

had yielded a few rags of fine silk (N. XIV. iii. 001), the small fragment of a Kharoṣṭhī document on leather (N. XIV. 005), and a little 'Takhtī'-shaped wooden tablet inscribed with Chinese characters of exquisite penmanship, when nightfall put a stop to our first day's labours.

Boarded enclosure embedded in refuse.

The excavation was continued next morning with all the available labour, and allowed us to cut through these layers of stable refuse to the natural soil, and to lay bare the boarded enclosure. It proved to be open to the south. Its floor lay fully seven feet below the level occupied by the extant débris of structures, and its wooden boards standing to a height of five and a half feet were in perfect preservation. The quantity of straw and loose oats found at the bottom of the enclosure seemed to indicate that the latter had originally served to store fodder, etc., for the horses and other animals which, as the refuse accumulations around showed, must have been stabled near by for a long time. But there was also found evidence that the enclosure had at one period been utilized besides as a sort of dustbin for some earlier habitation. Thus in the midst of coarser refuse, and intermingled with various grains, there were found curious sweepings of all sorts—rags of manifold fabrics, in silk, wool, hemp, and felt; pieces of embroidered leather and felt; plaited braids and cords; fragments of fine lacquer ware; broken implements and fittings in wood, etc. To these I shall refer briefly hereafter.

Find of Chinese labels of wood.

But far more important proved the find of over a dozen small label-like slips of wood which were discovered scattered amidst all this refuse. Eight among them retained Chinese inscriptions of beautiful penmanship and in complete preservation. One complete and two fragmentary pieces also showed some Chinese characters, while the rest were blank. I greatly regretted at the time that, prompted by the desire to save my excellent Chinese secretary weary tramps across dunes and the hardships of desert campings to which his previous career had in no way trained him, I had left him behind at Tülküch-köl in charge of my depot. But I felt still more regret later, when the antiquarian interest of these small records was fully revealed to me.

Decipherment of Chinese labels.

From such rapid examination as Chiang Szü-yeh was able to make of them *en route* after our reunion, I gathered, indeed, that from the character of their contents these slips must have served as forwarding notes attached to various presents. But it was only through the scholarly analysis and translation furnished to me in 1910 by M. Chavannes, and now embodied in his volume of this Report, that I became aware of the special importance attaching to these records.<sup>10</sup> He has shown there that the eight label-like little tablets, measuring from about two and a half to four inches in length and about half an inch in width, as seen in Plate XXXI of his volume, were originally fastened to presents consisting of a jewel which members of the local royal family made to each other, or received from their subjects, perhaps on the occasion of the New Year.

Records of presents to royal persons.

On one side of the label the donor inscribed his name and the mention of his present and good wishes. On the other appears the name or title of the recipient. In one case it is the mother of the king who presents her gift and salutations to her son; in another the wife of the hereditary prince sends them to one of the king's wives, etc. Presentations are recorded from certain personages to the princess Ch'un, to the younger hereditary prince, etc.

A princess of Chü-mo (Charchan) mentioned.

Most of the 'royal' personages and the donors are designated by name. But there seems little hope of their ever being identified from Chinese historical records, seeing that they must have belonged to the family of a small local ruler, not likely to figure in such notices as the extant Annals intermittently present of the states of the 'Western Regions'. Nor do the labels give the name of the territory over which the head of this royal family ruled, and of which this site evidently was the chief place. But it is an interesting indication that in N. XIV. iii. 10 one of the king's wives

<sup>10</sup> See *Documents*, pp. 198 sqq.