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## **Archaeological Investigations and Studies on the Protector-General of Western Regions in the Han Dynasty**

*Zhang Qian 张骞's diplomatic mission to the western regions in the Han Dynasty carved out the Silk Roads, opened the channel of cultural exchange between the East and the West, and helped the Han Dynasty gain a deeper understanding of the states in the western regions. When the Protector-General of the Western Regions was established, the Han Dynasty also set up beacon towers and defensive pavilions in the Western Regions and had garrison troops reclaim wasteland and grow food grain there to ensure the smooth flow of the Silk Roads and the communication between Chinese and foreign envoys. As an essential part of Chinese and foreign cultural exchange, studying city sites along the Silk Roads in the Han Dynasty has academic significance. This paper uses the Tarim Basin's city sites as the research object. From the perspective of archaeology, this paper systematically sorts out the data of the city sites around the Tarim Basin. It analyzes the characteristics of their spatial distribution, the platform and size of the city sites, the structure of the city walls, the building sites, and the related relics around the city sites. Based on historical documents, unearthed materials, and previous studies, this paper will talk about the sites related to Protector-General of the Western Regions and the latest archaeological research and study the characteristics and spatial distribution of the city sites in Tarim Basin, especially the city sites along the northern route of the Silk Roads. Based on historical records, this paper clarifies the spatial distribution relationship between the Protector-General and the neighboring states of the western regions and then tries to find the location and corresponding city sites of some recorded states in history.*

**Keywords:** Han Dynasty, Silk Road, Protector-General of Western Regions, city sites.

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## **Археологическое изучение и исследования Наместничества Западного края в период династии Хань**

*Дипломатическая миссия Чжан Цяня на запад в период династии Хань положила начало Шелковому пути, открыла культурные обмены между Востоком и Западом, помогла*

достичь более глубокого понимания о положении западных территорий в период династии Хань. Когда было учреждено Наместничество Западного края, в династии Хань были возведены сигнальные башни и оборонительные сооружения в западных регионах. Гарнизонным войскам было приказано окультуривать пустоши и выращивать там продовольственное зерно, чтобы обеспечить бесперебойное течение Шелкового пути и коммуникации между китайскими и иностранными посланниками. Как неотъемлемая часть китайского и иностранного культурного обмена, изучение городских поселений вдоль Шелкового пути во времена династии Хань имеет академическое значение. В данной статье в качестве объекта исследования используются городские поселения на территории Таримской впадины. С точки зрения археологии в этой статье систематически распределены данные о городских стоянках вокруг Таримской впадины. В ней анализируются характеристики их пространственного распределения, фундамент и размер городских поселений, структура городских стен, места застройки и связанный с ними инвентарь вокруг городских поселений. На основе исторических документов, раскопок и предыдущих исследований в этой статье будет рассказано о памятниках, связанных с Наместничеством Западного края, последних археологических исследованиях, а также изучении характеристики и пространственного распределения городских памятников Таримской впадины, особенно городских поселений на северном ответвлении Шелкового пути. Основываясь на исторических записях, в этой статье выясняются отношения пространственного распределения между Наместничеством Западного края и соседними государствами западного региона, а затем делается попытка найти местоположение и связи с городскими поселениями некоторых государств, которые отражены в истории.

Ключевые слова: Династия Хань, Шелковый путь, Наместничество Западного края, городские поселения.

Zhang Qian 张骞's mission to the West officially opened up the Silk Roads, after which the Han dynasty established a series of military and political establishments in the West Regions, marking the formal incorporation of the West into the central government's jurisdiction.

The Protector-General of Western Regions (Xiyu Duhufu, 西域都护府) was the highest military and political institution in the Western Region established by the central authority during the Han Dynasty and was a significant initiative of the Han Dynasty to manage the Western Region. As a result, the study of the Western Region Capital Protection Office and its associated ancient city sites in the Western Region has been of great interest. From the Qing dynasty onwards, scholars such as Xu Song 徐松 have studied this topic, but mainly based on historical materials and excavated documents, discussing the date of the establishment of the Protector-General of Western Regions, the attributes of its officials, its jurisdictional duties, and other contents, but less on the location and form. With the rise of public opinion research in the north-west during the Qing dynasty and the investigation of the north-west by Chinese and foreign expeditions, Stein, Sven Hedin, and Huang Wenbi began to notice the distribution of ancient cities in the Western Regions and the way they were built. Some scholars have attempted to correlate the sites discovered by archaeological investigations with the ancient cities of the West in the literature. However, the location of the Protector-General and its relationship with the surrounding city-states has not been fully discussed. As archaeological investigations and excavations continue in

the Xinjiang, the exploration of the location of the Protector-General has become an essential task in Western archaeology, and corresponding archaeological investigations and excavations are underway, as is the study of the Protector-General and the Western cities under its jurisdiction.

