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**Reconstruction of Early Chinese Bamboo and Wood Manuscripts:
A Review (1900–2010)***

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As integral part of the broader field of the study of early Chinese manuscripts, reconstruction efforts regarding bamboo and wood manuscripts¹ from pre-imperial and early imperial China can be dated back to the first important finds of such manuscripts in the early 20th century.² To explain the importance of the most recent developments and to be able to integrate these new perspectives into the frame of criteria and methods that have been developed over the

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¹ If not further specified 'manuscript' refers to 'multi-slip manuscripts'. The term is meant to refer to manuscripts consisting of at least two bamboo or wood slips that are connected by binding strings. Cf. the term 'multi-*strip* [document]' [emphasis added] coined by Michael Loewe (1967, vol. 1, x). Technically speaking such multi-slip manuscripts can be named 'codicological units'. On this term in the context of early Chinese manuscripts see Kalinowski 2005. The concept codicological unit was borrowed from European codicology, where it was originally invented for the study of codex manuscripts. According to Gumbert (2004, 23) a codicological unit is 'a discrete number of quires, worked in a single operation and containing a complete text or set of texts'. For a comparison of quires and 'sets of slips' produced from the same bamboo culm segment as codicological sub-units see Staack 2016, 172.

A codicological unit can consist of exactly one (single-text manuscript, STM) or more than one textual unit (multiple-text manuscript, MTM). If a codicological unit in turn consists of several formerly independent codicological units, this shall be named a 'composite manuscript' here, for simplicity's sake. For a more refined terminology developed for the study of codex manuscripts see Gumbert 2004.

² Although there are several reports on manuscript discoveries since the first century BCE in Chinese received literature, none of these earlier finds survived. For a list of discoveries see Lin Jianming 1984, 1–8, cf. Zhang Xiancheng 2004, 15–25. However, the texts of some of these manuscripts have been transmitted. For a famous example, the so-called *Bamboo Annals* (*Zhushu jinian* 竹書紀年) discovered in an ancient royal tomb during the third century CE, see Nivison 1993. For more details on this discovery and the other manuscripts excavated from the same tomb see Shaughnessy 2006, 131–184.

past century, a review seems in order.³ As new stages in the development of criteria and methods were often enabled by new discoveries and the respective manuscript publications, this review will not try to draw a comprehensive picture of all research related to this topic. Instead it will highlight the most important trends and the manuscript discoveries they were based on. In conclusion it will provide a catalogue of the criteria that were applied for reconstruction until the year 2010 and point out remaining problems. Before the actual review on reconstruction however, the following section will demonstrate that the problems to which this study and a large amount of research before were devoted clearly predate the scholarly discussion in the 20th/21st century.

1. The problem of disintegrating manuscripts in Chinese antiquity

The problem of disintegrating bamboo or wood manuscripts is not a new one. In fact it is as old as many of the manuscripts, which scholars today are trying to reconstruct. That the binding strings, which held together the individual slips constituting a codicological unit, were considered to be in danger of falling apart due to natural decay or intensive use, is illustrated by a passage in a possibly fictitious account involving Confucius (trad. 551–479 BCE) himself:

讀易，韋編三絕。⁴

[Confucius] read the [*Book of*] *Changes* so [often] that the horizontal binding strings [of his manuscript] had become severed three times.⁵

³ The review in this paper is concerned with the most important developments in the field of manuscript reconstruction since the discovery of the first examples of bamboo and wood manuscripts at the beginning of the 20th century. It describes the ‘traditional’ approach of manuscript reconstruction that has been widely used at least since the 1970s and ends with the year 2010, because this year represents a watershed with regard to manuscript reconstruction. Until the end of that year reconstruction had to completely rely on an analysis of the recto of the slips, but from then on photographs of the verso started to become available. On the importance of an analysis of the verso for reconstruction and how it can help to solve the remaining problems described in section 7 of this paper see the discussion in Staack 2013, 2014, 2016 and Staack (forthcoming).

⁴ *Shiji* 47, 1937.

⁵ For the interpretation of *wei bian* 韋編 as ‘horizontal (*wei* 緯) binding strings’ instead of the traditional reading ‘leather binding strings’ see Zhongwen xi gu wenzi yanjiu shi Chu jian zhengli xiaozu 1978, 65. The translation ‘all three horizontal binding strings had broken’ proposed by Li Ling (2008, 129) would not considerably change the overall meaning of the sentence but appears slightly less likely as far as the word order is concerned.

Sources from Han times also explicitly mention cases, where loss or disarrangement of slips had occurred. The historian Ban Gu 班固 (32–92 CE) notes in an introductory section to the *Yiwenzhi* 藝文志 catalogue, which was an outcome of the large-scale editorial work carried out at the imperial palace in the late first century BCE as well as the first century CE:

迄孝武世，書缺簡脫，禮壞樂崩，聖上喟然而稱曰：朕甚閔焉！⁶

In Emperor Wu's time (r. 141–87 BCE) the writings had become incomplete and slips were missing. The rites were ruined and the music degenerated. The Sagacious Emperor bemoaned this with the words: 'WE are greatly distressed about this!'

Although in this passage Ban Gu did not refer to a certain manuscript but 'the writings' more generally, he obviously had in mind manuscripts consisting of individual slips (*jian* 簡), some of which had become lost. A more concrete example can be found in the report, which Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 BCE) submitted to the throne after he had finished his editorial work on the *Zhanguoce* 戰國策:

[...]臣向言所校中戰國策書：中書餘卷錯亂相糅莒。⁷

Your servant Xiang [...] reports on the writings of the *Zhanguoce* from the inner [palace], which he checked by means of comparison: The more than [?] rolls with writings from the inner [palace] had become disarranged and were mingled with each other.⁸

Here the word *juan* 卷 explicitly refers to 'rolls' of bamboo or wood slips, the binding strings of which had apparently (partly) come apart, leading to a complete disarrangement of the slips. In similar detail Ban Gu describes Liu Xiang's work in comparing the so-called old-text version of the *Book of Documents*⁹ with the orthodox new-text versions:

⁶ *Hanshu* 30, 1701. Translation (slightly modified): Richter 2013, 2.

⁷ Liu Xiang 1985, 1195 (punctuation modified).

⁸ Cf. the German translation of this passage by Friedrich (2009, 246), who further proposed that there was very likely a number omitted between *shu* 書 and *yu* 餘.

⁹ This *Guwen Shangshu* 古文尚書 was purportedly found in a wall of the ancestral home of Confucius during the late reign of Han Emperor Wu (r. 141–87 BCE), see *Hanshu* 30, 1706. On this event and the textual history of the *Shangshu* see further Shaughnessy 1993, 380–383.

劉向以中古文校歐陽、大小夏侯三家經文，酒誥脫簡一，召誥脫簡二。率簡二十五字者，脫亦二十五字，簡二十二字者，脫亦二十二字，文字異者七百有餘，脫字數十。¹⁰

Liu Xiang checked the canonical text [of the *Shangshu*] according to the three schools of Ouyang, as well as the Elder and the Younger Xia¹¹ by means of comparison with the old-text [version kept] in the inner [palace]. [He discovered that] in the *Jiu gao* [chapter of the canonical text] one slip was missing; in the *Shao gao* [chapter] two slips were missing. Where the rate was 25 characters per slip, there were also 25 characters missing; where [the rate] was 22 characters per slip, there were also 22 characters missing. [Furthermore] more than 700 characters were different and several tens of characters were missing.

As can be seen, manuscripts with missing slips or dissolving binding strings were common phenomena already at a time when such manuscripts were still in normal use.¹² In the course of transmission this could easily lead to textual corruption, because the incomplete state of a manuscript might only become obvious through careful comparison of different manuscripts carrying the same text in a way exemplified by Liu Xiang. The reports on his work show that Liu Xiang was well aware of the problems caused by dissolving manuscripts, however his aim was not to reconstruct the original manuscripts (and their texts) but rather to compile new—and more complete—texts by collating all textual witnesses available to him.¹³ It was not before the 20th century that scholars gradually developed clear criteria and methods for the reconstruction of early Chinese manuscripts while pursuing the aim of recovering as far as possible their original state. This development was in fact sparked and repeatedly stimulated

¹⁰ *Hanshu* 30, 1706.

¹¹ This refers to the three schools of Ouyang Gao 歐陽高, Xiahou Sheng 夏侯勝 and Xiahou Jian 夏侯建, see Shaughnessy 1993, 381.

¹² This spans a time of at least a millennium, as the earliest extant examples of bamboo manuscripts can be dated to the 5th century BCE and bamboo and wood slips were still being used as writing support for around three centuries after paper had become to be widely used in the 1st or 2nd century CE, see Tsien 2004, 96–99. Some wood slips with writing, which were excavated in north-west China in 1973, could even be dated to the 7th century CE, see Tsien 2004, 125.

¹³ On the editorial work of Liu Xiang see van der Loon 1952, 358–363 as well as Friedrich 2009.

anew by several major archaeological discoveries made from the early 20th century onward right to the very recent past.

2. Manuscripts from desert ruins and ‘reconstruction by categorisation’

During the first four decades of the 20th century several expeditions to the desert regions of north-west China were conducted by different countries. Among these were expeditions led by Aurel Stein (1862–1943) and Sven Hedin (1865–1952), which for the first time yielded actual examples of bamboo and wood manuscripts from early imperial China. In the course of his three expeditions to Central Asia (1900–1901, 1906–1908 and 1913–1915) Stein discovered around 1,000 bamboo and wood slips and tablets from Han to Tang times at sites near Dunhuang 敦煌.¹⁴ About 20 years later, during Hedin’s Sino-Swedish expedition, Folke Bergman (1902–1946) made an even more extensive discovery leading to the excavation of around 10,000 pieces at sites along the Edsin Gol.¹⁵ It is safe to say that the reconstruction of early Chinese bamboo and wood manuscripts started with these major discoveries. The main reason for this was that among all the more than 10,000 excavated items there were only two manuscripts with intact binding strings,¹⁶ although, as Loewe stated:

¹⁴ Photographic reproductions and transcriptions of these manuscripts were published in Chavannes 1913, Luo Zhenyu and Wang Guowei 1993 and Maspero 1953. Note that beside slips and tablets there were also found short polygonal rods carrying writing, so-called *gu* 觚. See Chavannes 1913, ix. Although some of these rods have a small hole near their top end and could therefore be strung on a rope together (for an example see item Chavannes no. 1), this kind of manuscript is significantly different from the multi-slip manuscripts that are the object of this study.

¹⁵ The sites are usually subsumed under the name of the ancient district of Juyan 居延, although not all of the sites referred to by this name were really situated inside its former boundaries. For photographic reproductions, transcriptions and notes for these manuscripts see Lao Gan 1957 and 1960 as well as Zhongguo shehui kexue yuan kaogu yanjiu suo 1980. The pioneering study of these materials in a Western language is Loewe 1967. Further excavations at Dunhuang, Juyan and other sites in the second half of the 20th century have yielded additional material. For a brief introduction to these later finds see Loewe 1986. Note that further discoveries were made in north-west China also in the first decades of the 20th century, for an overview see e.g. Lin Jianming 1984, 8–18. As these however did not have the same impact on research as the mentioned finds, the discussion here is limited to the manuscripts discovered at Dunhuang and Juyan by Stein and Bergman.

¹⁶ These are a written request for official leave (Juyan 57.1, 3 slips, cf. photos in Zhongguo shehui kexue yuan kaogu yanjiu suo 1980, 182) as well as an inventory of weapons (Juyan 128.1, 77 slips, cf. photos in Lao Gan 1957, 570–575). Later excavations in the area provided further examples of manuscripts with intact binding strings. For some of these see Ôba 2001, 12.

Rolls of strips [...] formed the principal way in which multi-strip documents were made for administrative purposes, as well as for literary works. Most of the material found at Dunhuang and Juyan and from other official posts comprised the individual members, whole or broken, of such documents, whose binding cords had disintegrated.¹⁷

Beside natural decay another reason for this might be that most of the manuscripts, of which the largest part had been generated by the civil or military administration of the time, were found discarded in ‘rubbish pits’ of ancient offices or military posts.¹⁸ It is therefore conceivable yet difficult to determine, that some of them might even have been deliberately destroyed, before they were discarded. In any case, the task of reconstruction appears to be an immediate necessity.

It took quite some time, however, before serious attempts at reconstruction were made, because at first—as has been pointed out by Nagata Hidemasa 永田英正—each individual slip and tablet was considered as a historical source in its own right.¹⁹ What was most important, was the *content* of the documents, which of course was exciting new evidence for all scholars of early Chinese history. This had notable influence on the way in which scholars tried to somehow categorise the huge amount of individual slips and tablets unearthed at Dunhuang and Juyan as a basis for further research. Some early works—especially those by Chinese scholars—divided the material mostly according to content. Luo Zhenyu 羅振玉 (1866–1940) and Wang Guowei 王國維 (1877–1927) were among the first Chinese scholars to study the material discovered by Stein. In their edition entitled *Liu sha zhui jian* 流沙墜簡 (‘Slips left behind in the drifting sands’), which was first published in 1914, Luo and Wang divided the slips and tablets into the three categories *xiaoxue shushu fangji shu* 小學術數方技書 ‘writings on basic learning, divination and astronomy, health and medicine’, *tunshu congcan* 屯戍叢殘 ‘collected remnants from garrison posts’ and *jiandu yiwen* 簡牘遺文 ‘various slips and tablets’²⁰ according to content; the first two categories were further subdivided

¹⁷ Loewe 1997, 168. Cf. Ôba 2001, 8.

