

In the case of the wedge-shaped tablets forming so large a portion of the records brought to light, a series of complete 'double wedges' found intact under their original seal and fastening afford the clearest possible illustration of the manner in which documents of this class were used and despatched (Fig. 96). A pair of pieces of wood, pointed at one end and cut off square at the other, were fitted exactly to match each other. There is evidence that the carpenter engaged in producing this kind of stationery usually facilitated his task by first shaping the 'double wedge' as a whole, and then separating its two pieces by sawing or splitting. The under tablet of the pair was made quite flat, and received on its smoothed obverse the text, arranged in lines parallel to the upper long side of the wedge and never exceeding four in number. The upper or covering tablet rested on it as a kind of envelope to protect the writing, which could be continued on the reverse of the upper tablet whenever the length of the communication required it.

The wood of the upper tablet was kept thicker near the square end, and in this raised portion of its outside surface a square socket was neatly cut for the purpose of holding a clay seal impression. A hole drilled through both pieces near the pointed end received the string that was to unite the pair of tablets. The ingenious method used for fastening this string of hemp is best illustrated by the diagrams of Mr. F. H. Andrews' drawing in my *Ancient Khotan*. After having been passed through the string-hole of both tablets and drawn tight by means of a cleverly devised running loop, the string was drawn towards the seal-socket near the square end of the double wedge. There it was laid in regular cross folds over the seal-socket, three grooves cut through the edges of the latter serving to hold it in position. The socket was then filled with clay covering the folds, and the signet seal of the sender impressed into the clay. Subsequently the pair of tablets could be separated only by either breaking the clay of the sealing or by cutting the string.

By the ingenious arrangement here briefly indicated the communication written on the inner surfaces of the