

afield were concluded, I set about to search the ground systematically.

It was not long before I discovered fragments of that hard, dark grey pottery with which my work at other watch-stations had made me familiar, at the foot of a hillock rising less than a hundred yards to the north of the fort (Fig. 179). While Chiang and the Naik were engaged at the nearest watch-tower to the west, I had retained with me the least indolent of our men for prospecting; and as I made him scrape the slope of the mound at different points, layers of straw and other stable refuse came to light quickly at more than one point below the cover of gravel. I was conducting this first experimental search near the top of the west slope when his spade laid bare a vertical cutting into the hard clay composing the hillock.

It proved to be the mouth of a little tunnel about two and a half feet broad and about as high, running into the mound and filled with drift sand and refuse. Before I could form any view about its purpose, two dozen Chinese slips had emerged among pieces of blank stationery, matting, bones, and similar rubbish. Soon my digger had burrowed out of sight while clearing the tunnel. After making his way in for some ten feet, he reported that it led to a room completely filled with sand. No further work was possible here until the other men came back from their day's task. But the spirits of my own 'prospector' had been roused by a liberal reward for his discovery, and quickly he set about scraping elsewhere. Not far from the tunnel, but lower down on the slope, he unearthed a platform cut into the soft rock, and here another score of tablets turned up in excellent preservation. Of course I had sent word to Chiang-ssü-yeh, and when he arrived from the tower then 'in hand' two miles off, an eager scanning of the last finds began.

Many of the narrow slips of wood were covered with minute but well-written characters in several columns, and great was my joy when the dated pieces among those unearthed on the platform proved to belong to the period 48-45 B.C. So at last we had got well back into the pre-Christian era. All the dated records found in that queer