¹⁸ Loewe 1997, 164.

¹⁹ Nagata 2007, 35.

²⁰ A literal translation of *jiandu yiwen* would rather be something like ‘lost/scattered writings on slips and tablets’, but the category apparently contains everything that does not fit into one of the two other categories.

with regard to different topics.²¹ The authors stated that their choice of categories was influenced by the exemplar of Ban Gu's *Yiwenzhi*.²² Lao Gan 勞幹, who was mainly responsible for the edition of the manuscripts discovered by Bergman at Juyan, 30 years later followed the example set by Luo and Wang as far as the categorisation is concerned. However, he changed and further refined the categories arriving at five major 'types' (*zhonglei* 種類): *wenshu* 文書 'official correspondence', *buji/bulu* 簿籍/簿錄²³ 'registers', *xinzha* 信札 '(private) letters', *jingji* 經籍 'canonical works' and *zalei* 雜類 'various'. These categories were further subdivided according to the 'nature' (*xingzhi* 性質) of the documents, which in fact meant first and foremost their content.²⁴

On the one hand the categorisation according to content is still an ongoing process, which has built on the works just mentioned but meanwhile left behind this comparatively premature state.²⁵ On the other hand, such categorisation of individual slips according to content—although certainly not void of value for research—soon turned out to be obstructive for the reconstruction of codicological units, because it did not distinguish slips that had been excavated at different places or slips with a different format,²⁶ which could hardly have been part of the same manuscript. This problem was most vividly discussed by Japanese scholars who also proposed a different kind of categorisation from the late 1950s onward (see further below), but an awareness of the necessity to distinguish slips according to criteria other than content can be traced back to the European scholars, who were the first to study the Dunhuang manuscripts discovered by Stein. Edouard Chavannes (1865–1918), who initially published photographic reproductions, transcriptions, French translations and notes for the manuscripts discovered during Stein's second expedition even before Luo Zhenyu and Wang Guowei, first categorised the slips and tablets according to period, then subdivided them ac-

²¹ Luo Zhenyu and Wang Guowei 1993. Cf. Nagata 2007, 25.

²² Luo Zhenyu and Wang Guowei 1993, 75.

²³ Nagata (2007, 33, footnote 1) already pointed out the divergence between the designations *buji* in the preface and *bulu* in the table of contents and main text of Lao Gan 1949.

²⁴ Lao Gan 1949, preface, 1–2.

²⁵ One of the most refined categorisations of Qin and Han documents mainly according to content and function to date is provided in Li Junming 2009. In this work the author tried to reconstruct the distinctions made between documents at the time when they were actually produced, e.g. by identifying the different terms that were used to refer to them, see Li Junming 2009, 7–15.

²⁶ In the present study 'format' is defined as including material features such as the measurements of slips and their shape as well as the number and position of binding strings. The format of a manuscript—or, before reconstruction, rather of the individual slips constituting it—is therefore to be distinguished from other material features such as writing support or layout.

ording to place of excavation.²⁷ Chavannes also explicitly stated that in some cases manuscripts originally consisted of several slips. Although he was not always sure how to reconstruct the sequence of the slips inside such disintegrated manuscripts,²⁸ he still identified some groups of slips, which according to his view once belonged to the same manuscript, e.g. a calendar of the year 63 BCE.²⁹ An important criterion for this was a consistent format of the respective slips.³⁰ Similarly, his student and successor Henri Maspero (1883–1945) in his posthumously published work on the manuscripts discovered during Stein’s third expedition first categorised the slips and tablets according to region, then subsequently divided this material according to period and place of excavation.³¹ Although in the two works by Chavannes and Maspero categorisation is focused on the period and place of excavation instead of the content of the individual slips and tablets, they both did not apply these categories consistently. For example, Chavannes grouped together slips that carried parts of the *Jijiuzhang* 急就章³² text, although they did not derive from the same place of excavation.³³ Likewise, Maspero put into the same group slips that obviously each constituted a part of a calendar but had not been excavated at the same place.³⁴ This does neither mean that Chavannes and Maspero were not aware of the different places of excavation, nor that they even regarded said examples as constituents of (the same) multi-slip manuscripts. But it illustrates a typical problem, which only became visible in retrospect, after the importance of manuscript reconstruction had gained wider attention. Still, many of the observations that were made in these important early works—e.g. the value of the criteria place of excavation, format, script³⁵—benefitted later reconstruction attempts.

²⁷ See the table of contents in Chavannes 1913, 232.

²⁸ Chavannes 1913, viii.

²⁹ Chavannes 1913, 10–14. Cf. Loewe 1963, 153.

³⁰ Chavannes found that the mentioned calendar consisted of slips with a length of 36 cm and a width of 1 cm, which all showed three notches at identical positions on their left side, see Chavannes 1913, 10. These notches (*qikou* 契口) were probably cut into the side of bamboo and wood slips to mark the position of binding strings and/or prevent them from shifting.

³¹ See the table of contents in Maspero 1953, x–xii.

³² This text is also known as *Jiujupian* 急就篇.

³³ For these see Chavannes 1913, 6–10. Some of the eight items collected here (e.g. nos. 1 and 2) are polygonal rods (cf. footnote 14).

³⁴ See e.g. nos. 7 and 8 in Maspero 1953, 19, where it is in fact noted that these two fragments must have been parts of different calendars.

³⁵ Beside the works described in the preceding paragraphs a study by the German Sinologist August Conrady (1864–1925) deserves special mentioning here. In his edition and translation of the manuscripts discovered by Sven Hedin at Loulan 樓蘭 around 1900, Conrady categorised the wood documents among them accord-

Although there had been successful attempts to reconstruct early Chinese paper manuscripts, for example by using imprints of writing to put together fragments of the same folded sheet,³⁶ serious work of this kind on bamboo and wood manuscripts only started with the categorisation of the Juyan slips according to non-textual criteria. In the late 1950s photographic reproductions of the Juyan material were published for the first time.³⁷ Shortly afterwards Mori Shikazô 森鹿三, who in 1951 had initiated a research group at Kyôto University to study these newly available manuscripts, began to ‘categorise’ (*shûsei* 集成)³⁸ the material, collecting slips from the same place of excavation that referred to the same person and content, thereby trying to reconstruct a multi-slip food register.³⁹ In a famed article from 1961 Ôba Osamu 大庭脩 reconstructed an imperial edict consisting of 8 individual slips, which according to his categorisation efforts referred to the same content, carried script written by the same hand and derived from the same place of excavation.⁴⁰ It is these works that were among the first to actually use the term ‘reconstruction’ (*fukugen* 復原) in the context of multi-slip manuscripts. The procedure applied has later been called ‘reconstruction by categorisation’ (*shûsei fukugen/jicheng fuyuan* 集成復原).⁴¹ It should however be noted that this kind of ‘reconstruction’ usually meant to identify possible constituents of the same codicological unit, but that it seldom included a reconstruction of the original sequence of the slips. In this respect the cited work by Ôba stood out as an exception. A few years later Michael Loewe, who had participated in the meetings of the afore-mentioned research group at Kyôto in 1960 and 1961,⁴² took up the task of reconstruction and developed a detailed set of criteria according to

ing to content in a way similar to the Chinese scholars Luo Zhenyu and Wang Guowei, without providing information on their exact place of excavation, see Conrady 1920, 115–140. However, he pointed out that at least two of the wood slips had very likely once been part of the same manuscript. The main reason for this judgement apparently was an identical style of script, see Conrady 1920, 40 and 117.

³⁶ See e.g. Conrady 1920, 34.

³⁷ For these see Lao Gan 1957.

³⁸ Note that *shûsei*, which usually means ‘compilation’ or ‘compendium’ was translated as ‘classification’ in the English title of the respective article in the table of contents of *Tôhō gakuhō* 東方學報 29.

³⁹ Mori 1959.

⁴⁰ See the Chinese translation in Ôba 2001, 13–20. The work was originally published as Ôba 1961.

⁴¹ See e.g. Nagata 2007, 37.

⁴² Loewe 1967, vol. 1, xi.

which he suggested to categorise the Juyan slips. The criteria named by Loewe can be summarised as follows:⁴³

1. Site

In fact the ‘sites’ where Juyan slips were found can be further divided into ‘localities’.⁴⁴ All slips were assigned an item number after excavation and stored together with other objects excavated at Juyan in at least 586 containers. The serial number of the respective container is always the first part of the item number of a certain slip. This is followed by the serial number assigned to all objects included within this container. Both numbers are usually separated by a punctuation mark, e.g. a full stop.⁴⁵ For the reconstruction of multi-slip manuscripts it is important to note that all slips included together in a certain container, i.e. with the same first part of item number, also derived from the same site.⁴⁶ However, if a certain site yielded many objects, more than one container was used to store these. For example, as many as 94 different containers can be assigned to the site Ulan-durbelijn (Diwan 地灣, A33).⁴⁷

2. Form

With this Loewe refers to established patterns, which largely prescribed the form of a certain type of document (e.g. a record of food issues), to facilitate administrative work.⁴⁸ However, Loewe concedes that the Juyan manuscripts ‘can be expected to comprise many examples of comparatively few types of document, and there will be a superficial resemblance of subject-matter and form between a large number of piec-

⁴³ For the following criteria see Loewe 1967, vol. 1, 15–17. Cf. the less detailed catalogue of criteria in Loewe 1997, 174–175 as well as Ôba Osamu’s catalogue of the four main criteria ‘excavation site’, ‘handwriting’, ‘material’ and ‘content’ (Ôba 2001, 10–11).

⁴⁴ Loewe 1967, vol. 1, 3.

⁴⁵ Loewe 1967, vol. 1, 13–14.

⁴⁶ In 1967 Loewe stated that due to the lack of a full account of the numbering system, it is not always possible to ascertain the exact locality or even the site where a certain slip had been excavated, see Loewe 1967, vol. 1, 13. Meanwhile considerable progress has been made in this respect, as such an account was later found in an archive, see Zhongguo shehui kexue yuan kaogu yanjiu suo 1980, vol. 2, 291–297.

⁴⁷ Loewe 1967, vol. 1, 14. Cf. Ôba’s reconstruction of an imperial edict, where he argues that the slips with the item numbers 5.10, 10.27, 10.29, 10.30, 10.31, 10.32, 10.33 and 332.26, were part of the same multi-slip manuscript, see Ôba 2001, 13–20. All slips included in containers 5, 10 and 332 in fact derive from the same site A33, see the table in Xie Guihua et al. 1987, 679–889.

⁴⁸ Ôba pointed out that imperial decrees (*zhaoshu* 詔書) are comparatively easy to reconstruct, because of their fixed structure, see Ôba 2001, 60. Cf. his reconstructions of several such decrees in the same book as well as the analysis of their formal structure in Ôba 1961.

es.’⁴⁹ He furthermore points out that there are ‘documents that were written in their entirety, on a single occasion, and those which were compiled piecemeal, on successive occasions as opportunity demanded’, which Loewe refers to as ‘comprehensive reports’ and ‘ledgers’, respectively.⁵⁰

3. Type and size of stationery

Type most probably refers to the material (bamboo or wood), size to the measurements (mostly length and width) of a certain slip.

4. Style of inscription

With ‘style of inscription’ Loewe does not mean the style of script or the handwriting (for this see 7. below), but rather layout features such as the number of columns of writing on a single slip, division into bands⁵¹ or tabulation as well as spacing.⁵²

5. Traces of bindings

Loewe points out that attention needs to be paid to the way in which slips were fastened and how this influenced the layout.

6. Formulas and terminology

Regular use of the same formulas or expressions might suggest that the respective slips belong to the same (type of) document.⁵³

7. Handwriting

Loewe considers handwriting to be the most problematic criterion, because the handwriting of different scribes is likely to look very similar, if they were well-trained in the standard *lishu* 隸書 of the times. Furthermore, as mentioned in 2. above, there are examples of documents, which were compiled in several stages that also might have involved different persons and therefore hands.

Based on the premise that the respective slips and fragments show identical features as far as the above criteria are concerned, Loewe proposed reconstructions for 43 multi-slip manu-

⁴⁹ Loewe 1967, vol. 1, 15.

⁵⁰ Loewe 1967, vol. 1, 16. The latter type is called a ‘composite manuscript’ in this study, see footnote 1.

⁵¹ These are usually named ‘registers’, as it is also the case in Loewe 1997, 167.

⁵² In the present study spacing is considered to be a feature of ‘script’ rather than ‘layout’ (cf. catalogue of criteria in section 6 below).