The Protector-General is crucial to the archaeological study of the Western Regions during the Han dynasty. Both the *Dili zhi* 地理志 and the *Xiyu zhuan* 西域传 sections of the *Hanshu* use the Protector-General place as an essential geographical coordinate to record the relative location of the ancient cities of the Western Regions; without determining the exact location of the Protector-General and its relationship to the surrounding city sites, it is impossible further to study the ancient cities of the Western Regions. *Hanshu* recorded that before Zhang Qian's passage to the Western Regions and the establishment of official offices by the Han dynasty, the Western states had already built their cities and towns with corresponding economic production methods and lifestyles, and there were trade exchanges and battles between different areas. This official record provides essential information for a better understanding of the Western states' relationship with the Protector-General. Before and after the establishment of the Protector-General, the Han dynasty set up cantonments and beacons in the Western Regions, thus forming a whole system of military administration, which provides an essential reference for determining the location of the Protector-General Capital and its relationship with other ancient cities in the West.

### *An overview of the study of the Protector-General of Western Regions*

As the highest military and political institution established in the Western regions during the Han dynasty, the Protector-General of Western Regions has been studied from different perspectives, using different materials and methods at different stages. Documentary research has been the foundation of this research, so early studies of documents and commentaries on historical sources have been fundamental to all the issues of the Western Regional Prefecture. They have formed the basis of a cumulative historical record. The investigations of western explorers and the rise of public opinion research in the north-west during the Qing dynasty did fieldwork in the north-west, the geography of the mountains and rivers and the examination of ancient transport the focus of research, and the phased research of scholars such as Xu Song 徐松 became an indelible truth for a long time and was directly quoted by many scholars. As archaeological surveys and excavations began, archaeological research also began to fuel exploration about the Protector-General and combined with technological means such as remote sensing to explore the findings in multiple ways. A steady stream of new material from related censuses and excavations, and excavated documentary material, has allowed research in the field to move beyond the superficial and thus allow for a deeper and more diverse discussion.

## Historical Documentary Studies

A study of the Protector-General of the Western Regions and the Western cities is inseparable from analyzing the historical records. There is a clear divergence of opinion between the documents on the Protector-General. From the perspective of the historical material, scholars have mainly discussed the time and location of the establishment of the Protector-General and the official positions under it, with more discussion on the history of the establishment, the predecessor, and the significance of the Protector-General in administering the western states.

### *1) The date of the establishment of the Western Regions' Protector-General*

Regarding the circumstances surrounding the establishment of the Western Region Capital Protection Office, the Xiyuzhuan of Hanshu states that:

When Emperor Xuan 宣, a Guards' Major, was sent with a commission to protect Shanshan 鄯善 and the several states to the west. At the time of its conquest, Gushi 姑师 was not destroyed but was split between the two kings of Nearer and Further Cheshi 车师 and the six other states in the northern mountain. At that time, Han only protected the Southern Route, unable to take over the Northern Route completely, but the Xiongnu 匈奴 no longer felt at ease. After this, King Rizhu 日逐 rebelled against the Chanyu 单于 and led his people to submit to Han. Zheng Ji 郑吉, the Envoy for the Protection of Shanshan 鄯善 and the West, received him. On his arrival, the Han government invested King Rizhu with the title Marquis Guide 归德 (allegiance to imperial authority) and Zheng Ji with that of Marquis Anyuan 安远 (pacification of distant areas). These events took place in the third year of the Shenjue 神爵 reign period (59 BCE), and the government took the occasion to commission Zheng Ji to act as the Protector of both the Northern Route (and the Southern Route). He was therefore titled Duhu/Protector-General, an office which originated with this appointment of Zheng Ji. From that time onwards, the post of Commandant Tongpu 僮仆 was abolished, and Xiongnu became increasingly weaker and was unable to approach the Western Regions ... The Protector-General had his seat in the city of Wulei 乌垒, which was 2,738 li 里 from Yang Barrier 阳关, close to the agricultural office of Quli 渠犂 and the land was fertile. The location was at the center of the Western Regions, so the Protector-General had his seat here. [Hanshu, 3873, 3874; Yu Taishan 2021, p. 78].

Based on this, it seems that the Protector-General of the Western Regions was established in the third year of the Shenjue 神爵 reign period of the Emperor Xuan 宣.

In Baiguan gongqing biao 百官公卿表 of Hanshu, The Protector-General of the Western Regions, an additional official, was first set up in the second year of the Dijie 地节 reign period (68 BCE) of Emperor Xuan, to protect the thirty-six states of the Western Regions as Commandant of Cavalry and Grand Master of Remonstrance [Hanshu, 738; Yu Taishan 2021, p. 80].

