

CONCERNING FRAGMENT STEIN Br. Mus. Toy. 046
(Maspero No. 365)

by B. SCHINDLER

In my preliminary account of the work by Henri Maspero concerning the Chinese Documents on Wood and on Paper discovered by Sir Aurel Stein on his Third Expedition to Central Asia I commented on No. 365 in the MS. (A.M. I, 2, p. 239). This item reads in the original:

Imprimé. Papier déchiré en forme de bande, complet en haut et en bas, déchiré à droite et à gauche. Gros caractères de 20 mm. environ de haut. Hauteur: 275 mm.; largeur: 46 mm. VI^e siècle.

. . . 34^e année *yen-ich'ang* (594 p.C.), année *hia-yin*. Il y a un chien méchant dans la maison; que les passants prennent garde . . .

Un des plus anciens textes imprimés connus. C'était probablement une affiche servant d'amulette et destinée à être collée sur la porte d'entrée.

The note in my article was to this effect. There can be no doubt that this fragment stands out quite distinct from among all other paper fragments found either by Stein or Sven Hedin or the Japanese, and that may have been one of the chief reasons why Maspero treated this fragment in such an unusual and preemptory way. We could not ascertain why he had been so categorical about its being a printed document.

As to being a charm "there seems to be no reason" - according to Arthur Waley in a footnote to this number in the forthcoming British Museum publication - "to suppose that the document was a charm, or served anything but a purely practical purpose. A legal case (see *Wên Yüan Ying Hua* 547.10) probably dating from Sui or T'ang times throws light on this 'affiche': A's dog bites B. B claims compensation. A's defence is that



Maspero No. 365. Part of an enlargement.

there was a *p'ai-chi* 牌記, i.e. a warning notice which the plaintiff ignored. We know (*Sui Shu* 83.6b) that the institutions of Kao-ch'ang were closely modelled on those of China."

There was always some doubt about the fragment being a printed document. But I had taken Maspero's statement as being correct as long as not proven to the contrary.¹ The document was under glass, and I wanted it to be examined under the microscope to find out about the quality of the paper and inking and, above all, to discover whether it was written or printed. At the first opportunity I had photographs made of the document, and at the same time, for purposes of comparison, of the oldest blockprint in the B.M. (the Diamond Sūtra) and of another fragment which is undoubtedly calligraphy. These photographs were made by ultra-violet transmission (with S.G. pan, plus and minus screen) and infra-red (grade 0 and 1). I then asked other competent experts for advice in the matter, and here is a summary of the investigation made by Mr. E. B. Humphries:

"I have examined this document with low-power glass ($\times 15$) and get the impression that it was produced by brush work. Within a number of the characters there appears to be a variation of strength of colour which would be difficult to obtain by a printed impression.

"With the object of discovering the difference in strength I had a number of enlargements made three times life size direct from the ultra-violet and infra-red negatives which were handed over to me by Dr. B. Schindler. I had prints made with varying densities.

"The enlargements show a number of instances which would point to a brush having been used as it seems possible to indicate the sequence in which the characters were joined."

I shall deal with the whole question elsewhere. Here I reproduce part of one of those enlargements which reveals brush work in some of the characters, although the character 人 still remains a crux to me. The variation of intensity of colour is only very small and can be found in block-printed characters too, and there is certainly no indication of brush work in the joint of the two strokes of the character. But as quite a number of the other characters do show the characteristics mentioned above, it seems most probable that Maspero was wrong in his assertion that this fragment is "one of the oldest printed documents known to us".

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¹ See Schindler, *Über die ältesten Holzplattendrucke in Schweizer Graphische Mitteilungen* 1950, No. 8, p. 345. There I made a cautious remark about this fragment: "Wenn einwandfrei festgestellt werden würde . . ."