

La formation de la commanderie impériale de Dunhuang (Gansu) des Han antérieurs : l'apport des sources archéologiques

Located in the westernmost part of the Gansu province, Dunhuang commandery was founded under the Former Han dynasty (206 BCE–8 CE), during the reign of Emperor Wu (140–87 BCE). With the objective of protecting and retaining full control over the lands conquered from the Xiongnu, the occupation of this territory is the result of an unprecedented military expansion in the northwest. Until the early 20th century, our knowledge of this commandery came solely from the reading of official histories written during or after those events. Then, archaeological investigations in Dunhuang and Guazhou region revealed remains of this occupation such as the westernmost parts of the Great Wall. Archaeologists discovered more than 150,000 wooden tablets mostly written by Han dynasty soldiers and border officials. Such documents offer a more precise and detailed view of the functioning of this commandery and of its local administration. Important as these tablets are, they do not add a great deal to our understanding of the years of formation of Dunhuang commandery (between 111 and 90 BCE). By looking at several fortified sites discovered in Dunhuang and Guazhou region, the author will show that it is possible to gain a better comprehension of the formative period of this commandery.