

of China proper, should have adopted for official missives a form borrowed from Khotan. This conclusion, based upon the single tablet N. xv. 345, seems at present the only direct argument in favour of the assumption that the arrangements and fashions prevailing in the 'wooden stationery' of our Kharoṣṭhī documents had developed under Chinese influence. But there is indirect and quasi-negative evidence to lend support to such an opinion.

Ancient  
writing-  
materials  
of India.

Whatever ancient remains have come to light as yet in the Khotan region of the period to which the ruins of the Niya Site belong, or in fact, of the whole Buddhist epoch, show that the civilization then flourishing was indebted mainly to India and China for its constituent elements. Now for Chinese antiquity, the extensive and varied use of wood as a writing-material is, as we have seen, amply attested; but the same is by no means the case for ancient India, especially in the period during which Khotan received its importations of Indian religion, language, and art. There can be no doubt that in the extreme North-West of India, to which Khotan was directly indebted for everything that is of Indian origin in its culture, the easily obtainable and very convenient birch-bark (*bhūrja*) always formed the writing material most widely used for all purposes<sup>19</sup>. By its side the use of palm-leaves, which is attested for the whole of India from a very early period, must also be assumed to have been common<sup>20</sup>.

Use of wood  
for writing  
in India.

On the other hand, what scanty references we possess to wood as a writing-material in early India seem to indicate that its use was restricted to specific purposes widely distinct from those of the great majority of our Kharoṣṭhī documents. Of such purposes that of the *phalaka*, or writing-board used in the schools is the best attested<sup>21</sup>; as already mentioned, this wooden board, which took the place of our slate, and is now known throughout Northern India as *Takhtī*, has survived to the present day. Its form may have served as a model for the oblong Kharoṣṭhī tablets with handles described above; but the reproduction of so simple an implement does not justify any conclusion as to the origin of the other far more ingenious forms and arrangements illustrated by our Kharoṣṭhī documents on wood. Nor are the few references to wooden boards, used apparently like our blackboards for public announcements, relevant in this connexion<sup>22</sup>. Still more specific are the uses of wood alluded to in a few isolated passages of Buddhist works<sup>23</sup>. To conclude from them as to the general use of wood for records and written communications in Buddhist India would be as reasonable as if the writing of amulets on birch-bark, which is still customary throughout Northern India<sup>24</sup>, were adduced as evidence for the general use of this material in Indian records, &c., of the nineteenth century.

Wood as  
writing-  
material  
in Khotan.

It must be reserved to future researches—or to future finds—to decide how much of the arrangements and forms observed in our Kharoṣṭhī documents on wood was borrowed from other civilizations and how much was local development. But it is clear in any case that the economic conditions of the Khotan region must have favoured the use of wood as the chief writing-material previous to the introduction of paper. The *Bhūrja* tree (*Baetula Bhōjpattr*), which supplied and in part still supplies Northern India with a bark convenient for writing as well as for wrapping, is not, as far as I know, to be found to the north of the Himālaya, and certainly not on the terribly barren slopes of the Kun-lun. The difficulties of transport must have made the importation of

<sup>19</sup> See Bühler, *Indische Palaeographie*, p. 88. The general designation *lekhaṇa* 'writing-material', given in Sanskrit works to birch-bark, as well as the use of the term *bhūrja* for 'document', is significant.

<sup>20</sup> See Bühler, *ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>21</sup> See Bühler, *ibid.*, pp. 5, 88.

<sup>22</sup> See Bühler, *ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>23</sup> Bamboo cuts (*śalākā*) with the name of the owner

were given to Buddhist monks for purposes of legitimation; Burnouf, *Introduction*, p. 259, note, quoted by Bühler. The wooden tablets with incised directions as to religious suicide, the preparation of which is prohibited by a passage of the *Vinayapīṭaka* (Bühler, *ibid.*, p. 5), may have owed their form to some peculiar superstition.

<sup>24</sup> See Bühler, *Kashmīr Report*, p. 29, note.