

frontier and the inclement season of spring.<sup>88</sup> The latter complaint bears a local touch which I can fully appreciate after my two spring campaigns of 1908 and 1914 on the desert border; it shows that the amenities of its climate were two thousand years ago much the same as now.

Of interest for the study of the ancient stationery is the small silk envelope, No. 503, T. xv. a. ii. 4 (Plate XIV), used for a private letter, as its address shows. Its inside width is 65 mm. This would conveniently admit of the insertion of a letter on silk, such as No. 398 (Plate XX), which is 58 mm. wide, after folding. As the refuse-heap where the envelope was found contained documents with dates ranging from A.D. 15 to 56, it appears to me very probable that the envelope, too, belongs approximately to the first half of the first century A.D., and thus to the period preceding the invention of paper.<sup>89</sup>

Silk envelope for letter.

It only remains for us to cast a glance at the fragments of literature, as M. Chavannes' analysis has revealed them, among the written relics of the Limes. Considering the conditions of the life led by those who guarded the line of small posts flung out into the desert, we cannot feel surprised at the scantiness of the traces which have survived of their intellectual occupations. For all that concerns the philological interest of these literary relics reference to M. Chavannes' full explanations will suffice here.<sup>90</sup> Of particular value among them are the relatively numerous fragments of a famous lexicographical text, the *Chi chiu chang* 急就章, which was composed in 48-33 B.C. and played an important part in the primary education of China during the Later Han period.<sup>91</sup> These fragments, as M. Chavannes duly emphasizes, are the oldest known manuscripts which exist of a Chinese book, and it is fortunate that we have among them one containing the first paragraph of the work complete. The long prismatic tablet which bears this portion of the text on its three faces, No. 1 (Plate I), also has a special antiquarian interest as being a perfectly preserved specimen of a type of wooden stationery which is referred to in early Chinese texts and apparently was favoured for literary use.<sup>92</sup>

Literary fragments.

Fragments of *Chi chiu chang*.

The popularity which *Chi chiu chang* soon acquired in the elementary teaching of Chinese writing sufficiently explains its rapid spread to the extreme north-west end of the border; for, among several ruined watch-posts, fragments of it were found also at T. vi. c (No. 4), a post early abandoned. In these, as in some other fragments which are of the usual slip form, the text appears to have been copied out as a writing exercise.<sup>93</sup> The importance which the Chinese have at all times attached to good handwriting is well known, and so also the necessity of constant practice which the very system of Chinese writing implies. This fact fully accounts not merely for the presence of these 'copy slips' from the *Chi chiu chang*, but for the abundant finds made also of other writing exercises.<sup>94</sup> Nothing could illustrate better the trouble which some of the men on duty at the outlying posts must have taken 'to improve their education', or at least their handwriting, than the big packets of 'shavings' inscribed in this fashion which came to light on clearing the refuse-heaps of T. vi. b, as already described.<sup>95</sup>

Abundance of writing exercises.

<sup>88</sup> See *Doc. Nos.* 344, 345.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. above, p. 672. But for this chronological evidence it might have been possible to assume, as M. Chavannes suggests, *Documents*, p. 110, that the letter was on paper and folded into a small roll, as was No. 904 (Pl. XXVIII) when found.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. *Documents*, pp. viii, xvi sq., pp. 1 sqq. on Nos. 1-8.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Chavannes, *Documents*, pp. 1-3. It is from *Chi chiu chang* that the script, commonly known in China as *chang ts'ao* 章草 and illustrated by most of the Limes documents, takes its name; see Chavannes, *Documents*, p. viii.

<sup>92</sup> See *Documents*, pp. ix, 6 sq., note 1. M. Chavannes' note explains the term *ku* 觚, which occurs at the beginning of the first paragraph of the text and specially designates this type of tablet. We have fragments of prismatic triangular tablets in No. 2, T. xx. ii. 2 (Pl. II), also containing a passage from the text of the *Chi chiu chang*, and in No. 451, T. xv. a. iii. 31 (Pl. XII), which contains a brief congratulatory message.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. M. Chavannes' notes on *Doc. Nos.* 4, 6, 7.

<sup>94</sup> See, e.g., *Doc. Nos.* 251, 372, 422-3, 540, 632, 641, 643-4.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. above, p. 646.