There has been much discussion about the timing of the establishment of the Protector-General. The main views are that it was established in the second year of the Dijie 地节 period (68 BCE), the first year of the Yuankang 元康 period (65 BCE), the second year of the Shenjue 神爵 period (60 BCE), and the third year of the Shenjue period (59 BCE). Prior to the appearance of the Juyan 居延 Han bamboo slips, the majority of scholars supported the idea that the Western Regions' Protector-General was established in the middle of the Shenjue 神爵 period: such as Hu Sanxing 胡三省 and Xu Song 徐松 among others, argued that the Protector-General as Western Regions' government was established in the second year of the Shenjue period [Zizhi tongjian, p. 859; Hanshu xiyuzhuan buzhu, p. 399], and this view was later shared by scholars such as Zeng Wenwu 曾问吾, Huang Wenbi 黄文弼 and Zhou Zhenhe 周振鹤 [Zeng Wenwu, 1936, p. 31, 32; Huang Wenbi, 1989, p. 376; Zhou Zhenhe, 2017, p. 189].\* Later, the unearthed Han bamboo slips recorded that “in the fourth year of Yuankang 元康 reign-period, in the second month, whose first day is *jiwei* 己未, the Colonel (for the Assistance of Imperial) Envoys for Protecting Shanshan 鄯善 and the West, Zheng Ji 郑吉, the Guards' Major Fu Chang 富昌, the Assistant Qing 庆, and the Commandant Yi Jiandu 宜建都 ... in the second year of the Yuankang 元康 reign-period, in the fifth month, on the day *guiwei* 癸未, sent the Assistant for Commandant She 赦, with a call-to-arms of [the Colonel for the Assistance of Imperial] Envoys for Protecting the Western Regions, to lead fifty men who were exempted from punishment (on condition that they served in the army) to drive carriages ... started out from.” [Xie Guihua et al., 1987, p. 192; Yu Taishan, 2021, p. 391]. Some scholars found contradictions between this slip and the historical records, so new opinions emerged. Some scholars had directly advanced the time of establishment, such as Liu Hongbo 刘洪波, who believed that the establishment of the Protector-General was no later than the fourth year of Yuankang [Liu Hongbo, 1986, p. 99–101], and Liu Guofang 刘国防, who believes that “the statement that established in the second year of Dijie reign-period is plausible” [Liu Guofang, 2002, p. 18–22]. Some scholars have taken a compromise approach, viewing the establishment of the Protector-General as a process, such as Zhang Weihua 张维华, who argues that the Protector-General was named in the second year of the Dijie and the government was established in the second year of the Shenjue reign-period [Zhang Weihua, 1980, p. 245–308]. Liu Xigan 刘锡淦 argues that there was an “additional official” for the Protector-General, so that “the governor was established in Dijie reign-period, but formally appointed in Shenjue reign-period” [Liu Xigan, 1983, p. 64–67]. Yu Taishan thought that “Zheng Ji's title was ‘Colonel Assistanting the Imperial Envoys and Protecting the Western

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\*The “Zizhi Tongjian” Hu Sanxing 胡三省 noted: “Baiguan gongqing Biao said that ‘Protector-General of the Western Regions is an additional official, the second year of Dijie period firstly set up,’ Here the year of Shenjue was mistaken for the year of the Dijie. The Xiyuzhuan of Hanshu recorded the establishment in the third year of Shenjue period, which is also wrong.” Xu Song 徐松 noted: “After Zheng Ji 郑吉 had defeated Cheshi, he protected the Northern Road (both the Southern Road) and was already called Duhu/Protector-General, which means that the establishment of Protector-General should have been in the second year (of Shenjue period) in autumn.” Wang xianqian 王先谦 also noted that Protector-General was set up in the second year of Shenjue period, not in Dijie period.

Regions' in the second year of the Dijie reign-period when he was the Gentleman-in-Attendance in charge of the agricultural colonies at Quli 渠犁. However, he also was called 'Colonel Assistanting the Imperial Envoys and Protecting Shanshan 鄯善 and the West because he did not have charge of the various states on the Northern Route until he routed Jushi 车师 and was promoted to Guards' Major in the winter of that year. Zheng Ji, as 'Colonel Assistanting the Imperial Envoys and Protecting Shanshan 鄯善 and the West', received King Rizhu 日逐 in the autumn of the second year of the Shenjue 神爵 reign period, when his principal official position was Commandant of Cavalry and Grand Master for Splendid Happiness. In the next year, he was granted the title Marquis Anyuan 安远, and he then established his general headquarters, having his seat in the town of Wulei, and acted as the Protector of the various states on both the Northern and the Southern Route" [Yu Taishan, 2021, p. 397]. Hong Tao 洪涛 also argues that the Protector-General was established in the third year of the Shenjue 神爵 reign period, and Li Dalong 李大龙 interprets the term "Colonel Assistanting the Imperial Envoys (Shizhejiaowei, 使者校尉)" separately as both "Envoy (Shizhe, 使者)" or "Colonel (Jiaowei, 校尉)", according to the change in Zheng Ji's position, concluding that the name was changed from "Imperial Envoys and Protecting Shanshan 鄯善 and the West" to "Protector-General of the Western Regions" in the third year of Shenjue reign-period [Li Dalong, 1991, p. 64–70]. Li Bingquan 李炳泉 argues that the Protector-General was established in the second year of the Shenjue reign-period but that the headquarter was established in the third year of the Shenjue [Li Bingquan, 2003, 69–75].

