

manuscripts at the 'Thousand Buddhas' of Tun-huang had yielded up. This justified the hope that, aided by the abundant new materials thus secured, M. Gauthiot would be able to advance steadily towards a full decipherment of our Early Sogdian documents in spite of the serious difficulties necessarily presented by their character as private, or possibly official, letters and by their cursive script. His labours in this as in many other directions were soon interrupted by the outbreak of the war. Through his untimely death in 1916, from a wound received many months earlier, Irānian studies have suffered irreparable loss, and the elucidation of my Early Sogdian finds has been most unhappily retarded.

Question of  
origin of  
documents.

In view of this heavy blow it is a comfort to know that by making, in Plates CLIII-CLVII, practically the whole of the documents accessible I have assured, for other scholars also, the possibility of progress towards complete decipherment. The considerable length of the text contained in several of the letters—T. XII. ii. 2, 3 and 5 show no less than 60, 35, and 32 lines respectively—, the good condition of the writing in most of them, and, last but not least, the clear separation of the words, are features specially justifying this hope. Upon such progress must depend the decision of the historically interesting question whether these letters emanated from traders who merely passed along the route, coming from, or returning to, what was the *Scythia intra Imaon* of the first centuries after Christ, or whether they were written by people of Sogdian origin settled near the Limes and possibly employed on its defence.

Early silk  
trade with  
west.

When discussing above the Early Sogdian tablet found at the outlying watch-post T. VI. c, I have already explained the reasons for keeping the latter possibility carefully in view.<sup>28</sup> As regards the former it will suffice to refer to the eloquent testimony contained in what Ptolemy has preserved for us of Marinus' account of the trading agents of 'Maës, the Macedonian, also called Tatianus', who used to travel from even more distant parts of Western Asia for the silk of the Seres. An exact modern parallel is to be found in the frequent journeys undertaken by Muhammadan traders from Farghāna, usually known as Andijānīs, to Kan-su and even distant Ssü-ch'uan and Yün-nan, for the sake of bringing silk and tea. In my Personal Narrative I have had occasion to record instances of similar enterprise of Afghān traders from Bājaur or Kābul, such as my friend Shēr 'Alī Khān.<sup>29</sup> When I come to the remains of T. xv. a, I shall have occasion to mention an actual relic left behind by an ancient silk trader from the West, in the shape of the end of a silk bale which has an inscription in an Indian language, written in Brāhmī characters.<sup>30</sup>

Early  
adoption  
of paper by  
foreigners.

How these letters in Early Sogdian script and language had found their way to the rubbish-heap of a watch-station not immediately on the trade route, and most of them apparently unopened, is a question to which an answer could scarcely be hoped for, even after their decipherment. But we are in a better position with regard to another minor point of archaeological interest, when we come to consider the question why paper, certainly a product of China proper and manufactured first in parts far away from the Central-Asian border province, should be found there in the correspondence of foreigners from the distant West, and that within a few decades apparently after its first invention. The explanation is, I think, to be sought in the very fact that the writers were of foreign origin, and in the nature of the script that they used.

The passage of the Later Han Annals relating the invention of paper significantly indicates the inconveniences of the writing-materials previously available in China: <sup>31</sup> 'Since antiquity written documents were most frequently bundles formed of bamboo slips; when silk fabrics were used [in the place of bamboo slips], these fabrics were known by the name *chih* 紙. The silks were

<sup>28</sup> See above, pp. 652 sqq.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *Desert Cathay*, ii. pp. 38, 68.

<sup>30</sup> See below, pp. 701 sqq., and T. xv. a. iii. 57 in Descrip-

tive List, chap. xx. sec. vii.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Chavannes, *Les livres chinois*, p. 6.