

official character, invariably consisted of pairs of pieces fitted exactly to match each other in size. One end of the double tablet thus formed was cut square; the other runs out into a point near which a string-hole is drilled through both pieces. The text occupies the smooth obverse of the under tablet and is protected by an upper or covering tablet which serves as a kind of envelope. On the reverse of this the writing was continued if the length of the communication required it. The wood of the upper tablet shows greater thickness towards the square end, and in this raised portion of the outside surface a square socket was neatly cut, intended for the reception of a square seal.

A double-stranded string of hemp was in a cleverly designed fashion first passed through the string-hole and then drawn tightly over both tablets near the square or right-hand end. There grooves communicating with the seal socket held the string in regular cross-folds. The socket was then filled with clay, covering these folds of the string. When once the seal of the sender had been impressed into the clay, it became impossible to separate the under tablet from the upper tablet and to read the writing on the inner surfaces without either breaking the seal impression or cutting the string. Thus unauthorized inspection of the communication was absolutely guarded against.

Scarcely less ingenious was the method of fastening which the finds in that precious refuse-heap proved to have been used for the rectangular tablets. From a number of double tablets which I recovered here practically intact, it became clear that in this case the under tablet was provided with a raised rim on either of the shorter sides. Between these rims fitted exactly a covering tablet the obverse of which,