We believe that Zheng Ji, as the first governor of the Western Regions, was first agriculturally cantoned in Quli 渠犁 in the second year of the Dijie period as a Gentleman-in-Attendance 侍郎. In the same year, he breached the Cheshi 车师 and moved to the position of Guards' Major, making it possible to protect the southwestern road to Shanshan. In the second year of the Shenjue period, the Xiongnu king King Rizhu surrendered to the Han Dynasty and was received by Zheng Ji, who was the "Protector-General of the western regions, the Commandant of Cavalry" 都护西域骑都尉 sent by Emperor. According to the "Jing, Wu, Zhao, Xuan, Yuan, Cheng gongcheng biao 景武昭宣元成功臣表 of Hanshu, the general headquarters was established in central Western Regions and set in Wulei. In the context of establishing the Protector-General of the Western Regions, the situation was tense and time was short, so it is unlikely that an entirely new capital was built. From an archaeological point of view, the city's site as the Protector-General of the Western Regions must date from the time of its establishment, which was in the third year of the Shenjue reign period.

## *2) Geographical location of the Protector-General of the Western Regions*

The location of the Protector-General of the Western Regions is also documented. As mentioned above, The Zheng Ji Zhuan of Hanshu states that Zheng Ji "set up the headquarters in the central Western Regions and ruled the city of Wulei 乌垒" [Hanshu,



3006], which suggests that the Protector-General was established in the center of the Western Regions geographically. The Xiyu Zhuan of Hanshu states that “the Western Regions were first opened at the time of Emperor Xiaowu 孝武, and originally there had been thirty-six states, after which they were slightly divided into fifty or so, all in the west of Xiongnu 匈奴 and south of Wusun 乌孙. There are great mountains to the north and south and a river in the center, more than 6,000 li from east to west and 1,000 li from north to south. On the east, the area adjoins Han, from which it was blocked by the Yumen 玉门 and Yang 阳 Passes, on the west by the Congling 葱岭 mountains.” [Hanshu, 3871; Yu Taishan, 2021, p. 66]. The phrase defines the scope of the “Western Regions” in a narrow sense, as Yan Shigu 颜师古 noted: “the location of Protector-General is recorded at the center of the Western Regions, means that almost located in the center among the states, the distances between Protector-General and these states are tend to average” [Wang Xianqian, 1983, p. 1325]. Yu Taishan argues that the record “in the center of the Western Regions” is just a general statement [Yu Taishan, 2021, p. 84]. From Xiyu zhuan of Hanshu we can acquire that Protector-General of the Western Regions seated in Wulei and Wulei is about 2,738 li from Yang 阳pass, close to the Quli agricultural office, and the land was fertile, making it the center of the Western Regions [Hanshu, 3874].

The Notes on the book of waterways/Shui Jing Zhu 水经注 recorded that,

The water flows southeast again and flows right into the North River. The North River 北河 flows east again to the south of the Qiuci 龟兹 State and then east again to merge with the Qiuci River 龟兹川水 water on the left. There are two sources of Qiuci River water, and the west side originates from the south of the North Great Mountain 北大山 ... It also flows out of the southeast of the mountain, and one of its branches 枝水 flows to the left. Again to the southeast, the water flows in three parts, and the two waters to the right flow together to the southeast and into the North River. Dongchuan water 东川水 out of the northeast of Qiuci, through the Chisha 赤沙, Jili 积梨, and towards the south. The water branch out off towards the right, southwest into the city of Qiuci ... Dongchuan water and southeast flow run in the east of the Luntai. The Dongchuan water continues to flow southeast and converges to the right with the Xichuan branch water 西川枝水 ... There is a former city between the waters, which was presumably the place where the cantonment army was stationed. The water (Xichuan branch) flows southeast into the Dongchuan River, which flows southeast again, south of the Wulei country, and its water flows southeast into the Great River 大河. [Shui Jing Zhu, p. 40, 41].

From the water mentioned above flow, we can judge that the Qiuci River 龟兹水 is divided into two rivers, east (Dongchuan) and west (Xichuan), through the east and west of Qiuci city 龟兹城, and convergence at the south of the city, then southeast flow into the North River as Tarim River, the Dongchuan water southeast flow through the east of Luntai 轮台, and southeast flow, pools to the right into a tributary of the Xichuan branch water, southeast through the south of Wulei. According to the actual situation, “Xichuan water” is the present-day Weigan River 渭干河, and “Dongchuan water” should be the Kucha River 库车河. The Xiyu Shuidao Ji 西域水道记 Recorded, “Kucha River out of the mountains to the east of the broken city 破城 is divided into

three branches, the westernmost is Milteyan River 密尔特彦河, into the Shaharik Lake 沙哈里克湖, the next east one is Ucharshai River 乌恰尔萨伊河, also into the Shaharik Lake 沙哈里克湖, the easternmost one is Yesbashi River 叶斯巴什河, into the Atiwenek Lake 阿提委讷克湖, locally known as the first, second and third channel of the river.” [Xu Song, p. 100]. The Archaeological Record of the Tarim Basin 塔里木盆地考古记 records, “The present-day Tongchang River 铜厂河 is also divided into three branches: the westernmost named Chengshang River 城上河, also known as the ‘Kucha River’ 库车河, flowing through the eastern side of Kucha City, Dongchuan water recorded in Shui Jing Zhu is Kucha River.” [Huang Wenbi, 1958, p. 27]. From this, we can get that Dongchuan water flows southeast again, to the east of Luntai. This provides us with an essential clue to the location of the Protector-General.

