognizing the strength of this evidence, has drawn attention to an interesting passage in Ssü-ma Ch'ien's history which, if its literal interpretation must be accepted as decisive, would indicate that this was not the earliest position of the famous Jade Gate.¹⁶ The passage relates to the return in 103 B.C. of the general Li Kuang-li, with the scanty remnant of his forces, from the first and unsuccessful expedition he had led against the kingdom of Ta-yüan or Farghāna. 'The Son of Heaven having learned [of Li Kuang-li's failure] was much enraged; he sent emissaries to close the Jade Gate and declared that all those of the army who would venture to pass [the gate] would at once be decapitated. The general of Êrh-shih [i.e. Li Kuang-li] was afraid and therefore remained at Tun-huang.'

First posi-
tion of Yü-
mên east of
Tun-huang.

It is obvious that Ssü-ma Ch'ien's statement, if exact, presupposes that the Jade Gate, and with it the most advanced section of the Limes, was in 103 B.C. still at some point east of Tun-huang. The fact that, as we shall presently see, the construction of the Limes beyond Tun-huang is not recorded until after events belonging to 102-101 B.C. raises a strong presumption in favour of the statement. But it is not yet possible definitely to determine the point where the Jade Gate was situated in the years immediately preceding. Judging from what my surveys of 1907 have shown me, together with the actual exploration of the remains of the Limes between Su-chou and An-hsi carried out in 1914, it appears to me that there are only two points along this line at which topographical and other local considerations would have allowed an important frontier station, at 'rail-head' as it were of the Limes, to be established with advantage. One is the point near the hamlet of Shih-êrh-tun (Map No. 85. A. 2), some 15 miles north of the present Yü-mên-hsien, where the Limes wall coming from north of Su-chou first approaches the Su-lo Ho, close to the sharp westward bend of the river. I shall have occasion in a subsequent chapter to describe the remains found at this point, which curiously enough include a small but massive fort recalling the one at T. XIV.^{16a}

almost contemporary record of Ssü-ma Ch'ien is quoted in the original. The corresponding passages in the *Ch'ien Han shu* show that this reference to the extension of the Limes is made in connexion with Chao P'o-nu's expedition against Lou-lan and Turfān, 108 B.C.; see Wylie, *J. Anthropol. Inst.*, x. pp. 25, 71, and above, p. 336.

¹⁴ For the views held by the latter, cf. e.g. Richthofen, *China*, i. p. 36, where, however, the word *yü*, 'jade', is erroneously assumed also to be contained in the name of the present Chia-yü kuan near Su-chou (cf. below, chap. xxvii. sec. i). There are plentiful disquisitions on the question of *Yü-mên* in later Chinese antiquarian literature, including an essay ascribed

to no lesser a personage than the Emperor Ch'ien-lung. But they are not accessible to me in translation, and there seems no reason to assume that, as far as the earliest period is concerned, these learned inquiries carried on in the study disposed of historical sources other than those still available. It is obvious that in order to attain any approach to exact determination of the localities it was an essential preliminary to investigate the remains of the Limes and its topography directly in the field.

¹⁵ See above, pp. 689 sqq.

¹⁶ Cf. Chavannes, *Documents*, p. vi, note 4.

^{16a} Cf. below, chap. xxvii. sec. v.