

in its raised centre, had a square or oblong socket for the reception of a clay seal. Here, too, a string passed transversely over both tablets and being secured below a clay seal effectually prevented any unauthorized opening and reading of what was written on the inner sides of the two tablets. Fig. 39 shows such a double tablet, which was found with the string broken but otherwise intact, both before and after the opening. More frequently the 'envelopes' had become separated from their under tablets either before or when they were thrown away into this dustbin, an ancient substitute, I might call it, of the waste-paper basket. But in the course of the careful examination which all these finds underwent at the hands of Professor E. J. Rapson, my distinguished scholar collaborator, first at the British Museum and subsequently outside it, most of the pairs could be reunited.

I cannot detail here all the curious observations made in connexion with this ancient stationery in wood. But mention should be made of the fact that subsequent discoveries at ruined sites far away to the east have proved all those ingenious devices to have originated in China and at a far earlier period. There, I may add, the invention of paper, dating from A.D. 105, was causing the use of wooden stationery gradually to become obsolete during the centuries following. But the new writing material, more convenient as it was, evidently made its way but slowly into distant Central Asia. For though the Niya site can be proved not to have been abandoned until the second half of the third century A.D., yet not a single scrap of paper ever turned up there in the course of my explorations.

On the other hand, the remarkable series of clay seal-