Xu Song mentions in his Supplementary Note on the Western Regions of the Hanshu/Hanshu Xiyu zhuan buzhu: “(The Protector-General seated in Wulei city) The present-day city of Kucha belongs to Ceter 策特尔 Juntai 军台 and its eastern Cherchu 车尔楚 Juntai, both of which are in the land of Wulei” [Xu Song, 2005a, p. 400]. In Xiyu Shuidao Ji, Xu Song also places the Wulei city south of Cedaya 策大雅 Juntai. It recorded that,

The Tarim River flows east from Yugurzhuang 玉古尔庄. Yugur is a place in Han Dynasty called Luntai.....Forty li south of the Yugurzhuang is a former small city, and twenty li south is another former large city. For another hundred li or so to the south, there are many ancient cities and towns. The fields and drains are still there, reaching the river banks, and it is suspected that the Agriculture office/Tianguan 田官 is ruled. The river flowed another 200 miles east and passed south of the Ceter 策特尔 Juntai. Another 160 li to the east passed south of the Cherchu 车尔楚 Juntai. Between the two courses, the plain is fertile. To the south, near the river, is the former land of Quli 渠犁, and to the north, near the mountains, is the former land of Wulei 乌垒. The Han Dynasty set up the Protector-General here, which was considered the center of the Western Regions. [Xu Song, 2005b, p. 102].

Xu Song was the first one to determine the location of the Western Regions’ Protector-General in the Han dynasty through fieldwork and to give a more definite indication of its existence, and most later scholars cite his views.

In Xinjiang Tuzhi 新疆图志, Volume 81, Luntai County, it is recorded Cedaya 策大雅 and Yeyungou 野云沟, the note under the Cedaya said, “also known as Ceter 策特尔, it means tabernacle in Hui language because there were military camps set here. Between Kurchu 库尔楚 post of Yanqi Fu 焉耆府, the plain between these three courses is fertile. To the south, near the river, is the former land of Quli, and to the north, near the mountains, is the former land of Wulei” [Wang Shunan, 2015, p. 1546, 1547].

The Xiyutuzhi 西域图志 also recorded the above location in more detail: “Ceter 策特尔 is west of the Cherchu 车尔楚 140 li, northeast of the city of Harashal 哈喇沙尔 four hundred and ninety li, over the Eshimoguole 额什墨郭勒 to its land, spare water, and grass...” it also noted that “from Kulongle 库陇勒 west to Ceter three hundred li, it is no doubt that Ceter is the location of Wulei.” [Zhong Xingqi et al., 2017, p. 244]. Yu Hao 俞浩 argues that Wulei, located in Bugur 布古尔 [Yu Hao, 1066, p. 658–660], Li Guangting 李光廷 also put the agricultural colony of Luntai between Kurle 库尔



勒 and Yugur 玉古尔, its delineation of the scope of the administration is broader [Li Guangting, 1974, p. 167].

This is why most scholars have for a long time advocated the location of the city of Wulei in the area of Cedaya and Yeyungou in Luntai County. The location of Wulei, as indicated in the “Map of the Western Regions in Western Han” in the Historical Atlas of China 中国历史地图集, roughly points to the area west of Yeyungou today, just between Yeyungou and Cedaya [Tan Qixiang, 1996, p. 37, 38]. Later expeditions to Xinjiang by Huang Wenbi 黄文弼, Bergman, and others were also influenced to some extent by Xu Song. After investigating several sites in Yeyungou, Huang Wenbi believed that the small Yeyungou, west of Kurchu, was the ancient land of the Wulei state. In contrast, Bergman believed Wulei was in Cedaya [Folke Bergman, 1939, p. 44].

