

which issued from the local headquarters. Without going into technical intricacies of the complicated cyclical system of reckoning, it must suffice to mention that these calendars possess considerable importance as records which help to control, and in a few instances to rectify, the traditional chronology of the Han period.

Up to May 7th I was busy clearing the station the records of which have just been passed in rapid review, and exploring the last watch-towers traceable westwards. The one which lay about two miles from T. VI. B was remarkable for the ideal position it occupied on the flat top of a small and completely isolated clay terrace fully 150 feet high. The precipitous wall-like slopes made access to the ruined tower quite impossible except from the east, where a steep ravine descended, and even there it meant climbing. The terrace, only about eighty yards long and less than half that in width, suggested a huge natural keep. From its top I looked across the great basin westwards, all salt-encrusted marsh with here and there large open sheets of water, and felt as if I were surveying a great lake from the highest deck of a steamer.

Here, too, the remains of the guard's quarters yielded relics of interest. The most curious among them was a remarkably well preserved tablet, about sixteen inches long, bearing at the top four short lines in the unknown script resembling Aramaic which we had found weeks before in the paper documents from the tower T. XII. A. The tablet looked like the right half of a larger piece cut through on purpose like a tally. I was already inclined to connect this writing with Western Turkestan, and the place of discovery, so far away from the ancient trade route, made me wonder at the time whether possibly men from that region had found service among the auxiliaries of the Chinese on this border.

In another way it was a strange observation to find a quantity of perfectly fresh-looking horse-dung and green reeds cut into straw under the débris of the small room or passage immediately adjoining the once heavily barred entrance to the quarters. The space measured only about seven feet square, and could barely have allowed the