

'sand ocean', should have preserved for us in an Indian language records of everyday life far older than any written documents that have as yet come to light in India proper. From the first there was ample antiquarian evidence of the palaeographic sort pointing to this conclusion; for, as already stated, the Kharoshthi writing of the documents showed close agreement with the Kharoshthi inscriptions of the Kushana kings whose rule over north-western India falls mainly within the second and third centuries of our era. Their testimony was fully supported by the fortunate discovery in another ruin of a unique tablet showing by the side of Kharoshthi some lines written in Indian Brahmi characters of the Kushana or Indo-Scythian period. The evidence of the coins was equally eloquent, since the numerous Chinese copper pieces found during my stay at the site all belonged to issues of the Later Han dynasty which came to a close in A.D. 220.

But the incontrovertible chronological evidence I had longed for came from one of the small pieces of wood inscribed with single lines of Chinese characters of which the ancient refuse-heap had yielded up over two score (Fig. 47). As was to be expected in the case of documents penned by precise official hands, they yielded to M. Chavannes' expert examination a series of very useful data. Most of them contain brief references to orders issued by specified Chinese authorities or relate to the movements of certain individuals who were to be arrested or allowed to pass. References to ancient localities both in the Tarim basin and in China offer points of distinct historical interest.

But what gratified me most was the discovery, first made in London by a lamented Sinologue friend, Dr. Bushell,