⁵³ Loewe 1997, 174.

scripts consisting of overall 710 slips and fragments.⁵⁴ However, he duly called to attention two significant problems:

There can be no proof that the associations which are suggested are correct, other than the coincidence that the pieces were found in the same site, that the inscriptions were made out in the same form and, less certainly, by the same hand. [...] The strips and fragments whose association is suggested can usually be arrayed only in an arbitrary order [...].⁵⁵

We have seen that the reconstruction of bamboo and wood manuscripts from slips that had been excavated in north-west China during the first decades of the 20th century was rooted in categorisation. Whereas some Chinese scholars (Luo Zhenyu/Wang Guowei and later Lao Gan) had favoured a categorisation according to content, the development towards a categorisation that was mainly based on material/non-textual criteria and accordingly much more favourable for the task of reconstruction already started with the works of Chavannes and Maspero on the Dunhuang manuscripts. Japanese scholars, first and foremost Mori Shikazô and Ôba Osamu, made the criteria for categorisation explicit and applied them to the vast amount of Juyan manuscripts. Loewe further refined these and in 1967 established a set of criteria that was already close to the standard explicitly or implicitly applied in the course of manuscript reconstruction until today. The reason why a categorisation of the Dunhuang and especially the Juyan slips was considered necessary and attracted so much attention was—beside their large number—mainly the fact that the slips derived from many different sites in a vast territory. The Juyan slips for example were excavated from at least 21 sites that are stretched over about 250 km in a north-easterly direction, which demonstrates the utmost importance of especially the place of excavation criterion to find possible constituents of the same codicological unit.⁵⁶ In comparison the archaeological context of bamboo and wood manuscripts that were excavated from ancient tombs since 1951 was much clearer as it was restricted to a certain tomb at a certain site. In contrast to the Juyan manuscripts there was usually detailed in-

⁵⁴ After Loewe Nagata proposed further reconstructions based on similar criteria in three articles, see Nagata 1974a, 1974b and 1979. In China Xie Guihua was among the researchers most active in this field, see Xie Guihua 1992, 1993 and 1996.

⁵⁵ Loewe 1967, vol. 1, 18.

⁵⁶ Loewe 1967, vol. 1, 2–3. Cf. the map in Loewe 1967, vol. 1, 184.

formation on the position of the slips at the time of excavation available so that their location could even be investigated on a micro-level, which often yielded further hints that proved to be useful for reconstruction (see section 4). Another major difference is the content. While most of the manuscripts from the north-west of China were of administrative nature, such manuscripts were seldom found in tombs. In fact, new discoveries yielded the first examples of literary texts with counterparts in received literature, which often highly facilitated the reconstruction of the respective manuscripts. In the following section this new aspect of reconstruction will be illustrated with some examples of important discoveries.

3. Manuscripts with textual counterparts

The years between the discovery of the Juyan slips in 1930/1931 and the founding of the PRC in 1949 were marked by civil war as well as the Chinese-Japanese war and no major discoveries of bamboo or wood manuscripts were made in these nearly 20 years.⁵⁷ Archaeological excavations were resumed in the early 1950s and yielded the first (modern) examples of bamboo manuscripts from ancient tombs. The tombs were mainly dated to the Warring States period (5th to 3rd century BCE) and situated on the territory of the ancient kingdom of Chu 楚 (mainly modern Henan, Hubei and Hunan provinces). Most of the manuscripts found in these tombs were inventories of grave goods (so-called *qiance* 遣策).⁵⁸ In most cases one such inventory was the only manuscript contained in a certain tomb, which meant that although the binding strings had decayed a categorisation of the slips to assign them to different codicological units was normally unnecessary. Still, the sequence of slips in a certain inventory could not be reconstructed with any certainty, because the text on them was normally written in form of a list with one item per slip.⁵⁹ The sequence of slips chosen by the editors for publication therefore had to remain largely arbitrary.

In 1959 however around 500 bamboo and wood slips were excavated from Han tomb no. 6 at Mozuizi 磨嘴子,⁶⁰ Wuwei 武威 county (Gansu province).⁶¹ The largest part of these

⁵⁷ For two smaller discoveries (of 49 and 7 slips, respectively) during this time see Pian Yuqian and Duan Shu'an 2006, 385–386.

⁵⁸ For these discoveries see Pian Yuqian and Duan Shu'an 2006, 386–389.

⁵⁹ For an example see the inventory excavated from Yangtianhu 仰天湖 tomb no. 25 in 1953. It was published in Shang Chengzuo 1995, 43–75.

⁶⁰ This site is also referred to as Mojuzi 磨咀子.

slips contained texts that corresponded to seven chapters of the ritual classic *Yili* 儀禮, one of which was found in three versions. This was one of the earliest finds of texts written on bamboo or wood slips, which were neither of administrative nature nor mere inventories of grave goods.⁶² Moreover, it was the first significant example of an excavated bamboo or wood ‘manuscript with a transmitted counterpart’, which Boltz has once defined as ‘those [manuscripts] having corresponding received versions with which the texts of the manuscript versions can be compared.’⁶³ Chen Mengjia 陳夢家, who according to the postscript of the respective publication was mainly responsible for the editing work,⁶⁴ stated that the textual comparison with the received *Yili* was an important criterion during the reconstruction work.⁶⁵ After the respective slips had been roughly divided into wide wood slips (*jia ben* 甲本 → group A, containing seven chapters of the *Yili*), narrow wood slips (*yi ben* 乙本 → group B, containing one chapter of the *Yili*) and bamboo slips (*bing ben* 丙本 → group C, containing one chapter of the *Yili*), the text on the slips was carefully compared with the received text.⁶⁶ Another aspect that highly facilitated the reconstruction work was the fact that many of the slips in the first group showed numbers indicating the sequence of the slips (called *yeshu* 葉數 by Chen) on the bottom of their recto or verso, furthermore the chapters were numbered as well. Fragments were likewise placed in accord with the received version of the text. However, as the *Yili* contains many passages or phrases that occur repeatedly inside the same chapter

⁶¹ Photographic reproductions, transcriptions and notes for these slips have been published five years later in Gansu sheng bowuguan and Zhongguo kexue yuan kaogu yanjiu suo 2005.

⁶² Chinese scholars often refer to this kind of texts as *shuji* 書籍 ‘literature’ or *gushu* 古書 ‘ancient writings’ in contrast to *wenshu* 文書 ‘documents’, see e.g. Pian Yuqian and Duan Shu’an 2006, 175 or Li Ling 2008, 42–57. According to a list compiled by Li Ling the only significant example of a *gushu* text written on bamboo or wood slips discovered before the Wuwei finds was a manuscript excavated from tomb no. 1 at Changtai-guan 長台關 in 1957. However, this manuscript was only published much later in 1986, see Li Ling 2008, 114, 191. It should be noted that examples of *gushu* (e.g. the *Jijiupian*) had already been found at Dunhuang and Juyan (cf. Li Ling 2008, 102–104) but that these were no more than fragments.

⁶³ Boltz 1997, 253.

⁶⁴ Gansu sheng bowuguan and Zhongguo kexue yuan kaogu yanjiu suo 2005, 198.

⁶⁵ For this and the following information regarding the reconstruction process see Gansu sheng bowuguan and Zhongguo kexue yuan kaogu yanjiu suo 2005, 78–79.

⁶⁶ The chapters written on groups B and C of the slips both correspond to the chapter named *Sang fu* 喪服 or *Fu zhuan* 服傳 in the received text and group A, respectively. See Boltz 1993a, 242.

or even throughout the whole work, it was necessary to rely on material criteria as well and determine as far as possible, exactly which part of a complete slip a certain fragment was.⁶⁷

According to an estimate of 2006 about three quarters of the bamboo and wood slips discovered until then can be categorised as documents (*wenshu* 文書) due to their content.⁶⁸ No matter if they are of personal (e.g. inventories of grave goods, letters) or administrative nature (e.g. registers, statutes and ordinances), they were once produced for a certain purpose and to be used in limited frames of time and space. The respective texts were usually not transmitted over the centuries until today.⁶⁹ Literary works such as the mentioned *Yili* are a different matter. Although most of the literary texts recorded on bamboo or wood manuscripts and discovered in the last 50 years were only known from their titles or even entirely unknown before, some others have counterparts in received literature.⁷⁰

The most prominent examples for the latter case probably are versions or parts of the text that is today known as the *Laozi* 老子 or *Daodejing* 道德經. Following the discovery of the two virtually complete *Laozi* silk manuscripts in Mawangdui 馬王堆 tomb no. 3 in 1973,⁷¹ tomb no. 1 at Guodian 郭店 in 1993 yielded 804 bamboo slips, of which 71 contained text corresponding to almost half the text of the received *Laozi*.⁷² Finally, in 2009 Peking University purchased more than 3,000 unprovenanced bamboo slips. 221 of these belong to two manuscripts with the complete text of the received *Laozi*.⁷³ Even though the editors of the

⁶⁷ According to Chen Mengjia experience with the reconstruction of oracle bone and stone inscriptions from fragments was helpful in the course of this work, although he does not provide any details. See Gansu sheng bowuguan and Zhongguo kexue yuan kaogu yanjiu suo 2005, 78.

⁶⁸ Pian Yuqian and Duan Shu'an 2006, 176.

⁶⁹ Richter (2011, 208, footnote 3) called these 'occasion texts' in contrast to 'tradition texts'; cf. Kern's 'occasional texts/writings' and 'texts with a (transmission) history' (Kern 2002, 145–148). It is of course true that in some cases texts that were originally part of a document became incorporated into literary works such as the dynastic histories. For example, imperial decrees and orders from Han times are frequently cited in works such as the *Shiji* 史記 and the *Hanshu* 漢書. See the examples collected in Loewe 2004, 522–546.

⁷⁰ Based on Giele's *Database of Early Chinese Manuscripts* (Giele 1998/99, 306–336) Boltz calculated an average ratio of about 10%, meaning that of 10 sites that yield manuscripts 1 includes manuscripts for whose text there is a counterpart in received literature. See Boltz 2005, 52 with footnote 6.

⁷¹ Photographic reproductions, transcriptions and notes for these manuscripts were published in Guojia wenwu ju gu wenxian yanjiu shi 1980. For an introduction and many references see Boltz 1993b.

⁷² Boltz 1999, 594. Photographic reproductions, transcriptions and notes for these manuscripts were published in Jingmen shi bowuguan 1998.

⁷³ For photographic reproductions, transcriptions and notes for these manuscripts see Beijing daxue chutu wenxian yanjiu suo 2012c. All slips are uniform with regard to measurements and style of script but the text consists of two parts titled *Laozi shangjing* 老子上經 and *Laozi xiajing* 老子下經, respectively. Because these

mentioned manuscripts did not always explicitly state this, it is clear that they consulted the received text and—at least in the case of the Guodian and Peking University bamboo manuscripts—also the previously discovered other manuscript versions of the text. Peng Hao 彭浩, one of the editors of the Guodian manuscripts, for example stated that the sequence of the Guodian slips carrying passages of the *Laozi* was determined according to the received text and the Mawangdui silk manuscripts. Accordingly slips 1 to 20 of the Guodian *Laozi* A (*jia* 甲) are arranged in the present order, because they contain text that corresponds to (parts of) chapters 19, 66, 46, 30, 15, 64, 37, 63, 2 and 32.⁷⁴ The order of the slips can be determined without doubt, as each ‘change between chapters’ (based on the received text) occurs in consecutive passages of text on the same slip. The following slips 21 to 23 however (corresponding to chapter 25 and the last part of chapter 5 of the received text) according to Peng are an ‘independent section’, for which ‘[i]t is impossible to determine whether or not this section is linked to the section of slips 1 to 20.’⁷⁵ The Guodian manuscripts therefore show an order of the text, which differs significantly from the received text—the same is also the case in the Mawangdui silk manuscripts.⁷⁶ The consultation of other *Laozi* versions is also obvious in the publication on the Peking University *Laozi*, as the book includes a synopsis of eight different witnesses of the text including the Mawangdui and Guodian manuscripts.⁷⁷ According to the editors the sequence of the chapters completely accords with the received text, apart from the fact that the *De* 德-part (named *shangjing* 上經) precedes the *Dao* 道-part (*xiajing* 下經), whereas the order in the received text is *Dao-De*.⁷⁸ The order of the chapters however could not be determined by an investigation of the manuscript text alone, as in contrast to the bamboo manuscripts from Guodian a new chapter is always started on a new slip; remaining space on the last slip of a chapter is always left empty.⁷⁹ Still, the fact that text corresponding to seven separate chapters in the received version was divided into only three chapters in the Peking University *Laozi* but has the exact same order inside these three chapters, suggests that

titles are written on the verso of the second slip belonging to each respective part, i.e. slips 2 and 124, it seems likely that the two parts also constituted separate codicological units. See Han Wei 2012, 234.

⁷⁴ Peng Hao 2000, 36. This is nicely illustrated by table A in Boltz 1999, 593.

⁷⁵ Peng Hao 2000, 36. Cf. Boltz 1999, 593.

⁷⁶ For the Mawangdui *Laozi* see the synopsis of *Laozi* A, B and the received Fu Yi 傅奕 text in Guojia wenwu ju gu wenxian yanjiu shi 1980, 101–124.

⁷⁷ Beijing daxue chutu wenxian yanjiu suo 2012c, 173–205.

⁷⁸ The two parts were also put into the *De-Dao* order in both Mawangdui manuscripts. This phenomenon however was already known long before these discoveries, see Friedrich 1996, 105–106 with footnote 3.