### *3) The duties and regulations of the Protector-General*

The role and administration of the Protector-General in the Western Regions is also the subject of much scholarly attention. Whether to protect the states or the routes has become the focus of debate.\* The Xiyuzhuan of Hanshu says: “At that time, Han only protected the Southern Route, but failed to integrate the Northern Route fully... On the day of King Rizhu 日逐王 came to surrender, the year was also the third year of the Shenjue reign-period. Zheng Ji protected the Northern and Southern Route as Protector-General, so the name was called Duhu 都护. The origin of the Protector-General has been established since Zheng Ji.” [Hanshu, 3874]. Zhengji zhuan of Hanshu also emphasizes that “Duhu” refers to the parallel protection of the two routes, Yan Shigu 颜师古 noted: “and protect the two routes, so-called the Duhu,” Whether it was “protect the states” or “protect the routes”, the Western Regions’ Protector-General needed to be on an important transportation route, and “protect the road” in order to better “protect the states”. After Li Guangli invaded Dawan 大宛 in the Taichu 太初 period, “from Dunhuang west to Yanze, beacon towers were often set up, and there were hundreds of soldiers in the fields of Luntai and Quli, and the Envoys or Colonels were placed in charge of the guards in order to help foreigners” [Hanshu, 3872]. This suggests that the corresponding beacon system was continuously extended westward among the Western Regions to better protect the incoming and outgoing envoys and messengers and the cantonment matters. In addition, the main transport route in the West during the Han Dynasty was the Northern Route, “Starting from the Yumen 玉门 and Yang 阳 Barriers there are two routes which lead to the Western Regions. The route which goes by way of Shanshan 鄯善, skirting the northern edge of the Southern Mountains and proceeding west along the course of the river to Shache 莎车 is the Southern Route. To the west, the Southern Route crosses the Congling 葱岭 Mountains and then leads to Da Rouzhi 大月氏 and Anxi 安息. The route, which starts from the royal court of Nearer Jushi 车师, runs alongside the Northern Mountains and follows the course of the river west to Shule 疏勒 is the Northern Route. To the west, the

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\*For a review of relevant studies, see Hong Tao 洪涛, [Hong Tao, 2007, p. 5–10; Zhang Ying 张瑛, 2019].

Northern Route crosses the Congling 葱嶺 Mountains and leads to Dayuan, Kangju, and Yancai” [Hanshu, 3871; Yu Taishan, 2021, p. 70]. This is also roughly in line with the “Middle Route” as stated in Xirong zhuan 西戎传 of Weilue 魏略 as quoted in Sanguozhi 三国志, the one which, leaving the Yumen 玉門 Barrier by the west, starts from the Well of Protector-General, bypassing the northern tip of the desert of Sanlong 三隴, passes by the granary of Julu 居盧, then, from the Well of Shaxi 沙西, turns to the north-west, passes by Longdui 龍堆, arrives at the ancient town of Loulan 樓蘭, and turning to the west, comes first to Qiuci 龜茲 and then to the Congling 葱嶺 Mountains [Sanguozhi, 859; Yu Taishan, 2021, p. 360]. This route through along the Tianshan Mountains and Tarim River, through Yanqi 焉耆, Luntai 輪台, Qiuci 龜茲, Gumo 姑墨, Shule 疏勒, and then west across the Congling 葱嶺 Mountains to Dawan 大宛. The more definite Han dynasty beacon in Luntai is the west Laisu 拉依苏 beacon, and perhaps the beacon line was also distributed along this route, while the government seat of Protector-General should have been near the traffic route or to the left of the beacon line [Chen Ling, 2015, p. 190]. Some scholars have further analyzed that the Protector-General of Western Regions would have been set up in the Northern Route of the Silk Roads, strategic locations, and central areas where natural conditions were relatively good and suitable for cultivation [Zhang Anfu, 2013, p. 51–56].

In the “Baiguan gongqing Biao 百官公卿表” of Hanshu, it is clearly stated that “The Protector-General of the Western Regions was an additional office; it was first established in the second year (68 BCE) of the Dijie 地節 reign-period of Emperor Xuan 宣, when Zheng Ji 鄭吉, the Commandant of Cavalry and Grand Master of Remonstrance, was sent to act as the protector of the thirty-six states in the Western Regions, and the rank of Protector-General of the Western Regions equivalent to 2,000 piculs” [Hanshu, 738]. The Protector-General of the Western Regions had a separate government office. Therefore, the rules and regulations of The Protector-General should be in line with those of the mainland county governorship. According to the survey and excavations, the scale of the city sites in the Hetao area can be divided into three types: large, medium, and small, depending on the site’s perimeter. Large sites have over 4,000 meters, medium sites have a perimeter of 1,000-4,000 meters, and small sites have fewer than 1,000 meters [Wei Jian, Hao Yuanlin, 2020]. The large sites are considered prefecture headquarters, the medium ones are county headquarters, and the small ones are fortresses and bastions. Besides The Protector-General of the Western Regions, during the Qin and Han dynasties, There were also many other official positions like that of Protector of the Qiang 护羌校尉 and the Protector of Wuhuan 护乌桓都尉, all of whom were of a rank of 2,000 piculs or equivalent to 2,000 piculs, and were, in fact, equivalent to the county sheriffs of the mainland. [Yan Gengwang, 2007, p. 157–187; An Zuozhang and Xiong Tieji, 2007, p. 770–788].

