

only access to a well or shaft, about five or six feet square, which we cleared to a depth of over twelve feet without reaching the bottom. The earth roof of the shaft had originally been supported by timber, but now fell in, luckily without smothering any one. Dozens of wooden documents turned up in the sand cleared out, almost all, alas! badly decayed through damp, but some still showing legible dates of the first decades after Christ; and from these I concluded that this curious shaft had been filled up with refuse not very long after that period. Its original purpose seemed obscure, until Chiang and some of my Muhammadans rightly suggested that it must have been intended for a dungeon, the use of similar wells for the safe keeping of dangerous prisoners being still remembered in Chinese Turkestan.

In fact, I subsequently ascertained that such methods of burying prisoners as it were alive subsisted in the Central-Asian Khanats, too, until the time of the Russian conquest. The narrow side opening near the top of the well had, no doubt, served as an air-hole. I did not care at the time to think much of the horrors which this dungeon might have witnessed; but the fact that one of the inscribed slips here recovered, contains, according to M. Chavannes' translation, an order about the burial of a man who had died after having been beaten, has since helped to recall them. Curiously enough, the well-preserved ancient beating-stick of the traditional shape, shown in Fig. 172, was found on this very mound.

Of the structures which the top of the hillock had once borne, nothing but the scantiest foundations were discovered. But deposits of ancient rubbish laid bare at different points of the slopes yielded records on wood in abundance. From one refuse area near the centre close on five dozen documents were recovered. As almost all the dated pieces belonged to the years 96-94 B.C., it became quite certain that the occupation of this site went back to the time when the *Limes* was first established.

That the station had then already been one of importance was proved by several documents emanating direct from the commandant of the 'Jade Gate Barrier.' Others too