⁷⁹ Beijing daxue chutu wenxian yanjiu suo 2012c, 121.

the sequence of the text was at least in part identical above the level of individual chapters of the received text.⁸⁰

In the course of the discovery of large amounts of bamboo and wood manuscripts during the second half of the last century researchers sometimes encountered a second favourable circumstance, namely the case that—although the text of a certain manuscript was unknown from received literature—a second version of the same text had already been found in another manuscript. This is exemplified by two manuscripts, one of which was discovered in Guodian tomb no. 1, while the other was among the more than 1,200 unprovenanced slips and fragments purchased by the Shanghai Museum on the antique market of Hong Kong in 1994.⁸¹ The 67 slips found in Guodian were named *Xing zi ming chu* 性自命出, the 40 from the Shanghai Museum collection given the title *Xing qing lun* 性情論, as both groups of slips did not bear original titles and their texts were unknown from received literature.⁸² The two groups of slips are clearly different as far as their measurements are concerned. While the slips of the *Xing zi ming chu* are 32.5 cm long and most carry about 23 characters, those of the *Xing qing lun* measure 57 cm with about 38 characters per slip.⁸³ One can use this data to calculate that, if all extant slips of both manuscripts would be complete, the overall length of each respective text would be between 1,500 and 1,550 characters.⁸⁴ And in fact, the two manuscripts are also almost identical as far as the content is concerned. Apart from occasional variance on the level of individual characters/words⁸⁵ or a slightly more elaborate/abbreviated diction in certain passages⁸⁶ the main difference is the sequence in which the sections of the

⁸⁰ The text of the Peking University *Laozi* is separated into 77 chapters instead of the traditional 81, see Beijing daxue chutu wenxian yanjiu suo 2012c, 121. In the former the text corresponding to chapters 6 and 7 of the received text forms one chapter, so does the text corresponding to chapters 17, 18 and 19 as well as 32 and 33, respectively. See Beijing daxue chutu wenxian yanjiu suo 2012c, 192–193, 196–197, 202–203.

⁸¹ The provenance of the Shanghai Museum manuscripts is unknown. However, some scholars assume that the slips derive from a tomb near Guodian tomb no. 1, as the Shanghai Museum slips appeared on the market in Hong Kong shortly after that tomb had been excavated, see Ma Chengyuan 2001, preface.

⁸² Photographic reproductions, transcriptions and notes for the *Xing zi ming chu* and the *Xing qing lun* were published in Jingmen shi bowuguan 1998 and Ma Chengyuan 2001, respectively.

⁸³ As the average number of characters per slip is not provided in Jingmen shi bowuguan 1998, the count by Li Tianhong (2002, 11–12) is followed here.

⁸⁴ The editors of the Shanghai Museum manuscripts counted overall 1,256 characters in the *Xing qing lun*. The deviation from 1,500 could however be easily explained, as only seven of the 40 slips are complete, see Ma Chengyuan 2001, 218. Furthermore, at least two slips are apparently missing between slips 3 and 4, see Ma Chengyuan 2001, 225.

⁸⁵ Cf. the comparison of character forms in the two manuscripts in Ma Chengyuan 2001, 281–301.

⁸⁶ Ma Chengyuan 2001, 218.

text are ordered—at least according to the first reconstructions provided by the editors.⁸⁷ Before the discovery of the *Xing qing lun* the *Xing zi ming chu* text was mostly considered to consist of two main parts, the ends of which were indicated in the manuscript by two hook-shaped marks (*mogou* 墨鈎) on slips 35 and 67.⁸⁸ The *Xing qing lun* text on the other hand is clearly divided into six sections, which were graphically separated from each other by five thick horizontal lines (*mojie* 墨節 or *moxian* 墨綫).⁸⁹ As therefore in the *Xing qing lun* the places where a change between two sections occurs in the text are not only clearly identifiable but do also never coincide with a change between two slips, the sequence of the six sections of text can be determined. If the text of the *Xing qing lun* is compared with the *Xing zi ming chu* text, it becomes clear that all sections of the former have corresponding text sections in the latter (see table 1 below).

Section no. (acc. to <i>Xing qing lun</i>)	<i>Xing qing lun</i> slip nos.	<i>Xing zi ming chu</i> slip nos.
I	1–21A	1–33
II	21B–31A	50–67
III	31B–35A	36–42A
IV	35B–39A	42B–48A
V	39B	48B–49A
VI	39C–40	49B

Table 1: Corresponding text sections in the *Xing qing lun* and *Xing zi ming chu* manuscripts.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ On the division of the *Xing zi ming chu* and *Xing qing lun* texts in sections and their different sequences see Chen Wei 2010, 137–139.

⁸⁸ Li Tianhong 2002, 8–13, 204.

⁸⁹ Chen Wei 2010, 137. The five horizontal lines can be found on slips 21, 31, 35 and 39 (two). According to the editor Pu Maozuo the hook-shaped mark on the last slip 40 is used to indicate the end of the whole text, see Ma Chengyuan 2001, 219.

⁹⁰ This table follows the sections identified in Chen Wei 2010, 137–138. Note that the beginning of the fourth section of the *Xing qing lun* was mistakenly (probably due to a typo) assigned to slip 32 in Chen Wei’s book, which was corrected to slip 35 in the table. The slip numbers follow the original publications. If two or three consecutive parts of the same slip are referred to, these are distinguished in the table by an additional A, B and C (from top to bottom of the slip). Cf. the introduction on the arrangement of the slips in the *Xing zi ming chu* in Cook 2012, 686–691. Note that the overview on the *Xing zi ming chu* sections in this book (p. 691) contains a few mistakes: instead of ‘42b-47a; 47b-48a; 48b-49’ it should be ‘42b-48a; 48b-49a; 49b’.

It is immediately evident that—according to the reconstructions proposed by the editors of the two manuscripts—the sequence of the text sections is different in the *Xing zi ming chu*. While sections I and II directly follow each other in the *Xing qing lun*, the respective sections of text can be found on the first 33 and the last 18 slips of the *Xing zi ming chu*. Sections III to VI of the *Xing qing lun* on the other hand occur in the *Xing zi ming chu* (on slips 36 to 49) in the exact same order. This can be ascertained by the fact that—as is the case in the whole *Xing qing lun*—on *Xing zi ming chu* slips 36 to 49 a change between sections never falls together with a change between slips. However, the table also shows that in the *Xing zi ming chu*, unlike the *Xing qing lun*, the beginning of a section of text does not only concur with the beginning of a slip on slip 1, but also on slips 50 and 36. We can therefore follow Chen Wei 陳偉 who identified basically three independent parts in the *Xing zi ming chu* (corresponding to *Xing qing lun* sections I, II and III to VI, respectively), which he proposed to order in accord with the *Xing qing lun* text.⁹¹ Although this reconstruction would certainly be possible one should also bear in mind the possibility that the order of the three parts in the *Xing zi ming chu* might have been different than suggested by the *Xing qing lun*. The fact that the text on slips 34 and 35 of the *Xing zi ming chu* does not have any counterpart in the *Xing qing lun*⁹² as well as the fact that there are minor differences in the order of the passages inside the text that corresponds to section II of the *Xing qing lun*⁹³ might hint towards this possibility. What can be determined with some certainty by a textual comparison of the two manuscripts is therefore only the sequence of slips in the *Xing qing lun*. In the case of the *Xing zi ming chu* such a reconstruction is only possible for the sequence of slips *inside* certain groups of slips that can be regarded as self-contained units with a counterpart in the *Xing qing lun*, namely slips 1 to 33, 50 to 67 and 36 to 49. The reason for this are differences in the way the two manuscript texts are separated into smaller units by segmentation marks (the mentioned hook-shaped marks and horizontal lines) and left-blank space on the slips. Only if a change between

⁹¹ Chen Wei 2002, 176–177. Note that Chen had originally regarded slip 36 as belonging to the end of the part corresponding to section I of the *Xing qing lun*, whereas later he apparently changed his view and assigned the slip to the part corresponding to section III, see Chen Wei 2010, 137–138. The separation into three parts had earlier been proposed by Liao Mingchun (2000). However, Liao’s assignment of slips to the three parts was slightly different, as was the order of the parts, which he proposed.

⁹² Chen Wei 2010, 138. This is also the reason why slips 34 and 35 do not appear in table 1. The text on these two slips apparently constitutes a complete section that can also be found in the *Tan gong* 檀弓 chapter of the *Liji* 禮記, see Pang Pu 1998, 8–9. Note that there further is a short passage of text on *Xing zi ming chu* slips 36 and 37, which does not have a counterpart in the *Xing qing lun*, see Chen Wei 2010, 138.

⁹³ For these see Chen Wei 2010, 138–139.

two sections of the text does not coincide with a change between slips it can be concluded that the respective sections follow each other.

Although a thorough textual comparison can be extremely helpful for the reconstruction of multi-slip manuscripts with received or manuscript counterparts the above examples at the same time demonstrate the limits of such an analysis. A textual comparison can neither be the sole basis for a reconstruction nor does it necessarily enable the reconstruction of the sequence for all slips of a certain manuscript. More often it can only help to determine the internal sequence for certain groups of slips that each as themselves form only a part of the whole codicological unit and carry a unit of text that is basically self-contained. Such problems are certainly related to the ‘composite nature of early Chinese texts’, as Boltz phrased it.⁹⁴ It has been pointed out more than 80 years ago that the concept of the ‘author’ is problematic with regard to most pre-imperial Chinese texts, because they were usually not written by one person as complete works or books but consisted of smaller units of diverse origin that were in many cases first compiled during the Han dynasty or even later.⁹⁵ A comparison of several received early Chinese texts and their manuscript counterparts led Boltz to conclude that

transmitted texts that have manuscript counterparts [...] typically show themselves to be constructed out of individual textual units of about a ‘paragraph’ in length, and the basis of a correspondence with the manuscript will be that unit, not the overall structure of the larger text. The transmitted text in comparison with its manuscript counterpart will give the impression that [...] the order in which these building blocks come [...] is a consequence of the vicissitudes of a text’s compositional history.⁹⁶

The described movability of these textual building blocks can also account for some of the observations made during the analysis above. It can not only explain many of the discrepancies in the sequence of the text when comparing a certain manuscript and its received counterpart but also those between two manuscripts.

⁹⁴ Boltz 2005.

⁹⁵ Fu Sinian 1930.

⁹⁶ Boltz 2005, 58.

4. Manuscripts from tombs and the tomb micro cosmos

Compared with the sites near Dunhuang or Juyan, where information on the exact position of manuscript slips at the time of their excavation is scarce or unavailable, every ancient tomb in China that yielded manuscripts since the 1950s represents a micro cosmos, which was usually carefully mapped by archaeologists. For most discoveries brief excavation reports are published in archaeological journals such as *Wenwu* 文物, *Kaogu xuebao* 考古學報 or *Kaogu* 考古. Sometimes, especially if a tomb yielded spectacular discoveries, excavation reports in monograph form are published. The earliest such cases were the Han and Qin tombs excavated at Mawangdui 馬王堆 and Shuihudi 睡虎地 in the years 1972 to 1973 and 1975, respectively (see below).⁹⁷ Often these reports contain more or less detailed information on the position of the manuscripts at the time of excavation in form of drawings or diagrams. If bamboo or wood manuscripts were placed at different locations inside the same tomb knowledge about which slips were situated where greatly facilitates the attribution of slips to different codicological units.

For example, in the case of the already mentioned *Yili* manuscripts excavated at Mozuizi the position of the slips in the tomb was not only important for attributing fragments to a certain group of slips but also to determine whether all slips belonging to the same of the three groups were also part of the same codicological unit. As group A (see above) consisted of seven chapters and moreover a large number of almost 400 slips, whereas the other two groups comprised only one chapter each and consisted of 37 and 34 slips respectively,⁹⁸ the question whether the slips of group A constituted more than one codicological unit immediately comes to mind. According to Chen Mengjia's view the slips of each of the seven chapters of group A, e.g. the 16 slips with the chapter *Shi xiang jian zhi li* 士相見之禮, clearly constituted independent codicological units (*ce* 冊).⁹⁹ An important reason for this assumption was the fact that the slips belonging to two of the chapters of this group (i.e. *Yanli* 燕禮, and

⁹⁷ Before these monographs, several reports had sometimes been collected and published in book form in the fourth category (*ding zhong* 丁種) of the series *Kaogu xue zhuan kan* 考古學專刊 published by the Chinese Academy of Sciences. See e.g. the volume on excavations in Changsha during the 1950s *Zhongguo kexue yuan kaogu yanjiu suo 1957*.

⁹⁸ Gansu sheng bowuguan and *Zhongguo kexue yuan kaogu yanjiu suo* 2005, 80.

⁹⁹ Gansu sheng bowuguan and *Zhongguo kexue yuan kaogu yanjiu suo* 2005, 82. Cf. the photograph of the reconstructed manuscript roll in Gansu sheng bowuguan and *Zhongguo kexue yuan kaogu yanjiu suo* 2005, plate 24.

