

almost vertical faces I could not help being impressed by the skill of the old Chinese engineers. It must have been a formidable task to construct so solid a wall across an extensive desert area, bare of all resources and for the most part even of water. And yet it was accomplished within a comparatively short period, and as it proved in the end over a total distance of some 400 miles right away to the Etsin-gol.

But my satisfaction grew still greater when, from the refuse-layers traceable near most of the watch-towers and among the remains of small adjoining quarters, we recovered an abundance of Chinese records on wood. Quite a number of the inscribed narrow slips proved to be dated, and our excitement was great when my Chinese secretary's decipherment showed that all these dates belonged to the first century A.D. It thus became certain that this ruined border line was occupied already in the Former Han dynasty's times, and that I had in my hands the oldest written Chinese documents so far recovered.

I had reason also to be pleased with what Chiang Ssŭ-yeh's rapid examination sufficed to make out of their contents. It showed that they greatly varied in character. There were brief reports or orders on matters of military administration; acknowledgements of receipt for articles of equipment or supplies; private communications. Fragments also of a school glossary and writing exercises seemed to be represented. But equally clear was it that the full interpretation of these materials would need protracted study. There were, in fact, plenty of puzzles in palaeography and diction awaiting solution by the philological acumen of that great Sinologue, M. Chavannes.