#### ***4) The Protector-General of the Western Regions in Excavated Documents***

The Han bamboo slips unearthed in Juyan 居延, Tuyin 土垠, and Xuanquan 悬泉 contain information about the Protector-General and several states in Western Regions,

especially the ones found in Xuanquan that records a great deal of information about the travels of emissaries from the western states, providing a great deal of material for the study of the history of the Protector-General and the western states [Hu Pingsheng, Zhang Defang, 2001, p. 103–135]. Some Xuanquan bamboo slips deal with the cantonment of Quli, providing vital information on the possible direct subordination of the cantonment lieutenants of Luntai and Quli to the “Northern Army” 北军 of the Chang’an City Imperial Army [Zhang Defang, 2001, 113–121]. One slip records the surrender of the Xiongnu king of Rizhu, which provides new evidence for the establishment of the Protector-General and adds to the historical documentation [Zhang Defang, 2014, p. 26–35].

广至移十一月谷簿，出粟六斗三升，以食悬泉廐佐广德所将助御、效谷广利里郭市等七人送日逐王，往来三食，食三升。校广德所将御故稟食，悬泉而出食，解何？(I91DXT0309③:167-168)

This is one slip found in Xuanquan 悬泉, and it was the record of the food provided when the Xiongnu King Rizhu passed through the Guangzhi 广至 [Zhang Defang, 2014, p. 31].

神爵二年十一月癸卯朔乙丑，悬泉廐佐广德敢言之，爰书：廐御千乘里畸利，谨告曰：所使食传马一匹……送日逐王乘之冥安，病死。(87D.X.C)

This is a document of an investigation into the death of the horse on which Xiongnu King Rizhu rode, which is directly related to the surrender of King Rizhu to the Han Empire and his departure for Chang’an before the establishment of the Protector-General of the Western Regions. The specific date shown in the text is ‘in the eleventh month of the second year of Shenjue period- reigns. Under normal circumstances, a Han official would have taken between a month and two months to travel from Chang’an to Dunhuang 敦煌 using the vehicles provided by the post stations along the way so that King Rizhu would have arrived in Chang’an in the third year of the Shenjue period-reign [Gansu Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, 2019, p. 269].

Records of the Protector-General and his subordinate officials are also found in the Han bamboo slips of the Tuyin 土垠 site.

都护军候张□所假官驛牡马一匹，齿八岁，高五尺八寸。

Junhou 军候 mentioned in this slip, means military guard and was also a subordinate official of the Western Region’s Protector-General, suggesting a close connection between the Tuyin site and the Protector-General.

□用私马至敦煌辄收入敦煌去渠犁二千八百里更沙版绝水草不能致愿得用

This one records the relationship between the Tuyin site between Dunhuang and Quli and indirectly suggests that the Tuyin site would have been an important transit point from Dunhuang to Quli and other Western states on the Northern Road in the Western Han Dynasty.

## Preliminary exploration of the site of the Protector-General

For a long time, the scholarly community followed Xu Song’s statement that the location of the Protector-General was in the area of Yeyungou 野云沟 and Cedaya 策大雅. During his investigations in the Luntai area, especially along the Kizil 克孜尔

River and the Dina 迪那 River, Huang Wenbi 黄文弼 found sherds of black-painted pottery on a red background and sherds of black-flowered painted pottery in the ancient site of Koyukqin 柯尤克沁 (Kuiyukexiehair, 奎玉克协海尔) 古城 (古城) and concluded that the city should have been the site of the former Luntou 仑头 state of the Han dynasty. He also found black-flowered pottery shards on a red background and iron arrowheads with handles in Zhuoguoteqin 着果特沁 (Zhaoerkute, 卓尔库特). He concluded that the city was an agricultural cantonment city of the Han dynasty [Huang Wenbi, 1958, p. 10].

In 2013, Lin Meicun 林梅村, in his article, comprehensively analyzed the shape and distribution of the ancient cities in the Tarim Basin and argued that the Protector-General Office was not in the ancient cities of Yeyungou or Cedaya in Luntai County nor the ancient cities of Cherchu or Zhaoerkute in Luntai County, but the ancient city of Kuiyukexiehair site in the southeast of Luntai County. The article suggests that most of the indigenous citadels in the Tarim Basin were built in the form of circles. After the Han dynasty entered the Western regions, they adopted the Chinese architectural style of square cities. The article analyses the ancient city of Kuiyukexiehair in Luntai County as an inner city with a round shape, and the outer city as a square shape, which was popular after the Han culture entered the Western regions and was supposed to be the seat of the Protector-General [Lin Meicun, 2013]. From an archaeological perspective, this article places the Protector-General of the Western Regions in the area of the Dina River network on the southern side of Luntai County, advancing to some extent the study of the Protector-General of the Western Regions.

