

(Fig. 75) written on paper in that Early Sogdian language and script of which before my second expedition nothing was known. A few were found wrapped up in silk covers while others were merely fastened with string. The decipherment of these letters, a difficult task owing to the very cursive script and for other reasons, has now shown that they contained private communications apparently of traders visiting China from Central Asia. They must obviously have preferred the newly invented writing material, paper, to the wooden slips and tablets to which Chinese conservatism clung.

The microscopical examination made by the late Professor Von Wiesner, a leading authority on the history of paper-making, has proved that the material of these letters represents the earliest paper hitherto known. It was prepared from hemp textiles reduced to pulp exactly in the fashion which Chinese texts record as having been used for paper when it was first invented in A.D. 105. The discovery of these letters and of some paper fragments elsewhere on the *Limes* is in full accord with the fact that the latter can be proved by dated documents to have been guarded down to the middle of the second century A.D., except along its westernmost section. This appears to have been abandoned in the first quarter of the first century of our era during the troubled times of the usurper Wang Mang.

A retrenchment of the *Limes* made early in the first century A.D. is clearly marked by a later and less solid transverse wall running south from about the middle of the 'marsh section'. Just at this point there rises by the caravan route a ruined square fort of quite imposing appearance (Fig. 73). Its walls of stamped clay, fully fifteen feet thick at the