

to the packed bundles within, there were fixed other reed bundles carefully bound after the fashion of fascines and forming a revetment. The reed bundles or fascines showed a uniform length of eight feet and a thickness of about eight inches. The care and solidity of this strange wall could not by itself furnish a definite clue to its age, but a lucky chance encouraged the hope of my finding the needful chronological evidence.

Within the reed bundles exposed by a little scraping on the top of the wall there turned up, together with small rags of coloured silk, fragments of wooden boards and the like as well as a little label-like tablet of wood showing Chinese characters of remarkable clearness and of distinctly ancient look. There was no date, only the entry: "the clothes bag of one called Lu Ting-shih". My excellent Chinese secretary in his scholarly modesty would commit himself only to the statement that the characters looked older than those used since the tenth century A.D. Yet in my Sinologue ignorance I made bold to conjecture that they might be of Han times.

How these relics of manifest antiquity had got mixed up with the materials used for the wall was not a question to occupy me much at the time. What mattered was the clear sight I gained of more towers stretching away in a line both to the south-west and to the east. The need of following my caravan on the track towards Tun-huang made me turn eastwards, and I had no reason to regret it. Proceeding from tower to tower, we found that strange wall cropping out in long stretches (Fig. 71).

In places it was preserved up to five or six feet in height, in others ground down by erosion to what looked like a mere swelling on the flat gravel surface. But here, too, a