Taishe 泰射) at the time of excavation had been found on the ground near the eastern side of one of the two coffins placed in tomb no. 6, whereas all other slips containing chapters from the *Yili* had been found on top of the same coffin.¹⁰⁰ This means that from the perspective of the position of the slips at the time of excavation it is at least very unlikely that all slips of group A were once part of the same codicological unit. If this would have been the case, it would be curious that only slips belonging to precisely the mentioned two chapters became somehow separated from the others and scattered on the bottom of the tomb. More likely the slips with these chapters belonged to a separate codicological unit (or even two) from the beginning, which was/were for some reason placed or somehow ended up in a different part of the tomb.¹⁰¹

Whereas the excavation report for Wuwei tomb no. 6 contained a simple drawing that only showed the layout of the tomb as well as the position of the two coffins,¹⁰² many other excavation reports published from the 1950s onward provide more detailed drawings, which indicate the general position of bamboo or wood slips and other grave goods in the tomb or coffin.¹⁰³ Although we have seen that this kind of information can be useful for the attribution of slips to different codicological units, if these were also situated at a different location in the tomb, little can be gathered from them on the original sequence of the slips inside these units. For this purpose, diagrams that show the exact position of the slips in relation to each other—especially if seen from a cross-section perspective—can provide more useful information, as illustrated by the following examples.¹⁰⁴

Tomb no. 1 was the first of three Western Han tombs that were excavated at Mawangdui in Changsha. The only manuscripts found in this tomb were an inventory of grave goods

¹⁰⁰ Gansu sheng bowuguan and Zhongguo kexue yuan kaogu yanjiu suo 2005, 82, 7. Chen Mengjia cites the placement of chapter number and heading on the verso of the first and second slip carrying a certain chapter as well as the fact that the slips near the end of a chapter are usually preserved best as further evidence for this claim, see Gansu sheng bowuguan and Zhongguo kexue yuan kaogu yanjiu suo 2005, 82. Another indicator could be the sequence numbers on the verso or recto of the slips. With regard to these numbers there not only appear to be differences between the three groups of slips but also between the slips belonging to different chapters inside group A, see Gansu sheng bowuguan and Zhongguo kexue yuan kaogu yanjiu suo 2005, 64–65.

¹⁰¹ Chen Mengjia suspects that an earthquake might have been the cause for this, see Gansu sheng bowuguan and Zhongguo kexue yuan kaogu yanjiu suo 2005, 67.

¹⁰² Gansu sheng bowuguan 1960a, 10, cf. Gansu sheng bowuguan and Zhongguo kexue yuan kaogu yanjiu suo 2005, 4. The position of the bamboo and wood slips was only described in text form.

¹⁰³ See for example the report on 31 other Han tombs excavated at Wuwei Mojuzi in the year 1959 in Gansu sheng bowuguan 1960b, 16–17.

¹⁰⁴ On the importance of such diagrams or drawings see also Giele 2010, 127–128.

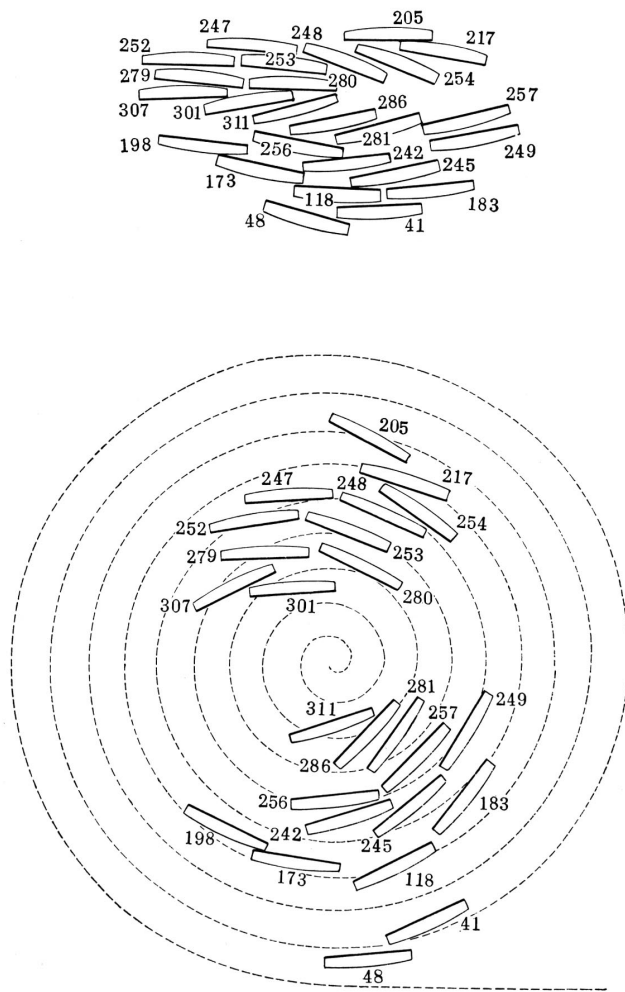
and 48 inscribed wood tablets, which had been attached to bamboo containers as labels. Certainly the reason for the archaeologists to publish an excavation report in two volumes¹⁰⁵ was not these manuscripts but rather the mummy of a noblewoman and the other grave goods, which had been found in the tomb. These included a large amount of silk fabrics, lacquered wood and bamboo objects, ceramics, etc.—overall more than 1,000 objects. As a ‘side effect’ however, the meticulous descriptions of the tomb and the funerary objects contained in the report were also very helpful for the reconstruction of the inventory of grave goods, which consisted of 312 bamboo slips. As the binding strings had already decayed the slips were found scattered in five small piles in the northern part of the eastern side compartment of the coffin. Apart from a drawing of the position of all funerary objects in the coffin¹⁰⁶ and photographs of the mentioned slips at the time of excavation¹⁰⁷ the report also provides a diagram, which shows the relative position of 25 of the slips to each other from a cross-section perspective (see fig. 1, top). From this information the editors deduced that the manuscript was placed in the tomb after it had been rolled up and were also able to roughly reconstruct the sequence of the slips in the original manuscript roll. As the text was an inventory of grave goods they could largely reconstruct the sequence of the different classes of items (e.g. food and drink, lacquer objects, pottery objects, etc.), which were distinguished in the inventory text by sub-headings. However, the editors admitted that although their reconstruction provided a general impression of the sequence of the text (and the slips, see fig. 1, bottom), a more detailed reconstruction would be difficult.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Hunan sheng bowuguan and Zhongguo kexue yuan kaogu yanjiu suo 1973.

¹⁰⁶ Hunan sheng bowuguan and Zhongguo kexue yuan kaogu yanjiu suo 1973, vol. 1, 36. The five piles of bamboo slips belonging to the inventory of grave goods were assigned the numbers 53 to 57.

¹⁰⁷ Hunan sheng bowuguan and Zhongguo kexue yuan kaogu yanjiu suo 1973, vol. 2, 12, 223.

¹⁰⁸ Hunan sheng bowuguan and Zhongguo kexue yuan kaogu yanjiu suo 1973, vol. 1, 130.



图一一四 竹简(局部)出土情形及复原示意图

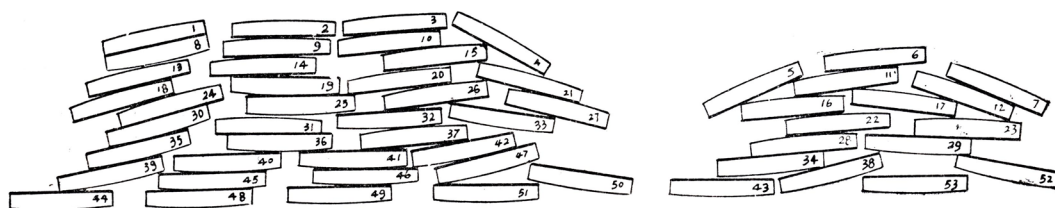
Fig. 1: Slips belonging to the inventory of grave goods from Mawangdui tomb no. 1 and reconstruction (cross-section).¹⁰⁹

The next important discovery following the Mawangdui finds was tomb no. 11 at Shuihudi in 1975. Beside some personal belongings (e.g. a lacquered wood container with a comb and a bronze mirror) the inner coffin of this tomb contained eight piles of bamboo slips (referred to as groups *jia* 甲 [A], *yi* 乙 [B], *bing* 丙 [C], etc.), which were placed above the head and to the right side of the corpse.¹¹⁰ The identification of these eight piles must have highly facilitated the attribution of slips to separate manuscripts, of which there originally were ten, ac-

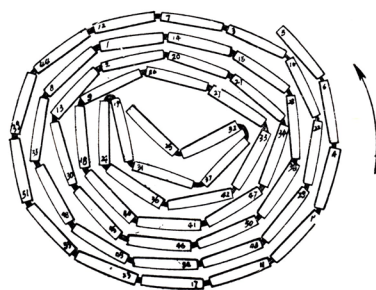
¹⁰⁹ Hunan sheng bowuguan and Zhongguo kexue yuan kaogu yanjiu suo 1973, vol. 1, 130.

¹¹⁰ See the drawing in Yunmeng Shuihudi Qin mu bianxie zu 1981, 13.

ording to the opinion of the editors.¹¹¹ For group A, 53 slips that constitute a chronicle named *Biannianji* 編年記 by the editors, the excavation report of 1981 further provides a diagram, which shows the relative position of all slips to each other at the time of excavation from a cross-section perspective (see fig. 2, top).



图一六 甲组简出土情形



图一七 甲组简复原示意图

Fig. 2: Slips of group A from Shuihudi tomb no. 11 and reconstruction (cross-section).¹¹²

Based on the position of the slips as well as the content of the manuscript text the editors suggested that the 53 slips belonged to the same manuscript roll.¹¹³ It is unclear in how far they also relied on the position of the slips in the course of the reconstruction of the *Biannianji* manuscript, which is presented in form of a second diagram directly below the first (see fig. 2, bottom). However, there are some obvious correspondences between the two diagrams: For example, in the diagram of the reconstruction slips 3, 6 and 4 are situated on the right side in the outermost layer of the manuscript roll, whereas slips 44, 39 and 51 are on the opposite far left side, also in the outermost layer. This corresponds with the position of the slips at the time of excavation: slips 3, 6 and 4 were all part of the uppermost layer of the pile, while slips 44,

¹¹¹ Cf. the table in Yunmeng Shuihudi Qin mu bianxie zu 1981, 12, which also provides the average measurements of the slips that were attributed to a certain manuscript. Note that according to this interpretation only groups A and C also correspond to complete manuscripts. It has in fact been criticised that the editors put together slips from two different piles during their reconstruction, see e.g. Nagata 2007, 462–463 on the so-called *Qinlü shiba zhong* 秦律十八種, which mainly consists of slips from groups D and E.

¹¹² Yunmeng Shuihudi Qin mu bianxie zu 1981, 14, fig. 16, 17.

¹¹³ Yunmeng Shuihudi Qin mu bianxie zu 1981, 14.

39 and 51 were part of the two lowermost layers. Although unfortunately the *Biannianji* slips are the only ones for which a diagram was provided, Nagata Hidemasa has shown that it enables some conclusions on the other piles of slips as well. From the way the slips of the *Biannianji* were numbered from top to bottom he inferred that this way of numbering must also have been used for the other piles. Accordingly it is possible with the help of the table providing the excavation numbers of all slips¹¹⁴ to infer which slips of a certain group were situated on the bottom and which on top of the respective pile. For example, Nagata concluded that those slips of group B belonging to the so-called *Rishu A* 日書（甲） lay on top of those belonging to the *Fengzhenshi* 封診式.¹¹⁵ From this it can be further inferred that *Rishu A* and *Fengzhenshi* were very likely not part of the same manuscript roll. If this would have been the case a different layering of the slips of group B would have to be expected, namely that the top- and lowermost layers contain slips belonging to the one, the middle layers slips belonging to the other text.

In the case of two bamboo manuscripts excavated from Mawangdui tomb no. 3 in 1973, diagrams were only published in 1985 as part of the edition,¹¹⁶ but were of a better quality than those already mentioned. While the diagrams for the bamboo manuscripts from Mawangdui tomb no. 1 as well as Shuihudi tomb no. 11 did not include all slips, the diagrams provided in this publication were already close to the standard often found in later publications until today. Besides the famous silk manuscripts tomb no. 3 also yielded three groups of bamboo and wood slips. The first of them, containing an inventory of grave goods, was probably not illustrated by a diagram, because according to the report the respective slips did not show any traces of binding strings.¹¹⁷ The other two groups of slips, which contained medical texts, were however carefully mapped by two cross-section diagrams (see fig. 3 and 4), because they appeared to once have constituted two manuscript rolls.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Yunmeng Shuihudi Qin mu bianxie zu 1981, 74–102.

¹¹⁵ Nagata 2007, 460.

¹¹⁶ Mawangdui Han mu boshu zhengli xiaozu 1985.

¹¹⁷ Hunan sheng bowuguan and Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiu suo 2004, 43. This would mean that the slips were likely never tied together as a manuscript roll. However, an examination of the photographic reproductions of these slips (Hunan sheng bowuguan and Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiu suo 2004, plates 20–51) shows that some of them apparently exhibit traces of two binding strings. See e.g. slips 97, 125, 158, etc.

¹¹⁸ Hunan sheng bowuguan and Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiu suo 2004, 73, cf. plates 52.1/2.

