

and lucid treatise, *Les livres chinois avant l'invention du papier*², that it became possible for me to realize how closely the documents recovered from N. xv. conform in all external features to the descriptions preserved in Chinese literature of that earliest writing material, slips of bamboo. I cannot attempt, nor is it necessary, to reproduce here in detail the convincing and curious evidence collected by M. Chavannes, and the critical conclusions he draws from it as regards the shape, use, &c., of these bamboo slips during the different periods of Chinese antiquity. A brief reference in each case to the facts established in his publication will suffice to prove what mainly interests us here, viz. that our Chinese documents on wood have derived all peculiarities of their outward appearance from the bamboo slips used in China itself for the corresponding class of records during the period immediately preceding the invention of paper.

The feature which proves this most significantly for our wooden 'slips' is their narrowness, and the consequent restriction of the text written on them to a single row of characters. M. Chavannes has demonstrated from an abundance of testimonies that the *chien* 簡, or slips in bamboo, were during all periods limited to a very slight width, never exceeding two centimetres, and often much less, and that, with the exception of some very rare cases where they bore two parallel lines of characters, writing on them was restricted to a single row and to one side only³. This arrangement was natural and practically inevitable in the case of slips cut from the round stem of a bamboo, hollow inside and having ordinarily only a small diameter⁴. It has no justification in records written on wood, a material which readily lends itself to cutting into shapes far more convenient for the purpose of writing. Its maintenance in our wooden slips can be explained only as a designed imitation of the bamboo slips, indicating an endeavour to preserve the traditional form established by them. We are led to the same conclusion by comparing the length of our wooden slips 9-9 $\frac{1}{4}$ in., as above indicated, with the standard sizes for bamboo slips as they prevailed during the Han period. M. Chavannes has shown that, with the exception of certain well-defined classes of texts, such as classical works, ritual rules, &c., for which immutable tradition had fixed special sizes, the slips used for writing measured always one Chinese foot (of ten inches) in the case of ordinary individuals, while the Emperor, to mark his superiority, had his edicts written on slips one foot and one inch long, or else employed slips of two feet and of one foot alternately⁵. I do not know whether the measure exactly equivalent to the foot of the Han epoch can be ascertained; but it is evident that the actual length of the complete Chinese records from N. xv., most of them official, but not Imperial edicts, must closely approach the normal of one foot or ten inches.

The shape and size of bamboo slips.

M. Chavannes, in the concluding remarks of his treatise, has already emphasized the importance possessed by our Chinese documents on wood as a striking archaeological confirmation of the data which the literary sources critically examined by him furnish as to the ancient writing material of China, and the manner of its use previous to the invention of paper in 105 A. D.⁶ He has recognized equally interesting evidence in the ancient wooden pen, N. xv. 21 (Plate CV), which was found in the identical rubbish-heap and has been reproduced in my *Preliminary Report*. It consists of a small twig of tamarisk wood, about 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. long, split at its pointed end and fitted at the other with a bone knob which manifestly served the purpose of a burnisher. Rougher styles made of the same wood and also intended for writing, N. x. 04, 05 (Plate CV), had been

Ancient pen of wood.

² See *Journal asiat.*, 1905, Janv.-Février, pp. 5-75; quoted below from reprint.

³ See Chavannes, *Les livres chinois*, &c., pp. 34-42.

⁴ See Chavannes, *ibid.*, p. 14.

⁵ See *Les livres chinois*, p. 34, with the evidence detailed, pp. 18 sqq.

⁶ See *Les livres chinois*, pp. 73 sqq.