

nearer. For about three-quarters of a mile I could trace the line of the wall quite clearly, still rising in places to over three feet. Then we lost it on difficult ground, amidst tamarisk cones with soft eroded soil and dunes of fine drift sand between. The ruin which we reached after another mile and a half was undoubtedly that of a watch-tower, of the usual size, but badly decayed on some faces (Fig. 164). It had been built on a small clay terrace, which rose about seventeen feet above the eroded ground level on the south. On its west side the tower was adjoined by a mass of soft refuse about fifteen feet across, filling the remains of some poorly built structure to a height of three to four feet.

I had scarcely set the men to work when, on the southwest and almost on the surface, there were found three wooden slips inscribed with clear Chinese characters. They were quite complete, and showed the usual size, being about nine and a half inches long and half an inch wide (Fig. 119). Chiang at once recognized that two of them bore full dates, and our excitement was great. Presently three more inscribed narrow tablets emerged from under half a foot or so of rubbish in the middle of the heap, one of them being dated. Evidently we had struck a rich mine. But there was no time that evening to clear it with care; and as Chiang-ssŭ-yeh was unable to fix the 'Nien-haos,' or regnal titles in which the dates were recorded, I hastened to return to camp by sunset. We were both greatly exercised by conjectures as to the age which the date records, when identified, would reveal for the ruined wall and towers. Our high spirits were in a way shared by the labourers, who tramped after us pleased with the silver I had given in reward for the day's finds.

Arrived in camp by nightfall I almost grudged the time needed for a wash and hasty dinner before settling down with Chiang to search for those mysterious 'Nien-haos' in the chronological tables attached to Mayers' excellent *Chinese Reader's Manual*. It proved quite a thrilling hunt. In the absence of any definite clue, we had to search through the hundreds of regnal periods comprised