Fragments of Han administrative documents written on wooden strips were first found in the Tun-huang area during Sir Aurel Stein's expeditions to central Asia, between 1900 and 1915. Transcriptions, translations and comments to some 700 select pieces were included in the catalogue of documents which was published by Chavannes, with the help of three Chinese scholars, in 1913 1). A further 166 Han fragments, which were found during the last of Stein's expeditions, were included in a second catalogue of documents, originally prepared by Maspero and eventually published in 1953 2). The work of Chavannes and Maspero deserves all possible praise as pioneer achievements in a field of study which had been hitherto unknown, and it is no detraction from the value of their work to observe that later developments have rendered possible some improvements and additions to the original catalogues. The inclusion of plates of photographs in Chavannes' volumes immediately enabled Chinese and Japanese scholars to study most of the fragments, and a number of corrections have been published to the readings which were first adopted, notably by Wang Kuo-wei 王國維, Lo Chen-yü 羅振玉 and Ho Ch'ang-ch'ün 賀昌.

1) E. Chavannes, Les documents chinois découverts par Aurel Stein dans les sables du Turkestan Oriental, Oxford 1913. Of the total 997 items included, 709 are assigned to the Han period.

2) H. Maspero (posthumously), Les documents chinois de la troisième expédition de Sir Aurel Stein en Asie Centrale, London 1953.
1). Of greater significance has been the discovery of a far richer collection of material, which is in many respects comparable with the strips found in the region of Tun-huang; this material was unearthed at various sites near Chü-yen, from 1930 onwards 2).

It is only since 1957 that photographs of the strips from Chü-yen have been generally available, but already a number of outstanding problems presented by the strips of Tun-huang have been solved. It has become possible to reconstruct the forms of some of the types of administrative document with some degree of certainty; an analysis can be made of the different types of wooden pieces, according to shape and size, and to relate certain types with particular documents or parts of documents. Moreover, a comparison of the strips from Chü-yen with those from Tun-huang has made possible further correction or amplification of the readings of Chavannes and Maspero, and a more accurate interpretation can be provided for some of the texts. In the following notes, reference will be made to conclusions which derive from the Chü-yen material, but it will not be possible to cite full supporting evidence; it is hoped that such evidence will be made available at a later date.

The material found at Chü-yen comprises some ten thousand fragments. Despite certain basic difficulties (e.g. work must be done from photographs of varying, poor quality; and precise information of the sites where the strips were severally found is not

1) For bibliographical details, see Hulsewé, Han-time Documents (T'oung Pao XLV, 1-3, 1957, pp. 1-50). The readings suggested by Wang Kuo-wei, Lo Chen-yü and Ho Ch'ang-ch'üin can be consulted most conveniently in Lao Kan's 勞斡 Chü-yen Han-chien k'ao-shih shih-wen chih pu 居延漢簡考釋釋文之部. Shanghai 1949, which includes a supplement of the full texts of the Han-strips published by Chavannes. Lao Kan's own suggestions are also included here. These transcriptions have been reprinted, less completely, in Lao Kan's Chü-yen Han-chien k'ao-shih chih pu, Taipei 1960.

4) For bibliographical details of transcriptions, photographs and commentaries, see Hulsewé, loc. cit., and Loewe, Some notes on Han-time documents from Chü-yen (T'oung Pao XLVII, 3-5, 1959, pp. 294 f.).