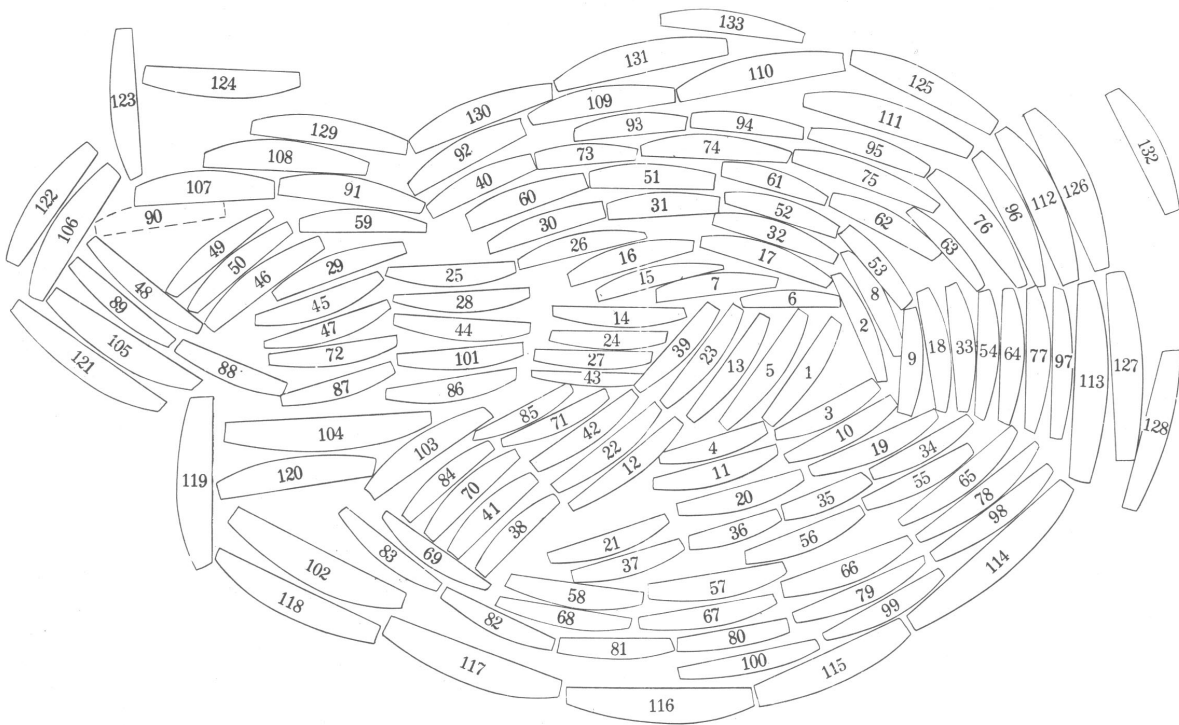


Fig. 3: Slips of group A from Mawangdui tomb no. 3 (cross-section).¹¹⁹

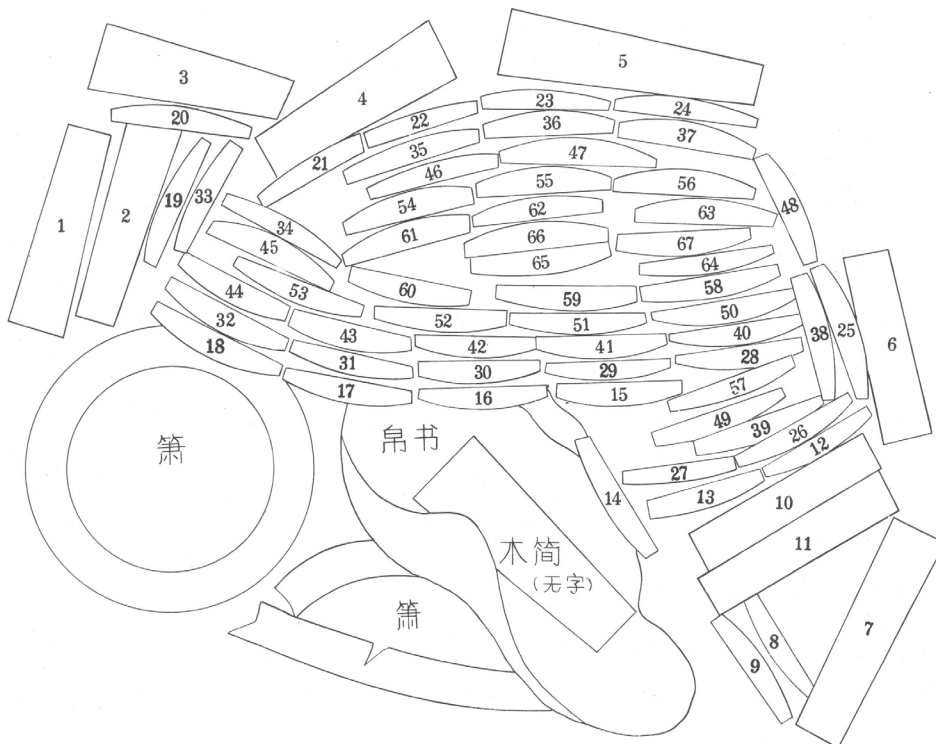


Fig. 4: Slips of group B from Mawangdui tomb no. 3 (cross-section).¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Mawangdui Han mu boshu zhengli xiaozu 1985, 152.

From the diagrams, which show the slips in their position at the time of excavation, it can be gathered that both rolls consisted of two different groups of slips, on which also two different texts were written. Group A (*jia* 甲) consisted of 133 bamboo slips, of which the innermost 101 carry the text *Shi wen* 十問, the outermost 32 the text *He yinyang fang* 合陰陽方.¹²¹ All slips have a length of 23 cm but differ in width with 0.6 and 0.9 cm, respectively.¹²² Group B (*yi* 乙) consisted of 67 slips, of which the outermost 11 carry the text *Za jin fang* 雜禁方, the innermost 56 the text *Tianxia zhi dao tan* 天下至道談.¹²³ The slips in this roll differ in length (22–23 cm vs. 29 cm) and width (1.1–1.2 cm vs. 0.5 cm) as well as writing support (wood vs. bamboo).¹²⁴ It remains unclear whether in both cases slips with different measurements (and in group B even different kinds of writing support) were in fact tied together to form a composite manuscript¹²⁵ or whether they were really four separate codicological units, two of which were rolled around the two others—e.g. to better fit into the chest the manuscripts were stored in.¹²⁶ Still, the diagram can serve as a convincing support for the reconstruction of the sequence of the slips proposed by the editors. As can be seen from the slip numbers in the diagrams, which actually reflect the sequence of the slips in the edition, the editors respected the position of the slips at the time of excavation during reconstruction.

Following the publications in the 1970s and 1980s described above many later manuscript editions included cross-section diagrams of the position of the slips in relation to each other at the time of excavation, e.g. the publications on the manuscripts from Longgang 龍崗 tomb no. 6,¹²⁷ Zhoujiatai 周家臺 tomb no. 30,¹²⁸ Kongjiapo 孔家坡 tomb no. 8¹²⁹ and Zhang-

¹²⁰ Mawangdui Han mu boshu zhengli xiaozu 1985, 160.

¹²¹ Mawangdui Han mu boshu zhengli xiaozu 1985, 152 with footnote 4.

¹²² Hunan sheng bowuguan and Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiu suo 2004, 73–74.

¹²³ Mawangdui Han mu boshu zhengli xiaozu 1985, 159 with footnote 4, 160.

¹²⁴ Hunan sheng bowuguan and Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiu suo 2004, 73–74.

¹²⁵ See footnote 1. That this cannot be ruled out is demonstrated by a manuscript from the Peking University collection, which probably consisted of six bamboo slips and one bamboo tablet (*zhudu* 竹牘), tied together with three binding strings, see Chen Kanli 2012, 93 with footnote 13.

¹²⁶ For a photograph of this chest with five compartments see Hunan sheng bowuguan and Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiu suo 2004, plate 52.1. The two groups of slips can be seen on the left and right side of the top-most compartment in the photograph.

¹²⁷ Liu Xinfang and Liang Zhu 1997, 8, 12–16. Cf. Zhongguo wenwu yanjiu suo and Hubei sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiu suo 2001, 12–14.

¹²⁸ Hubei sheng Jingzhou shi Zhouliang yuqiao yizhi bowuguan 2001, 191, 196, 198.

¹²⁹ Hubei sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiu suo and Suizhou shi kaogu dui 2006, 10, 30.

jiashan 張家山 tomb no. 247.¹³⁰ The subsequent publications on the thousands of bamboo and wood slips from the 3rd century CE that were excavated from well no. 22 at the Zoumalou 走馬樓 site in Changsha in 1996 likewise include such diagrams.¹³¹ As has been shown information about the exact position of the slips is a valuable resource for the task of reconstruction, and there are many examples where scholars have made use of this to propose first reconstructions or to challenge and improve earlier reconstructions.¹³² Even if the original structure of a codicological unit is not visible anymore, the position of the slips can still provide valuable information, which is why it is of utmost importance that a record about this is made at the time of archaeological excavation.¹³³

5. Unprovenanced manuscripts

The section on manuscripts with textual counterparts already touched upon unprovenanced manuscripts. Although the robbing of tombs has a long history in China,¹³⁴ the fact that early Chinese bamboo and wood manuscripts, which were looted from ancient tombs, are offered for sale on antique markets outside mainland China and purchased by institutions such as universities or museums from mainland China to be studied, is a comparatively new phenomenon. The rise of such unprovenanced manuscripts began in the middle of the 1990s, when the Shanghai Museum purchased the bamboo slips, which have been subsequently published since 2001.¹³⁵ To justify such acquisition of stolen goods this is usually termed ‘rescue (pur-

¹³⁰ Zhangjiashan er si qi hao Han mu zhujian zhengli xiaozu 2001, appendix B.

¹³¹ Until now six volumes of these manuscripts have been published, see Changsha shi wenwu kaogu yanjiu suo et al. 1999 and 2003, Changsha jiandu bowuguan et al. 2007, 2008, 2011 and 2013. For details on the ordering process and the drawing of diagrams see Song Shaohua 2011.

¹³² See e.g. the studies by Wang Wei (2006) and Cheng Shaoxuan (2013) on the *Ernian lüling* 二年律令 from Zhangjiashan and the *Rishu* 日書/*Sa liu nian ri* 卅六年日 from Zhoujiaitai. See also Xiong Beisheng 2010 on the slips of group J from Shuihudi tomb no. 77. For respective studies on the bamboo and wood slips excavated from well no. 22 at the Zoumalou site in Changsha see Hou Xudong 2009 and Ling Wenchao 2011.

¹³³ This was stressed in Li Ling 2008, 166–167. See also Li Junming et al. 2011, 67–68 on the importance of ‘stratigraphy’ (*cengweixue* 層位學) and ‘typology’ (*leixingxue* 類型學) in this context. For an example—albeit without diagrams—see the report on the Tsinghua University *Shifa* 筮法 in Zhao Guifang 2013. In fact it is of course equally important that such reports are not only made but also published. The Guodian finds provide a negative example here, because ‘drawings of the top and side views of the clump of bamboo slips’ were apparently made (Peng Hao 2000, 33) but to the author’s knowledge have never been published.

¹³⁴ For an overview see e.g. Wang Zijin 2011.

¹³⁵ To date nine volumes of these manuscripts have been published. See Ma Chengyuan 2001–2012. It should be noted that unprovenanced manuscripts had surfaced already in the 1980s. For one example, an imperial edict on 26 slips allegedly found in some tomb at Wuwei, see Wuwei xian bowuguan 1984.

chase/buyback)’ (*qiangjiu* 搶救,¹³⁶ *qiangjiuxing goucang* 搶救性購藏,¹³⁷ *qiangjiu huigui* 搶救回歸¹³⁸). Although some scholars doubt the authenticity of at least a part of this material¹³⁹ or refrain from engaging in research on it at all by principle,¹⁴⁰ the majority of researchers has chosen the more pragmatic approach of not excluding unprovenanced manuscripts from their work *a priori* while being more or less conscious of the possible problems this might pose.¹⁴¹ Apart from occasional doubts about the authenticity of certain unprovenanced manuscripts, the most serious problem is the lack of information on the archaeological context, in which the manuscripts were originally situated. Important external evidence that could provide hints for dating or help to identify possible functions is usually not available. But this also bears consequences for any attempt to reconstruct a manuscript from unprovenanced slips, as information on their original position at the excavation site (see previous section) is likewise difficult to obtain.

The criteria and methods for reconstruction described in sections 2 to 4 basically originated from three different disciplines that are all closely related to the study of early Chinese manuscripts, namely manuscriptology (as an umbrella term for codicology¹⁴² and palaeography), philology and archaeology. Categorisation of slips according to material criteria such as writing support, format, layout and script is clearly rooted in manuscriptology; philology provides methods for the comparison of different textual witnesses to draw conclusions on the sequence of a certain manuscript text; archaeology supplies researchers with important external evidence in form of detailed descriptions of the position of slips at the archaeological site and in relation to each other. In the case of unprovenanced manuscripts researchers have to mainly rely on the manuscript slips themselves without external evidence, which means that only manuscriptology and philology with their criteria and methods remain as tools for reconstruction.

¹³⁶ Ma Chengyuan 2001, preface.

¹³⁷ Zhu Hanmin and Chen Songchang 2010, preface.

¹³⁸ Li Xueqin and Qinghua daxue chutu wenxian yanjiu yu baohu zhongxin 2010, preface.

¹³⁹ For a recent example regarding one of the manuscripts from the collection of Tsinghua University see Jiang Guanghui and Fu Zan 2014.

