

away, I had little inkling of the great find of complete letters in the same script which was waiting for me in a forlorn watch-station at the eastern end of this ancient desert route.

That all these miscellaneous records had found their way to the large refuse-heap as sweepings from the surrounding offices and dwellings, was plainly shown by the plentiful remnants of worn-out articles of clothing and broken implements which we found mixed up with the refuse. The collection of rags in all kinds of fabrics, from fine silk and brocade to felts and coarse homespun; of old shoes and sandals in leather, woven string, etc., brought home to me, more vividly perhaps than anything else, the petty realities of a life long departed.

The discovery of these ancient refuse layers added so greatly to our stock of Chinese records from the site that from the first I felt encouraged to hope for historically interesting data to be gleaned among them. This expectation has been justified by the painstaking and thorough analysis which M. Chavannes, the eminent Sinologist, has made of these documents. The difficulties presented by their archaic and often very cursive script, by their contents too often fragmentary and always bristling with obscure administrative details, have been great even for such a master of Chinese antiquarian lore as my learned collaborator. But in most cases he has succeeded in overcoming them, and his kindness in communicating his translations and notes, as far as documents on wood are concerned, makes it possible for me, even before the appearance of his full publication, to offer some glimpses of what the records reveal as to the character and local conditions of the site.

To begin with the main point, they clearly prove the ruins to belong to a small fortified station garrisoned by Chinese troops and intended to guard an important ancient route which led from Tun-huang on the extreme west of Kan-su to the oases along and north of the Tarim River. We knew in a general way from the early Chinese Annals that a route opened about 110 B.C. through the desert west of Tun-huang to the Lop-nor region served for the first