

Wind and driving sand had destroyed all but the lowest layer of fascines, here all made up of tamarisk branches. But this, with the overlying stratum of clay and gravel, cropped out so clearly on the level flat that the line of wall which it marked was easily followed by the eye far away. The next tower on the east towards which this wall or *agger* ran quite straight proved to be only one and one-eighth mile distant. Beyond I could see three more 'Pao-t'ais'; but the examination of them had to be postponed.

Instead, I directed my attention to a close search of the ground immediately adjoining T. xxvi., as I numbered the tower just described. Fortune for once seemed inclined to encourage me at the outset. About four yards from the south-east corner of the tower I noticed slight refuse cropping out on the gravel surface. It proved the last remnant of the rubbish once filling a small apartment about eight feet square. Only traces of mud-built walls with a plastered reed-facing survived. But within this scant shelter and almost on the surface there turned up a flat piece of thin wood, about one foot long and over an inch broad, with Chinese characters neatly inscribed in five columns. Dates such as I was eagerly asking my learned secretary to look out for, were found neither in this document, which Chiang took to be part of an account, nor in another clearly written but incomplete Chinese record of the 'slip' type, apparently referring to some arms. But Chiang declared the writing to be of a strangely ancient look, and in any case the discovery of records at a spot at first sight so unpromising justified further hopes. The labourers, somewhat roused from their torpor by the prompt payment of a good reward, scraped the ground in vain for remains in other quarters adjoining the tower. The only find was two copper coins of the Han period. But as this type had continued to circulate right down to the early middle ages, they could not by themselves suffice for the dating of a ruin even now within reach of people from the oasis.

In order not to tax the tender feet of my Chinese diggers too severely, I decided to turn next to the first tower south-westwards, whence return to camp would be