¹⁴⁰ Goldin 2013.

¹⁴¹ On the issue of authenticity see e.g. Giele 2010, 114–116.

¹⁴² Rather than a study of the material features of complete manuscripts, scholars studying early Chinese manuscripts have been basically confined to a more or less detailed description of the individual bamboo or wood slips, which once constituted these manuscripts. It probably is not a coincidence that the concept codicological unit was introduced to the study of early Chinese manuscripts with a work on silk—not bamboo or wood—manuscripts, see Kalinowski 2005.

While in China philology had already witnessed a heyday during the Qing-dynasty (1644–1911) and could therefore provide a well-tested set of tools for textual analysis, manuscriptology in the sense of the study of bamboo and wood manuscripts naturally started with the first discoveries in the early 20th century. During the second half of the 20th century, especially since the 1970s, the number of discoveries of bamboo and wood manuscripts witnessed a rapid increase.¹⁴³ After the excavation of the Yinqueshan 銀雀山 manuscripts in 1972 the PRC's 'State Administration of Cultural Heritage' (*Guojia wenwu ju* 國家文物局) started to establish special 'editorial teams' (*zhengli xiaozu* 整理小組) to facilitate and enhance the publication of newly excavated manuscripts, which before had mostly been handled by a few individuals. For example there were set up editorial teams working on the important discoveries from Mawangdui and Shuihudi.¹⁴⁴ Together with the fast increase of available sources the knowledge on early Chinese manuscripts also became more and more refined. What Chinese scholars nowadays often call the 'system of slips and tablets' (*jiandu zhidu* 簡牘制度, with 'slips and tablets' referring to bamboo and wood manuscripts in general), was described in much detail already by Wang Guowei in his *Jiandu jianshu kao* 簡牘檢畧考.¹⁴⁵ Later works have constantly added research findings from newly available manuscript material, thereby further improving our understanding of this 'system'. Although this concept itself has, in the same way as 'standard', come to be questioned with regard to the evidence provided by pre-imperial manuscripts,¹⁴⁶ most of these works contain detailed descriptions of different aspects of bamboo and wood manuscripts—e.g. materials used, measurements, binding, etc.—and in this way at least indirectly supply a wealth of criteria that can be used for a categorisation of

¹⁴³ Pian Yuqian and Duan Shu'an (2006, 379–479) list overall 90 discoveries for the 30 years from 1971 until 2002, which is almost thrice the amount of the 32 discoveries listed in the same book for the 70 years from 1900 until 1969. An important reason for this increase might have been large-scale construction work carried out in many regions of China in recent decades, which often unveiled new manuscripts that had been buried in the ground.

¹⁴⁴ Chen Kangsheng 2012, 327.

¹⁴⁵ For a recent edition of the text that was originally published in 1912 see Hu Pingsheng and Ma Yuehua 2004.

¹⁴⁶ Hu Pingsheng (2000) has for example shown that there was no unified system (*zhidu*) regarding the measurements of slips in Warring States and early imperial China. Rather, there were large differences with regard to period and content. Cf. Ma Xianxing 1993. Meanwhile further details have been added to the picture. These show for example that the actual appearance of a certain manuscript—which might reflect a certain production standard—was probably influenced by community, group and personal habits of 'writers' (Venture 2009), the precedent of administrative documents (Venture 2011) as well as the underlying standard(s) of the model that was copied (Richter 2009).

slips according to material features.¹⁴⁷ Researchers dealing with unprovenanced manuscripts can of course draw on this growing manuscriptological experience to find codicological criteria that are suitable for the reconstruction of multi-slip manuscripts. Additionally, some progress has recently been made to further develop the field of early Chinese palaeography. Whereas formerly judgements on the distinction of different styles of script or scribal hands were often purely subjective—at times strongly influenced by aesthetic arguments—some scholars in China as well as the West were quite successful in developing more objective criteria to draw such distinctions.¹⁴⁸ The described developments over the last decades have naturally also facilitated the reconstruction of manuscripts with clear provenance, but they are even more critical for the case of unprovenanced manuscripts, where information on the exact position of the slips at the time of excavation is often lacking. In some cases of unprovenanced manuscripts bundles of slips appear to have largely remained in much the same position as they were at the time of excavation, and therefore some hints for the reconstruction can be gathered, but this is not the rule.¹⁴⁹ It should also be noted that the lack of such external evidence can usually not be completely compensated by a philological or manuscriptological analysis. To name one example, it has been argued that those slips from the collection of the Shanghai museum carrying the texts *Kongzi shilun* 孔子詩論, *Lu bang da han* 魯邦大旱 and *Zi Gao* 子羔 were likely once part of the same manuscript, as they are identical with regard to measurements as well as number and position of binding strings and further exhibit the same style of script.¹⁵⁰ The editor Ma Chengyuan 馬承源 himself however held the view that due to differences in content the three groups of slips should not be considered as parts of the same manuscript.¹⁵¹ Without information on the position of the slips at the time of excavation, which could help to substantiate either claim, it is impossible to determine with any certainty what was actually the case. Uniformity of all slips with respect to the mentioned criteria is a hint towards the first interpretation, but it is easily conceivable that the same person might

¹⁴⁷ See for example Chen Mengjia 1980, 291–315, Zheng Youguo 1989, 25–44, Li Junming and Liu Jun 1999, 1–142, Li Junming 2003, 134–168, Zhang Xiancheng 2004, 108–220 (including silk manuscripts), Cheng Pengwan 2006, 9–153 or Pian Yuqian and Duan Shu’an 2006, 32–174.

¹⁴⁸ See especially the works of Matthias Richter (2006) and Li Songru (2006, 2012).

¹⁴⁹ For a positive example see the exceptionally detailed report on the ‘indoor excavation’ (*shinei fajue* 室內發掘) of the Qin slips in possession of Peking University (Beijing daxue chutu wenxian yanjiu suo 2012a).

¹⁵⁰ Li Ling 2002, 13–17.

¹⁵¹ Ma Chengyuan 2001, 121.

have produced three distinct manuscripts, which all share exactly the same material features.¹⁵²

6. Conclusions – A catalogue of criteria for reconstruction

The preceding sections provided a rough outline of the main trends and developments in the field of manuscript reconstruction between 1900 and 2010. When trying to summarise the numerous criteria that were utilised for the purpose of reconstruction during this time and touched upon in the outline, these can be abstracted to a catalogue of criteria.¹⁵³ Although the historical/disciplinary division of criteria and methods made above facilitated an understanding of the development of the field, a division that distinguishes material and textual criteria¹⁵⁴ and focuses more on the reconstruction procedure appears more suitable for such a catalogue. In this way it can serve as a guideline to the criteria that can and should be applied when trying to reconstruct early Chinese bamboo or wood manuscripts.

1. Categorisation

1.1 Material criteria¹⁵⁵

1.1.1 Position (macro level)

¹⁵² On this and related problems see in detail Liu Chuanbin 2013.

¹⁵³ Most of the criteria included in this catalogue were already mentioned in the above sections, but some others, which are only applicable in special cases, have been added with references.

¹⁵⁴ Chen Wei calls these external (*waizai* 外在) and internal (*neizai* 内在) factors, respectively. See Chen Wei 2002, 83, cf. Chen Wei 2012, 92. Following a suggestion by Matthias Richter on an earlier paper, the dichotomy material vs. textual has been chosen here, so that the category ‘external’ can instead be used to refer to criteria that are—although material in nature—not inherent in the manuscript itself but belong to its archaeological context, e.g. the position of slips at the excavation site.

¹⁵⁵ One might think about adding a criterion ‘sequence of production’ to the material criteria, because sometimes it is possible to judge whether several slips were tied together only after writing had been applied to them or rather before, and differences regarding this criterion would suggest to put the respective slips into different categories. However, only the production sequence ‘writing→binding’ (*xian xie hou bian* 先寫後編) is verifiable in cases where writing is covered by binding strings. If said phenomenon does not occur, no judgement on the production sequence is possible. The reason for this is that the later position of binding strings can easily be marked (e.g. by notches on the side of a slip) and the scribe can therefore take precautions to prevent writing from being covered (Li Tianhong 2002, 6–8). The occurrence or non-occurrence of covered writing is therefore rather caused by certain features of format, layout and/or script (more exactly spacing), which is why no ‘sequence of production’ criterion has been added here.

1.1.2 Writing support (bamboo vs. wood)

1.1.3 Format

1.1.3.1 Measurements (length, width, thickness)

1.1.3.2 Shape (e.g. straight vs. ‘arrowhead’ ends)¹⁵⁶

1.1.3.3 Number of binding strings/notches

1.1.3.4 Position of binding strings/notches

1.1.4 [Layout] (e.g. with/without registers, upper/lower margin)

1.1.5 [Script] (style/hand, spacing)

1.1.6 [Marks]¹⁵⁷

1.2 Textual criteria

1.2.1 [Content/type of text]

2. Sequencing

2.1 Material criteria

2.1.1 Position (micro level)

2.2 Textual criteria

2.2.1 Sequence numbers

¹⁵⁶ Cf. the two different shapes of top and bottom ends of the Guodian slips, see Boltz 1999, 591.

¹⁵⁷ This criterion refers to all kinds of marks that are applied to a manuscript by a scribe or editor beside the script (in the narrow sense of ‘written representation of language’) for different reasons (e.g. segmentation). For an overview of marks occurring in bamboo and wood manuscripts see Guan Xihua 2002, Zhang Xiancheng 2004, 179–214. Chen Wei (2002, 83) pointed out the usefulness of this criterion for the reconstruction of multi-slip manuscripts, which appears to be mainly based on the fact that the use of these marks—although being far from arbitrary—shows considerable variance. This seems to be connected with regional and/or temporal differences as well as scribal habits. Although the function of a certain mark might therefore vary, if comparing two manuscripts or two parts of a manuscript written by different scribes, it is usually stable inside such units, which makes these marks a useful criterion for categorisation in a similar way as the script (Zhang Xiancheng 2004, 212, cf. Sun Weilong and Li Shoukui 2008, 190, Li Junming et al. 2011, 61–62).

2.2.2 Textual parallels (inside MS text/in comparison with other textual witnesses)

2.2.3 Structure/keywords¹⁵⁸ (e.g. for formalised genres)

2.2.4 Textual coherence¹⁵⁹

The reconstruction of bamboo and wood manuscripts can basically be distinguished into two major steps that shall be called ‘categorisation’ and ‘sequencing’ here.¹⁶⁰ Categorisation always has to be the first step as it aims to identify (among all slips and fragments of the corpus under investigation) the potentially constituent slips of a certain manuscript, i.e. those slips that probably once belonged to the same codicological unit. Usually such a categorisation is based on the assumption that slips belonging to the same manuscript share the same features with regard to the listed material and textual criteria. In other words, it is basically assumed that two slips can only have been part of the same codicological unit, if they are uniform with regard to writing support, format, layout, content etc. As this bears potential problems, at least for some of the criteria (on this see section 7 below), these ‘soft’ criteria have been put in square brackets in the catalogue to indicate that for the purpose of categorisation they are to be used with caution and significantly weaker than the other ‘hard’ criteria. The step following categorisation is sequencing, which means to reconstruct as far as possible the original sequence of slips and fragments that probably belong to the same manuscript (according to the results of the preceding categorisation). In the above catalogue the reconstruction of complete slips from fragments is not treated as a separate step, because this procedure largely relies on criteria already listed under ‘categorisation’ or ‘sequencing’.¹⁶¹ As can be seen the

¹⁵⁸ Ôba stressed the importance of keywords in certain types of documents, see Ôba 2001, 103.

¹⁵⁹ This criterion was not mentioned in the discussion above but has been added here to explicitly include all those cases, where the text on two slips appears to be continuous but where such a judgement is purely based on textual coherence and not supported by more objective criteria such as textual parallels and/or the structure of the whole text. Here coherence is used as not only referring to the fact that a certain part of text is semantically meaningful but as also including grammatical features that are sometimes subsumed under the narrower category of ‘cohesion’ in linguistics (cf. the entries on ‘Kohärenz’ and ‘Kohäsion’ in Glück 2005, 326–327). Judgements on textual coherence are of course at least implicitly part of basically every reconstruction of an early Chinese manuscript published so far. Cf. the criteria ‘coherence of sentences/phrases’ (*yuju tongshun* 語句通順) and ‘conformance to logic’ (*hehu luoji* 合乎邏輯) proposed in Chen Wei 2012, 92.

¹⁶⁰ These procedural steps are usually called *fenlei* 分類 and *pinlian* 拼聯 or *paixu* 排序 in Chinese scholarship, see e.g. Li Ling 2008, 169–170, Li Junming and Zhao Guifang 2012.

¹⁶¹ For example, the criteria measurements, shape and position of binding strings/notches (on the latter see especially Takeda 2008) are important to identify different parts (e.g. top, middle, bottom) of slips and judge

only manuscript external criterion for reconstruction—the position of slips at the time of excavation—has been subsumed under material criteria. Furthermore, it has been divided into a macro and a micro level. This was done to distinguish between a wide and a narrow scope with regard to the position of individual slips. For example, the sites and localities over which the finds from Juyan were spread, or different parts of a tomb (e.g. side compartment vs. head compartment) would be regarded as macro level distinctions. The exact position of individual slips inside a bundle as for example shown in the diagrams on the slips from Mawangdui tomb no. 3 (see fig. 3 and 4) would be regarded as micro level distinctions.

