

characters (*i.e.* words) in a single vertical line will help to illustrate the remarkable neatness of the writing which prevails in these records. Sometimes the writing was in several columns, or also continued on the back. Among the woods used for these 'slips' that of the poplar seemed most frequent, as at the sites I had explored in the Tarim Basin. But, besides, there appeared a peculiarly streaked soft wood which the Naik recognized as belonging to some conifer. It could not have grown in a climate so arid as the Su-lo Ho Basin must have had throughout historical times. I conjectured it to have been brought from the slopes of the western Nan-shan, and there, in fact, I subsequently came across remnants of fir forest. A still more distant import was represented by the neat slips of bamboo which turned up at other ruined stations.

But here in the refuse of tower T. xxviii. variety was imparted to the wooden stationery, also, by the plentiful 'fancy' use of that abundant local material, the tamarisk. There were tamarisk sticks of varying length, roughly cut into polygonal shapes, and inscribed on a number of sides; broad labels with rounded tops or peg-shaped, etc. Evidently convention was not so strict in the case of internal communications as about official correspondence, and for mere 'copy writing,' with which soldiers quartered at this and other stations had evidently beguiled their time, sticks of tamarisk cut on the spot were certainly good enough. At the same time the number of 'shavings' from regular slips (see Fig. 119, 14), and the fact of the latter being found often thinned down by repeated previous paring, showed that the supply of proper wooden stationery had its value, and was used over and over again.

Miscellaneous objects in wood also turned up among the refuse in plenty: such as small marked cubes apparently used for gambling or divination (Fig. 119, 15); tally sticks; fragments of combs. But what interested me most were two wooden seal-cases, evidently meant to be attached to some closed bag or other receptacle. They showed the identical arrangement of three grooves for folds of string over which the seal was to be impressed in clay as I had first found on the envelopes of Kharoshthi documents at