

on the right, one above, one below, and a third always placed on the left in the middle. Among single slips provided with notches only one, No. 182, needs special mention here, as its text supports the conclusion, suggested by the single notch on the right, that it belonged to a book.<sup>106</sup> It is worthy of particular note that none of these slips bear any writing on the reverse, except those of the calendar of 59 B.C., where we find a system of consecutive numbering by means of cyclic characters.

Attention is claimed by the fact that no text is to be found on the reverse of any of the notched slips belonging to sets.<sup>107</sup> It appeared *a priori* all the more significant in view of the inconvenience which the bulk and weight of books written on slips of bamboo or wood must in any case have caused. It necessarily raised a presumption that the fastening, for which the notches were undoubtedly intended, must have been arranged in a way which brought the blank reverses of consecutive slips back to back and thus made it inconvenient to use the reverse surfaces for inscribing or reading any portions of the text. This conjectured arrangement recalled to my mind that of numerous Chinese and Tibetan manuscripts brought back from the 'Thousand Buddhas' of Tun-huang, which are long sheets of paper consisting of several joined pieces and folded up into narrow pages somewhat after the fashion of a concertina. In these manuscripts, too, the reverse surface of the paper is always left un-inscribed, just as we find it regularly in Chinese printed books, in which, as a matter of fact, we merely have an adaptation to block-printing of the 'concertina' method just alluded to.

Reverses of notched slips un-inscribed.

Conjectured 'concertina' arrangement.

At this point I appealed to Mr. Andrews' often-proved technical ingenuity, and the note and diagrams from his hand, shown on p. 766, furnish what seems to me a very likely solution of the puzzle.

*Habent sua fata libelli.* It seems strange that we should have to look among the relics from lonely desert posts of the border-line pushed out far towards the barbarian west for evidence to clear up details, even if they are only technical, concerning the books in which that glory of Chinese civilization, its ancient literature, found its earliest written record. What this literature has to offer in return in the shape of historical notices bearing on the Tun-huang Limes has already been examined at the beginning of this chapter. All that remains now is to call attention to the vivid and often touching glimpses which Chinese poetry has retained of the feelings of the exiles whom imperial command had dragged away from their homes and set to guard this and other far-flung stretches of the Great Wall.

The specimens of Chinese poems on this theme of forced military border service which M. Chavannes has translated at the end of his *Introduction*<sup>108</sup> belong mostly to the T'ang period. But they faithfully reflect the deep impression left behind by the sufferings and sacrifices which attended the extension of the Great Wall and the subsequent bold enterprises of Han times in inhospitable Mongolian and Central-Asian regions, far away to the Pāmīrs and beyond them. Those poems form thus a valuable supplement to the contemporary remains and records brought to light by my explorations along the Wall itself. It would serve no useful purpose were I to attempt to offer here second-hand extracts from these poetic yet convincingly true *documents humains* which M. Chavannes has rendered with the pen of a master. But I feel that I cannot close my account of the results which the exploration of the Tun-huang Limes has yielded more fitly than by quoting M. Chavannes' eloquent lines on the human background of this notable chapter in Chinese history: 'L'historien qui retrouve les traces de la politique hardie des Han dans l'Asie centrale ne doit pas

Hardships of border service reflected in Chinese poetry.

<sup>106</sup> There are besides: Nos. 264, 306, both fragments of calendar slips, displaying one notch on the right in the extant top portion; No. 478, containing only a signature, with one notch on the top to the right. Nos. 519, 610, with three notches and one respectively on the right, remain un-

deciphered and hence must be left aside for the present.

<sup>107</sup> The same fact is clearly established by the evidence of Chinese literary records; cf. Chavannes, *Les livres chinois*, *J. Asiat.*, janvier-février 1905 (reprint), pp. 35 sqq.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. *Documents*, pp. xvii-xxiii.