Now the catalogue of criteria presented above is not hierarchical, although some statements can of course be made in terms of which criteria should be examined first (those under ‘categorisation’ before those under ‘sequencing’) or that certain criteria are more decisive than others. As far as categorisation is concerned most material criteria (with the exception of layout, script and marks) clearly outweigh textual criteria, which have to be regarded as secondary. The three material criteria layout, script and marks however are significantly less decisive than the other material criteria. One could therefore say that categorisation potentially comprises one or several steps of ‘sub-categorisation’.¹⁶² As far as sequencing is concerned the situation is different. Here textual criteria generally outweigh material criteria, which to this point only include position on the micro level. As the possibility that the position of a certain slip as part of a manuscript roll slightly shifted due to different reasons after the binding strings had come apart is comparatively high, this criterion is considered secondary to textual criteria.

The reason why a strictly hierarchical ordering of the criteria is problematic is that exceptions to these general rules are imaginable and that reconstruction is not a mechanical process but has to include a constant reflection on the decisiveness of the criteria in each concrete case. For example, it is possible that bamboo as well as wood slips were used in the same manuscript. And if there is overwhelming evidence with regard to textual criteria this can

whether or not they might once have been part of the same slip (Li Ling 2008, 170). Exceptional criteria that are only useful to piece together fragments are the appearance of places of fracture, the texture or pattern of the writing support in the case of wood slips (Chen Guoqing 1989) or the distinct colour of a certain slip (Gansu sheng bowuguan and Zhongguo kexue yuan kaogu yanjiu suo 2005, 79). For a separate discussion of the reconstruction of complete slips from fragments vs. the sequencing of complete slips see e.g. Zheng Youguo 1989, 75–80 as well as Chen Wei 2012, 92–103. Reconstruction of complete slips from fragments is also discussed in detail in He Shuangquan 1996 (cited according to Li Junming et al. 2011, 255–257).

¹⁶² Cf. Li Ling 2008, 169. For example, a sub-categorisation according to script can help to identify different parts of the same manuscript that were written by different hands, see Li Songru 2012, 110–111.

outweigh the ‘writing support’ criterion, i.e. the premise that bamboo and wood slips are usually not tied together as part of the same codicological unit.¹⁶³ Also, it might well be necessary to repeat certain steps or ‘jump back and forth’ between the investigation of different criteria, especially during sequencing, as certain criteria might be more or less helpful than others for the reconstruction of a certain part of a manuscript.¹⁶⁴ It is finally important to note that the catalogue of criteria provided above is more of a maximum version and not necessarily every criterion is applicable in every case of reconstruction. There are for example many manuscripts without sequence numbers on the slips.¹⁶⁵

7. Remaining problems

Apart from the fact that a clear hierarchy of the criteria for reconstruction is problematic and the above catalogue can therefore only serve as a rough guideline, there are other remaining problems related to manuscript reconstruction, some of which were already touched upon in the previous sections. For certain corpora of slips—especially those that are unprovenanced—information on the position of the slips at the time of excavation is lacking. As will be shown it is in these cases impossible to solve some important questions by an investigation of the criteria presented above.

Problem 1: Categorisation according to potentially misleading criteria (script, layout, marks, content/type of text)

As was already noted by Loewe and Ôba during their work on the Juyan slips (see section 2 above), there are examples of manuscripts with different parts of the text written in different

¹⁶³ There are also examples of manuscripts with (partly) extant binding strings, which combine slips of different width. See e.g. manuscript I 90DXT0208②: 1–10 in Ma Jianhua 2002, 35, cf. Hou Xudong 2014, 61–63. See also Zhang Xiancheng 2004, 117, footnote 3. There furthermore are cases where certain slips of a manuscript apparently had to be replaced for unknown reasons and where the measurements of the new slips differed significantly from those of the others. See e.g. slips 8 and 60 of the *Xinian* 繫年 in Li Xueqin and Qinghua daxue chutu wenxian yanjiu yu baohu zhongxin 2011. The mentioned two slips are significantly shorter and narrower than the others. Such differences in length might also be due to external factors such as dehydration. See Giele 2003, 424.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Li Ling’s experiences with the reconstruction of bamboo manuscripts. See Li Ling 2008, 168–170.

¹⁶⁵ Although most manuscripts with sequence numbers discovered so far contain literary texts (*gushu* 古書) rather than documents (*wenshu* 文書), there is at least one example for the latter, see Wuwei xian bowuguan 1984. This disproves He Jin’s claim for the exclusive use of sequence numbers in literary texts, see He Jin 2013, 458.

hands or styles of script.¹⁶⁶ In such cases the script criterion is therefore not only useless but outright misleading when trying to identify the potentially constituent slips of a certain codicological unit through categorisation.¹⁶⁷ The same is in fact true for the material criterion layout as well as the textual criterion content/type of text. To name only one example for the former case, the already mentioned *Rishu A* manuscript from Shuihudi tomb no. 11 consists of 166 bamboo slips of the same format that carry writing on both their recto as well as their verso.¹⁶⁸ Apart from different hands or styles of script¹⁶⁹ the *Rishu A* slips also feature numerous different forms of layout. For example there are slips with two,¹⁷⁰ three,¹⁷¹ four,¹⁷² six¹⁷³ and even eight registers,¹⁷⁴ respectively, as well as slips carrying continuous writing without registers.¹⁷⁵ This nicely demonstrates that in the case of *Rishu A* only a categorisation according to the criterion content/type of text would yield a ‘correct result’, whereas a categorisation of the slips according to layout and/or script would have separated slips that actually belong to the same codicological unit. A similar situation is easily conceivable with regard to the content/type of text criterion. The fact that it is hard to find an actual example where different types of text have been gathered in the same manuscript is most likely only due to the fact that this possibility was often neglected. In most editions slips that carry distinct texts are by default kept separate, even if they are completely identical with regard to all other criteria that are used for categorisation.¹⁷⁶ However, among the yet unpublished Qin bamboo slips in

¹⁶⁶ See also Li Songru 2006 and Huang Ruxuan 2011. Chen Wei has further drawn attention to the fact that there are even cases where two scribal hands are visible on the same slip, see Chen Wei 2002, 95–96. The latter phenomenon can for example be caused by corrections, which might be done by the original scribe at a later point in time or by a different person. Chen Mengjia already recognised cases of correction in the *Wuwei Yili*, see *Gansu sheng bowuguan and Zhongguo kexue yuan kaogu yanjiu suo* 2005, 65–67.

¹⁶⁷ The use of marks is probably closely connected to the style of script or hand and therefore marks too are a potentially misleading criterion.

¹⁶⁸ For photographic reproductions, transcriptions and notes for these manuscripts see *Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian zhengli xiaozu* 1990.

¹⁶⁹ Kalinowski 2008, 7.

¹⁷⁰ See e.g. slip 27r.

¹⁷¹ See e.g. slip 17r.

¹⁷² See e.g. slip 64r.

¹⁷³ See e.g. slip 142r.

¹⁷⁴ See e.g. slip 136r.

¹⁷⁵ See e.g. slip 143v. Cf. Kalinowski 2008, 10.

¹⁷⁶ As has been criticised by Wang Bo (2001, 248) the editors of the *Guodian* manuscripts did not strictly adhere to their own principles when they separated slips with the same format and script according to purely textual evidence. Scott Cook (2012, 13) also recently reminded the readers of his translation of the respective texts: ‘[I]t is certainly possible that texts that were conceived as distinct could still be bound together on the same scroll of bamboo strips.’

the possession of Peking University there is an example of a bamboo manuscript containing nine different texts on 318 slips. The texts are of diverse content including mathematical, hemerological and geographical works and are written in at least three different hands or styles of script.¹⁷⁷ For these 318 slips a mechanical categorisation according to type of text would have led to results that are quite far from the truth.

Problem 2: Sequencing of individual slips (if [most of] above criteria not helpful, e.g. unprovenanced slips with otherwise unknown literary text[s])

If information on the position of the slips at the time of excavation is lacking, sequencing of the slips has to completely rely on textual criteria. And if the slips contain literary texts that are not as clearly structured as administrative documents, matters are often further complicated by the fact that the respective text is otherwise unknown.¹⁷⁸ Now if the slips also lack sequence numbers—which is mostly the case—then the criteria available for sequencing quickly boil down to only textual coherence. This criterion however is in fact most prone for errors to occur, because it involves a comparatively high degree of subjective judgement.¹⁷⁹

Problem 3: Distinguishing between MTM/composite MS and separate codicological units

Lack of information on the position of the slips on both the macro- and the micro-level can further make it impossible to distinguish between a multiple-text manuscript (MTM) or composite manuscript on the one hand and separate codicological units on the other.¹⁸⁰ It has already been touched upon in the description of problem 1 that slips containing distinct texts are often kept separate in editions, even if all material criteria suggest that they might have been part of the same codicological unit, which would mean that the slips together formed an MTM. But even if this possibility is recognised, it can usually not be verified.¹⁸¹ This is all

¹⁷⁷ Beijing daxue chutu wenxian yanjiu suo 2012b, 66–67.

¹⁷⁸ As noted in footnote 70 above the latter is on average true in nine out of ten cases.

¹⁷⁹ The *Kongzi shilun* is an illustrative example for this. An overview of 2004 included no less than 10 different reconstructions, see Ji Xusheng 2004, 2.

¹⁸⁰ On multiple-text manuscripts (MTM) and composite manuscripts see footnote 1 above. Through meticulous investigation of the position of the slips at the time of excavation it can actually be possible to identify MTMs and composite manuscripts, see Hu Dongbo and Chang Huaiying 2012, 62–63.

¹⁸¹ There are cases where scholars argued on the basis of similarities regarding content and/or script that a certain group of slips was likely once connected with another group of slips of the same writing support and format (see e.g. Li Ling 2002, 13–17, Fudan Jida gu wenzi zhuan yanjiusheng lianhe dushuhui 2011). Still, such similarities are normally only hints that point towards this possibility rather than clear evidence that this

the more true for composite manuscripts. Whether two or more groups of slips that probably each constituted an individual codicological unit at a certain point in time were later tied together in one and the same manuscript, is normally only verifiable, if the binding strings are still extant.¹⁸² Even if there is detailed information on the position of the slips at the time of excavation, a definite judgement on this might be difficult.¹⁸³

Problem 4: Sequencing of textual/codicological units inside MTM/composite MS, respectively

This problem is closely related to the preceding one. In cases where certain textually or codicologically self-contained groups of slips are suspected of being part of an MTM or a composite manuscript, the question of their sequence in the whole manuscript automatically arises. And again, if material criteria are lacking, one can only guess about the order in which the scribe or compiler of the manuscript might originally have put them. Although in some cases the content of the respective texts might provide some help—e.g. in the case of administrative documents that are dated and were therefore likely compiled over time or in chronological order—the organisational pattern behind an MTM or composite manuscript will often remain unclear.

was actually the case. Of course arguments for the opposite case based on differences regarding content and/or script were likewise made (see e.g. Li Songru 2013). More examples for both circumstances are cited in Li Songru 2012, 109–112.

¹⁸² An example where this can be determined is the already mentioned manuscript Juyan 128.1 (cf. footnote 16). Its 77 slips originally formed five independent codicological units of different length. See Chen Mengjia 1980, 296–297, 306. For another example (according to Kong Xiangjun 2012) see the Juyan slips EPF22.1–10 and EPF22.21–35, respectively. The editors of the slips excavated from Shuihudi tomb no. 11 also consider the *Yushu* 語書 to be a composite manuscript, see Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian zhengli xiaozu 1978, 14. In some cases the composite nature is quite obvious, because there are extant binding strings at different positions, see e.g. manuscript II 90DXT0216②: 66–69 in Hou Xudong 2014, 63–64.

¹⁸³ During a lecture he gave at the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures in Hamburg on August 26, 2014 Enno Giele brought up the question whether it might be possible that the more than 500 slips of the *Ernian lüling* 二年律令 excavated from Zhangjiashan tomb no. 247 did actually not constitute only one—as generally assumed—but several independent codicological units. If several such shorter units would have been put together as a bundle with one of them wrapped around the others to roughly hold them together, the picture one would get after disintegration of the binding strings might on the first glance be the same as or very similar to the one shown in appendix B of Zhangjiashan er si qi hao Han mu zhujian zhengli xiaozu 2001. To solve this problem one would have to know more about the exact orientation of the slips, see Hu Dongbo and Chang Huaiying 2012, 57–58.

The problems presented above show that in many cases the criteria developed and applied for reconstruction until the year 2010 are insufficient to solve some very basic questions, especially regarding MTMs and composite manuscripts. To know more about these phenomena could however help to better understand early Chinese manuscript culture, especially the ways in which texts and knowledge were organised in manuscripts, and give answers to questions of what kinds of texts were assembled in MTMs, how they were assembled and thereby possibly even provide hints on the motives lying in the back of this. To date there is only scarce evidence for composite manuscripts in early China but these examples already demonstrate that this practice was definitely not unknown. If it would be possible to identify further examples of MTMs and composite manuscripts among the bamboo and wood slips found so far, this could greatly improve our understanding of early Chinese manuscript culture.

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