HAN ADMINISTRATIVE DOCUMENTS
RECENT FINDS FROM THE NORTH-WEST*

BY

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Until 1960 the documents on wood and bamboo dating from the Han period were limited mainly to the strips and fragments found during the pioneer journeys of Sir Aurel Stein between 1900 and 1915 and those discovered by the Sino-Swedish expedition of 1930–31. The material amounted to some 1000 pieces that had been found near Tun-huang 敦煌 and up to 10,000 pieces unearthed at various sites along the defence lines of Chü-yen 居延 (Edsen-gol). The finds attracted considerable interest among Chinese, Japanese and Western scholars, whose work resulted in the publication of photographs, transcriptions and studies of particular topics of civil and military administration that the inscriptions discussed. These major discoveries were supplemented by smaller finds from Lop-nor, which were studied by Huang Wen-pi 黃文弼, and by the more spectacular find of some 500 strips from tombs at Mo-tsui-tzu 武威 county, Kansu province in 1959. This last group of material included for the first time large sections of a literary text (i.e. the I-li 壹禮; there were also a few fragments of mantic texts, and a copy of a decree of 31 B.C. and an account of subsequent action) and the documents have been duly published (Wu-wei Han chien 武威漢簡; ed. Kansu Provincial Museum and Chinese Academy of Sciences; Peking: Wen-wu ch’u-pan-she, 1964).

In recent years this situation has been changed dramatically by fresh discoveries, many of which were made at sites within the interior provinces of the Han empire and which yielded material of a literary, historical, legal and technical nature. Preliminary reports of this material have been followed in some cases by monographs, but it is to be expected that photographs and transcriptions of the entire corpus may not be available for some years. Lists of newly discovered items have been published in TP 63: 2–3 (1977), 99–136 and WW 1978. 1, 44.

In addition, discoveries of major importance have been made at sites in the north-west since 1972, with inscriptions that concern both the general administration of the Han empire and the local

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conditions and problems of the garrisons posted on the defence lines. Some of these sites are identical with, or very close to, those investigated on earlier occasions, and the newly found documents (referred to below as the new material) enhance the value of those found previously (referred to below as the old material) to a considerable degree. The following article attempts to provide a summary of the finds that have been made in the north-west, and of the work published by Chinese scholars on the subject up to the end of 1984. Account is taken of articles published in journals such as WW and KK, together with those of the scholars and teams who have been working in Kansu province, published recently in collected form (Kan-su sheng wen-wu kung-tso-sui 甘肅省文物工作隊 and Kan-su sheng po-wu-kuan 博物館 ed., Han chien yen-chiu wen-shi 漢簡研究文集; Lan-chou: Kan-su jen-min ch'u-pan-she, 1984; hereafter HCYCWC). Publication of an English version is scheduled for March 1986.

These discoveries result from a series of excavations at the sites of Chu-yen (1972; 1973–74; and 1976) and Tun-huang (1979). In addition further finds were made at Mo-tsui-tzu (1981) and at a tomb in Ch'ing-hai province (1973). The investigations carried out at Chu-yen were directed partly to a few select sites, but an attempt was also made to carry out a full-scale survey in order to determine the extent and deployment of the military units subordinated to the commandant of Chu-yen. Taking the lines that had been laid down by Bergman in 1930 as their base, the investigators extended their field of enquiry and succeeded in producing a much more clear and detailed account of the defence lines with maps and photographs (HCYCWC, pp. 62f., with a map on p. 63 and plates at the outset of the volume).

Excavations near Tun-huang centred on 71 sites of signal stations, together with a special study of Ma-chüan-wan 馬圂灣; so far publication has been restricted to a preliminary report about that site, now designated as D 21, and not investigated by Stein (WW 1981. 10, 1–7; reprinted, without all the illustrations, in HCYCWC, pp. 499f.). The report describes the remains of the buildings of the site and the traces of activity that survived the outbreak of fire. Ma-chüan-wan is close to Stein's sites T 12a and T 11, now re-designated D 22 and D 20 respectively. It was evidently at its most active point during the time of Hsüan-ti (74–49), falling into decline by the time of Wang Mang and being abandoned ca. 20–22. Most of the 1217 strips that were found at the site were of wood, with some of bamboo, and while the dates mentioned extend from Hsüan-ti's time until AD 21, over half are of the period of P'ing-ti (1 B.C.–A.D. 6). Some