Concerning the location of the Western Region's Protector-General, the Xiyuzhuan of Hanshu describes in detail the number of li between its seat and the other western states. Among the more definite ones is the Nearer Cheshi 车师 which is seated in the city of Jiaohe 交河 in today's Turpan 吐鲁番. In addition, the distances from Qiuci 龟兹 and Yuli 尉犁 to the Protector-General are also referable. According to the Western Han standard of 1 li is equivalent to 417 meters, which means that the distance from Yuli to Wulei 乌垒 is about 125 kilometers, from Qiuci to Wulei is about 146 kilometers, from Korla 库尔勒 to Luntai County is 163 kilometers along the present-day National Highway 314, and from Luntai County to Kucha 库车 is 109 kilometers, which means that the distance from Cedaya to Luntai County, which Xu Song and others previously believed to be Protector-General is about 58 kilometers, and from Yeyungou to Luntai County is 73 kilometers, the distance is too far, so the city of Wuqi may have been located near 16–17 km east of present-day Luntai County [Chen Ling, 2015, p. 188].

In addition, the Protector-General of the Western Regions must have been under the protection of the beacon system. The only Han dynasty beacon in the Luntai area that can be identified now is the Laisu 拉依苏 West Beacon in the north-west of Luntai County, and the Laisu East and Tingmudun 廷木墩 beacons, which are not far from it, are both Tang dynasty beacons. It is generally believed that the ancient city of Kuanaxihair 阔纳协海尔, located north of the ancient cities of Kuiyukexiehair and Zhaoerkute, was a Tang dynasty city of Wulei Prefecture, so the line of beacon system of the Han and Tang dynasties may have passed through this area, and the

Protector-General of the Western Regions should have been located here, in the southeast of Luntai County.

Based on the number of distances between the Protector-General and the 12 ancient neighbor states as recorded in the literature, some scholars have used the *r.walk* module of GRASS GIS to invert the location of the city of Wulei by converting the number of *li* recorded in the *Xiyuzhuan* of the Han dynasty into a time cost. The generated buffer zone was overlaid and analyzed, and the intersecting area was the location of Wulei. The most probable location of the city is the one we have estimated above. There are five ancient cities within its coverage area: Kuiyukexiehair, Zhuoerkute, Kuanaxihair, Saiwer 赛维尔, and Khatadun 喀塔墩. The ancient city of Kuanaxihair can be identified as a Tang dynasty city site. At the same time, the ancient city of Saiwer and the site of Khatadun are too small to be a capitalist-level seat. So we can confirm that the Protector-General of the Western Region was located in the ancient city of Kuiyukexiehair or Zhuoerkute.

Since 2018, the Xinjiang Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology and the School of Archaeology and Museology of Peking University have formed a joint team to carry out archaeological excavations in the ancient cities of Kuiyukexiehair or Zhuoerkute in Luntai County. Among them, the excavation of the ancient city of Kuiyukexiehair clarified the condition of the cultural accumulation inside and outside the city, the way the walls were constructed, and their basic structure. The excavators have dated the ancient city in four phases, comparing the results of carbon dating to 750 BC. The city was first built during the Spring and Autumn period and abandoned around 80 AD, making it the earliest scientifically excavated and dated city site on the northern edge of the Tarim Basin and providing crucial material for the development of early oasis civilizations in Xinjiang [Zhang Xiangpeng, et al., 2021]. The excavation of the ancient city of Zhuoerkute focused on the high platform within the city, and the drilling of the surrounding city walls has clarified that Zhuoerkute was a triple structure of inner, outer and high platforms, with the high platform site built to the east of the inner city walls. Based on the stratigraphic deposits and excavated relics, the excavators concluded that the high platform was built during the Warring States period, flourished during the Han period, and declined during the Wei and Jin periods [Chen Ling, Wasima Talati, Wang Long, 2021]. According to the available excavation material, the ancient cities of Kuiyukexiehair and Zhuoerkute are the closest geographically and spatially to the Protector-General of the Western Regions, with a distance of 9 km between them. In terms of the age of the site, the Kuiyukexiehair predates the ancient city of Zhuoerkute in general, and the use of the latter is consistent with the historical date of the operation of the Western Region's Protector-General in the Luntai area; in addition, the excavation of tombs from the Warring States period on the outer walls of Kuiyukexiehair suggests that the city appears to have been abandoned during the Warring States period, but further excavation is needed to confirm whether it was reused. In terms of the area of the city site, Zhuoerkute is 560m east-west and 790m north-south, covering an area of 330,000 square meters, and martyrdom has also been found during excavations of the ancient city of Zhuoerkute [Ibid]. As the highest military and political institution in the western region of the Han dynasty, the building form and structure of the Protector-General office should have been following Han dynasty rules,



and the historical books clearly state that it was a modified city as a city site built based on the original western indigenous citadel.

The exploration of the Western Regions' Protector-General office continues, and more investigations and excavations are needed before the location of the Protector-General office can be finally determined. The investigation and study of the military and political establishments of the Protector-General from an archaeological perspective will not only complement historical documents. However, they will also corroborate with excavated military documents, revealing a more comprehensive picture of the Western Regions' urban sites during the Han Dynasty and better reconstructing the Silk Roads network.

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