

afforded by the sand and gravel which had accumulated along the foot of the wall. Higher up, where this protecting cover was thinning out towards the surface, they had been completely eroded by the wind. The intervening layers of clay and gravel, originally, no doubt, excavated from the adjoining soil, had acquired a remarkable consistency, resembling that of cement and due largely, as subsequent examination showed, to the binding effect of salt. Yet the actual height of the wall, where our experimental digging first uncovered it, was only about five feet. Much of the loose gravel and coarse sand found heaped up along this remnant may have originally been contained in the higher parts of the wall which had completely decayed.

Wall affected by wind-erosion.

There was little time then available to investigate the constructive details of this strange wall, and still less methodically to search for a clue to its date and origin. But through a lucky chance even this first scraping produced finds of manifest antiquity. Within the bundles of reeds, at the point where the wall had been partially exposed, there turned up fragments of fabrics (T. III. i. 001. b) in gay-coloured silk and a rag of a stout white fabric in hemp, such as found at the Lou-lan sites; remains of iron implements, including what probably were shafts of cross-bow arrows (T. III. i. 001. a' 002-004); the end of a wooden bar (T. III. i. 005); a birch of Toghrak twigs, etc. But far more welcome was a small piece of wood, about four inches long and mortised at the back. On the obverse were five Chinese characters, perfectly legible in spite of the faded ink. The inscription, now reproduced in M. Chavannes' *Documents* under No. 674,<sup>6</sup> was quite correctly read on the spot by Chiang Ssü-yeh as simply stating that the object to which the little wooden label had once been attached was 'the clothes bag [of one called] Lu Ting-shih'. The hoped-for chronological clue was not here. Yet, as the writing looked so strikingly old, I ventured, in my Sinologist ignorance, to suggest to Chiang Ssü-yeh that it was of Han times. The conjecture proved right in the end; but, as told elsewhere, my excellent *litteratus* received it at the time with due critical caution.<sup>7</sup>

First finds at T. III.

Chinese record on wood.

This record and the other small objects had turned up within a few square feet, and clearly proved that the ground along the wall, notwithstanding its desert nature, must have been occupied at some points. But at the time it was difficult to decide how they had got into or underneath the wall just where a fortunate chance had made me first examine it. The most likely explanation seemed to be that the small relics dated from a camp, perhaps of a working party, established here at the first construction of the tower and wall, and that they had been accidentally mixed up with the materials for the latter. This conjecture was confirmed when, on a subsequent visit in 1914, I had the wall cleared at the same spot right down to the ground and found more rags of silk and woollen fabrics, with dung and other refuse, resting on the natural soil beneath.

Occupation of ground proved.

Of far greater importance to me at the time than such details was the view of the line of wall, as it showed itself above ground stretching away to the east, and of the chain of watch-towers which could be sighted in the distance. Fortune had favoured me in this respect, too, by making me strike just here the fortified border line—for as such I could now safely recognize it. Owing to its commanding position, close to what proved to be a great bend of the line defended by the watch-towers, the post T. III offered itself as a particularly convenient station for a first rapid survey. Only about two miles to the west, on a last offshoot of the same gravel ridge, there rose another tower, T. IV. b. To the south-west, at least two more could be sighted, though at much greater distances. And here I may mention at once as evidence of the care with which commanding positions had been chosen for these watch-stations, and of their distant visibility over such bare

Chain of watch-towers sighted.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Chavannes, *Documents*, p. 143. The number of the label, T. III. i. 1, having become partially effaced, has been shown there erroneously as T. i. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Desert Cathay*, i. p. 542. The critical self-distrust

felt on this occasion by my learned Chinese helpmate has been singled out for special praise by so competent a Sinologist authority as Prof. F. Hirth, when reviewing that work in *The Nation* (New York), August 15, 1912.